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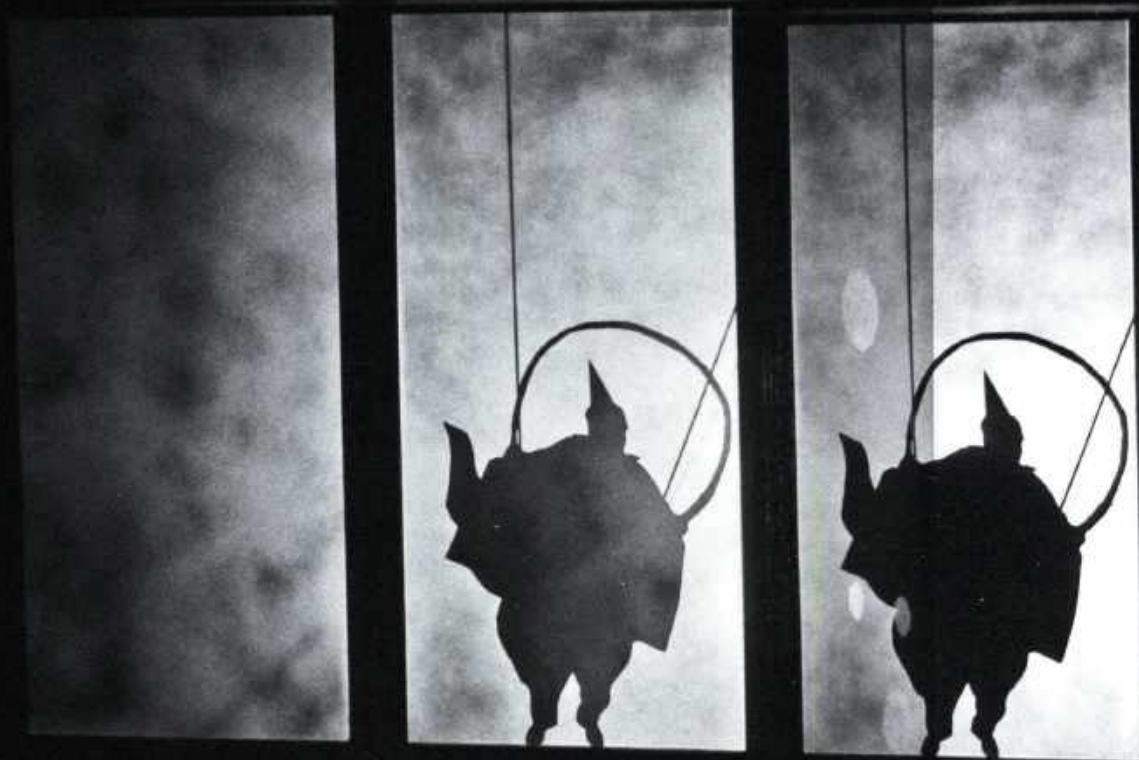
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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

issue no. 26

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FRONT COVER

Billboard for the International
Kerala Film Festival in Trivandrum.

photo: Morgan FitzPatrick Andrews



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

Editorial

Imagine yourself making a shadow.

Finished?

Good.

Did you imagine, I wonder, setting up the lamp, or choosing an instrument with a small point source, or placing it at a particular distance from the projection surface? If you were using an overhead projector, did you plug it in first? If you used the sun as a light, was it shining so brightly that you felt its warmth on your skin?

No?

That's not surprising. Why? Because the amazing human mind is not only capable of imagining things that it is not actually doing, it also selects the most important images and leaves out the details

it perceives as unimportant.* Except that in art the details are never unimportant. But don't despair; in this issue we will give you more details than you can shake a lightsaber at. Welcome to the Shadow Issue.

As this magazine hits your mailbox or local bookstore, the 8th International Shadow Festival will be taking place in Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany—dozens of performances by companies from all over the world. The range of work is fantastic—small- and large-scale, simple and multi-layered, traditional and cutting edge. We often think of shadow theatre as ancient,

sacred, ritualistic. And it is. But it is also much more—ephemeral, subversive, confounding, hysterical, metaphoric, therapeutic, mind-bending, gut-wrenching...

As Fabrizio Montecchi insists: *Shadow theatre is not a technique, rather it is a kind of scenic art, a theatrical language that makes use of a multitude of techniques.*

When we decided to devote an issue of PI to Shadows, I was pretty sure we'd get enough material for a good survey of the genre, but I did not foresee getting the *deluge* of diverse articles that would threaten to breach our editorial levees



IMAGES FROM THE SCHWÄBISCH GMÜND SHADOW FESTIVAL PROGRAM

www.unima-usa.org/publications

(and this at a time when— thanks to the current “Economic Downturn,” we are unable to blithely increase the number of pages in order to include more material).

One of our strategies to get you the full range of opinions, reviews and research on this topic is to increase our web component yet again. Go to our website now and you will get access to what is essentially an entire online magazine to complement our print edition. There are lots more images and many articles that don't appear in this

edition, as well as an assortment of full-length articles that appear here in abridged form.

Thanks so much for your ongoing support of this venture. We hope you'll continue to enjoy *Puppetry International* both in the hand and on the web.

*see Dan Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness*, for more on mind and perception.

—Andrew Periale



GIOCO VITA



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WAMDA:

Opening Doors and Shedding Light on Egyptian Shadow Puppetry

by Laurie McCants

Not long ago, in the cool of a Cairo twilight, children ran through the winding alleys (not far from where recently a bomb was planted under a bench at the centuries-old *souk*, the *Khan al-Khalili*) to gather in the open-air courtyard of an elegantly-restored Ottoman-era historic house. Awaiting them was a shadow-puppet stage, canopied with vibrant Egyptian festival fabric and strung with multicolored lights. They plopped themselves down in front of the stage and began to chant: "Aragoz! Aragoz!" And on the screen appeared the shadow figure of "The Aragoz," the puppeteer who travels from village to village, street to street, performing the antics of his hand puppet, also named Aragoz. Like his Turkish and European cousins, Karagoz and Punch, Aragoz is a complex creature, a wily little guy. Both dupe and trickster, silly and sly, he's a beloved rascalion.

Turns out the trick's on the audience this time. For as the story unfolds, it is revealed that this shadow Aragoz is not what he appears to be. He is actually Ali Al-Zeibaa ("Ali Quicksilver"), master of disguise, a sort of mediaeval Middle Eastern mix of Robin Hood and Zorro, yet unmistakably Egyptian. By the evening's end, Ali Al-Zeibaa has managed to upend the corrupt rule of tainted leaders and restore order to the nation, to the cheers of the children who have been entertained, engaged, and enlightened by this twist on a story as old as the Arabian Nights.

The show is one of several updated ancient tales presented by *Wamda* (an arcane Arabic word that means "the flash of light at night in the dark desert that fully illuminates everything"), a puppet troupe led by Nabil Bahgat. Dedicated to revitalizing the almost-extinct *khayal al zill* (Egyptian shadow puppetry), Bahgat's motto is "We have that which can express us." He feels that this distinctly Egyptian art form can combat the "cultural invasion" of commercial products and shallow values from abroad. "Look at the Ninja productions," Bahgat says. "They are always followed by pizza promotions. This creates a non-productive person; whenever he feels hungry he orders junk food by phone." Bahgat feels that multinational corporations aim to make people the world over into consumers rather than creators. So he and *Wamda* are not only bringing back stories from Egyptian folklore, they are also teaching children how to make and manipulate their own puppets. Why buy Western dolls (made in China)? "We have that which can express us." That the neighborhood children now know Aragoz's name and clamor for his stories is a testament to *Wamda's* success in satisfying a need their community may not even know it had. "People are thirsty for this type of art because it reflects their heritage," Bahgat says. "This genre enhances the imagination, and if we abandon it, then the whole nation

will fall behind and be left in the hands of a generation in search of instant entertainment and instant pleasure."

Bahgat and his fellow *Wamda* members know what it means to search, but their quest has been to find the authentic entertainment indigenous to their own culture. They ventured out and found the last remaining shadow puppeteer in all of Egypt, Hassan Khanoufa, who was hanging out and smoking *shisha* at an *ahwa* (coffee shop) on Mohammed Ali Street, where buskers look for work. The aging master took them under his wing, teaching them the stories and tricks of his trade (how to buy and dry the translucent donkey leather that is cut, pierced, painted, and decorated in the Islamic style; how to hinge and attach the rods; how to breathe life into figures pressed against the screen so that they talk, walk, dance, cry, and laugh). Not long after these lessons, Hassan Khanoufa died. The young artists were left to carry on their teacher's legacy, and also that of their ancestor, Mohammed Ibn Daniel, who fled to Cairo from Iraq during the Mongol invasions of



the 13th century. His three extant puppet play scripts (labeled by the author as "phantoms of the shadows") are the only complete examples of Arabic drama from the Middle Ages that have survived to the present day.

As in Ibn Daniel's plays (and as in so many puppet traditions the world over), *Wamda* uses old stories to make new points. Modern Egypt is a wondrous and difficult place. It takes sharp wit and sheer bravery for these young artists to yank this dying craft back to life in the 21st century. *Wamda* is intent on addressing complex contemporary issues through updated adaptations, both respectful and radical, of these age-old street "entertainments." They are claiming their heritage as artists in a country in which, for centuries, only puppets have been permitted a certain freedom of expression. With their impish antics, the puppets of *Wamda* are playing the "under the radar" role that puppets have always played as social and political critics, as the voice of the *sha'bi*, the people.

WAMDA:

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will fall behind and be left in the hands of a generation in search of instant entertainment and instant pleasure."

Bahgat and his fellow *Wamda* members know what it means to search, but their quest is not for their own entertainment. They are puppeteers in their own right, and they are not smoking *shisha* buskers looking for a few dollars. They are the street donkey lea style; how pressed against the wall long after the sun has set to carry on the tradition of Ibn Daniel.



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As in 1 world over is a wonder these young *Wamda* is updated and "entertainment" which, for of expressing the "under political cr

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The building that houses *Wamda* is hidden away in an impoverished neighborhood in the heart of Old Islamic Cairo. To find it, you have to ask the neighbors which cramped and crooked alley to follow. Once there, you walk through an ornate wooden doorway into a glistening, restored 16th century house. There's a labyrinth of rooms, intricately tiled and latticed, many of which have been turned into workshops and classrooms where *Wamda* teaches puppetry to children and aspiring artists. In the open-air courtyard, they experiment with performance style in their evening shows. Recently, they expanded the role of the *rawi*. (The *khayal al zill* has always mixed shadow puppets and human performers; the *rawi* is the storyteller/singer/poet who serves as a conduit between audience and puppets.) In some of *Wamda*'s new shows, the *rawi* now solicits audience suggestions, empowering them to actually determine the ending of the play. After the final song, the children and their families filter into the night. This elegant old house, the *Beit El Seheimy*, once a private domicile of the ruling class, now a cultural center for the community, has been renamed by *Wamda* as the *Beit El Seheimy Center for Innovation*. Its doors are open.

Roughly translated, *khayal al zill* means "shadows of the imagination." As the light cast on the screen brings the puppets to life, so *Wamda* has animated the imagination of their community. Collectively, the Egyptian shadow puppet plays are called *babat*, which means "doors," because each play is a door into



an imaginary world. How wonderful that Bahgat and *Wamda* are opening doors for their audience into a place that helps them know who they are and imagine who they can be in *this* world.

Laurie McCants is a founding member of the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble [www.bte.org]. In 2007, BTE collaborated with *Wamda* in creating *Our Shadows*, a bilingual puppet play that toured to hundreds of schools and community centers, introducing American children and their families to the Egyptian arts of music, dance, and the *khayal al zill*.

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Road to Ruin, the making of a puppet punk

by Morgan FitzPatrick Andrews

The artistry of Erik Ruin has become a familiar sight in the realms of radical puppetry and political art. His sharp graphic style is distinctive: gaunt-faced figures with thick, wrinkly hands inhabiting an intricate backdrop of industrial urbania and twisted thorny wilderness. Layers of bold, expressive lines weave an elaborate papercut cobweb that captures the eye and evokes an intertwining tension between struggle and hope on the precipice of resolution, leaving the viewer to determine which will be victorious.

Erik's art is easily obtainable through Justseeds—a cooperative of artists who make graphic work around social justice issues and sell their prints for cheap online, and Erik's silkscreen, stencil, and woodblock prints pop up on walls the world over. He's also been active in the do-it-yourself (DIY) publishing world, having contributed graphics for newspapers, magazines, books and album jackets. Under the nom de plume "Erik Reuland," he co-edited and designed the cover for the hefty anthology *Realizing the Impossible: Art Against Authority*. But there is a vast aspect to Erik's creativity that can only be experienced by being in his presence: his work as a shadow puppeteer. He's staged puppet rock operas, adapted Shakespeare and Brecht, and (ironically) cut shadows for Minnesota Public Radio. Over the past decade, Erik's performances have been a fixture at puppet festivals, activist conferences and punk rock concerts, as well as a roadside attraction. In 2007 he toured the American East Coast solely via public transportation, and in 2005 built a shadow puppet peepshow that he towed behind him on a bicycle trip around Europe. Yet he hesitates to call himself a puppeteer.

"I call the work I do 'shadow sequences' or 'shadow theater,'" says Erik Ruin (or Reuland—both work for him). "People have a certain amount of expectation of puppetry, that things are going to be more movement-oriented. But the movement that I do is simple and subtle. I really like layering things and animating them that way."

Some of the images in Erik's shadow theater are puppets in the classic sense: intricate little silhouettes etched out of cardboard (Erik tends to use beer boxes) that move around behind a screen or on the glass of an overhead projector (OHP). More of his images are entire scenes, sometimes made from big sheets of cutaway paperboard that float across the landscape before settling into place, or colorful mosaics of contact paper cutouts and spray-painted stencils that scroll by on a "kranky."

"My work is kind of like a book in theater form. Comics and painting inform what I do: it has the fluidity of painting and the unexpected experiment you find when you spill a bunch of paint on something; it also has the framing and dynamic composition found in the panel of a comic book—that splicing of images you get in comics or film."

Erik Ruin is a member of the "puppet punk" generation: artists who took the DIY model created by punk music in the 1970s and 80s and reapplied it to fit the medium of puppetry. Growing up in Detroit, Erik was drawn to the energy of punk rock and had a desire to perform, but being a shy person who didn't play an instrument,



there was little outlet for that wish. When he saw his first shadow puppet show at a squatter community space in Philadelphia in 1998, something resonated with him.

"I really thought it was great. You didn't have to be an expert at it—just like anything in punk rock. You could just pick it up and cut up a bunch of stuff and move it around. You could strive to do well, but if you screwed up it was really no big deal. It was an easy way to enter into that realm of being a creative, vocal, political person."

In 1999 Erik moved to New Orleans where he performed shadow puppet stories at punk shows with fellow Michigander Shanna Owen. They called themselves the Puppetbaggers and their shows were surreal tirades about having sex with a raven and zombies plummeting to earth from another dimension. The Puppetbaggers got all their quirky friends in on the act, utilizing everyone's eclectic talents.

"We put my friend James in this van and jacked him up on coffee to record him telling the zombie story, then slowed down the recording and layered in all these sound effects. Our friend Don manipulated the tape during our show to create a 'Zombie Slow-Jam' with funky hiphop beats. It was really great."

Erik's political bent popped out when he returned to Detroit in 2001 and started a project called Rust & Riot with puppeteer Bee Young, backed by musicians playing violin, cello, guitar, banjo, drums and saxophone. Their shows offered a people's history of Detroit: stories about Martin Luther King, the 1943 and 1967 race riots, as well as Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. (Julie Taymor's film *Frida* relocated these artists' Detroit period to Manhattan—a detail that Erik begrudges.) One show told of a doctor named Ossian



Sweet, the first African-American to move into a white neighborhood in Detroit. Erik explains, "His house was surrounded by a mob and someone from the house shot into the crowd and killed someone. The judge charged everyone in the house with murder." Rust & Riot's goal was to tell a lesser-known history of a place and its people, but all of the stories had sad outcomes.

Like many radical shadow puppeteers, Erik drew inspiration from printmakers like Franz Masereel, Kathe Kolwicz, Elizabeth Catlett, Ernst Kirchner, and Bread & Puppet founder Peter Schumann. In 2002 Erik made the pilgrimage up to Vermont to intern with Bread & Puppet whose style differed greatly from what Erik had been making—it moved slowly and with graceful majesty. "B&P uses iconography more than characters," says Erik, "theater of symbolism that reclaims religious icons and makes non-religious things holy." Bread & Puppet's paper mâché giants floating across fields and through forests affected Erik's ideas. "Imparting movement to the objects of everyday life—doors, windows, chairs—it made me think about the city that I live in. How would I move that? How do I interact with it? Buildings and cities and streets are very much a character in my work. I've always been intrigued by the idea of moving while standing still—like standing on a freeway overpass and watching all the cars rush by, or when you're biking around and your mind moves independently of your feet as they pedal."

One story that Erik keeps coming back to is Bertolt Brecht's "The Ballad of Pirate Jenny" (possibly written by Elisabeth Hauptmann

who was romantically involved with Brecht). To date, Erik has made five different Pirate Jenny shows, and Jenny is the central theme of his otherwise wordless shadow play *Seams Like*, a collaboration with the Minneapolis music duo Dreamland Faces. *Seams Like's* images happen on a triptych of scrims starting with mountainous landscapes that fall away to reveal neighborhoods, which dissolve to show the interiors of people's homes until nothing remains but a solitary billboard posing a simple question: "Lonely?" The pumping of an accordion ushers in a detailed cutout of a tavern as an intricate little Jenny scrubs the wooden floor. Projections of pirate ships inspire Jenny's transformation from hapless servant to vengeful buccaneer who commands her ghastly crew to burn the town to the ground and spare no one. The ship sails away, and spray-painted landscapes shift from ocean to mountains, shattered glass to forest, and then arrives in a sea of faces. *Seams Like's* final vignette compiles side-by-side images that zoom the viewer in and out of perspective: a figure stands on the cracked pavement. Suddenly we're looking at lines in someone's hand.

Erik explains this as "revelation as rupture—the thought that you knew what something was, now you realize you don't, and that revelation is something that could potentially kill you. In "Pirate Jenny," this person people spit on turns out to have a lot more power than they thought. We make a lot of assumptions about the world. When we discover that it's not how we thought it was, that can be a potentially liberating or potentially dangerous place to be in."

Most of Erik Ruin's earlier work was tiny—*Seams Like's* screens measured 2'x2' and the puppets' faces were impossible to see from the back row at Pittsburgh's Black Sheep Puppet Festival. As a touring artist who either packs his show on a bicycle, in a suitcase conforming to Amtrak's luggage limits, or stuffed on top of some band's equipment in a tour van, his puppets can't be big. "Portability," he says, "but also intimacy. On tour I'm always reminding people, 'Please get up really close—really be in it and feel involved in it.'"

Erik's first foray into large-scale work came in 2007. Minnesota Public Radio commissioned him to make and perform a series of shadow sequences for *Faeries, Dogs & Fighting Men*, a St. Patrick's Day performance at St. Paul's Fitzgerald Theater. Erik enlarged his customary tiny puppets via OHP for an audience of 1,000 people—a far cry from what he was accustomed to. For Erik, the show was great, but he yearned for intimacy. "When I can feel that live connection to the audience, I have this real link with them. We're all in this dark room together. I know they're there and they know that I'm here, saying something through the medium of my work. There's something special about that."

Erik's recent performances are boundless in their experimentation. Sometimes he plays as a non-musical band member with groups of improvising musicians, creating abstract light shows using multiple projectors laden with leftover cutouts of paper and acetate—a testing ground for more firmly narrative work. In creating images for Reid Books' 2007 rock opera *The Nothing Factory*, Erik framed his shadow scenes inside Victorian windowpanes, loaded slide carousels with altered vacation photos, and erected a life-sized toy theater scene onstage while scrolling multiple OHP cranky sequences to relate a dystopic tale of a world where everybody desires everything, and so a factory is created that manufactures nothingness.



Perhaps Erik's finest work to date is a piece called *Flight*, based on the stories of African refugees and set to a chilling live score by violinist/vocalist Katt Hernandez. *Flight's* silhouette protagonist is sent on a vivid and horrendous journey plagued by arson, military juntas, boy-eating lions, and epic treks across deserts and oceans. Why would anyone want to look at this? The answer is in Erik's art: viewing it and seeing the labor that went into every tiny hand-cut diamond of chain-link fence is enough to make an audience drool. He has mastered the art of transforming misery into passion in his vision for a better humanity.

"Lately I've been wanting to give people some sense of possibility through puppetry," he says. "To make things that are more nuanced and less dogmatic—not necessarily a sense of being always uplifted, but not of being crushed, at the very least."

Flight, *The Nothing Factory* and another Reid Books/Erik Ruin collaboration called *Conspiracies of Reality* are the first three releases on Erik and Reid's new publishing project, Desperate Commodities. Each title features a handmade package with a silkscreened cover, a booklet containing the story's text and art, plus a CD of the music from the performance. It has always been difficult for puppeteers to capture the essence of a live show and make it available to those who cannot be there to see it. Erik and Reid's label is a valiant effort to remedy this through their mission to juxtapose images, words and sounds.

"My goal is to make something beautiful. Even if we're going to talk about sad things—the doom and gloom and bare facts of existence, which are pretty ugly at times—I want beauty in it and I want people to be able to see that. There's so much beauty left in the world. That's something that I want to come through."

Erik Ruin's work can be seen at
www.justseeds.org and
www.puppetuprising.org

Morgan FitzPatrick Andrews creates puppet art in Philadelphia (see page 29) and is featured in *Puppetry International* #25: 40 Under 40.

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Out of the shadows:

Ilya and Arseny Epelbaum in Moscow

by John Freedman

It is hard to believe that no shadow theater existed in Moscow before Ilya Epelbaum emerged on the scene in the mid-1990s. On the other hand, now that Ilya and his son Arseny have become recognized as the shadow masters of Russian theater, it surely seems as though it must have been that way.

Where would the shadows have been before Ilya and his wife Maya Krasnopolskaya founded their "family theater," the Ten', or Shadow, Theater in their apartment in 1987? Lighting designers have always known the value of a well-placed shadow, of course. In Russia, Yefim Udler knew no equals. But the extraordinary shadows and light concocted by Udler rarely had an independent function, their primary purpose being to evoke atmosphere and emotional shading. Naturally there were discrete shadow elements in the work at the Obraztsov Puppet Theater, decades ago one of the most influential puppet theaters in the world. But as the old adage has it, the exception proves the rule: the fact is that shadows were exclusively relegated to the realm of puppet theaters. It was a specialization limited to the confines of a specialized form of theatrical art.

Ilya Epelbaum changed that.

In the late 1980s Epelbaum was a professional design artist in his mid-20s with an itch to do something different. His wife Maya was a professional puppeteer. One thing led to another and, as two babies came into the picture, a daughter and then a son, the couple resolved to do the unthinkable – they decided to create their own theater. This was the Perestroika era, and the impulse was not unusual. For the first time in eight decades, Russians regained the right to open a theater without state intrusion or support. In an interview conducted in 2002, 11 years after the Ten' had received official status as a municipal theater, Ilya told me what he and Maya had in mind.



FOREIGN WINDOWS. SHADOW DESIGN BY ARSENY EPELBAUM

"A shadow theater seemed closest to what an artist does on paper," Ilya explained. "But I have no education in theater and we couldn't hold to the genre for long. I think what best describes us is 'visual theater.' Mine is the theater of an artist who begins with visual images and then adds literature, music and other things."¹

The works that established the Ten' Theater as an important Moscow venue were *The Tour of the Lilikan Grand Royal Theater in Russia* (1996) and *P.I. Tchaikovsky, Swan Lake, The Opera* (1998).

The first was a total-environment work in which spectators entered a world created by Epelbaum and Krasnopolskaya. The show's "performers" belonged to the fictitious Lilikan nation, a name created from the Russian words for "midget" (*liliput*) and "giant" (*velikan*). These people were ostensibly so tiny that when the Lilikan Grand Royal Theater went on tour, it took its entire physical plant with it, including, purportedly, the 2,000 Lilikan spectators who always kept their theater filled to the rafters. This and a myriad of other amusing details were narrated to us by the charming and ever-ironic Krasnopolskaya as if she were conducting an excursion through a museum. Spectators were led into a space that Ilya had constructed with elaborate chandeliers, tiny art works displayed on the walls, a cafeteria serving thumb-nail open-faced sandwiches, a bank to change rubles into the minuscule local currency of lils, a quartet of hand-painted, scrolling "video" screens on the walls, an actual moving puppet orchestra led by a wild-haired conductor and much more. The production of the touring Lilikan theater – an allegedly ancient folk epos titled *Two Trees* – was a frenetically-paced puppet show featuring one-inch puppets on the end of sticks. As funny and entertaining as it was, it was anti-climactic to the entire experience. The immersion of the audience into the world of the Lilikans took nearly 45 minutes; *Two Trees* clocked in at about fifteen.

Swan Lake, another grand ruse, began with a party in a foyer catered and hosted by Krasnopolskaya. It then transformed into a street theater scene – still in the foyer – with fire and tumbling actors who eventually led everyone into a hall where the remainder of the performance took place in traditional surroundings – actors on stage, spectators in their seats. But there was nothing traditional about this inventive work.



FROM THE RED BOOK OF EXTINCTION

The cast consisted of live actors, puppets, shadows and, most magically, images revealed in the ashes of burning paper or sketched by Epelbaum in real time in wax at the bottom of a shallow pan of water and projected onto a screen.

In this tall tale, the creators claimed to have discovered a lost score by Tchaikovsky, indicating that his first draft of *Swan Lake* was an opera. The production at the Ten Theater, then, was billed as the world premiere of the great composer's unknown work. That may not have fooled many, but I have yet to meet anyone who failed to be charmed by this multi-media spoof of everything theatrical. Arguably, it was *Swan Lake* that established Epelbaum as the go-to man for anyone wishing to incorporate shadows into their works. More importantly, it was probably *Swan Lake* and *Lilikan Grand Royal Theater* together that encouraged theater makers to think outside the box and employ unorthodox visual elements in their work.

Epelbaum and Krasnopolskaya further encouraged this notion in the 2000s by establishing a series of miniatures called *The Lilikan Museum of Theatrical Ideas*. These were productions that the husband and wife created in tandem with famous performers, directors and writers. All ran approximately 15 minutes and were performed inside an exquisitely detailed, scale model of a real opera house replete with 2,000 spectators, balconies, an orchestra pit and ornate windows through which real spectators watched the action.

The legendary theater director Anatoly Vasilyev was invited to stage a brief, but hilarious and incendiary version of Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, in which the director had a puppet spectator hurled from the balcony to his death before having the entire theater burned down, using clever lighting and shimmering plastic sheets, of course. Tonino Guerra, Fellini and Antonioni's collaborator and script-writer, created an astonishing apocalyptic piece called *Rain after the Flood*, in which many of the world's major cities were inundated by water before the theater itself was drowned, literally using smoke and mirrors. The world-class Bolshoi Ballet soloist Nikolai Tsiskaridze actually danced pirouettes in a show called *The Death of Polyphemus* – his leg and foot were just able to fit down onto the miniature stage of the scale model theater.

By this time Epelbaum was being invited to ply his trade elsewhere. When the composer Alexander Bakshi conceived the idea for an adventurous, essentially wordless production called *From the Red Book of Extinction* (2003), he enlisted Epelbaum as co-creator. Working on stage with a video camera, an overhead projector, and a palette of watercolors, Epelbaum created an ever-evolving environment projected on huge drops behind the players. One of the most moving moments in this work about people and cultural phenomena being pushed to the edge of extinction in the modern world was a scene of a live ballerina dancing in silence as Epelbaum appeared to paint her into a cage. Slowly but surely, his brushstrokes projected on the wall behind the performer trapped her in a corner then blacked her out altogether.

Working at the renowned Sovremennik Theater in 2004, Epelbaum created numerous shadow scenes for Valery Fokin's dramatization of Nikolai Gogol's *The Overcoat*, the story of the impoverished clerk Bashmachkin who is obsessed with the idea of obtaining a new overcoat. In the prologue of this one-actor show, Epelbaum created a hypnotic, silent snowstorm, both hinting at the setting in wintry St. Petersburg, as well as tipping the spectator off to the sensation of isolation that never abandons the unfortunate clerk. In fact, the weather of this show – rain, floods, snow and ice – was rendered exclusively in shadows. Epelbaum's shadow creations also gave expression to several of Bashmachkin's dream images, among them an undulating sewing machine that is in the process of making the fateful new overcoat.

But it was a scene of nighttime violence in which, for a few moments, Epelbaum's shadows became the primary players. Against the spectral background of an ominous St. Petersburg skyline, a shadowy group of thugs chaotically swept across the back screen appearing to attack the actor playing Bashmachkin and make off with his prized possession. All of this was created by backlit actors performing behind a screen.

Arseny Epelbaum could not possibly have escaped the influence of his parents' theater even if he had wished to. He was literally born, raised and educated there. Although he never performed in any of the shows – he claims his parents were too serious about their work to allow that – he was eternally in the midst of everything as it was being conceived and created. By the time he was

14 he knew he wanted to study theater professionally and applied to the Moscow Art Theater school. Not accepted because of his age, he was able the following year to enter the Russian Academy of Theater Arts. He graduated in 2007 at the tender age of 19.

While still a student at the institute, Arseny found his way into the company of Dmitry Krymov, one of the most important and innovative directors to emerge in Moscow in the 2000s.² As he tells it, he was sitting in on rehearsals of Krymov's *Sir Vantes*, *Donkey Hot* in 2005 when a discussion arose about shadow figures. Arseny offered his services, but Krymov didn't take the unknown 17 year-old seriously. Later, however, when the scene still hadn't gelled, Krymov was encouraged by his actors to bring the youth back. According to Arseny, the students said, "He's the son of that guy from the Ten' Theater," and that apparently was enough to convince Krymov to make the call.³ Epelbaum, Jr. ended up creating shadows for and performing in several of Krymov's productions over the next few years.

Apart from his work on *Donkey Hot*, Arseny mounted detailed shadow scenes for Krymov's dramatization of Andrei Platonov's story *The Cow* (2007) at the School of Dramatic Art. He also performed in Krymov's production of *The Demon*, *The View from Above* (2006), and for Krymov's studio he directed a delightfully tongue-in-cheek show called *Optimus Mundus* (2007), in which 12 spectators, broken into groups of four, chased four actors from place to place, watching scenes unfold from the deconstructed works of Shakespeare and Alexander Pushkin.

If the delicate and beautiful images created for *Donkey Hot* were relatively traditional – images of humans working puppets behind a screen – those devised for *The Cow* were more sophisticated. They included a segment in which an individual takes apart a train in order to rebuild it as a rocket, and a full-length scene of a man's earliest erotic memories. Here, as the man thinks back to his childhood, his memories of stirring adolescent sexuality and the love he had for his family cow commingle in a single knot of sensations that are expressed in the form of a woman's silhouette undressing and dressing again one night.

Other shows for which Epelbaum, Jr. has created shadow scenes include Alexander Ogaryov's staging of Alexander Chugunov's *Libido* (2006) and Alexei Burykin's staging of his own play *Foreign Windows* (2009). This latter work contains some of the most advanced shadow work the young artist has created to date. Burykin's mystical play about four people meeting before and after they are born is performed in a generally empty space. Epelbaum created elaborate and dynamic shadow backdrops that place different moments of action in, among other places, a leafy park, an urban riverside, a street with a tram moving down its tracks, a traffic-jammed thoroughfare and an interior with a rain-washed window. Projected at a sharp angle onto the stage's back wall through a door at stage right, the images were visibly distorted, giving them a sense of life and movement, as well as accentuating the otherworldliness that was an important part of Burykin's play.

At present Ilya, Maya and Arseny are working together for the first time on a new production of *The Blue Bird*. The plan is to build a long corridor with walls made of film screens, through which spectators will walk, as shadows and film images from Maeterlinck's play surround them on two sides. If that sounds like something you have never seen, you are beginning to get a picture of what the Epelbaums consider a normal day's work.



ILYA EPELBAUM, JR. FROM THE RED BOOK OF EXTINCTION

Endnotes

¹ Quoted in John Freedman, "Total Theater, Starring Puppets," *New York Times* (March 31, 2002); available online at: www.nytimes.com/2002/03/31/theater/theater-total-theater-starring-puppets.html.

² For more on the Krymov studio, see John Freedman, "Dmitry Krymov: Designer's Theatre," *TheatreForum* No. 32 (2008): 13-18.

³ Quoted in John Freedman, "In the Family," *The Moscow Times* (August 8, 2008).

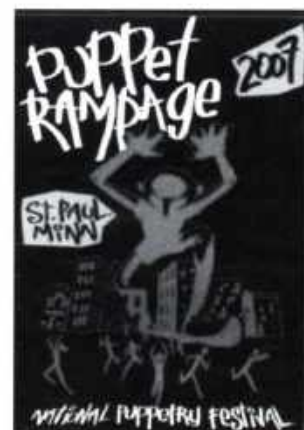
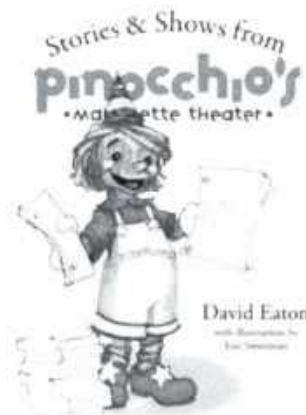
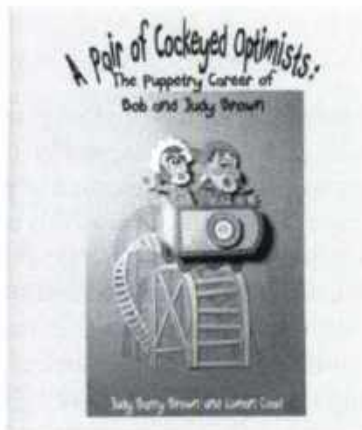
John Freedman is the theater critic of *The Moscow Times* and co-author, with Kama Ginkas, of *Provoking Theater: Kama Ginkas Directs*. His voice plays the lead role in *The Epic of Lillikan*, the latest show to open at Moscow's Ten' Theater.

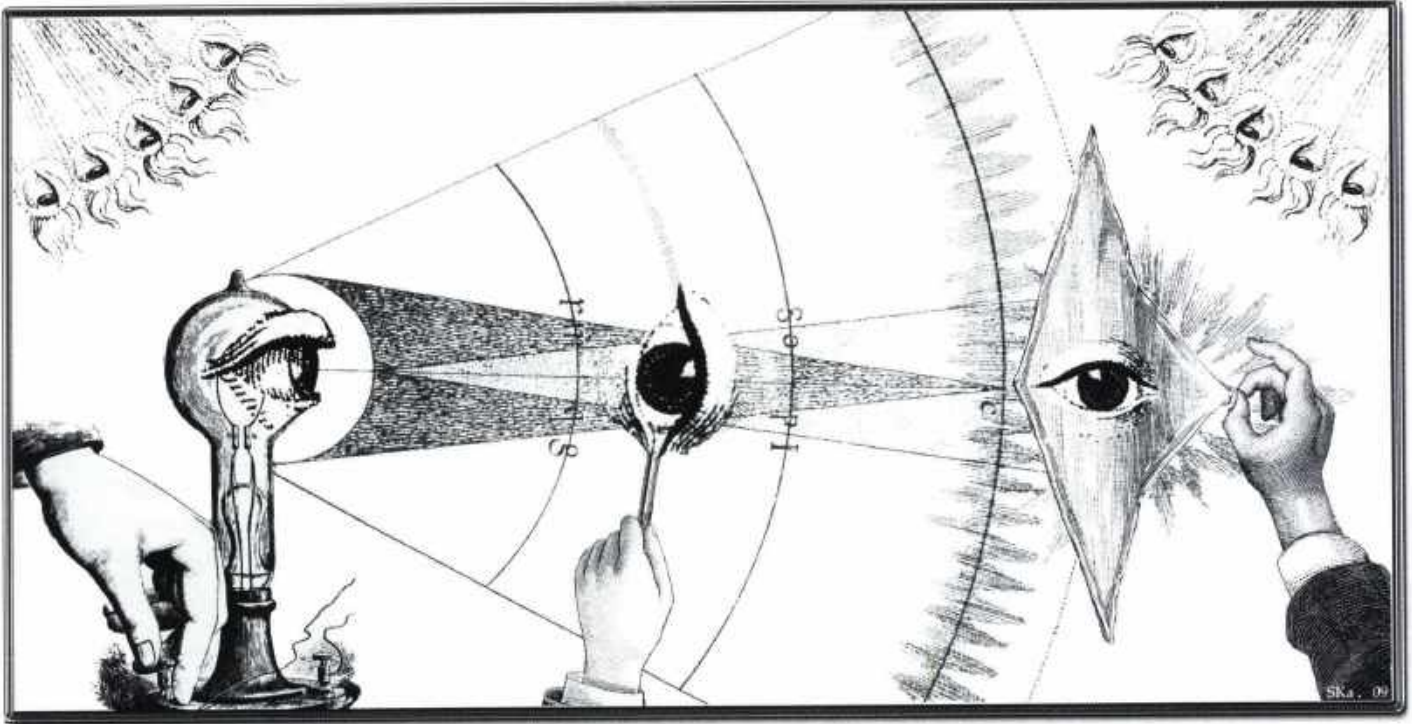
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The Eye of Light - Playing in the Shadows

by Stephen Kaplin

The Light of Creation

In the beginning (according to Biblical sources) there was Light, emanating from the very first creative utterance of the Divine architect. This radiance percolated down from the highest planes of existence, illuminating the entire newborn Universe even before sun and stars had been created. In the *Zohar* ("The Book of Splendor," a 13th century Jewish Kabbalist treatise,) there is a compelling description of the emergence of this primal Light into the realm of the physical:

... Within the most hidden recess a dark flame issued from the mystery of *Eyn Sof* ["without end"], the Infinite, like a fog forming in the unformed—enclosed in the ring of that sphere, neither white nor black, neither red nor green, of no color whatever. Only after this flame began to assume size and dimension did it produce radiant colors. From the innermost center of the flame sprang forth a well out of which colors issued and spread upon everything beneath, hidden in the mysterious hiddenness of *Eyn Sof*... It could not be recognized at all until a hidden supernal point shone forth under the impact of the final breaking through.¹

10⁻⁴⁷ seconds after the Big Bang (according to contemporary cosmologists) an unimaginably fierce, roiling pinpoint of energy sprang into existence out of the emptiness of No-Space/No-Time. Expanding explosively in ten or eleven dimensions (depending on who's counting) the unified forces of Space/Time/Gravity split apart and unfurled to fill an area the size of the solar system in less than a second—an unbelievably dense and burning ball of plasma, hotter than the interior of a star. During this period, Space itself glowed brilliantly in every direction and from every point, so that not a trace of shadow existed from one end of the Universe to the other. Thousands of years of expansion passed before the newborn cosmos had cooled enough so that hyper-energized quarks could begin to link up and congeal into hydrogen atoms. As eons passed, the omni-directional radiation gradually simmered down to the velvety blackness of near-vacuum and the production of light photons became localized into the massive clumps of hydrogen and helium, that became the first stars. Yet even today, billions of years after the fact, the energy imprint emanating from those first fiery moments of cosmo-genesis still reverberates throughout the Universe as a faint background hum of radiation that can be detected by our most sensitive radio-telescopic instruments.

In truth, there is not a whole lot which mystics and scientists can agree upon. But these two accounts of the first moments of Creation seem to concur that the Universe and all it contains is a composition of various sub-frequencies and textures of Light. This awesome energy force (constituting the living fabric of the Divine garment, or excitable photons traveling at 186,000 miles per second, depending on your belief set) has been stepped down many, many octaves before ever reaching the opaque confines of our particular neighborhood of the Space/Time continuum and registering on our feeble eyes. In this straightened manner, the once-pure Cosmic Light trickles into the mouth of the dense, material caves where we, Plato's prisoners, are chained, no doubt watching dim re-runs of the greater reality-show.

Given its primacy in the very fabric of the physical universe, it is perfectly logical for both mystics and puppeteers to make use of Light (and its antonymic, Shadow) as a metaphor for human existence. The shadow puppet figure itself is a kind of bridge between the world of disembodied spirits and the physical world that we inhabit in our hard, opaque bodies. It performs a text that is actually a dance of the naked, translucent parchment skin—a skin that has not yet been tattooed and pinned down with letters, words and verses that subsequently freeze into sheets of written scriptural canon. Shadow puppets are a kind of living hieroglyph, not etched into stone or punched onto clay, but spun out of Light and imbued with breath and motion. In the words of the 12th Century Persian Poet, Omar Khayyam:

Heav'n but the Vision of fulfilled Desire,
And Hell the Shadow from a Soul on fire,
Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire.

We are no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with the Sun-illuminated Lantern held
In Midnight by the Master of the Show.²

The connection of Shadow performance to spiritual discourse is quite evident in the oldest surviving genres of Asian shadow performance: the "tolu bomalata" from southern India; the Thai "nang-yi"; the Indonesian "wayang kulit." These genres are explicitly enmeshed in the transmission of sacred cultural material. But even the more secular Chinese shadow traditions have roots in both ancient shamanic rituals for communicating with the dead and in Buddhist religious traditions that spread up and down the Silk Road.

Fascinating stuff, no doubt, for Sufi poets, ethnologists, performance studies scholars and other students of the arcane. But there is another compelling reason to give serious attention to the art of shadow performance—something that goes to the essential nature of the craft of puppetry itself.

At its core, the art of puppetry consists of creatively bridging the gaps between performer, performing object and audience. Shadow puppetry factors in an additional element to this triadic equation—since it is not the object being manipulated by the puppeteer that is focus of the audience's attention, but the object's image as it appears projected out onto some surface or translucent plane. As the puppet figure is pulled away from the focal plane, the gap between the physical puppet and its shadow image widens. It is this gulf, where object and image first begin to wiggle free of each other's embrace, which defines the art of shadow puppetry. Thus while other genres of puppetry engage the tension of the animator/object duality, shadow puppetry plays upon the exponentially greater dynamic of the animator/object/image complex. The material substance out of which this dance between performing object and image is fabricated is a composite of ethereal light and its absence. No wonder then that the results are so remarkably malleable.

The image/object gap can be manipulated with the application of various mechanical filters, such as precisely curved arcs of smooth, polished glass. These refract and subtly twist the unfocused stream of light, before or after it passes through the object, into crisp, disciplined patterns that can then be projected a great distance onto any receptive flat screen or surface. Or the focused beams can be directed to fall onto photo-sensitive receptors inside the body of a camera and translated into an analog pattern or digital bit streams, making the image suitable for even wider dispersal. But while sophisticated technical mediation increases the distance in space and time that these patterns of light and motion can be transmitted, the essential principal of broadcasting live images is not much different than that employed by a Javanese dalang in a wayang kulit performance. There are however a number of important distinctions. Modern forms of electronic broadcasting—film, video and computer-generated media—require small armies of specialists and technicians to manufacture and operate the imaging and broadcasting equipment, create, perform and edit into shape the content, as well as producers and marketers to disseminate the resulting image-streams to its intended public. This entire industrial combine must be engaged (no striking unions, faulty transmission satellites, or unpaid cable bills) before any image flickers to life on a single screen.

In contrast, shadow puppetry maintains hands-on, physical contact between performer and object, as well as real-time, unmediated line of sight connections between object, image and audience. Though there may be a superficial resemblance between a shadow image and an animated film, shadow puppetry is a product of light flowing directly through and around the object directly to the focal plane, not the reflection of an object's image imprisoned by the curvature of a camera lens. Nevertheless, it can be said that shadow puppetry is the primal ancestor of all contemporary broadcast media, analog and digital.

The Architecture of Light and Shadow

Without the dead weight of a material body, a shadow projection has no physical limits in terms of scale. They can be made any size—inside a shoebox or a tent with a candle or flashlight, or projected onto the sides of buildings and bridges hundreds of feet tall with lasers or arc-light projectors. The only practical limitation to scale is the brightness of the light source. I can imagine in the not-too-far-off future, enormous disks of mist, generated by a hovering aircraft above New York City (assuming that it is still above sea level and habitable) serving as a pulsing, wavering surface upon which a stereoscopic image from several banks of ground-based laser projectors can toss a live shadow image a mile wide. It's not so far-fetched actually, since even now, it is possible to build lasers capable of bouncing focused beams of light off the moon and registering their echoes back on Earth. I think it is safe to say that, in terms of mega-shadow puppet performances of the future, the sky is the limit.

A stunning example of practical mega-light-and-shadow spectacle was on view not so long ago in Lower Manhattan. The *Pillars of Light* was a temporary installation placed at Ground Zero in the autumn of 2001 a month after 9/11. Technically, it was relatively simple, yet it was an emotionally moving and monumental construct (visible from 20 miles away) achieved with 88 parallel beams of intense light arrayed in two clusters outlining the footprints of the fallen buildings. Although the twin shafts of light did not move or “perform” in any way, they were in constant interplay with the landscape and the atmosphere above the city. During the month that they were activated, I often sat near our studio, across the East River from them, about a mile distant, and watched their beams dance across the various layers of scudding clouds. On rainy nights they formed a brilliant mushroom over the spindly skyscrapers; on clear nights the shaft of light arched straight up like an awesome finger pointing straight to Infinity. It was truly a masterful (and totally minimalist) aesthetic gesture.

Curiously, these *Pillars of Light* hearken back to the earliest reference to shadow puppetry in Chinese literature. Some two thousand years ago, an emperor of the Han Dynasty was mourning the death of his beloved concubine. His grief was such that he was no longer able to rule. His ministers were confounded and concerned that he might leave the State rudderless. Finally however, an old shaman was found who claimed he could summon back the soul of the emperor's beloved. He set up a silk tent in the palace and had the emperor take a seat in front. A flame was lit inside the tent and from out of its flickering light emerged the silhouette of the concubine. The emperor conversed with her and was consoled. Both the contemporary *Pillars of Light*, and the Han Dynasty shaman's ghostly manifestation were a similar type of illuminated séance. They both deftly illustrate one the most important social functions of the artist and the arts within the larger cultural context – to fill up the death-ridden voids left behind by History's wrecking ball.

There is no reason why contemporary shadow theater needs to lose its connection to the primal forces that imbue the ancient roots of the art form. Even though these archaic cultural layers have managed to come down to us in traditional shadow theater genres, they are more and more out of step with the flow of contemporary culture. But the digital artist providing motion imagery for a You-tube video upload and the dalang performing episodes of the *Mahabharata* all night in a Javanese village are really opposite poles of the same cultural continuum. It is necessary to reconnect the technician and the shaman once more in the service of fashioning an ephemeral architecture that can frame the aperture between spiritual and physical planes of existence.

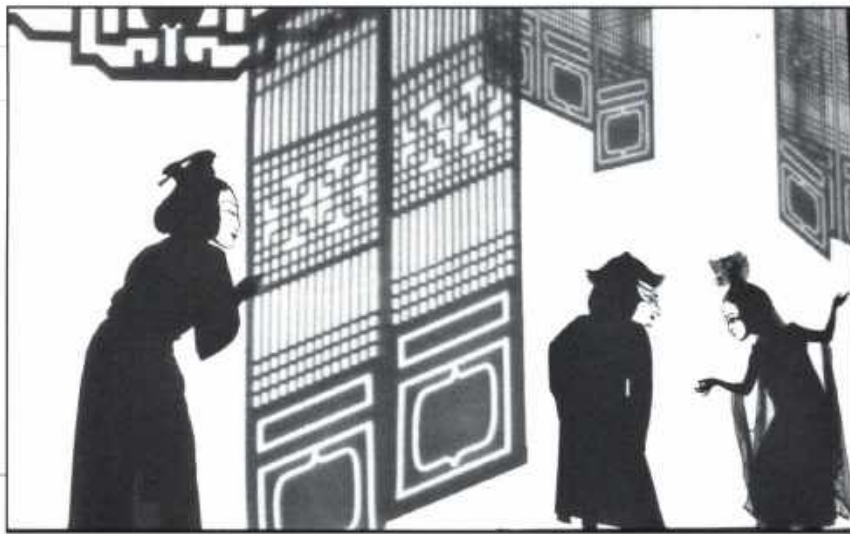
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- 1- Scholem, Gershom (translator and editor) – *Zohar—The Book of Splendor*. 1949 Schocken Books. Pg 27.
- 2- Khayyam, Omar – *The Rubaiyat*. Internet Classics Archive. Stanzas LXVII and LXVIII.
- 3- Bachelard, Gaston – *The Flame of a Candle* – translated from the French by Joni Caldwell. 1988 Dallas Institute Publications. Pg 22.

Stephen Kaplin is a founding member of NYC's Chinese Theatre Workshop and a frequent contributor to PI.

For the author's insights on the elements of shadow, light, figure and projection surface, go to:

www.unima-usa.org/publications



In Xanadu by Linda C. Ehrlich

A POEM INSPIRED BY *IN XANADU*, SHADOWLIGHT PRODUCTIONS

Lovers cast parallel shadows against the screen. Khubilai Khan and his consort Chabui, inseparable, until her untimely death. Shape-shifting shadow. Even the most powerful man on earth cannot command Death to relinquish its hold. The falcon, with the sun and the moon in its claws, enters the Kingdom of Death as a beggar, wrapped in a cloak of night.

*The Great Khan conquers mountains.
Forests of men fall at his feet,
the Great Khan.*

*The Great Khan is invincible,
and yet
before the Shadow Dancer,
Victory dissolves like mist departing
Wushan Mountain
with the rays of the sun.*

The Great Khan and his adoring consort.

*But the Shadow Dancer
spreads her wings
across the frost-filled plain
where no one enters
except on foot
alone
leaving his shadow behind.*

Linda C. Ehrlich, associate professor at Case Western Reserve University, has published poetry in *International Poetry Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Literary Arts Hawaii*, *Case Western Reserve Review*, *Tributaries*, and other literary journals.

For more information, visit:
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For another of Ehrlich's shadow poems:
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*I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.*

*The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow—
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;
For he sometimes shoots up taller like an India-rubber ball,
And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all.*

—Robert Louis Stevenson

Shadows of Magic

Shadowgraphy and Shadow Illusion

by Beth Kattelman

Shadowgraphy is the art of creating silhouettes of animals, humans and objects using primarily one's hands. This "allied art" of magic and puppetry became very popular in Europe during the nineteenth century when parlor entertainments were in vogue. At that time numerous books on home amusements were published, and these often contained instructions on how to create simple hand shadows and shadow plays. For example, *The Corner Cupboard—A Family Repository*, published in 1858, contains instructions on how to create hand shadows (Dawes 189), and Professor Lorento's 1878 volume *Amateur Amusements* contains entire chapters on how to stage shadow pantomimes and gallant shows at home. Victorian families, it seems, recognized the entertainment value of shadows, and the home shadow-show remained a favorite until the magic lantern-show eventually overtook it in popularity as a home entertainment (Reiniger 31). During the nineteenth century, shadow-play was not confined to the private parlor, however. Professional entertainers also began to present hand shadow shows, and books that described advanced techniques appeared. Henry Bursill, for example, published two well-known volumes that were useful for novices trying to learn shadowgraphy performance. By the end of the century, the art of creating hand shadows was so popular that some professional shadowgraphists were giving lessons (Dawes 189).

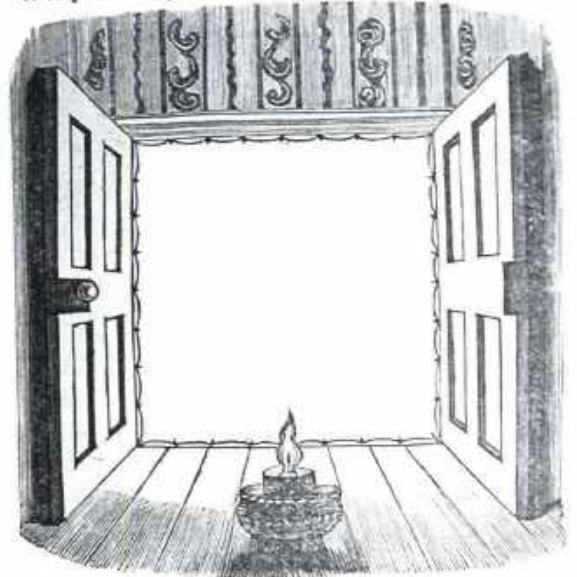
As an allied art, shadowgraphy has often been performed by magicians who would include a demonstration of the skill as part of a longer program of magic and conjuring. The dexterity required to ably perform sleight of hand was an asset that allowed many magicians to become accomplished shadowgraphists, and these practitioners of legerdemain were primarily responsible for presenting the art as a popular entertainment:

It has been mostly magicians who have kept hand shadows alive as an amusement allied to conjuring. . . . England's greatest magician of modern times, David Devant, was a hand shadowist. So was the American illusionist, Nikola, who wrote extensively on shadowgraphy and contributed much to its presentation. Holland's famous conjurer, Okito, brought American audiences some of the most artistic shadow showings that have been given in this country (Severn 57).

8

SHADOW PANTOMIMES.

it be desired to be very white, virgin wax dissolved in spirits of turpentine may be used.



The preceding diagram will give a very clear idea of the screen as it stands dividing the two apartments.

The Lamp:—This is managed by having a small tin cup made about the size of a breakfast cup, in the bottom of the inside of which a piece of twisted wire should be added, to hold some cotton to serve as a wick; round this there is to be put some tallow, that cut from candles is best, any other kind of waste fat is often impregnated with salt, which causes the wick to spit and splutter. The fat should be pressed down close all round leaving about a quarter of an inch or so of the cotton sticking up. On lighting this it will burn on, melting the tallow, until it becomes a sea of almost boiling grease. The cup should be placed in an earthenware pan or bowl, which latter ought to

A PAGE OF PROFESSOR LORENTO'S AMATEUR AMUSEMENTS
SHOWING HOW TO SET UP A SCREEN AND LIGHT SOURCE FOR THE
PRESENTATION OF SHADOW PANTOMIMES AT HOME.

While the art of shadowgraphy is less common among magicians and performers today, there are still a few who continue to perform this skill and who are keeping the art form alive for future generations.

In addition to including shadowgraphy displays in performance, magicians have also explored the theatrical values of shadows by using them to create illusions. One such popular stage illusion that had its genesis during the vaudeville era was the "The Shadow Box." Cyril Yettmah, English magician and master illusion-builder, is credited with the invention of the illusion some time during the early 1920s. He produced the effect for the great magician David Bamberg (Fu Manchu) who featured it in his *Chinese Wonder Show* (Orleans). The trick features an open-framed box covered on the top and the sides with translucent paper panels. To begin, the magician opens the front panel to show that the box is empty. Then, he/she takes a light and passes it entirely around the box, on both sides and the back. The audience can see the light

shining through the paper, thus demonstrating the translucency of the sides, top and back. No shadows are cast as the magician passes the light behind and on the sides of the box, reaffirming that it is indeed empty, and also indicating that there is nothing concealed behind the box. The magician then places the light inside the box and closes it, so that it is now lit from the interior. Very slowly, shadows begin to form on the front panel. The shadows make it appear as if something is materializing inside. The shadows continue to grow until they take the shape of a human figure. The person then suddenly breaks through the front paper panel of the box to emerge onstage. If well-performed and well-timed, the effect can be quite astonishing and beautiful.

Since its introduction, the Shadow Box has remained a staple of stage magic and has been performed by numerous magicians throughout the world. In his *Illusions of the 92* show, David Copperfield used the Shadow Box as his opening effect, wherein he made his entrance from a seemingly empty, translucent, antique elevator that was hoisted high above the stage (Lee 254). The illusion has also been performed by internationally renowned magicians The Pendragons and Juliana Chen. The trick has recently been updated by illusion designer Brian South, who has released a commercial version that replaces the white, translucent paper box with a white nylon camping tent. In this version, the person emerges by means of a breakaway front panel. Although the trappings of the shadow tent are different than the shadow box, the principles of both illusions are exactly the same and both versions are dependent upon the skillful creation of the shadows to aesthetically set up the illusion that a human being has been produced from "thin air."

The "Man Who Walks Away from His Shadow" is another standard illusion that has been performed by magicians throughout the world. Harry Blackstone unveiled the illusion at the first convention of the International Brotherhood of Magicians held in Kenton, Ohio, 1926. As a local newspaper reported, "In this latest illusion, Blackstone permits his shadow to be thrown on an ordinary window shade behind which is located a lamp. . . . [A]s Blackstone steps out of the range of light, the stage is darkened and the silhouette continues to stand clearly on the shade" (Robenalt 182). The illusion became a favorite and was eventually adopted by other magicians. Some added more shadow work to the presentation by performing shadow puppetry or shadowgraphy before actually stepping away and leaving their own silhouette on the screen. This illusion is not performed by magicians very often any more, however, because the technology used to create the effect is commonly known and is now commercially available as a children's toy. When first introduced, however, the "Man Who Walks Away from His Shadow" was extensively performed and was especially popular with magicians who presented midnight ghost shows.

A more recent, beautiful shadow illusion has been created by Teller, the silent half of the magic duo Penn and Teller. At the beginning of the illusion, a single rose in a vase sits in front of a white paper screen. The rose is brightly lit from the front so the audience can clearly see the silhouette of the flower and its leaves. Teller slowly approaches the screen with a knife and begins to cut the shadow of the rose. As he "cuts" the shadow, each corresponding leaf and petal of the real rose miraculously falls as well. Finally,



THE COVER OF THE HENRY BURSILL'S HAND SHADOWS TO BE THROWN UPON THE WALL, PUBLISHED IN 1859.

both the shadow rose and the real rose have been dismantled by Teller through his simply cutting away at the shadow. At the conclusion of the trick, Teller accidentally cuts himself on the knife and spreads bright red blood across the white screen, his blood creating a startling contrast to the clean and simple monochromatic shadow of the remaining rose stem.

The genesis for Teller's shadow effect came when he was about sixteen years old, but it wasn't until many years later that he actually settled upon the current form of the illusion:

I was sitting in my room late at night when I was about sixteen. I had lit a candle, and I was fascinated with Playschool blocks. So I built a tower of the blocks on my tabletop next to the candle. I noticed the shadow of the blocks on the wall. On an impulse, I reached over and touched the shadow... and at that same moment flicked the fingers against the tower of blocks. They clattered to the desktop and I got chills. I spent the next eleven years thinking about the idea off and on. For some reason, Playschool blocks didn't seem right for the stage. I built myself voodoo dolls and tried it with that... but the dolls looked mechanical. Somewhere around 1975... I hit on the notion of using the rose (Teller).

Teller's "Shadows" has provided a memorable moment of theatre for many who have seen it. Actor Jason Alexander admits, "The first time I saw Teller do the shadow illusion, I actually cried. There are moments when magic is so poetic that it just catches me." I too have had the pleasure of seeing Teller's "Shadows" live. It is truly an enchanting illusion.

Wherever there is light, there is shadow. Shadows are ubiquitous so it's not surprising that performers have found interesting ways to incorporate them into stage shows. From shadow puppetry to magical stage illusions, the interplay of light and dark has been a feature of entertainment for centuries; and as long as they continue to fascinate and intrigue, puppeteers and magicians will continue to use shadows to amaze and mystify their audiences.

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London's "Chinese Shades"

from "The Chinese Shades," in Henry Mayhew's
London Labour and the London Poor

introduced and edited by Dassia Posner



ALTHOUGH NO IMAGES ARE PROVIDED OF MAYHEW'S "CHINESE SHADES" PERFORMERS, THEY WOULD LIKELY HAVE PERFORMED IN A BOOTH SIMILAR TO THIS.

Henry Mayhew is known among puppeteers for having famously recorded the Punch and Judy text performed by a Punch professor known to posterity only as "Mayhew's man." Perhaps less known is that in Mayhew's 1851 *London Labour and the London Poor*, among the interviews with mouse-trap makers and fishmongers are records of performances by many different kinds of street performers, including peep show exhibitors, fantoccini men, and shadow puppeteers. Reproduced below are excerpts from "The Chinese Shades," a first-hand description of the conditions and conventions of shadow performances in the London streets.

Of special interest in this account are the abundant details the puppeteer provides about how the shows were performed and for whom. You will note, for example, that he uses a Punch and Judy booth with a shadow screen across the opening, that his puppets were jointed, that a swazzle was probably used for some of the voices, that candles provided the light source, and that child audiences were considered a nuisance unless they were in private homes.

One thing especially striking about Mayhew's interviews is that they seem to have been recorded verbatim. Mayhew states of his work:

It surely may be considered curious as being the first attempt to publish the history of a people, from the lips of the people themselves—giving a literal description of their labour, their earnings, their trials, and their sufferings, in their own “unvarnished” language....¹

I have thus retained Mayhew's original spelling and grammar. Whether or not Mayhew shaped his interviews in any way, they are a rare and invaluable source of information on these fascinating, highly ephemeral performances.

The Chinese Shades²

“The proper name of my exhibition,” said a showman of this class to me, “is *Lez Hombrés*, or the shades; that's the proper name for it.... We call it the Chinese galantee show, [...]

I should say, sir... it is about twenty-six years since the ombres first come out.... Thomas Paris was the first as come out with them. Then Jim Macklin, and Paul Herring the celebrated clown, and the best showman of Punch in the world for pantomime tricks—comic business, you know, but not for showing in a gentleman's house—was the next that ever come out in the streets with the Chinese galantee show.... He did it just equally the same as they do it now, in a Punch-and-Judy frame, with a piece of calico stretched in front, and a light behind to throw the shadows on the sheet. [...]

I was the first that ever had a regular piece acted in his show.... I am the author of “Cobbler Jobson,” and “Kitty biling the Pot, or the Woodchopper's Frolic.” There's “Billy Button's journey to Brentford on horseback, and his favorite servant, Jeremiah Sticheem, in want of a situation.” I'm the author of that, too. It's adapted from the equestrian piece brought out at Astley's, I don't know who composed “the Broken Bridge.” It's too far gone by to trace who the first author is, but it was adapted from the piece brought out formerly at Drury-lane Theatre. [...]

We in general goes out about 7 o'clock, because we gets away from the noisy children—they place them to bed, and we gets respectable audiences.... There's only two of us about now, for it's dying away. When I've a mind to show I can show, and no mistake, for I'm better now than I was twenty years ago.

“Kitty biling the Pot, or the Woodchopper's Frolic,” is this. The shadow of the fireplace is seen with the fire alight, and the smoke is made to go up by mechanism. The woodchopper comes in very hungry and wants his supper. He calls his wife to ask if the leg of mutton is done. He speaks in a gruff voice.

He says, “My wife is very lazy, and I don't think my supper's done. I've been chopping wood all the days of my life, and I want a bullock's head and a sack of potatoes.” The wife comes to him and speaks in a squeaking voice, and she tells him to go and chop some more wood, and in half-an-hour it will be ready. Exaunt. Then the wife calls the daughter Kitty, and tells her to see that the pot don't boil over; and above all to be sure and



OMBRES CHINOISES FROM GÜNTER BÖHMER'S "PUPPENTHEATER"

see that the cat don't steal the mutton out of the pot. Kitty says, “Yes, mother, I'll take particular care that the mutton don't steal the cat out of the pot.” Cross-questions, you see—comic business. Then mother says, “Kitty, bring up the broom to sweep up the room,” and Kitty replies, “Yes, mummy, I'll bring up the room to sweep up the broom.” Exaunt again. It's regular stage business and cross-questions. She brings up the broom, and the cat's introduced whilst she is sweeping. The cat goes Meaw! meaw! and Kitty gives it a crack with the broom. Then Kitty gets the bellows and blows up the fire. It's a beautiful representation, for you see her working the bellows, and the fire get up, and the sparks fly up the chimney. She says, “If I don't make haste the mutton will be sure to steal the cat out of the pot.” She blows the fire right out, and says, “Why, the fire's blowed the bellows out! but I don't mind, I shall go and play at shuttlecock.” Child like, you see. Then the cat comes in again, and says, Meaw! meaw! and then gets up and steals the mutton. You see her drag it out by the claw, and she burns herself and goes, spit! spit! Then the mother comes in and sees the fire out, and says, “Where my daughter? Here's the fire out, and my husband's coming home, and there isn't a bit of mutton to eat!” She calls “Kitty, Kitty!” and when she comes, asks where she's been. “I've been playing at shuttlecock.” The mother asks, “Are you sure the cat hasn't stolen the mutton.” “Oh, no, no, mother,” and exaunt again. Then the mother goes to the pot. She's represented with a squint, so she has one eye up the chimney and another in the pot. She calls out, “Where's the mutton? It must be down at the bottom, or it

has boiled away." Then the child comes in and says, "Oh! mother, mother, here's a great he-she-tom cat been and gone off with the mutton." Then the mother falls down, and calls out, "I shall faint, I shall faint! Oh! bring me a pail of gin." Then she revives, and goes and looks in the pot again. It's regular stage business, and if it was only done on a large scale would be wonderful. Then comes the correction scene. Kitty comes to her, and her mother says, "Where have you been?" and Kitty says, "Playing at shuttlecock, mummy;" and then the mother says, "I'll give you some shuttlecock with the gridiron," and exaunt, and comes back with the gridiron; and then you see her with the child on her knee correcting of her. Then the woodchopper comes in and wants his supper, after chopping wood all the days of his life. "Where's supper?" "Oh, a nasty big he-she-tom cat has been and stole the mutton out of the pot." "What?" "passionate directly, you see. Then she says, "You must put up with bread and cheese." He answers, "That don't suit some people." and then comes a fight. Then Spring-heeled Jack is introduced, and he carries off the fireplace and pot and all. Exaunt. That's the end of the piece, and a very good one it was. I took it from Paris, and improved on it. Paris had no workable figures. It was very inferior. He had no fire. It's a dangerous concern the fire is, for it's done with a little bit of the snuff of a candle, and if you don't mind you go alight. [...]

Our exhibition generally begins with a sailor doing a hornpipe, and then the tightrope dancing, and after that the Scotch hornpipe dancing. The little figures regularly move their legs as if dancing, the same as on the stage, only it's more cleverer, for they're made to do it by ingenuity. Then comes the piece called "Cobbler Jobson." ...I am in front, doing the speaking and playing the music on the pandanean pipe.... I have to do the dialogue in four different voices. There is the child, the woman, the countryman, and myself, and there's not many as can do it besides me and another. [...]

We go out two men together, one to play the pipes and speak the parts, and the other to work the figures. I always do the speaking and the music, for that's what is the most particular. When we do a full performance, such as at juvenile parties, it takes one about one hour and a quarter. For attending parties we generally gets a pound, and, perhaps, we may get three or four during the Christmas holiday-time, or perhaps a dozen, for it's according to the recommendation from one to another. [...]

When we are performing of an evening, the boys and children will annoy us awful. They follow us so that we are obliged to go miles to get away from them. They will have the best places; they give each other raps on the head if they don't get out of each other's way. I'm obliged to get fighting myself, and give it them with the drumsticks.... Quietness is everything; they haven't the sense to know that. If they give us any money it's very trifling, only, perhaps, a farden or a halfpenny, and then it's only one out of a fifty or a hundred. The great business is to keep them quiet. No; girls ain't better behaved than boys; they was much wus. I'd sooner have fifty boys round me than four girls. The impertinence of them is above bearing. They come carrying babies, and pushing, and crowding, and tearing one another to pieces. "You're afore me—I was fust—No you wasn't—Yes I was"—and that's the way they go on. [...]

The higher class of society is those who give us the most money. The working man is good for his penny or halfpenny, but the higher class supports the exhibition. [...]

When we are out performing, we in generally burn three candles at once behind the curtain. One is of no utility, for it wants expansion, don't you see. I don't like naphtha or oil-lamps, 'cos we're confined there, and it's very unhealthy. It's very warm as it is, and you must have a eye like a hawk to watch it, or it won't throw the shadows. A brilliant light and a clean sheet is a great attraction, and it's the attraction is everything. In the course of the evening we'll burn six penny candles; we generally use the patent one, 'cos it throws a clear light. We cut them in half. When we use the others I have to keep a look-out, and tell my mate to snuff the candles when the shadows get dim. I usually say, "snuff the candles!" out loud, because that's a word for the outside and the inside too, 'cos it let the company know it isn't all over, and leads them to expect another scene or two.

Notes:

¹ Henry Mayhew, Preface to Vol. I, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work*, 4 vols. London: Griffin, Bohn and Company, Stationer's Hall Court, 1851, 1862. Citation from the Perseus Digital Library edition: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2000.01.0026>. Perseus Digital Library Project. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. <www.perseus.tufts.edu>. Accessed July 31, 2009.

² Mayhew, "The Chinese Shades." *London Labour and the London Poor*. Vol. 3. *The London Street-Folk; Comprising. Street Sellers. Street Buyers. Street Finders. Street Performers. Street Artizans. Street Labourers*. Citations (and full text available) from the Tufts University Digital Library edition: <http://hdl.handle.net/10427/15186>. Accessed July 31, 2009.



LIGHT

by Kate Brehm

Images...**Shadow Puppetry...****When did I start using video?**

And why? What I've always enjoyed about puppetry is the heavily handmade quality of it all. The anti-computer-generated-ness of it. And yet, I have found myself, in the guise of a puppet show, surrounded by video camera, computer projector, a swarm of cables, and other technological effects. My video work, though technological, and requiring a wee bit of expertise, is not particularly computer-generated.



puppets and create secret entrances. For instance, in my puppet show, *Pig and Pepper* (Chapter 6 from *Alice in Wonderland*), I used Xeroxed drawings from the original book as puppets. It was lovely to make the Alice puppet "zoom in" by pulling her close to the camera as she engaged in her internal monologue. The Cheshire Cat appeared multiple times through invisible slits in the background paper. And I included my

hand as a "character" that wrote live on the "stage" with a magic marker at inopportune moments.

I became interested in video when I worked at a computer research lab in their equipment room. So many toys! I wanted to learn how to use them all. But being from a live theater and puppet background, I only wanted to use them in real time and in a way where the audience could get in on the fun. I'm not a magician; I want my audience to see how my illusions are created, but revel in them despite that knowledge.

I like to set up this mass of cables, equipment, and puppets in a small area on the floor. In the middle of it all, I cannot see the projection of my puppets behind me. Instead I face the audience. For them I perform the action of making magic, and I perform the struggle to keep the illusion running smoothly behind me.

My most successful video experiment mimics the use of an overhead projector to create shadow puppets. I hang a video camera and a light pointed directly down over a small box. I connect the camera to my computer, through some software, and out to a computer projector. This works almost exactly like an overhead projector except I get a few different effects: 1) I don't need to rely solely on clear acetate for color; 2) I get the awesome effect of zooming in!; and 3) I can use opaque layers to hide

Although I occasionally use simple video effects, like a still image overlaid with the live video, the puppetry retains a very handmade quality. For lack of a better term, I'd say my video work with light and images remains very... "puppetry."

Kate Brehm lives in New York City. She was featured in *Puppetry International* #25: 40 Under 40.

Dancing into the Heart of Darkness: Modern Variations and Innovations of the - Shadow Theatre

by Kevin Brown

In most of the countries in Southeast Asia, shadow theatre is a traditional, rural form of entertainment. In the big cities, Western forms of media entertainment like movies or television have, for the most part, taken the place of traditional art forms. In contrast, the traditional shadow theatre of Thailand, the *nang*, has been transformed into a new form of popular entertainment. Another distinctive aspect of Thai shadow theatre is that there are two traditional forms of shadow play. This is very unlike the majority of countries in Southeast Asia that practice one form of shadow theatre in each country. In Thailand, the oldest form of shadow theatre, more closely connected to the court tradition, is called *nang yai*. A more recent form, arising from Thai popular tradition, is called *nang talung*. Modern shadow performances often incorporate one or both of these forms, using traditional elements juxtaposed with modern elements. Commonly, these traditional forms are referred to collectively as *nang booraan* (ancient nang), while modern forms are referred to a *nang samai* (modern nang). Modern shadow plays have combined traditional *nang* with elements of contemporary popular culture. More than any other influence, modern shadow plays

have been transformed by the acculturation of Western movies and television. Paradoxically, many new innovations have arisen as an attempt

to preserve the traditional art forms of Thailand in the face of this cultural onslaught.

A very interesting case study in innovation for the sake of preservation is the work of Pornrat Damrhung, an Assistant Professor of Drama at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. For the past several years, she has been traveling to remote villages of Thailand to study traditional forms of *nang*. Damrhung conducts workshops for children and adults, in Thailand as well as abroad. In these workshops, elements of *nang yai*, *nang talung*, *khon* masked dance, and some elements of free-form dance are combined together in an open expressive form. Damrhung muses: "Actually, I am more like The Muppet Show."

I was very fortunate to participate in one of these workshops in the United States. Over a week-long period, students were instructed to create original performances of stories from the *Ramakien* using original *nang talung* puppets, paper cut-outs of *nang yai* puppets, and paper cut-outs of *khon* masks. Students were encouraged to bring other modes of expression including elements of free form dance and by creating their own modern "puppets" out of sheets of colored plastic and construction paper. The results were often surprising, but seemed to flow forth seamlessly from the combination of traditional forms. Some of these surprises included a rotating, multi-colored lotus flower and silhouettes cast by the bodies of male and female performers.

Professor Damrhung has also integrated traditional forms into her own theatrical performances. "If you are in contemporary theatre, which I am, you tend to use a lot of traditional elements, so I start with traditional elements." Damrhung traveled to a remote village in Thailand, and was able to borrow a *nang yai* puppet, loaned to her from monks at a temple. She used the puppet in a modern performance about a wife who tries to rescue her dead husband from the lord of the dead. "I used two kinds of movement...The lord of the dead used traditional dance, masked dance, and the alive woman used modern dance. So you see they are juxtaposed in the same scene."

"If it hurt – that good!" Her broken English and diminutive stature cannot take anything away from the heart and passion that she has for her work. Her name is Pornrat Damrhung, and she is an associate professor of theatre from Bangkok, Thailand. Her nickname is "Oui," pronounced like



the French word for "yes." She explains that her father gave her the nickname when she was a little girl, after the sound of a tiny bird. "You can also spell it 'We,' but it is better to say 'yes' than 'no.'"

Oui is an artistic missionary. Her mission is to preserve the traditional art forms of Thailand. She carries out this mission by traveling to the remote villages of Thailand, in an attempt to preserve the last remnants of a dying art form. This form is called *nang yai*, which means "big shadow puppets." She then brings this knowledge back to the cities, and conducts workshops with students. Although most of her students are children in Thailand, Oui also does workshops with adults, and occasionally travels out of her country to bring the *nang* to the rest of the world.

"If you feel pain, that is your body talking." The first day of the workshop my body and I were having a rather animated conversation. Actually, it was more like a full-blown argument, and my body was winning. The stretches she showed us seemed to be a mixture of martial arts and yoga. I remembered doing some of the same stretches in a Karate class that I took in college, and I recognized the "cat" pose from a yoga class that I took at the "Y." I was beginning to get the idea that Thai shadow puppets must somehow be much different from the other *wayang* forms that we had learned about in class.

It is the sheer physicality of the form that surprised me the most. The descriptions I had read of *nang yai* seemed to imply that it was a static art form. Somehow I thought that these "big" puppets, often containing a complete scene in themselves, must be subdued and a bit boring when compared to the three dimensional, lively *wayang* forms. Through experience, I soon learned that this is perhaps the most physical, the most energized of all of the southeast Asian shadow forms. This is because *nang yai* combines puppets with elements of traditional Thai dance. Puppeteers must also be dancers, and commonly appear in front of the screen with their puppets, unheard of in other shadow forms.

Oui's workshop combined elements of *nang yai* with two other traditional art forms: the *nang talung*, or "small shadow puppets," and the *Khon* masked dance. This is perhaps the most innovative part of the workshop. Oui calls this modern combination of forms *nang samai*, or "modern shadow puppets." Over the several day workshop, we were divided into three groups. Each group was asked to create three short performances based on stories from the Ramayana. The final product would be a combined performance created through a collaboration of the three groups. At our disposal were *nang yai* (big shadow puppets), *nang talung* (small shadow puppets), and traditional masks from the *Khon* dance, literally photocopied out of a book by Oui. Her methods are innovative, practical, and sometimes just downright pragmatic.

Periodically, Oui would check in on each group's progress. At one point we were having trouble figuring out what a lotus flower looked like. Oui grabbed my notebook and scribbled several versions of the lotus flower: from above, from the side, in bloom, and in bud. Oui would mingle from group to group, occasionally stopping to demonstrate a dance move or suggest choreography. She would demonstrate conventional ways of portraying events such as courtship, marriage, or abduction.

At first, our group struggled to grasp the big, expansive ideas contained in this mythic text. We found that we had to concentrate on just the essential actions contained in the stories. Once we did this, our task became much easier. It would have been great to have had several more days, weeks, or even months to perfect our performances. Nevertheless, we did the best that we could, given the time available.

The day of the performance came all too quickly. Our group was still discussing the cues and cutting the script, literally up to the moment that the show started. Nevertheless, the performance was pure joy! Only through an experience such as this can one come to appreciate what a traditional performance might be like. Amidst the confusion there are strange moments of clarity and connection with the audience. At one point, one of the members from another group moved one of the puppets we were about to need. Momentary chaos ensued.

I have read that, during traditional shadow performances, a *dalang* may stop performing for several minutes to find the right puppet or just to light a cigarette. These performances often last many hours, into the wee hours of the morning. Because our performance was only half an hour, our momentary lapse to find the missing puppet must have been quite noticeable to the audience.

Still, it was one of those strange moments of clarity, a moment of realization about the true nature of an art form. It was this momentary lapse, a puppet misplaced, that brought to me new meaning, and a more complete understanding of the *nang*. It is an art form that itself is an approximation, a reflection of the divinities. No human performance can be as perfect as the gods in their truest form. Therefore, a shadow performance is a type of play in which the shadows are just that – the shadows of the gods, an imperfect approximation of the divine.

Kevin Brown has recently obtained a new position as Assistant Professor of Theatre and Film at Missouri Western State University.

For a full version of this article, with notes, references and more photos, go to:

www.unima-usa.org/publications

A Balinese Tempest: an Experiment in Interculturalism

by Jacqueline Romeo

Yet with my nobler reason 'gaitist my fury

Do I take part: the rarer action is

In virtue than in vengeance...

—Act V, Scene 2: *The Tempest*

Three knocks and the guttural calls of the *dalang* (puppeteer) pierce the air of the Annex theatre at La Mama Experimental Theatre Club. The accompanying gamelan punctuates the *dalang*'s shouts and fills the theatre with a complex interplay of sound. Behind a small screen, stage left of the gamelan, a bronze oil lamp illuminates the stage for the shadow puppets about to perform there. The *dalang*, I Nyoman Catra, chanting in the Sanskrit-based language of *kawi*, recites a blessing all shadow puppeteers use at the beginning of a story, while the "tree of life" flutters across the screen. After the blessing, Catra performs a scene in Balinese that is a translation of Act 1, Scene 2 of *The Tempest* wherein Prospero abuses Caliban.... Another experiment in interculturalism has begun.

Caliban Remembers: A Balinese Tempest had at least two prior incarnations [beginning in 1995] before it arrived at La Mama's Annex Theatre in New York City in September 2004. I was a participant in all three with I Nyoman Catra, Desak Made Suartilaksmi (his wife), and Ron Jenkins. By now, Shakespeare's play and our third version of it had taken on greater meaning and purpose, at least to its participants. The New York version was born out of two acts of destruction: the one on September 11, 2001 and the one on October 12, 2002 in Kuta, Bali. Most people, Americans and non-Americans alike, remember September 11, but what of October 12? On that night, three bombs killed 202 people and injured several hundred more. Kuta is the Balinese Ground Zero. They reacted to the bombing by printing T-shirts created by the Balinese garment industry with: "Bali Cinta Damai" on the front and "Bali Loves Peace" on the back. On November 15, 2002, participants in a cleansing and purification ceremony, coordinated at both Kuta and New York's "Ground Zero" memorial events, wore the T-shirts.

Catra had always been attracted to Shakespeare's text because of its theme of "non-violent response to aggression," but after the atrocities in New York and Bali, he felt another production of the play would be a fitting memorial to the two events, especially since the Balinese eschewed retaliation in favor of staging religious ceremonies with music, dance, and ritual offerings. In a conference on



art and politics in Denpasar, Bali, before the New York premier of *Caliban Remembers*, I Nyoman Catra and Ron Jenkins "discussed the parallels between the lessons Prospero learns on the island about forgoing vengeance and the response of the Balinese to the terrorist bombings." Their remarks included the following:

Unlike the American response to terrorism, which answered violence with war, the Balinese answered violence with art. The predominantly Hindu population staged religious ceremonies in every village that included music, dance, and ritual offerings that encouraged the island's inhabitants to look inside themselves for the causes of violence... To some outsiders, responding to terrorism with sacred art and ritual might seem naive, but the Balinese are proud to report that the perpetrators of the Balinese bombings have been captured, tried, and imprisoned, and the island is safe again. If Muslim terrorists had attacked a Hindu population center anywhere else in the world, there would probably have been ethnic riots. The fact that the Balinese, who live in the world's most populous Muslim nation, were able to resolve their conflicts peacefully through art and prayer, is a story that has not received the international attention it deserves. While our production of *The Tempest* does not refer directly to current events, Shakespeare's story reminds us all of our responsibility to look inside ourselves for the causes of violence before we attack others, particularly in Prospero's response to the half-human creature, Caliban, who tried to kill him. "This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine."

The New York production was a much more elaborate version of the play than the previous two I had participated in, involving several months of rehearsals with a full gamelan, most held at the Indonesian Consulate on East 68th Street. At first, I was only part of the *kecak* chorus, but later I joined the Gamelan Dharma Swara, playing *jegogen*. Original music was composed and sung by Desak Made Suartilaksmi, who played Ariel. Catra performed and helped to direct the play with Ron Jenkins.

At its simplest, intercultural theatre is theatre that is created from an exchange between two or more cultures. More recently Una Chaudhuri asserts, "Interculturalism is unraveling into, and re-forming out of, contemporary cultural theory, with results that promise to take theater theory itself into an exciting new syncretic phase." *Syncretic*, claims Chaudhuri, "is one of those loaded terms that interculturalism frequently finds itself rubbing shoulders with today; others are *hybridity*, *translocality*, *transnationalism*, *nationalism*, *centers*, *margins*, *peripheries*, *elites*, *subaltern*, and *multiculturalism*," all terms that are at various times and in different contexts at the center of intercultural theatre.



The intercultural encounter for *Caliban Remembers* first began as a "transnational" work in regards to its funding and its participants. Next was its "hybrid" text. The script started with Shakespeare's play, but in the end it had been significantly "Balinese-ified." As Jenkins remarked:

Our concept was to show the story as remembered by Caliban after everyone left the island. Caliban uses the puppets to reenact his memories and the memories are animated into the masked actors. Ariel is the only one who is really there with him on the island, and he loves her, but she loves Prospero. We used the entire story but cut the text so that each scene was reduced to its essence. Everything was Shakespeare's language. The only change we made was in the celebration of Miranda's wedding when Prospero calls down the gods Juno, etc.: We called down the Balinese dancers. (Jenkins, email)

The few scenes from Shakespeare's original that were retained were those involving the clowns Trinculo and Stephano. Nearly half of the play was devoted to the comic antics of these two characters, as well as Caliban, because, unlike Aristotle, both Shakespeare and the Balinese recognize that the comic and the tragic need equal respect on the stage. In fact, it appeals to the entire cosmic structure of Bali Hinduism, which depends on the balance between good and evil.

This emphasis on the comic is one of the reasons this version of *The Tempest* was more Balinese than Shakespearean. In temple performances, sacred laughter is a necessity and the temple clown, as Jenkins describes him, is "a natural part of a complex communal event where laughter helps link the spectators to their gods, their ancestors, and one another. Balinese religion revolves around the propitiation of divine and ancestral spirits. One way of pleasing the gods is to present them with prayers and offerings, another is to make them laugh." It is much more likely, the Balinese believe, that the gods will grace their performance if there is the promise of a good laugh. The most difficult concept for a modern, secular humanist, or just an American raised to believe in the separation of church and state, is that, to the Balinese, the sacred is all around them, in all that they see and do.

Even outside of Bali, the technique has been a useful one, especially when it comes to intercultural theatre. Intercultural theatre as it has been formulated and defined is ultimately a Western theory, and this bias may always be a part of its features. In the more famous and well-known intercultural experiments, such as those created by Brook or Mnouchkine, the "Westerner" typically has control over his or her source culture (usually "non-Western") and how it will be presented to the target culture (a Western audience). The difficulty of such encounters lies in understanding the context in which the exchange takes place and the ethical, moral, and artistic problems that may arise from such an encounter. In *Caliban Remembers*, the source culture was Western (Shakespeare) but the text was adapted to suit the Balinese performance style and sensibility. Moreover, the product was controlled by Balinese: Catra was co-director and adapter, music was composed and sung by Desak, I Nyoman Saptanayana directed the gamelan, etc. This time the power was with the Balinese, who transformed the play, not into something recognizably Western, but Balinese.

This "Balinese-ification" of *The Tempest* is most obvious in the few comments I solicited from the audience and the one written review that appeared in the media. Although this is hardly a scientific approach to the reception of the play, it does provide some preliminary insight into how the audience received the performance. Comments about the show were generally favorable, but many people felt Shakespeare's text was lost in the "spectacle." The costumes, music, and performances were all "colorful," "rich," and "engaging," yet these audience members had little idea what the story was about and could not follow any recognizable plot.



The more likely beneficiaries of the intercultural experiment are the participants rather than the audience, although attending the performance of *Caliban Remembers* is not without its merits (One might argue that some exposure to another culture is better than nothing.) In addition to performers from Indonesia, the cast included actors from Turkey, Italy, and the United States, including an Iraqi-American actress. As Suzuki Tadashi says, "Culture is the body." And, Patrice Pavis concurs that intercultural theatre "is at its most transportable and experimental when it focuses on the actor and performance, on training of whatever duration conducted on the 'others' home ground, or, an experiment with new body techniques. Microscopic work of this kind concerns the body, then by extension the personality and culture of the participants." The focus on the actor and the performance is what made this particular intercultural event so "transportable and experimental." The acting for *Caliban Remembers* was very presentational (as in the tradition of Balinese theater) and did not adhere in any way to a Stanislavski representational style of theatre. Other than Catra, who played Caliban, and Desak, who played Ariel, the other performers were non-Balinese. Because the actors were playing Balinese shadow puppets, the

rehearsals involved training them to act on a two-dimensional plane moving their bodies in ways to which they were unaccustomed. Some, however, like Nadia Mahdi, who played Stephano, had some previous dance training and the reviewer acknowledged that she "held a posture that for most humans would require a third leg."

At its best, intercultural theatre always engages in a kind of "productive misinterpretation," which should not be confused with, "appropriation." In reference to its postcolonial meaning, and even to its more neutral position as a theory of reception, Pavis defines appropriation as that which "reduces everything to the perspective of the target culture, which is in the dominant position and turns the alien culture to its own ends." Thus, the impetus for intercultural staging is not centered around "an interest in the foreign—the foreign theatre or the foreign culture from which it is taken—but rather a situation completely specific within its own culture or a completely specific problem having its origin within its own theatre" (Erika Fische-Lichte).

"Whatever may be the form and the strategy of cultural interactions," claims Patrice Pavis, "exchange implies a theory and an ethics of alterity. A foreign culture, an *other* culture, is one that fascinates by what one recognizes and what one fails to recognize in it." During the rehearsing and performing of *Caliban Remembers*, it was clear that the Westerners and the Balinese were fascinated by the other's foreignness and that productive misinterpretation was in abundance allowing for the target and source cultures to benefit in some way from the exchange. We may recognize that what we seek in these intercultural experiments is a desire to fulfill what we lack, but in the end we learn that the foreign has been familiar to us all along. The play and the performance were neither Shakespeare's, nor Bali's, but both.

Jacqueline Romeo has her PhD from Tufts University. She teaches courses in world and American drama, intercultural performance, popular entertainment, and American frontier history.



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THE TEMPEST



Larry Reed, Shadowlight Productions

Co-produced with Gamelan Sekar Jaya, *A (Balinese) Tempest* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's most musical and magical play. It is about a sorcerer and dethroned Milanese duke, Prospero, who has been banished with his daughter, Miranda, to an enchanted island, where he is served by the spirit Ariel and servant-monster Caliban. The men who had plotted to kill Prospero happen to sail near the island, giving Prospero the opportunity for revenge: he uses his powers to create a storm to shipwreck them to the island, where he has them cornered. But instead of killing them, he uses magic to teach his enemies a lesson, and forgives them. The story resolves with the freeing of servants, a marriage between opposing factions, and the renunciation of magician-excessive, out-of-balance power for humans.



Debra Wise, Underground Railway Theatre

Underground Railway Theatre's *Tempest*, commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in celebration of the 100th anniversary of Symphony Hall, features an original score by Robert Xavier Rodriguez. Both the music and the colorful figures, designed by David Fichter, evoke two worlds. The inhabitants of the magical island – Caliban, Ariel, and the rest – are imagined as ‘pan pre-Columbian;’ their visual design reflects motifs from Aztec and Mayan civilizations, and their musical themes are played on bells, whistles, flutes. Prospero and the Europeans are ‘Pan-Elizabethan,’ in Spanish, Italian, or British costume, accompanied by strings, oboes and harpsicords.



5 acts, 5 companies, one play — Shakespeare's THE TEMPEST

This joint production by Philadelphia's Puppet Uprising and the Missoula Oblongata was performed at a ‘secret location’ in South Philadelphia for a totally sold-out four-day run in May of 2007. They are currently working on a similar treatment of KING LEAR.

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[www.flickr.com/photos, Morgan FitzP, Puppets & Performance Miscellany](http://www.flickr.com/photos/MorganFitzP/Puppets%20%26%20Performance%20Miscellany)

Transforming Ghosts into Mud and Sand: Religion and the Shadow Theatre of Hunan

by Fan Pen Chen

Communities in southern China have been known since antiquity to have been intensely involved in shamanistic activities and the worshipping of ghosts and spirits. Through a fortuitous chance, I had the opportunity during the summer of 2008 to observe a shadow show in southern Hunan that ended with ritual banishment of evil spirits. Since the role played by religion in the Chinese shadow theatre had been largely neglected prior to the publication of my book, *Chinese Shadow Theatre: History, Popular Religion and Women Warriors*, the rituals performed prior to and after the shadow plays in this instance – much more pronounced and elaborate than anything I had observed before – were of immense interest to me. This tradition of shadows also turned out to have been a rare form known as Paper Shadows.

The study of shadow theatres was not in the original agenda of my 2008 research trip. Ye Mingsheng, a senior researcher at the Research Institute of Art of Fujian Province (*Fujiansheng yishu yanjiuyuan*), Bradford Clark, professor at Bowling Green State University, Huang Jianxing, a graduate student, and myself were conducting a survey of puppetry in southern China. Ye had arranged for a rod puppet performance of *Tale of Fragrant Mountain* (*xiangshanzhuan*) for us. But while in Changsha, we were informed that foreigners needed to obtain special permission to enter into this militarily sensitive region. It was decided that Ye and his graduate student would go without Clark and myself, and videotape the event.

Clark and I decided to visit the famous Mount Heng in southeastern Hunan en route to Shaoyang. The day we arrived at Nanyue, the main entrance to the mountain, we walked across the town until a side street led us to a vista of beautiful vegetable gardens and woods reminiscent of the village this touristy town once was.



AN OLD SHADOW PUPPET HEAD FROM HUNAN AND A "PAPER SHADOW" COLLECTED BY THE SHADOW THEATRE MUSEUM AT CHENGDU.
PHOTO: FAN PEN CHEN

An elderly lady with a basket of home-grown squash chatted with me and invited us to visit her house down the lane. We sat on little stools in the open front courtyard of her house.

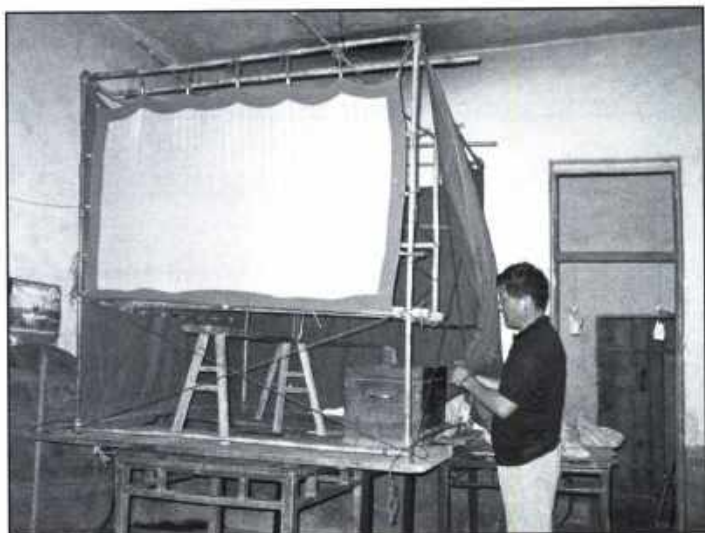
The elderly lady was the mother of the household. By early evening, her husband came home from working in the fields. Their son called his cousin and located a troupe in a village three kilometers away.

The grandfather suggested that we have the troupe perform at his house. A few phone calls later, all was arranged for the evening. Grandmother cooked dinner for us – we had delicious homegrown vegetables, egg and tomato soup, and rice. By the time the troupe arrived, neighbors began to trickle in. The grandfather served tea to the visitors and was a visibly proud "host." The troupe of a master puppeteer and two musicians arrived on two scooters after dark. The master puppeteer carried the trunk of puppets and musical instruments at the back of his scooter. One of the musicians drove the other scooter, with the other musician and some other equipment at the back. The musician riding on the back held onto the driver with his left hand and carried a bundle of bamboo poles with his right hand over his shoulder.

In less than half an hour, the stage was set up in the sparsely furnished living room, using furniture and doors of the household. Two square dining tables with two unhinged wooden doors placed on them served as the base for the stage. Bamboo poles ingeniously tied together formed the frame for the stage. The musicians sat behind the puppeteer and set up their instruments. One musician was in charge of the percussion instruments: a drum, a large gong, a small gong, a large cymbal, a small cymbal, a clapper and a stick called "rod" (*bangzi*). The other musician played a two-stringed



AN OLD FIGURE OF A TIGER MADE OF LEATHER. PHOTO: FAN PEN CHEN



COMPLETED STAGE. PHOTO: BRADFORD CLARK

violin (*erhu*). Unlike the majority of other shadow traditions, the musicians sometimes chimed in when the puppeteer sang, creating a chorus.

As the cymbals announced the start of the show, grandfather stuck two candles in the ground to one side of the front courtyard. There he lit the candles, offered incense, burned tissue-like yellow paper that represented money for the spirit world, and set off a string of fire crackers as offerings and announcement to the ancestors and other gods and spirits in the area. The main puppeteer completed this opening ritual through an invitational prayer before the performance. I requested a play that featured at least one woman warrior; the master puppeteer, who was also the director of the troupe, got to select a local favorite as the second play for the evening.

The troupe performed two plays that lasted for about two hours: "Xue Dingshan Fights at the Cold River Pass" (*Xue Dingshan Jian Hanjiangguan*) and "Han Xiangzi Teases His Wife" (*Han Xiangzi xiqi*), both being stand-alone excerpts of serial plays. The former was an episode from the fictional tales of a general, Xue Dingshan, and an even more powerful woman warrior, Fan Lihua, popularized through the military romance, *Three Tales of the Tang* (*shuoTang shanzhuan* by Rulian Jushi, 18th century). The latter was one of many popular stories based on Han Xiangzi, one of the famous Eight Immortals. Both tales were situated during the Tang dynasty (618-907).

This shadow theatre tradition is transmitted through memory. Traditions that do not use playscripts tend to result in performing less sophisticated versions of the stories that deviate considerably from the published versions of the novels or plays on the theme. In this case, Xue Dingshan's encounter with Fan Lihua was so grossly simplified that the complexity of the relationship between the two was totally neglected, and a comedy was created out of one originally filled with tensions. While in the renowned novel, *Three Tales of the Tang*, the foreign or "barbarian" princess, Fan Lihua, becomes so enamored of the Chinese warrior, Xue Dingshan, that she disobeys her father and eventually commits both patricide and fratricide; in this shadow play, Fan Lihua proposes to Xue who is initially reluctant to accept her offer but then agrees to ask his father

for permission. The two warriors are subsequently married with the blessings of both fathers. Hence, in the shadow play, the marriage of Xue and Fan enables two enemy forces to join as one.

"Han Xiangzi Teases His Wife" illustrates how Han, who has already attained immortality, returns home to lead his wife to the path of the transcendence. This he accomplishes by transforming himself into a playboy who tries to seduce his own wife. She holds steadfast against his advances and finally earns herself the right to attain the Dao. To the audience, however, her rejection of his advances is of no surprise. An ugly, lewd clown, rather than a dashing playboy, his characterization provides laughter for the spectators rather than admiration for the chastity of his wife. This may have been one of the most popular plays in the region precisely because it affords many opportunities for enacting salacious humor. It is also a popular theme in the local Flower Drum Opera (*huaguxi*). I suspect, however, that the version videotaped by us was considerably toned down as is the usual case whenever women, children and "outsiders" join the audience of such plays.

After the conclusion of the plays, the master puppeteer stood behind the screen and performed an extended (about eight minutes) ritual that sent away any evil influences and ghosts that might have resided in the house. Judging from the characters on the talismanic block he pounded, he might have transformed the ghosts into mud and sand. This shamanic ritual included the burning of incense and mock money, chanting without music, the use of talismanic hand gestures, and the banging of a two-hundred year old wooden block called an "Order-Dispatching Ruler" (*lingchi*). Four characters are carved into each side of this rectangular block. They are: "As Soon as the Golden Whip Strikes" (*jinbian yixia*); "The Ghosts Transform into Mud and Sand" (*guihua nisha*); "The Five Thunder Order Dispatcher" (*wulei haoling*); and a side with talismanic character-like created symbols. Once the ghosts and spirits were exorcized and the house cleansed, the master puppeteer blessed it by tossing a mixture of tea and rice into the audience several times as he continued to chant. The grandfather, as master of the household, once again lit candles, burned mock money and set off firecrackers in the front courtyard, which ended the rituals.



WANG DONGLIN BEHIND THE SCREEN. PHOTO: BRADFORD CLARK



FAN LIHUA, XUE DINGSHAN AND THEIR FATHERS,
PHOTO BY FAN PEN CHEN

We photographed some of the shadow figures and interviewed the performers after the show. Most of the puppets had one rod at the back of its neck on a swinging hook. Simpler, both in construction and manipulation, than the puppets of the other Chinese shadow theatre traditions, characters wearing robes with long sleeves only had a rod attached to one hand; the other arm had neither hand nor rod. However, characters not wearing robes, such as warriors and soldiers, did have two hands, each with its own rod. The figures were fairly large (about 27 inches tall). Some of the protagonists were made out of painted celluloid, but the majority of the figures were carved out of thick paper and made colorful by filling the cutout patterns in the bodies with colored plastic paper. These southern Hunan puppets also differ from the figures of most of the other Chinese shadow traditions in that the faces tend to be painted rather than carved and seen "head on" rather than in profile.

When asked about the obviously exorcistic ritual, the priest-puppeteer was reluctant to discuss what might be construed as

"superstition." He simply said that the blocks were to ensure safety and peace (*bao ping'an*). The particular "ruler" used here belonged to the master of his father's master and was more than two hundred years old. The master puppeteer, Wang Donglin, was born in 1945. He began learning the art form when he was thirteen and had studied with his father, Wang Shousheng (b.1913) and three other masters. The percussionist and the *erhu* violinist have worked with him for several decades, probably beginning sometime after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976.

Wang Donglin claimed his had been the most popular troupe in the region, performing more than 250 shows each year. Occasions for their services included the celebration of birthdays, building of houses, passing of college entrance examinations, fulfillment of vows, and purification of homes. Vow fulfillment, the sponsoring of a show promised to a deity for the granting of a favor requested of the deity, and exorcism of ghosts and evil influences from homes were the most common occasions for the sponsoring of shadow plays. Grandfather was obviously happier with the cleansing aspect of the performance than the entertainment aspect of the show.

This was the first time I'd watched a shadow performance by a mere three-member troupe. Indeed, its simplicity and emphasis on religious functions may be reflections of its antiquity and as a very traditional form. In no other shadow theatre tradition have I ever seen the master puppeteer taking over so unambiguously the functions of a shamanic priest. While its disappearance during the Cultural Revolution could be traced to the suppression of traditional culture and "superstitions," one might attribute its present decline to the attrition of traditional religious beliefs among the younger population who grew up without the religious ambiance. Given the nature of the function of this shadow theatre tradition, it may disappear when the local religious belief system no longer exists.

Fan Pan Chen, PhD, is Assistant Professor of East Asian Studies at SUNY-Albany.

For a more complete account of Professor Chen's trip to Hunan, the challenges posed by local dialects and more images, go to:

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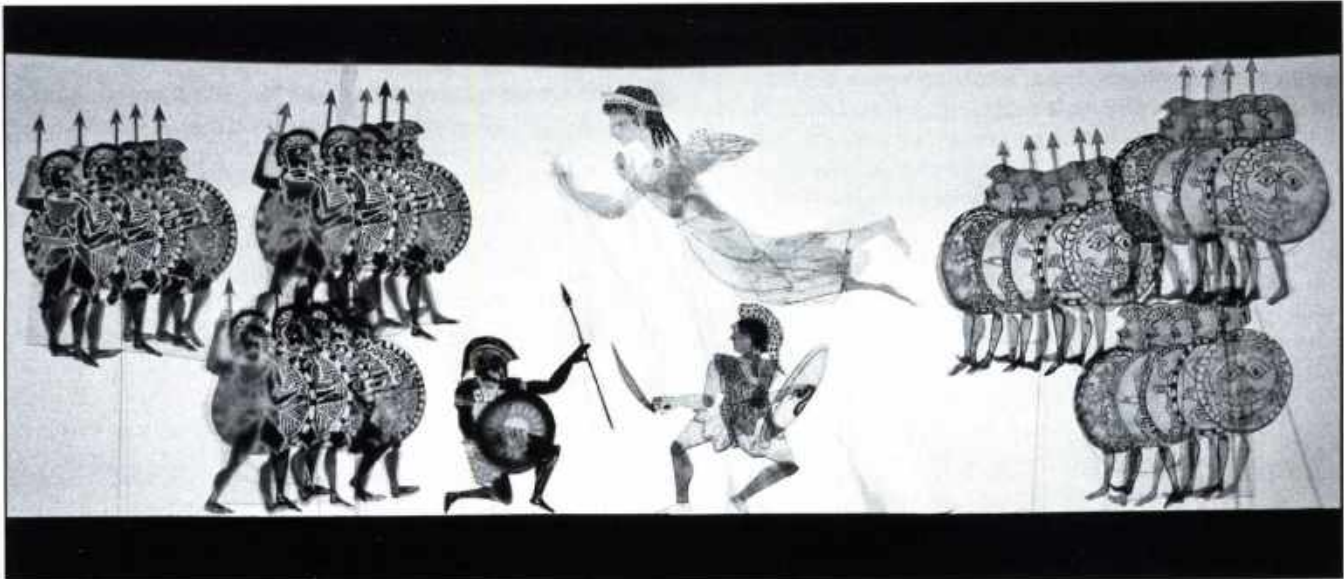
Indian Performance Traditions in the Puppetry of Theodora Skipitares

by Lauren Hobbs Sexton, PhD

Theodora Skipitares has been creating, designing, and directing multimedia theatre pieces since the early eighties. Though she has consistently used puppets in her productions since 1982, the types of puppets with which she has worked changed considerably throughout her career. Her most recent productions feature puppets influenced by Asian traditions. These changes are the result of greater world travel—especially her travels to India. Theodora Skipitares has routinely traveled to Europe to present productions, but in the late nineties, she began to travel to parts of Asia as well, where she was commissioned for productions in Vietnam, Cambodia and India. These cross-cultural interactions have had

varying degrees of influence on Skipitares's production style, specifically concerning her narrative structure, the way she chooses to create her puppets and the way she, in turn, uses those puppets in performance. In her typical multi-media style, Skipitares collages these Asian/South-East Asian artistic methods together in such a way that reflects both a respect for her sources and a unique creative vision.

In Skipitares's production with Ellen Stewart in Vietnam (1997) the pair came to the projects already prepared with the central ideas and production methods they wanted to apply. In Vietnam, Skipitares experimented with water puppets, combining them with other forms of puppetry and media.



According to her published journal on the trip, the goal of the Vietnam project was to “integrate [water] puppetry techniques and the stock characters into a multi-media production with singers and dancers, based on the myth of Dionysus.” (Vietnam Journal 65) Skipitares goes on to state, “We are told that, because we are foreigners, we are welcome to try this in a way in which Vietnamese artists are not.” (Vietnam Journal 65) The resulting production was a big success and continued to run, even on national television, after the artists' departure. Although Stewart and Skipitares collaborated with local artists in both the Vietnam and Cambodia projects, in general none of the traditional forms were truly integrated into Skipitares's style. This was not true of her 1999/2000 trip to India where she was greatly inspired by Yakshagana dance-drama, shadow puppetry, scroll painting and the traditional epic narratives, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

Theodora Skipitares traveled with Ellen Stewart to India in the winter of 1999 to 2000 on a Fulbright Fellowship where they collaborated on two pre-arranged productions: *Sita* in November of 1999 and *The Pied Piper* in February of 2000. *Sita* was performed in Bangalore (Karnataka) India, in a large amphitheatre with a company of forty-six puppeteers, dancers, actors, and musicians. Working with local artists, Skipitares and Stewart combined many types of Indian puppets with Yakshagana dancers to present an episode of the Ramayana between Sita and her husband, Rama. According to Stanley, the production held two outdoor performances “for standing-room-only crowds.” (59) In contrast, *The Pied Piper* was a much smaller puppet theatre show performed in Ahmedabad. In partnership with the Darpana Theatre Company, Skipitares's production presented a mix of shadow puppets, masked dancers, and a bunraku-style Pied Piper.

While in India, Skipitares toured mostly through the states of Kerala and Karnataka, in major cities and small villages, and attended many traditional dance-drama and puppetry performances. Puppetry has existed in India for roughly 2500 years, originating with leather cutouts. They are referenced in both the *Mahabharata* and the *Natyasastra* (wherein the director of live theatre is called the “string holder”) both of which date between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Today in India there is a relatively large range of shadow puppets, many centered in Kerala in south India; however, the majority are made in the same fashion, varying only in size, color, and type of story presented. As usual, Skipitares made an individual statement in her incorporation of this age-old tradition, specifically with the materials she used and the way she performed the puppets’ voices.

Traditional Indian shadow puppets are typically made of deer-skin with holes punched through to denote ornaments and the lines of the costume. Many are painted different colors, but these appear muted on the natural hide. Often three puppets may be made for one character, each in different positions and/or scales. Unlike the scroll paintings, which Skipitares has used in productions, she did not have traditional Indian artists build her shadow puppets. Instead, Skipitares created her own puppets, modifying tradition by using plastic rather than the traditional animal skin. This plastic material, when painted, resulted in brighter, more vibrant colors. The material was also easier to work with, which allowed Skipitares to make larger puppets, some forty-three inches high. Secondly, in Indian shadow puppetry traditions, both female and male characters are manipulated and voiced by male puppeteers who do not attempt to match their voice to the character’s gender. Instead, the puppeteer identifies the character that is speaking by moving its arm or entire body. In contrast, when using shadow puppets in her productions, Skipitares typically either assigns a specific voice to each puppet character (one which matches its gender) or performs without any voice at all.

Since her trip to India, Skipitares has repeatedly used shadow puppetry in many productions, specifically *The Rise and Fall of Timur the Lame*, *Helen: Queen of Sparta*, *Odyssey: The Homecoming*, and *Iphigenia*—the last three being reproduced together at LaMama ETC in March 2006 under the name *Trilogy*. According to Stanley, Skipitares’s incorporation of this mode of production

stemmed from the numerous large, colored shadow puppets she saw in museums across India, as well as live productions. Skipitares’s use of shadow puppets has primarily been reserved for large battle scenes and supernatural scenes, such as at Iphigenia’s sacrifice when her body is replaced by that of a deer. In each performance the shadow puppets serve as a contrast to other forms of puppetry, such as Otome Bunraku-style puppets and humanettes, used for the majority of the show.¹

The Rise and Fall of Timur the Lame (2001) presented a collision between Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* and the historical figure of Timur Lang, a fourteenth century Asian warrior-conqueror also known as Timur the Lame. For this production, Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* was combined with shadow puppetry and Yakshagana dance. Skipitares used shadow puppets for the first act where, manipulated by eight puppeteers, thirty-five characters appeared on a five-sided, sixty-foot-long screen that wrapped around the audience. (Stanley 62-63) As reviewer Bruce Weber describes:

A U-shaped screen separates the audience and the puppeteers, and in the southern Indian technique borrowed by Ms. Skipitares, the brightly colored, two-dimensional puppet figures are illuminated from behind so that their images, colors and all, show up on the screen. The effect is striking, especially with Ms. Skipitares’s puppet designs, which, like some Picasso paintings, are representations of three-dimensional figures mapped onto a plane surface: the eyes of each puppet, for example, are on the same side of the nose.

The narrators in this play were positioned behind the screen and provided reading and sound effects in a “cartoonish” style, which was intended to comment upon the text. (Weber) In her adaptation of Indian shadow puppetry, Skipitares presents a mix of invention and tradition that is fundamental to her production style.



ODYSSEUS' ENCOUNTERS THE CYCLOPS IN ODYSSEY



THE RISE AND FALL OF TIMUR THE LAME

In *Trilogy* (*Helen*, *Odyssey*, and *Iphigenia*) Skipitares combines various puppetry styles and media styles, but each show includes shadow puppetry. *Helen* was originally created for a 2002 puppetry festival in Calcutta, sponsored by Arts International, and was built with Calcutta puppeteers and actors, including Bengali television stars (Personal Interview, March 2006). In *Helen*, *Queen of Sparta*, and *Odyssey*, large segments of shadow puppetry are used to depict days and battles in The Trojan War. In *Helen*, warriors, who looked like they had “just leaped off Greek vases,” battle behind a fifty-foot wide screen. (Bruckner) Armies are thrown into each other and the “dead” lay in large piles against the shadow screen as Athena flies above the battlefield. Loud bass-driven music accompanies each onslaught. In *Odyssey*, Skipitares uses shadow puppetry to represent Odysseus’ encounters with the Cyclops, as well as other episodes from his epic journey home. In one scene, different versions of the character Odysseus, each in gradually smaller scale, are used to show his approach to the giant, bright blue Cyclops. According to one review, however, the shadow puppets in *Odyssey* were not entirely well-received: “The conceptual ideas are more of a focus than actual high performance values; plenty of clunking and clanging goes on when the epic battle of Troy is being told with shadow puppets.” (Portwood). In all the plays, these shadow puppetry sections are combined with other scenes in which Skipitares uses video, rod puppetry, and recorded music, what *New York Times* reviewer Neil Genzlinger calls a “merging of the ancient and the modern.” In traditional productions of Bunraku, shadow puppetry or scroll paintings (*patua*), the art forms are never combined with other forms of performance. However, within one production, Skipitares routinely mixes these Asian traditions with contemporary media such as slide projections or video. Each method is performed independently, yet it is the episodic structure of Skipitares’s productions that allow for a seamless flow between these various cultures and traditions.

Skipitares’s trip to India was also, in the end, responsible for “reinvigorating her thinking and inspiring her to move in new directions” (Stanley 58-59). She was impressed by the relationship between spirituality and the creative arts in India, specifically the tradition of dedicating each performance of dance theatre or puppetry to Lord Ganesha, the remover of obstacles. Although Stanley speaks of Skipitares’s “reverence for her sources,” there is no evidence she ever began these Asian influenced productions with ceremonies, offerings, or blessings (63). Skipitares’s trip to India was, however, influential in changing the way she viewed stories:

Before I went to India, I could care two figs about a story[...] Then I go to India, where there’s a 4000 year old culture that reveres its stories and still presents its stories [...] and oddly enough those months in India made me want to tell stories about Greece. It’s so weird. But I became interested in stories and in storytelling. (Personal Interview, March 2006)

Skipitares’s trip to India did end up changing the way she told stories—especially her use of puppets in the stories—and what stories she chose to tell. It also inspired a new tendency in Skipitares’s work toward focusing on a particular story rather than a theme. (Stanley 65) Evidence of these changes can be found in Skipitares’s renewed interest in Greek myth and legend. Though Skipitares dealt somewhat with Greek mythology in her performance art pieces, since her return from India, Skipitares has created several productions dealing with Greek legends on Helen of Troy, the Trojan War, and the House of Atreus. Skipitares’s more recent work seems to be incorporating texts that have a more traditional dramatic are (*Iphigenia*, *Orestes*, *Medea*), yet even these are presented in a fragmented, episodic fashion.

Although many of Skipitares’s Asian influences have only been incorporated into her productions once or only recently, overall they mark a distinct shift in the artist’s style. In Skipitares’s hands Japanese, Vietnamese, and Indian methods are combined to express ancient Greek myths, creating a collage of artistic styles and cultures. Amazingly, these elements are combined in ways that complement the story Skipitares wishes to tell, not in ways which exoticise the cultures from which they originate. Moreover, Skipitares’s modifications to each method reflect a possibility for these traditions to survive globalization while maintaining their cultural and historical contexts.

Lauren Hobbs Sexton earned her PhD from the University of Georgia and has been published in the *Theatre Journal* and elsewhere.

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THE SPACE OF SHADOWS*

by Fabrizio Montecchi



Every technique has its own metaphysic
-Dzevad Karahasan**

TOWARD A REDEFINITION OF THE TECHNIQUES OF SHADOW THEATRE

Shadow theatre is not a technique, rather it is a kind of scenic art, a theatrical language that makes use of a multitude of techniques.

I insist upon this statement, as shadow theatre is all too often superficially regarded as "a technique," and it is all too often assumed that, to put it into practice, all that is needed is a basic knowledge of this "technique."

I claim this not because I frown upon technique—quite the opposite! It is because I attach great importance to it and firmly believe that every kind of technique has its own metaphysic. Only by trying to understand the dimensions of the metaphysics of each technique is it possible to comprehend this is not merely the insensitive use of instruments or the cold utilization of method.

SHADOW THEATRE IN THE COURSE OF THE LAST 20 YEARS

In the last twenty years, the shadow theatre has undergone a remarkable change in technique and in language. One important impetus to this technical and linguistic further education came from the "Teatro Gioco Vita." It was no coincidence that for a long time people talked about the "Teatro Gioco Vita style." Some characteristics of this were the use of pinpoint lamps, the special handling of the screens, a proliferation of techniques for animating figures and the concept that shadow theatre is fundamentally based upon a technical revolution. It is a well-known fact that a revolution produces new ideas that then become the norm.

But the greatest revolution that the shadow theatre is undergoing at the present time is the discovery of scenic "space." The traditional *limited* space, which we can look upon as a system of closed techniques and relationships, has been replaced by an *open* space—rich and dynamic in possibilities and powers of articulation. In my opinion, this scenic space is at the heart of all new techniques in shadow theatre. What follows demonstrates this development and at the same time is a contribution towards a new definition of the techniques of contemporary shadow theatre—something that has been needed for a long time.

SCENIC LIGHT AND SPACE

Every technical and linguistic change in the past years has been expressed and subsumed in the scenic field. We must first of all be in agreement that space plays an essential role as a shadow is a phenomenon of projection. Shadows live in and are fed by space: their shape and their dimensions depend upon the characteristics of the space in which they are found. By "space," however, we should not think only of the outer surface of the screen upon which the shadow is seen. The space available to the shadow is the total area between the light source and the screen. The shadow is guided within this space. At any position within this space, a figure casts a variety of shadows, depending upon its relationship to the light and to the screen. This space—rich in dynamic connections—is the space of shadow projection. Shadow theatre, which has come into being through the creation of shadows, cannot distance itself from these simple rules. On the basis of any technique of shadow theatre, there are different ways of realizing the relationship between light, figure and screen. You could even say that there are different ways of realizing the shadow's space.

In the traditional shadow theatre, where the figures touch the screen and are fixed, this space has no particular importance. That's why the original use of the naked flame as a means of lighting is severely limited. The screen is the only space and the scenic action can only be realized by moving the figures. But contemporary shadow theatre—thanks to the new possibilities offered by the evolution of lighting technique—has begun to see the shadow as the key to projection and to radically change the function and role of space in shadows.

LIGHT IN SPACE

It cannot be denied that different images and uses of light are founded upon this change in the shadow's space. Every kind of light is a universe, an attitude, and a way of designing and presenting the world. In this sense there comes into being a world of shadows, conditional on light and space. And so a choice of light is never primarily a technical choice but an expressive one. You don't need the light to illuminate the figure but rather to show the

non-technical alterations of form. The introduction of pinpoint lamps made it possible to see a new world of shadow that had never before existed. The possibility of enlarging the shadows and simultaneously keeping their form recognizable, gave us the chance to increase the size of the space, so that the animator can actually “live” there and physically participate in the action of the play. The use of halogen lamps also made it possible to manipulate the light and so multiplied the creative possibilities of this space.

This new space also led to a change in the concept of shadows as a form of theatrical expression. Luc Amoros saw the origins of contemporary shadow theatre in the uniqueness of theatrical language in which there is a detachment of the movement of the figure from the figure itself. This definition clarifies in a simple way how the action brings the shadow to life, animates it and presents it in 3-dimensional and not in 2-dimensional space. In fact, contemporary shadow theatre tends – in the concept of a single scenic space – to incorporate both the shadows and the players. But their commitment is very different, even when they are part of the same scene. If the players’ actions take place on the 3-dimensional level of the scene, then the shadows appear on the 2-dimensional surface of the screen. That’s why it’s necessary to attach great importance to space by means of a discriminating use of the screen. This screen – up until now always treated as a passive object onto which shadows are projected (following the example of the film industry) – becomes an integral part of the scenic action. As a mobile, dynamic element, the screen has forced itself into the space and, by transgressing the limits of 2-dimensionality, has turned this space into an important element itself. The disappearance of a fixed screen, which used to separate the actors from the spectators, has led to the extraordinary importance of the screen as not just a receiver but also as a transformer of shadows into full consciousness. The quality of space as well as that of the shadow itself, are dependent upon the material condition of the screen, its shape, its size and its position. By moving the screen, it’s possible to create shadows that could not be created by moving the figure alone. As the figures show their forms on the vertical screen, the player moves horizontally. It is his task to theatrically fill the space between the projector and the screen. The player creates objects and figures by moving inside this space (or different spaces). That means that the player uses the special relationships between light, figure and screen in order to finally carry out the creation of the shadows. All of these special relationships together you can call *the techniques of animation*. The traditional shadow theatre has provided us with abundant codified techniques, ranging from the kind of lighting or the properties of the screen to ways of making figures. For this reason every traditional style of acting can be recognized by the acting techniques. As I’ve already said, however, in the traditional theatre the concept of space is already fixed, which is why the variability depends entirely upon the organization of the figures.

In the contemporary shadow theatre, the awareness of the technique of animation becomes much more important. One reason for this is that any identification with the play through the techniques of production or the manipulation of the figures is no longer possible. The dimensions of a figure, its articulation and the way it is handled are dependent upon its relationship to light and screen.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FIGURE, LIGHT AND SCREEN

Another reason is that light and screen play an active part in the creation of shadows and are, therefore, also capable of animation. There are some techniques based upon the manipulation of screen and light in which neither object nor figure plays a part. The result is that neither screen nor light can be regarded as passive instruments in the service of the figure. They are themselves instruments full of expression and contribute to the play as much as do the figures. It is, therefore, these relationships that—in their infinite possibilities of combination—form the basis of all playing techniques. Most artistic aspects—the articulation of the figures, the characteristics of the light or the material of which the screen is made—depend first and foremost on the system of relationship you are looking for. They belong to a system of relative and not absolute values. They must not be seen as a kind of dogma, but rather as motifs in a scheme that is continually changing and being newly defined. As I have already said, contemporary shadow theatre is determined by the use of various techniques. The traditional theatre had only *one* space; the theatre today has many. Nowadays a shadow play can use all possible techniques and simultaneously various “spaces”: the space behind the screen, the space in front of the screen, space with fixed lights and space with movable light – or space which is a combination of all.

CONCLUSION

The wealth of techniques of play is only possible if you have an open room capable of making use of all these different kinds of “shadow rooms” in a functional and consequential way. This transformation has consequences not only for the mechanics and the set but also for the qualitative importance of the player. Indeed, the player has once again found his central point in scenic space. It is the player who creates the relationship between all the elements. He is the one who, by moving screen, light and figure, gives this space its theatrical existence and so makes the whole thing possible.

Conceived this way, scenic space has ascended to a position of the greatest theatrical importance in shadow theatre. It has become the centre of modern theatrical language and is no longer the servant of techniques of the past.

* Lo Spazio del Ombre first appeared in the second volume of *Schattentheater*, Einhorn-Verlag, Schwäbisch Gmünd, 2001. English translation by the author.

** Dacrad Karshasan is a Bosnian writer and dramaturg, also a collaborator with *Gioco Vita*.

Fabrizio Montecchi is the artistic director of Italy's groundbreaking Teatro Gioco Vita.



by Brigitte Rivelli

When Brigitte Rivelli offered a shadow theatre workshop at a primary school for French children in India, a vast scope of reflections opened up.

Our Set-up—

A large screen stretching to the floor, a light source that allowed us to enlarge shadows without losing their clarity.

The set-up allowed the children to play at a bit of a distance from the screen so that they could see their shadows as they worked, which, during the initial phase of initiation, is easier for them than imagining what they are showing to the other side of the screen. This also permits the composition of images using depth of field, close-ups, and the interaction of characters of different heights.

In comparison to shadow puppets, body shadows offer a more direct tool, one that also has the advantage of immediacy. Using body shadows, one can explore without first passing through the stage of building puppets or masks.

To the intrigues of the simplicity of corporeal shadows, we then added the object: A large prosthesis concealing the head of the actor and replacing it with that of the character. The size of this object is deliberately disproportionate to the body of the actor, which remains visible.

From this combination, simplicity + unrealism, a pictorial creation is born, which is both theatrical and fantastic.

The Static Image as a Unit of Composition

Through shadows, the work of the actor is translated into image, which is its base material.

The projected image emanates from the actor at the same time as it is dissociated from him. Thus he can see it at the same time he performs it. The mask-prosthesis is made in such a way that the actor can see its image from the front, while the figure itself is in profile, introducing another level of unreality.

The body is at the same time the tool producing the image and the material constituting it through the intervention of the projected shadow.

Being, as it is, immateriality reflected, defined in black and white, reduced to its outline, and eventually distorted by the angle of the light—*a priori* the projected image is not realistic.

The heterogenous constitution of the character— inanimate picture + living body—is unified in the shadow image. The connection of these contrasting elements carries with it a dramatic charge, inspiring one to play.

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

The actor works with his body as a draftsman would, working on building an image as he sees it on the screen. For children in particular, when the characters they animate are a combination of their own drawings and their own bodies, they identify profoundly with them on the level of the fantastic.

The body in its natural postures does not work with the prosthesis. One must experiment to find appropriate postures for the natural body to enter into a symbiosis with the mask-prosthesis of the character. Note that these postures are not the same as for a normal mask.

The screen takes the place of the piece of paper to which the child habitually trusts his line drawings, but this time the white space on which the projection is inscribed is vertical and bigger than the child. The surface replaces the line. The proportions of the child and the space are inverted, considering the intimacy of the proportions of the child and what he projects. The space becomes public. Suddenly an image of himself is there before he has even decided on it, in contrast to the experience in drawing or other deliberate actions. The child stands in front of a self of another sort, a shadow, transformed by the mask-prosthesis of the head.



Acting, Writing

Making static images, tableaux, exploring moments of suspended action that permit the children to observe the images they create, rather than getting caught up in acting behind the screen, these are all part of the first, preliminary stage. Acting and writing belong to a second stage in the process.

To the base material, the image, the actor injects movement. Learning to take control of the image for performing is the focus of a long process of observation that leads towards an understanding of the dramatic rules that govern the screen. The actor must be conscious of the succession of images being created, as a film editor is of the overall progression of a movie.

The power of these images will often depend on their economy and rhythm. The pauses in particular will give them punctuation and readability. The distance between the actor and his projection immediately shows him the need for a unique language. The physical distance between the actor and the image he projects permits him not only to see what shadows he casts, but to observe the gaps between what he does and what appears in the image, taking into account the

distortion between reality and its reflection. For example, imagine an actor facing his shadow and punching his fist in its direction; hardly any of this action would be perceptible from the image because the shadow of the arm would be absorbed into that of the body. So if actors want to make their actions visible, they have to position themselves and transform their action in relation to the impact of the image it projects.

The actor must emit a signifier so that the signified is transmitted. Signifier and signified are not similar and can even sometimes be contradictory. Facing her shadow, the novice finds herself face to face with these facts.

Thanks to the mirror of the screen that offers us both the image itself and the construction necessitated in its creation, the trap of naturalism, into which novices in the theatre often fall, is discovered. In this setting, realistic movements lose their dramatic impact.

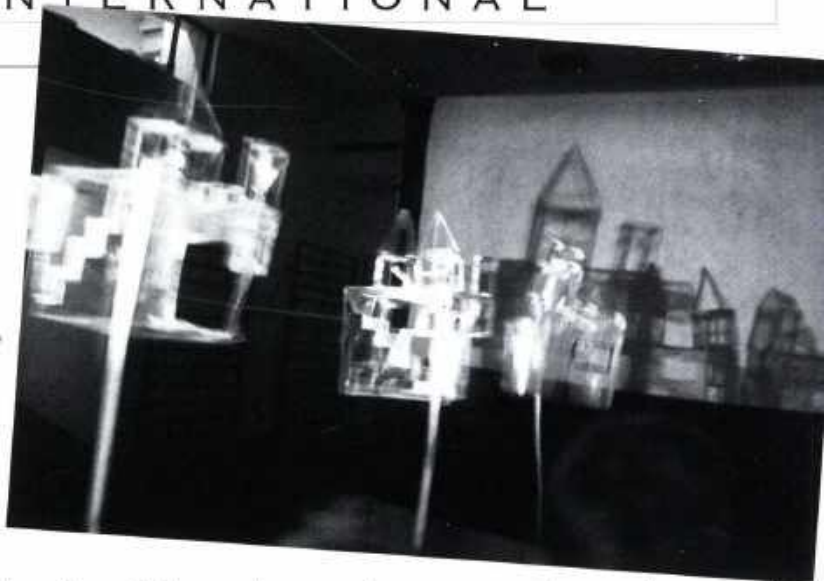
I arrive here in my reflections and return from this step to once again grind the grain of my practice...

NOTES on a PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

FUNDAMENTALS

Fundamentals to explore when beginning work in shadow theatre

These fundamentals are the basis for subsequent narrative and theatrical development.



Each one of these fundamentals can be developed through exercise-games, the goal of which is to come naturally to an understanding of the basics.

The forms of the exercises vary depending on the ages of the participants and not on the fundamentals themselves.

Awareness of the space in relationship to the light source.

Identify the ZONE in the space where the bodies (or the puppets) project their shadows on the screen and, consequently, the dead spots.

BIG-LITTLE

The limit of largeness: complete black

The limit of smallness: the puppet or object placed against the screen

Play between one and the other...

SELF AND SHADOW

LOOK at the image that the shadow draws and not at your partner (or puppet) .

PROFILE and BACK: 2 moments when one doesn't see one's own image. Interest and particular difficulties of profile. BACK, avoid.

IDENTIFY your shadow amidst the others.

SELF and IMAGE

The relationship between the created image and the one who sees it.

When shadows superimpose themselves on the screen, they hide each other...

Play WITH your partner, which implies differentiating between the actor, the manipulator, and the characters. The concept of balance and balancing of images on the screen.



We play FOR spectators who are invisible but are watching from the other side.

Learn to SEE and OBSERVE what happens on the screen at the same time as we are absorbed IN THE ACTION.

See and observe also in the position of the spectator. Work alternately IN FRONT OF and BEHIND the screen.

Schematically, THREE AREAS with specific characteristics.

- Behind : Do
- In front : Watch
- On the side : Watch those who do

The MUSIC of the EYES

Images have a visual rhythm determined by a complex set of givens including speed and its modulations, the proportions between shadow and light source. Special work on slowness.

The relationship between space and time is the basis of this music. At a later stage, one can tackle the relationship between the visual and the auditory with actual music, but it is interesting to begin by working strictly on the visual music created by the images themselves.

The children were divided into three age groups :

- Exploration of fundamentals: the space structured by the light source and the screen, and the relationship between the shadow and the light. This was the basis of our work with the 5-6 year-old children. The only mediating objects here between the source of light and the screen, which produced the shadows, were the childrens' own bodies.
- Work with the 7 year-olds combined body shadows and the use of performing objects.
- With the two older groups, we focused on putting together a story with puppets

The Metaphysic Tradition in Shadow Theater

by John Bell



Of all the different types of puppet theater in the world, shadow theater stands out distinctly as a form that, simply by its nature, persistently questions the nature of object, image, and identity. While other types of puppet theater involve the combined focus of performer and audience on the performing object, shadow theater complicates things by including two more elements: a light source and a screen upon which the shadow of the object is projected. Although technically simple (anyone can, and probably has, played with shadows at one point or another), shadow theater is immediately metaphysical, because the focus of our attention is the trace of the object—the *sign* of its presence, but not the object itself. Also, unlike marionettes, handpuppets, masks, or other performing object forms, shadows are by definition fleeting—they exist for the moment of performance, and then disappear.

In addition, although the dynamics of shadow theater are much like those of other puppet forms because they deal with the sequential movement of images in a defined space and their traditional subject matter is similar or identical to the dramaturgy of three-dimensional puppetry, shadow theater has some particular characteristics that don't appear in other forms of puppetry, and that have to do with the nature of light. The size and scale of the images, for example, can change radically depending on the distance of the puppet from both the light source and the shadow screen; and the nature of the light source itself, especially when an open flame is used, brings its own flickering, constantly shifting movement to the shadow images.

The metaphysical questions posed by shadow theater are also connected to the peculiar properties of light, which, as we tried to understand in science class, can be considered to be matter *or* energy, or both. (Did this confound you as well?) Light is matter that has no mass, according to a posting on an internet site called "Physics Forum"; but wait, on the other hand, according to the next posting, it is in fact energy. This ongoing discussion inevitably brings in Einstein's theory of relativity, which precisely articulates the relationship between energy and mass. Aha!.... or, Uh-oh! Does this mean, in puppet terms, that we can say light, as mass, is a kind of performing object, and at the same time, as energy it is not an object at all? Hmm....

These consistently mysterious qualities of shadow puppetry—it's there, it's gone; it's big, it's small; it's matter, it's energy—lent themselves to the metaphysical speculations of Plato, in his famous "Allegory of the Cave" in Book VII of *The Republic* from the 5th or 4th

century B.C.E. Plato, who quite obviously had seen some shadow shows himself, used the four-part nature of shadow puppetry (puppeteer, object, light source, projection surface) to attempt to explain the Greek sense of the relationship between The Ideal and The Real. The suggestive ambiguities and non-realism of shadow theater lent themselves quite well to Plato's attempt to deal with a very basic question of existence in a way that allegories of Greek marionettes, masks, or mechanical statues could not have matched.

Part of the exoticism of shadow theater as it has been considered in the Euro-American West involves shadow puppetry's sophisticated historical development as an art form in China, Java, Bali, India, and other places in Asia, as well as its appearance across the southern Mediterranean and in the Middle East. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe described the nature of popular 18th-century European shadow theater in his 1769 play for puppets, *Das Jahrmarktstest zu Plundersweilern*, which Paul McPharlin translated as *Junkdimp Fair* (and published in his 1929 *Repertory of Marionette Plays*). This evocation of the fairground entertainments that Goethe saw in his native Frankfurt includes a Shadow Showman whose spectacle—which seems to harken back to the entertainments of medieval religious theater—presents images of Adam, Eve, and the Serpent; the sinful lecheries of humans before the Flood; and then, somewhat improbably, the Greek god Mercury flying to the rescue. In other words, from what Goethe tells us, European shadow theater traditions seem also to have dealt with basic questions of existence, identity, and belief.

While we may surmise that the European history of shadow shows could go back to the Middle Ages, we only seem to start to hear of "galanty shows" and "ombres chinoises"—two terms for shadow entertainments—in the 19th century, and the obvious Asian origins of the latter term point to the introduction of Chinese shadows, somehow, as an innovation in European shadow theater. A good barometer of the European consciousness of shadow theater

in the late 19th and early 20th century is Edward Gordon Craig, who documented the emerging European awareness of global shadow theater traditions in the pages of his publications *The Mask* and *The Marionette*. Craig wrote about Chinese shadow theater and Javanese *wayang kulit*, published the script of the ever-popular French shadow play "Le Pont Cassé" ("The Broken Bridge"), and reprinted Théophile Gautier's 1856 account of a Turkish *Karagöz* performance witnessed in Constantinople.

The rediscovery of shadow theater's possibilities was rife in late 19th- and early 20th-century avant-garde circles. For example, Oskar Schlemmer, Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack and other Bauhaus artists created experimental performances with light and shadows in the 1920s in Germany, around the same time that Lotte Reininger was performing with traditional-looking shadow figures in very high-tech environments as she pioneered the sophisticated use of shadow theater in the relatively new medium of film.

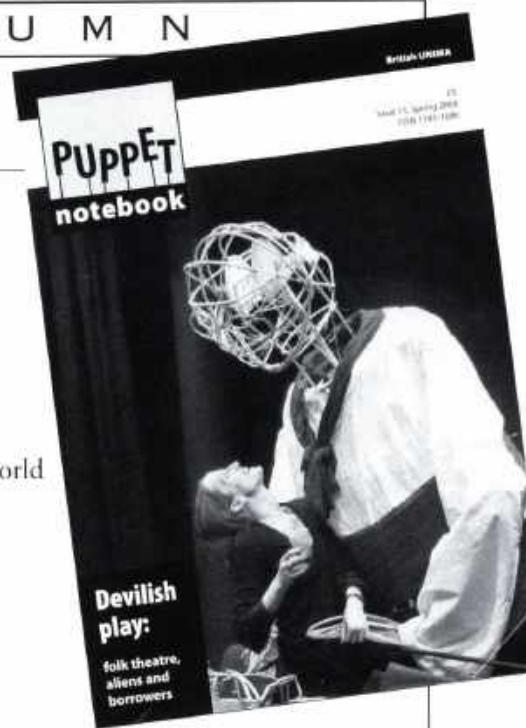
Shadow theater and film are obviously linked forms of light performance, since both involve, in essence, the play of light and shadow on a screen. It is no accident that the late 19th-century invention of film coincided with a rich exploration of image and object performance possibilities throughout Europe, and it is important to keep in mind that shadow puppet theater is in fact the true precedent to the mechanical medium of film. Even more, shadow theater is the historical antecedent of all forms of light play on screens, from the MacBook on which I am writing this, to the television set downstairs, and the cell phone in my pocket. They are all, I would argue, mechanical variations on the ancient techniques of shadow theater; understanding the dynamics of shadow puppet theater can help us understand the dynamics of these other light-screen performances we encounter or create daily.

The Western rediscovery of shadow theater continues today in many forms, and one fascinating example of it is the work of contemporary American visual artist Kara Walker. Walker, whose early focus on the technique of 19th-century silhouette portraiture allowed her to delve deeply into the issues of race, sexuality, politics, and identity that haunted American life in that century, as well as in the 20th (and now in the 21st), has more recently added articulation and movement to the cutout shapes she makes, and, in filming and videotaping her manipulation of these silhouettes, has entered the world of shadow theater to stunning effect.

Walker's 2004 shadow puppet film *Testimony* uses a black and white shadow palette (like Reininger's) to pursue an alternative history of 19th-century slave society. Her images have the uncanny feel of 19th-century popular art, since the portraiture of silhouette cuttings is at the center of this aesthetic, but her short film turns the tables, because at the start of her story the whites have grown tired of taking care of themselves, and have asked to be the slaves of the blacks. What follows is a raw, sexually charged, and violent depiction of the bitter consequences of slavery, here drawn out expansively and shockingly because of Walker's radical role reversal. The exploitation (sexual and otherwise) that we know was a feature of our own history of slavery is here depicted with black female characters taking advantage of white males, instead of the other way around. A slave escape prompts the inevitable, familiar, and in fact clichéd images of a slave hunt, with bloodhounds, and the capture of the runaway slaves, and then the hanging of the same young white man with whom the black

'an unequalled window on the world of contemporary puppetry'

Travis Elborough,
The Guardian



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PUPPET
notebook

female narrator had been involved with sexually at the story's beginning. This short film is stunning, because it replays the barely repressed history of black/white relations during and after slavery (which most recently emerged spectacularly in the confrontation between a police officer and professor Henry Louis Gates in my hometown of Cambridge) in a way which amplifies and somehow clarifies the complexity, ambivalence, and deep and lasting effects of this injustice that is essential to our past and present.

Shadow theater, as Walker uses it, is a brilliant medium with which to examine this story since, as I argued at the beginning of this column, the form is always already dealing with issues of existence and identity. Walker's use of the limitations of flat profile imagery, as well as the restriction to black and white (and some gray) propels the story comfortably into the highly symbolic idiom in which shadow theater has always operated. Edward Gordon Craig recognized that Javanese and Turkish shadow theater dealt with deep issues of religious and cultural identity, and Goethe saw that shadow plays he saw in Frankfurt were likewise dealing with such basic issues from a Christian and European perspective. Kara Walker's recent use of the form as a means to understand more fully our own conflicted past and present experiences with race joins with precedent forms and their use of shadow puppet theater to make compelling and evocative art.

*A Pair of Cockeyed Optimists,
The Puppetry Career of
Bob and Judy Brown*



**A Pair of Cockeyed Optimists:
The Puppetry Career of
Bob and Judy Brown**

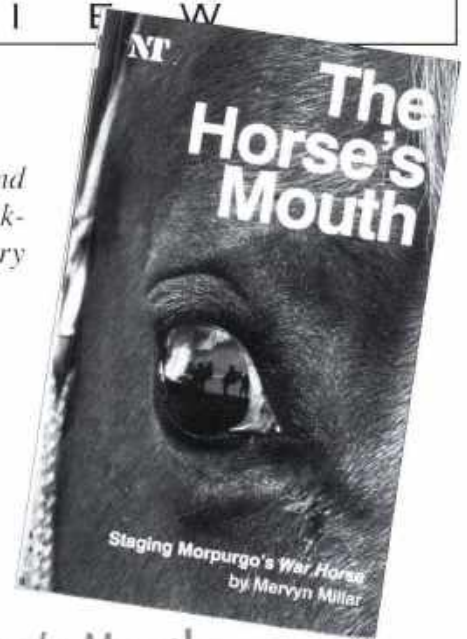
by Judy Barry Brown and Luman Coad
340 pp. Charlemagne Press, 2009. \$25.

A Pair of Cockeyed Optimists is another installment in the Charlemagne Press's consistent and commendable effort to document the nature of American puppetry over the last half-century or so. Like Charlemagne's other recent imprints, Judy Barry Brown and Luman Coad's history of the Bob Brown Marionettes is an up-close, unfiltered testimony of what it means to make puppet theater at a time when live performance is routinely overshadowed by television and film media, and when puppetry in general faces a constant identity struggle—what exactly is it, who is it for, and what should it do?

Bob Brown's start in puppetry is fascinating. Born in New Jersey, he learned hand puppets, rod puppets, and marionettes with Len and Patsy Piper's Piper Puppets, and then joined Bil Baird in time to take part in the company's State Department-sponsored tours of India and Russia, at the height of the Cold War. Amazing! Brown met playwright and director Judy Barry at the 1964 Puppeteers of America Festival, where he began to share what he knew of puppetry with her; six months later they were married.

The story of their puppet career in the next decades is absorbing. They work with Baird at the 1965 New York World's Fair, perform at the Swedish Cottage in Central Park, and develop Christmas season marionette shows for Manhattan department stores. Over the years they create a substantial repertoire of marionette and hand puppet shows, shift into a combined

These two books offer fascinating—and very different—examples of the making of puppet shows in contemporary western culture.



**The Horse's Mouth:
Staging Morpurgo's War Horse**

by Mervyn Millar
96 pp. Oberon Books, 2007. £12.99.

bunraku and Czech black-theater style, and develop into a full-time puppet company based in the Washington, D.C. area. Long-term gigs at the Smithsonian Institution and *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood* put them in the middle of American professional puppet theater, but their story shows that this road was a hard one every step of the way. Altogether, the view of United States puppetry presented in this book is illuminating. The rise and fall of the school assembly show, for example (which the Browns lived through), is in itself a fascinating marker of the nature of late-twentieth-century culture.

Both Browns emerge as larger-than-life idiosyncratic characters: Bob the master puppeteer and builder, most comfortable with onstage improvisation (and unable to memorize lines); and Judy the playwright and director possessed of a sly, irrepressible and often acid wit. The book's focus on the Browns' "War Stories" gives it an insider's perspective that is revelatory and yet often discomfiting. We learn that Bil Baird, puppeteer Rod Young, the Smithsonian Institution, most puppet show producers, the majority of children's audiences,

and even Mr. Rogers are—from the Browns' perspective—by turns naïve, stupid, unfair, selfish, or mean. Ouch! Such stories are meant to be humorous tales of the Browns' perseverance, but the laughs sometimes stick in the throat. Unusual for Charlemagne Press, the book has more than its share of spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors; and the paucity of actual dates often makes it hard to know exactly when





heart of England's generously subsidized National Theatre, marks a particular openness to the possibility of puppetry as a legitimate contemporary performance form. Mervyn Millar, a puppeteer and member of the large company that put *War Horse* together, offers a fascinating insider's account of how a team of highly competent performers, designers, writers, and directors from mainstream actors' theater opened themselves up to Kohler, Jones, and the whole world of puppetry. Aware of the possibilities of puppet production from the perspective of the past four decades, the *War Horse* creative

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reviews by John Bell



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important events transpired. But the sheer honesty of the book and the energy of its subjects make it compelling reading.

The Horse's Mouth is compelling in a different way. It documents the 2007 development of *War Horse*: a full-fledged theater work for puppets and actors at Nicholas Hytner's National Theatre in London. The production (rumored to be headed for Broadway in 2012) is based on Michael Morpurgo's eponymous novel, which tells the epic story of Joey, a stalwart farm horse from Wales, his young owner Albert, and their journeys from rural innocence in the Welsh countryside through the modern machine horrors of World War I, and then, miraculously, back home. In short, it is a love story—an entirely romantic one at that—and in performance the remarkable puppets created by Handspring Puppet Company's Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones make *War Horse* a stupendous spectacle that has been packing houses in London over the past three years, first at the National Theatre and now in the West End.

British drama has long had a reputation for prizing text over image, so the success of a puppet-based production, especially from the

heart of England's generously subsidized National Theatre, marks a particular openness to the possibility of puppetry as a legitimate contemporary performance form. Mervyn Millar, a puppeteer and member of the large company that put *War Horse* together, offers a fascinating insider's account of how a team of highly competent performers, designers, writers, and directors from mainstream actors' theater opened themselves up to Kohler, Jones, and the whole world of puppetry. Aware of the possibilities of puppet production from the examples of the past few decades, the *War Horse* creative team is nonetheless shown grappling with the challenge of inventing, understanding, and utilizing a new "visual language" of puppets in a production whose central character—Joey—says not one word. Different from *The Lion King*, the animals in *War Horse* are not anthropomorphized, and yet are still invested with complex emotions. Millar recounts how actors become puppeteers, dramaturgs learn to write for puppet theater, and directors (the production has two) learn to combine Handspring's life-size puppet horses, puppet birds, puppet humans and shadow theater, together with video and performing objects, into a spectacle about modern life, modern war, and the relations of humans and animals that, in production, achieves stunning effects.

Different from *A Pair of Cockeyed Optimists*, Millar's book eschews anecdote in an earnest effort to understand the innovations that *War Horse* thrust upon its makers. This aspect of the story is fascinating because it documents a challenge many puppeteers face: how to explain puppetry's possibilities to highly skilled practitioners of actor-based theater who, even if they want to, have a hard time understanding how a construction of wood, metal, plastic, and leather can become the center of intense emotional and narrative power. Puppeteers know such things are routinely possible; *The Horse's Mouth* shows how others can learn this as well.

reviews by John Bell

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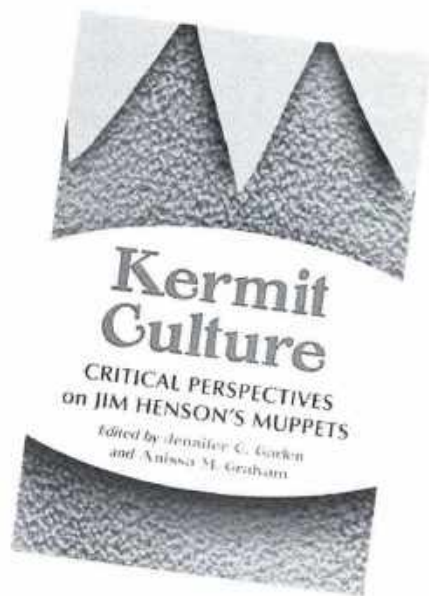
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BOOK REVIEW



Kermit Culture: Critical Perspectives on Jim Henson's Muppets

edited by Jennifer C. Garlen and Anissa M. Graham, McFarland & Company, Inc., USA, 2009. ISBN Number 978-0-7864-4259-1

Just as contemporary scholars have studied the work of J.R.R. Tolkien and *The Simpsons* for their cultural resonance, so too do the Muppets deserve academic attention. *Kermit Culture* represents the first collection of scholarly writing about Jim Henson's Muppets. Editors Jennifer C. Garlen and Anissa M. Graham have gathered essays that will both challenge perceptions of how the Muppets function as pop culture icons as well as essays that will delight readers with recognition of favorite Muppet moments. The "critical perspectives" range from essays about characters such as Gonzo the Great and Miss Piggy to close examinations of specific Muppet projects like *The Muppet Wizard of Oz*; to examinations of their impact on popular culture and global economics. The fifteen essays are usefully divided by category into three sections—"audience participation," "adaptation and performance," "theories and strategies." In addition, there is an appendix that gives guest star listings for *The Muppet Show* as well as a listing of other projects including the stable of characters from the show. While only one chapter takes puppetry as its focus (my own "From Muppetry to Puppetry"), the material has enough variety to interest academics, cultural critics, and Muppet fans alike.

review by Jennifer Stoessner, PhD

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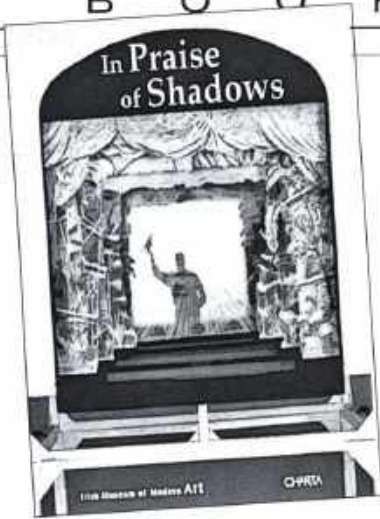
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In Praise of Shadows

Curated by Paolo Colombo, text by Evamarie Blattner, Carolina Lopez Caballero, Metin And, Lewis Hyde, William Kentridge, Enrique Juncosa, Francois Martin, Paolo Colombo.
Published by Charta, Milan, January 2009, ISBN 978-88-8158-714-8, 150 pages

In Praise of Shadows is a handsome volume, created as a catalog for a museum exhibition. The book brings together traditional shadow puppetry of Greece and Turkey, early shadow films and contemporary art and film.

Part I features eight lavishly illustrated essays. Photos include images of rare figures and silhouettes, films, texts, and manuscripts pertaining to shadow theatre, and early silhouette and stop-motion movies. Professor Metin And contributed the article on Karagoz, and Lewis Hyde provided scripts of Greek Karaghiozis plays. Two essays focus on great animation classics by Ladislav Starewitch and Lotte Reiniger. South African artist/filmmaker, William Kentridge, writes about his long time interest in shadows.

Part II, The Works, offers about 90 beautiful images of work by contemporary artists Haluk Akakçe (Turkey), Nathalie Djurberg (Sweden), William Kentridge (South Africa), Katariina Lillqvist (Finland), Jockum Nordström (Sweden), Christiana Soulou (Greece), Andrew Vickery (United Kingdom) and Kara Walker (USA). Excellent documentation of the powerful and inventive puppetry work of Djurberg, Lillqvist, Kentridge and Walker make *In Praise of Shadows* an especially significant contribution to the field.

In Praise of Shadows opened at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, on Nov. 5, 2008. The exhibition traveled to the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art and the Benaki, Museum, Athens, closing July 26, 2009.

Order from the Charta website www.chartaartbooks.it, Barnes and Noble (\$41.95) or on Amazon.com

review by Steve Abrams

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La Natividad, photo by Bruce Slicka

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What's new at the Center for Puppetry Arts®?

Jim Henson: Wonders from His Workshop

Highlighting some of the performance and design contributions Jim Henson and his collaborators have made to the world of puppetry, this exhibit features the technological advances behind *Fraggle Rock*, *Labyrinth* and more. Come and experience past and current innovations that continue to inspire puppeteers and audiences around the world. On loan from The Henson Family Collection courtesy of The Jim Henson Legacy and The Jim Henson Company.

Jim Henson: Puppeteer

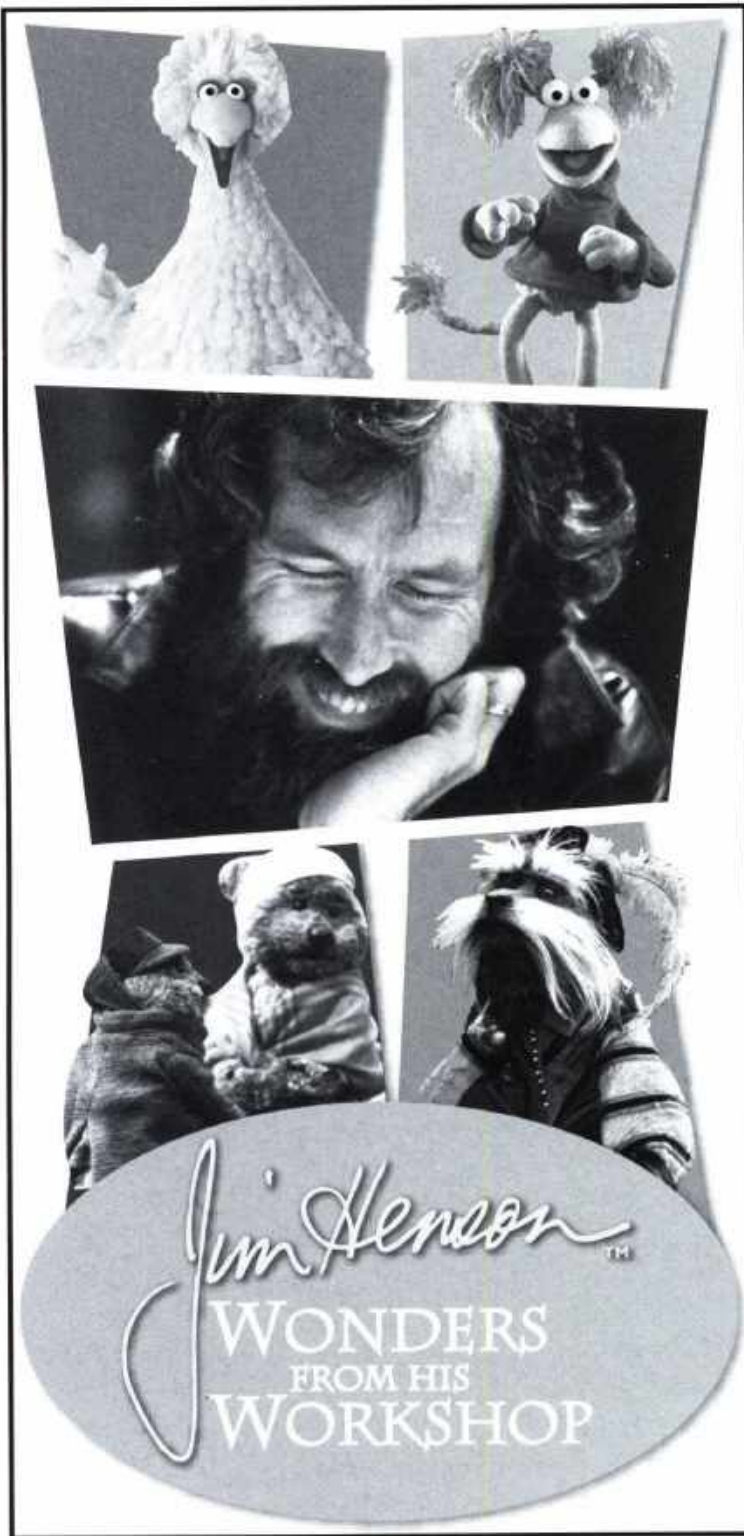
Drawn from the extensive collection of the Henson family and The Jim Henson Legacy, *Jim Henson: Puppeteer* includes Rowlf the Dog, Ernie, the La Choy Dragon, Dr. Teeth, The Swedish Chef, Bugsy Them and others. The exhibition presents photographs, design reproductions and a selection of the many puppets Jim performed during his lifetime. On loan from The Henson Family Collection courtesy of The Jim Henson Legacy.

Jim Henson: A Man & His Frog

Jim Henson: A Man & His Frog profiles Jim Henson and his most famous puppet. This display inaugurates a series of preview exhibitions leading to the future Jim Henson Wing of the Center for Puppetry Arts. On loan from The Henson Family courtesy of The Jim Henson Legacy.

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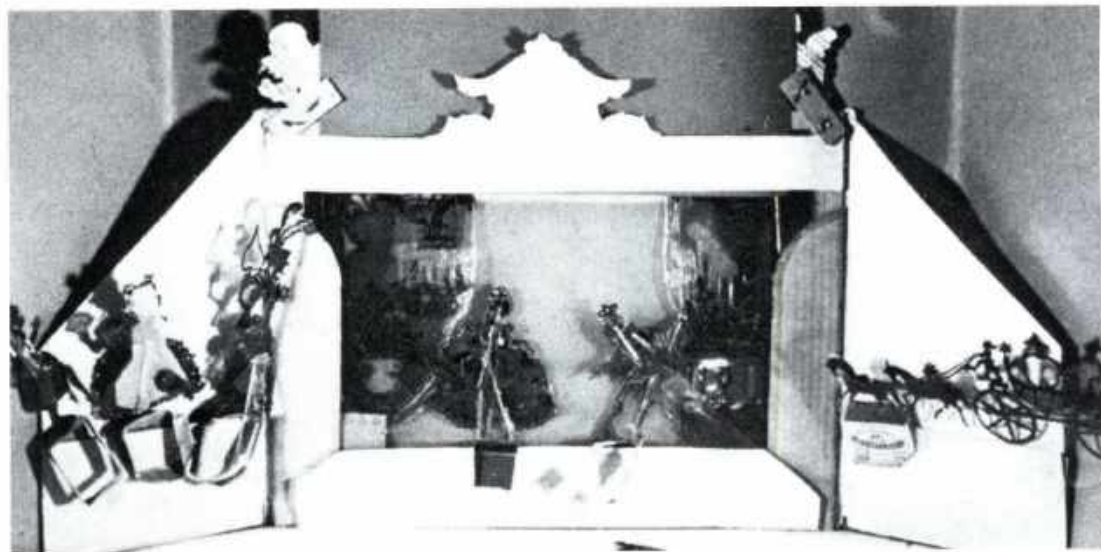
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Small shadow-theatre. BOTTOM. Backstage. *Figures left: Cinderella and Ugly Sisters. Right: The glass coach. On the screen: Cinderella and the Prince in the ballroom. TOP. Cinderella meets the Prince. Ballroom scene as the audience sees it.*

from Lotte Reiniger's **SHADOW THEATRES AND SHADOW FILMS**, 1970