



# **Puppetry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reflections and Challenges**

Edited by **Marzenna Wiśniewska** and **Karol Suszczyński**

The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw  
Branch Campus in Białystok, Puppet Theatre Art Department





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*Ręce* [*The Hands*], Teatr Ognia i Papieru (1980)

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## Introduction

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries brought heightened visibility of puppets and performing objects in various fields of cultural performance, so that we might call these last decades 'a puppet moment' – as Claudia Orenstein points out in the introduction to the book *The Routledge Companion to the Puppetry and Material Performance*.<sup>1</sup> We are profoundly convinced of the truth of this reflection and we see in this point of view an important research challenge, one that leads toward a discussion about the processes, tendencies, and influences shaping contemporary puppetry in different countries. The intention of our monograph is to present theoretical and practical ideas, analyses and questions which have arisen since the turn of the century under the influence of the latest puppet performances and works inspired by puppet art. The collection of articles naturally represents only a few of the possible approaches to these topics, but we hope it provides a glimpse of multidirectional contemporary reflection and different perspectives of research now being applied to (and demanded by) puppet art.

This book originated at the International Conference 'Puppet Theatre in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', organised by the Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok of the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw and Białostocki Teatr Lalek [Białystok Puppet Theatre] in June 2016, in conjunction with the 8<sup>th</sup> International 'Puppet-no-Puppet' Festival of Puppetry Schools. The conference intended above all to provide a forum young European researchers exploring the phenomenon of puppet theatre, and encouraged scholars to share new methodological strategies in theory

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<sup>1</sup> Posner, D. N., Orenstein C., Bell, J. (ed.), (2014), *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*. London: Routledge. Taylor&Fracis Group, p. 2.

and puppet theatre practice. The book *Puppetry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reflections and Challenges* combines selected contributions presented during conference discussions with other articles written specially for the monograph. This volume's authors are both researchers and practitioners, so the book features scholarly discourse together with puppeteers' accounts of their experiences. These investigations highlight the redefinition of the terms 'puppet', 'animation', 'puppeteer' in contemporary theatre and performance, analyse the different modes of relationship between puppet/performing object and puppeteer, focus on artists and works exploring the borderline between the puppet theatre and other performing arts, including dance, and show the interdependencies among organizational approaches and models of studying and practicing puppetry in different countries and the aesthetic tendencies in puppet theatre.

The book is divided into three parts. The first one, *Being an Artist of Puppet Theatre*, focuses on the question: what kind of artist is the puppeteer of today? Marek Waszkiel confronts the tradition of puppeteer as craftsman and independent artist, creator of invented puppet worlds (e.g. Neville Tranter, Duda Paiva) with the model of puppeteer as actor cultivated in institutional puppet theatres in 20<sup>th</sup> century Eastern Europe. Using performance study methodology, Marzenna Wiśniewska considers the performative potential of the puppeteer. Her work focuses on the strategy of puppeteer presence and bodily expression, the puppeteer's relationship with performing objects, and the event nature of such performances; she analyses three modes of puppeteer-performer, represented in the contemporary puppet theatre in Poland by Grzegorz Kwieciński, Tadeusz Wierzbicki and Adam Walny. The Japanese puppeteer Miyako Kurotani from Theatre Genre:Gray here offers a brief presentation of her idea of the puppeteer and his/her training. For Kurotani, a puppet is a unique form of existence that remembers its material origins and possesses its own individual energy; a puppeteer is thus someone who discovers an object's 'traces of life' through their relationship with it and 'brings it back to life' through a kind of manipulation of that object. For Oriane Maubert, the concepts of the puppet and the 'return to life' are reminiscent of Heinrich von Kleist's comparison between puppet and dancer; in her work, Maubert considers common threads between dance and puppet theatre on the contemporary stage. Her analysis focuses on performances by Gisèle Vienne, Duda Paiva, Ilka Schönbein, companies WHS and Sungsoo Ahn Pick up Group, the Compagnies Moussoux-Bonté and Pseudonymo. That section closes with Zofia Smolarska's essay, calling for reflection on the craftsmen

who work in puppet theatre's back-stage professions. Her paper presents the results of qualitative field research conducted at six Polish puppet theatres, including interviews with craftsmen, and analyses the economical, technological and artistic context of their work.

The section *Challenges of Puppet Theatre and Research* is focused on the puppeteer response to the issues relating to philosophical, aesthetical, cultural and social transformations at the turn of centuries. Eric Bass from the Sandglass Theatre opens this section with his view of puppet theatre as a medium of empowerment. His case study of a group of international theatre projects (from *The Story of the Dog* in Cambodia to the recent *Babilon*) explores the potential of puppet theatre for confrontation and engagement with some difficult issues of our time: war, social injustice, and refugee crises. Julie Postel's article offers reflection on a number of contemporary artists (François Lazaro, Nick Steur, Gisèle Vienne) and groups (Morbus Théâtre, Cie Non Nova) who confront the audience with the emergence of visibility and visibility in contemporary culture. The fragile and discontinuous presence of puppets and the relationship between the puppet's 'two bodies' – material and non-physical/phantom – leads Postel to revise the definitions of the terms 'puppet' and 'animation'. Agata Drwięga proposes posthumanism and animal studies as productive methodologies for developing strategies of heightened animal presence and representation in puppet theatre. Handspring Puppet Company and a Polish play, *Baltic. Pies na krze* [*Baltic. The Dog on an Ice Floe*], presented by Miejski Teatr Miniatura [Miniatura City Theatre], are examples that go beyond conventional anthropomorphism toward theatre creation that restores animals' inherent attributes to their representations. The last two articles concern some remarkable early 21<sup>st</sup> century performances in Polish puppet theatre. Karol Suszczyński presents the diversity of puppet types and techniques in the puppet theatre for adults (from such classic forms as marionette, shadow to total performances and indefinable varied forms). His observation confirms Henryk Jurkowski's thesis about the domination of Polish puppet theatre by a theatrical ethos that prioritises maximum variety in the means of expression used. Martyna Friedla asks about the embodiment of an 'Other' figure in the newest Polish puppet theatre and simultaneously focuses on phenomenological reflection about the puppet.

The third section, *Organization and Education*, is dedicated to the institutional dimension of puppet education and theatre systems in Europe. Maria Janus compares the structure of German and Polish puppet theatres and shows the main areas of their transformation since 1989. Analysing two pedagogical

principles and practices in two representative puppetry academies of Central-Western Europe: Germany's Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch in Berlin and the French École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières, Sarah Vecchietti shows how differences between European puppet theatre models are directly connected with puppetry education systems. The last paper in the book is a presentation by practitioner and scholar Tomasz Graczyk of his own artistic training method. His methodology treats the physical training of actor-puppeteers as a particularly important issue for our time, in which the puppet theatre is undergoing dynamic and many-sided development.

We hope that this monograph will result in further innovative and dynamic research on the subject of far-reaching changes in the space of the puppet theatre in the near future.

**Marzenna Wiśniewska, Karol Suszczyński**



**Part 1:**

**Being an Artist of Puppet Theatre**

## **Marek Waszkiel**

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### **Summary**

The changes that have taken place in the puppet theatre over the last decades have led to the transformation of this artistic genre. At present, the terms 'puppeteer' and 'puppet theatre' do not fall within their classical definitions and need to be redefined. The author confronts the tradition of puppeteer as craftsman, a tradition that continues to be found in the works of such artists as Neville Tranter and Roman Paska, creators of distinctive puppet worlds, with the institutional model of puppet theatres, where the puppeteer is primarily an actor, which essentially influences the stage puppet's presence.

### **Streszczenie**

Zmiany, które nastąpiły w teatrze lalek na przestrzeni ostatnich dziesięcioleci doprowadziły do transformacji tego gatunku sztuki. Obecnie hasła 'lalkarz' i 'teatr lalek' nie mieszczą się w swoich klasycznych definicjach i wymagają redefiniowania. Autor konfrontuje tradycję lalkarzy-rzemieślników, której kontynuację znajduje w twórczości takich artystów jak Neville Tranter czy Roman Paska, kreatorów autorskich światów lalkowych, z modelem instytucjonalnych teatrów lalek, gdzie lalkarz jest przede wszystkim aktorem, co zasadniczo wpływa na sceniczną obecność lalki.

## Puppeteer: Craftsman, Actor or Creator?<sup>1</sup>

Reflection in every academic discipline is, from a certain moment, limited by its terminology. The vocabulary that was used so far turns out to be insufficient. Generally speaking it does not correspond to the phenomena which we find in practice. The old terminology hinders communication concerning contemporary phenomena. And this is also a problem for modern puppetry which has been evolving rapidly over recent decades. The old terminology is not adequate. It is difficult to use terms such as 'hand puppet', 'stick puppet' or 'rod puppet' because such techniques are rarely found nowadays outside puppetry schools and sparse traditional performances. The term 'puppet' has become less precise. Words such as 'object', 'thing' or 'form' are not precise enough due to their ambiguity and broad meaning. Perhaps we will use the term 'animant', increasingly popular in Poland, a word logically derived from the root-word of puppetry, i.e. inanimate animation. Since we have the word animation in the sense of 'bringing to life' and animator, the person who brings to life, then it may be that we should also have 'animant', designating the object of animation in the theatrical language and practice.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that – especially in Central Europe – the word 'puppeteer' is used more and more often with reference to the past. And from a certain perspective it may describe a historical phenomenon that vanished at the turn of twenty-

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<sup>1</sup> The first publication of the text was in: (2016), *Teatr Lalek*, vol. 3-4, pp. 65-71.

<sup>2</sup> The term was introduced by Halina Waszkiel and then fully discussed in: Waszkiel, H. (2013), *Dramaturgia polskiego teatru lalek*. Warszawa: Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie, p. 10.

first century. This phenomenon was called puppet theatre, with the puppet as its essence. Nevertheless, these words are and will long continue to be used because, on the one hand, the process of parting with such language is slow, hindered by social consciousness<sup>3</sup>, and on the other, we still have problems with new terminology. This process is quite natural. But terms such as 'puppet' and 'puppet theatre' are undoubtedly insufficient to describe the contemporary theatre. We live in the sui generis presence of 'animants' which go far beyond the meaning of the word 'puppet'. The puppet and puppet theatre in the traditional meaning are at best placed in the niche of contemporary world of theatrical performances.

This problem becomes obvious in education. When we teach young students, we need to know not only what but also whom we are teaching. Nowadays in Poland the term 'theatre of form' is overused, which leads to a total blurring of boundaries not only in puppet theatre but in art overall. The 'form' has become a key word used everywhere and opening all doors, so it can no longer be used as the organizing term. What is more, we have historically equated the puppet theatre with theatre for children, an equation which has become a fundamental problem. At the moment we are fiercely trying to disrupt this equation. Unfortunately puppeteers who are not dynamic and creative enough lose in the process. Polish 'puppetry' is dominated by young audiences' theatre without puppets, which as a genre was previously replaced by the puppet theatre. Now this style or genre is coming back with almost revolutionary force and it seems strange that some theatres still have the word 'puppet' as part of their name.

I would like to look at the basic meanings of the term 'puppeteer', especially its older and contemporary contexts, without attempting to organize the entire lexicon of the puppet theatre.

In the distant and more recent past, encompassing the whole tradition of travelling and often family theatre, the puppeteer was chiefly a craftsman. He did his job in order to earn his living. He always needed partners to keep his enterprise going, but at the same time he was a jack of all trades. He sometimes even made his own puppets, he definitely fixed and maintained them, he wrote of the scripts for his own performances, invented new plays, animated and interpreted the characters, took care of the music and scenography,

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<sup>3</sup> Let me remind you that in Poland we still have the tradition of referring to puppet theatre as a 'stick puppet theatre', evoking a form mainly aimed for children which vanished at least fifty years ago.



and when needed sold tickets, as he brought his theatre to a different place each time. He lived in the theatre and made a living there. In some sense, the great contemporary puppeteers continue this tradition. Because we may say with-out fear of contradiction that such people as Neville Tranter, Frank Soehnle or Roman Paska are puppeteers. Some puppeteers were or still are just craftsmen, while others happened to be artists, even great artists, as happens in all art forms. But you cannot be a puppeteer without being a craftsman.

The rise of the puppet theatre for children at the end of nineteenth century and its popularisation in the twentieth brought many amateurs into this business. They sometimes had a very good position in society but in fact brought about divisions in specialization, not in the sense of techniques (using marionettes or hand puppets) but rather theatrical skills. Especially when at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some artistic circles, to some extent influenced by the Great Reform of the Theatre, became more interested in puppetry. The puppet theatre became a model of the pure theatre, where the roles were also divided – there was a director, stage designer, choreographer, animator or puppeteer, and actor who delivered text. These developing specializations became full-blown in post-war Eastern Europe. The model for this was set by the Obraztsov theatre, derived from dramatic theatre, with visibly separate puppetry tasks, especially those of director, stage designer (sometimes technologist) and puppet actor. Yes: puppet actor. The term was first used when they decided to get rid of the screen behind which puppeteers were hiding. When actors became visible, they automatically took over some acting functions, so the term puppet actor seemed appropriate. The new term became popular with the development of puppetry education. Despite its prestigious connotations, it referred simply to the common, ordinary puppetry situation. In fact, all puppetry schools, starting from the 1950s and continuing for the next twenty-five years, were attached to dramatic schools, so some level of interaction was inevitable. And the prestige of dramatic acting was unquestionable, because the actor is the essence of the theatre, including puppet theatre! Today this connection is officially confirmed by the diploma awarded in Poland to students of puppeteer studies, who then liaise with actors' agencies and look for work. Also in puppet theatres.

As a result we lack comprehensive education for puppeteers, even those with very specialized skills. We haven't had proper puppeteer-craftsmen for many decades because their natural development was stopped by the nationalisation of theatres shortly after World War II. We have actors with diplomas who are

ready for all (or very nearly all) challenges. They can be hired as journeymen, the way we hire a plumber or painter. They can and in fact do work in puppet theatres or at least in the theatres which are given that designation. But are they able to create a contemporary puppet theatre, when we have practically no vocabulary for such a thing?

In our part of Europe we are still in a transitional period. We still have the network of the socialist puppet theatres with all their virtues, and we are slowly developing independent theatres, similar to those in all Western European countries. But this individual and independent phenomenon has to be regenerated after fifty years of forced collectivism. We are torn. And so is our education. We focus on craftsmanship and specializations but we try to teach students how to be a creator, an artist engaged first and foremost in fulfilling his or her ambitions. As a result, theatres accept mainly those students who believe that they have mastered their job. Private institutions are created by those who do not want to follow a manager's or director's orders and are ready to create and look for inspiration on their own. Institutional actors don't enjoy such freedom. They don't have any influence on the repertoire, visiting artists, their instruments or even the selection of their closest partners.

Both parties are mostly interested in displaying their acting skills. They use puppets because they have to and sometimes because of a real need. But this need is not grounded in the consciousness of being a puppeteer, the consciousness of the puppet. Puppets are simply useful in certain situations. That is why we have so few puppets in puppet theatres and even fewer puppeteers. And that is why in puppet acting school so little time is devoted to puppets and, especially, to their modern forms (despite the fact that traditional puppet techniques are the part of the school syllabus), and even less to animants. We live in a time of changes and we can see them on an everyday basis. The aim is quite clear but the road ahead is long and winding. The ideal puppeteer should combine the skills of craftsman, actor and creator. In certain situations those skills can be partially or entirely the same, but they should coexist as complementary most of the time. Let's hope that we can achieve this ideal.



## **Marzenna Wiśniewska**

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### **Summary**

The article focuses on the phenomenon of the puppeteer as performer. The brief presentation deals with the various modes of the puppeteer-performer, which are connected with the performer's strategy of presence and bodily expression, his relationship with performing objects, and eventness as the nature of the performances. The performative potential of the puppeteer is analysed through an examination of three Polish puppeteer-soloists' work: 1. Grzegorz Kwieciński, the author of the *Teatr Ognia i Papieru* [Theatre of Fire and Paper] – as an example of the interface of puppetry art, happening and performance art; 2. Tadeusz Wierzbicki with his *Laboratorium Zjawisk Świetlnych* [Light Forms Laboratory] – representative of the synergy of various visual techniques and light technologies of shadow theatre; and 3. Adam Walny – whose work presents the idea of the puppeteer-sculptor and craftsman, performing with puppets produced and brought to life by the artist himself. A distinctive feature of their performances is the improvisational dimension of the theatrical experience, resulting from the performer's presence as well as the material specificity of animated beings.

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł koncentruje się na zagadnieniu lalkarza jako performerera oraz na strategiach wyróżniających różne modele działania lalkarza-performerera, które wiążą się m.in. z problematyką jego obecności i ekspresji cielesnej, relacją z animantami/performującymi przedmiotami i zdarzeniowością jako cechą spełnianych performansów teatralnych. Z tej perspektywy analizowana jest działalność trzech polskich lalkarzy-solistów: 1. Grzegorza Kwiecińskiego, twórcy Teatru Ognia i Papieru – teatru na styku sztuki lalkarskiej, happeningu i *performance art*; 2. Tadeusza Wierzbickiego z jego Laboratorium Zjawisk Świetlnych – teatrem rodzącym się z synergii różnych technik wizualnych i technologii świetlnych z teatrem cieni; i 3. Adama Walnego wcielającego ideę lalkarza rzeźbiarza i teatralnego rzemieślnika. Ich performanse teatralne wyróżniają się improwizacyjnym charakterem, który wynika z koncepcji obecności performerera na scenie oraz specyfiki animowanej materii.

## Performers in Polish Puppet Theatre

In Poland, the research on puppet theatre has evolved, slowly but surely, to include a performative perspective, which is indeed beneficial to the discourse concerning this particular form of theatre. One of the important changes which this evolution has brought about is the fact that the reflection on puppet theatre has become part of a wide-ranging discussion on the nature of cultural performances. In my paper, I shall concentrate on the topic of the puppeteer as a performer with a view to delineating the research fields which result from the proposed perspective. Three Polish artists with considerable experience in puppetry will serve as points of reference in my reflection:

1. Grzegorz Kwieciński, the founder of the Teatr Ognia i Papieru [Theatre of Fire and Paper]<sup>1</sup>, a theatre working at the intersection of puppetry, happening and performance art;
2. Tadeusz Wierzbicki and his Laboratorium Zjawisk Świetlnych [Light Forms Laboratory], the performer working by means of a synergy of various visual techniques, light technologies and shadow theatre;
3. and Adam Walny, who embodies the idea of the puppeteer and theatre craftsman and probes into what he calls 'różne tradycje teatru lalki, mask i przedmiotu w warunkach studyjnych, estradowych i ulicznych.'<sup>2</sup> [the various traditions of theatre centred on puppets, masks and objects in the context of studio, stage and street performances.]

Their self-authored, experimental, alternative theatre projects make one reflect on the various potential incarnations of the puppeteer-performer. These particular examples have been selected for the sake of brevity and this list certainly makes no claim to be comprehensive. Several other Polish artists could be included into this category. Some figures from

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<sup>1</sup> All translations in brackets in the article were made by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Walny, A. (2014), *Walny-Teatr*. [Krosno]: Wydawnictwo Ruthenus, p. 82.

recent puppet theatre history: such as Jan Wilkowski with his *Guignol w tarapatach* [*Guignol in Distress*] (1956), and Andrzej Dziedziul with his self-authored puppet monodramas (e.g. *Wielki książę* [*The Great Prince*], 1967; *Stan losów Fausta* [*Faust's State of Destiny*], 1968). Others from the present, including Agata Kucińska (creator of the solo performance *Żywoty świętych osiedlowych* [*The Lives of the Project-Housing Saints*] based on a collection of short stories by Lidia Amejko, 2010) and Marcin Bikowski and Marcin Bartnikowski's production *Baldanders* (2006). My decision to limit the scope of cited examples is due to the fact that in my view the work of Kwieciński, Wierzbicki and Walny illustrates the characteristic features of the performative paradigm of a theatre artist in Poland.

But first, let us consider the fundamental question: who is the puppeteer-performer? Henryk Jurkowski, in his manifesto published in the magazine *Teatr Lalek* [*Puppet Theatre*] in 2015, proposed a preliminary definition of the puppeteer-performer:

Puppeteer-performers are a new idea conceived of as analogous to the artists involved in happenings or performance art. In a way similar to that of sculptors, painters, and other master craftsmen, they are familiar with the principles of contemporary art. Moreover, they are capable of making their own puppets and demonstrating their theatrical expression from the position of both the author of the play and that of the performer. The phenomenon of puppeteer-performers is parallel to that of puppeteers 'in the strict sense of the term'. Not all performers are puppeteers [...].<sup>3</sup>

Jurkowski situated the puppeteer-performer in the field of performance art which was developed in the 1960s and '70s, related to the visual arts as well as conceptual art, live art, and the happening. His definition involved referring to a narrower sense of the term 'performance' (i.e. a specific genre formed of elements borrowed from various art disciplines/ fields, interdisciplinary art), which has led to these two key developments:

1. puppeteer-performers are a distinct type of stage artists who employ various elements from both visual and performance art; the roles of sculptor artist and actor converge in their work;
2. they first appeared in the second half of the twentieth century and it may well be argued that this artistic endeavour still awaits fulfilment, at least in Poland.

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<sup>3</sup> Jurkowski, H. (2015), 'Puppeteer – Puppet-theatre Actor – Performer'. *Teatr Lalek*, vol. 1, pp. 53-54.

As a result, Jurkowski juxtaposes the puppeteer-performer and the actor: 'The puppeteer-performer makes use of simple matter organised by himself, while the actor employs biological matter, i.e. he puts himself on show as a piece of an artistic statement.'<sup>4</sup>

When seen from this perspective, the puppeteer-performer is above all the author of a material performance: as a result, the attention of researchers has focused primarily on analysing the materiality of the performance, including various types of animated objects. Less attention has been paid to the corporeal/ bodily aspect of **the performer's presence**, his status as the subject and the variants of performative behaviour<sup>5</sup> which result from, among others, a particular performer or performance's relationship to other cultural performances. There is also a risk of making value judgments and dividing the artists who use performing objects/animants (the term devised by Halina Waszkiel<sup>6</sup>) as their means of expression into two groups: the so-called ordinary puppeteers and the supposedly superior puppeteer-performers.

At this particular instance, it seems worthwhile to reference Milton Singer's term 'cultural performance' and the American school of performance studies headed by Richard Schechner<sup>7</sup> and Marvin Carlson<sup>8</sup>, who subsumed into the notion of performance various forms of 'cultural organisation' and 'restored behaviours'. The objects of this organisation vary in nature and may involve religious, political, social, ludic or artistic content transmitted from generation to generation since time immemorial until the present day. The performer is thus a person who performs some such sort of organisation. With this in mind, instead of discussing a definition of the puppeteer-performer which emphasises his distinct status, I propose to address the following questions:

1. what sort of a performer the puppeteer is, i.e., which descriptive categories best illustrate his ontological and aesthetic status;
2. what performative processes establish the relationship between the puppeteer and the performing objects – understood according to Frank

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Wachowski, J. (2013), 'Performer, performans, performatywność, czyli o miejscu performatyki w badaniach teatrologicznych'. In: Bał, E., Świątkowska, W. (ed.), *Performans, performatywność, performer*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> See: Waszkiel, H. (2013), *Dramaturgia polskiego teatru lalek*. Warszawa: Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie.

<sup>7</sup> Schechner, R. (2013), *Performance Studies. An Introduction*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>8</sup> Carlson, M. (2017), *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Routledge.

Proschan as 'material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance'<sup>9</sup>;

3. what kind of performance is offered by artists who use performing objects and, as a consequence, which model of a performer they decide to adopt.

These approaches can be found in the reflections of such Polish scholars as Mirosław Kocur<sup>10</sup> and Halina Waszkiel.<sup>11</sup> There is also an important monograph, *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*<sup>12</sup>, which collects some illuminating new ideas developed by a wide-ranging worldwide selection of puppet theatre practitioners and theorists. It is neither necessary nor possible to present the views of these scholars in greater detail here. Guided by their insights and with recourse to some observations of my own, I will briefly identify the most important elements of this particular discourse with reference to the questions I have just mentioned.

1. Firstly, the performative reflection on the ontological and aesthetic status of a puppeteer draws attention to the following three elements:
  - a. the bodily aspect of the puppeteer's expression (the expression of a phenomenal body/embodiment, the manipulation/transfiguration of a human body and the circulation of energy in or among a human body and non-human bodies, the expanding map of the performer's body, the hybrid nature of his existence) – some interesting examples are the performances of Neville Tranter, Duda Paiva, Nicolle Mossoux and in Poland the duo: Marcin Bikowski, Marcin Bartnikowski;
  - b. the cultural roots of the conception of puppeteer presence – from traditional puppet genres to contemporary experiments with cyber-puppets present (an interesting challenge is the figure of a techno-performer, if I may derive such a term from the notion of techno-performance developed by Jon McKenzie<sup>13</sup>);

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<sup>9</sup> Proschan, F. (1983), 'The Semiotic Study of Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects'. *Semiotica* vol. 47 (1-4), pp. 3-44.

<sup>10</sup> Kocur, M. (2013), *Źródła teatru*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.

<sup>11</sup> Waszkiel, H. (2013), 'Lalkarz-performer'. In: Bał, E., Świątkowska, W. (ed.), *Performans, performatywność...*, op. cit., pp. 347-355.

<sup>12</sup> Posner, D. N., Orenstein, C., Bell, J. (ed.), (2014), *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*. London: Routledge.

<sup>13</sup> McKenzie, J. (2001), *Perform Or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. New York: Routledge.



- c. the performative emergence of presence, the scope of the performer's actions extended between acting and non-acting (this implies reference to the categories proposed by Michael Kirby<sup>14</sup> and Marco de Marinis<sup>15</sup>), and the performer's subjectivity in dialogue with performing objects.
2. Secondly, the puppeteer is a performer who consciously animates the performing objects, which leads us to the study of the processes involved in their interaction. It may be viewed in the context of staging strategies, such as the question of the technique (exposed versus disguised), the role of improvisation and established rules, play with distance (being close or farther away) and the emergence of visibility. But in addition to that, there are other contexts worth considering, such as the neurobiological foundations of animation discussed in Polish theatre studies by Mirosław Kocur<sup>16</sup>, who makes reference to the theory of dynamic peripersonal space or the two-net system of the human brain.
3. And finally – this is the third observation resulting from the methodological perspective we have – the puppeteer belongs to the category of performers who constitute a part of the history of both live and mediated performances (Jim Henson may be mentioned here as a particularly vivid example). For the puppeteer, the puppet as a medium serves as a means to devise both a theatre of representation based on staging techniques and performances which by their very nature are one-off events. For this reason, the puppeteer is able to adopt various modes of artistic expression: that of a traditional skomorokh or a performer of digital/virtual puppets, a master of metamorphoses who wields power over his puppets, or an artist who enters into a dialogue with the performance given by the performing object itself.<sup>17</sup> The traditional naming convention uses the term 'puppeteer', while in referring to the experimental interactions with performing objects the term 'performer' seems more pertinent to the essence of these interactions.

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<sup>14</sup> Kirby, M. (1987), *A Formalist Theatre*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>15</sup> Marinis de, M. (2013), 'Performans i teatr. Od aktora do performer'a i z powrotem'. In: Bał, E., Świątkowska, W. (ed.), *Performans performatywność...*, op. cit., pp. 36-40.

<sup>16</sup> Kocur, M. (2015), 'Dwie teorie' / 'Two Theories', *Teatr Lalek*, vol. 2-3, pp. 6-9.

<sup>17</sup> See: Searls, C. (2014), 'Unholy Alliances and Harmonious Hybrids. New Fusions in Puppetry and Animation'. In: *The Routledge Companion...*, op. cit., pp. 294-307; Jochum, E. A., Murphey, T. (2014), 'Programming Play. Puppets, Robots, and Engineering'. In: *The Routledge Companion...*, op. cit., pp. 308-321; Morgolis, E. (2014), 'Return to the Mound. Animating Infinity Potential in Clay, Food and Compost'. In: *The Routledge Companion...*, op. cit., pp. 322-334.

The dynamic nature of the puppeteer's performative potential can be illustrated by using the example of puppeteers-soloists, which was rightly pointed out by Halina Waszkiel in her reflection of the work of Duda Paiva.<sup>18</sup> What sort of performers can we find among puppeteers in Poland?

I shall not dwell on the modest representation of Polish puppeteers who are involved in experimental projects. Instead, I will concentrate on the three artists mentioned at the beginning. My reflections, of necessity, will take the form of a concise presentation of the most important aspects of their work. I will discuss them separately, in succession, but first I would like to draw attention to one particular feature which Kwieciński, Wierzbicki and Walny have in common. They all espouse the idea of an independent artist who takes responsibility for the whole process of artistic creation and performance. Even in the earliest stages of their artistic work, which often involved making use of techniques characteristic of puppet theatre and other performance art and media, they exhibited some features characteristic of the performer, who '[r]ather than an actor playing a role, (...) is in turn a narrator, painter and dancer and, because of the emphasis on physical presence, a stage autobiographer who has a direct relationship with the objects and situation of enunciation.'<sup>19</sup> They conjure up theatrical events by experimenting with the physical properties of various materials (wood, paper, stones, strings, foil, mirrors, etc.) and elements (fire, water, light and shadow). The nature of these events consists in the unrepeatability of the action presented by the performer in the here and now, before the audience. The specific mode of the performances is their eventness, what Erika Fisher-Lichte describes in her *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*<sup>20</sup> as 'existing only as and in [the] process of performing.'<sup>21</sup>

Let us begin with Grzegorz Kwieciński and his self-authored, predominantly solo projects with the Teatr Ognia i Papieru, which take pride of place in his multifaceted body of artistic work. The open-air spectacle-event titled *Cyrk [The Circus]* and shown at Gardzienice in August 1978 turned out to be foundational, since it was this production that paved Kwieciński's way towards developing his response to the revolution in Polish theatre

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<sup>18</sup> Waszkiel, H. (2013), 'Lalkarz-performer', op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Pavis, P. (1998), *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analyses*. Trans. Christine Shantz. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>20</sup> Fisher-Lichte, E. (2008), *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. Trans. Saskya Iris Jain. New York: Routledge.

<sup>21</sup> Fisher-Lichte, E., 'Culture as performance. Theatre history as cultural history'. Online: [http://ww3.fl.ul.pt/centros\\_invt/teatro/pagina/Publicacoes/Actas/erika\\_def.pdf](http://ww3.fl.ul.pt/centros_invt/teatro/pagina/Publicacoes/Actas/erika_def.pdf) [10.12.2017]

in the 1970s represented by Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski, Leszek Mądzik, independent student theatre, and happenings performed at that time by such artists as Władysław Hasior (Kwieciński had set these developments in motion with his well-known action *Płonące ptaki* [*Burning Birds*] in Szczecin<sup>22</sup>). Kwieciński expressed his artistic response by means of the theatre of form and, as he recalls, the remarkable exploration of fire in that performance was initiated by the fact that 'nothing [else] was available.'<sup>23</sup>

Out of his demiurgic activity emerges a world composed of durable and inflammable materials, inhabited by human-like figures made of paper: these figures may have clear cultural connotations, such as, for example, the tightrope walker, illusionist and mime actor who are the main characters of *Cyrk*; but they may also convey a symbolic, an archetypal sense of the human condition which so often has to contend with life and death (as in the performances *Ptak* [*The Bird*] (1980), *Odłot 2* [*The Departure 2*] (1996) or *Kamienie* [*The Stones*] (2012). Most of Kwieciński's paper figures have simplified human shapes, without any stylization, like children cut-out. They following the same approach used by Yves Joly in his *Tragedy in Paper*; and as in the French puppeteer's work, fire is the cause of the figures' death. Both performers thus use fire and paper figures to show the temporality, fragility and instability of the human being. Kwieciński also uses metaphorical paper figures to reference emotions, fantasies and visual art tropes like wings, angels, cardboard birds, winged chairs, ladders, and cracked mirrors. Kwieciński, surrounded by these performing objects, does not assume any specific role, but remains himself, an artist who acts as maker and performer. The result of his actions is an event which essentially produces another performer, separate from the artist, the fire which flickers in front of the audience. The leaping flames enliven the meticulously planned network which connects simple paper puppets and other objects. The action plays out as a result of the dialogue between the unforeseeable and unrepeatable manifestations of the performing fire and those of the human



**Figure 1:** *Wieża* [*The Tower*], Teatr Ognia i Papieru (2003).

<sup>22</sup> (2013), 'Creator of Fire. Lucyna Kozień talks with Grzegorz Kwieciński'. *Teatr Lalek*, vol. 4, p. 87.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

performer who intervenes in response to unpredictable events. Eventness and fortuitousness together constitute the mode of these performances:

In my case, there are no rehearsals prior to a presentation and thus each spectacle is a premiere but also a new experience. A vital element of the presentation is the recognition of the site on which we perform and the inclusion of our surroundings. In the course of a spectacle astounding things might take place, whose development I, too, find fascinating and observe in the manner of the average audience member: sometimes a sharp wind endows a blazing figure with a different dimensions, while upon another occasion a flock of birds flying by introduces additional content...<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 2:** *Odlot 2*  
[*The Departure 2*],  
Teatr Ognia i Papieru (2011).

In this case, as Kocur would have it, visuality cannot become reduced to the visible, but rather plays out as an event, one of a kind for every single spectator.<sup>25</sup>

In his performances, Kwieciński distances himself from his performing objects, with one particular result: the objects are revealed in their full phenomenal status, while their own expression and dynamics stimulate the associative perception of spectators, who thus also take on the role of performers. The actions of the puppeteer-performer exceed the boundaries of a spectacle as a self-contained work of art and lead to the exposure of the creative act as an event.

The Laboratorium Zjawisk Świetlnych founded by Tadeusz Wierzbicki builds on the timeless human predilection for producing optical impressions which has given rise to various types of shadow theatre and employed an array of simple technological methods of projecting images. These methods make one think of the quaint variety of early films and the theatre of attraction (magic lanterns, camera obscura and shadowgraphs). Henryk Jurkowski wrote about Wierzbicki:

a poet, director and experimenter who devoted many years of his work to light energy, finding in it an inspiration for creative activities. In the course of his experiences, he exceeded everything that the shadow theatre had achieved so far, and pointed the way to new types of performing art, although paradoxically his 'visual' programs are highly intimate.<sup>26</sup>

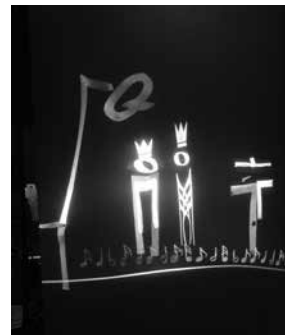
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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>25</sup> Kocur, M. (2013), *Źródła teatru*, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> Jurkowski, H. (2003), 'A Poet in the Universe of Light'. *Teatr Lalek*, vol. 2-3, p. 25.

To some extent, Wierzbicki performs in a way analogous to that of shadow theatre animators. This means that he produces reflections projected on screen, but his work does not consist in making use of the puppets'/figures' bodies to form shadow equivalents corresponding to their physical construction. From his first remarkable work inspired by children's play with bouncing light (sunbeams), mirrors and shadow techniques, *Zajęczki* [*Sunbeams*] (1993) and its later theatrical variations, entitled *Litera 'i'* [*The letter 'i'*], *Małe 'i'* [*The Little 'i'*] or simply '*i*', the animation processes sparked by Wierzbicki involve flexible mirrors which are curved to varying degrees: when manipulated, they reflect the light in a way which makes one think of a paradoxical luminous shadow, able to freely take part in creating anti-illusory worlds.



**Figure 3:** *Małe 'i'* [*The Little 'i'*], Laboratorium Zjawisk Świetlnych (2011).

Wierzbicki tends to focus on process and experiment much more than the creation of a complete work, which is why some of his performances have undergone continuous evolution. The series of performances about '*i*' is a famous case in point, as well as his latest production, *Labirynty światła* [*The Labyrinths of Light*] (2016). Wierzbicki's performing flexible mirrors and light perform at the intersection of improvisation and a thoroughly planned techno-performance. His spectacles consist of a series of visual episodes structured as collages, an assemblage of luminous figures appearing in micro-scale. A dot, a dash, a zero, a line, a circle, a spiral, a loop, as well as letters and masks, appear in motion, 'on the way', in a process captured and recorded in light on the screen.<sup>27</sup> The visual game does not form a narrative, but instead constitutes a sort of abstract, liberated seeing, a flow of associations subsumed into kinetic actions of luminous shadows and the ephemeral nature of light as visual poetry.<sup>28</sup> The visibility of Wierzbicki's performances may be viewed as an unrepeatable event, which develops differently at every instant, depending on the feedback between the performer and the audience and on the process of endowing the shadow with its proper shape (at times the performer is searching for an appropriate form, and comments on this).

<sup>27</sup> See: Wiśniewska, M. (2016), 'Labirynty myśli nieuczestnych'/'The Labyrinths of Unkempt Thoughts'. *Teatr Lalek*, vol. 2, pp. 14-16/17-19.

<sup>28</sup> Stern, A. (1964), *Poezja zbuntowana*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, p. 278. An interesting context for Wierzbicki's theatre activities are some film and theatrical productions of Stefan and Franciszka Themersons, Polish avant-garde artists.



**Figure 4:** *Labirynty światła*  
[*The Labyrinths of Light*],  
Laboratorium Zjawisk  
Świetlnych (2016).

Wierzbicki constantly modifies his own ideas and creates an ever-increasing number of new image projection machines. He is a performer of one-off/unrecorded performances, experiments with sunlight and moonlight presented on the fields of Majaczewice (a small village in the province of Lodz), where he lives. From his first open air work, which was *Strachowisko* in 1999 (the title is a play on the words 'scarecrow' and 'fright' [*strach* in Polish]), to his latest installations with the masks, he studies how to perform with light from different sources and discovers the theatricality that lies on borderlines and is expressed in short-lived, unique performances. Wierzbicki's visual theatre of light is a poetic reflection on the condition of the paradoxes of human existence, and the absurdity of life as well. Wierzbicki is interested in the human being as an individual entity, whose life is shadowed by loneliness and the ever-present question of personal authenticity in society.

The third artist under consideration, Adam Walny, runs the Walny-Teatr [Walny Theatre] and occasionally works as a set designer and director in institutional theatres. His solo performances, particularly *Kuglarz i śmierć* [*The Juggler and the Death*] (1997), *Motyl. Inspiracje biblijne* [*The Butterfly. Biblical inspirations*] (2000), *Hamlet* (2010) and *Opus. Hamlet* with Lars Kynde (2011), *Noe* [*Noah*] (2015) and *Don Kichote* (2017), form Walny's off object and puppet theatre concept, reviving the tradition of itinerant puppeteers and the ludic puppet theatre presented in the open air. Being both a sculptor and an animator, he produces his marionettes, effigies and instrument-puppets in a dialogue with the material used (wood, fabric, stone, metal, etc.) based on an understanding of how it contributes to the performance. Walny writes in his *The Art Handbook For The Culture World. On Object Theatre*:

That's how the original techniques of object theatre were created: drawer puppets (after reading Bergman); underwater figurines (after analysing Shakespeare; instruments/ figures (eschatology myths experience); keyboard marionettes (Bach's music); manual cinema (Cervantes). I think that the original techniques are the crucial distinguishing feature of my theatre.<sup>29</sup>

As an animator, he does not merely endow his puppets/effigies with transformational abilities, but also studies the forces which govern the puppet,

<sup>29</sup> Walny, A. (2018), *Podręcznik sztuki dla kultury. Rzecz o teatrze przedmiotu./The Art Handbook For The Culture World. On Object Theatre*. Keszczele: Instytut Teatru Przedmiotu, p. 104.

as can be seen in his *Hamlet* with marionettes diving into aquariums, where the powerful gesture of animation and cutting the strings off puppets is a result of finding a formula for weightlessness and of the puppets' autonomy. The puppets are completely under his control, as is the big wooden effigy of Catherine the Great brutally hoisted on a gallows in the spectacle *Dyktator* [*The Dictator*] (2012). Walny's animation, however, is not limited to his virtuoso command of the puppets: he acts as a performer who sets the puppets in motion and participates in the varying rhythms of movement which occur due to the weight of the puppet, its balance, or the changes in its gravitational pull. He exposes the material aspect of his puppets, their grotesque features, fissures, grooves and faulty proportions. Their very bodies, in a sense, become a stage of their own. The performer also plays himself, embodying sheer ordinariness, with no pretence at playing a role, and, similarly to an actor in *commedia dell'arte*, invites the audience to enter a world of theatrical play which develops in the here and now. In doing so, he acts not only as a puppeteer-performer, but also, to some extent, a storyteller, a jester, or a harlequin/clown. The anti-illusory elements add to the theatricality of the puppet/ object as a medium, so that we can see, in the here and now, how the human actions of the performer 'solidify and become the matter' (to borrow a phrase from Werner Knoedgen<sup>30</sup>).

Walny-Teatr is affiliated with a laboratory where performers hone their craft and animation skills to develop puppets and other performing objects as a dynamic medium of theatre. In this laboratory Walny is a performer who assumes the figure of the traditional puppeteer-craftman, and a performer of ludic theatre, an improviser, a jester and a juggler who creates theatrical apocryphs in which carnival fun is permeated with *memento mori*, the *sacrum* is revealed in the *profanum*, and the grotesque discloses menacing misdeeds and ominous meanders of history.

To conclude, Kwieciński's spectacles have the performer subsume puppet theatre into the heritage of twentieth-century happening/performance art.



**Figure 5:** *Hmlet*, Walny-Teatr (2000).

<sup>30</sup> Knoedgen, W. (1990), *Das Unmögliche Theater. Zur Phänomenologie des Figuretheaters*. Stuttgart: URACHHAUS, p. 109. Citation after: Jurkowski, H. (2002), *Metamorfozy teatru lalek w XX wieku*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Errata, p. 266.

Wierzbicki in his turn can be viewed as a performer probing the intermediality of theatre and working at the intersection of art and technology, whereas Walny brings out the potential of performers who present various forms of ludic puppet theatre.

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## **Miyako Kurotani**

**Theatre Genre:Gray, Tokyo (Japan)**

### **Summary**

This article presents the major ideas of the puppet theatre Genre:Gray founded by the author in Tokyo, Japan. The concepts of the puppet and object's 'traces of life' and the 'return to life' govern the two central processes of puppeteer training which the author, a Japanese performer, describes.

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł prezentuje główne idee lalkarskie patronujące tokijskiemu teatrowi Genre:Grey. Autorka skupia się przede wszystkim na 'śladach życia' lalki i przedmiotu oraz 'powrocie do życia' obiektów w rękach lalkarza. Autorska koncepcja treningu lalkarskiego zasadza się na założeniu, że nieożywione obiekty posiadają własną pamięć i wspomnienia, które należy odkryć w procesie animacji.

## **Searching for Traces of Life in Lifeless Things**

In Japan we do not have independent institutes of theatre arts. There are some universities and institutes of art, but they don't have departments dedicated to puppet theatre. What is more, we don't have specialized educational institutions dedicated to puppet theatre arts. Our only resources consist of major puppet theatres, public puppet theatres, and individual puppeteers providing classes where they teach their own methods irregularly and without institutional backing.

I am an individual puppeteer who became a member of a puppet theatre troupe at the age of nineteen; after that, at the age of twenty-three, I became an independent performer, and founded a tiny tiny troupe to continue working creatively in the field of puppet theatre. So my experiences as a puppeteer do not result from puppet school training or a regular education, but come from practice and research into the specifics of puppet theatre language. So in what follows, I will talk about the creative practices at my theatre Genre: Gray to show how we understand puppetry as a theatre medium.

### **Creative Practice**

Puppet theatre art is a form of expression which has retained aspects of primitive theatrical practices, and at the same time offers very avant-garde challenges. There were people older than me at puppet theatres in Japan, who had made efforts to gain a kind of citizenship in the circle of dramatic arts.



**Figure 1:** *Ancha [Elder Brother]*,  
Theatre Genre:Gray (2016).

They thought if puppets and objects perform roles written for human actors, you can create a puppet as a unique and ideal ‘actor’, and exaggerations and satires become more effective than when performed by human actor. They thought that this constituted an advantage of acting with puppets. However, in my opinion, ‘puppets and objects’ should have their own, unique mode of existence, and they do not act instead of a human actor, they perform on the stage using their unique being.

### **Extreme Forms of Expression**

‘Return to life’ does not mean to live like a human being. When ‘traces of life’ of puppet or object push away the outer form which you can see, and appear outside of it, that is the phenomenon of ‘returning to life’. The phrase ‘traces of life’ means uncountable numbers of memories that have been kept by puppets and objects from the beginning until now, such as the memory of the material from which they are made, the memory of the people who interacted with them, the memory of emotion, the memory of spaces, and so on. It may also be called the subconscious mind of puppets and objects.

The main point of training and rehearsals is to teach the hands to become the wisest part of the puppeteer: those ‘wise hands’ are searching for each puppet’s ‘traces of life’ and stay close to the moments of ‘returning to life’. Next come the ‘eyes’. The puppeteer’s eyes observe and remember visible phenomena and see invisible phenomena. These accurate eyes assist the puppeteer’s ‘hands’. To see invisible phenomena means, first, to grasp the entire stage through the eyes of the puppet or object and look at your partner on stage. Secondly, it means having eyes that can grasp the virtual world and recognize it as if it were a real one. It amounts to having two kinds of eyes – the puppeteer’s own eyes, and the eyes of puppet or object. When the puppet’s ‘traces of life’, which are found by means of ‘hands and eyes’, and the subconscious mind of the puppeteer and the puppet ‘stay close to’ each other, at last they together become one complete actor. It doesn’t matter whether the puppet or object returned to life has human shape or is a piece of cloth, paper, wood and so on.

## Training and Rehearsals

Roughly classifying, a performer's training and rehearsal fall into four categories. In the first category, we learn about behavioural principles of human beings. In the second category, we learn about the bodily functions of human beings. There are three reasons why we do these two kinds of training. The first reason is to prepare for becoming a highly expressive puppeteer. The second reason is to have a firm foundation of knowledge about human beings, since we rely on the understanding of an audience that consists of human beings. The last and the most important reason is that by working with comprehensive knowledge about human beings, we try to create unique behaviours and functions for puppets and objects which are not human beings. The third category of training is in how to manipulate puppets and objects.

Even if you have fine ideas for creation, you cannot test them if you do not execute them. We often have bitter experiences: an idea flounders because the idea is too ambitious and the level of our technique does not measure up to it, or the idea may sink to the level of deficient technique. But training only in technique is certainly inadequate for reaching our goals. If you have something you want to do, that means you have an idea, and sooner or later your level of technique will catch up. Furthermore, good technique itself opens up a world to us that extends beyond individual ideas. On condition, of course, that you continue training seriously.

On the basis of these three categories of basic training, which constitute preparing fertile soil, it is next time to plant seeds. We are trying to find the difference between human actor or dancer and puppeteer. We are not searching for the difference between puppet theatres and other theatre arts, but for the difference between puppeteers and other performers who express themselves. Without understanding that, we cannot understand who a puppeteer is, nor how to teach puppetry.

Puppet theatres are based on an assumption that puppets or objects are not mere properties but have 'energy and direction', that is, independent will. The puppeteer must live that virtual life. Unlike puppets and objects, puppeteers and audiences are human beings. To really live in the virtual world of puppet theatres, we have to move in reverse, and analogize with the behavioural principles and bodily functions of human beings. What is needed is an abundance of soil, including technique, allowing the freedom to be



**Figure 2:** *The Son of the Moon*, Theatre Genre:Gray (2016).

an expressive person. Then we have to take a leap forward and experience the reality of the virtual world.

For the seeds to bud and grow, it is helpful to practice not demanding particular results. This entails a period of patience, enduring repetition without results. If you can find the relationship between yourself as a puppeteer and the puppet, flowers may bloom one after another as a result. However, after that a consecutive stage of soil preparation will immediately be required again.

## **Conclusion**

In general, it seems to me that when we are teaching students how to become puppeteers, training as human actors and training in puppet techniques follow independent paths. Each puppeteer is a unique person with his or her own approach to expressing the relationship between human being and puppet or object.

Just as when a human being wanted for the first time to express something by a means apart from himself, puppet theatre itself seeks to express something through nonhuman and non-sentient forms and will do so in the future as well. But if the puppeteer does not stay close to the 'traces of life' of the puppet or object, and pays attention only to herself or himself, the form of expression called puppet theatre will become just another one in the arsenal of performing arts techniques for performing arts, and I suppose that the original vivid puppet existence will die out. I think that puppeteers should firmly oppose this development.



## **Oriane Maubert**

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### **Summary**

The first author to really make a comparison between puppet and dancer was Heinrich von Kleist, in his famous essay 'On the Marionette Theatre', published in 1810. For him, the string puppet was the figure of zero gravity and grace to which the classical dancer has to look. The author of this article considers common threads between dance and puppet theatre in the contemporary stage and analyses artistic strategies involving dancer and puppet in various configurations and balances of forces. The thesis is focused on performances by Gisèle Vienne, Duda Paiva, Ilka Schönbein, as well as the companies WHS and Sungsoo Ahn Pick-up Group, the Compagnies Moussoux-Bonté and Pseudonymo.

### **Streszczenie**

Pierwszym autorem, który porównał marionetkę z tancerzem, był Heinrich von Kleist w słynnym eseju 'O teatrze marionetek', opublikowanym w 1810 roku. Marionetka stała się dla niego symbolem wdzięku i zwycięstwa nad siłą grawitacji, o których klasyczny tancerz może tylko marzyć. Autorka artykułu podaje analizę relacji pomiędzy teatrem tańca i teatrem lalek w najnowszych działaniach scenicznych. Przedstawienia Gisèle Vienne, Dudy Paivy, Ilki Schönbein, a także zespołów WHS i Sungsoo Ahn Pick-up Group, Compagnies Moussoux-Bonté oraz Pseudonymo służą wskazaniu strategii artystycznych, które wytwarzają różne konfiguracje i układy sił pomiędzy tancerzem i lalką.



# Puppet and Dancer, Choreography of Object-body: Meeting, Control and Vertigo

The first author to seriously suggest a comparison between puppets and dancers was Heinrich von Kleist, in his famous essay 'Über das Marionettentheater' ['On the Marionette Theatre'], published in 1810.<sup>1</sup> Via a fictive conversation between the narrator and his friend, the first dancer of the Opera, Kleist establishes here a positive use of string puppets, presented as a model of the classical dancer, released from the weight of body and gravity. For Kleist, the string puppet is the figure of zero gravity and grace to which the classical dancer has to look. On the other hand, it may be interesting to compare the *Lettres* of Jean-Georges Noverre published in 1760<sup>2</sup>, where the word 'puppet' is used in a pejorative sense to describe the classical dancer as a puppet, an object that serves and obeys, in some way, the codes of the classical dance. However, the present article has the goal of moving beyond this classical comparison, in order to leave behind stereotypes and focus on the contributions of the encounter between these two arts.

Starting from this comparison of two very different bodies, those of the puppet and dancer, and stage arts, puppetry and dance, we need to focus on and to reflect upon the meeting points between puppet and dancer, choreography and animation. What does the puppet do to the dance, and what does the dance do to the puppet? The present work is focused on plays which gather puppetry and dance in the same choreography.

The questions of their intertwining coexistence, confrontations and relationships will be developed too. First of all, a simple observation can easily be established: a lot of contemporary artists, especially in Western Europe, have already created plays and choreographies centered around the question of the double presence or coexistence of dance and puppetry on stage. The list includes: the Compagnie Mossoux-Bonté, Duda Paiva,

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<sup>1</sup> Kleist von, H. (1810), 'Über das Marionettentheater'. Berliner Abendblätter, December 12-15.

<sup>2</sup> Noverre, J.-G. (1760), *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets*. Lyon: Aimé Delaroche, imprimeur-libraire du Gouvernement et de la Ville, aux halles de la Grenette.

Ilka Schönbein (Theater Meschugge), the Finnish company WHS, the Compagnie Philippe Genty, the Compagnie Pseudonymo... and a lot of artists who came from both puppetry and theatre, from the theatre of objects or the plastic arts, for example.

Moreover, a second finding from observation of the contemporary landscape of artistic creation on the stage is that a lot of dancers or choreographers use puppetry (whether for only one play, or more) without even realizing it, or simply without naming it: among these we could name Fanny de Chaillé, Hélé Fattoumi and Éric Lamoureux, Aurélien Bory, Sungsoo Ahn Pick-up Group (a south Korean company which works with the Finnish company WHS)...

A lot of artists are actually playing with and creating around this idea of confrontation, the exhibition of an opposed duality between the living body of the dancer and the inert body of the puppet. The questions of centre of gravity, inertia and impetus of movement are still crucial. How to consider the movement, when it is choreographed (synchronized or not) by puppet and human body? What does this 'choreographic duo' create for the notion of body (body of material or body of flesh)? Also, who or what is at the origin of the movement? Is it the body of the dancer? Or is it the manipulator's gesture which is changed by the presence of the object-body of the puppet? Who or what is really the object being controlled by the other? It seems clear that this conflicting dialogue, based on an obvious biological contrast (flesh against material) is currently drawing, in the space of the stage, on the invisible movement of the dance, at new levels, new strata of presence in choreography, from the abstraction of movement or from its narrativity.

From this cohabitation, across this idea of transdisciplinarity, emerges the question of interactivity between the dancer and the puppet. Puppetry and dance seem to have the same origin, because they are led by the same impulse: movement. To quote Kleist's text 'On the Marionette Theatre', when the narrator talks about his conversation with his friend, a dancer, at the very beginning of the text: 'He assured me that the performance of these puppets was a source of great pleasure to him, and he made it quite clear that a dancer who wished to improve himself could learn a great deal from observing them.'<sup>3</sup>

Forms of body language are at the centre of the contemporary creations that represent the focus of this article and its reflection. In the book *Le Sens*

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<sup>3</sup> Kleist von, H. (1972), 'On the Marionette Theatre'. Trans. Thomas G. Neumiller. *The Drama Review*, vol. 16, no. 3, p.22.

*du mouvement*<sup>4</sup>, Alain Berthoz develops the idea of kinesthetic sense: the body's structure features is composed with muscular receptors which carry out movements projected by the person looking. To be concise, Alain Berthoz explains that the perception of things is not unresponsive, but, on the contrary, active: there is a kind of anticipation of the movement. To borrow an idea from Alain Berthoz and transpose it to our reflection, when a puppeteer leaves his puppet but continues his movement, it is also possible to talk about a kind of choreography, a 'hands-dance', or a dance for the whole body of the puppeteer: the puppet-movement, without its puppet, finds its proper sense.

How, through the observation of this cohabitation of puppet and dancer, does the expression of movement in a common choreography create bodies in metamorphosis? How does it create a new projection of presence? How does the artificial body achieve its impact, transforming, or more, expanding the dancer's movement on stage, perhaps on the entire body of the dancer?

The French researcher Sylvie Martin-Lahmani, in the review *Alternatives Théâtrales*, makes this observation:

Bien manipuler l'autre n'est pas aisé. Se maîtriser soi-même encore moins. Une partie du travail du danseur consiste à répéter avec son instrument corporel comme un instrument de musique, un objet extérieur.<sup>5</sup>

[It is not easy to manipulate the other well. And even less easy to control oneself. A part of the dancer's work consists in rehearsals with the instrument of his body, as with a musical instrument, an object outside his body.]<sup>6</sup>

If dance and puppetry are artistic creations based on the movement, they are also based on inertia, but with a difference: if the dancer is, in a way, independent to create his gesture, and to do his movement whenever and wherever he wants on stage, the puppet needs a puppeteer to move. Even if the audience has the impression of the puppet's autonomy, almost a sense of its freedom (in the play *Double Exposure*<sup>7</sup> by the companies WHS and Sungsoo Ahn Pick-up Group, for example, where heads' puppets seem to stimulate the movement of the dancers' bodies), it is, in fact, of course, an illusion. All the movements of the puppet are led by those of the puppeteer. The movement is, in fact, transmitted from the puppeteer, or the dancer, to the inert material which constitutes the puppet's assembling.

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<sup>4</sup> Berthoz, A. (1997), *Le Sens du mouvement*. Paris: Odile Jacob.

<sup>5</sup> Lecucq, E., Martin-Lahmani, S. (2003), 'Manipulation du corps: vertige ou maîtrise?'. *Alternatives théâtrales. Objet-Danse*, vol. 80, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> All translations in brackets in the article were made by the author.

<sup>7</sup> The performance was created in Helsinki in 2012.

Through the plays of Gisèle Vienne, Duda Paiva, Ilka Schönbein, the WHS and Sungsoo Ahn Pick-up Group companies, the Compagnies Moussoux-Bonté and Pseudonymo (from puppetry, dance, plastic arts...), we should analyse the phrase: 'to dance with'. Then, we need to focus on the transition from transplantation to merging, taking into account the idea of the sharing of bodies, that we can call also 'to dance in'. Lastly, this article will consider the notion of the 'puppetrization' of the dancer's body, with reference to the idea of an object-body, a space possessing a kind of hollowness.

### **To dance with, cohabitation of partners: dialectic movement of dancer and puppet**

Is it possible to talk about a choreographic duo when a dancer meets a puppet? What is it possible to do with this confrontation between two very different bodies (puppet and human)? It is the insertion of a strange body, which isn't a part of the body of the dancer: they are interconnected opposites, conflicting partners. A puppet and a dancer are two very different, even opposite bodies, one living, the other inanimate, creating bodies that are strangers to themselves in a common choreography between intimacy and conflict.

#### ***Puppet and dancer: conflicting partners***



**Figure 1:** *Double Exposure*, WHS and Sungsoo Ahn Pick-up Group (2012).

The play *Double Exposure*, created by the companies WHS (from Finland), and Sungsoo Ahn Pick-up Group (from South Korea), combines a ballet troupe's choreography with a group of puppet heads. Nearly beheaded Barbie dolls, the puppets of WHS are all the same: blond hair, pink lipstick and blue eyes. To quote Sylvie Martin-Lahmani again: 'La mode a inventé la «femme-objet» qui cherche à se sculpter un corps parfait.'<sup>8</sup> [Fashion created the 'female sex object' who seeks to sculpt herself a perfect body.] The ballet troupe seems to be composed of twelve dancers: six heads, six humans. The fluidity of the movement, and some narrative episodes during the choreography (especially love stories between men and dolls) create a choreography of illusion where puppets and dancers have the same importance, the same presence on stage.

<sup>8</sup> Lecucq, E., Martin-Lahmani, S. (2003), 'Manipulation du corps: vertige ou maîtrise?', op. cit., p. 2.

The puppet invades the body of the dancer and seems to disrupt its choreography. Body of material and body of flesh enter into a conflicting cohabitation during this contemporary ballet choreography, with diagonals, straight lines and synchronized movements. Indeed, these heads of Barbie dolls don't have any bodies: their bodies are absent from the stage, and we can only imagine the presence and the outlines of this renounced body.

In a non-realistic way, the dancer will sometimes try to complete or to replace the missing body of the puppet's head. But these impersonal heads would need an impersonal and perfect body. On stage, Sungsoo Ahn Pick-up Group is composed of very different bodies of dancers, men, women, tall and small. So, in a way, we can observe that it doesn't work: cohabitation is difficult, and sometimes the heads seem to rebel.

Moreover, we have the feeling that, very often, the movement is stimulated, not by the dancer, but by the head itself. The Barbie doll's head leads the movement, and the dancer follows. The non-living material sets the rules. Puppets and dancers find a kind of harmony only when the Barbie doll's head wins: the head takes the place of the dancer's hand, the dancer's shoulder, etc. A doll's head is put on the dancer's shoulder blades. The head of the dancer disappears. The dancer begins to walk, his back to the audience. The human disappears, only the doll's head leads the whole the body.

With WHS and Sungsoo Ahn Pick-up Group companies, puppet and dancer are, indeed, members of the same choreography, but they never constitute only one body to dance together: there is a constant story of fighting, of difficult cohabitation, of conflicting partners for the same dance. It is a metaphor of the human body's struggles for its own independence, identity and specificity. Its fight to remain unique.

### ***The Siamese Technique: a shared existence***

The term 'Siamese Technique' is borrowed from the famous Brazilian puppeteer and dancer Duda Paiva, who used it during one of his workshops in the Institut International de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières, during the summer of 2014. To summarize it simply, it is a technique of manipulation that audiences can find in a number of plays staged by Duda Paiva, based on the coexistence of two bodies – the puppeteer and the puppet – in only one body, that of the puppeteer. The sculpture of the puppet is incomplete by design. It may lack one leg or both,

an arm, a hand, a head. The body of the puppeteer can replace the body of the puppet. Puppet and puppeteer share the same and unique body.



**Figure 2:** *Bastard!*, Duda Paiva Company (2011).

To develop this idea of the Siamese Technique, it is useful to consider the play *Bastard!* created by Duda Paiva in 2011. In this play, inspired by Boris Vian's novel *L'arrache-cœur*<sup>9</sup>, the figure of an artist (played by Duda Paiva himself) meets an old woman, Miss Clementine (represented by a puppet). Here, in the dramaturgy and in the sculptural aspect, the audience observes the meeting of two very different partners, one of synthetic material, the other of flesh, one a puppet, one human, one old, the other young. Even if the puppet has an anthropomorphic form, it is not made in a realistic way; it is a little bit caricatural, with thin arms and a big head, for example. Moreover, Miss Clementine's body is incomplete: her legs are missing. She is a legless, disabled character. Then, even if these two characters are completely independent and different in terms of dramaturgy and corporeality<sup>10</sup>, the audience observes a connexion between them, not really a merging of bodies as we will see later with Ilka Schönbein, but, in a way, a shared body, and shared movement, reinforced by the concept of intercorporeality.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Miss Clementine and the puppeteer dance together, with only two legs. In a way, the puppeteer lends his legs to Miss Clementine's dance. This is this Siamese Technique and its possibilities for movement and expression. The puppeteer comes to help the puppet move for one moment during the play. The empty spaces in the incomplete body of the puppet<sup>12</sup> are filled in by the complete body of the dancer. The central element of this shared choreography is, of course, the legs: all the emotion, the movement, and the expression are created

<sup>9</sup> Vian, B. (1953), *L'arrache-cœur*. Paris: Pro-Francia et Vville.

<sup>10</sup> 'Pour Michel Bernard, la corporeité est le processus de structuration-déstructuration-restructuration permanent dans lequel le corps est entraîné, et qui empêche de le saisir de manière figée.' [For Michel Bernard, the corporeality is the continuous process of structuration-deconstruction-rebuilding in which the body is driven. It stops to catch permanently the body.] Guisgand, P. (2011), 'À propos de la corporeité', p. 1. Online: [http://perso.univ-lille3.fr/~pguisgand/downloads/PG\\_Corporeite.pdf](http://perso.univ-lille3.fr/~pguisgand/downloads/PG_Corporeite.pdf) [6.09.2017].

<sup>11</sup> With this idea of intercorporeality, Michel Bernard tries to think of the body as a body-being-in-the-world, in a phenomenology perspective. In this sense, the body is considered as receptive to the other.

<sup>12</sup> I think about the 'bunraku' technic, which inspired a lot of European puppeteers during the 1970s. The Siamese Technique is a kind of derivative of it.

by the legs of the dancer. As the centre of attraction, the shared legs are the third character in the play, the point which joins Miss Clementine to the puppeteer. In the dramaturgy, this technique enables Miss Clementine to remember her youth. During one dance with a young man, Miss Clementine is still a pinup, and recovers her femininity and her sexuality, far removed from her everyday mutilated and old body.

### **To dance in: from transplant to merger, the sharing of bodies**

The notion of 'transplant', or 'puppet transplant', is to be understood in a clinical sense. Indeed, on the contemporary stage, the body of the puppet is hurt, disabled, or simply incomplete as if it was an unfinished sculpture, a metaphor of an unfinished puppet in creation, for a puppet dependent of its puppeteer, similar to a disabled person. Here, the puppeteer is perhaps on stage to help, to serve, and to move the puppet. In this perspective, the body of the puppet is open like a hole: it is a gaping body. And, in this concept, the dancer has to fill in the empty spaces of the puppet's body.

### **To repair the fragmented body of the puppet**

In the work of the indispensable puppeteer Ilka Schönbein, especially her play *La Vieille et la Bête* [*The Old and the Beast*] (2009), the puppet is seen moving on stage with an incomplete body, a kind of unfinished sculpture, transplanted, in a way, onto the body of the puppeteer.

A recurring character in her plays, the old woman, permits Ilka Schönbein to create families, exposing blood relations across a single body: the old woman presents a metamorphosis of bodies across ages, from birth to death. The destroyed body of the old woman exists on stage through two metaphorical bodies: the body of the old woman herself, with an empty mask for the head and an empty dress for the body where Ilka Schönbein moves with her legs, and the body of the donkey, the baby that the old woman has before dying. This donkey is in fact a metaphor for the old body in decomposition, with hair, coat, and stiff legs similar to those of hoofed animals... Seeing this infestation of her own body by the animal body of her baby, the old woman in the play needs to justify and to defend herself: 'C'est pas moi, c'est pas moi qui suis vieille, c'est pas moi qui chie, qui pisse, qui bave, qui pète, qui pue, c'est pas moi, c'est lui, lui, l'animal qui s'appelle mon corps!' [It's not me, it's not me who is old, it's not me who shits, who pees, who drools, who stinks, it's not me, it's him, him, the animal called the body!] Here we find the metaphor of the conflict between the mind of the old woman and her old body that she denies.

To move the tired and incomplete body of the old woman, Ilka Schönbein merges her body with these pieces of the puppet's body. There are two or three characters for one body. This idea is reinforced by studying the puppets' faces, which are molded with the face of the puppeteer who manipulates them. Ilka Schönbein creates her puppets from casts of her own body. In the end, sculptures are, in a way, a part of her own body.



**Figure 3:** *La Vieille et la Bête* [The Old and the Beast], Theater Meschugge, Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne (2009).

Moreover, Ilka Schönbein was a dancer before being a puppeteer. In the beginning, she learnt the eurythmical dance of Rudolph Steiner before choosing to study string puppetry. Then, she decided 'to cut the strings of the puppet', according to her own words, and to keep her body closer to the puppet's body. *La Vieille et la Bête* exposes that the old woman was a great ballerina when she was younger. Ilka Schönbein wasn't a classical dancer, but here there is a direct link between her life and the dramaturgy. Classical dance, which creates athletic and aesthetic bodies, is indirectly presented as the executioner of the dancers' body, who can dance only for a short time, with the idea that, the dancers' bodies are rapidly worn out and destroyed because of too much physical effort. In the narration of the play, the old woman is successively called 'la ballerine' [ballerina] when she is learning dance, 'la ballereine' (combining 'ballerina' and 'queen') when she is principal dancer of the ballet, and 'la balleruine' (combining 'ballerina' and 'ruin') when her body is dying. With *La Vieille et la Bête*, dedicated to the father of Ilka Schönbein, who died during the rehearsals, and to her first life as a dancer, the bodies die before the mind. Only an old, ugly and incomplete body survives. Ilka Schönbein gives, in a way, her legs to permit to this old woman to dance again and again, and to express the dance that she still has in her mind.

The aging and broken-down body of the figure of the old woman exists on stage, finally, between the fragmented body of the puppet and the small and very thin body of the puppeteer. In a way, the global metaphor which may be conveyed through this play is the gradual disappearance of the puppeteer's body in the bottomless hold of the puppet's body. On the other side, the fragmented body of the puppet finds its complete silhouette only with the puppeteer's presence. An interdependence to survive is established. There is a kind of merging, with flesh and synthetic material, between these two very



different bodies. To quote here Jacques Jusselle: 'Par ses métamorphoses, (...) elle ne cesse d'évoquer par rupture ou conciliation ces zones de transition entre ce que nous fûmes, ce que nous sommes et nous deviendrons. On ne se débarrasse pas de l'enfant que nous étions, ni du vieillard que nous serons.'<sup>13</sup> [With her metamorphoses, (...) she continually doesn't stop evoking, via rupture or conciliation, these areas of transition between what we were, what we are, and what we will become. We can't get rid of the child that we were, nor the old man that we will be.]

### ***From the double to a kaleidoscope of the puppeteer***

In the play *Twin Houses*, the French Compagnie Mossoux-Bonté likewise develops this concept of the puppet's transplantation. The puppet melds with the body of the dancer-puppeteer in their shared choreography. Like twins or doubles (the idea presented in the title of the play), puppet and puppeteer look similar. Indeed, *Twin Houses* is the story of a woman who is haunted, in a way, by a series of figures who seem to give her orders and manipulate her. Sometimes, these figures resemble the woman.

To give birth to several puppets, the Compagnie Mossoux-Bonté hangs all of them on the body of the dancer-puppeteer: on the shoulders, the hands, the knees etc. The movement of life is stimulated by the whole body of the puppeteer. The human body is used as the medium of expression for the puppets (the body as puppet booth). The puppets really invade the entire body of the dancer-puppeteer. Their relationships are sometimes conflicting, sometimes harmonious, because they have to share the same, unique body.

Sometimes, the human body is completely absorbed by the material of the puppet. Indeed, for one moment, after a fight on the floor and the rape of the woman by one of the figures, the woman literally disappears into the body of the puppet. It creates a tall, impressive and threatening figure: the character of the rapist completely devours the woman's presence on stage. With this fluidity, this free flow of the movement, the human on stage disappears within the puppet's body. Creating a mystical impression, the body of the puppet and the body of the dancer, each seem to extend themselves into the body of the other.



**Figure 4:** *Twin Houses*, Compagnie Mossoux-Bonté (1994).

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<sup>13</sup> Jusselle, J. (2011), *Ilka Schönbein. Le corps: du masque à la marionnette*. Paris: THEMATA, p. 77.

Puppets are used by the Compagnie Mossoux-Bonté to provide kaleidoscopic views of the dancer-puppeteer's figure, multiplying the presences on stage and confusing the audience in a gloomy and dream-like atmosphere.

### **Puppetrization of the dancer's body: object-body, space of hollowness**

Finally, the concept of the 'puppetrization of the body of the dancer' is the idea that the puppet, or the material which composes the puppet on stage, completely devours the dancer's body. The human body and human life disappear during this cohabitation. How does the relationship between the puppet and the dancer transgress and question the body of the dancer in his flesh, deconstructing his everyday image, to change him and bring him closer to being a puppet, an object of the manipulation on stage?

### ***From a human 'presence' to a 'presence-effect'***

In the collective book *Pratiques performatives. Body Remix*<sup>14</sup>, published in 2012, Josette Féral develops the ideas of 'presence' and 'presence-effect'. When a dancer or an actor is on stage, it is a presence, opposed to the notion of absence: he or she is moving, talking and acting by himself or herself. But, when someone is walking in a hood, for example, and hears the crack of a branch, he has the feeling of the presence of someone. In fact, there is no one; it is the 'presence-effect'. In the idea of the dance-object, it could be interesting to transpose the notions of Josette Féral directly to the figures of dancer and puppet. On the one hand, it could be easy to have the presence of the human (the dancer); on the other hand, how much richer to have first the absence of presence (the assembly materials of puppet), and second the 'presence-effect' when the puppet is brought, through movement, to serve the process of animation and to create the illusion of life. When the puppeteer transmits life to his puppet, he creates a 'presence-effect', a feeling of presence on stage.

But these two notions of 'presence' and 'presence-effect' really begin to be interesting when codes are disturbed, when the audience begins to have trouble distinguishing between the living and the dead or the inanimate, puppet materials and flesh, the dancer and the puppet.

*Showroomdummies* (2001, reworked in 2009 and 2013), a play by Gisèle Vienne and Étienne Bideau-Rey<sup>15</sup>, features choreography with dancers

<sup>14</sup> Féral, J. (2012), *Pratiques performatives. Body Remix*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes et Presses de l'Université du Québec.

<sup>15</sup> Gisèle Vienne and Étienne Bideau-Rey met at the ESAM (École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette), in Charleville-Mézières (France), in the 4<sup>th</sup> class. Vienne is choreographer, scenograph

(men and women) and plastic models. Some dancers (especially the women) have masks on their face. Moreover, the real bodies of the women dance in a very mechanical choreography, inspired by the 'Voguing' Dance. The 'Voguing' Dance was born in the United States of America during the 1920s, and had great success during the 1970s and '80s in the Latino-Afro and transsexual communities. This choreography is based on the exhibition of the body posing as a shop mannequin: the dancers strike poses like models. Inspired by 'Voguing', the choreography of Gisèle Vienne for *Showroomdummies* can be qualified, finally, as an 'anatomic choreography', because the movements are centered in the exhibition of joints and the jerking movements of the dancer. With this exhibition of the construction of the body, Gisèle Vienne tries to disembody the dancers' bodies with the goal of creating a new presence, new bodies with this living objectification. Creating 'full areas and empty areas' in the conception of the body by means of choreography, Gisèle Vienne is 'puppetrizing' the bodies of her dancers, seeking to lose the impression of life. With its stereotypical movements of models' poses, this choreography creates normed bodies which start 'going wrong' in the course of their anatomical movement. To borrow the idea of Gisèle Vienne herself about this play, the bodies go from 'inertia to disorder', pushing cultural norms to their extreme in each dancer, an idea evoked by the 'habitus' of Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>16</sup>

Based on this idea, in *Showroomdummies*, the plastic bodies of the models seem to invade the bodies of the dancers. A lot of the dancers' faces are replaced by masks, which are devoid of expression and cut the link between the audience and the performers, whose humanity is hidden. Moreover, at the back of the stage, there are shop models present. They are all similar, in different poses. Fixed in one movement, these models in fact recall the movement of one of the dancers: these plastic bodies divide amongst them the movements of her choreography. Fixed in their movements, like frozen pictures, these bodies seem to be a metaphor for the invasion of human bodies by plastic on stage.



**Figure 5:** *Showroomdummies*, Bonlieu - France (2001).

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and puppeteer, and Bideau-Rey is stage director and sculptor (he was a student in the Beaux-Arts).

<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1979), *La Distinction*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.

Then, centered on a mechanical gesture, in an effort to break up the movement, the choreography of *Showroomdummies* works around the repeating of falls and lifts. The puppeteers of the stage direction, the male dancers, move the women across the stage, like objects: there is no apparent distinction between shop models and these masked women. Through this mechanical movement, we are finally shown the history of submissive bodies. These bodies are presented as incoherent, led by their mechanical movement in a space and in a time with no sense for them. By its immobility, the shop model backstage has, in fact, an active dimension via the dancers, who reveal inertia to have a choreographic and dramaturgic quality.

The women's bodies are completely destroyed and crushed by the objects: humans are now the puppets in the play. With *Showroomdummies*, Gisèle Vienne and Étienne Bideau-Rey represent women as sexual objects for men: the women's bodies are completely transformed by surgery (masks, frozen in a perfect smile), and manipulated by a male society and its fantasies. And then, we only have the 'presence-effect' of the humanity of these women: their real presence is completely destroyed by the domination of the consumer society and male fantasies. Women are not fighting against this invasion of plastic in their bodies: indeed, the game is over, plastic and the models have won. If the invasion of 'puppetrization' of the bodies seems to affect only women's bodies, it in fact afflicts men's bodies too: they will join this mechanical choreography and will begin to be slaves to this oppressive code of domination by men over women. Toys of the performance, men and women, all the dancers obey the general rule of fantasy. *Showroomdummies* and its invasion by puppets of the dancers' bodies creates, finally, 'bodies out-of-codes', between puppet and dancer, in an illusion of life, disturbing the reference points of the audience.

### ***Denial of the human***

With the masks of *Showroomdummies* comes the idea of the denial of the human, and, together with it, the 'puppetrization' of the dancer. Indeed, masks are here the climax of the omnipresence of plastic material on stage: with a frozen smile, too much make up, and perfect facial characteristics, these masks refer, of course, to the mass production of dolls with flawless bodies. In the frozen and perfect smile of the fashion show, they devour the specific identity of each dancer. Conformism abrogates the unique nature of each face. In the perspective of Emmanuel Levinas<sup>17</sup>, who uses the word

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<sup>17</sup> Levinas, E. (1982), *Éthique et Infini*. Paris: Fayard.

‘face’ to name the essence of every human being, masks seem to cancel the individual, his expressiveness and his own uniqueness. With this devouring presence of masks on faces, the dancers are dispossessed of the ‘I’, a reflection, for Gisèle Vienne, of our contemporary time: *Showroomdummies* is here the place in which the human being’s fracture is exhibited, across a fashion show of rebuilt bodies by the reassembled plastic which constitutes them. The bodies of dancers in Gisèle Vienne and Étienne Bideau-Rey performances are between human and non-human, flesh and synthetic material, with prosthesis and transformation. The body can be changed to the point of irreversible exhaustion.

In this idea of a denial of the human, the French Compagnie Pseudonymo, led by David Girondin-Moab, co-creates the play *L’Orée des Visages* [*The Edge, or the Beginning of Faces*] (2013) with the choreographers Christian and François Ben Aïm. Here, in a landscape which is nowhere, the faces of the dancers are hidden by bulky masks composed of organic materials (pile of clay on the face sculpturing new forms by the dancer himself, ball of hemp around all the head, hairs on the face...). With the use of material which obliterates human faces and replaces them, life, on stage, can’t be expressed by the face, or the eyes, but only by the body, imprisoned in such material. Therefore, an instable choreography, where the body’s life fights against that material, is expressed through the instability of the feet, in a danced movement on half-toes. The gesture never stops, but continues in a constant hesitation. The presence of the human creates a presence-effect.<sup>18</sup> Under the organic material, the human is denied, as an object, and has to fight to express its humanity. As the title says, the dramaturgy seems to be set between the Beginning and the End of Humanity: bodies are not really human, but not really material either. Without faces, without realistic movement, these characters seem to have an anthropomorphic silhouette, but unfinished, between human, animal, and sculpted material, with a kind of abstraction of facial characteristics and choreography. With an important place allotted to the projection of the audience’s imagination, Pseudonymo here offers a phantasmagoric and dreamlike approach to this hybridization of bodies, between life and material, puppetry and dance.

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<sup>18</sup> Féral, J. (2012), *Pratiques performatives*, op. cit.

Puppetry and dance seem to be areas in which a metamorphosis of the body can develop freely. Puppet is a graphic and plastic form, where the movement of the dancer disappears on the stage in an elusive and enigmatic time frame. Puppetry and dance find a common way to express the interior dance that everybody has, through the materialization of mind space. Puppet dancing, or dancing with puppets, questions the memory of the body and that of human perception through hybrid forms of bodies.

Evelyne Lecucq says on this subject:

L'essentiel n'est plus le respect des codes établis mais la nécessité d'une expression émise ici et maintenant. Peu importe le nom de la langue employée puisqu'elle est inventée pour l'occasion sans faire l'économie de l'autodérision. Danse ou marionnette, ce sont des prétextes à une déstabilisation excitante qui permet aux artistes d'être là où on ne les attend pas.<sup>19</sup>

[What matters is no longer the respect for established codes, but the necessity of expression released here and now. The name of the language used doesn't matter because it is invented for the occasion, without trying to economise on self-derision. Dance and the puppet are excuses for an exciting destabilisation which enables artists to be where we don't expect them.]

From Oskar Schlemmer (and in particular his famous choreography *Le Ballet triadique*, 1922)<sup>20</sup>, to Pablo Picasso (the ballet *Parade* choreographed by Léonide Massine with a text of Jean Cocteau, 1917, presented by Apollinaire in the programme as 'a wedding between paint and dance, plasticity and mime'), through Philippe Découflé (especially his musical comedy *Contact*, 2014), to Maguy Marin<sup>21</sup>, the dance seems to hesitate and to oscillate between disembodiment and loss of oneself, and maybe a kind of exploration

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<sup>19</sup> Lecucq, E. (2003), 'Flagrant délit de décalage'. *Alternatives théâtrales. Objet-Danse*, vol. 80, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> I am here using the reference of the Conférence/Rencontre by Marilén Iglesias-Breuker and Luc Petton: *Dialogues avec la matière, objets de danse* at the Institut International de la Marionnette (Charleville-Mézières, 9th of March 2016). Marilén Iglesias-Breuker did a rapid historical summary of the relationships between puppet and dance, and talked about their play *Oskar*, a tribute to Oskar Schlemmer and his *Dance of Sticks*.

<sup>21</sup> I have in mind *Groosland* (1989) and *Cendrillon* (1985) where the audience can find costumes treated as second skins, with the goal of transforming, completely changing the silhouette of each dancer. The body is metamorphosed in another body, far away from the original, as a living sculpture, a kind of puppet.

of the living figure of the human. Finally, a link, connecting puppetry and dance, puppet's body and dancer's body, has been established by means of a feedback effect.

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### **Summary**

The main aim of the paper is to present and explain the complexity of the deep but hidden conflict between the 'top' and the 'bottom' that is currently taking place in many theatre institutions in Poland, including puppet theatres. Since 1989, Polish repertory theatres have been continually changing from the old, highly hierarchical Fordist mode of production to the new, flexible post-Fordist mode which is characteristic for cognitive capitalism and alternative, neo-avant-garde theatre. These organisational changes and some new aesthetic trends are leading to the extinction of theatre craft, as the work of craftsmen is increasingly outsourced or replaced by ready-made objects. This paper presents the results of qualitative field research conducted at six Polish puppet theatres, each with a different range, including interviews with craftsmen, in order to examine the economical, technological and aesthetic decisions that cause dysfunctions and exacerbate the dying-off of backstage theatre professions.

### **Streszczenie**

Głównym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie i wyjaśnienie złożoności głębokiego, lecz ukrytego konfliktu między 'górami' a 'dołami', jaki obecnie toczy się w wielu polskich teatrach instytucjonalnych, nie wyłączając teatrów lalkowych. Od 1989 roku polskie teatry publiczne stopniowo zmieniają model produkcji z hierarchicznego modelu fordowskiego na nowy, bardziej elastyczny post-fordowski model charakterystyczny dla kapitalizmu kognitywnego, stosowany także przez teatry neoawangardowe. Owe zmiany organizacyjne oraz towarzyszące im nowe trendy estetyczne powodują wymieranie rzemieślniczych zawodów teatralnych. Praca rzemieślników jest bowiem coraz częściej zlecana na zewnątrz lub zastępowana przez produkty masowe. Artykuł prezentuje wyniki badań jakościowych przeprowadzonych w pracowniach i warsztatach sześciu polskich teatrów lalkowych o różnej randze. Celem wywiadów z rzemieślnikami było zbadanie, jakie decyzje i czynniki natury ekonomicznej, technologicznej oraz estetycznej powodują dysfunkcje organizacyjne odpowiedzialne za degradację teatralnego ekosystemu.



## **Towards Sustainable Change. Craftsmanship in Polish Puppet Theatres: an Ecosophical Perspective**

My first important encounter with theatre craftsmen took place in 2014 in Gdansk, when I co-operated with the Miejski Teatr Miniatura [Miniatura City Theatre] on a Polish-Icelandic project entitled *Blue Planet*, working as an assistant to the Icelandic director Erling Jóhannesson. The play *Blue Planet* by Andri Snær Magnasson deals with environmental issues and shows the way democracy can be used to either save or destroy our natural heritage. It was significant that the play was staged in Gdansk, where in 1980 the independent Solidarity trade union emerged, a development which led to the fall of communism. Inspired by the location, Jóhannesson aimed to transpose a globally relevant topic – the politics of climate change – onto Polish soil, simultaneously putting our current troubles with democracy in a new perspective.

However, during the production process it soon became clear that our main concern was the crisis of democracy within the institution of the theatre. For me as a translator to enable a dialogue between the director and the technicians and craftsmen whose job it was to produce puppets and other elements of the production, I first had to understand the deep but hidden conflict of interests between the ‘top’ and the ‘bottom’, between the management of the Miejski Teatr Miniatura and the craftsmen. Or, going a bit deeper, the clash of two different methods of production that accompanies aesthetic changes. In this process of understanding, the history of the Miejski Teatr Miniatura provided a helping hand.

Miniatura is one of the oldest children’s theatres in Poland and was among the leading puppet theatres in the 1950s and ‘60s, when it was run by the excellent set designer Ali Bunsch. After he moved to Warsaw, Miniatura was run by his collaborators – Natalia Gołębska and Michał Zarzecki – who

maintained a high level of professionalism. Later, under the leadership of Zofia Watrak in the '70s, puppets remained the central means of expression, despite her introduction of more contemporary drama into the repertoire, replacing the folk tales that had previously dominated. It was only after 1985 that Zbigniew Wilkoński and his joint successors, Piotr Tomaszuk and Tadeusz Słobodzianek, radically changed the theatre's approach by merging traditional puppet techniques with live-action theatre, proposing extremely provocative interpretations of classic children's literature and mounting new plays addressed more to adult than child audiences. This experimental phase did not last long. Although Tomaszuk and Słobodzianek were highly praised by Polish critics (whose opinion later received international confirmation with the Fringe First Award in 1993), they had to leave the theatre due to a conflict driven by technical workers' strong resistance to organisational changes.<sup>1</sup> From 1991-1996, when Tomasz Jaworski was both Artistic Director and Chief Executive, and during the subsequent long leadership of Konrad Szachowski, who held both posts for fifteen years, *Miniatura's* artistic reputation suffered. In 2012 the new director, Romuald Wicza-Pokojski, again dared to introduce big changes in the repertoire and theatre aesthetics, as well as a new model of management.

Wicza-Pokojski's background lies in alternative theatre. As a founder and director of Teatr Wiczy (since 1991) with copious experience as a freelancer and grant applicant, he may have perceived *Miniatura* as a rather sluggish institution in need of immediate transformation into a more flexible entity. He started to collect funds from various sources (for example, *Blue Planet* was financed with EEA grants<sup>2</sup>) in order to become more independent from the City Council's subsidies and increase the public's interest by organizing various one-off events, including workshops and performative readings. In 2015, a local newspaper, *Dziennik Bałtycki*, nominated Wicza-Pokojski as 'Personality of the Year 2015 in Gdansk' for the 'konsekwentny rozwój jedynej instytucji artystycznej dla dzieci i młodzieży w Gdańsku, która dołączyła do czołówki teatrów lalkowych w Polsce.'<sup>3</sup> [consistent development of this sole artistic institution for children and young people in Gdansk, which has become one of the top puppet theatres in Poland.]<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> BAL (1993), 'Teatr Wierszalin zadziwił Turlajgroszkiem'. *Życie Warszawy*, 23 December.

<sup>2</sup> The EEA Grants are jointly financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway and are available to the 13 European Union member countries that joined the EU and the European Economic Area (EEA) in 2004, 2007 and 2013 as well as Greece and Portugal. See: <http://eeagrants.org/Who-we-are/EEA-Grants>.

<sup>3</sup> (2015), 'Dyrektor miniatury nominowany w plebiscycie osobowość roku 2015'. Online: <http://www.teatrminiatura.pl/aktualnosci/2016/01/11/dyrektor-miniatury-nominowany-w-plebiscycie-osobowosc-roku-2015> [3.01.2017].

<sup>4</sup> All translations in brackets in the article were made by the author.

When I came to Gdansk for work in 2014, the theatre appeared to be enjoying great success. Much to my (and Jóhannesson's) surprise, I learned that the craftsmen were at first very resistant to the democratic mode of co-operation proposed by the Icelandic director. He had previously run an alternative theatre group (the very successful Hafnarfjörður Theatre) where there were no strict divisions (and no hierarchy) between physical and mental work and where trust and partnership were basic principles. It was therefore only natural for him to involve the craftsmen in the creative process by letting them independently develop the props and other elements of the production. He was willing to give them a lot of freedom, trusting in their skills, taste and knowledge. Only later did I understand how this democratic approach had initially been abused or misunderstood. It took a couple of weeks for them to stop using this new freedom as an excuse for indolence or exploitation. That changed when they learned about his first profession, as a goldsmith, and the fact that he has in part earned his living at his craft since the closing down of his theatre company.

Later, in 2014 and 2015, the foyer and the main building of the Minitura theatre were renovated and acquired a much more modern, guest-friendly look. However, the craftsmen's workshop remained untouched, a bit shabby and untidy. This visual characteristic was another clue that made me think that the modernisation process had been rather superficial and done without proper consultation, in accordance with a 'top-down' approach. This may seem even more surprising if one remembers that Wicza-Pokojski had produced numerous artistic projects addressing socially or economically-deprived audiences or socially marginalised populations such as homeless people and immigrants, yet apparently lacked empathy for this lowest-paid, also marginalised, group of workers at his own theatre.

I suspected that the Miejski Teatr Miniatura was just one of many similar cases where supposedly necessary changes (in order to catch up with economic transformation) met with distrust and charges of exploitation from backstage workers. To find more evidence for this presumption, I researched fifteen institutional theatres, including six puppet theatres, and interviewed over eighty craftsmen and technicians of all kinds and from multiple generations: puppet-makers, scenic painters, tailors, metal workers, shoemakers, prop makers, upholsterers, wood carvers, dyers, hat makers, make-up artists, light and sound designers. In this paper, I will concentrate on the data I collected in puppet theatres, which have their own specific characteristics. Although I chose institutions in different parts of the country and of different sizes

and scopes, it is not a criterion of representativity that legitimises my conclusions but rather so-called 'theoretical saturation' (according to grounded theory)<sup>5</sup>, which I felt myself to have reached from the moment when I kept coming across very similar examples. I believe that the facts pointed out by my interviewees can be used not only for an analysis of discourse but also for an institutional critique.

Before diving into the details of the subject, I need to add that the interviews were anonymous, in accordance with the provisions of the Act on the Protection of Personal Information, so I am going to reveal neither the names of my interviewees, nor the institutions or towns where they work.

### **From manufacturing by hand to an air-conditioned office**

As is the case at Miejski Teatr Miniatura, the working conditions for technicians at other puppet theatres are often painfully inadequate, whereas dressing rooms, rehearsal rooms or public areas like lobbies, offices or guestrooms may have recently undergone major renovations. Respondent A., a puppet-maker, shares his workshop with a wood carver: 'I would rather have a dust-free place with no noise. When my colleague saws or sands a piece of wood [using an electric machine], the noise reaches over a hundred decibels.' When asked whether he reported his request for a separate room to the management, A. responded: 'They told me to do the carving in a mask and with headphones on, but I can't work like that. I have to hear how the chisel hits the wood; I need to feel its smell too. Sculpting needs to be done in full concentration and in close contact with the material.'

There seems to be too little understanding among managers of how diverse ostensibly similar theatre specialisations have become today, such as in this case the sculptor and wood carver, and how different their needs are. On the one hand, from a spatial perspective, all theatre crafts seemed to be lumped together as if nothing had changed from the pre-industrial era when all craftwork was done by hand. On the other hand, on a psychological level, theatre craftsmen are treated like factory workers delivering a product according to a specified plan, whereas the essence of some theatre crafts is in fact inextricable from the sensuous pleasure found by craftsmen in their tasks, and their work cannot therefore be done well without basic mental comfort. As Richard Sennet writes: 'Western civilization has had a deep-rooted

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<sup>5</sup> Konecki, K. (2000), *Studia z metodologii badań jakościowych. Teoria ugruntowana*. Warszawa: PWN, pp. 31-32.

trouble in making connections between head and hand, in recognizing and encouraging the impulse of craftsmanship.<sup>6</sup>

One may think that nowadays these extremely anachronistic views should be fading into history, but even in new theatre buildings and ones which have been totally renovated, the conditions in the workshops are sometimes worse than before. In one such institution, the new workshops have not been equipped with fume hoods and non-slip floor coverings, which is contrary to safety regulations. Moreover, the size of one of the studios has, according to the workers, been limited to such an extent that it is hard to stay inside because of the high noise level. Due to complaints, some fume hoods will be installed, but nothing can be done about the size of the studio.

How can the architects not have provided the necessary equipment? Respondent B., a puppet maker, voiced the following suspicion: 'It seems to me that it is due to a lack of specific knowledge about how people work in a theatre. At some point our boss participated in the consultations [with the architects], but I think there weren't enough consultations or they were too late.' However, the architects of one of the theatre's new buildings must also have forgotten that puppet-making is not always quiet, slow and healthy work, but can be very noisy and toxic as well. Respondent D., a worker at an institution that has recently moved to a brand new building, complains: 'The new facilities are completely inadequate for our needs. The rooms may be visually appealing, but none of the designers were interested in how we are supposed to do our work. Although we have to use some adhesives, paints and sprays, there were no fume hoods on the whole floor and no windows that we could open. Instead, they installed air conditioning, which is fine in an office where there are no toxic fumes. There was also no proper noise insulation between the rooms, so when we use the machines, we disturb each other. But what struck us most when we moved in was that there was only one power outlet per room, or in some cases none.' This clearly shows how the old stereotype of handcraft has been preserved despite modernisation.

## **Extinction debt**

Along with the political transformation, Polish theatre institutions have had to shift towards more effective and economical management. The number of job positions for craftsmen has been consistently reduced over the last

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<sup>6</sup> Sennet, R. (2008), *The Craftsmen*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 9.

twenty years. Instead, these institutions prefer to outsource and cut labor costs such as insurance. Nevertheless, even if we wanted to fight to retain the number of jobs, we would have to know how to recruit new workers. There are very few other jobs in theatres as low-paid as craftwork; only cleaning services earn less. It is no wonder that so few young, talented people want to work in theatres. Craftsmen share a feeling that their skills acquired over the years will soon be lost as they have no successors. The situation is also critical because during the political transformation, many secondary schools for crafts and private enterprises that had supplied theatres with professionals closed down and there has since been hardly any transfer of know-how outside theatres. Most of them provide short unpaid apprenticeships, but very few can offer employment afterwards, as there are no free slots until somebody retires.

What is more, theatres do not want to invest in skills development for their employees from technical departments, although they eagerly invest in new infrastructure, which is pointless if there is no human that can make good use of it. One of the institutions I researched has equipped their workshop with a 3-D printer. However, the manager was reluctant to send workers to a 3-D design course, so they would only use the machine if a 3-D project was provided. The high level of demand for skills development among theatre craftsmen is evident from the first, experimental iteration of a workshop for puppet makers organized on 14-16 November 2016 in Teatr Animacji [Animation Theatre] in Poznań. The chosen date turned out to be unfortunate, as it collided with another similar event: a master course on 'Construction and mechanization of traditional BUNRAKU Puppets' led by Noriuki Sawa and Yumi Hayashi from Japan, held during the 'Around the Sources' International Puppeteer Convention, organized by the Teatr Lalki Tęcza [Tęcza Puppet Theatre] in Słupsk. As Teatr Animacji wrote in the announcement: opportunities to develop knowledge and practical skills in theatre craft happen far too rarely. The fact that those two institutions did not confer on the issue of dates says something about the low level of integration within the Polish puppeteer trade or their lack of concern for the future of theatre craft. As I was sent to Poznań by the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw, a co-organizer of the workshop, to write a report, I found out that serious interest in the workshop among theatre craftsmen was much higher than the Theatre had expected. They received more than ninety applications from people from all over Poland who deal with theatre craft, both professionals and amateurs.

How can this vicious cycle leading straight to the extinction of theatre craft be broken? One of the institutions surveyed offers a six-month paid internship financed by the local labour office. After their completion of the internship, the theatre is obliged to hire the intern permanently. As I was told, many other theatres could do the same thing, so why don't they? It might be risky for a theatre to invest in somebody's education for couple of years (to train someone in all the basic techniques takes three to four years), especially if one remembers that those skills are highly valued in Western Europe. But knowing today's labour market, it is hard to expect allegiance from anybody. The old model of a worker who spends his/her whole life in one workplace – the type still most frequent among puppet makers – is now in decline. It is high time theatre managers acknowledged this, and if they wish to keep a high calibre of personnel, they should start to build an attractive and open organizational culture<sup>7</sup> based on values such as trust, respect and worker participation. Otherwise, the new 'species' of workers will not stay for long.

Many craftsmen admit that their salaries have never been satisfactory. Nevertheless, most of them could easily (unofficially) earn extra money by working for other theatres, in advertising and for private clients during production stoppages. However, some managers have recently become more restrictive and aim to find additional tasks for these workers, such as producing extra puppets for sale or making repairs, to use all the time that they pay for. Most craftsmen feel that this attitude doesn't reflect an accurate understanding of their difficult financial situation. It also seems unfair when a theatre earns extra money from its commercial activity with the help of craftsmen and does not share the profits with them.

Above all, it is not only a matter of money, but also a matter of respect and symbolic appreciation. Respondent J., a puppet maker, claims that there are various ways to reward workers, even with a limited budget: 'The previous manager, as soon as he came and we requested a raise, said that if we don't like the way things are, we can go to Ireland. But after some time he saw what we were capable of and was shocked. He then said that although he couldn't give us a pay rise, he would find out how to show appreciation for our work in another way. He would give us bonuses and call us on to the stage [at the premiere] to hand us each a flower. But now, as it is, we are just looking forward to retirement and can let them worry about things.' To worry – to put it clearly – about future staff, because the moment of retirement is – again, using ecological terms – often a moment of extinction.

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<sup>7</sup> (2016), 'Rynek pracownika to mit'. Online: <http://extra.innpoland.pl/rynek-pracownika-to-mit> [3.01.2017].

This is how theatres run up 'extinction debt'. This ecological term could easily be transposed into the sociology of theatre to describe the dying-off process of craftsmen. In ecological communities, extinction debt is the number or proportion of existing specialised species in the focal habitat expected to eventually become extinct as the community reaches a new equilibrium after an environmental disturbance such as habitat destruction, climate change or invasion by exotic species.<sup>8</sup>

In three out of six cases, proper conditions do not exist in the warehouses. In some of them, puppets are put in wooden boxes or air-tight plastic bags, in others they are hung in damp basements or leaking attics. Puppets, easily affected by mould, are thrown away. It is a painful sight for craftsmen to see their work, and the work of their masters, being discarded; but more importantly, the young generation of puppet makers lose the opportunity to learn about mechanics and techniques which sometimes took a long time to be invented. An environmentalist might call this situation 'habitat destruction'.

### **Between eco-criticism and recycled ideas**

Respondent M., a wood carver, distinguishes between two models of theatre management: 'the theatrical' and 'the economic': 'If a person thinks in a theatrical way and has a vision of a theatre as a whole, then he/she knows that workshops are necessary to build this whole world [on stage] and will preserve them. But if that person is an economist and cannot bear the fact that employees are idle for two weeks, because we have a break in the production cycle, then he/she will close the workshops down.' This theatrical way of thinking about a theatre 'as a whole' is surprisingly close to what art theorists have called an ecological perspective on the arts. As Suzi Gablik, American art historian, wrote: 'Whereas the aesthetic perspective oriented us to the making of objects, the ecological perspective connects art to its integrative role in the larger whole and the web of relationships in which art exists.'<sup>9</sup>

However, we should not confuse an ecosophical approach to management with common strategies of today's set designers, who use 'recycled' ideas and thereby contribute to the disintegration of a theatrical organism. Respondent

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<sup>8</sup> Kuussaari, M. (et al.), (2009), 'Extinction debt: a challenge for biodiversity conservation'. *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, vol. 24 (10): 564. Online: [http://www.cell.com/trends/ecology-evolution/abstract/S0169-5347\(09\)00191-8](http://www.cell.com/trends/ecology-evolution/abstract/S0169-5347(09)00191-8) [3.01.2017].

<sup>9</sup> Gablik, S. (1992), *The Reenchantment of Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, p. 8.



M. notes: 'I have the impression that lately we are merely remaking IKEA all the time, because sometimes the furniture comes from IKEA and we just adapt it to suit the new stage, rather than making things from scratch.' Craftsmen admit that they have noticeably less work with this 're-made' scenery, as well as with clothes from second-hand shops instead of hand-made costumes or mass-produced items from China instead of hand-made props. These common artistic strategies of contemporary puppet (and dramatic) theatre, often dictated by low budgets, time pressure or the limits of the set designer's imagination, pose a very real threat to the existence of workshops because they can operate without highly skilled professionals. It is no wonder that 'modern theatre', as they call it with an ironic smile, has a bad reputation among many craftsmen. Respondent M. argues: 'Take a regular table, everyone has one at home, but the world on stage should be a fantasy, it should be unreal. Let theatre be strange, artificial and mysterious.'

There is a certain danger in generalising about what constitute 'right' and what 'damaging' theatrical aesthetics, which easily turns into disapproval of any artistic experiments. This is what happened when puppeteers came out from behind their screens, trying to go beyond the notion of a puppet as figurative or anthropomorphic. And although this trend is already in decline and some directors, like Jarosław Kilian, the new head of the Teatr Lalka [Lalka Theatre] in Warsaw, have returned to more traditional forms<sup>10</sup>, most of my interviewees still find it hard to identify with these 'modern' (or, more accurately, post-modern) aesthetics. There are several reasons for this contestation.

In times when puppets were the centre of attention, the craftsmen's work was one of the most important elements of the stage spectacle. Now puppets are just one of a large number of components of multi-media and multi-conventional performances. Puppet makers complain that sometimes, puppets whose preparation has cost them a considerable investment of creative energy are barely visible among so many other objects and effects. They claim that nowadays actors are so busy with their own presence on stage that they don't care much about maintaining old skills like playing with marionettes. When a play demands a more traditional technique, they use a very small range of possible puppet movements, and the craftsmen's efforts to make puppets as lively and multi-functional as possible go to waste. It also seems that puppets – in being accorded equal status with other stage objects – have lost their privileged, sacred quality, a development linked

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<sup>10</sup> See: [http://www.teatrlalka.waw.pl/p\\_krzesiwo.php](http://www.teatrlalka.waw.pl/p_krzesiwo.php) [3.01.2017].

to the decline of professional ethics among actors. According to craftsmen, it is an increasingly frequent occurrence for actors to throw puppets on the floor and break them during rehearsals, just to release their anger or frustration.

However, the problem extends well beyond this loss of position in the hierarchy, or of a feeling of identification with the final product, the performance. There is a deeper, underlying conflict which mirrors the contemporary clash between 'the winners' and 'the losers' of the post-socialist transformation. In the current, cognitive, phase of capitalism, non-material labour is most highly appreciated, together with fast, low-cost adaptation and adjustment. Craftsmen nostalgically recall the set designers of the past, who used to make precise hand drawings, whereas now they would rather cut elements from the Internet and paste them together into a collage with the help of programs like Photoshop. Their projects often lack basic information on measurements and materials, which makes craftsmen feel disrespected and exploited, because it is often they who have to re-make these drafts into proper projects so that they can start building the set. It is therefore not surprising that they are sceptical when they hear calls for creativity and flexibility, and more and more often refuse to perform tasks set them by set designers who are paid for their copywriting. Respondent K, a carpenter, makes an allusion: 'When a set designer gets a prize, I sometimes wonder who really gets it.' In these circumstances, to adapt and co-operate means to lose twice – to do the artist's work and work extra hours with no reward – to become precarious.

Craftsmen suspect that this copy-and-paste, unfinished nature of projects results in part from the amateurishness or poor education of the new generation of set designers, but in fact it is also the 'work-in-progress' paradigm that the modern economy imposes on freelancers to survive in an ever-accelerating marketplace.<sup>11</sup> Contrary to mobile set designers, who are constantly busy, theatre craftsmen function according the old model of a full-time, stationary job where material work is still essential. Theatre institutions are thus hybrids of two different modes of production, Fordist and post-Fordist, a fact which is causing a severe rupture within the theatre 'as a whole'.

Mobility is one of the most important privileges (while also being a curse) of the 'creative class' (Richard Florida), to which set designers belong. Together with sound and lighting designers, they tour with theatres to festivals or

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<sup>11</sup> See: Gleick, F. (1999), *The Acceleration of Just About Everything*. New York: Pantheon.

other venues as part of guest performances, while puppet-makers stay in the theatre and do not have an overview of the diversity of contemporary theatre aesthetics. Their only chance to experience a bit of novelty is when their theatres organize a festival (or when they do extra work for a different theatre). However, it is not always possible to find the time to watch performances, because craftsmen have to look after guest artists and help them set up. Also, during such festivals there are no seminars or conferences especially designed for craftsmen, so they have to try to integrate informally with the guests, provided the language barrier is not too big. Not having the opportunity to compare the quality of their work with the work of others, to learn new techniques, to get to know other craftsmen and to talk about working conditions, craftsmen are also deprived of knowledge that could help them to resist the protectionism of theatre managers and the exploitative practices used by set designers.

It is therefore no wonder that the set designers most respected by craftsmen are those who work to reduce inequalities. Respondent L. recalls an example of a truly democratic artist: 'He is a wonderful man and, something that's very rare today, has no pomposity, yet is a huge star in graphics. He could sit at rehearsals the whole evening and come in at nine in the morning to the workshop the following day. And not to drink coffee, but to work with us, to draw, sculpt and paint. He taught us a lot of things. His humility and serenity made the work like a celebration.'

### **Towards sustainable change**

Artists should follow this example and think more about the social and relational consequences of their artistic choices – this is reasonable to expect, in particular from people who claim to be politically or socially engaged. Bojana Kunst pointed out that ironically, the neo-avant-garde ideas for liberating the human race from alienation, in reaction to the authoritarian, Taylorist organisation of work, went hand-in-hand with the new post-Fordian, flexible, creative mode of production.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the most progressive artists of those times, who claimed that the work of art and the work of life should be inseparable, created the very rule of precarious work. Managers, no matter how progressive and rooted in the alternative art they are, should always be aware of this trap and consider the moral consequences and social costs of the modernisation process in their theatres.

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<sup>12</sup> Kunst, B. (2015), *Artist at Work, Proximity of Art and Capitalism*. Winchester/Washington: John Hunt Publishing.

I am aware that many of the problems mentioned above cannot be easily solved and I have to admit that craftsmen are not always easy-going partners due to their strong feelings of frustration, which renders their opinion highly subjective and emotional. It is their job now to change their position from resentment and passive dissatisfaction with organizational transformation toward formulating specific, pragmatic demands, just like the Strike Committee did in August 1980 in the Gdansk Shipyard. This time, however, not to create a revolutionary carnival<sup>13</sup>, but to effect sustainable change.

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<sup>13</sup> Górlkowski, M. (2016) 'Andrzej Leder: Jeśli klasa średnia jest za bardzo skupiona na sobie, to dostanie za to po uszach'. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, vol. 307, December 23.







**Part 2:**

**Challenges of Puppet Theatre  
and Research**

## Eric Bass

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### Summary

In recent years, Sandglass Theater has looked at several pressing social issues through the lens of the puppet. This case study is focused on five collaborative international projects exploring the potential of puppet theatre in confrontation with difficulties of our time: war, violence, social injustice, social exclusion, religious tensions, and refugee journeys. *The Story of the Dog* (Cambodia), *Czarne ptaki Białegostoku* [*Białystok Black Birds*] (Poland), *D-Generation* (USA), *Natan el Sabio* [*Nathan the Wise*] (El Salvador) and, most recently, *Babylon* present a theatre journey deep inside the puppet's 'otherness' as a medium which often embodies a broad, generous humanity. An encounter of the actor and puppet with human stories is a way forward from collision and tracing borders to searching for a common voice to define our world and engage with it more fully.

### Streszczenie

W ostatnich latach Sandglass Theater zajmuje się prezentacją palących problemów społecznych współczesnego świata w języku teatru lalek. Artykuł stanowi studium przypadku oparte na pięciu międzynarodowych projektach badających potencjał teatru lalek w konfrontacji z tematami: wojny, przemocy, niesprawiedliwości społecznej, wykluczenia społecznego, napięć religijnych i uchodźstwa. *The Story of the Dog* (Kambodża), *Czarne ptaki Białegostoku* (Polska), *D-Generation* (USA), *Natan el Sabio* (Salwador) i ostatnio *Babylon* wyrastają ze świadomości 'inności' lalki jako medium, które paradoksalnie uosabia ludzkość w jej najgłębszych i najcenniejszych wartościach. Spotkanie aktora i animanta z ludzkimi opowieściami układa się w teatralną drogę od kolizji i tropienia granic pomiędzy tymi dwoma bytami, do poszukiwania wspólnego głosu, który pomoże zdefiniować nasz świat i bardziej się w niego zaangażować.



# **Colliding Worlds. Puppet Theatre Dramaturgy in a Time of Social Injustice**

*In the dark times  
Will there also be singing?  
Yes, there will also be singing.  
About the dark times.*

– Bertolt Brecht<sup>1</sup>

## **Every age is a time of social injustice.**

That being said, the world today is in an acute state of polarization. To fail to see this is to live in a bubble. The wars in the Middle East, sparked by superpower intervention, and the waves of refugees that are fleeing, have touched every one of us, and provided an excuse for xenophobia, racism, and violence. The climate crisis has pitted science against superstition in ways that evoke the rebirth of the Dark Ages. These crises have also brought the social and political divisions in many countries to critical, explosive, and shocking pinnacles.

In what way is the art of puppet theatre suited to address this world? To begin with, when the puppet meets the actor, they are standing on two sides of a border. This border is, of course, metaphorical. It is a moment in which worlds collide. It is a moment of choice: we can choose to see ourselves in the puppet, and learn something; or we can choose to reject this distortion of the human, and lose part of ourselves. In this meeting, to our surprise, it is the puppet who most often embodies the greater humanity.

In recent years, Sandglass Theater has looked at several pressing social issues through the lens of puppetry. Each of these projects has recognized the above proposition in a different way. By looking at five of these projects,

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<sup>1</sup> Brecht, B. (1976), 'Svendborg Poems'. In: Idem, *Poems 1913-1956*. Trans. John Willett. London: Eyre Methuen Ltd, p. 320.

we can explore some of the potential range of how puppets occupy a colliding world, and thereby directly confront the injustice that this collision engenders. Indeed, every injustice is a disenfranchisement of a segment of our population, a people, a world, whose humanity we refuse to embrace.

In each of these pieces we have the same starting point: the presumption that we know nothing about our subject. This makes research a necessity. What we know is our medium, puppet theatre. We know both the humanity of the puppet, and its 'otherness'. We know how to animate the puppet, to give it breath. We know how to help it find a footing in its environment, and to witness its predicament. Most importantly, we know, or have to learn, how to see through its eyes.

### ***The Story of the Dog (2005)***

In 2001, on an arts delegation to Cambodia, I met Mann Kosal and his theatre company, Sovanna Phum. I was looking for a possible collaborator on a piece, still undetermined. Sovanna Phum is a company that blends puppetry with music and dance, and in doing so, uses traditional arts in a non-traditional way. We approached each other carefully, building trust slowly. I went back in 2003 with some other performers from Sandglass Theater, and again in 2005. By this time we had built the trust to create a piece together. Kosal picked the story, a Cambodian tale of war that he knew from his teachers. He had wanted to stage this story for many years, but it was only after he and I sat down to talk, to merge our approaches to theatre, that he felt for the first time that he had the means to do this tale.

The tale, in brief, is this: A soldier goes off to war. He leaves his wife – and his dog – at home. He is gone a long time. During his absence, his wife takes in a lodger, an old woman. As years go by and the husband does not return, the wife finally takes a lover, a serious crime in the age and culture in which the story takes place. The old woman discovers the lovers together, whereupon, the wife and her lover burn down the house, killing the woman in order to save their own lives. Sometime after that, the soldier returns home. He finds his home burned to the ground, and presumes that his wife has died in the fire. He begins to travel from town to town and, by accident, discovers his wife in a distant town, washing the clothes of her lover. In court, she denies that he was her husband, but at that moment the dog enters, recognizes both of them, and proves that they were 'of one family'. Although the crime

of infidelity is serious, the lenient judge is about to forgive and reunite the pair when suddenly, the ghost of the old woman enters and condemns her murderer. The wife goes to jail, the soldier and the dog – go back to war.

This story had the potential to be a melodrama, except for one thing – the context of war. If we looked at this story as one of many stories of how families are broken by war, of how morals are corrupted by war, of how, in the face of war, we betray our innate goodness, we evoked a more relevant story. To do this, we had to give the wife a strong voice, as strong as the voice of her accusers. By doing this, we already addresses injustice in Cambodian society. But what about the puppets? What about their worlds?

We chose to divide the styles of puppets, to define the worlds of the piece. Specifically, we have the human story, and we have the greater story that surrounds them, the story of the war. We used Sandglass's style of modeled puppets for the soldier, the wife, the old woman, the lover, the dog. We used the large, magnificent, traditional Cambodian shadow figures for the war itself. As shadows, they are the background of the story, and as shadows grow when they move closer to the light, these images of war could loom like clouds of war above and around our puppet characters. Cambodians dance their shadows, and so the dance of war set the rhythm of the piece. The images of the puppets themselves, figures from the Ramayana, the great epic, were also warlike. We used human dancers for the judge, and for the sense of witnessing that this story required. In this way, the puppets made it possible for Kosal, and for Sandglass, to find the humanity of this story, and to find the great shadow world that lifted this tale beyond the level of domestic drama.

### ***Czarne ptaki Białegostoku [Bialystok Black Birds] (2012)***

Sandglass collaborated again in 2012, this time with Białostocki Teatr Lalek [Bialystok Puppet Theatre] in Poland. This project was personal to me. I had worked several times in Poland and, as a Jew, had had to wrestle with my people's history there: specifically the lack of conversation about Polish anti-Semitism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially among puppeteers that I met. When Marek Waszkiel asked me to write a 'Jewish' piece for BTL<sup>2</sup>, I could only offer one that addressed the 1968 expulsion of most of Poland's remaining Jews. As a writer, I looked for a format that made this a piece for puppet theatre. Two aspects of puppetry made this work: transformation and memory. I had been in Bialystok seven years earlier, and had been struck by the remarkable

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<sup>2</sup> A shortened version of the Polish-language name of the theatre – Białostocki Teatr Lalek (ed.).

presence of hundreds of large black birds in the central park. For me they were the spirits of the fifty thousand Jews who died in the Bialystok ghetto in 1941: dressed in black, and cacophonous, like Hassidic men in a synagogue. So I wrote a piece in which a Jewish American dancer comes to Poland and is accosted by these birds. They trap her in the park, and transform into ghosts of a Rabbi from 1906 (the year of the infamous Pogrom in Bialystok), a Woman from the Ghetto of 1941, and the Director of a Puppet Theatre from 1968. These are cast as puppets, meeting a human dancer in the present time. Each of these ghosts tells her their story, and each engages her in a song, a dance, an invitation to look into their world. When the dancer finally meets the young Polish man that she has come to work with, they have much more to talk about than either of them imagined. Even when we know history, we do not always know what our emotions will be when we confront it, relive it, engage with it. What interested me was finding a form for dialogue, to help inspire a conversation that, for me, was not happening enough. As an American, raised in the Civil Rights era, I feel that nothing really changes without dialogue.



**Figure 1:** *Czarne ptaki Białegostoku* [Bialystok Black Birds], Białostocki Teatr Lalek (2012).

Approaching this piece, I realized that I knew very little about the 1968 expulsion. I started looking for people, especially in the US, who could tell me what they experienced, how they heard that they were being expelled, what they felt, what they left behind. I found a number of Polish Jews who had created new lives in the US after leaving Poland at that time. Their voices and stories are woven into the fabric of *Czarne ptaki Białegostoku*, but what is important here is how the puppet theatre gives those voices a unique form.

Puppet theatre requires complicity with the audience, in order to bring a puppet to life. Playing a puppet is like playing a game, one that the puppeteer and the audience play together. I had met a director of a Polish puppet theatre back in 1982 who told me he was Jewish, and that he would lose his job if that truth were revealed. And so my ghost of 1968 became a puppet theatre director, and, in my story, he directs a small puppet play about Janosik, a Slovak folk hero, also popular in Polish culture – the ‘Robin Hood of Poland’. This enabled the audience to enjoy the puppet playing with puppets, and it enabled my puppet director to contrast his own situation with that of the West Slavic and Polish folk hero in his play. He stages a scene in which Janosik rescues his friend Tomas, and then wonders: ‘Would he help me escape, as he helps Tomas? Or would I be the rich man from whom he steals to help the real people of Poland?’ And then my ghost of 1968,

my puppet theatre director, reaches out from his own puppet stage and touches the young American woman, the human dancer, to whom he tells his story. She was his witness, a compassionate witness. It was her story, too, that he was telling. He demanded to be heard, and she, from her world of another time and place, complied.

### ***D-Generation: An Exaltation of Larks (2012)***

Sandglass Theater worked on our own production in that same year, a piece called *D-Generation: An Exaltation of Larks*, directed by Roberto Salomon. It is a piece about people with dementia. We worked on this show for four years before it opened. We had been approached by an organization in New York that worked with circles of people with dementia, using a storytelling process called Timeslips (created by MacArthur Prize winner Anne Basting). They had hoped that we would create a puppet play from one of these stories, written by people with late-stage dementia. Our response was that we liked the project, but that in order to understand the material we were working in, we had to collect the stories ourselves. The organization, PHI, trained our cast in facilitating Timeslips circles, and we ran twenty weeks of these storytelling events in nursing homes to gather the material for our piece.

This was the longest and most extensive commitment to research that we had ever made. It enabled us to get not only the stories, but to get to know many people with dementia, and to develop, over time, our own reactions to the people, the disease, and our own fears. We came to understand that many people are afraid not only of the disease, but of people who have it, because they don't know what to do or say, or feel embarrassed, or perhaps because people with dementia have become 'other'. Understanding that puppets are always 'other' to us, we knew we had found a way to stage the show. We, the puppeteers, became nurses and caregivers to our cast of puppets, residents of a nursing home, all of whom had dementia, although each in an individual way. The show became then, not a piece about people with dementia, but about our relationship to them, as caregivers. It became a piece about the difficulty and challenges of our work, and about our own fears of becoming like our patients. This process could have led us down a very dark and hopeless path, but our work was to create a piece that was actually uplifting, that gave strength to caregivers, and helped to de-stigmatize the



**Figure 2:** *D-Generation: An Exaltation of Larks*, Sandglass Theater (2012).

people with dementia. It is easy to be dark, especially in dark times, as Brecht would have said. I question whether this helps anyone. On the other hand, to give someone hope, realistic hope, is a task worth taking on. What *Timeslips* does, over time, is to help improve not the condition of dementia (which is irreversible), but the quality of life of both people with dementia and their caregivers. It does this by retraining caregivers to stay in the present when talking with dementia patients, and by accepting play as a form of discourse.

How did our production do this? By presenting the residents with dementia as puppets (all of them in oversized wheelchairs made from crutches and baby buggies), we, the puppeteers and caregivers, towered over them, and yet they dominated us. It gave us room to move in and out of the story, to be part of the interaction of worlds, and also to step outside and comment on our experience. At one point in the show, we give the puppets to people in the audience to hold, so that they can all watch a play-within-a-play together. We demand that the audience take responsibility for these puppet characters – and they love it. We could not do this with actors. We could not put actors into the laps of the audience members. Using puppets, our metaphor is tactile, it is material. The audience takes caregiving into their own hands. It might seem harmless, but the metaphor is not lost. It is about the care we take for others, for ‘others’. For those we believe are outside of our world.

### ***Natan el Sabio* [Nathan the Wise] (2015)**

*Natan el Sabio* was a project spanning three years, a collaboration with Teatro Luis Poma in El Salvador. The play, written by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in Germany in 1799, is a powerful enlightenment epic about racism and religious intolerance in Jerusalem during the Third Crusade. I had proposed this project to Roberto Salomon, director of TLP, for three reasons. Firstly, we both love the piece for its story and theatricality. Second, it seemed to address aspects of the violence and religious tensions that plague Salvador today. And third, it seemed to lend itself to puppets, in spite of the weighty text.

Salvador is, today, a country under siege from gangs that are at war: with each other, with the government, with people on the street. Their main business is extortion, but they have profited from traffic in guns and drugs as well. These gangs began in the United States during the Salvadoran civil war in the 1980s, during which many Salvadorans moved to the US, were challenged by gangs in US cities, formed their own gangs to defend themselves, and then

were deported back to El Salvador. As an American, it is hard not to feel some responsibility for this situation. In such a climate of violence, *Natan el Sabio* was received as ‘a mouthful of fresh air’ by one of the critics.<sup>3</sup> The characters in Nathan are all positioned to hate ‘others’, but by the end of the play, they have all rejected that hatred.

Of course, the play had to be adapted. One of the ways that we did that was to separate the characters into two worlds: those who move the action, and those upon whom the action moves. The five central characters: Nathan the Jew, his daughter Rehe, The Sultan Saladin, The Sultan’s Sister Sitta, and a Knight Templar are all carried by the forces around them, forces that seem to be driving them to their doom. These characters were played by puppets. Around them are the characters that drive these intrigues: Recha’s nurse, Saladin’s banker, the Christian Patriarch and a Friar. These characters were played by actors, who could push the puppets into paths that they, the human characters, had devised. It was a powerful distinction, one that gave the puppets a focus and helped to move beyond the melodrama inherent in the writing. To add further freshness and relevance to this device, we costumed the puppeteers/actors as different members of Salvador’s rigid class system. The honest Templar was played by someone dressed as a gang member; the Sultan’s noble sister by someone dressed as a maid: the Sultan himself as someone dressed in the fashion of today’s Salvadoran politicians. The costumes suggested that people of different classes could come together, if only for an hour, and create a piece of art together. This, of course, cannot really happen, and that is the point. At the end of the play, they put down their puppets and go their separate ways.



**Figure 3:** *Natan el Sabio* [*Nathan the Wise*], Sandglass Theater and Teatro Luis Poma (2015).

### ***Babylon* (2017)**

Finally, Sandglass Theater’s newest piece is a production about refugees, an issue affecting everyone in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. We call the show *Babylon*, after the fallen kingdom that once existed about sixty miles from what is now Baghdad. Again, Roberto Salomon worked with us, co-directing the work. *Babylon* is a piece about dehumanization and, of

<sup>3</sup> (2015), ‘Una Bocanda de Aire Fresco’. *La Prensa*, August 17, p. 34.

course, its corollary, humanization. We began our work on this performance by interviewing refugees, with help from the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, a branch of the US Committee on Refugees and Immigrants. Once again, the puppet is our medium. As in the productions I've talked about, the characters in this piece, the refugees, are seen as 'other', and so, we cast them as puppets. There are other reasons, too, for exploring this theme with puppets: we have come to view puppets as containers of stories, objects that are there to be looked into until they reveal what they carry inside. Each refugee carries the story of their homeland, the story of their journey, and sometimes the story of a new life. Often, however, refugees do not have the voice to tell their stories. Their voice might be hampered by a difference of language, or by fear or mistrust, or by lack of access. Or, frequently, by trauma, which can be reignited by the telling of their stories. Puppets, too, cannot always tell their own stories. In *Babylon*, we, the puppeteers, help interpret what we discover inside them.



**Figure 4:** *Babylon*, Sandglass Theater (2017).

One of the dramaturgical choices in puppetry is finding how the puppet's voice is heard. Not all puppets speak. This is most artfully exemplified in the Japanese Bunraku theatre, in which the offstage narrator speaks or sings the voices for all of the puppets onstage. In *Babylon*, we turned the refugees' stories into songs that are sung by the entire ensemble of puppeteers. In doing so, we take responsibility for getting the puppet/refugee stories heard. Then, we allow the puppeteers to speak to the audience about what these stories mean to them and how they are affected by the act of interpreting. The refugee stories are different for the puppets than for the puppeteers. The puppets, stand-ins for the refugees themselves, embody the stories; the puppeteers can only imagine what the refugees have experienced. At times, the puppeteers whisper arguments about whether these puppets/refugees should be given asylum at all. At times, they talk behind the puppets' backs, as if the puppets cannot hear. As if refugees in our midst were only lifeless puppets. At times the puppeteers sit with the puppets, facing adversity together, joining their worlds if only for a moment. The dramaturgy of the puppet in an age of social injustice is a dramaturgy of mediation. As the puppets are cast as 'other', we, the puppeteers, become intermediaries between other



and audience. We no longer know the full story of our puppet characters. Our role is to help the audience to look harder, to listen deeper, and to challenge the objectification of otherness.

### **In Closing**

We meet the puppet. How do we treat it? With gentleness? With force? Do we insist on having our way with it, or do we support it, and wait to see where it leads us? The way we treat the puppet is what our performance is about, no matter what we say. The puppet remains in a world separate from us, an 'other'. How we define that world, and how we engage with it, is our statement. It may be a world of spirits that overshadow us, or ghosts from our collective memory, or a segment of society whose consciousness we cannot access. It may be a class of characters caught in the fateful wheels of our machinations, or it may be a world of people we are afraid of. In the myriad of possibilities we have, each contains the possibility of justice or violation, of inclusion or expulsion. Each encounter with the world of the puppet might well be a collision. It might also be an opening to our better humanity.

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### **Summary**

This paper focuses on the presence modes of figures in contemporary puppetry. Using a reflection on the relation between the 'two bodies' of the puppet (material and non-physical), it is shown how contemporary artists confront the audience with puppets, with no link to any unique, identifiable material body. The phenomena of immobile animation and disembodiment of the puppet are analysed and illustrated by examples of creations from the turn of the 20/21<sup>th</sup> century – François Lazo, Morbus Théâtre, Nick Steur, Gisèle Vienne, Cie Non Nova. They lead to a redefinition of the term 'puppet', which needs to be extended to include the concept of the puppet as a fragile and discontinuous presence, with a focus on the emergence of the visibility and visuality of the puppet.

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł porusza problematykę różnych form uobecniania się figuratywnych bytów scenicznych we współczesnym teatrze lalek. Wychodząc od refleksji nad 'podwójnością' lalki jako bytu materialnego i niematerialnego zarazem, autorka omawia działania współczesnych artystów, które konfrontują widzów z formami nie mającymi już nic wspólnego z lalką jako obiektem materialnym. Fenomen statycznej animacji i odcieśnienia lalki jest analizowany na przykładach przedstawień François Lazo, Morbus Théâtre, Nicka Steura, Gisèle Vienne, zespołu Kompanii Non Nova, które są symptomatyczne dla przemian sztuki przełomu XX i XXI wieku. Prowadzą one do redefinicji pojęcia 'lalka', które wymaga uwzględnienia obiektów objawiających się na scenie jako delikatna i nieciągła obecność będąca efektem emergencji widzialności i wizualności lalki.

## **Toward a Disembodied Puppet: Vibrational Presences and Illusory Animation**

A very simple question served as the starting point for this reflection on the presence and emergence of dramatic figures in contemporary puppetry. This question is: 'Where is the puppet?' It has been heard many times in the audience, watching contemporary shows, where something was obviously being played by a disembodied actor or actors, but where it was impossible to point toward one object or one place where a single puppet could be identified and named.

If the question is simple, its answer seems to be more complex: this paper aims to specify what is absent for these disappointed spectators and to aesthetically distinguish what remains from what is called 'a puppet'. To do so, we must overcome the ideas of the unity and materiality of the so called 'puppet'. This overcoming appears to be possible only by contemplating puppetry not only in terms of a confrontation between material objects and human bodies but in terms of a singular interplay between dramatic presences and material bodies or objects.

The concept of the 'two bodies of the puppet'<sup>1</sup>, proposed by Amos Fergombé, gives us an interesting theoretical starting point. It was inspired by the famous work of Ernst Kantorowicz, a specialist in medieval political theology: *The King's Two Bodies* (1957).<sup>2</sup> The eponymous expression names the double nature of the king's body in feudal law: the natural and mortal body, on one hand, and the political and consequently eternal body, on the other. Fergombé proposed that we consider the puppet, using this model, as a body that is irreducibly singular and double at the same time. The puppet would have a physical and visible body, behind which an invisible one would stand, which is symbolic and relies on a collective belief.

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<sup>1</sup> Fergombe, A. (2010), 'Les deux corps de la marionnette', paper for the symposium 'Corps vivants/ corps marionnettiques' organized by Françoise Heulot-Petit and Stanka Pavlova (Textes et cultures EA 4028) Université d'Artois, Arras.

<sup>2</sup> Kantorowicz, E. (1957), *The King's Two Bodies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Now, the contemporary works on which we want to focus seem to render equivocal the articulation of these two bodies. The link between the material part and the non-physical part of the puppet – its presence – is stretched to an extreme, so that the audience can face spectral figures, without any fixed or inert raw materials, from which a symbolic sense emerges. Our hypothesis is that this oscillation between spectrality and opacity is one of the symptoms of the disembodiment of the puppet.

This article focuses on creations from the turn of the century in Europe (mostly in France) that we saw live, among other spectators (an important factor in our approach). In these examples, we want to highlight aesthetic phenomena which illustrate this disembodiment. Focusing first on what becomes the objects in such performances, we want next to analyse their specific relationships to the actors. We will identify a form of ‘immobile animation’ that enables the emergence of a dramatic figure out of the bodies of the actors without moving the scenic objects. Then the identification of specific forms of manipulation and visual craft will lead us to evoke a ‘discontinuous inhabitation of bodies’ that builds an illusory circulation of presence. Dramatic presence emerges from this play through the presence of inception flows in between the bodies. We aim finally at specifying the technical foundations, the aesthetic effects and the theoretical consequences of what we propose to call the disembodiment of the puppet.

The first aesthetic phenomenon which appears significant in numerous contemporary creations is the abandonment of the traditional manipulation of objects and the development of a form of listening to motionless objects.

To best qualify this shift, a classical definition of the puppet, proposed by Henryk Jurkowski at the beginning of his major work, *Métamorphoses. La marionnette au XXe siècle*, can serve as a reference point to consider before necessarily broadening its scope:

Je considère que la marionnette est une figure artificielle, articulée, fabriquée selon les principes des arts plastiques, dotée de capacités techniques pour être mise en jeu, lors d’un spectacle, devant un public, en tant que sujet fictive.<sup>3</sup>

[I consider that the puppet is an artificial figure, articulated, made by means of plastic arts in order to be played on stage, in a show, in front of an audience, as a fictional subject.]<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jurkowski, H. (2008), *Métamorphoses. La marionnette au XXe siècle*. Montpellier: l’Entretemps, pp. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> All translations and underlines in brackets in the article were made by the author.

Some elements of this definition have been increasingly transgressed since the seventies and are even discarded by many contemporary creations; those elements include the necessity of articulation and movement of an object.

The audience can indeed be confronted with immobile objects, which are not necessarily articulated, much less moved by the hand of a performer, as the etymology of the term 'manipulation'<sup>5</sup> suggests. However, these still objects maintain a prominent role in the drama, a fact that prevents us from considering them to be props or decorative items. Jean-Luc Mattéoli called this phenomenon 'immobile animation' and thoroughly analysed it (in works by Théâtre La Licorne, Théâtre du Radeau, Théâtre de cuisine...<sup>6</sup>). He borrows the phrase from Roland Shön<sup>7</sup>, French puppeteer of the Théâtrenciel company, who writes:

je pratique, depuis des années et sans le savoir, l'animation immobile, en utilisant dans mes spectacles des fétiches théâtraux. Des objets qui ne sont pas manipulables, qui sont simplement exposés, installés, à l'image d'une installation de plasticien, mais sur lesquels le jeu de l'acteur va s'appuyer.<sup>8</sup>

[I have practiced for years, without knowing it, a form of immobile animation, by using theatrical fetishes in my shows. Some objects are not manipulable; they are only exposed, installed, as in installations in the work of visual artists, but on which the actor's playing will rely.]

The use of the term 'theatrical fetishes' offers two perspectives for our analysis: the staging of immobile objects carrying a high level of symbolic meaning and its relation to the ritual form. A recent example of such proximity to the installation form is the creation *Des Hurlements montaient le long des saules pleureurs* [*The Screams Rose Along the Weeping Willows*] (2013) from the Clastic Théâtre.<sup>9</sup> In this work, François Lazaro set the sculptures of the artist Francis Marshall in several little groups. The audience moves from one scene to another, as it would do at an exhibition. But this wandering is precisely timed

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<sup>5</sup> Etymology of 'manipulate': (from 'manus', lat. 'the hand') to handle skillfully with the hand.

<sup>6</sup> Mattéoli, J.-L. (2011), *L'objet pauvre: mémoire et quotidien sur les scènes contemporaines françaises*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

<sup>7</sup> Roland Shön is a French actor, puppeteer, puppet director and writer. He taught at the ESNAM (Charleville-Mézières, France) and founded the company Théâtrenciel. In his work, he explores all the possible techniques and arts: theatre, painting, sculpture, puppet, shadow theatre, object theatre, clown and literature.

<sup>8</sup> Mattéoli, J.-L. (2011), *L'objet pauvre...*, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>9</sup> Founded in 1984 by François Lazaro, the Clastic Théâtre is a French company which explores the contemporary dramatic literature through creative stage work in which actors, dolls, dummies, puppets, objects and materials interact. It stands for a theatre of the body and of the disembodied character.



**Figure 1:** *Des Hurléments montaient le long des saules pleureurs* [The Screams Rose Along the Weeping Willows], Clastic Théâtre (2013).

(by the ringing of bells), it is collective, and furthermore it is punctuated with sketches. These factors highlight the proximity between theatrical performance and the art of installation. It is also significant that the theatrical process of *Des Hurléments* is based on a pre-existing visual arts piece, to which François Lazaro wants to pay tribute. In that sense, the idea that the puppetry object has to be built 'in order to be played on stage' has been transgressed.

Immobile objects can also be staged without any intention of focusing on their visual artistic value. For example, in the creation *54x13* (2015) by the Morbus Théâtre, an actor moves around a table on which is set a little sculpture representing a cyclist. The show represents four hours in the life of a cyclist but the sculpture of the sportsman is paradoxically very small, formally very simple, and never moved. Only the actor's movement, his running, breath and voice, along with some recorded sounds, evoke the rhythm, the road background, and the atmosphere of the competition as it evolves. Through specific corporal and vocal techniques, the actor finds a posture which creates a lively tension between him and the sculpture, so that the spectator focuses on an intangible presence somewhere between the object and the performer.



**Figure 2:** *54x13*, Morbus Théâtre (2015).

In such performances, the installed objects are not puppets in themselves but they enter into play through the emergence of the dramatic figure. The sight of the object is meticulously set up and accompanied by music and voices, singing and informative or evocative texts. The orchestration of all these scenographic media builds up a vibrational presence around the object, so that its immobility becomes no longer a synonym for inertia. The apparent immobility is enriched by an aura.

Concerning the nature of the objects that enable this kind of illusory animation, we want to notice that numerous contemporary creations place on stage not only immobile sculptures but also raw material that has not been 'made by means of visual arts'.

Nick Steur, for example, works with stones: his performance *Freeze* (2012) consists entirely of stacking stones, maintaining a very fragile balance, in unusual places. The use of such stones is highly symbolical: it brings to mind,

for instance, the ancient 'colossus'. These immobile stones assured the link between living and dead, by representing a dead person after his death and during the funeral ceremony. It could be 'une statue ou simple pierre dressée, sans rien de mimétique ou d'anthropomorphe à l'origine'<sup>10</sup> [a statue or a simple raised stone, with originally no specific mimetic or anthropomorphic characteristics] and was considered 'image figurée du mort.'<sup>11</sup> [a figurative image of the dead.] Nick Steur's show echoes this pattern of stones doubling for human beings: it doesn't use anthropomorphic carved statues but plays with the invisible presence that each of us can project on the immobile stones. The gesture of stacking then highlights the ephemeral nature of the form, which is constantly moving toward its end. This play with raw materials and forms under construction nourishes an extreme dramatic tension and gives rise to presences apart from the human body on stage.

It is interesting to note that in such shows, animation, which leads to the construction of a symbolic meaning or an immaterial presence, is sometimes counterbalanced by a provisory refusal to animate objects that underlines their opacity as objects. Cariad Astles identifies such a process in the work of this category of puppet directors, whom she calls 'those who treat the puppet as object, prop or ritual icon.'<sup>12</sup> According to her, Roman Paska is one of them, because his 'puppets [...] celebrate their difference from the human form and remind the audiences constantly of their nature as objects.'<sup>13</sup> Several creations by Gisèle Vienne<sup>14</sup> play clearly with this oscillation. The artist uses puppets in her staging which are very similar to commercial dummies. Their use in *Showroomdummies* (2001), as in *I apologize* (2004), for example, relies on a discontinuous animation that makes these objects alternatively inhabited by a presence or left to their pure material status. They are first taken out of wooden



**Figure 3:** *I apologize*, DACM (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Borie, M. (1997), *Le Fantôme ou le Théâtre qui doute*. Arles: Actes Sud, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Astles, C. (2016), 'Wood and Waterfall: Directing Puppet Theatre'. In: Astles, C., Hledíková, I. (ed.), *Tracing past and present*. Bratislava: Slovak UNIMA Centre, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Gisèle Vienne is a French director and choreographer. After studying philosophy and music, she trained at the ESNAM (Charleville-Mézières, France). She explores the link between inert and human bodies through creations which combine dance and puppetry. She regularly collaborates with writers (Dennis Cooper, Catherine Robbe-Grillet), musicians (Peter Rehberg, Stephen O'Malley), lighting designer (Patrick Riou) and the actor and puppeteer, Jonathan Capdevielle.

boxes and then put back in it after the performer has talked to them or kissed them. This explicit reference to the opacity of the object itself is a way for Gisèle Vienne to raise the issue of the status of a woman's body (sometimes considered as an object) and to show at the same time how the irreducible materiality of the body can become a way to resist social and cultural manipulations. That is why Julia Dobson refers in her article, 'Troubling matters', to the '(un)inhabited bodies in the work of Gisèle Vienne', the 'mute and obstinately material resistance'<sup>15</sup> of these dolls. Their discontinuous manipulation enables a form of animation that, when they are strewn on the floor of the stage, highlights their opacity and irreducibility as real and material objects.

Obviously the finesse of this oscillating status of the immobile or non-articulated object is mostly determined by the play of actors, which is far from being only a manipulation (in its etymological sense) and is sometimes not even based on physical contact with the object. That explains our choice of the term 'animation' rather than 'manipulation'. The specific role of the performers in the use of these kinds of devices also has to be reviewed: rather than manipulators, they become presenters or translators. One of the identifiable similarities among all these creations is the act of metaphorically and physically being at the service of the objects.

The first form of this relation between actor and object is the act of showing or exhibiting, which is displayed, for example, in *Des Hurlements*. In one of the skits, the actors take the paintings of Francis Marshall and present them in front of the audience. But in other skits, the use of immobile visual works is closer to light touching, listening or even calling than to exhibiting.

This second form of relation relies on the actors moving around either behind or under the sculptures, sometimes speaking or shouting a text. The actors organize their bodies depending on the form and the meaning of the objects: a very simple downward movement can mean a shipwreck, or an actor may scream and turn his face upside-down, to create a monstrous hybrid figure expressing the violence of the sculptural scene (a train accident). Moreover, many signs in the sculptures symbolically refer to the impossibility of speaking and moving: the proliferation of strings, the slouching bodies of dolls made of used tissues, the recurring image of accidents, etc. So the

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<sup>15</sup> Dobson, J. (2013), 'Troubling matters: (un)inhabited bodies in the work of Gisele Vienne'. In: Guidicelli, C. (ed.), *Über-marionettes and mannequins. Craig, Kantor and their contemporary legacies*. Laverune: L'Entretemps, Institut International de la Marionnette, p. 404.



eponymous 'howls' that the actors and musicians make us hear are those of these objects, which imaginarily delegate their voices and movements to the human performers. Performers become the translators of the muffled voices of neglected objects.

A third function of the actors, particularly in the work of Roland Shön, *Ni fini ni infini* [Neither Finished nor Infinite] (2008) but also in *Des Hurlements*, is to enact the role of guide. At the beginning of his show, François Lazaro, dressed as a worker, makes a speech to the audience and gives security indications. Then the group is led by the injunctions of the performers: 'we wait', 'we go further'. To an extent, the role of the performers is to create the feeling of a group rather than to directly animate objects. By creating a collective movement, they also build a sense of a complicity among the spectators and make people share an experience. This operating frame allows an extended distribution of the sensible<sup>16</sup> and, consequently, the animation of immobile objects.

The animation of still objects relies on a form of belief that borrows from totemism and animism. The importance of the ritual dimension is reflected, in part, in the spaces chosen or built for these shows: a lot of works are put on in traditional Baroque theatres. The division between the stage and the stalls is often abolished and replaced by a single space. *Freeze* was presented in very different places, outdoors, amidst natural surroundings, while *Des Hurlements* was set in a forge still in operation (but shown in the evening, when the machines were off). Work on the relation between performers, spectators and spaces is a condition for the operation of immobile animation. Because the puppet presence has an illusory dimension, the felt but intangible animation of dramatic figures makes collective consent (agreement about what is acceptable to imagine and actively project) a prerequisite for their activation. In that sense, contemporary puppetry is much more than an art of manipulation of objects: it is an art of relations, which relies on the convocation and sharing of illusory images.

The focus on the development of the status of the objects in contemporary puppetry enables us to expand on Henryk Jurkowski's definition of a puppet to include immobile and not only articulated objects. But some works break free even from the idea of the unity and fixity of the objects by playing with fluctuating forms, fluid materials, and the circulation of presence between human and non-human bodies. Not only is the link between material ties and presence challenged, but also the material part tends to disappear or fluctuate.

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<sup>16</sup> See: Rancière, J. (2000), *Le Partage du sensible*. Paris: La Fabrique.



**Figure 4:** *L'Après-midi d'un foehn* [The Afternoon of a foehn] (version 1), Cie Non Nova (2011).

The existence of a dramatic presence apart from any fixed material body has been shown, for example, by Phia Ménard<sup>17</sup> (Cie Non Nova), who has created many shows which are based on the movement of fluid materials such as water<sup>18</sup> or air. In *l'Après-midi d'un foehn* [The Afternoon of a Foehn] (2011), a variety of plastic bags are moved by several bursts of air. The rhythm and the force of these bursts make the global movement of plastic bags change, so that they successively draw changing landscapes and choreographies of ephemeral figures in the air, nourished by the music of Debussy.<sup>19</sup> The dramatic tension is less based on the emergence of a 'fictional subject', than on the construction of fragile and unpredictable fleeting forms. This work with abstract and changing forms frees the theatre from the idea of a puppet figure fixed in a shape. Another aesthetic phenomenon that contributes to the disembodiment of the puppet is the multiplication of bodies on stage, through which presence (the animation effect) circulates. In Gisèle Vienne's work *I apologize*, the dolls are very numerous and almost all identical. The serial aesthetic is a way to facilitate the circulation of presence: the bodies are interchangeable, and as such they can be shared, exchanged, abandoned. Furthermore, one of the human performers in that work, the dancer Anja Röttgerkamp, is dressed and made up in a manner similar to the dolls on stage. Her gestures incorporate the stereotypical features of the mannequins: jerky rhythm, alternating between falling and rapidly rising movements or other shifting motions (head down and feet up). In this work, the limit between human and non-human is still further disturbed by the acting of one performer, Jonathan Capdevielle, who behaves in the same way with dolls and other humans: he carries them, throws them, sets them in stiff repose, lets them fall. The feminine dolls and dancers appear alike to belong to the criminal and erotic fantasies of this man. This manner of erasing the ontological boundaries between

<sup>17</sup> Phia Ménard is a French director and actress, also a juggler. She founded the Compagnie Non Nova in 1998. Her creations aim at exploring juggling in its dramaturgical and scenographic dimensions. Her projects are multidisciplinary and mix dance, juggling, puppetry and theatre.

<sup>18</sup> She worked with water in many different form (gas, ice...) in her production *P.P.P.* (2008).

<sup>19</sup> The show's inspirations include the music of Debussy: *Prelude to the afternoon of a Fawn*, *Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea* and *Nocturnes*.

humans and objects removes any hierarchy between potential spaces of presence on stage by demonstrating that human bodies, like any other scenic objects and spaces, can be inhabited. Moreover, the reification of the performers, like the animation of dolls in this production, is never permanent or continuous. They are provisory developments that encourage the circulation of presence and the discontinuous inhabitation of the bodies onstage<sup>20</sup>. The disembodiment of the puppet is evident in Gisèle Vienne's work in the sense that no unique and stable body on stage can be identified as the body of the puppet, but a fictional subject indiscriminately emerges from the mass of bodies on stage.

The reconsideration of the puppet as a form of incarnation can even go further in the work of Gisèle Vienne, which is deeply inspired by visual phenomena of pop culture (television, cinema, fashion, etc.). In *I apologize*, as in *Showroomdummies* or *This how you will disappear* (2010), the artist set up an oscillation between real flesh bodies, toy dolls' bodies and flat 2D images. The appearances of the human and nonhuman teenage girls and women on stage borrow from pop culture stereotypes, such as the trope immortalized by Vladimir Nabokov in his novel *Lolita*. In addition to the incomplete animation of objects (promptly reverting back to their rank of inert material), this play with visual codes tends to turn real bodies into ideal images. It de-realizes the hint of animation which can ephemerally inhabit the bodies. It underlines the illusory character of their incarnation. The uncertain density of visible bodies puts the question of incarnation at the centre of the work. Incarnation can thus no longer be considered as a fixed state but rather is seen as a process which has to happen before the eyes of the audience, an event which can happen and then be undone. In dealing with such contemporary cases, we want to speak of 'embodying' rather than 'embodiment', in order to underline the process which takes place live onstage.

The result of this work with iconography and discontinuous inhabitation of bodies is that the puppet of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can't always be easily pinpointed in a body or an object. It is far more than a simple object and may even have no precise body or material ties.

This observation could lead to a theoretical impasse concerning the specificity of puppetry as an art. If the puppet is no longer recognizable in one body nor localizable in a single place, where is it and what is it? The reconsideration

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<sup>20</sup> On the discontinuous inhabitation of bodies in the work of Gisèle Vienne, see the previously mentioned article of Julia Dobson.

of puppet embodiment raises the question of what remains and what defines the ontology of the contemporary puppet.

Our hypothesis is that the contemporary puppet figure can be defined as a specific presence emerging in dramatic space, in tension between bodies, objects and images, through random interaction among all the elements on stage (space, music, voices, lights) and exterior (at least temporarily) to the bodies of human performers.



**Figure 5:** *Des Hurlements montaient le long des saules pleureurs* [The Screams Rose Along the Weeping Willows], Clastic Théâtre (2013).

This proposal not to think about puppetry only in terms of bodies or material objects seems to be the logical continuation of what Brunella Eruli<sup>21</sup> observed when she wrote that ‘le corps de la marionnette n’existe pas (...), il se cache sous des robes qui se perdent dans le nulle part.’<sup>22</sup> [the body of the puppet doesn’t exist, (...) it is hidden under the dresses, which get lost in the anywhere.] If the famous professor could still identify dresses as the material and visual part of the puppet, some more recent creations go further with the disappearance and fragmentation of it. Then the nonexistent body of the puppet creates an immaterial dramatic tension, which enables the building (or illusory calling) of spectral presences.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the impossibility of identifying a fixed body belonging to the puppet makes the puppet presences, as observed before, oscillate between opacity and evanescence, between raw materials and fleeting figures. That leads several artists to explore the aesthetics of the trace, in a phenomenological or historical sense. The dramaturgy of *Des Hurlements* by the Clastic Théâtre specifically relies on the tension between ‘what disappeared’ and ‘what remains’. The sculptures of Francis Marshall are indeed made out of old tissues and waste materials which continue to degrade. Their appearances carry the traces of the history of these materials and they refer at the same time to their imminent end or total

<sup>21</sup> Brunella Eruli (1943-2012), professor at the University of Siena, specialist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde and contemporary theatre. She was chief editor of the review *Puck, la marionnette et les autres arts*, from 1988 to 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Brunella Eruli, mentioned in: Braunstein, M. (2006), *Le bûcher des marionnettes*. Paris: L’Oeil d’or, p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> Some specific research should be conducted on the topic of cyberobjects and how the manipulation of virtual presences through numeric technology can nourish our analysis of the disembodiment which is the focus of this article. I decided not to speak about such processes in this article to keep the focus on the relation between humans on stage and material objects in a more immediate way, or at least one whose mediation is non-electronic.

disappearance. Consequently, these objects, as much as the factory where the spectacle takes place, appear as survivors. The venue chosen for the show is indeed highly symbolic: it is the last still-active forge in this region of France, a region particularly affected by the economic crisis. So these objects and spaces in themselves testify to a process of disappearance. The disappearance of the human bodies in the show<sup>24</sup> in this place which holds particular value in workers' memories is even more dramatic because of the presence of gigantic, immobile machines next to these degraded anthropomorphic sculptures. The emergence of fragile, living traces through abandoned objects confers a strong memorial – or mythical – dimension to this creation. The disembodied puppet seems particularly appropriate for telling and warning of the imminent disappearance of humans in a place with such historical resonance for workers. It operates on the semiotic model of erasures (which lets one see what is at the same time being deleted): a mode of apparition which relies on an imbalance between the material persistence of a thing and the reality of its presence.

This persistence of vision, which is in *Des Hurlements* only illusory and metaphorical, could also be questioned from a biological or neurological perspective. Indeed, the illusory dimension of the contemporary puppet makes us wonder about its relation to neurological processes of perception and realization. The fluctuating presence of the contemporary puppet leads us to identify the eye of the spectator – meaning the process of watching – as the final place of animation. As much as Gisèle Vienne, who leads the spectators to permanently readjust their relation to the visible by confronting them with layered images (as explained previously), François Lizaro, in his work, challenges the visual habits of the spectator by choosing a quotidian work environment as the site of his show, instead of a theatre. The shift of social and daily frames that this causes generates a new perception of the environment. It stimulates a new perspective on usual objects and spaces and, at the same time, raises awareness of them. That makes possible the perception of other kinds of signs constituted by objects. If these two examples show two very different ways to animate the eye of the spectator, they testify to the density of scenic images. It is also significant, as Ciriad Astles notes, that Boy, who 'focus[es] on the debunking of all systems of authority, including that of unified and authored text or indeed unified and

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<sup>24</sup> The disappearance of the human bodies here does not refer to the traditional dissimulation of the puppeteer behind the puppet or in the darkness of the stage. It rather describes a metaphorical disappearance or absence of habitation that makes the spectator oblivious to them even if they are concretely visible. It is linked to the process of 'being at the service of the object' referred to earlier.

completed puppet (...) works (in rehearsal) through the creation of still images, which he then develops into action' and that he is strongly 'influenced by fine art, sculpture, and the image as narrator itself.'<sup>25</sup> This stratification of images, combined with puppetry's specific iconographic approach, provides the base for the vibrational and illusory presence of the puppet that led us to determine that the phenomenon of the disembodiment of the puppet should be analyzed with the tools of the media studies.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the disembodiment of the puppet enshrines the incomplete nature of the puppet as one of its defining characteristics. The perception of the presence of the disembodied puppet is mainly based on a mental reconstruction performed by the spectator which searches for a thread through continuously changing forms and simultaneously links together separate stage elements and bodies. In that sense, the contemporary disembodied puppet seems to create space for what Marie-Josée Mondzain identifies as the necessary 'off-screen of the visible' that preserves the vitality of images. She also writes that 'décider d'une image est l'affaire du commerce, celui des êtres parlants qui croisent les fils de leurs regards et de leurs mots pour construire le site qu'ils veulent partager.'<sup>27</sup> [deciding on an image is the business of speaking beings, who cross the lines of their views and their words to build the area that they want to share.] The presence and existence of a contemporary disembodied puppet depends on how and how much we collectively accept the invitation to attribute a meaning to fragmented and ephemeral images a meaning that we organize and build together, the second 'body' of the puppet.

Our proposal to enlarge the classical definition of the puppet and to identify puppets where no material or visual bodies are identifiable would require us to enlarge the field of study, which could enhance our understanding of collective play with illusory presences. The anthropological work of Bruno Latour, for example, could allow us to overcome the binary opposition between immanent and transcendent, material and immaterial, present and absent, in order to help us understand the development of contemporary rituals of the operation of presences.

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<sup>25</sup> Astles C. (2016), 'Wood and Waterfall...', op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> See for example: McLuhan, M. (1964), *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: Mc Graw-Hill.

<sup>27</sup> Mondzain, M.-J. (2003), *Le commerce des regards*. Paris: Seuil, p. 9.

Our theoretical hypothesis aims also to initiate a reflexion on the roles and skills of human performers in such ritual devices, which are multidisciplinary. The question of their training and teaching could indeed be explored by considering how these contemporary creations go beyond the boundaries that separate the fields of art.

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### **Summary**

The main aim of this paper is to consider works of the Handspring Puppet Company and the Polish performance *Baltic. Pies na krze* [*Baltic. The Dog on an Ice Floe*], directed by Romuald Wicza-Pokojski, as examples of ways in which humanistic and ecological postulates regarding empathy towards animals may be presented through puppet theatre. The author discusses them in the light of selected concepts from the fields of animal studies and evolutionary cognition, taking into consideration psychological aspects of anthropomorphism.

### **Streszczenie**

Głównym celem tego artykułu jest przywołanie wybranych produkcji grupy Handspring Puppet Company oraz polskiego spektaklu *Baltic. Pies na krze* w reżyserii Romualda Wiczy-Pokojskiego, by pokazać, jak humanistyczne i przyrodnicze postulaty o empatyczne spojrzenie na zwierzęta realizują się poprzez teatr lalek. Autorka dokonuje tego odwołując się do wybranych aspektów humanistycznych studiów nad zwierzętami, kognitywistyki ewolucyjnej oraz uwzględniając psychologiczne aspekty antropomorfizacji.



## **Non-Human Puppet Theatre. An Empathic Approach to Horses, Giraffes, Dogs and Other Animals**

Academic works devoted to animals as well as the research concerning the human-animal relations known as 'animal studies' represent a relatively new field of scholarship in Poland, which is now developing dynamically within the scope of what are called the environmental (sometimes also ecological) humanities. This area of research was defined by Ewa Domańska in an article published in *Teksty Drugie*.<sup>1</sup> Domańska argues that one of the objectives of environmental humanities is to integrate the humanities and the sciences as well as Western, Eastern and Indigenous ways of knowing in a non-hierarchical manner. It aims to promote both intercultural and interspecies relations. According to its principles, humanity constitutes a part of a larger living system and should submit to ecological laws. By invoking the ethical principles of respect, reciprocity and interspecies solidarity, environmental humanities emphasize the idea of social justice which ought also to be open to non-human beings such as animals, plants and inanimate beings belonging to the natural world. In other words, this area of study strives to turn our attention to the non-human realm and toward critical reflection upon the notion of the uniqueness of our species. Domańska suggests that the key instrument to be used in relations with human and non-human others should be empathy, and that 'być człowiekiem godnie reprezentującym gatunek ludzki, to znaczy być *homo empathicus*.'<sup>2</sup> [being a human worthily representing the human kind means being *homo empathicus*.]<sup>3</sup>

The most interesting area within this field of study, whose objective is to construct a holistic network of connections between the humanities and

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<sup>1</sup> Domańska, E. (2013), 'Humanistyka ekologiczna'. *Teksty drugie*, vol. 1-2, pp. 13-32.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>3</sup> All translations in brackets in the article were made by the author.

the environment, deals with the relations of humans with other animals and the way in which humanistic and ecological postulates regarding an empathetic attitude towards animals may be examined through the puppet theatre. Even though animal characters appear in it much more frequently than humans, not many performances are rooted in the perception of animals as independent, sovereign beings who do not merely act out anthropomorphic scenarios. Internationally, the artists whose work stands out in this field are Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones from the Handspring Puppet Company in Cape Town, who have devoted years to studying the possibilities of portraying interspecies relations as well as animal subjectivity and sovereignty in the puppet theatre. In Poland there has been one production worthy of note in this context: *Baltic. Pies na krze* [*Baltic. The Dog on an Ice Floe*]. The play was adapted from Barbara Gawryluk's book of the same name and directed by Romuald Wicza-Pokojski from Miejski Teatr Miniatura [Miniatura City Theatre] in Gdansk (2012).

The approach to animals adopted in the Polish performance as well as in some of the works of the Cape Town group will be discussed here in the light of selected concepts from the fields of animal studies and evolutionary cognition. The discourse in this paper will predominantly refer to a study by Kari Weil, presented in her article 'A Report on the Animal Turn'<sup>4</sup>, as well as to the approaches described by Frans de Waal in his book *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?*<sup>5</sup>. The phenomenon of anthropomorphism and the humanistic issue of critical empathy will be presented with reference to the ideas of Krzysztof Mudyń and Amelia La Torre.<sup>6</sup>

## **A humanistic and ecological turn to animals**

As pointed out by Kari Weil, the dualism of culture and nature and the resulting idea of human supremacy over non-human animals as well as the idea of the human in general were built on a previously unverified belief in the uniqueness of the *homo sapiens*. This is reflected in the development of language and of abstract thinking. However, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century scientists have conducted research whose results refute this

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<sup>4</sup> Weil, K. (2010), 'A Report on the Animal Turn'. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 21 (2), pp. 1-23.

<sup>5</sup> Wall de, F. (2016), *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?*. New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company.

<sup>6</sup> La Torre, A., Mudyń, K. (2014), 'Ukierunkowania i psychologiczne konsekwencje antropomorfizacji'. *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis*, vol. 7, p. 57-68.

thesis. It is known, for example, that some animals are able to master human language to a certain extent and use it to communicate with humans.<sup>7</sup> Nowadays growing numbers of people are aware that many non-human creatures possess characteristics and skills which used to be considered intrinsically human. The primatologist Frans de Waal, influenced by these discoveries, explicitly states that:

Proponents of human uniqueness face the possibility that they have either grossly overestimated the complexity of what humans do or underestimated the capacities of other species.<sup>8</sup>

Nowadays animal studies and evolutionary cognition, which belong to the domain of environmental sciences, attempt to redefine the position of humans with respect to other animals. In his book, de Waal posits that: 'instead of making humanity the measure of all things, we need to evaluate other species by what 'they' are'.<sup>9</sup> What the ethologist has in mind is the study of animals using a cognitive approach to the evolutionary processes which connect different species (including humans and other animals). This corresponds to the posthumanistic ethical turn to animals, which Weil describes as:

an attempt to recognize and extend care to others while acknowledging that we may not know what the best form of care is for an other we cannot presume to know. It is a concern with and for alterity, especially insofar as alterity brings us to the limits of our own self-certainty and certainty about the world.<sup>10</sup>

Representatives of both of the aforementioned fields of study emphasize that our ability to get to know the world is limited and, in connection with that fact, reference the notion of 'Umwelt', advanced by German biologist Jakob von Uexköl. 'Umwelt' signifies the subjective perception of the world by various organisms and reminds us that the way the world and its inhabitants are 'seen' by humans is only one of many ways of perceiving the environment. Acceptance of this fact, and its transposition to human-animal relations, must lead to a redefinition of the human position with respect to other beings.

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<sup>7</sup> In 1979 Herbert Terrace published the article 'Can an Ape create a Sentence?' in a journal called *Science*. It concerned the ability to use sign language mastered by a chimpanzee called Nim Chimpsky (the name was a nod to the linguist Noam Chomsky). Today we know that humans can use their language to communicate to a certain extent not only with apes, but also with some bird species. See: Waal de, F. (2016), *Are We Smart...*, op. cit., and Weil, K. (2010), 'A Report...', op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Waal de, F. (2016), *Are We Smart...*, op. cit., pp. 885-886.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 910-911.

<sup>10</sup> Weil, K. (2010), 'A Report...', op. cit., p. 13.

According to de Waal, 'true' empathy is crucial to understanding other species:

We seek ecological validity in our studies and follow the advice of Uexküll, Lorenz, and Imanishi, who encouraged human empathy as a way to understand other species. True empathy is not self-focused but other-oriented.<sup>11</sup>

In zoology, empathy is said to affect not only the way the studied entities are treated, but also to change the presuppositions upon which research questions are based.<sup>12</sup>

By referring to Jill Bennett, Weil highlights the notion of critical empathy, which is a:

conjunction of affect and critical awareness [that] may be understood to constitute the basis of an empathy grounded not in affinity (feeling for another insofar as we can imagine being that other) but on a feeling for another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible.<sup>13</sup>

The views presented by Weil and de Waal are concordant and complementary. What such an attitude entails is the abandonment of 'speciesism' – a mechanism which discriminates against non-human species by operating in a manner similar to sexism or racism – and, consequently, a re-evaluation of our views concerning the distinctiveness of humans and a replacement of hierarchical anthropocentrism with the integration of human beings within a horizontal network of relations with other animals. In Weil's view, a redefined anthropomorphism, perceived as a 'potentially productive critical tool that has similarities to empathy within recent historical research'<sup>14</sup>, might bring us closer to such a view.

### **The role of anthropomorphism**

The ideas of Weil and de Waal are confirmed by Amelia La Torre and Krzysztof Mundyń, who define anthropomorphism as 'wyraz nadania obiektowi znaczenia, prowadzący do wiary w posiadanie przez obiekt ludzkich atrybutów.'<sup>15</sup> [the expression of the attribution of meaning to an object

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<sup>11</sup> Waal de, F. (2016), *Are We Smart...*, op. cit., p. 909.

<sup>12</sup> De Waal invokes the achievements of such scientists as Jane Goodall, who created partnerships with the chimpanzees she studied, which allowed her to make revolutionary discoveries about, for instance, the apes' skills and customs.

<sup>13</sup> Bennet, J. (2005), *Empathic Vision*. Stanford: Stanford UP, p. 10. Quoted in: Weil, K., 'A Report...', op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Weil, K. (2010), 'A Report...', op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> La Torre, A., Mudyń, K. (2014), 'Ukierunkowania...', op. cit., p. 57.

which leads to the belief in its possession of human attributes.] Moreover, the psychologists emphasize that:

dla osoby dokonującej antropomorfizacji dany obiekt niekoniecznie musi wyglądać jak człowiek, aby uważać, że myśli i czuje jak człowiek, że działa intencjonalnie i odczuwa złożone emocje. Z psychologicznego punktu widzenia najważniejsze w tym zjawisku nie jest samo nadanie obiektowi ludzkich cech, ale idąca za tym wiara w ich posiadanie, co skutkuje ukształtowaniem się szeregu specyficznych postaw i zachowań. (...) Zmienia to postrzeganie przez człowieka nie tylko otaczającego świata, ale też siebie samego i własnego miejsca w świecie.<sup>16</sup>

[a given object does not necessarily need to resemble a human in order for a person using anthropomorphism to believe it thinks, feels, acts intentionally and experiences complex emotions like a human. What is most important in this phenomenon, from a psychological perspective, is not the attribution itself of human features to an object, but the underlying belief that it possesses them, which results in the emergence of a number of specific attitudes and behaviours. (...) This alters humans' perception not only of the surrounding environment but also of themselves and their place in the world.]

Such an understanding of anthropomorphism is common in puppet theatre, although it is rarely used to re-evaluate our perception of non-human others. Artists use animal characters (or plants, everyday objects, even atmospheric phenomena) to metaphorically discuss issues seen as universal from a humanistic point of view. One of the reasons for this might be the centuries-long tradition of animal fables. In art (including theatre and drama) anthropomorphism is reflected in a presentation of animals which justifies their use by humans, strengthens their cultural image, privileges 'useful' animal species and stigmatises those considered to be 'pests'. Such an approach leads to an anthropomorphism involving the simple humanisation of animals, a perception of them which has little in common with the real animals the characters were modelled on (not only with respect to appearance, but also in terms of their behaviour and the adventures they have).<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, in puppet theatre it is anthropomorphism that has enabled the issues connected with the ethical turn to animals to be voiced exceptionally

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> Various ways of humanising animals in Polish plays addressed to children and teenagers as well as in puppet theatre can be found in one of my other articles. See: Drwięga, A. (2017), 'Dramaty (nie)zwierzęce w teatrze lalek dla dzieci'. *Polonistyka. Innowacje*, vol. 5, pp. 103–119. Online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/pi.2017.1.5.9> [10.12.2017].

clearly. The audience's main focus is not on a human – whether actor, performer, dancer, musician or acrobat, but on the puppet and the puppeteer, in that order. As a result of anthropomorphism, the use of an object imitating an animal on stage may strengthen hierarchical human-animal relations and cultural stereotypes about non-human species (as happens in contemporary animal fables). On the other hand, Jane Taylor, in her book on the achievements of the Handspring Puppet Company, reminds readers that for the human, 'the imperative to project human attributes onto non-human entities' is probably related to 'our species' instinct to parent, or to take care of which predisposes us to project human capacities onto a puppet 'as if our very lives depended on it.'<sup>18</sup> It is a challenge for the artist to convey a message consistent with the humanistic and ecological postulates concerning the redefinition of the humans' position with respect to non-human beings.

### Empathy in the work of Handspring Puppet Company

Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones from the Handspring Puppet Company have been highlighting techniques of presenting animals in puppet theatre by making them the main characters of some of their plays. This renowned group, which received international acclaim mainly thanks to its participation in the production of *War Horse* (National Theatre in London, 2007), had previously put on two plays whose main characters were animals, namely: *The Chimp Project* (2000) and *Tall Horse* (2004). Photos and promotional materials from their archives suggest that Handspring Puppet Company have had an inclination to present animals and 'the Others' with empathy for a long time, even if they did not explicitly state that to be their approach.



**Figure 1:** *Tall Horse*, Handspring Puppet Company (2004).

Let us begin achronologically with the play *Tall Horse*, which included fragments of the biography of a historical animal character, a giraffe named Zarafa, given by the Egyptian pasha Muhammad Ali to Charles V of France. The animal was captured in 1824 in the south of present-day Sudan and then sent to Paris. The plot of the play revolves around the giraffe's journey: first by boat on the Nile, then across the Mediterranean and eventually ending with a strenuous walk from Marseilles to the capital of France. This animal odyssey was a co-production of the Handspring Puppet Theatre with the Republic of South Africa and Sogolon Puppet Troupe from Mali and presented

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, J. (ed.), (2009), *Handspring Puppet Company*. New York: David Krut Publishing, p. 28.

a contrast between modern thinking about puppet theatre and the traditional design of North African puppets. The play, set in colonial times, made us remember the non-human victims of the Age of Exploration, who are forgotten even today.<sup>19</sup>

*The Chimp Project* was a play depicting the life of a female chimpanzee raised by people and then, after reaching maturity, placed in a rehab sanctuary in Africa. While there, she was kidnapped by apes living in the wild. After adapting to the new conditions and bearing offspring, the chimpanzee began to pass on the sign language to her young as her human caretakers had taught her. Even though Lisa is a fictional character, her story incorporates the lives of many apes who were studied in order for us to know how much this species resembles humans in terms of language and adaptation of human behaviour patterns. Some of the most known cases are Nim Chimpsky or Luc<sup>20</sup>, Joni<sup>21</sup> and Gua<sup>22</sup> who were all brought up like human children. References to their biographies are easy to find in the plot of *The Chimp Project*. Various tests have proved that the practices to which the animals were subjected caused them to lose their sense of identity – they began to identify with humans. Those who were ‘returned’ to the wild became no less helpless than humans lost in the jungle.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 2:** *The Chimp Project*, Handspring Puppet Company (2000).

It appears that this aspect was considered secondary by the producers of *The Chimp Project* and that their objective was to create a believable animal character able to communicate with humans in their language. As mentioned above, it was believed until recently that this ability was only innate in humans. By giving voice to ‘hominidae’ whose genotype is 98.8% identical to the human one and showing a chimpanzee comfortably performing our everyday activities (e.g., using dishes or looking in the mirror), the artists show how closely we are related. Particularly telling is the fact that not only the apes but also the humans who appear in this play are represented by puppets.

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<sup>19</sup> At this point the name of Éric Baratay deserves to be mentioned. In a number of publications this author attempts to trace history of anthropocentrism and demands that the memory of the hardships suffered by animals at the time of the great events shaping human civilisations be kept.

<sup>20</sup> She lived from the 1960s to the mid-1980s. Her human parents were Jane and Maurice Temerlin, who worked with the Institute for Primate Studies of the University of Oklahoma.

<sup>21</sup> Studied by the Russian primatologist Nadezhda Kohts in 1913-1916.

<sup>22</sup> Raised by Luella and Winthrop Kellogg alongside their biological son Donald in 1930s.

<sup>23</sup> Nowadays the experiments that were conducted on these chimpanzees are considered unethical.

Such an approach makes all 'hominidae' equal and may be interpreted as a symbolic negation of the divide between humans and animals.

The Handspring Puppet Company wanted to present animals in a way which emphasizes their subjectivity. The puppeteers devoted much time to studying the anatomy, customs and movement of chimpanzees in order to find appropriate technological and construction solutions to be adopted on a puppet theatre stage. They visited facilities conducting research on chimpanzees living in their natural environment (the Gombe Stream Chimp Reserve run by Jane Goodall in Tanzania) as well as institutions doing research on apes held in captivity (universities in the USA and Japan). As a result, the puppets they created do not merely resemble their prototypes, but can move like them as well. The puppets are designed to be manipulated by at least two people. They have carved heads, grasping hands and their complex structures are covered with semi-transparent fabric. They are designed to imitate animal behaviour as accurately as possible, while at the same time showing their puppet nature.



**Figure 3:** *War Horse*, National Theatre in London (2007).

Linguistic issues were also considered by the artists during their work on creating Joey, the main character of *War Horse*.<sup>24</sup> The protagonist of this play, unlike its prototype, is mute; what he communicates to the audience, however, is clear. During Kohler and Jones's lecture 'Animals in Translation: Temple Grandin's Influence on Handspring's Work', given at the Gordon Institute of Performing Arts at the Cape Town University in 2012, the puppeteers presented their own strategy of creating a horse language which would be understandable for the audience while at the same time not being an imitation of human means of communication. It combines all horse sounds with a variety of horse movements: from major movements (choreography) to so-called micromovements, which are regarded by the artists as the most significant.<sup>25</sup>

For the purposes of the play, Kohler and Jones familiarized themselves with the horse's 'Umwelt' (to the extent it was possible) and transposed it onto the stage. Their objective was to make the audience believe in the life, emotions, suffering and death of the animal soldiers, as well as to elicit as much

<sup>24</sup> An adaptation of a book with the same title written by Michael Morpurgo in 1982.

<sup>25</sup> Online: <http://www.gipca.uct.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/GTBQ-23-Feb-2012-Handspring-Puppet-Company.mp3>. [5.12.2018].



sympathy for them as for the human characters. By doing so, the artists drew the audience's attention to the animals as truly valuable characters playing their part in particular stages of our civilisation's evolution.

In a symbolic sense, the relationship between the *War Horse* puppets and the puppeteers fulfils the postulates regarding non-hierarchical interspecies cooperation advocated by animal studies researchers. The life of each horse appearing on stage depends on three people: two puppeteers controlling the breath as well as the body, skin, legs' and tail movements of the puppet from the inside, and a third person animating its head and ears. The puppeteers must synchronise their breathing and they must not make eye contact or talk to each other – they act as if they were literally a single organism. In this setting people do not function as subjects, but have the task of letting the puppets use their bodies to present the story of a character who, in the traditional system of interspecies relations, is supposed to serve its human owners.

Last but not least among the works by Kohler and Jones that need to be mentioned here is *Olifantland* (2016) – an outdoor puppetry performance created by the artists in collaboration with the UKWANDA Puppet and Design Collective. It involves life-sized elephant puppets and was produced in order to draw attention to the uniqueness of these animals and to raise awareness of the need to protect this species. The event was held for Reconciliation Day, on which a parade is organised annually in Barrydale (a small town located a few hundred kilometres from Cape Town). The theme of the event – reconciliation – is traditionally understood as a call for unity among all the citizens of Barrydale during their joint preparations for the parade and collective joyful celebration. By making elephants part of this celebration and presenting them as incredibly intelligent animals, able to create social and family bonds in a way that is known and respected by people, the artists took the notion of 'reconciliation' to the next level. They placed it on a plane where human and animal attributes intermingle to form a harmonious and non-hierarchical whole.

### ***Baltic. Pies na krze* – a Polish animal protagonist**

Puppet theatres in Poland produce a variety of plays with non-human characters every year. However, a great majority of their creators tends to adopt an anthropocentric perspective consistent with the model perpetuated by the animal fable. *Baltic. Pies na krze*, directed by Romuald Wicza-Pokojski

in the Miejski Teatr Miniatura in Gdansk, is a play unlike the others within this framework.



**Figure 4:** *Baltic. Pies na krze*  
[*Baltic. The Dog on an Ice Fole*],  
Miejski Teatr Miniatura (2012).

Wicza-Pokojski, the director of the show and director of the theatre, assembles his institution's repertoire by putting emphasis on productions deeply rooted in the local context. The story of a dog which floated over 100 km on an ice floe down the Vistula River in January 2010 belongs to this category. Despite the media interest and the efforts of incidental witnesses, the animal's odyssey could not be stopped until a successful rescue operation was performed by the crew of a research vessel named 'Baltica' in the Bay of Gdansk. The freezing and starving mongrel was saved by officer mechanic Adam Buczyński and, after recovering, became a permanent crew member.

Wicza-Pokojski adapted this story for the stage, he decided to give the play a documentary character, omitting first person narration in accordance with the assumption that only the dog himself knows his experiences and emotions, and that our access to the animal's 'Umwelt' is limited. The story of the dog nicknamed Baltic is a combination of fragmentary events and the audience know more story details than the characters in the play. In spite of that fact, they follow the plot from their own human perspective. The animal point of view remains inaccessible to them and can only be surmised. Baltic does not speak a human language, so it is impossible to know his thoughts. We hear him bark and howl, we see him shiver, slip on an ice floe and escape from those struggling to come to his rescue. His heartbeat slows down and his breath becomes heavier and heavier. Even though the director maintained the non-human character of the protagonist, the audience can relate to the dog's experience.

Baltic's life depends on people in just the same way that the life of a puppet lies in the hands of its animator. In the play produced in Gdansk, this relationship acquires a unique meaning: the dog suffered his cruel fate because of people, but he was also eventually saved by humans. An actor-human has absolute control over the puppet-animal and the people's dominance over the world is embodied both in the symbolic and in the total form. It should be highlighted that the puppet representing the dog is the only puppet in the show, which emphasizes not only the alienation of the animal, but also its dependence on humankind. The puppet resembles and is equal in size

to a large, hairy dog. Specially designed mechanisms used to move its tail, eyes and ears make its animation true to life. For this reason, the scene during which the exhausted dog lies still is deeply expressive. Baltic, so far perceived by the audience as a genuine animal, turns into an inanimate object within a second. It depends on the puppeteers whether he comes back to life or not.

The creators of the play continue to remind us that people are responsible for the lives of other beings. One scene expresses this point of view directly. When Baltic is spotted approaching the river mouth and it becomes clear that he cannot be saved, two people want to end the dog's suffering by shooting him in an act of mercy. Nonetheless, pulling the trigger is extremely difficult for them – after all, people are generally supposed to protect an animal's well-being. The argument that the pet is surely going to die seems convincing, but does not make the decision any easier. The dog trapped on the ice floe eventually floats into the darkness, which gives him another chance for a miraculous rescue. The true fight for his survival begins 30 km further into the sea. When one crew member shouts: 'Man overboard!' it does not matter what species Baltic is. A life in danger must be saved, so a pontoon is dropped on the rough sea amid the ice floes and a crew member, Buczyński, after a few failed attempts, eventually pulls the dog safely on board. The audience observes this dramatic moment through the lens of a mobile phone camera, with which instrument the events of 2010 were recorded. The animal's distress and the gravity of his position as well as the dedication and bravery of his rescuer appear even more dramatic when we consider their authenticity. Back on stage, the crew members resuscitate the dog in accordance with the procedures for saving a human life: they massage him, cover with blankets and give him warm fluids to drink. When the animal recovers, he is given a new name and becomes a crew member.

Baltic, in Wicza-Pokojski's production, is 'the Other' described by Kari Weil. He is a being dependent on human mercy and our access to the way he perceives reality remains restricted. This is strongly reflected in the desperate, futile attempts to convince the dog to jump to shore. Despite the animal's autonomy (or perhaps because of it), its terror and suffering are equated with the human experience of those emotions. The audience see the puppet as a living being whose personal experience remains unknown to them, but to which they can also relate as if it was their own.

## The empathic turn to animals in puppet theatre

All of the aforementioned theatre plays share the same empathic approach to animals and therefore concur with the presuppositions of the environmental humanities. This can be seen at every stage of the shows' creation, from the choice of the protagonists to the way they are presented on stage. Biographical productions such as *Baltic*, *Tall Horse* or *War Horse* highlight the individuality of these authentic animal life stories, which were shaped by authoritative human decisions and actions. When animal biographies are set in a rich and convincing historical context, Baratay's call to free history from anthropocentrism is answered and the forgotten or ignored protagonists, whose role in their stories was often as important as that of the humans involved, emerge from the shadows of the past. *The Chimp Project* emphasizes how closely we humans are related to our cousins from the animal kingdom, whereas initiatives such as *Olifantland* highlight similarities between the natural behaviour and social practices of members of different species from a cognitive point of view.

It is not an easy task to avoid the kind of anthropomorphism that consists in simply humanising an animal character. Achieving this requires in-depth understanding of the natural behaviour and habits of a given species and the ways its members communicate with their environment. The task, moreover, necessitates selecting the particular behaviours that are crucial to convey the intended message. Last but not least, it entails transposing these behaviours onto the stage by means of puppets who possess appropriate animation features.

The documented search queries conducted by Jones and Kohler prior to the execution of their projects combine zoological knowledge regarding anatomy and ethology with their experience as puppeteers. The puppets they created copy the shape, proportions and colours of the animals they are based on, while at the same time being artistic interpretations of their prototypes. When we look at them, we see the fabric and construction materials they are made of, but this does not prevent us from perceiving these puppets as the animals they represent. The puppets' resemblance to horses, elephants or chimpanzees is not limited to their appearance, but is most completely expressed by the movement that represents the puppet's coming to life. As the artists have emphasized in a number of interviews about Joey, their intention was not to create a horse, but to make the audience believe that

they see one on stage.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the puppets do not breathe in the same way as real horses (their chests expand and contract like human chests). Interestingly, not only people but also real horses perceive these puppets as something more than complex mechanical objects.<sup>27</sup> Jones and Kohler would not have achieved such results if it had not been for their belief in the power of puppets and their sensitivity to the individuality of animals combined with their utter conviction that a relationship of community exists between the animals and us. These three combined elements create space for an empathic turn toward non-human animals on the puppet theatre stage.

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<sup>26</sup> Online: [https://www.ted.com/talks/handpring\\_puppet\\_co\\_the\\_genius\\_puppetry\\_behind\\_war\\_horse](https://www.ted.com/talks/handpring_puppet_co_the_genius_puppetry_behind_war_horse) [17.11.2017].

<sup>27</sup> Evidence of this can be watched on a number of recordings documenting Joey's meetings with real horses and meetings between puppets and animals living in stables – their reactions to the puppets may become material for further research. The artists went on a visit to the racetrack with their *War Horse* puppets and the live horses' behaviour seemed to express acceptance of the puppet beings. See online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnZPXS68dv0> [13.11.2017].

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### **Summary**

The main aim of this paper is to present the diversity of means of expression in puppet theatres for adults in Poland since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The author focuses on the most interesting ones and groups them according to the types of puppets and techniques used in each – from the traditional puppet theatre forms and conventions, through performances where traditional puppets become partners of the actors on stage, and shows with masks, dummies, shadows, tabletop puppets, children's toys and even miniature figurines, to – what theatre historian Henryk Jurkowski called – the theatre of various means of expression.

### **Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest omówienie różnorodności środków wyrazu w repertuarze polskiego teatru lalek dla widzów dorosłych od początku XXI wieku. Autor skupia się na najciekawszych spektaklach i grupuje je według rodzajów lalek i stosowanych technik – od klasycznych lalkowych form i konwencji, poprzez spektakle, w których tradycyjne lalki stają się partnerami aktorów na scenie, pokazy z maskami, manekinami, cieniami, lalkami stolikowymi, dziecięcymi zabawkami, a nawet miniaturowymi figurkami, aż do teatru różnych środków wyrazu – jak nazywał ten gatunek sztuki polski badacz teatru lalek, Henryk Jurkowski.

## **Diversity of Means of Expression in the Polish Puppet Theatre for Adults: Since the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

The last fifteen years in Poland have been marked by the quick development of puppet performances for adults: we have increasingly frequent opportunities to see them in the institutional theatres as well as the independent ones. New theatres and theatrical groups are being formed with solely the adult public in mind. But there has been no detailed research on this phenomenon in Polish theatre studies. There have only been a few attempts at scholarly reflection on this subject, and, as Halina Waszkiel concluded in her article 'Teatr lalek dla dorosłych' [The Puppet Theatre for the Adults]<sup>1</sup> in *Teatr* magazine: 'Zjawisko zasługuje na monografię, która objęłaby całe bogactwo i zróżnicowanie oferty teatralnej tego typu.'<sup>2</sup> [This phenomenon should have its own monograph, one which would cover its richness and variety.]

There were only about a hundred performances presenting the available and well-known repertoire of the Polish puppet theatres for teenagers and adults in the over four decades between the end of the Second World War and the collapse of Communism (from 1945 to 1989).<sup>3</sup> I stress the teenage viewers here because for many years there was a division in Poland between theatre for children and theatre for teenagers and adults.<sup>4</sup> The post-war repertoire included mostly puppet stage productions of the most popular dramatic plays

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<sup>1</sup> All translations in brackets in the article were made by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Waszkiel, H. (2015), 'Teatr lalek dla dorosłych', *Teatr*, vol. 11, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> After the Second World War, Polish puppeteers accepted the Soviet model of puppet theatre and committed themselves to educating audiences comprised exclusively of children (a statement to that effect was in the charter of every puppet theatre in the country). Such puppet repertoire as existed for adult audiences resulted from directors' own initiative in individual theatres.

<sup>4</sup> We still can find this cliché on the web pages of a few institutional puppet theatres. To get a specific idea of what age a performance is intended for, it is sometimes necessary to read the full description of the show.

for actors (from the Greek tragedies of Euripides or Sophocles to the works of the most prominent twentieth-century Polish playwrights: Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Tadeusz Różewicz or Sławomir Mrożek) and puppet adaptations of Polish and world literature (e.g. the stories of Bruno Schulz or Franz Kafka).

Just after the political, economical and cultural transformation post-1989, the production of puppet performances for adult viewers in institutional theatres stopped almost completely, because the most important thing at that time was the high quality of productions for younger audiences. The experimenting with the repertoire for adults moved to the theatre schools and, more importantly, to independent groups. In the new political reality, private theatre activities began to arise and quickly gained publicity and popularity through new quality puppet shows, including those intended for adult audiences.<sup>5</sup> As Marzenna Wiśniewska writes in her article describing the history of independent theatre groups in the nineties:

Szybko nowe teatry lalkowe zaczęły zbierać polskie i międzynarodowe laury (...) i znakomite recenzje występów gościnnych w Europie i Stanach Zjednoczonych. Alternatywny impuls, z którego się zrodził, w nowym świetle postawił teatr lalkowy, funkcjonujący w Polsce na uboczu głównego obiegu krytycznego, stereotypowo przypisany do kultury dziecięcej. Sztuka lalkarska zaczęła intrygować wielością form, eksperymentalnym traktowaniem materii poddawanej animacji, złożonymi, metaforycznymi relacjami między animatorem i lalką, plastycznością wizji scenicznych. Coraz więcej lalkarzy znajdowało w nowych strukturach organizacyjnych szansę na niezależność artystyczną i rozwój autorskich poszukiwań.<sup>6</sup>

[Very soon the new puppet theatres began to collect Polish and international laurels (...) and excellent reviews of guest performances in Europe and the United States. The alternative impulse from which they were born set the puppet theatre, functioning on the side-lines of mainstream critical circulation and stereotypically assigned to the children culture in Poland, in a new light. Puppetry art began to intrigue with its multiplicity of forms, experimental treatment of animated matter, complex, metaphorical relations between the animator and the puppet, and the plasticity of its stage visions. In the new organizational structures more and more puppeteers found a chance for artistic independence and the development of individual exploration.]

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<sup>5</sup> The most important independent groups, which started work in that period, were: Towarzystwo Wierszalin [Wierszalin Company], Teatr ¾ Zusno [¾ Zusno Theatre], Unia Teatr Niemożliwy [Union Impossible Theatre], Walny-Teatr.

<sup>6</sup> Wiśniewska, M. (2012), 'Alternatywni lalkarze'. In: Duda, A., Adamiszyn, E., Oleszek, B. (ed.), *Polski teatr alternatywny po 1989 roku z perspektywy Akademickich/Alternatywnych Spotkań Teatralnych KLAMRA*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, p. 239.



The situation changed drastically at the beginning of the new century.

An analysis of the repertoire from the last fifteen seasons shows that productions for adults are developing with incomparable speed – we have had almost one hundred such plays performed in that time.<sup>7</sup> This impressive number is due to many reasons and the most important are:

- a) constant development of artistic higher education institutions which, apart from teaching traditional puppet techniques, move with the times and respond to contemporary demands (at the same time keeping in mind the development of related art forms and techniques, especially multimedia);
- b) debuts by directors of the new generation;
- c) changes to the state system which allowed independent groups<sup>8</sup>;
- d) joining the EU – financial support for artistic projects, theatre festival, exchanges and international co-productions;
- d) greater interest drawn by puppet theatres among adult viewers.

The purpose of this article is to show the aesthetic trends in puppet performances for adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I would like to discuss the diversity of means of expression in the productions of both institutional theatres and independent groups. However, I do not intend to write about the dramatic aspect or the problem of selecting scripts, which is a topic for a separate article. Moreover, there is no way to include all of the premieres from the 2000/2001 to the 2015/2016 season; that is why I will focus on the most interesting ones and group them according to the puppet types and techniques used.

### **Classical puppet forms and conventions**

The performances which belong to classical forms of puppet theatre make one of the smallest groups here. The most remarkable are the two from the Scena Marionetkowa Warszawskiej Opery Kameralnej [Marionette Stage of Warsaw Chamber Opera]: *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* [The Abduction from the Seraglio] by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart with the stage and puppet design of Marlena Skoneczko (2014) and *La serva padrona* [The Servant Turned Mistress] by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi with stage design by Aleksander

<sup>7</sup> See: Suszczyński, K. (2016), 'Utwory dramatyczne w teatrze lalek. Repertuar z myślą o młodzieżowym odbiorcy'. In: Wiśniewska, M., Wróblewski M. (ed.), *Teatr i dramat dla dzieci i młodzieży*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, pp. 141-152.

<sup>8</sup> The first groups and private theatres appeared in Poland in the end of '70s.

Maksymiak and puppet design by Iwona Makowska (2016), both directed by Lesław Piecka. They are classic examples of the marionette (string puppets) opera in which the viewers can see the story through a small window on the stage. Those performances, with rich stage design and highly skilled animation, were accompanied by an orchestra and soloists.<sup>9</sup>

The premiere of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Kantata o kawie* [*Coffee Cantata*] at the Białostocki Teatr Lalek [Białystok Puppet Theatre], in a production directed by Tatiana Logoida, using a set designed by Halina Zalewska-Słobodzianek (2014), represented a similar kind of performance to those mentioned above. This performance used different types of puppets: marionettes, puppets 'à la planchette', and multimedia visualizations.

Of the productions discussed here, and of all those shown in theatres in recent times, these were the only ones where the puppeteer remains invisible to the audience. In the rest, the animator appears on stage or is present the entire time.

### **Performances where classical puppets were partners of human actors on stage**



**Figure 1:** *Iwona, księżniczka Burgunda* [*Ivona, Princess of Burgundia*], Opolski Teatr Lalki i Akrota im. Alojzego Smolki (2009).

Among the performances that partner classic puppet forms with actors on stage, we should mention the works of Marián Pecko and Eva Farkašová. In their production of *Iwona, księżniczka Burgunda* [*Ivona, Princess of Burgundia*] by Witold Gombrowicz at the Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora [Opole Puppet and Actor Theatre] in 2009, the artists used small marionettes (led by the wires in their heads and threads attached to their limbs), hand puppets (which appeared in the flaps on the stage) and small dummies (animated in front of the actors) – all representing incarnations of the oppressive inhabitants of the royal court. Different forms of the same character at the same time constituted a form of dialogue with the plastic theatre, which gives the opportunity to endow any figure with stage existence. Pecko and Farkašová reprised this idea at the Teatr Lalek Białostocki [Białystok Puppet Theatre] in Bielsko-Biala, where they staged Shakespeare's *Sen nocny letniej* [*Midsummer Night's Dream*] in 2013. There, they used both marionettes

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<sup>9</sup> In this, it differs from other European theatres of this kind, where recordings are used.

and hand puppets. Those stage creations were alter egos of characters played in dramatic performance (by human beings) and their presence helped compress the extended plot on the small stage of theatre and amplify comic features of the play.

Another interesting performance of this kind was Adam Walny's monodrama with puppets, entitled *Hamlet*<sup>10</sup> (2010), which the artist presented in his theatre in Ryglíce. Walny put his marionettes in fish tanks full of water, with the result that they were not lifeless without the puppeteer's exertions because the water moved them gently throughout the length of the performance. Only the main character lived outside the aquarium, a choice which emphasized his loneliness.

It is also worthwhile to mention *Przemiana* [*The Metamorphosis*], based on the novella by Franz Kafka, directed and designed by Aleksander Maksymiak at the Teatr Lalek Banialuka (2008), because it was one of a small number productions for adults created with rod puppets. In the performance, the actors and puppets represented two different worlds which were falling apart and the metamorphosis of the main character into a living man was metaphorical. Rod puppets were also used by Paweł Aigner and Magdalena Gajewska in their staging of *Stworzenia sceniczne* [*Playhouse Creatures*] by April De Angelis at Teatr Lalek Pleciuga [Pleciuga Puppet Theatre] in Szczecin (2013). The story of women allowed by King Charles II Stuart to work as actors – a profession previously reserved exclusively for men – showed the ups and downs of their lives (performed by human actors on stage) and work (performed using rod puppets).

In those performances the puppets were mostly used as doppelgangers of the actors. Such a form of staging multiplies the theatrical levels through the illusion of various live and animated scenic beings. This is quite a popular effect, not only in the Polish puppet theatre, and that is why it is possible to find many more similar performances. The mentioned ones are the most recognizable, and of course do not make a full list.

### **Performances with masks**

In productions for adults, artists sometimes use masks. We have many examples of such performances: *Kartoteka* [*The Card Index*] by Tadeusz Rózewicz, directed by Krzysztof Rościszewski with stage design by

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<sup>10</sup> Based on *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare.



**Figure 2:** *Ubu Król [King Ubu]*, Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok (2002).

Jadwiga Mydlarska-Kowal at Olsztyński Teatr Lalek [Olsztyn Puppet Theatre] (2001), *Ubu Król [King Ubu]* by Alfred Jarry, directed by Zbigniew Lisowski and designed by Pavel Hubička (the production was the diploma performance at the Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok in 2002, and was then shown in a revised version at the Baj Pomorski Theatre in Toruń in 2005),

*Zamek [The Castle]*, based on the novella by Franz Kafka, directed by Wojciech Kobrzyński, with stage design by Wiesław Jurkowski, at the Białostocki Teatr Lalek (2005), *Romeo i Julia [Romeo and Juliet]* by William Shakespeare, directed by Marcin Ehrlich and designed by Ireneusz Salwa, at the Miejski Teatr Miniatura [Miniatura City Theatre] in Gdańsk (2007), or *Zaproszenie na egzekucję [Invitation to a Beheading]* by Vladimir Nabokov, directed and designed by Sabina Waclawczyk, at the Teatr Lalki i Aktora Kubuś [Kubus Puppet and Actor Theatre] in Kielce (2015). In all those performances the classical technique of actors performing in masks was used.

But masks in the puppet theatre also take other attractive forms. A good example here is *Janulka* based on *Janulka, córka Fizdejki [Janulka, Daughter of Fizdejko]* by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, directed by Dorota Bielska and stage designed by Beata Tomczyk, at Teatr Lalek Arlekin [Arlekin Puppet Theatre] in Łódź (2011). In this performance each actor played two roles: one acting dramatically and facing the audience, the second using the mask technique, standing with his/her back to the audience.



**Figure 3:** *Sprawa Dantona. Samowyywiad [The Danton's case. Autoreview]*, Teatr Malabar Hotel (2012).

A diverse range of mask forms is used by Teatr Malabar Hotel [Malabar Hotel Theatre] in Warsaw. In their performance of *Sprawa Dantona. Samowyywiad*<sup>11</sup> [*The Danton's Case. Autoreview*] by Stanisława Przybyszewska, directed by Magdalena Miklasz and designed by Ewa Woźniak, with puppets/masks designed by Marcin Bikowski (2012), the dramatic actors also performed in the masks representing other characters. There was an especially memorable scene in which the dialogue between two characters (Georges Danton and Maximilien de Robespierre) was in fact a monologue by the actor, partly with and partly without the mask he was animating. Two other

<sup>11</sup> Co-production of the Malabar Hotel Theatre, the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw (Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok), Polski Theatre in Warsaw and State Theatre Higher School in Cracow.

productions, *Mistrz i Małgorzata*<sup>12</sup> [*The Master and Margarita*] based on Mikhail Bulgakov's novel (directed by Magdalena Miklasz, with set design by Ewa Woźniak, and puppets/masks by Marcin Bikowski, 2014), and *Ćwiczenia stylistyczne*<sup>13</sup> [*Exercises in Style*] by Raymond Queneau, directed by Maria Żynel with masks designed by Marcin Bikowski (2015) use not only masks but also large boards with faces of characters drawn or photocopied on them.

Masks made of silicone that change the facial features of the actors were used in *Pastrana* by Malina Prześluga, based on the life of 'Bearded Woman' Linda Pastrana, directed by Maria Żynel and designed by Ewa Woźniak, at Teatr Animacji [Animation Theatre] in Poznań (2015). In this way they created a realistic retinue of circus monsters which was then shown at fairs and other public places. However, many different types and forms of puppets were used in this performance, such as marionettes, dummies and half-dummies.

In all of the performances mentioned, each mask was a kind of instrument complementing the actor's means of expression, serving the metaphorisation of language and creating a symbolic image of one of the characters on stage.

## Dummies

Dummies are widely used in productions for adults, and vary widely in description. In some cases they may be used as pivotal characters, animated by actors dressed in black. That was the case with the production of Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Ślepcy* [*The Blind*] which was the diploma performance at the Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok in 2001, directed by Marián Pecko and designed by Pavlo Andrasko. A similar device was used by Petr Nosálek and Eva Farkašová in their production of Juliusz Słowacki's *Balladyna* at Teatr Lalek Białaluka (2007). Some of the dummies there were so big that they had to be put on frames with wheels to help the actors. Oleg Żiugżda and Krzysztof Paluch also used dummies in *Białe małżeństwo* [*White Wedding*] by Tadeusz Różewicz in Teatr Maska [Mask Theatre] in Rzeszów (2014). In this performance, actors dressed in white provided support for the dummies. Dummies can function as a kind of double when animated by actors who also play non-puppet roles – such a scheme



**Figure 4:** *Baldanders*, Białostocki Teatr Lalek (2006).

<sup>12</sup> Co-production of the Malabar Hotel Theatre and Dramatyczny Theatre in Warsaw.

<sup>13</sup> Co-production of the Malabar Hotel Theatre and Studio Theatre in Warsaw.

was used by Marcin Bikowski and Marcin Bartnikowski, first in *Baldanders* in Białostocki Teatr Lalek in 2006 and later in *Arszenik*<sup>14</sup> [*Arsenic*] at the Teatr Baj [Baj Theatre] in Warsaw in 2011. In the first performance we followed the relationship between a demon trapped in a cage, who takes different forms, and the torturer who listens to his stories; in the second one we watched two actresses on stage playing two old ladies and at the same time animating dummies who represented the apparitions of their murdered lovers.

Dummies also function as doubles in: Waldemar Wolański's and Maria Balcerek's production of Cervantes's *Don Kichot* [*Don Quixote*] and Brecht's *Opera za trzy grosze* [*Threepenny Opera*] at the Teatr Lalek Arlekin in Lodz (2001, 2008); Wiesław Hejno's and Joanna Braun's production of Chekhov's *Mewa* [*The Seagull*] at the Teatr Lalki i Aktora [Puppet and Actor Theatre] in Lomza (2007); Aleksander Maksymiak's production of Shakespeare's *Burza* [*The Tempest*] at the Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora (2008); Bogusław Kierc's and Danuta Kierc's production of Robert Jarosz's *Wnyk*<sup>15</sup> [*A Snare*] at the Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora (2012) and Waldemar Wolański's and Joanna Hrk's production of Bulgakov's *Mistrz i Małgorzata* [*Master and Margarita*], first shown at the Teatr Groteska [Groteska Theatre] in Cracow (2008) and then at the Teatr Lalek Arlekin in Lodz (2014), to name only a few examples of many.



**Figure 5:** *Szewcy* [*The Shoemakers*], Teatr Animacji (2014).

Dummies can also be used to present multiple versions of the same character, as in the production of Stanisław Wyspiański's *Wesele* [*The Wedding*], directed by Jakub Roszkowski and designed by Eva Farkašová at Teatr im. Hansa Christiana Andersena [Hans Christian Andersen Theatre] in Lublin (2015). The same concept was earlier used by Oleg Žiugžda and Walery Raczkowski in the final exam production of Anthon Chekhov's *Wiśniowy sad* [*The Cherry Orchard*] at the Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok (2006) where Raniewska was played by both an actress and her dummy (the director used many other puppet techniques in the production: from classic marionettes to tabletop puppets or dummies of various sizes).

Anna Rozmianiec and Cecylia Kotlicka's production of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's *Szewcy* [*The Shoemakers*] at the Teatr Animacji in Poznań (2014) used dismembered shop dummies/mannequins as an element of its scenography.

<sup>14</sup>Based on *Arsenic and the Old Lace* by Joseph Kesserling.

<sup>15</sup>For more on this performance, see the article by Martyna Friedla 'The Other' in *Contemporary Polish Puppet Theatre* in this monograph (ed.).

This was astonishing choice symbolically highlighted the revolutionary content of Witkiewicz's drama. We should also consider a puppet design, visually similar to a dummy, which allows the animator to hide inside or put it on like a costume. It was first used in *Fasada* [*The Facade*], created and directed by Duda Paiva at the Białostocki Teatr Lalek (2007), and later in Arkadiusz Klucznik's and Maciej Chojnacki's production of Samuel Beckett's *Końcówka* [*Endgame*] at the Teatr im. Hansa Christiana Andersena in Lublin (2011).

One of the most remarkable forms of puppets appeared in a production of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [*Forefathers' Eve*] entitled [*'dzadi*']<sup>16</sup> ('Dziady' spelled in phonetic symbols) at the Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora (2015). In this re-imagining of one of the most important dramas of Polish Romanticism, director Paweł Passini and set designer Zuzanna Srebrna used more than two hundred rough dummies. All of them were made from thick white fabric and decorated with red elements, but they varied in size (from small dummies attached to actors' trousers to human size dummies and enormous ones several meters high). Their presence was rich in meanings: they could represent bodies risen from the grave or souls which wanted to integrate with the highest ideal. However, as representatives of the spiritual sphere, they were primarily a theatrical means of helping the audience – an active participant in stage rituals – join in the mystical experience of forefathers' eve and reaching the springs of the collective unconscious.

Dummies are thus a very popular feature of the puppet repertoire for the adults. Their functions are diverse and their presence on stage manifests itself in many different forms: as an actor's alter ego or doppelganger, as a costume, as a kind of animated puppet, as a symbolic form or an ordinary object. It is one of the most widely used puppet techniques.

### **From tabletop puppets to miniature figurines**

Some artists also animate smaller puppets in front of the actors. Depending on the stage designer's ideas, they may become smaller dummies, muppet-like or so-called tabletop puppets (similar to Japanese 'bunraku' puppets), or tiny, fragile puppets similar to children's toys, or humanoid figures several centimetres high. They do not follow a particular template and spring from the inventiveness of stage designers.

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<sup>16</sup> For more on this performance, see the article by Martyna Friedla 'The Other' in *Contemporary Polish Puppet Theatre* in this monograph (ed.).



**Figure 6:** *Śmieszny staruszek* [*The Funny Old Man*], Wrocławski Teatr Lalek (2001).

We should consider the example of a puppet designed by Jadwiga Mydlarska-Kowal for the performance of Tadeusz Różewicz's *Śmieszny staruszek* [*The Funny Old Man*] directed by Wiesława Hejny at Wrocławski Teatr Lalek [Wrocław Puppet Theatre] in 2001. The puppet was animated even by five actors and the precision of its movements had the effect of making it something like a realistic character. Moreover, the main hero was presented by several different forms of puppets, allowing the artists to create a variety of animation etudes. Neville Tranter's production of *Molier* [*Molière*] at Teatr Animacji in Poznań (2015) used muppet-like forms as did Magdalena Miklasz's in production of *Avenue Q* (2014), previously a great off-Broadway success, at the Teatr Muzyczny im. Danuty Baduszkowej [Danuta Baduszkowa Music Theatre] – this is the only example to be mentioned here of a format being dictated by a play's existing specifications.

The puppets used by Oleg Žiugžda and Walery Raczkowski in their production of Słowacki's *Balladyna* at Olsztyński Teatr Lalek (2014) present yet another approach. These puppets looked like wooden sculptures, and some were dressed in folk costumes. The same artists used a group of rag dolls/puppets in their production of Jean Genet's *Pokojówki* [*The Maids*] at the Mask Theatre in Rzeszów (2013).

A remarkably simple form was used in the production of Molière's *Don Juan* directed by Alexiej Leliawski and designed by Aleksander Wochromiejew at the Teatr Lalek Pleciuga in Szczecin (2011) – the title puppet resembled a patchwork doll with freely moving limbs and was accompanied by slightly bigger bust puppets also made using the patchwork technique. An opposite approach was demonstrated by the clay figurines (all similar to each other, and with moving limbs) made by Mirek Kaczmarek which director Jakub Roszkowski used in his staging of *Krzyżacy* [*The Teutonic Knights*], based on Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel, at the Miejski Teatr Miniatura in Gdańsk (2016). The advantage of the material used (baked clay) was that the puppets were literally destroyed in the performance, mashed by the actors.

Even smaller forms of tabletop puppets were used in *Balladyny i romanse* [*The Balladins and the Romances*], based on the novel by Ignacy Karłowicz, directed by Konrad Dworakowski and stage designed by Marika Wojciechowska, at the Teatr Pinokio [Pinokio Theatre] in Łódź in 2012. In that production, the human



world was shown by small tabletop puppets who were being animated by a group of gods played by live-action actors. Similar forms were used in the production of Vladimir Nabokov's play *Biegun* [*The Pole*] directed by Ewa Piotrowska, with stage design by Julija Skuratova, at Białostocki Teatr Lalek in 2007. The director's concept was to use puppets to present stories from the remembered and imagined visions of the characters freezing at the pole, who were played by live actors.

The smallest plastic puppet-humanoids could be seen in the final exam performance of *Żywoty martwych Polaków* [*Common Lives of the Dead Poles*], directed by Marcin Wierzchowski and stage designed by Mirek Kaczmarek, at the Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok (2016). In order to make these tiny creatures more visible, the director used a camcorder so that the viewers could see them projected on a screen at the background.

## Shadow theatre

In contemporary productions for adults we also find a few different kinds of the shadow theatre. The classic form in which the animator is hidden behind the screen was used in a production of Bruno Schulz's *Sklepy cynamonowe* [*The Street of Crocodiles*] directed by Robert Drobnich with shadow puppets created by Cengiz Özek at the Teatr Lalki i Aktora Kubuś in Kielce in 2014. In this performance the dream-like dwelling of the main character (played by a live actor performing in front of the screen) was created by fantastic and versatile forms of shadows (and also light) projected on the horizon at the back of the stage. Fabrizio Montecchi also used shadow play inventively in his production of Nicola Lusuardi's *Widmo Antygony* [*Spectre of Antigone*] at Białostocki Teatr Lalek in 2011. The stage designer, Nicoletta Garioni, and the costume designer, Zofia de Ines, invented fantastic outfits featuring very specific headgear. When lighted in a special way, they produced shadows on the screen behind the actors, introducing an alternative world into the play.



**Figure 7:** *Sklepy cynamonowe* [*The Street of Crocodiles*], Teatr Lalki i Aktora Kubuś (2014).

Teatr Figur [The Theatre of Figures], established in 2007 in Cracow, specializes in shadow performances. The performance-installation *Huliet huliet* (directed by Dagmara Żabska and Alla Maslovskaya, designed by Agnieszka Polańska, Beata Klimkowska and Edyta Stajniak, 2015) was a touching story about life

in the Cracow ghetto during World War II which used archival photographs and original everyday objects (such as cabinets, tables, suitcases or boxes) from that period. All of these elements come alive thanks to animation, manipulation of light, and use of screens, whether hidden or openly displayed.

Tadeusz Wierzbicki is a very important artist of shadow theatre in Poland<sup>17</sup>. In his Studio Form Światła [Light Forms Studio] and Laboratorium Zjawisk Świetlnych [Light Form Laboratory] in Majaczevice he has been creating light and shadow performances for many years. In the last one, *Labirynty światła* [Labyrinths of Lights] made in 2016, he creates poetic light-and-shadow miniatures inspired by the aphorisms of the Polish poet Stanisław Jerzy Lec.

When discussing shadow and light in the puppet theatre for adults, it is worth mentioning the only example of which I am aware of the use of black lights in puppet theatre: the staging of Sławomir Mrożek's *Na pełnym morzu* [At Sea] directed and stage designed by Joanna Zdrada at the Teatr Maska in Rzeszow in 2013. However, the black light technique was just one of many visual elements in this performance.

### Theatre using various means of expression



**Figure 8:** *W środku słońca gromadzi się popiół* [Ashes Accumulate in the Middle of the Sun], Wrocławski Teatr Lalek (2015).

There is also a large number of productions which cannot be classified within a particular genre. Henryk Jurkowski defines such performances as belonging to the theatre of various means of expression<sup>18</sup>, where the puppet is just one element in the scenic world – in this kind of theatre the artists use all possible theatrical means, resulting in a collage of different techniques, forms, materials, items or elements. In her production of the monodrama *Żywoty świętych osiedlowych* [The Hagiography of Housing Estate Saints], based on Lidia Amejko's novel (Ad Spectatores Theatre in Wrocław, 2010), Agata Kucińska introduced many different puppet forms: from small puppets only several centimetres tall to various masks, delicate and airy fabrics, and quick light and costume changes, as in a fair booth. In a production of Artur Pałyga's drama *W środku słońca gromadzi się popiół* [Ashes Accumulate

<sup>17</sup> For more about this artist and his performances, see the article by Marzenna Wiśniewska *Performers in Polish Puppet Theatre* in this monograph (ed.).

<sup>18</sup> See e.g.: Jurkowski, H. (2002), *Metamorfozy teatru lalek w XX wieku*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza 'Errata'.

*in the Middle of the Sun*] co-directed with Mirek Kaczmarek at Wrocławski Teatr Lalek in 2015, Kucińska used tabletop puppets, masks, children's toys and fantasy costumes to tell a story about the contemporary world and its lack of empathy. The variety of means of expression not only allowed the directors to present a multiplayer drama using just a few actors, but more importantly, reinforced symbolic images and metaphorical content, intensifying viewer interest. The same applies to the *Żywoty świętych osiedlowych*.

A 2009 staging of *Turandot*<sup>19</sup> written and directed by Paweł Passini, with stage design by Michalina Kostecka, employed a rich variety of means of expression. Giacomo Puccini's unfinished opus was illustrated using various forms of puppets (including a human-size one representing the main character), multimedia, and even fruit. Passini's production of Artur Pałyga's *Morrison/Śmiercisyn* [*Morrison/Deathson*], with stage design by Zuzanna Srebrna, at Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora in 2013, introduced tabletop puppets, string puppets, masks, costumes and ludic lighting to invoke the narcotic visions of The Doors's singer Jim Morrison.

In their production of *Dziady po Białoszewskim* [*Forefathers' Eve in Honour of Białoszewski*] based on *Chamowo* and poetry of Miron Białoszewski (2015), at Teatr Lalki i Aktora Kubuś in Kielce, director Anna Retoruk and stage designer Justyna Banasiak re-created the room of the dying poet on stage and filled it with figures of saints as well as pictures and photographs of his friends. The main hero was represented by a realistic head which metamorphosized in subsequent scenes; eventually he acquired a whole body. All the elements of the scenography were animated.

The production of Witold Gombrowicz's *Ślub* [*The Wedding*] directed by Zbigniew Lisowski and designed by Pavel Hubička at the Teatr Baj Pomorski in Toruń in 2015 displayed a particularly rich abundance of different art forms. Unfortunately those forms interfered with the meaning and resulted in interpretative chaos. The same artists' 2011 production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* introduced masks, costumes, multimedia projections and other visual elements much more cohesively and successfully.

But there were many other performances that incorporated various means of expression: *Historia występnej wyobraźni* [*The Story of the Vicious Imagination*], based on Bruno Schulz's novel, directed by Konrad Dworakowski, with stage design by Andrzej Dworakowski at the Teatr Pinokio in Łódź (2010);

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<sup>19</sup> Co-production of the NeTTheatre from Lublin and the Coincidentia Group from Białystok.

*Głośniej! [Louder!]* by Jonathan Safron Foer, directed by Michael Vogel with puppet design by Marcin Bikowski at the Teatr Malabar Hotel in Warsaw (2012); *Faza REM Phase* by Michael Vogel at the Białostocki Teatr Lalek<sup>20</sup> (2014); or Shakespeare's *Burza [The Tempest]*, directed by Waldemar Raźniak and designed by Jan Polívka, at the Białostocki Teatr Lalek (2015). And this list is far from comprehensive.

### **Varied forms**

There are still other forms of puppet theatre which constitute fragments of various productions, such as: actors' performances that imitate marionette theatre, actors playing with ready-made objects, animation of space, video projections, play with light, water and even fire, or certain art forms which are difficult to describe (especially in Leszek Mądzik's visual art theatre). In addition, we can find performances for adults in Polish puppet theatres in which there are no puppets, and actors play an ordinary performance as in dramatic theatres.

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The research discussed here shows that puppet theatre for adults is constantly evolving and changing its forms of aesthetic expression. The traditional puppet and the theatre of homogeneous means of expression long time ago yielded there place to various puppet beings and a modern visual orientation. This results not only from the need to make stage productions more attractive to viewers, but, above all, from the need to reckon with the new drama and the aesthetic challenges of postdramatic theatre. In the diversity of animated forms we may also see the movement of puppeteers out of a niche of strictly puppet theatre towards border genres of theatre expression, in a process characteristic of the postmodern cultural paradigm and which is also taking place in other kinds of theatre (e.g. dance theatre). In this way, the language of the contemporary puppet theatre strengthens and modernizes. For if we can make any definite statement about art, it is that art abhors stagnation.

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<sup>20</sup> Co-production of the Figurentheater Wilde&Vogel in Stuttgart, Lindenfels Westflügel in Leipzig, Coincidentia Gropu in Bialostok and Bialystok Puppet Theatre.

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## **Martyna Friedla**

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### **Summary**

The article discusses the figure of 'the Other' in modern Polish puppet theatre. The author focuses on several examples of performances presented at the Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora [Puppet and Actor Theatre in Opole], namely *Wnyk* [*A Snare*], directed by Bogusław Kierc, and *[dżadi]*, directed by Paweł Passini. The author aims to show how the phenomenon of puppet as 'Other' contributes to the show's impact (in the aesthetics of performance, i.e., the interaction between actors, actors and director, etc., and also between artists and audience), using several tools of modern humanities, such as Agamben's category of the anthropological machine and his notion of cultural dualisms, Turner's category of liminality, and Kristeva's concept of the 'abject'.

### **Streszczenie**

Refleksja poświęcona obecności figury 'obcego' w polskim współczesnym teatrze lalek. Autorka skupia się na przykładach spektakli powstałych w Opolskim Teatrze Lalki i Aktora im. A. Smółki w Opolu: *Wnyk* w reżyserii Bogusława Kierca i *[dżadi]* w reżyserii Pawła Passiniego. Wskazuje jak figura 'obcego' wpływa na interpretację przedstawienia (a także na relację między twórcami a odbiorcami spektaklu), stosując narzędzia analityczne współczesnej humanistyki. Powołuje się na kategorię maszyny antropologicznej i kulturowych dualizmów w myśl prac Giorgio Agambena, liminalności Victora Turnera i abiektu Julii Kristevy.

## **‘The Other’ in Contemporary Polish Puppet Theatre**

The series of political and social changes that took place in Poland after the collapse of Communism in 1989 have been reflected in Polish theatre in various ways. Artists have tried to capture the effects of the transformation. Any evaluation of their work must therefore reckon with the difficulties that Polish society had to struggle with and the new social regulations that emerged during the period. Theatre, being a dynamic genre of art, shows societal change as if in a mirror reflection, and does so particularly acutely by propelling to the fore the fragility of the individual who experiences alienation in the new reality. And this is the right place to show how an alienated individual, in the form of ‘the Other’ who emerges in the tension between a person and society, is presented in particular works. A wide spectrum will be presented in my doctoral dissertation, but in the more limited context of this shorter publication, I will focus on puppet performances.

I am going to present several distinctive forms of such mirroring, using as examples two spectacles from the Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora<sup>1</sup> [Puppet and Actor Theatre in Opole]. The first one is *Wnyk* [*A Snare*], written by Robert Jarosz and directed by Bogusław Kierc (2012).<sup>2</sup> The second one is the 2015 spectacle [*dżadi*], a unique interpretation of Mickiewicz’s canonical drama *Dziady* [*Forefathers’ Eve*], with the title presented in phonetic notation, directed by Paweł Passini.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Full Polish name is: Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora im. Alojzego Smolki [Alojzy Smolka Puppet and Actor Theatre in Opole].

<sup>2</sup> More information about the production: <http://teatrlalki.opole.pl/spektaki/wnyk/> [15.10.2017]

<sup>3</sup> More information about the production: [http://teatrlalki.opole.pl/spektaki/\['dżadi'\]](http://teatrlalki.opole.pl/spektaki/['dżadi']/) [15.10.2017]

When we try to analyse the figure of 'the Other' in a Polish puppet theatre performance, there are many questions we have to ask:

- who is 'the Other';
- how is 'the Other' presented in the performance;
- why is this figure presented in the spectacle.

A figure of 'the Other' presented in a theatre performance is generally a character with some kind of peculiar individuality. The character is somehow isolated in the represented world, because it is different; it feels different itself, for varying reasons. A work of puppetry gives the artists a chance to present abstract concepts in material form. An actor may show the loneliness of a character with words or gestures, but a puppeteer can perhaps create a purer embodiment of it. Importantly, 'the Other' in the puppet theatre may be doubled.

### **Who is 'The Other'?**

My analysis will be based on several theories that address the problematic figure of the Other in ways relevant to the cases under discussion. These are: anthropological dualism, or the dichotomy between 'one's own' and 'strangers' (Zbigniew Benedyktowicz); the category of the anthropological machine and cultural dualisms (Giorgio Agamben); the category of liminality (Victor Turner); and Julia Kristeva's reading of the concept of the 'abject'.

As cultural scholars have shown, symbolic dualisms may lead to exclusion or situate a subject at the border of two entities. In his work *Portret 'obcego'*<sup>4</sup> [*Portrait of 'a Stranger'*]<sup>5</sup>, Polish anthropologist Zbigniew Benedyktowicz analyses classical ethnographic materials and shows the contradistinction of the relationship 'human – nonhuman' and its elaboration in the opposition 'human – animal'. A common feature in descriptions of strange lands in the accounts of Pliny, Herodotus and Ascot (one of the most distinguished geographers of the sixteenth century) is the authors' attribution of animal characteristics to 'barbarians' – 'Others' on the other side of cultural divides. Ascot wrote about American Indians in Florida and Brasilia: 'choć nie są tak okrutne jak tygrysy lub pantery, to jednak mało czym różnią się od zwierząt,

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<sup>4</sup> Benedyktowicz, Z. (2000), *Portrety 'obcego'. Od stereotypu do symbolu*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

<sup>5</sup> All translations in brackets in the article were made by the author.



chodzą nago i hołdują najgorszym występkom.<sup>6</sup> [although they are not as cruel as tigers or panthers, they are not much different from animals; they walk naked and favour the worst misbehaviors.] But these descriptions also reference the linguistic categories 'speakers – nonspeakers' (of a given language). Benedyktowicz sees it in 'etymologia nazwy własnej «Słowian» – jako ludzi władających słowem w opozycji do obcych – «Niemców», tj. niemych<sup>7</sup> [the etymology of the word 'Slavs' – people in command of words, in opposition to strangers – 'German', which in Polish means 'mute']; a similar mechanism can be observed in the German word 'deutlich', which means 'relating to language' or 'speaking clearly'. Of course, the fact that the Polish word 'Niemcy' is believed to come from the word 'niemówiący', meaning 'mute', 'inarticulate', does not mean that hundreds of years ago Poles thought that their neighbours were incapable of speech; it merely means that their words were not understandable, so they seemed to be mumbling.

The figure of 'the Other' is very closely connected to various kinds of dualisms that enable exclusion or marginalisation. The second category might include liminal beings, in the sense developed by Victor Turner<sup>8</sup>: forms of existence that do not have their own identity or sense of belonging, that are unable to cross the threshold of assimilation. But a stranger may be also stuck on the inside, i.e., experiencing inner exclusion, a form of internal conflict: the 'abject' represents one such form of an internal incoherence, when an element that does not fit somehow remains present and as a result violates some kind of taboo.

Another popular category in humanities in recent years is the category of the anthropological machine proposed by Giorgio Agamben. He studies cultural and social dualisms and their frames of reference. As Agamben says, the roots of what seems like the original dualism (because it dates back thousands of years), 'life – non-life', lie in Greek semantics. In fact, however, 'Grecy nie posiadali jednego terminu na oznaczenie tego, co my rozumiemy pod pojęciem życie.'<sup>9</sup> [the Greeks did not have a single term to describe that what we call 'life'.] Instead, they used two terms with a common etymology: «dzoē», która oznaczała zwykłą cechę życia wspólną wszystkim ożywionym bytom (zwierzętom, ludziom i bogom), oraz «bios», który wskazywał formę lub sposób

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<sup>6</sup> Tazbir, J. (1969), *Szlachta a konkwistadorzy. Opinia staropolska wobec podboju Ameryki przez Hiszpanię*. Warszawa: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Benedyktowicz, Z. (2000), *Portrety 'obcego'...*, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, V. (2010), *Proces rytualny. Struktura i antystruktura*. Trans. Ewa Dżurak. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.

<sup>9</sup> Agamben, G. (2008), *Homo sacer: suwerenna władza i nagie życie*. Trans. Mateusz Salwa. Warszawa: Prószyński i Sk-a, p. 9.

życia właściwe jednostce lub grupie.<sup>10</sup> ['dzoë', meaning an extraordinary quality of life common to all living existence (animals, people, gods) and 'bios', meaning a form or way of life that belonged to an individual or a group.]

In Agamben's thought, the subject is seen in the context of some other concepts. Agamben examines the ways human beings struggle with their own creations, using concepts such as language, spectacle, law or economy.<sup>11</sup> A form of use of concepts that he finds anomalous is profanation, which his theory treats as a political attitude.<sup>12</sup> Using the category of the anthropological machine, Agamben shows that at certain points in the past humanity was mostly defined in opposition to animality. That is the primary cultural dichotomy that founds the social order and humans' concept of their own status. This system also produced a lot of other socially and legally authorized dichotomies, such as adult/child, women/man, and one's own/stranger.<sup>13</sup> But those dichotomies do not function as explicit oppositions: 'mamy raczej do czynienia z polaryzacją, a więc rozciągającym się między dwoma biegunami polem napięć oraz strefą nierozstrzygalności.'<sup>14</sup> [we rather have to do with polarization, so with a field of tensions extending between two extremities and a zone of undecidability.] This corresponds to the concept of 'the abject' in Kristeva's thought.<sup>15</sup>

## Wnyk

*Wnyk* means a snare, which is a kind of a trap – a knot that hunters leave in a forest to catch wild animals. The snare in which the protagonist of Jarosz's production struggles is made of neither rope, nor wire. It is made of feeling and thinking, of consciousness and experiences, of an obsession with irreversibility. The awareness of being caught in a trap comes to the boy's mind quite early. He is twelve and his parents dismiss his confession that he has a lot of friends. 'For such a confession it is always too soon and too late', they say. This is one of his first lessons, a painfully remembered one. The next ones will be even more painful.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ratajczak, M., Szadkowski, K. (2010), 'Agamben: instrukcja użycia'. In: Bielik-Robson, A., (et al.), *Agamben. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Borowski, M., Sugiera, M. (2012), *W pułapce przeciwieństw. Ideologie tożsamości*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo 'Trio', Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, pp. 9-29.

<sup>14</sup> Kwaterko, M., (2006), 'Niežnośna lekkość gestu'. In: Agamben, G., *Profanacje*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Kristeva, J. (1982), *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>16</sup> (2013), 'Dni Sztuki Współczesnej'. Program. Online: <http://dsw.bialystok.pl/2013/en/program/wydarzenie/opolski-teatr-lalki-i-aktora-of-alojzy-smolka-wnyk/> [13.12.2016].

Bogusław Kierc highlights the themes of the drama using various theatrical tools, including puppets, though he struggles with problems that include defining the palette of emotions of a teenage boy.

There are nine characters in the show, played by five actors. Some puppets representing characters seem humanoid, and some are hybrids, while others represent animals. And though their names in the text seem to give us clues as to which is which, director Kierc and stage designer Danuta Kierc decided to make it more complicated. The main character, played by Miłosz Konieczny, is named Son. Since he has no particular name, he could be anyone. His name merely defines his role in the family. Another character, the Dog, narrates how the Son tried in the past to talk with his parents, but was criticised for doing so.



**Figure 1:** *Wnyk [A Snare]*, Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora im. Alojzego Smolki (2012).

PIES	[DOG
mając lat dwadzieścia	When he was twenty years old
powiedział	He said
 SYN	 SON
nie ma mnie (...)	I'm not there (...)
 <i>(pisze rodzicom wiadomość – M.F.)</i>	 <i>(he is writing a note for his parents – M.F.)</i>
 SYN	 SON
od dziś jestem aniołem	From today I'm an angel
jeżeli nie znacie tego słowa	If you don't know this word
to specjalnie dla was	I will become a dog
zostanę psem (...) <sup>17</sup>	especially for you]

In the dialogue between Son and Dude (Łukasz Bugowski), in which the Dude tries to corrupt the Son, Konieczny operates the puppet representing the Dude and Bugowski operates the puppet representing the Son. The actors do not show the naturalistic movements of those characters but rather shake them expressionistically to communicate their moral struggle, the violence in which they are engulfed. Each puppet is a form of 'the Other' that metaphorically helps to show the relationship between two characters. When the boy is treated like an object, then the puppet becomes nothing more than an object. Puppets are liminal – sometimes they are used to show

<sup>17</sup> Jarosz, R. (2011), *Wnyk. Dialog*, vol. 2, p. 100

specific situations, playing their roles as actors; other times they are treated like objects, like dolls (to play with) without a soul of a character. In scenes like the one described above, they come alive due to the dramatic tension of the situation. In other situations they are merely stage props or even a kind of antagonist for the living actors (or rather for the roles they play). Their status on stage is ambiguous.

The appearance of the puppets is very important. Some of them, like the Dude and the old woman played by Anna Jarota, look like normal human beings. But others, like the Son and 'She' (the Bitch) are half-human, half-animal beings, composed of human bodies with dogs' heads.

In Zbigniew Benedyktowicz's theory the relation between 'human – unhuman' is a simple dichotomy, like many others that every society creates to separate its own community from strangers in a symbolic way. Sometimes such ideas are hidden in the language, sometimes careful study of a given society's habits is required to discover how such a mechanism works; but these mechanisms are widespread. In art this kind of dichotomy becomes a tool that helps a painter, writer or director to show how we act in relation to other people or even to ourselves. I think that in *Wnyk* it functions in both ways.

In Jarosz's drama, every person seems to be guided by animal instinct and biological needs. For the boy, everything that he calls a 'human thing' and 'natural' is part of the world of adults. On the other hand, he sees strange, incomprehensible forces that rule a world he doesn't belong to or doesn't feel he belongs to. The personification of those instincts is the Alsatian mentioned in a conversation between the Son and the Bitch. She says: 'widziałam wilczura / miał brudną sierść / i śmierdział.' [I saw an Alsatian / he has dirty hair / and he stinks.] The Son replies: 'znasz jego zapach / znasz jego sierść.' [You know his smell / you know his hair.] She answers: 'taka jestem / suka jestem.'<sup>18</sup> [That's what I am / I am a bitch.] She later dies in a car accident. Later a Son describes his meeting with this dirty dog: 'po drugiej stronie ulicy / stał wilczur / asfalt był mokry / asfalt był lustrem / wilczur moim odbiciem / patrzyłem mu w oczy / jak w swoje własne.'<sup>19</sup> [On the other side of the road / stood an Alsatian / the road was wet / the road was a mirror / the Alsatian was my reflection / I looked in his eyes / as if in my own.] That is the moment when the boy starts to identify himself with the Alsatian who, to his mind, represents himself. The Son is thus a liminal being, neither human nor animal.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

He also tries to establish his own status in the confrontation with the Alsatian, which makes him feel sick. His self-consciousness develops with this feeling of inner exclusion (of the abject). It's important to note that in the performance Konieczny speaks this line with a bit of fascination and simultaneously disgust. Those feelings are typical human reactions in situations where we encounter strangers.

In the scene where the Son meets his first girlfriend, the Bitch, they tame each other. Not only do they sniff each other, but there's even an expression in the text: 'i tak szeptali / szczekali / (...) domem ich ulica.'<sup>20</sup> [They were whispering / and barking / (...) the street was their home.] There is also a scene in which Konieczny, as the Son, manipulates the puppet of the Dog and teaches it to walk. While taking his first steps, he also tries to talk, but at first nothing but muttering comes out of his mouth. He tries to articulate what he feels, but the process of talking seems to be as difficult as finding the right words; it is, in fact, the same problem (vide Benedyktowicz).

There is another duet, in which the character of the Dog is not entirely differentiated from the character of the Son; where, in the text, the character of the Dog is external, in the performance he is not. The Dog may be understood to be some kind of an inner voice of the Son; on the stage, it's Mariola Ordak-Świątkiewicz, the actress who plays the character of the Mother, who speaks the Dog's lines. Sometimes the Son speaks to the Dog as if it were a strange voice coming out of nowhere to disturb and annoy him.

And now I'd like to make a confession.

The Puppet and Actor Theatre in Opole teamed up with Polish Television in Opole in 2011 and 2012 on the project 'Wnyk – Without a Heart, Without a Soul'. Bogusław Kierc let a few students watch rehearsals for *Wnyk*. He also presided over debates about the problems described by Robert Jarosz. And I had the chance to take part in the project. Sometimes Kierc was interested in receiving feedback from us, as young adults. But for me, the most important part of the experience was working on the spectacle. We tried to understand this character of the dog. And I had some ideas but I didn't feel fully convinced of them myself.

Now I have an idea, which I bring from Julia Kristeva's essay on disgust and repulsion: the idea of the abject. As I mentioned before, it relates to the idea of what is 'rejected' or 'thrown off'. It is located on the boundary between

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

self and other. It is a phenomenon that emerges when we do not accept ourselves. Kristeva even uses the expression: 'I spit *myself* out'.<sup>21</sup> This occurs when we cannot displace or reject feelings that are primal, biological, that seem to render us more animal than human. The Dog appears because the Son does not feel at ease with himself, because there are things happening with his life and his parents, that he doesn't understand and that cannot endure. Agamben's interpretation of cultural dualisms that finds them emerging through particular contexts is relevant here. The main problem that Son is struggling with is the concept of adulthood, but he also struggles with concepts of humanity, femininity, and masculinity that are connected and originate from the concept of adulthood.

### ***['dzadi]***



**Figure 2:** *['dzadi]*,  
Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora  
im. Alojzego Smolki (2015).

Space plays a very important role in Paweł Passini's spectacle *['dzadi]*. Spectators are not completely separated from actors. The main stage is in the middle of the Small Stage of the Opole Theatre, where spectators are seated on steps situated on two sides of the main stage. Actors move throughout the theatre during the play. Hundreds of white mannequins, symbolising the souls of dead people who have come to take part in the ritual of Forefathers' Eve, are seated amongst the spectators. The ritual of Forefathers' Eve, in pre-Christian times, was a moment of contact between the living and the dead: people believed they encountered the ghosts of their ancestors during the ritual. The mannequins become mobile, in a sense, when some of the spectators take mannequins on their knees or push them aside to take a seat for themselves. The effigies are thus animated by spectators.

Those puppets are similar to the ghost of Rollison, a character played by Jakub Kowalczyk who looks like a human and acts like a cross between a bird and a dog. This blind, speechless ghost in a human body is a liminal being, hanging between two worlds, somewhat akin to the golem of Jewish mythology (the name means 'unformed' or 'amorphous' in Hebrew).<sup>22</sup> Victoria Nelson defines the golem as a simulacrum of a human, used for help in simple housework tasks, but one who desires to be stronger than its maker (like the

<sup>21</sup> Kristeva, J. (1982), *Powers of Horror...*, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Nelson, V. (2011), *The Secret Life of Puppets*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 52.

Biblical Adam), and finally rebels against its human masters.<sup>23</sup> The similarity between the golem and the hundreds of puppets lying on the stage and in the audience may lead us to think it is also a ghost (also a liminal being, whose status is not clearly defined) summoned from the nether world to take part in a ritual. An interpretation of the puppet as an animated (revitalised, inspirited) corpse also appears in Nelson's analysis.<sup>24</sup> In Passini's spectacle, a Poet (Bogusław Kierc) has power over the golem. But 'the other' is not entirely passive; it has its specific emanation, described by Benedyktowicz (the demonization of what is beyond reason or incomprehensible) and what also Nelson connote:

'What does language communicate?' asks Walter Benjamin, who promptly answers himself: 'It communicates the mental being corresponding to it.' In the psychopographic universe language is also subject to transformation (...) its disintegration from a vehicle for recognizable human communication into something 'other' – both divine and demonic (...).<sup>25</sup>

The non-speaking golem is also similar to another non-speaking character in the performance – the figure of a gigantic silent God, composed of tens of puppets. This deity is a powerful being who does not react to people's prayers. If we interpret the puppets used to assemble the God figure as souls, then this God becomes another form of 'the other'. People have no settled formula for how to imagine their God. On the stage of Passini's spectacle, God is represented as a figure made of myriad 'others'. The Poet, the character who seems to be the ruler of words and is somehow connected with the golem, tries to challenge God to answer him. In response, however, there is nothing but silence. Both Mickiewicz and Passini show the existential loneliness characteristic of the figure of 'the other'.

According to the syncretic principles formulated in Late Antiquity, developed and extended in medieval Jewish cabbalism, and revived by Christian hermeticists during the Renaissance, humans have lost the ability to understand God's divine language, the pre-Tower of Babel *lingua adamica*, the Perfect Language spoken by the Divine Human (...).<sup>26</sup>

Spectators are also liminal: their status changes throughout the show, as they become participants forming their own 'communitas'. Actors walk among the spectators, and sometimes even touch them; they surround

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 61, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

them, watch them, and, in one of the last scenes, hand some puppets to the participants. Spectators become 'częścią teatralnego obrzędu'<sup>27</sup> [part of a theatrical ceremony], as Jacek Kopciński writes. Kopciński describes Passini's performance as made 'według reguły anamnezy, czyli przypominania, w starożytności rozumianego jako wędrówka do źródeł: pamięci, wiedzy, mocy, świętości, nawet mowy'.<sup>28</sup> [according to the rules of anamnesis, i.e., remembering, interpreted in antiquity as a journey to the source: of memory, knowledge, power, holiness, and even language.] For Passini, Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* is a forgotten text that we have to discover all over again: 'Świat opowiedziany przez Mickiewicza już się wydarzył, oglądamy go z perspektywy seansu duchów'.<sup>29</sup> [The world that Mickiewicz tells us about has already happened; we watch it from the perspective of a séance.] 'The Other' doesn't have to directly address spectators in order to be performative. But in [*dżadzi*] such interaction does take place. Passini uses a feedback loop.<sup>30</sup> In *Wnyk* the confrontation with the Other happens on another level, for example, in the scene between Son and Dude where there is a homosexual subtext and the puppets that have previously been treated with care are suddenly treated with brutality. For the young adults watching the show (and I saw it with an audience many times) the scene had a very powerful resonance. The Son is a liminal character because he is stuck between childhood and adulthood. Our society lacks rites of passage that could help us better define our social status. Sexual initiation doesn't fulfill young men's expectations, nor does leaving home, bidding farewell to parents or even, in the case of the Son, one's own humanity.

### **People are strange when you're a stranger...**

More diversified analysis and interpretation of contemporary Polish spectacles using the methodology featured here may allow us to situate these artistic works within a wider historical context of Polish and European theatre. The most important objects for future study are the connections between art and social reality and their analysis with the tools of performance studies.

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<sup>27</sup> Kopciński, J. (2016), 'Powrót Dziadów, czyli dwa teatry'. *Teatr*, vol. 1, p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Świerczyński M., (2015), 'To będzie niezwykle przeżycie w opolskich Lalkach'. *Wyborcza. Opole*, online: [http://Opole.wyborcza.pl//1,35114,17538930,To\\_będzie\\_niezwykłe\\_przeżycie\\_w\\_opolskich\\_\\_Lalkach\\_.html](http://Opole.wyborcza.pl//1,35114,17538930,To_będzie_niezwykłe_przeżycie_w_opolskich__Lalkach_.html) [13.12.2016].

<sup>30</sup> Fischer-Lichte, E. (2008), *Estetyka performatywności*. Translated by Mateusz Borowski, Małgorzata Sugiera. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, p. 79.



Analyses of cultural texts with reference to the category of the anthropological machine have been done by Polish teatrologists Małgorzata Sugiera and Mateusz Borowski.<sup>31</sup> They analysed the ideology of human identity using material from modern art broadly understood (including literature, advertising, and cinema). But there has not yet been any systematic interpretation of Polish theatre from this perspective and this is what I am trying to do in my doctoral research.

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<sup>31</sup> Borowski, M., Sugiera, M. (2012), *W pułapce przeciwieństw. Ideologie tożsamości*. Warszawa: Trio, Instytut Teatralny im. Z. Raszewskiego, pp. 9-29.

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**Part 3:**

**Organization and Education**

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### **Summary**

There are two fundamental types of puppet theatre in Europe: institutions with a regular ensemble and their own fixed abode, on the one hand, and small, relatively mobile independent groups on the other. Each model functions differently in Poland and Germany. In this article, the author describes the influence of organisational differences on the work of both types of puppet theatre.

### **Streszczenie**

Dwa podstawowe typy teatrów lalek w Europie to teatry-instytucje ze stałym zespołem i własnym budynkiem oraz małe niezależne grupy, działające w różnych przestrzeniach i nieposiadające stałej siedziby. Każdy z wymienionych modeli funkcjonuje inaczej w Polsce, a inaczej w Niemczech. Autorka opisuje wpływ różnic organizacyjnych na pracę teatrów obu wymienionych typów.

# The Influence of a Theatre's Organisational Structure on the Work of Puppet Theatres in Poland and Germany

## Introduction

A theatre's organisational structure strongly affects the quality and quantity of theatrical performances. Typically, large public theatres produce and present more shows per year, they also use their own stages, workshops and technicians. This contrasts with smaller theatres, whose productions often have low budgets. Therefore, these theatres work with a smaller amount of performers and simpler stage design. This relationship is apparent not only in dramatic theatres but in puppet, musical or dance theatres as well. The issue has not often been pursued by researchers, but interest has grown in recent years. Polish publications like *System organizacji teatrów w Europie*<sup>1</sup> [*The Organisational System of Theatres in Europe*]<sup>2</sup>, edited by Karolina Pyrkowska-Michalak, and *Struktura teatru a struktura spektaklu. Wpływ systemu organizacji instytucji na estetykę przedstawienia w wybranych krajach europejskich*<sup>3</sup> [*Theatre Structure and Performance Structure. Influence of the System of Institutional Organisation on Performance Esthetics Across Europe*], edited by Anna Galas-Kosil and Piotr Olkusz are collections of articles featuring some works concerning Polish and German theatre organisational systems, mainly dealing, however, with the realm of dramatic theatre. My article, on the other hand, will deal with puppet theatre and its situation at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, usually overlooked in general theatre studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Pyrkowska-Michalak, K. (ed.), (2016), *System organizacji teatrów w Europie*. Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego.

<sup>2</sup> All translations in brackets in the article were made by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Galas-Kosil, A., Olkusz, P. (ed.), (2016), *Struktura teatru a struktura spektaklu. Wpływ systemu organizacji instytucji na estetykę przedstawienia w wybranych krajach europejskich*. Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego.

Puppet theatres in Western Europe are traditionally small groups comprised of several persons. The organisation of puppet theatres in Post-Soviet countries generally follows the pattern of the Central State Academic Puppet Theatre in Moscow, founded by Sergey Obratzov. Obratzov's theatre model is a big institution with an ensemble of actor-puppeteers, directors, stage-designers, and technicians working in their own theatre house and workshops. The spectacle is the combined effect of the work of an artistic and technical ensemble, not the efforts of a single artist-puppeteer. Non-institutional theatres without their own house, consisting of ensembles with a few members, are the most common type of puppet theatres in Germany. Nomadic puppet theatre is part of a tradition. Puppeteers have wandered throughout various countries since medieval times. In those days, they often performed during fairs among other artists: tightrope walkers, dancers or jugglers. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries younger members of puppeteer families were still inheriting performance licences, puppets, portable stages and know-how. Nowadays, it seems easier to become a puppeteer. There are university-level academic programs devoted to puppetry: Poland's Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw (Puppet Theatre Art Department in Bialystok) and National Academy of Theatre Arts in Cracow (Puppetry Department in Wroclaw) and Germany's Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch in Berlin and Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Stuttgart. Some artists do apprenticeships in theatres, perhaps the most traditional way of learning. Autodidact enthusiasts are rare, but courses are available for them too (for example: construction courses at the Teatr Animacji [Animation Theatre] in Poznan, Poland or at the Puppenspiel Kolleg in Bochum, Germany).

There are twenty-five institutional puppet theatres in Poland. It is practically impossible to estimate the number of non-institutional groups. The Internet database of theatres<sup>4</sup> lists around fifty-seven puppet theatres overall (this number includes institutions). The list in *Teatr w Polsce. Dokumentacja sezonu 2014/2015*<sup>5</sup> [*Theatre in Poland 2016. Documentation of the Season 2014/2015*] mentions about sixty-five puppet theatres (also including institutional ones). Both figures seem incomplete; some popular ensembles, well-known for their active interest in puppetry, have not been listed. For example, the Teatr Malabar Hotel [Malabar Hotel Theatre] from Warsaw and the Grupa

<sup>4</sup> Search engine – 'teatry lalkowe' ['puppet theatres'], *E-tetar.pl*.  
Online: <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/institucje/lista.html> [30.03 2017].

<sup>5</sup> Buchwald, D. (et al.), (2016), *Teatr w Polsce 2016. Dokumentacja sezonu 2014/2015*. Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, pp. 899-900.



Coincidentia [Coincidentia Group] from Białystok, both established by puppeteers (graduates of the Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok), use puppetry techniques in their performances and locate their artistic experiences and interests in relation to puppetry. We can read on their websites: 'The core of Malabar Hotel's interests is form, both as understood by Witkacy and as connected with visual theatre and puppet theatre'<sup>6</sup> or 'The group combines in its performances many different means of expression: traditional and contemporary puppetry, acting, visual theatre, object theatre, miming, singing'<sup>7</sup> – however, they both appear as 'other theatres' in the documentary mentioned above.

It seems that puppetry is much more popular in Germany. The website of Das Deutsche Forum für Figurentheater und Puppenspielkunst [German Forum of Puppet Theatre and Art of Puppetry] mentions three hundred and fifty-four puppet theatres and independent puppeteers.<sup>8</sup> Another puppetry society – Verband Deutscher Puppentheater e.V. – has one hundred and forty-one members.<sup>9</sup> These numbers are surprisingly high. Some puppeteers or theatres are members of both organisations, so it is difficult to estimate the real number of theatre groups and soloists.

Puppeteers in Germany are a heterogeneous group. On the one hand, there are institutional puppet theatres, located mainly in the former GDR. After the unification of Germany, many of them changed their organisational structure, and some of them closed, such as, for example, the Puppet Theatre in Neubrandenburg.<sup>10</sup> Today they sometimes belong to state theatres, as in Schwerin, Gera, Halle, Chemnitz, or Dresden (Theater Junge Generation – Theatre for Children and Youth), or they may be independent institutions, as in Magdeburg, Erfurt and Zwickau. On the other hand, theatres with fixed companies were also founded in the former FRG, in Lübeck, München, Düsseldorf, Schwäbisch Hall, Augsburg and two in Köln. These theatres are private<sup>11</sup> and struggle for funding from sponsors and subsidies. Wikipedia's

<sup>6</sup> Teatr Malabar Hotel. Online: <http://www.malabarhotel.pl/malabar/about.html> [20.09.2017].

<sup>7</sup> Grupa Coincidentia. Online: <http://www.grupacoincidentia.pl/#/en/about-us> [20.09.2017].

<sup>8</sup> Das Deutsche Forum für Figurentheater und Puppenspielkunst – list of member artists. Online: [http://www.fidena.de/fidena-das-portal/die-szene/theater-kuenstler/mn\\_41](http://www.fidena.de/fidena-das-portal/die-szene/theater-kuenstler/mn_41) [04.04.2017].

<sup>9</sup> Verband Deutscher Puppentheater e.V. – list of member artists. Online: <http://www.vdp-ev.de/mitgliedsbuehnen/buehnen> [04.04.2017].

<sup>10</sup> Puppet Theatre in Neubrandenburg was the first theatre in GDR which regularly produced performances for adults. Online Lexicon: [http://www.fidena.de/fidena-das-portal/dokumentationszentrum/online-lexikon/artikeluebersicht/mn\\_44894?objectid=bd6bad31\\_e081\\_515d\\_74f6e2bc86691655](http://www.fidena.de/fidena-das-portal/dokumentationszentrum/online-lexikon/artikeluebersicht/mn_44894?objectid=bd6bad31_e081_515d_74f6e2bc86691655) [30.09.2017].

<sup>11</sup> The Händel-Theater established in 1802 in Köln is an exception. Nowadays it is the State Puppet Theatre and has one of the biggest ensembles of any puppet theatre in Germany. *Wikipedia*.

list of stationary puppet theatres has seventy-five items.<sup>12</sup> Comparing this number to the number of members in the Deutsche Forum für Figurentheater und Puppenspielkunst, we can assume that the majority of puppeteers in Germany work as soloists or duets.

To sum up: the two fundamental types of puppet theatres in Europe are: 1) institutions with a professional ensemble and their own house, and 2) small independent groups. Each model functions differently in Poland and Germany. In consequence, this article is divided into four main parts to provide an analysis of each type.

### **Institutional puppet theatres in Poland**

As already stated, there are twenty-five institutional puppet theatres in Poland. Most of them are municipal – twenty-four theatres. Only Teatr Lalek Rabcio [Rabcio Puppet Theatre] in Rabka-Zdroj is categorised by district affiliation. The majority of institutional puppet theatres in Poland were established in 1945-1955. The exceptions are Teatr Baj [Baj Theatre] in Warsaw, founded in 1928, the Opolski Teatr Lalki i Aktora [Opole Puppet and Actor Theatre], founded in 1937, and the newest one in Poland, Teatr Lalki i Aktora [Puppet and Actor Theatre] in Lomza, established in 1987.

The houses are primarily buildings adapted for puppet theatres. The theatre houses designed specifically for puppeteers are located in Bialystok (the first in Poland – built in 1979), Szczecin (2009), Opole (2014) and Lodz (2014, Arlekin Puppet Theatre). Needless to say, renovation or even overhaul cannot fix such difficulties as a stage too small in all its dimensions, the lack of a trapdoor, a cramped backstage area, lack of space for the puppets and the absence of costume storerooms or workshops. Several theatres use their former rehearsal rooms as chamber stages. Several theatres use their former rehearsal rooms as chamber stages that are usually arranged as black box theatres. However, this replacement of rehearsal room into stage makes production organisation more difficult.

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Online: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%C3%A4nneschen-Theater> [30.09.2017].

<sup>12</sup> Liste der stehenden Figurentheater [List of stationary puppet theatres]. *Wikipedia*. Online: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste\\_der\\_stehenden\\_Figurentheater](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_stehenden_Figurentheater) [30.09.2017]. This statistic is also problematic: some theatres are listed twice (for example: Figurentheater Wilde&Vogel, Stuttgart/Leipzig, Theater im Globus, Leipzig&Berlin) or their stationary status is controversial (Figurentheater Tübingen).

The number of people employed in puppet theatres is estimated at: forty-four people including fifteen full-time workers in the artistic departments (thirteen performers).<sup>13</sup> Theatres rarely work with actors outside their ensemble, but occasionally collaborations take place. Theatres are managed by an artistic director and general director; sometimes one person fulfils both positions. The audience organisation office is an important part of nearly every theatre. It cooperates closely with the box office and helps it with ticket sales. It executes some of the duties of the box office, marketing and public relations departments, especially in maintaining contacts with schools, kindergartens and other spectator groups. More and more theatres outsource some services, which is a general tendency throughout Polish theatre, not only in its puppetry branch. Many dramatic theatres have closed their workshops or limited the number of employees they engage, but those developments seem to be unthinkable for most puppet theatres.

In these theatres, rehearsals for each production last about six weeks. The majority of the plays in Polish puppet theatres are based on dramatic texts, therefore the artistic process is quite similar to the work of dramatic theatres. The short rehearsal time does not allow for experimentation. Puppets and stage designs are prepared before rehearsal work begins.

### **Independent puppet theatres in Poland**

Independent-theatres in Poland can work as informal groups of people, or secure some kind of official accreditation for their work by forming a company, foundation or association. A company was the most popular form of accreditation among theatres in the beginning of the 1990s. Nowadays most companies are founded by puppeteers with the intention of performing regularly. A good example is Teatr Lalek Buratino [Buratino Puppet Theatre] from Bydgoszcz, the only stationary puppet theatre in that sizable town. Led by director Czesław Sieńko, it is supported by the municipality and works in the Community Centre of Bydgoszcz, and therefore appears to have a stable, secure financial and organisational situation. Most non-institutional puppet theatres are not in such a comfortable situation; instead, they work as non-government organisations and must apply for grants or subventions, usually for a specific production or project. The most important donors to these projects are municipalities, voivodeship offices, and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

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<sup>13</sup> Own estimation based on two sources: Buchwald, D. (et al.), (2016), *Teatr w Polsce 2016...*, op. cit., and Wolański, W., (2011) 'Polski teatr instytucjonalny 2007-2010 w liczbach'. Supplement to: *Teatr Lalek*, vol. 1-2, p. 2.

Unaffiliated puppet theatres in Poland face many difficulties. Some artists produce educational spectacles using a portable stage design and present them at schools or community centres. On the other hand, many groups work as independent artists because they want to be independent from institutions and develop the commercial potential of their work. They present their work irregularly, usually during theatre festivals, not only those dedicated to puppetry. The phenomenon of the festivalisation of culture is strictly connected with the financing of independent theatre productions. There are a few stages in Poland where independent puppeteers present their work outside of festivals. This is also the result of the limited popularity of the art of puppetry and, more generally, of theatre itself. The lack of money for such presentations is the second reason for this situation. Independent groups usually obtain money from grants for the production of a particular performance, not for regular presentation of the performances. Independent puppeteers also encounter problems finding work spaces: for example, they have to rent space, which increases the costs of production. Working in community centres or other partner institutions is a solution that requires cooperation from both sides and can be problematic or even untenable for many reasons.

Many interesting independent theatres in Poland have managed to surmount these difficulties with spectacular results, such as Teatr Malabar Hotel, Grupa Coincidentia<sup>14</sup> and Teatr PAPAHEMA [PAPAHEMA Theatre] (also created by graduates of the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw, the Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok), all of which rehearsed in rooms lent to them by Academy. They also presented their work good results, were allowed to further develop. Nowadays Teatr Malabar Hotel cooperates with Teatr Dramatyczny [Dramatyczny Theatre] in Warsaw and performs regularly on one of its stages (Scena Przodownik). Grupa Coincidentia decided to create their own work and performance space in the village of Solniki (about 20 km from Białystok). Since their very beginning (when they both belonged to the Doomsday Company), both groups have collaborated with German puppeteers – especially Figurentheater Wilde&Vogel from Leipzig. Furthermore, Teatr PAPAHEMA, despite being the youngest among those mentioned, has frequently collaborated with institutional theatres. PAPAHEMA worked with Teatr Montownia [Montownia Theatre] (a well-established independent theatre in Warsaw with twenty years of experience) and Teatr Powszechny [Powszechny Theatre] in Warsaw,

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<sup>14</sup> Teatr Malabar Hotel and Grupa Coincidentia were established from division of Kompania Doomsday [Doomsday Company] in 2009.

and produced performances for Och-Teatr [Och-Theatre] in Warsaw and Teatr Dramatyczny [Dramatyczny Theatre] in Białystok. The work of its puppeteers is therefore better known – it has helped many spectators discover the art of puppetry, when the form was previously considered merely an art for children.

These theatres' independence has other positive aspects. Their experimental work allows them to look for new artistic media. The work of independent puppeteers differs from that of institutions. Elements of a performance are prepared parallel to one another, each follows the other. The preparation of stage design, puppets, mise-en-scene, and text penetrate and influence each other. Adam Walny, a solo puppeteer with over twenty years' experience, answered when asked about the discipline: 'Ja sobie «dłubię» i ja bym mógł sam bardzo długo «dłubać» natomiast wyznaczam sobie konkretne terminy.'<sup>15</sup> [I like that time of 'searching' and I myself would like to take a long time to 'search', but I give myself very clear deadlines.] Self-development is the most important motivation for work as an independent artist, despite all of the difficulties. Agnieszka Makowska, coworker of Teatr Malabar Hotel, and a member of Nieformalna Grupa Avis [Informal Avis Group] says:

Praca jest ciężka, bardzo wyczerpująca nie tylko fizycznie, ale i psychicznie. Na próbach w zasadzie nie ma mowy o marnowaniu czasu. Interpretując wybrany przez siebie temat, sięgamy bardzo głęboko – staramy się dokładnie 'prześwietlić' postaci, przyjrzeć się najmniejszym szczegółom. Dla mnie, aktorki z niewielkim jeszcze doświadczeniem, styl pracy reprezentowany przez Kompanię jest fantastyczną szansą na rozwój zawodowego warsztatu. Zadania z kolejnych spektakli wymagają wykorzystania za każdym razem innych środków wyrazu. (...) Współpraca z niezależnymi teatrami jako wolny strzelec to najlepsza droga, jaką mogłam wybrać zaraz po ukończeniu studiów i aktualnie jedyna, jaką chcę iść. Oby tylko determinacji i sił wystarczyło.<sup>16</sup>

[The work is exhausting not only physically but also mentally. There can be no wasting of time during rehearsals. When we interpret a chosen problem, topic, we go very deep. We want to 'x-ray' the characters, we notice the smallest details. For me, as an actress with limited experience, such a work style is a wonderful opportunity for professional artistic development. Each part needs new methods of expression. (...) Cooperation with independent theatres as a freelancer was the best path I could have chosen after graduating from the puppetry department and, now the only path I want to pursue. If I can only muster enough strength and determination for it.]

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Adam Walny from May 15, 2015 (own material).

<sup>16</sup> Szczepirot, K. (2009), 'Krajobraz po końcu świata'. *Teatr*, vol. 7-8, p. 56.

Independent theatre work involves constant experiments. For puppeteers, these are experiments with new materials, new animation techniques, new types of puppets and new mixes of styles. Marcin Bartnikowski, one of the leaders and founders of Teatr Malabar Hotel, has called it an escape from rotting:

Patrzę na kolegów, którzy idą do teatrów instytucjonalnych i nagle robią się starzy. I aktorzy, i reżyserzy. Całe szaleństwo i bunt nagle znikają. A to wszystko z jednego powodu: te teatry mają misję robienia bezpiecznych, przyjaznych, moralistycznych spektakli dla dzieci. I to jest wielkie nieszczęście. Jeśli gdzieś jest ciepło i wygodnie, to zaczyna gnieździć się pleśń.<sup>17</sup>

[I look on my colleagues who work in institutional theatres and I see how fast they are aging. They are all old: actors and directors. Their craziness and rebellion suddenly disappear. This all happens for one reason: these theatres have to make safe, friendly, moralistic spectacles for children. It is a disaster. If somewhere is warm and cosy, rot begins to set in.]

Many independent theatres, especially those established at the beginning of the 1990s, appeared, flourished, and disappeared. Others, usually younger, evolved despite their difficulties, in a natural process we cannot stop.

### **Institutional theatres in Germany**

The reunification of Germany caused a collision of the two organisational models for theatres. The differences between the models were more significant for puppet theatre than for the opera or the dramatic theatre. The situation was difficult in the early nineties, but now it has stabilised. Institutional puppet theatre in Germany is not the same as institutional puppet theatre in Poland; in Germany, the puppet stage is often part of a big municipal theatre. As already noted above, puppet theatres that function as independent municipal institutions, as in Poland, are rare. Moreover, some puppet theatres are private enterprises and operate as companies or non-governmental organisations. They produce their own performances or work as impresary stages. They can also apply for public assets from grants and donations.

During my research, I studied puppet theatres of different types: puppet stages that are parts of big municipal theatres, private stationary theatres,

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<sup>17</sup> Bartnikowski, M. (2012), 'Lalka daje pewien paradoks'. *E-teatr.pl*, November 11. Online: <http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/149917.html> [30.04.2017].

and theatres associated with organisations (NGO and municipal). Theater Junge Generation in Dresden has three departments: a dramatic stage, a puppet stage and a Theaterakademie or theatrical pedagogy department. TJG is a municipal institution, subordinate to the Office for Culture and Monument Protection and financed from the municipal budget.<sup>18</sup> Theatre works on three stages: the former stages of the Young Spectator Theatre and Puppet Theatre (TJG was created after these two institutions were joined together) and the summer stage in Park Großen Garten. Over one hundred and fifty employees work in the theatre, including thirty-two actors (seven puppeteers) and twenty-one artisans in theatre workshops. Decisions about the theatres' repertoire, themes, directors and other artists are made by the management and house playwrights. Conceptual work (so called Bauproben) precedes the rehearsal process; stage design projects and mock-ups are essential at this stage. Puppets and props are produced before actual rehearsals with actors. Rehearsals last about six weeks and the approach taken to rehearsal depends on many factors, such as puppet technique, the provenance of the play (whether it is inspired by an existing dramatic work or is an original work) or its duration. A play typically runs for about one year. The repertoire is a mix of non-dramatic performances for children aged 2+, classical fairy tales or legends for older children and modern texts written in cooperation with theatre education specialists (for all age groups, but also for teenagers over 14-16 years old).

A huge, stationery puppet theatre can also constitute a company. Augsburger Puppenkiste, established in 1948, represents a partnership, managed by members of one family since that time.<sup>19</sup> The theatre employs about sixty workers, including twenty members of the artistic staff. Augsburger Puppenkiste has its own workshops where stage sets and puppets are produced. The classical marionette is nearly the only puppetry technique used in this theatre; rehearsals therefore last only about four weeks. Puppeteers don't have to learn new puppet forms and animation techniques. They only learn the text of the play and blocking. Traditional fairy-tales, cabaret programmes and classics (like Mozart's operas or a puppet version of *Doctor Faustus*) form the basis of its repertoire. History seems to be at the centre of Augsburger Puppenkiste's interests. The museum of puppetry is as important as the theatre itself. Augsburger Puppenkiste became popular thanks to TV

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Cristoph Macha from May 12, 2015 (own material) and TJG website. Online: <http://www.tjg-dresden.de/#/startseite.html> [12.04.2017].

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Peter Scheerbaum from May 18, 2015 (own material) and Augsburger Puppenkiste website. Online: <http://puppenkiste.com> [11.04.2017].

programmes that have been produced since 1953 and continue to this day.<sup>20</sup> Augsburger Puppenkiste also follows tradition in its personnel policy, in that puppeteers do an apprenticeship in the theatre, lasting several years, before joining the ensemble.<sup>21</sup>

Another form of puppet theatre that exists in Germany is the puppet theatre house without a puppeteers' ensemble. These can be established as private initiatives or as municipal theatres.

Hamburger Puppentheater is run by the association (e.V – eingetragener Verein) ARGE für das Puppenspiel.<sup>22</sup> It receives extra financing from Hamburger Kulturbehörde [The Culture Office of Hamburg] and, as an organisation with the status of Freier Träger des Jugendhilfe [public benefit organisation supporting youth], from the Office for Work, Social and Family Issues and Integration (Behörde für Arbeit, Soziales, Familie und Integration – BASFI). Performances take place on a regular basis between September and April, with morning shows during the week for school groups and Sunday shows for families. The theatre's repertoire consists mainly of performances for children, with shows for adults a rarity. The performers are members of the Arbeitskreis Hamburger Puppen- und Figurentheater e.V. [Working Group of Hamburg's Puppet Theatres]. Nowadays, the working group is comprised of thirteen ensemble members, together offering about fifty different performances.<sup>23</sup> Hamburger Puppentheater presents plays both on site and in the Fundus Theater. About eight hundred shows per year are presented in both houses and during tours.

Schaubude Berlin Theatre is located in East Berlin in Prenzlauer Berg. It was established in 1993 after reorganisation of Municipal Puppet Theatre.

Die Schaubude Berlin ist einziger Veranstalter von nationalen und internationalen Gastspielen des Puppen-, Figuren- und Objekttheaters in Berlin mit eigener Spielstätte und kontinuierlichem Kinder- und Abendspielplan.

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<sup>20</sup> Liste der Produktionen der Augsburger Puppenkiste [List of Augsburger Puppenkiste productions]. *Wikipedia*. Online: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste\\_der\\_Produktionen\\_der\\_Augsburger\\_Puppenkiste](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_Produktionen_der_Augsburger_Puppenkiste) [30.04.2017].

<sup>21</sup> Knoller, A. (2016), 'Die Puppenspielerin'. *Augsburger Allgemeine*, August 9. Online: <http://www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/augsburg/Die-Puppenspielerin-id38740217.html> [12.12.2017].

<sup>22</sup> Information from interview with Peter Racker from May 10, 2015 (own material). See also: (2014), 2014. *Über 60 Jahre Hamburger Puppentheater. 70 Jahre Arbeitsgemeinschaft für das Puppenspiel e.V. Rückblicke und Ausblicke. Daten und Fakten* and theatre's website. Online: <http://www.hamburgerpuppentheater.de> [15.04.2017].

<sup>23</sup> Information from Arbeitskreis Hamburger Puppen- und Figurentheater website. Online: <http://www.figurentheater-hamburg.de/frames1.htm> [15.04.2017].



Die Schaubude Berlin präsentiert ein breites Spektrum von klassischen bis experimentellen Inszenierungen, die von der künstlerischen Ausdruckskraft des Spiels mit den Dingen – der Puppe, dem Objekt, dem Material... leben.<sup>24</sup>

[Schaubude Berlin is the only organiser of guest puppet theatre performances in Berlin with its own house, and performs regular shows for children and adults. The spectrum of performances presented by Schaubude is wide: from classics to experimental works, whose artistic power is based on play with objects – puppets, everyday life objects and... animated material.]

Schaubude has seven employees: an artistic director, a secretary, a theatre pedagogue, a PR specialist and three stage technicians. Silvia Brendenal, the theatre's retired (since July 2015) artistic manager, estimates that about four hundred ensembles showed spectacles, seen by over four hundred thousand spectators, during her twenty-two years of work.<sup>25</sup> When I interviewed Brendenal, she told me that she had cooperated with about fifty different ensembles each year.<sup>26</sup> It seems practically inconceivable that such a theatre could have only seven employees. The organisation Kultur Projekte Berlin is responsible for some aspects of Schaubude Berlin's work; since the latter is part of KPB. The organisation is in fact responsible for many cultural events and institutions in Berlin.

## **Non-institutional theatres in Germany**

Non-institutional theatres without their own house, consisting of ensembles with a few members, are the most common type of puppet theatre in Germany. This artistic non-attachment also has an economic rationale. To maintain a theatre house and a large ensemble is very expensive. On the other hand, the free-floating situation of these ensembles also has many disadvantages: the performances must be congenial to mobility and the number of performers limited.

Independent theatre groups in Germany have many options with regard to performances. They play not only in the impresary theatres described above but also during countless festivals and everywhere else where they get invited: schools, daycare centres, or elsewhere during special events.

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<sup>24</sup> (2015), 'Über die Schaubude'. Online: <http://www.schaubude-berlin.de/schaubude-berlin.html> [12.06.2015].

<sup>25</sup> (2015), 'Schaubude Schedule for April-August 2015'. Online: [http://www.schaubude-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/sb\\_2\\_2015/index.html#p=2](http://www.schaubude-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/sb_2_2015/index.html#p=2) [12.06.2015].

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Silvia Brendenal from May 17, 2015 (own material).

Impresary theatres cooperate with unaffiliated groups. The collaboration of local theatres and independent groups is the main feature that distinguishes German from Polish puppet theatres.

German independent theatres are registered as companies, usually as a limited company (GmbH) or, less often, as registered associations (e.V.). Another approach used involves several puppeteers who hold the status of freiberufliche Künstler [self-employed free artist] working together. Freiberufliche Künstler status has no equivalent in other countries, including Poland. To become a 'free artist', the applicant must prove that artistic work is his or her main professional occupation. The benefits of this status are social, health and pension insurance granted on favourable terms. On the other hand, this does not mean that this group of artists lead a life free of worries or cares. As has been written in a report about independent theatre (not only puppet theatre)<sup>27</sup> in Germany:

Organisiert sind die Künstler der freien Theaterszene im 1991 ins Leben gerufenen Bundesverband Freie Theater, ein Dachverband für 15 Landesverbände und 3 assoziierte Partnerverbände mit rund 1.000 Mitgliedern. Er vertritt nach eigenen Angaben die Interessen von schätzungsweise 1.500 freien Theatern und Künstlern und zielt unter anderem auf die Verbesserungen ihrer sozialen Lage. Denn die Einkommensbedingungen der Szene sind ungleich schlechter als am Staats- und Stadttheater. Der Durchschnittsverdienst liegt – nach Angaben der Künstlersozialkasse 2012 – bei 1.104 Euro brutto monatlich. Laut Schätzungen aus dem Jahr 2006 finanzieren sich 75 Prozent der freien Künstler über theaterferne Tätigkeiten quer.<sup>28</sup>

[Independent theatre artists founded the State Association of Independent Theatre in 1991. It connects fifteen district associations and three other unions, with a total of one thousand members. It takes care of about one thousand five hundred independent theatres and artists. The main aim of the Association is to improve the social situation of artists. Their incomes are incomparably lower than those of artists working in state and public theatres. The average income estimated in 2012 by Artistic Social Authority was 1104 Euros per month (with tax). About 75% of independent artists make a living in non-theatrical jobs.]

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<sup>27</sup> This was the biggest report about independent theatre in Germany till today. Some similar general conclusions can also be found in: Rosendahl, M. (2014), *Freie Darstellende Künste in Deutschland 2014. Daten und Analysen. [Non-institutional Performance Arts in Germany 2014. Data and Analysis]* Online: <http://www.dfdk.de/images/downloads/ArbMatFDK-012015FreieDarstellendeKuensteln-Deutschland2014web.pdf> [30.09.2017].

<sup>28</sup> Rakow, Ch. (2013), 'Freies Theater in Deutschland'. *Goethe Institut*. Online: <https://www.goethe.de/de/kul/tut/gen/tup/20364715.html> [15.04.2017].

Independent theatres continuously search for money. They earn money from performing and sometimes win grants. The grant applications are judged by independent juries, a process which limits the artists' freedom of artistic experimentation and exploration.

The situation of German theatres (both institutional and non-institutional) seems to be better than that of Polish theatres:

Institutionen und etablierte Theatergruppen erhalten eine zumeist auf fünf Jahre angelegte öffentliche Grundförderung. Das Gros der freien Gruppen finanziert seine Arbeiten über Einzelprojektanträge, zumeist aus kommunalen Fördertöpfen. Die beiden größten Förderinstrumente sind der deutschlandweit operierende Fonds Darstellende Künste der Bundeskulturstiftung und der Hauptstadtkulturfonds für Projekte mit Berliner Anbindung. Der 1985 gegründete Fonds Darstellende Künste hat seit 1988 deutschlandweit 11 Millionen Euro für 2.400 Projekt ausgegeben, davon im Jahr 2011 785.000 Euro an 79 Projekte. Der Hauptstadtkulturfonds hat seit seiner Gründung 1999 über 1.400 Projekte aus diversen Bereichen (Theater, Tanz, Kunst, Musik, Literatur) mit insgesamt rund 119,5 Millionen Euro gefördert (Stand: Juni 2012). Der Hauptstadtkulturfonds sorgt mit dafür, dass der Schwerpunkt der freien Theaterarbeit Deutschlands heute in Berlin liegt.<sup>29</sup>

[Institutions and recognised theatre groups receive guaranteed financing for periods of five years. On the contrary, the majority of independent groups are based on non-recurrent grants, usually from district budgets. The main institutions responsible for financial support of culture are the Fund for Performing Arts of the National Culture Foundation) and the Fund for Capital City Culture from Berlin. Established in 1985, the Fund for Performing Arts spent 11 million Euros for two thousand for hundred projects in the period 1988-2010. The Fund for Capital City Culture spent about 119.5 million Euros on about one thousand four hundred projects in disciplines including the fine arts, theatre, dance, literature and music (from its establishment in 1999 to mid-2012). The Fund for Capital City Culture made Berlin the capital city of independent theatre.]

The five-year periods of guaranteed financial support for the best performers create a very agreeable situation. This allows long-term planning and artistic development without the strain of anxiety about the near future. On the other hand, the financing is not unconditional. The Theatre must maintain a high artistic level, demonstrated by its artistic achievements.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

## **Conclusion**

The institutional puppet theatres which remained after Soviet times in Poland and East Germany were forced to reorganise in the early nineties. East German theatres imitated western patterns – most of them dramatically limited hiring and some formed ties with other institutions. Lastly, a few theatres closed. The reorganisation after 1989 is somewhat apparent in Poland but it needs to be continued. I believe that Polish executives should analyse the German example when planning any changes to the organisational system in Poland. On the other hand, the potential of a big ensemble of puppeteers should be used wisely, because it is unique.

Due to international contracts, the differences between the work of independent theatre groups in Poland and Germany are decreasing. The style of their work is very similar. German puppeteers have a slightly better social situation thanks to the possibility of gaining *freiberufliche Künstler* [self-employed free artist] status. In Poland, artists and authors benefit from tax relief, but it seems this is not enough. Many artists in Poland cannot afford to have health and social insurance. The lack of financial stability is a major problem in both countries. Another problem is the lack of cooperation between institutions and independent artists. Agency theatres in Germany seem to be a good idea, one worth testing in Poland.

Change is possible but needs financial encouragement and opening of minds on both sides. Puppetry has great potential (not only artistic) as yet not undiscovered by the majority of the population. As a niche among the performing arts, it should speak a bit louder to attract the interest of government.

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### **Summary**

The article examines two models of puppet education in European theatre academies: the Faculty of Puppenspielkunst of Ernst Busch Hochschule für Schauspielkunst in Berlin (Germany), as representative of Central-Eastern Europe and the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières (France) as representative of Central-Western Europe. The goal is to focus on the pedagogical structure, through an analysis of the principles and educational practices that underlie the educational systems of these schools, which represent the cultural backgrounds of different puppet theatres.

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł analizuje dwa modele edukacji lalkowej w europejskich akademiach teatralnych: na Wydziale Lalkarskim Wyższej Szkoły Sztuki Dramatycznej im. Ernsta Buscha w Berlinie (Niemcy), reprezentującej Europę Środkowo-Wschodnią, i w Państwowej Wyższej Szkole Sztuki Lalkarskiej w Charleville-Mézières (Francja), czyli uczelnię z Europy Środkowo-Zachodniej. Celem rozważań jest analiza zasad i praktyk edukacyjnych leżących u podstaw systemów edukacyjnych tych dwóch uczelni jako źródeł różnych modeli teatrów lalkowych i twórczości lalkarskiej.



# **Berlin and Charleville-Mézières: Two Models of European Puppetry School. A Proposal to Research the Transmission of Puppet Knowledge and Practices**

## **Introduction and contextualization of the field of research**

‘Education is a set of means through which one acquires theoretical and practical knowledge relative to a technique or profession. Pedagogy is a teaching method allowing for the acquisition of this knowledge’<sup>1</sup>, writes Alain Recoing; he goes on, wondering which types of education could be the basis of artistic education and in particular of puppetry, identifying four types:

- one based on companionship, which has influenced traditional and demiurgic practices from popular theatre to contemporary avant-garde performances;
- one based on a Master-disciple relationship, more discernible in Asia or perhaps in Africa in initiatory puppet practices;
- one involving self-education;
- the contemporary one, within the framework of a school.<sup>2</sup>

The school as a professional training institution for actor-puppeteers first appears in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe, presenting a new horizon for the transmission of puppetry practices. With the foundation of the puppetry school institution, puppetry knowledge was, for the first time ever, identified and structured. The importance and the recognition of puppetry as an independent theatrical genre are defined differently in relation to the official culture of each country. Some European countries have departments

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<sup>1</sup> Recoing, A. (2009). ‘I is another’. In: Bodson, L., Niculescu, M. and Pezin, P. (ed.), *Passing It On*. Charleville-Mézières, Montpellier: Institut International de la Marionnette, l’Entretemps, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

of puppetry in state drama schools, whereas other countries may not have puppetry departments at all, in spite of their popular national historical puppet traditions. The goal of the research presented here was to focus on the structure and educational principles and practices of two European puppet schools (chosen as representative of two concepts of the transmission of puppetry knowledge through institutional theatre education), which have influenced the cultural backgrounds of puppeteers and models of puppet theatre from the 1960s to the present day: the puppet department of the Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch state drama school in Berlin, established in 1971, and the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette (ESNAM) in Charleville-Mézières, established in 1987, a school totally devoted to the puppetry arts (not a branch of a drama school). These schools are setting up a new system of knowledge, contributing in particular to an increase in new forms, but also engaged in an effort to restore tradition.

Three major questions form the starting point of my analysis:

- Would it be possible to retrace the origin of these schools' foundational models and find out how those relate to the schools' didactic methods? In other words: which principles are expressed through their pedagogical work, and how?
- Within which theoretical framework should we consider innovation in teaching methods and what is the role of tradition in the context of the transmission of knowledge? Moreover, how did the reinvention of educational processes take place?
- How did the 'algorithmization' of knowledge happen, and what are the ontological issues and production needs at the structural base of the training system?

First of all, I will consider the results of an analysis of quantitative data, related to the subdivision of the disciplines during a three-year didactic cycle, in order to have an objective ground from which to deduce qualitative considerations. I will then interpret the organizational structure of the didactic model to show the fundamental nature of both schools, but will also not overlook the geographical and cultural context. The research methodology I've adopted is based on the collection and study of the schools' archival documents, as well as field research, taking part, as a listener, in courses and lessons at those schools. The purpose of my research residencies was to produce updated documentation by collecting oral, visual, print and digital documents.

## Comparison of the French and the German pedagogical systems

### *Pedagogical structure*

Considering the didactic cycle of the French and German schools (a basic training programme is followed throughout the whole three-year period), many features have come to light.

- The pedagogical cycle of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette (ESNAM) is structured as follows:
  1. The first year is mainly devoted to intensive workshops specializing in the fundamentals of puppet animation, carried out by visiting professional masters (masters of puppetry, directors and visual artists); the school's internal staff of professors teach supplementary (practical and theoretical) theatre-related disciplines (plastic arts and scenography, body and gestural training, dramaturgy, history of theatre);
  2. The second year includes a period of didactic activity, but the main activity is the creation and development of group performative studies, under the direction of one or more guest artists;
  3. The third year is mainly devoted to research and creation: the planning and execution (in all its aspects, from directing to set design, to lighting and music ...) of a 'solo show' by each student, lasting ten minutes. Moreover, 'at the end of the year, the students are asked to develop a written scenario for an end-of course assessment.'<sup>3</sup>

The presentation of work to the public, and the relationship between the two, are conceived as integral parts of the course throughout the three years of its duration.

- The pedagogical cycle of the Ernst Busch Hochschule für Schauspielkunst is structured as follows:
  1. The first year and the second year are devoted mainly to:
    - practical disciplines specialising in puppet animation and acting (cycles of about six weeks), at the end of which (about once quarterly) the students take a practical examination, as a group or individually at the theatre of the school;

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<sup>3</sup> Online: <http://www.marionnette.com/en/Esnam/Presentation> [09.09.2016].

- other disciplines (developed throughout the year), mainly focused on speech and body education;
2. The third year provides for the preparation of each student's written dissertation and the mounting of a show, for the final practice test. This show may be executed using various techniques, in groups or as a 'solo show' conceived and created by each student (in every aspect, from directing to set design, lighting and music, etc.). The diploma exam is structured in three parts: 'group performance', 'free diploma project' and 'diploma thesis', after which the students graduate as an actor-puppeteer. The presentation of work to the public is conceived as an integral part of the course throughout the three years of study.

### ***Analysis of timetables, based on the categorization of disciplines***

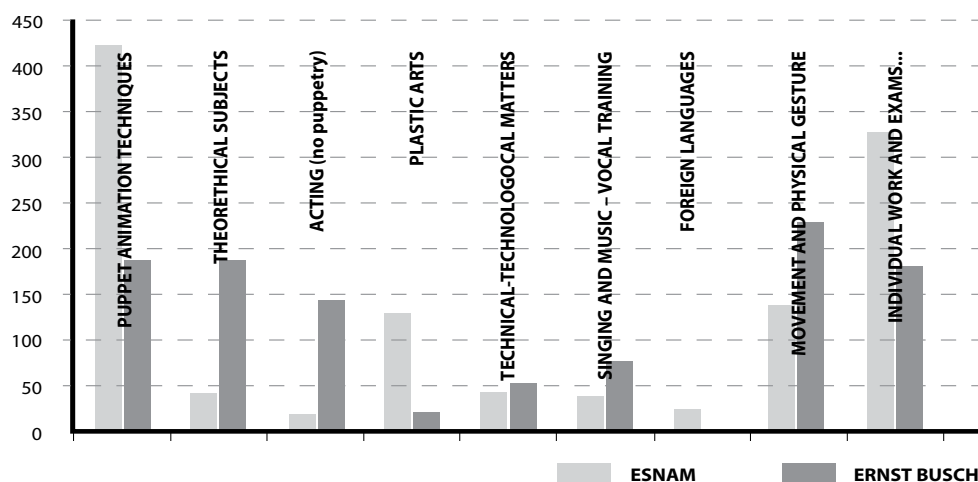
An analysis of the timetables used during each three-year cycle since the founding of both schools, classified by discipline, has enabled a comparison of the curricula of both schools. This analysis involved cataloguing the didactic hours dedicated to each subject every triennium. In order to allow the cross-quantitative analysis of the two schools, first of all it was necessary to select homogeneous and objective criteria which would permit us to compare differently named disciplines. By convention, the data collected from the German and French schools were organized on the basis of categories related to some specific analogous subject areas, which are:

- puppet animation techniques;
- acting (non-puppetry);
- movement and physical gesture;
- plastic arts;
- technical-technological matters (audio, video, digital puppetry);
- theoretical subjects;
- singing and music – vocal training;
- foreign languages;
- individual work and exams preparation.

In a note, the list of the subjects which are taught in the puppet schools is explained, in order to fit the criteria of belonging to one or other conventionally used thematic area.<sup>4</sup>

On this basis, the calculation of the average hours of teaching of the various disciplines each triennium is made possible.<sup>5</sup>

The following graph shows a comparison between the French and the German puppet school, relative to the arithmetic average of the number of hours taught on the whole triennium 2011-2014, divided on the basis of the conventionally adopted thematic categories.



<sup>4</sup> 'Puppet Animation Techniques': ESAM – la marionnette à fils, la gaine chinoise, la marionnette à tringle, la manipulation primitive, la main nue, le théâtre d'ombres, la marionnette à gaine, la marionnette indonésienne, jeu de la marionnette, le fil, la gaine chinoise, la tige, formes animées, les corps-castelet, Pulcinella napolitain, théâtre de papier, Punch and Judy, Pupi sicilienne, théâtre d'objets, marionnette-ventriloquie; Ernst Busch – Puppenführungstechnik, Szenenstudium Handpuppe, Szenenstudium Marionette, Szenenstudium Hybride Formen, Grundlegende Animation (Objekte Theater), Offene Formen. 'Acting, non Puppetry': ESAM – théâtre comique (le clown, le bouffon, le mime et l'acteur, jeu de l'acteur, jeu et parole), théâtre dramatique, comédien-texte; Ernst Busch – Schauspiel Grundlegende Szenen, Szenenstudium Maske. 'Movement, Gymnastics, Body Training': ESAM – le théâtre par le mouvement, corps dans l'espace, geste théâtral, tai-chi, corps-masque-mouvement, karaté, aikido; Ernst Busch – Bewegung, Akrobatik, Körperstimmtraining, Fechten/Steppen/Reiten/Tanz, Pantomime, Aikido. 'Plastic Arts': ESAM – la scène et l'espace, arts plastiques, la couture, scénographie, technologie des matériaux, construction, conception graphique; Ernst Busch – Gestaltungslehre. 'Technical-technological': ESAM – son, lumière, video, technologie, jeu et technologie; Ernst Busch – Animation Grundlagen, Animation-Trickfilm, Digitale Puppen, Puppentechnologien, Digitale Medien. 'Theoretical Subjects': ESAM – histoire du théâtre, du théâtre de marionnettes et de sa dramaturgie, langue et littérature, histoire de la représentation, administration, gestion, droit, fiscalité d'une compagnie, atelier d'écriture, conférences; Ernst Busch – Theater/Puppentheater (Theorie I, Theorie II), Theatergeschichte/Dramaturgie, Kulturmanagement, Ästhetik, Kunstgeschichte. 'Sing and Voice Training': ESAM – langage et théâtralité, diction, geste vocal, chant, chorale, piano, flute à bec, guitare, percussions, saxophone, troquette, violon, violoncelle, accordéon, voix; Ernst Busch – sprechen, Verslehre, Musik. 'Foreign languages': ESAM – anglais, français, espagnol; Ernst Busch: none.

<sup>5</sup> It should in fact be noted that in the full three-year course the didactic plan has been changed many times. For that reason, the graph shows the average of hours of teaching during the course of the schools' three-year cycles, from their foundation to the present day.

Arithmetic average of the number of hours, taught in the whole triennium 2011-2014 (at the ESNAM and at Ernst Busch schools), divided on the basis of the categories of subjects

The graph reveals that:

- the German school's total amount of working hours is mainly divided into four groups, which are, in order of relevance: 'movement and gesture', 'theoretical subjects', 'puppetry manipulation' and 'acting', at the expense of the category 'construction and set design';
- the French school's total amount of working hours is mainly divided among three subject categories, which are, in order of importance: 'puppet manipulation', 'movement and gesture', 'construction and scenography', at the expense of the category 'acting'.
- About the time spent for the preparation of exams, students at both schools spent a similar amount of time preparing their 'solo show' and final exam performance during the third year. In addition, the French school provides for a certain quantity of hours intended for students' personal work and research during the first two years of study.

These points lead us toward some reflections about the skills and the requirements necessary to define the profession of puppeteer. Both schools aim to train professional puppeteers, but each school differentiates itself from the other according to the different relevance of some disciplines. In particular, the didactic program of the German school doesn't invest a substantial amount of hours in fine arts and building disciplines, but a lot of time is invested in disciplines relating to movement and gesture, puppetry and acting. On the other hand, the French school invests a substantial amount of hours in the plastic arts and building disciplines, movement and gesture and puppet manipulation, but hardly any in acting. Those differences result from varying interpretations of the role of the puppeteer in the production process and in performance. European puppet theatre schools work in a tension between the model of the puppeteer seen primarily as an actor and the model of the puppeteer who is prepared in all fields of puppetry.

### ***Founding principles***

The didactic structure of each school finds its origins in the philosophical and ontological principles on which it has been founded.

The ESNAM didactic plan is structured mainly on:

- 'Thematic workshops' led by artists known for a style and a distinctive creative originality, focused on a specific practice, such as writing for the stage, set design and puppet construction, or puppet animation with a specific language and technique;
- 'Master's workshops', conceived as an opportunity for students to live a significant experience of individual and collective growth through meetings and exchanges with important practitioners of the art of puppetry;
- Occasional workshops with Eastern masters, important for the understanding of new (in the West) approaches to body awareness, based on traditional techniques.

Margareta Niculescu wrote in her article (published in the catalogue of the ESNAM, at the time of the foundation of the school, with the collaboration of the teaching council), that the educational plan of this institution is based on principles radically different from the strict dogmas of the Soviet system, favouring a modern openness to multidisciplinary, eclecticism and a combination of teachings by various professionals.

According to Nicolescu, the puppeteer's basic training should be identical to the vocational training of the student actor, where the teaching of traditional practice is interwoven with innovative and experimental methods. The school should also help coordinate numerous meetings between students and theatre professionals; such meetings are in fact valuable because of their capability to open up new horizons, to stimulate students toward discovering their own aspirations and attitudes, an indispensable part of their process of personal artistic development. The school should constantly be in dialogue with the current culture, with the performing arts and overall society of the current time; unlike a conservatory, the French school is driven by ideas of mobility, flexibility, multidisciplinary, even at the risk of creating an overly ambitious program. The goal is for students to learn to approach and relate to different disciplines holistically, without any compartmentalization, so that they may acquire a global perception of all the components of puppet theatre production. The first training project also responded to the question: Must the puppeteer be primarily an actor or must they rather possess the qualities and the skills of a visual artist, a set designer, and a painter? Niculescu based her teaching on the principle that a student puppeteer needs to learn different languages and techniques, paying particular attention to the study of the animation of puppets, combined with different construction techniques, a combination

essential for performances based on gesture and manipulation (it also acts as a stimulus for the invention of new stylistic solutions). The knowledge of different techniques, practices and traditions can help develop the metaphorical and symbolic dimension of the performance and get rid of restrictive genres, codes and categories, so as to discover new aesthetic and poetic frontiers. The French school prefers to keep open the possibility of discovering different methods, avoiding the imposition of a unilateral approach.<sup>6</sup>

Although the German school teaching approach isn't based on a workshop system of training, it too arises as an alternative model to the Soviet one, because it denies dogmatism and the specialization of disciplines. The teaching is in fact organized in modules specializing in acting and animation with objects and puppets, lasting five-six weeks each, in addition to supplementary subjects. The German School does not use a training system, i.e., an educational program divided into short modules (such as that used by the Russian School, whose daily timetable consists of lessons lasting an average of fifty minutes), because it fears that the students might lapse into a mode of passive, mechanized learning.

The triggering of a creative process, the discovery of one's own artistic language, is the basic requirement for the vocational formation provided by the German school; that is why the student actor is constantly tested and trained toward acquiring dramaturgical and compositional autonomy: each subject of puppetry characterization involves improvisations and exercises that are useful to train the ability to conceive, design and to create scenes. As declared by Hartmut Lorenz, one of the founders of the Ernst Busch School, during an interview he kindly gave me during my research residency in Berlin, the artistic-aesthetic perspective on which the German school was founded is the restoration to the theatre of 'the art of figures', which since the sunset of the traditions and great aesthetic changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Futurism, Constructivism, Bauhaus) had been mainly the preserve of non-theatrical avant-garde arts. The first step was to organize and structure the knowledge associated with the puppet (or, to use Lorenz's term, 'figure') theatre, in order to establish a mode of professional training for actors, who act using figures and objects.

The 'Puppenschauspieler', Lorenz continues in his declaration, has a higher ontological order task than the 'Schauspieler': to manifest his inner self through the externality of an object that otherwise would be lifeless.

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<sup>6</sup> Information taken from: Niculescu, M. (2009), 'On the path of experimentation'. In: Bodson, L., Niculescu, M. and Pezin, P. (ed.), *Passing It On...*, op. cit., pp. 28-61.



The Ernst Busch Academy is founded on the aesthetic-philosophical principle of the transition 'from the subjective to the objective', with roots both in the principles of Stanislavskij – working with affective, sensory, and physical memory and study of the given circumstances – and in the principles of Brecht –using the ideas of objectification and alienation. (The Brechtian term 'alienation effect' is here understood in a general way, set apart from the political attitude, social thought and ideological attitude conceived by Bertolt Brecht. The broad concept, 'Verfremdungseffekt' in German, 'consists in the opposition of an actor and his role, in the use of masks, in the special stress of gestures, in the use on stage of visual documents, in separating the text from gesture, in quotations, and in direct address to audiences.'<sup>7</sup>)

The school's approach uses two seemingly opposite methods of human character creation at the same time. On the one hand, it invokes the concept of realism to approach the idea of 'the human' in its complexity and tangibility; but at the same time, the way through which this human is represented often escapes the bounds of natural requirements, instead affirming its objective contingency, according to an aesthetic and theatrical perspective which privileges the 'non-naturalistic', often including that which is grotesque, symbolic, surreal.

The puppetry students at the Ernst Busch Academy therefore follow the same programme of vocational training during the first phase of their theatrical studies as the acting students. The approach to teaching the art of acting at the academy is based on the Stanislavskij Method, involving such techniques as the study of inner circumstances, the 'magic if', and physical actions, in order to find the union of the psychological and physical spheres. The training involves a great deal of improvisation and the creation of scenes on the basis of a text. The second phase of puppetry vocational training, however, concerns only the puppetry student, whose challenge is to use the physical-emotional material discovered during the first step in coordination with 'alienation'.

As Lorenz told me, the puppetry student, in the second phase of the programme at the German puppetschool, is required to naturalistically play the role of an inert object. The 'naturalism' of the playing can obviously be reached with various techniques, but an unavoidable criterion is the Stanislavskian background of his acting training.

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<sup>7</sup> Fiebach, J. (1975), *Von Craig bis Brecht. Studien zu Künstlertheorien in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin: Henschelverlag, p. 299. Quoted in: Jurkowski, H. (2013), *Aspects of Puppet Theatre*. Second Edition. Houndmills in Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 53.

## Conclusions

The differences between the French and German didactic academic structures come from a radical difference between the founding pedagogical objectives of the two schools, reasons that reflect the dichotomy, on a larger scale, between the cultural contexts and divergent theatrical production orientations in Eastern and Western Europe.

As mentioned, both of the schools are located fairly centrally in Europe, offering two alternative models, in opposition to the models prevalent in Eastern Europe, and especially to the model of Soviet schools.

Since their foundation in fact, a chief concern of Western European schools was training future artists in all branches of art, while Eastern European schools promoted a sectorial traineeship, with strict differentiation of curricula in different disciplines.

These two educational approaches are reflected in the structure of many theatre companies. Western European theatrical groups tend to be numerically small, and are often associated with a popular and familiar tradition, accustomed to conceiving and executing every aspect of the shows they presented, mostly in schools, auditoriums, squares and small theatres, supported mainly by municipal and local subsidies.

Eastern European theatrical companies, on the other hand, enjoyed comparatively large financial support (also because the puppet theatre was promoted by the institutions as a means of political and ideological control), and were therefore (and continue to be) numerically larger. A lot of professionals specialising in different sectors of theatre production were part of the eastern European companies, which is why such companies had access to larger audiences, through cooperation with big theatres.

For a comprehensive view of the issue, further research could proceed with an analysis of the pedagogical structure of schools in Eastern Europe, the most emblematic example of which is the school of St. Petersburg. Its study program varies greatly from those of the West due to the strong division of disciplines and curricula, reflecting the needs of the typical state theatre system of stage production, divided by specialized tasks.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Russian State Institute of Performing Arts in St. Petersburg was founded in 1779, and introduced a vocational training program for actors with numerous specializations related to the puppet theatre in 1958. In 1988 they established a puppet theatre department, which is divided in the following fields of study: acting, directing, set design and stage technology in puppet theatre.

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### **Summary**

The physical training of an actor-puppeteer has become a particularly important issue nowadays, as a result of the dynamic and many-sided development of the puppet theatre. The methodology designed by the author represents a way to free the puppeteer's body from tensions and turn it into an integrated and conscious professional tool. The connection of two important aspects of training – the physical and the mental – gives a holistic training capable of shaping both the actor-puppeteer's body and his artistic personality.

### **Streszczenie**

W związku z wszechstronnym i dynamicznym rozwojem teatru lalek, trening ciała aktora-lalkarza jest dziś tematem szczególnie istotnym. Autor przybliży opracowaną dla lalkarzy metodę treningu fizycznego, której podstawowym celem jest uwolnienie ciała od napięć oraz uczynienie z niego zintegrowanego i świadomego narzędzia pracy. Połączenie dwóch ważnych aspektów ćwiczeń – fizycznego i mentalnego – daje holistyczny trening kształtujący zarówno ciało aktora-lalkarza jak i jego artystyczną osobowość.

## **Images in the Space of Mind: The Body Training of an Actor-Puppeteer**

Kristin Linklater, one of the biggest experts in the field of voice work – with whom I have had the pleasure of meeting and collaborating – has said: '(...) u podstawy wszelkiej pracy nad głosem powinny leżeć dwie maksymy: zablokowane emocje są podstawową przeszkodą w swobodnym posługiwaniu się głosem; niejasne myślenie jest podstawową przeszkodą wyrazistej artykulacji.'<sup>1</sup> [two things should always lie at the basis of any voice work: blocked emotions are the main obstacle to the free use of voice; unclear thinking is the main obstacle to clear articulation.]<sup>2</sup> The problem of blockages, which Linklater mentions in the context of voice work, seems to me equally important. My theatre experiences have shown that blockages are the main impediment to the free use of the body, since they limit its plasticity and flexibility. Their presence impacts both the general level of fitness and the quality of actors' nonverbal expression.

The issue of physical fitness and the actor's training is universal, applicable to all forms of theatre. Regardless of the individual's theatre interests, whether they include drama, dance, pantomime, opera or puppet theatre, the body is always a tool which in the end will either enhance the work or hinder it. In comparing the forms of the theatre mentioned above, one can notice that each of them has its unique nature and places different demands on the actor in terms of the how the body is used on stage. If we look at the issue purely from the point of view of the physical demands placed upon the body,

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<sup>1</sup> Linklater, K. (2012), *Uwolnij swój głos. Tworzenie obrazów w pracy nad głosem i mową*. Kraków: Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Teatralna im. L. Solskiego w Krakowie, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> All translations in brackets in the article were made by the author.

then dance theatre requires the most from the actor-dancer, in terms of both specific technique and physical strength and endurance. So body awareness itself will generally be greater in the case of dancers than other artists.

In the case of the actor-puppeteer, the richness and multitude of forms available for the puppet theatre place more sophisticated demands on the artist, in terms of how he uses his body on stage, than any other theatre form. This relates to both the unique character of this particular art form and the dynamic changes it underwent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays the puppet theatre is an interdisciplinary art including – apart from classic puppet forms – object animation, actors performing with masks, shadow theatre, visual theatre and a number of combinations that represent syntheses of various forms of artistic expression.<sup>3</sup> All of this increases the demands placed on the actor's movement apparatus in new and changing ways. A thoroughly trained and fit body enables him to carry out a wide variety of complex tasks, mainly to freely enliven the puppets, build the gestures or quickly change the tempo or direction.

Each specific type of puppet, which creates varied demands in the process of animation – different for hand puppets, pull string puppets, body puppets or marionettes – requires the actor to adjust his body to the animated form. The puppeteer must be able to enter a kind of organic symbiosis with the puppet and create the impression that each puppet is a living, independent being. This diversity of forms requires versatile skills and overcoming one's blockages helps the artist learn new forms.

A different kind of thinking and approach to the body is needed when an actor performs with a mask. The basis for such work is primarily the actor's knowledge of pantomime, where precision of movement, in addition to plasticity and flexibility, is important and involves the skilful isolation of particular body parts. Then the body becomes a form which is transformed and properly rearranged. The mask requires the ability to see oneself through an observer's eyes, as if through a camera lens – which process helps to fully expose the mask and create a believable character. A lack of blockages and a high level of physical fitness are highly desirable here.

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<sup>3</sup> An example of this is *The Carnival of the Animals* choreographed by Karolina Garbacik at the initiative of the Podlaskie Dance Association and the Białystok Puppet Theatre (2014), of which I am a co-creator. This piece is a skilful combination of the object theatre and dance theatre with both puppeteers and dancer performing.

A similar ability to step outside the boundaries of one's body is useful when the actor's costume is an animated form, a few times bigger than the actor's own body, often one requiring strenuous movement.<sup>4</sup> Also, in the shadow theatre, a plastic and flexible body is a form of organic material which, combined with the interplay of lights, offers a vast array of staging choices.<sup>5</sup>

These examples clearly show that nowadays, work in the puppet theatre – regardless of the aesthetics and techniques used – poses a number of challenges for the puppeteer. Only specialized knowledge and intensive training will help meet these demands, and in effect bring about staging results which may be more interesting than traditional 'live-action' drama.

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When I began working as a lecturer in the Puppet Theatre Art Department in Białystok, I started wondering how my many years of experience acquired in several Polish theatres<sup>6</sup> during numerous dance workshops and specialized massage courses<sup>7</sup> could be useful for future actor-puppeteers? Would teaching modern dance technique<sup>8</sup>, which greatly influenced my thinking about movement as means of artistic expression and the body as a tool in an actor-dancer's hands, be of real benefit to them? Finally, through trial and error, seeking balance between my own bodily technique and the needs of my students in view of their abilities, I found the proper working method for us. It came as a result of the synthesis of my own professional experience with methods I encountered in my work as well as my own studies and research.

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of this are the puppets used in *The Lion King* directed by Julie Taymor in Orpheum Theatre in Minneapolis (1997) or those created by the Handspring Puppet Company in London for *War Horse*, directed by Marianne Eliot and Tom Morris (2007).

<sup>5</sup> As could be seen in *The Carnival of the Animals* directed by Nikolina Georgieva in the Sofia Puppet Theatre, Bulgaria (1997).

<sup>6</sup> Wojciech Bogusławski Theatre in Kalisz (1999-2004), Henryk Tomaszewski Pantomime Theatre in Wrocław (2002-2003), Projekt Dance Theatre in Białystok (2002-2004), Alter Dance Theatre in Kalisz (2004-2005), Silesian Dance Theatre in Bytom (2008-2012).

<sup>7</sup> Rolfining – fascial massage based on the Thomas W. Myers concept of anatomy trains: Anatomy Trains part 1 (2014); Anatomy Trains Specialized Course FRSB (fascia release for Structural Balance): Spine Tensegrity (2014); Anatomy Trains Specialized Course FRSB: chest, abdomen, breathing (2015), Anatomy Trains Specialized Course FRSB: arms, shoulder girdle, hands (2015); Anatomy Trains Specialized Course FRSB: arches of the feet, knees, legs (2015); Anatomy Trains in motion (2016); Jivaka body&mind p. 1 (2014), Jivaka body&mind p. 2 (2015), Jivaka body&mind p. 3 (2015), Jivaka body&mind p. 4 (2016), Jivaka body&mind p. 7 (2016); Chinese massage with chiropractic (2007).

<sup>8</sup> A characteristic dance style created by Jacek Łuminski – founder and artistic director of the Silesian Dance Theatre in Bytom (one of the first professional dance theatres in Poland) and the founder and a long-time dean of the Dance Theatre Department in Bytom, part of the Ludwik Solski National Theatre Academy in Cracow.

Mikhail Chekhov, Kristin Linklater, Alexander Lowen, Thomas W. Myers, Gunther Krueger – these are the theoreticians, practitioners and reformers of the theatre whose work has helped me look for my own solutions and enabled me to reach my students, help them liberate their bodies from different kinds of limitations, and offer practical tools for use in their future artistic work.



**Figure 1:** Work with the students, Puppet Theatre Art Department (2018).

Working with future puppeteers requires a different approach to the pedagogical process than working with dancers. For a dancer, movement in and of itself has value, whilst for a puppeteer, this is not the case. A puppeteer very often wants or even needs to know the meaning of the movement he engages in, its precise purpose and effects. For this reason, I decided to focus on searching for the source of inspiration, whatever makes artists aware of the meaning of their actions and helps liberate their bodies. Kristin Linklater's method of freeing the natural voice was a great help here. These exercises are geared towards free and expressive speech on stage; their final phase involves the use of text. Hence the text is the starting point for me, and it enriches the physical training with an additional aspect – working with the voice in movement – for an actor-puppeteer such a comprehensive approach seems more effective and brings better results.

Developing the imagination plays an equally important role in the actor's training. Practices developed by Linklater are helpful here, as well as the method of Michael Chekhov, which I find equally inspiring. It doesn't really matter in this case that the two methods differ significantly from each other; importantly, they both use mental images. Linklater uses imagination to free the natural voice and reconnect with emotions, where Chekhov links imagination with movement improvisation, providing actors with a body training tool.<sup>9</sup>

Alexander Lowen's method, focused on freeing suppressed emotions through simple physical exercises, drew my attention to the therapeutic aspect of body work. Knowledge of the relations between physical health and human psyche has not only helped me understand changes taking place in students taking my classes, but also made me realize that physical training affects personal development.

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<sup>9</sup> See: Czechow, M., A. (2008), *O technice aktora*. Ed. by M. Sołek. Kraków: Arche. Mainly chapter V: 'Ciało aktora', pp. 85-96.



Thomas Meyer's idea of the anatomy trains, which I learned about from specialists in the field<sup>10</sup>, enriched my understanding of how the body functions in movement. This concept clearly shows that deeply held tensions can seriously disrupt body structure and limit movement range and ability. The problems of bodily tensions and their influence on physical and mental state are also considered in the Jivaka massage techniques.<sup>11</sup>

Their skilful use allows us to free the body from tensions and accumulated stress and also to liberate the inner potential of life energy that has been blocked for various reasons.

The Body Awareness lesson structure runs according to precisely composed exercises. They aim to enable students to create individual movement which in its final stage enters the structure of etudes at the border of dance theatre and physical theatre, and to: 1. practice concentration; 2. sharpen perception; 3. calm the mind; 4. awaken imagination, creativity and abstract thinking; 5. observe and explore the body and the speech apparatus; 6. awaken sensitivity to the spoken text (from single phonemes through syllables to complete words); 7. expand and deepen the range of motion; 8. enliven the 'dormant' parts of the body; 9. expand body awareness; 10. integrate breath and body; 11. offer practical knowledge about releasing physical tension; 12. gain awareness of our responsibility for our partners; 13. build a non-verbal dialogue. All of these processes help an actor-puppeteer develop a number of additional skills that support his work. Having developed different levels of awareness, he will find it easier to enter performance settings, which on many occasions will require from him exactly these kinds of skills.

As mentioned earlier, one important element that students use in class is their imagination. Ken Robinson defined it as 'zdolność przywoływania na myśl rzeczy, które nie są dostępne naszym zmysłom.'<sup>12</sup> [the ability to call to mind what's unavailable to our senses.] My students' accounts confirm this. Whenever I ask about their favourite place – a place where they feel safe and comfortable – I hear a similar answer each time: what first appears in their

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<sup>10</sup> Wojciech Cackowski, Gunther Krueger, Michael Watsan.

<sup>11</sup> Jivaka – Thai massage technique originating from Jivaka Kumar Bhaccha born in ancient India, personal physician and close disciple of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. The aim of the massage is to reveal and remove bodily and mental blockages. The method is based on active muscle relaxation, integration of body parts through movement, and increasing the energy flow in the body. Gunter Krueger taught me this method.

<sup>12</sup> Robinson, K. (2015), *Kreatywne szkoły. Oddolna rewolucja, która zmienia edukację*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Element, p. 123.

awareness is not words describing the place, but the image itself. Focusing on the image appearing in the stream of awareness while making a movement or speaking is the key to a new and deeper meaning of the words spoken or physical gestures made by the actor. Tapping into the imagination during class work helps students create their own language of expression, allow their bodies to access poetry, acquire skills supporting their ability to create movement and find ways to interpret it.

Furthermore, using the imagination in training, by distracting the attention from the main subject of our interest – the body – and focusing it on the image, delivers quicker results than does traditional physical training. Experience has shown that using mental images works perfectly.

For example, sometimes I can see that a student's centre of gravity has moved from the pelvis higher up into the chest. Depending on the person's body awareness, drawing their attention to this detail might not be effective and an unconventional approach is sometimes required. A mental-physical exercise proves to be best for this purpose. I tell to a student:

Feel the waves of warmth covering your body. This warm air freely comes in and out of your body, fills all the corners, your belly, pelvis, knees and feet. Your entire body becomes warm and soft, from your feet to the top of your head. Soft elastic skin, soft face, soft shoulders, belly, pelvis, soft knees. Focus on your feet now – they are soft too. Feel the gravity attracting them towards the floor. The entire body follows this force. Inhale: the air freely enters your belly and softly pours over the body. Exhale: your body is soft, elastic and relaxed.

When this exercise is done properly, the centre of gravity automatically returns to its place. In addition, the breath calms down, the mind quietens, and the students get more in touch with their bodies. Only when the student is well prepared can I move on to more complex exercises that form the core of the main training.

In the first stage of the work process, everyone has to choose about a dozen words from a certain text and create movements to accompany them. One word equals one move. Having memorized the words and movements, we move on to the next stage, where I begin individual work. Each person is to repeat the word-moves a number of times. Starting from mechanical repetitions, at first accompanied by the slow breakdown of words into

syllables and letters, moving on through their reconnection to fluency in speech and movement. What interests me in this practice, and what I want to draw students' attention to, is the texture, or structure, of letters and words, their temperature, colour or shape spontaneously emerging in the mind – by this means I focus on a new vision of the word. The next step is to search for the melody of the word, observing how the sound travels through the corners of the body, how its vibrations pass through the mouth to finally become audible in space. Such deep and detailed exploration of the structure of the text, broken down into its basic elements, serves to help students forget the habitual use of speech. It helps refresh our understanding of how we use words, and allows us to find new meaning in them.

The next step in the practice introduces the physical aspect. At this point I want the students to find a tangential point between movement and word, to localize a place of origin of both the impulse to move (and how it reorganizes the body structure) and the impulse toward sound (which always begins with breath) and subsequently bring both into a symbiosis. Having reached a desired goal, the students continue exploring the body, this time in the context of blockages that limit the freedom of movement, to swiftly move on to awakening their sensitivity to the shape and texture of the floor, local temperature, air, sounds.

The third stage is about introducing the entire group into the process, which adds certain difficulties. My role here becomes minimal, as I become merely an outside observer setting the tempo from time to time. I consider this one of the most interesting phases because the students begin to decide themselves which aspect of the activity they want to focus on – breath, word or movement. Furthermore, working within a group strongly encourages heightened awareness of partners and the external stimuli.

Both I and the students watching their fellows in a group activity at this stage often have an impression that we're actually watching directed etudes, where everything intertwines smoothly and seems to fit perfectly together. This isn't anything new in the theatre; it was highlighted by Eugenio Barba, who called it the trick of pre-expression.<sup>13</sup>

The fourth, penultimate part of the process involves students creating etudes based on the word-movement material developed so far. It is up to them

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<sup>13</sup> Barba, E. (2007), *Canoe z papieru. Traktat o Antropologii Teatru*. Wrocław: Instytut im. J. Grotowskiego, pp. 172-173.

whether they prefer to work individually, in pairs or in a group. They are also free to choose music or possible costumes. The cycle finishes with the presentation of the results of students' independent work.

What is interesting here is that the exercises constructed and led this way can be also considered in the context of movement meditation or mindfulness training<sup>14</sup>, which is an indispensable part of Buddhist meditation practice.<sup>15</sup> In order to develop awareness during daily or professional activities one does not need to share the Buddhist world view, because the practice of mindfulness is based on universal principles of the functioning of mind. According to Peter Malinowski<sup>16</sup>: 'Trening uważności ma na celu udoskonalić naszą uwagę i świadomość, co pozwala nam skoncentrować się nawet w sytuacjach zewnętrznych lub wewnętrznych zawirowań, obserwować wzajemne oddziaływanie wielu czynników, które kształtują daną sytuację oraz zyskać wewnętrzną przestrzeń, która pozwala na podjęcie jak najbardziej korzystnych decyzji.'<sup>17</sup> [Mindfulness training aims to improve our attention and awareness, which enables us to focus even in the midst of internal or external turmoil, observe the interaction of the many elements involved in the situation and gain inner space which allows us to make the most beneficial decisions.] These words can be applied to onstage events, when during a performance the actor should be prepared for unplanned moments requiring him to act adequately to the situation at hand.

There is one more principle used by meditation practitioners which I have used in my class. I have noticed that students frequently judge everything in terms of 'I like' – 'I don't like'. In meditation, where the object of focus is for example the mind<sup>18</sup>, the meditator on his path of spiritual development learns to observe phenomena arising in his mind stream without attributing a personal meaning to them, which creates the inner space Malinowski is referring to. In the realm of theatre, the same approach creates spontaneity

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<sup>14</sup> Mindfulness in intentional, conscious direction of awareness, concentration on a mental or physical activity without critical judgement.

<sup>15</sup> Meditation (tib.: *gom*) is a practical method aiming at the recognition of one's innate potential for enlightenment. According to a German scholar, respected teacher of buddhism Manfred Sieegers meditation means 'effortless resting in what is'. Sieegers, M. (2009), *Medytacja. Pogląd i praktyka w buddyzmie Diamentowej Drogi*. Opole: Hung, p. 199.

<sup>16</sup> Doctor of psychology and lecturer specializing in neuroscience at John Moores University in Liverpool (School of Natural Sciences and Psychology), an honorary lecturer of Liverpool University (Institute of Psychology, Health and Society), certified teacher of meditation. Conducting research on meditation and its influence on human.

<sup>17</sup> Malinowski, P., 'Meditation Research'. Online: <http://meditation-research.org.uk/meditation/mindfulness/> [01.03.2017].

<sup>18</sup> In Karma Kagyu Diamond Way lineage of Tibetan buddhism, concentration on mind itself is the highest form of meditation and is called Mahamudra (tib.: *chag chen*, meaning *Great Seal*).

and freshness in the actor's actions, as he needs to be constantly present to avoid falling into a routine caused by repetition. This and many other benefits issuing from the practice of mindfulness enhance the effects of actor's training while at the same time supporting his psycho-physical wellbeing.

Due to the variety of forms animated by the actor-puppeteer, his focused awareness of his body, partner and the space he operates in must be highly developed. For this reason, in the educational process I lead the students through, I draw their attention to the existence of so many aspects or objects of concentration. The training I have described integrates body with breath and voice. In the future, it will help create an authentic, organic relationship between the animator's living body and the puppet, mask or other kinds of animated object. I am also strongly convinced that the practices I have developed can be useful in other artistic activities. Their versatility allows them to work for any actor, performer or stage artist. In every case, a body liberated from the unnecessary baggage of tensions and blockages as well as a more fully developed imagination and the ability to use its resources will provide a precious key to freer realization of many acting tasks.

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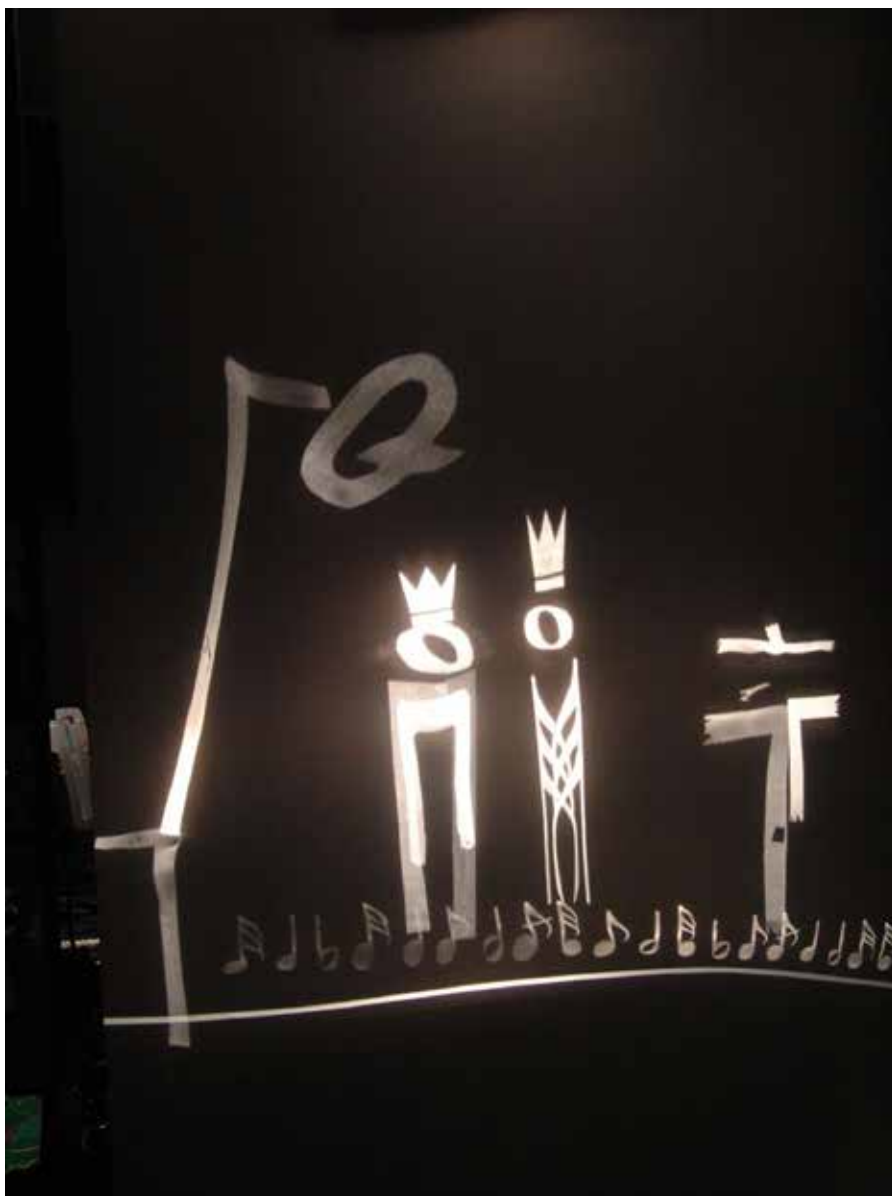
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**Figure 1:** *Iwona, księżniczka Burgunda* [*Ivona, Princess of Burgundia*], directed by Marián Pecko, Opolski Teatr Lalki i Akrota im. Alojzego Smolki (2009), photo by Rafał Mielnik.



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**Figure 1:** Work with the students,  
Puppet Theatre Art Department, Białystok (2018),  
photo by Michał Murawski.







(...) One of the benefits of the Academy's publishing activity is its promotion of young authors who bring new views on the topic of contemporary puppetry. These authors are mainly young doctoral students and practitioners. Their articles are symbolically reinforced by others written by such renowned seniors as internationally known theorist Marek Waszkiel Ph.D. and practitioner Eric Bass. The editors have selected essays with a high level of erudition and good knowledge of puppetry and background research.

(...) The book is a most inspiring publication which opens new themes and promises continuation of this discourse. The contributions are of high quality and the confrontation of young researchers, theoreticians and practitioners useful and necessary.

The book is a valuable supply for the 'world's puppetry library.

*– form the review of prof. Ida Hledíková, Ph.D.*

