

SPRING and SUMMER 2011 Issue #29

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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

issue no. 29

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On the COVER

from
A Child's View:
19th-Century Paper Theaters
Bruce Museum, Greenwich, CT
(see center pages)



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



ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATION- POLLOCK'S "BLUE JACKETS OF HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE."

The film begins.

Lights up on water rushing over a small dam. Fade to building façade, ornate columns and balustrade. Pan down to proscenium opening, deep red curtains parted to reveal a landscape from classical antiquity, illuminated by actual gas footlights. The painted drop rises to reveal a beautiful woman in the woods flanked by several men—perhaps soldiers—not far from a castle. The castle backdrop is then raised to reveal the head of a real little boy. He is the director and animator of this pint-sized, paper theater. To the scene before him he adds a woman in a fancy red ball gown before abandoning his players to the open flames (we imagine there was a best boy grip just off camera, fire extinguisher in hand).

The film is Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*¹, and it is one of quite a number of celluloid masterpieces to use the toy theatre as a metaphor, motif or at the very least a compelling visual curio. *Tea with Mussolini*, *Frida*, and *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* are a few others that feature beautiful examples of these Victorian-style paper theaters.

One of the great uses of toy theatre in recent years was Danté's *Inferno*, a short film made by Sean Meredith² with Paul Zaloom and Sandow Birk. Part of this film, at least, is on the internet³ and it is well worth watching. The miniature nature of traditional toy theatre, well-suited to an audience of eight or ten, is also one of its liabilities. The media of film easily leaps this limitation with close-up shots and large screens. Even large, though, the detailed sets of *Inferno* maintain some of the charm of the 19th century pastime, with its 2-D sets and stiff little actors.

We have dabbled in this genre as well, inspired by such contemporary artists as Robert Poulter (page 8) and Great Small Works (page 20). Recently we worked on the Underground Railway Theater production of Brecht's *Galileo*. I proposed a pre-show toy theatre presentation of "The Life and Times of Galileo Galilei" as a way of orienting the audience to the age and culture in which Galileo first trained his telescope on the heavens—exactly 400 years before our 2009 premiere. With the help of muralist David Fichter, the material got a satiric and energetic "street theatre" performance

by URT actress (and artistic director) Debra Wise and her young apprentice. This little diversion was very popular with audiences, and certainly contributed to our determination to devote an issue of *Puppetry International* to the history and recent resurgence of the form.

Other things fueled our enthusiasm as well—Michael and Valerie Nelson's Little Blue Moon Theatre opened us up to toy theatre's erotic/comic potential (page 26); the Toy Theatre Festival in Preetz, Germany has helped foster an international network of practitioners (page 12) as has the biennial toy theatre festival in New York City presented by Great Small Works (page 20). We hope the numerous examples presented in these pages will both enlighten and inspire. Do try this at home!

¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=loJjTc5F6Xk

² Review in *Puppetry International* #19

³ www.dantefilm.com/trailer.html

- Andrew C. Periale

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



FANNY AND ALEXANDER



TEA WITH MUSSOLINI



FILMING DANTE'S INFERNO
DIRECTED BY SEAN MEREDITH



FROM BRECHT'S GALILEO, UNDERGROUND RAILWAY THEATER

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STEINWAY STUDIO

Production of a Traditional Toy Theatre Play - Then and Now

by Ann Szabo Neff

In a dimly lit display case, just inside the entrance to the library, a book lay open.¹ The sketch on the left hand page showed a toy theatre being delivered to a family of children. The caption is: "Here Captain Clarence arrives with the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in miniature, and the Miller and his Men in a forward state of preparation." On the right hand page the children are shown further preparing the play.



A ditty begins under the second sketch:

*That night they would not go to bed –
Kate, Tom and Jane, and Frank and Ned;
But with their brushes plates and paint,
Made dirt enough to vex a saint.*

The book is *Young Troublesome*, from the year 1850.² *The Miller and His Men* is undoubtedly the best known traditional British toy theatre play.

In this century, Dr. Neff's Incredible Puppet Company, Toy Theatre Division, also creates toy theatre productions in a traditional vein. The delivery of toy theatre materials has changed. Either UPS, or the US Postal Service brings the brown parcels or long tubes, many with foreign stamps. But our response to receiving a new proscenium sheet or book or play or sliders is just the same – excitement! And yes, there are times when we have not gone to bed in the frenzy of working on a new project.

First, let us define "traditional toy theatre." John Bell, in his "Short Entertaining History of The Toy Theatre" presentation, has us all sing "It's got an arch, it's miniature, it's made out of paper, it is flat and you can do it yourself. This is what toy theatre is."³ Dr. George Neff and I focus on the "traditional," in that the style of our graphics and the content of our shows reference the human theatre or classic literature of the nineteenth century or at very least put up a gripping good story.

The *commercial* process of drawing and printing the materials of toy theatre has changed greatly during its history. But, for the most part, the methods used by the purchaser of those materials to create toy theatre performances in the home, until recently, has changed little. Although few early instructions can be found, it is possible to uncover that process from subsequent how-to books as well as from the chroniclers of this theatrical art form.

In 1926 W. H. Whanslaw wrote:

Now your father, when he was a boy – and his father also years before him – probably made himself a little toy that gave him unforgettable pleasure. He went into a toyshop and, for a penny or so (*at that time a considerable sum for a child*), purchased a sheet of paper upon which were printed the design of a model theatre front. This design he pasted to a sheet of card. . . . The next time he brought home a wooden framework. . . . After that he bought sheets of scenes and characters with "book of words," a few metal slides, some oil-lit footlights and so became his own stage manager. He could buy his scenes and actors either plain, and colour them himself, or already coloured.

The book was the first in a series on puppetry called "Everybody's Theatre." In it Whanslaw gave instructions for building theatres and puppets and producing theatre in the home.⁴ The book has been credited with fueling a revival of interest in British

toy theatre and the founding of the venerable British Puppetry and Model Theatre Guild, which exists today.

And thus Whanslaw has listed for us the components of traditional toy theatre, which were necessary when it began, and still are today. You need a play and scenes and characters. There must be a proscenium and a stage on which to perform. You also need slides, or some sort of stick with which to hold, push and pull the characters. It all must be lit, and there should be proper stage effects – perhaps music and explosions, flashes and shots, as required by the drama.



Then what? A. E. Wilson, one of the first chroniclers of toy theatre, in 1932, recalls:

But if you bought the plays in sheets – Webb's and Pollock's – you could, for the modest outlay of a shilling or so, become the possessor of the real thing. It generally began with "The Miller and His Men" or perhaps with one of those queer and incomprehensible pantomimes . . .

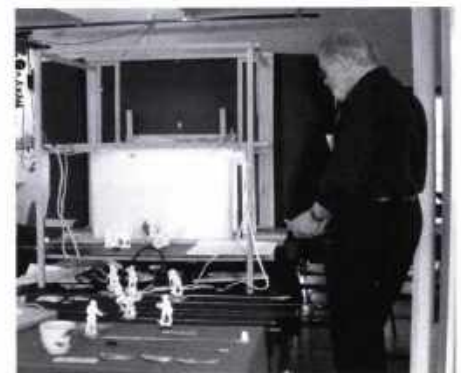
Then you hurried home as fast as your young legs would carry you to begin the delectable task of Preparing the Play. . . .

Ah, me, well I remember the ecstasy of it! The hours of glad toil with paint brush and watercolors, the glue and the cardboard, the glittering frost and tinsel paper for the pantomime scenes and the thick rancid odour of colza oil which you burned in the footlights."⁵

Is it possible, in 2011, to "possess the real thing?" In the nineteenth century, buying toy theatre involved a magical journey to a shop somewhere in England. It was rumored in 1884 that there was only one seller left.⁶ Truly, there are no longer many toyshops carrying toy theatre paraphernalia. However, the Museum of Performance & Design in San Francisco, in connection with a recent exhibit, listed only eleven "toy theatre merchants" in both Europe and America. Two are shops still in London. However, a search on the internet for "toy theatre" brought up over a million references, including shops, sites, books, exhibitions, art prints, videos and blogs! Yes, the material of toy theatre is still available.

And after you have procured all the materials, are there still "hours of glad toil?" Perhaps. One of the easiest constructions is a toy theatre book – one of three – by Mr. Peter Jackson, in which there is a whole stage and characters and sliders to merely punch out and slot together.⁷ Jackson's playbooks advertise – "No Cutting, No Gluing!!" It is also possible to obtain play sets that are printed on sturdy card and already colored. Robert Poulter of the U.K. has had a few of his plays published in that manner, with a fold up concertina theatre part of the package.⁸ Pollocks' Toy Shop in Covent Garden sells a reproduction of the classic Pollock's Britannia toy theatre on sturdy card.⁹ However, this theatre must be cut out and constructed. The seller's description adds "complete with wobbly paper characters, shaky scenes and a text adapted from the 1836 original – that's all part of the fun."

At Dr. Neff's Incredible Puppet Company, we started simply, using published materials. For our fourth production we took on the challenge of constructing a large theatre and creating an original play.



By then we had reached a level of toil no longer "glad" but still satisfying!

Another aspect of "toil" — and fun — of toy theatre production is in creating an entertaining performance. In our first efforts, when we tried to perform, the provided characters were the wrong size, or they faced the wrong way, and the dramatic action was impossible to portray. Adjustments were needed. It was here that we employed technologies not even dreamed of in the 1800s.

Before we address the use of modern technology in toy theatre, are there other differences in the production of traditional toy theatre, then and now? Some of the materials have changed. The tinsel decorations have been set aside, and the colza oil lights replaced. There is still paper, card, wood and watercolors, but we no longer have to boil our glue. Some enthusiasts have experimented with glue films to mount their images. One German play of a wolf story is even printed on adhesive backed paper!¹⁰ Watercolor is no longer the only medium, with markers, colored pencils and pastels being used. Plastic is now used for making sliders and the proscenium supports, and scenery sheets and theatres may employ foam core in grooves.



Computers, electricity and electronics are at our disposal to make toy theatre magic.

It is with technology that the greatest changes have taken place in the personal process of "preparing the toy theatre." The advent of personal technology, i.e., computers, home printers, video cameras and computer software, along with the availability of on-demand printing services have taken over much of the creative role of the original commercial providers. Harry Oudekerk also uses his home computer with a plotter/cutter to eliminate the tedium of cutting out characters by hand.

As for lighting, the possibilities change constantly. With the advent of electric power in England, footlights were attached to battery cells; now experimentation with dimmable LED lights, is all the rage. And in between, all sorts of incandescent lights have been used, even with home dimmers and specially created Danish boards. There is an ongoing debate whether plays should be performed to recorded soundtracks or live. But certainly, there is exciting software for composition and downloadable music and sounds to play with, plus devices to control it all.



Images are available on-line to download characters, scenery and prosceniums. Computer software programs exist for drawing characters, altering existing ones; to color and enlarge the drawings. And you can print it out on sturdy paper, in glorious color, at home! Although still controversial, movie and animation programs

have been used to turn images into virtual toy theatre performances, to be distributed on-line or on DVD. The explosion of opportunities for and with toy theatre, even in the traditional vein, is rather like the famous explosion at the end of *The Miller and His Men*, with bits and pieces flying everywhere, filling up the whole frame!¹¹



But, after construction? We are talking toy theatre here, which from almost the very beginning, over two hundred years ago, was intended for actual performance.

Toy theatre performances originally took place in the home, for family and friends. There are still those who do set up their theatres at home and perform for invited guests. Others, such as the Nelsons in California, target their material for customers' house parties. The performances at the bi-annual Vishmarkt Papierentheatre Festival in the Netherlands¹² take place in living rooms and other home spaces around the town of Harderwijk.



Toy theatre enthusiasts flock each year to Preetz, Germany for a world famous festival¹³ in a schoolhouse. The venue for festivals such as Great Small Works¹⁴, which attracts performers from around the world, involves large theatre spaces in Brooklyn, NY.¹⁴



So your modern toy theatre production must be portable, even as airplane cargo, to get to performance locations! It also helps if you can use modern video technology to project your tiny performance to a larger audience.



In conclusion, the question remains: Why is this archaic theatrical art form fascinating young and old alike, two hundred years after the first record of a toy theatre performance? The ability to “do it yourself” is appealing. In one GSW video, a young woman says, “I get to play God, see?” with a wink and a finger snap.¹⁵ The repertoire contains adventure and romance. The visual effect can be stunning. Dr. Neff and I recognize the enchantment in the eyes of our audience when we lift the curtain on a charming scene; we have felt it ourselves.

As G. K. Chesterton, for whom toy theatre figured prominently, says, “The most artistic thing about the theatrical art is the fact that the spectator looks at the whole thing through a window. . . . But the advantage of a small theatre exactly is that you are looking through a small window. Has not everyone noticed how sweet and startling any landscape looks when seen through an arch? This strong, square shape . . . is not only an assistance to beauty; it is the essential of beauty. The most beautiful part of every picture is the frame.”¹⁶ And so we frame the portion of the world we elect to portray within the toy theatre proscenium.

Ann Szabo Neff began her career in puppetry with the New York City Department of Parks in the 1960s. After a long detour in the business world, she returned to her first love in 1992, and is now the Operations Manager and Resident Scholar for Dr. George Neff’s Incredible Puppet Company, and Mrs. Neff. Her interest in toy theatre surfaced in childhood, and it remains an enjoyable addiction of study, collecting, building and performing “the little plays in the frame.”



Footnotes

1. The library is the Cotsen’s Children’s Library at Princeton University. The exhibit was entitled “Making the Toy Theatre, The Skelt and Webb Collection.”
2. Leech, John, *Young Troublesome or Master Jacky’s Holidays*, 1845.
3. Bell, John, “Short Entertaining History of the Toy Theatre” live presentation.
4. Whanslaw, W. H., *Everybody’s Theatre and How to Make It*, Wells, Gardner Darton & Co. Redhill, U.K. 1926, 1948, 1957. p. 5.
5. Wilson, A. E., *Penny Plain Twopence Coloured, A History of the Juvenile Drama*, Benjamin Blom, New York/London, 1932, 1969. p. 20.
6. Stevenson, Robert Louis, “A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured,” in *Memories and Portraits*, London, 1887.
7. Jackson, Peter, “Cinderella,” Hawkin & Co. St. Margaret, Harleston, Norfolk, U.K. (available at Benjamin Pollock’s Toyshop).
8. Poulter, Robert - www.newmodeltheatre.co.uk/.
9. Benjamin Pollocks Toyshop - www.pollocks-coventgarden.co.uk/.
10. Peter Schauerte-Lüke, *Ich Bin Der Starkste im Ganzen Land* (I am the Strongest), toy theatre play, 2001 Burg Theater, Schölsburg 2003.
11. Powell, David, W. G. Webb and the Victorian Toy Theatre Webb Festival, 2005.
12. Oudekerk, Harry, web magazine - www.vischmarktpapierentheater.nl/.
13. The Preetz Paper Theater Festival - www.vhs-preetz.de/ppitt/festival.htm.
14. Great Small Works - www.greatsmallworks.org/festivals-spaghetti/index.
15. Great Small Works, web video- www.kickstarter.com/projects/1256400278/great-small-works-9th-international-toy-theater-fe-0. [see back cover. -ed.]
16. Chesterton, G. K., *Tremendous Trifles*, Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1929. p. 183.

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- Baldwin, Peter, *Toy Theatres of the World*, Zwemmer, London, 1992.

Photo Sources

- “Leech Sketch” John Leech, *Young Troublesome or Master Jacky’s Holidays*, 1845.
- “Miller and His Men” Explosion from David Powell, W. G. Webb and the Victorian Toy Theatre.
- “The Cure” performance at the Vischmarkt International Toy theatre Festival 2007 – photo by Rainer Sennewald. Used with permission.

All other photos – Ann Neff

Robert Poulter's New Model Theatre in Museums

by Fay Tsitou



POULTER PAINTING THE BACK OF THE EIDOPHUSIKON'S ROLLING BACKGROUND, ALTONAER MUSEUM

This article introduces the readers to Robert Poulter's New Model Theatre which departs from the English traditional toy theatre genre. The article focuses on Poulter's work in museums and galleries. More specifically, it aims at exploring the significance of a multi-sensory, low tech New Model Theatre event in relation to visitor-centered policies.

Poulter has been presenting his more than eighty New Model Theatre (NMT) shows in museums, galleries, libraries, and festivals for almost thirty years. His performances invite the audience to a journey around intriguing people (such as famous painters, actors, literary figures, or even pirates) and stories inspired by theatre and opera.

The New Model Theatre

Poulter's shows are as a rule designed, written, constructed and manipulated entirely by himself.² NMT has as its starting point the English traditional toy theatre which consists of paper figures on a small stage. Yet, NMT differs in many ways from what we understand today as the toy theatre genre. Poulter's innovations consist primarily of a painted rolling background, a complex theatrical lighting system, and twelve grooves on the stage. The grooves prevent his figures from the typical toy theatre risk of falling down. Also, grooves offer the show great flexibility: a figure can enter from one side and exit from the other, the performer can safely speed up action and hide the manipulation -a strip of cardboard- inside the grooves. On rare occasions, this permits the manipulator to have one figure pushing the other across. Poulter admits though that even if "you cannot hide manipulation, you can sometimes surprise the audience by having the figures coming forward from the back of the theatre... everything happens horizontally, so anything happening like that is a shock to the audience."

NMT figures and settings are painted with felt-tip pens, watercolors, colored paper, card, fiber, pastel, or collage. In some cases they have articulations and in rare occasions, instead of cardboard, they might be built out of metal, wood or glass. The rolling background often is painted and lit from behind for effects such as sunrises, volcano eruptions, explosions, or fires.

The puppeteer and theorist John Philips comments on the action outside a NMT framed area:

The performance is one of continual movement—not only the characters, but the scenery as well. The curtain rarely falls and even the proscenium sometimes changes its shape. The characters have even been known to perform outside the confines of the tiny stage. It's definitely different and a break with traditional forms of small theatre. (1997: 12).

Poulter usually uses a prerecorded mix of voices, music and sound which makes the shows' soundtracks sound "like short radio programmes in their own right." (Poulter 1994: 14) Moreover, he puts great emphasis on the theatricality and composition of each scene. The figures, the scenery and the rolling background are meticulously choreographed and attribute a cinematic quality to the framed area which stands simultaneously as a stage, a canvas, and a screen. This contributes to the montage of the scenes which is based on: the proportions and the distances among figures and props, the angles from which these are painted and lit, how far in or off the center should the slides go and in which groove should they be.

It is like seeing history at great speed.—Robert Poulter¹

For example, in *Mr. Turner Gets Steamed Up*, we see Turner with his housekeeper Hannah in the artist's studio. The image of the studio is painted on one slide while on the stage there is also another slide with a big picture frame (Turner and Hannah are placed in front of it). Turner is painting the *Temeraire* warship which took part in the battle of Trafalgar, when suddenly the image of the studio slides and goes off the stage. The audience, together with Turner and Hannah, now look through the picture frame at a grayish sky on the rolling background. Then a number of slides come in: the water-river on two slides, two steamboats, and an image of what *Temeraire* would have looked like. This is a scene where the ship literally has no masts on. Then, as Poulter turns the rolling background, the sky changes to a Turner-like sunset and the ships swap around: the slides of this image go off the stage while new slides come in at the same time. This is the moment when the real image of *Temeraire* turns into Turner's *Fighting Temeraire* painting. This poetic image of the ship with the masts on -as Turner thought it would look better for the composition- is a three dimensional NMT version of the original painting.

I have often witnessed Poulter literally dancing while manipulating, as he tries to coordinate all the elements of his multifaceted art. Perhaps he could not have succeeded otherwise, having to match long lists of sound and light cues, unless he treats each and every figure as a dancing partner from the moment it appears on stage till it vanishes backstage.

The museum as a venue

Museum interpretation and communication today favor a dialogue³ that goes well beyond the manipulation of multimedia exhibits. As Andrea Wintcomb, an academic in the Cultural Heritage field and ex-curator in many museums in Australia, explains:

Taken seriously, this dialogue could become the basis for a new understanding of interactivity in museums. Such an understanding would break the association between a mechanistic understanding of interactives and attempts to democratize the museum, as well as too uncritical a reliance on technology, as the basis for the way forward. (2006: 360).

This dialogue often takes the form of an open narrative. In the last decade, museums consider learning “essentially a narrative endeavor” and have undergone a shift “from knowledge to knowledges, from science to narrative” (Roberts 1997: 3, 132). In their new role, museums negotiate meaning with their visitors and invite them to participate in a playful, entertaining, and thought-provoking, narrative. This context provides them with “the optimum conditions for learning—openness, loss of self.” (ibid: 40)

SCENE FROM THE NEW MODEL THEATRE SHOW *THE LOYAL* 47



LONDON AS SEEN FROM GREENWICH

Poulter's art and history NMT shows *Mr. Turner Gets Steamed Up* (1999) and *The Great Belzoni* (1996)⁴ have been frequently performed in museums and galleries internationally. With these shows, Poulter doesn't aim at making a sentimental appeal to the audiences with innocent, friendly-looking figures, or challenging their knowledge and spirit from an expert's point of view. Instead, his narratives attempt to suspend spectators' disbelief by stimulating their imagination and sense of humour. Rigorous movement, use of scales, close ups, time travels, surprising associations and inventive montage, all aspire to carry the audience with Poulter into the playful side of life.

Poulter intends to entertain -and by no means to teach- his audience. He aims, as the Soviet ethnographer and critic, Pyotr Bogatyrev would say, at 'co-creating' (1983: 62) with them a world based on poetic interpretations of real facts; a world of ultimate metaphors which presents a mini-view of the social, historical and cultural context of the time his protagonists lived. NMT audiences literally witness a person from the present attempting to enter into a multi-sensory dialogue with the past.

Poulter's miniature stage of history is accompanied by his live presence. This reconfirms a humble truth, as the scholar emeritus at the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Education and deputy director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculptural Garden, Stephen Weil, clarifies: In certain museum exhibition practices, museum interaction "is in no way inevitable but has been shaped and mediated by real human beings, with all the possibilities for error and/or bias that any such human undertaking might entail." (2007: 42)

Based on thorough research, NMT shows seem to be fairly accurate.⁵ However, any puppets or paper figures do not pretend to be something more than what they stand for: They are metaphors and can never become the real thing. Recognizing this self-evident fact, without however seriously contradicting reality in any other ways, Poulter treats with the same eagerness both his protagonists and their setting. He thus invites the audience to take a new look on the world and history and appreciate them afresh. As he manipulates his tiny people, the props, the landscapes as well as the frame through which he performs, he invites us to look at his world. There, nothing is static or born of some mystery forces.

For example, in *The Great Belzoni*, the curtains are vertical as well as horizontal and the proscenium (an Egyptian temple) is continuously changing shapes to fit the scenes. The opening scene is a non-realistic amalgam of Belzoni's early life. There, a number of slides are pushed on stage, in various grooves and in perspective. The montage is non-linear and all action is compressed within a single frame. The challenge here is to follow Belzoni's travel and do the scene changes (from Rome to London, Scotland, Portugal, etc.) without closing the curtain. As Poulter admits, for the second part of the show, he "squeezed Belzoni's two to three year journey to Egypt into two to three seconds."

In addition, in the final scene of *Mr. Turner Gets Steamed Up*, Turner is trying to finish a painting at the Royal Academy of London on the varnishing day before the exhibition's opening. Poulter introduces the audience to a flashback using a slide with an image of the great engineer Brunel who built the bridge over the river Thames at Maiden Head for the Great Western Railway to cross. The quick

changes of sky images on the rolling background suggest the time changes (in great speed!). New slides get in to suggest the opening of the Railway: The trains are crossing the bridge and, in one of the carriages, we see Turner being amazed at the Railway's speed, and at a wonderful stormy sky. After this flashback, the narrative goes forward to the Royal Academy of Arts. There, Turner is putting some last touches on his painting *Rain, Steam and Speed - The Great Western Railway*. It looks like there is nothing on it and a little boy comes in asking where the train is. Turner explains that he has not painted it yet, while slowly the train appears on the canvas out of nowhere. (The magic relies on the backlighting of the rolling background.)

If NMT is revolutionary in any sense, this is because it suggests that poetry and *joie de vivre* are closer to real life than we tend to think in our everyday routine. With simple techniques that create breaks in time and space and a fragmented narration, NMT reveals some hidden strange structural forms of a world which otherwise remains more or less familiar to us from our everyday experience, or our readings.

Overall, in the case of museum learning, where the aim is to enhance entertainment, inspiration for learning, sociability among visitors, and sharing instead of teaching, Poulter's NMT seems to fit perfectly. This is not only because of its flexible size, but foremost because it does not pretend to mirror life or history. It rather comments on and responds to facts in a highly poetical, open, and funny way and clearly suggests just one of all possible interpretations of this world.



FREELANCE CURATOR DONATA PREDIC AND ONE OF THE EIDOPHUSIKON MANIPULATORS IN FRONT OF THE AUTOMATON IN ALTONAER MUSEUM.

Fay Tsitou is a museum educator puppeteer, as well as a PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Notes

- ¹ Unless stated otherwise, all quotes are from a personal interview with Robert Poulter (9 December 2007).
- ² In 2004, Poulter was asked by the Altonaer Museum in Hamburg to make a full size reconstruction of Philip de Louthembourg's miniature theatre (*Eidophusikon*) for their major painting exhibition on cloud pictures. This was followed by the Yale Center for British Art, Connecticut & the Huntington Library, California, asking for a fully automated version for their joint Gainsborough exhibition (2005-6). Both automata were constructed based on Poulter's designs and supervision in conjunction with technicians from the institutions.
- ³ Such a dialogue might also entail collaborations among practitioners and museum staff. For example, the *Eidophusikon* automata were performed by groups of museum staff, curators, volunteers, and guards. In Yale, they even built up a social club of fifty people, "a little brotherhood," as Poulter calls it.
- ⁴ Giovanni Battista Belzoni was a strongman, hydraulic engineer, actor and Egyptologist who brought large Egyptian statues to the British Museum in the 19th century.
- ⁵ The few liberties Poulter is taking are usually mentioned in the shows' leaflets.

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VALERIE NELSON, LITTLE BLUE MOON, MAIN STREET IN PREETZ

*Preetz: a Festival of Paper and Gastfreundlichkeit**

by Michael Nelson

The Preetz Paper Theater Festival in northern Germany is reputed to be the world's largest international gathering of paper theater performers. First held in 1988, it happens each year on the second weekend of September, which often means beautiful fall weather for visitors. Preetz is a little town north of Hamburg, not far from the Baltic Sea. The charming downtown boasts cobblestone streets and verdant nature trails beside pastoral waters (often populated by rowers), gardens and outdoor cafes along with the usual amenities. One gets the feeling that, due to its size, all of the residents of Preetz know each other by sight, but one feels welcome even as a foreigner.

The performances are Lilliputian, with some performers (the paper ones) standing only 3-6 inches tall. The event takes place in a school building, where classrooms are converted into small auditoriums (25 seats), with each of the paper theatre companies moving into their classrooms and setting up their stages for the duration of the three-day event, performing between one and three times a day according to a complicated schedule that allows audience members and performers to wander from classroom to classroom, seeing up to twelve performances over the course of the weekend. Festival attendees purchase individual tickets for each performance, picking and choosing what appeals. The choices are very varied and can

include fairy tales, ballads, dramas, operas, operettas and experimental theater. There are live-voiced performances and recorded sound, self-drawn and ready-made wings, original and traditional techniques, and artificial and natural materials, recreations of 19th century scripts and new, original works. One caveat of the festival is that each production must be a Germany premier, that is to say, not performed in Germany before the festival. This is much easier on the foreign troupes who can bring a show they have tested many times, whereas the Germans are always sweating out their first performance with the festival audiences.

The festival states that the underlying purposes of the event are: to revive paper theater performance and to gather a wider audience; to awaken the passion to perfect individual styles by meeting paper theater performers from all over Europe, sharing ideas and experiences.

In addition to performers and audience members, the event also attracts collectors of toy theatre sheets and memorabilia and there is a festival store where you can purchase antique and newly printed items.

September, 2010, was our fourth time attending as performers. During the three-day event, performers were put up in local inns and ate together in a small dining area at the school where



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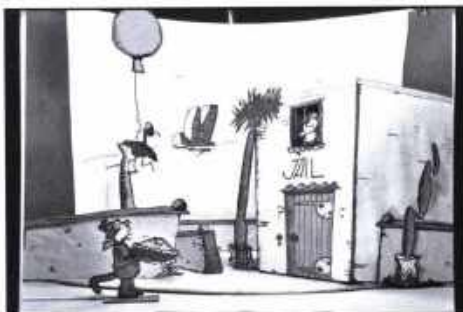
JOE GLADWIN'S
PAPERPLAYS PUPPET THEATRE

the performances took place. This allowed for much sharing and friendship among performers who basically hung out together and chatted about each other's shows, techniques and other festivals. After hours everyone would gather across the street at the local pub, eating and drinking and chatting in numerous languages (mostly English and German) until the wee hours. We quickly became an ad hoc family, and, after the weekend, a number of performers (and some audience members) stayed on for the annual, lovely breakfast at Dirk and Barbara Reimers' home. Dirk has been involved in organizing the *Treffen* since the beginning, and, in addition to his and Barbara's own paper theatre company (Papiertheater Pollidor), they also have a magical toy theatre store in Preetz which you can find on the internet at www.pollidor.de/ (the actual store is much better). For those still not tired of parties, at the very end, festival administrator extraordinaire Marlis Sennewald hosted yet another dinner party at her lovely home in the countryside.

In 2010, sixteen companies presented their shows. As performers we are allowed to attend any other of the performances for free, as long as there is room in the little theatre spaces and the schedule permits. (As a performer, you, of course, have to attend ALL of your own shows, numbering five performances over the course of the weekend, which does limit how many other shows you can see.) If you are not a performer, I believe that the festival is organized so it is possible to see all of the performances, but you will be very busy.

Performers come from all over Europe, with the occasional entry from beyond (such as our Little Blue Moon from California and Facto Teatro from Mexico in 2010). As our German is not good, we often choose to attend performances in English. As there are a number of British troupes usually performing, and as many of the non-German troupes perform in English as a universal language, there are generally many English choices. One non-English show that we attended and loved was "Tripp, Trapp, Troll," a Swedish company comprised of three sisters telling a children's fairytale in German, and maybe Swedish. The three sisters sang beautiful harmonies throughout (a capella) and the story was simple enough to follow, as three little girls set out to rescue their father from the troll who had turned him to stone. One delightful moment (there were many) used to show the passage of time was the children knitting while waiting for their father to return. With a simple string mechanism, their knitted items grew before our eyes into what would be scarves that were yards long (in scale) showing that they knitted for weeks while waiting.

Teatro Facto did a wonderful performance in Spanish about the Mexican Day of the Dead. Two performers worked the stage and figures and acted, while two musicians accompanied them brilliantly. The show told the story of one man who did not realize that he had died as he traveled along the seven tests for the dead of Náhuatl mythology. The show was funny and, at the same time, very moving, and was very well received at the festival.



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Per Brink Abrahamsen's Svalegangens Duketeater from Denmark presented *Heloïse (Die Heldin)*. The play is adapted from a short story by Tania Blixen (Isak Dinesen). During the Franco-German War of 1870, a group of French travellers, including Heloïse, a young widow, and a young English theologian by the name of Frederick Lamond, get caught at the border to Luxembourg accused of espionage. The show was in German and much of the story lost to us, but the scenery was beautiful and changed most ingeniously with bits and pieces of scenery constantly combining to create new scenes. (Example—a series of columns in a museum were transformed into a park with the addition of foliage, changing the columns into tree trunks.) As a note of interest, the Danish Queen often provides the designs for Per Brink's shows.

Robert Poulter's New Model Theatre (from Great Britain) presented *Valsha, the Slave Queen*, an old tale of political ambition with many twists involving who is actually related to whom. It is a complex tale and Robert told it in a very exciting

manner, with his beautiful art and a presentation that exploited the strengths of paper theatre perfectly. A couple of aspects of his presentation technique stood out to me. One was his use of a scrolling scene for the background that was lit from behind (and thus illuminated through the paper, like stained glass.) The advantage to this was very clear back scenes that had no shadows of the figures on them (often a problem in the tiny paper theatre stages.) Another technique was his use of changing proscenium sizes and shapes; he had the ability to move the walls and top of the proscenium around to make different sized rectangles and squares that highlighted the mood of a scene.

Another Brit who performed was Joe Gladwin and his Paperplays Puppet Theatre. He did a wonderful version of a classic toy theatre production (which I had never seen before) called *The Miller and His Men*. The story was an adventure of robbers and heroes and maids in distress, and ended with a huge explosion (done with paper and lighting effects) that destroyed the robber's den, and allowed the young lovers to be reunited. Joe's acting and delivery was first rate, and his hand-painted figures and scenes sparkled with saturated color, making the whole show a delight.

Yet another Brit, Sarah Peasegood, did an adaptation of the American cartoon, *Krazy Kat*, with her Sarah's Paper Theatre, accompanied by her parents, Peter and Sylvia Peasegood who are well known in the paper theatre world. The show captured the color and feel of the comics well, with bold, bright colors and simple cartoon figures. It was wonderful to look at, but like many comic strips, had the feeling of being a part of an ongoing story rather than having a beginning, middle and end. In that way it was also true to the original strip.



PETER PEASEGOOD (R) DEMONSTRATES SUBTLE TOY THEATRE SKILLS



CHILDREN'S WORKSHOP



THE AUTHOR, JOE GLADWIN, VALERIE NELSON, AND FESTIVAL DIRECTOR ALAIN LECQUIC AT A CAFE

PHOTO: RALPH SEIDENWALD



The French company, Papierthéâtre, presented *Romeo and Juliet* with the performers Narguess Majd and Alain Lecque. This was not the Shakespeare version at all, but rather a strange tale written by Gordon Craig, about Romeo wooing a rather fickle Juliet while losing arms and legs (in the war?) until he is reduced to a torso and is finally rejected by her for being not enough of a man. It was performed in English by the French/Iranian team of Alain and Narguess, and was fun to watch in spite of its inscrutability. (I spoke with Alain afterwards who said he was true to the original Gordon Craig text, and that after the show there are always many questions from the audience about the play.)

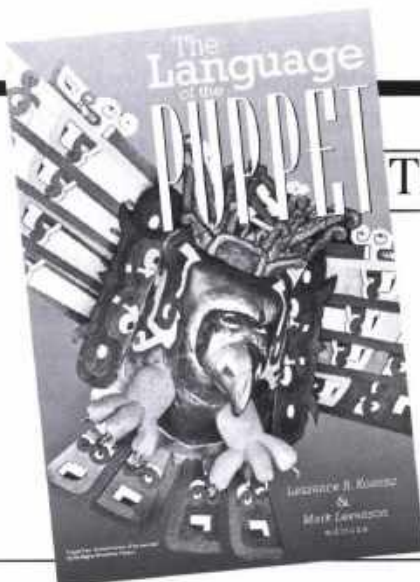
The company delighted many by including in the funeral procession many traditional toy theatre figures who had had their heads replaced by the paper heads of the directors and staff and performers from the festival.

One show we did not get to see but heard good things about was Haase's *Papiertheater*. They did a show on the life of Vincent van Gogh, using his paintings which started out flat (as they usually are) but then expanded back like an accordion to create 3-D versions of the artwork where figures and carts, etc. could move, a very fun idea.

The weekend festival passes quickly, but, like puppetry festivals in the U.S., there is a feeling of family among the performers and audience, as they mingle after shows and around the festival site and town. The festival is extremely well organized and festival organizers seem more like hosts who want to make sure you have a great time at their function. Audience members come back again and again, some from out of Germany, and many seem to look forward to it the whole year.

**German Hospitality*

Michael Nelson and his wife, Valerie, are *Magical Moonshine Theatre* and, more recently, *Little Blue Moon* (toy theatre). Michael is also the new toy theatre consultant for the *Puppeteers of America*. For more on *Little Blue Moon*, see Kathy Foley's article on page 26.



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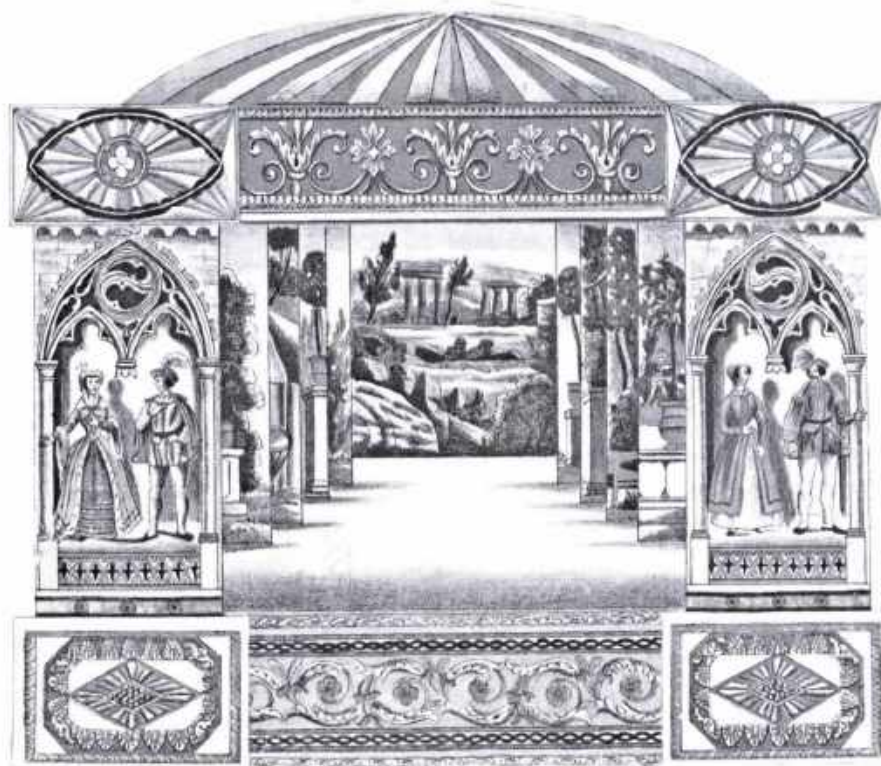


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Paper Theater Play as Cultural Performance: The Example of Germany

by John Rouse



Paper theaters were among the most common bourgeois children's toys in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany. They became widely available in the 1830s; by 1900 literally every middle-class household had such a theater. Figures and scenery could be purchased on separate *Bogen*—sheets of art paper. These elements would be cut out, the figures pasted to small rods, and productions mounted inside table-top wooden proscenium “theaters.” The theaters were modeled on the baroque theater's wing and backdrop, proscenium stages; figures were controlled from above, rather than from the side, as in England.

At first glance, paper theaters (called “toy theaters” in England) seem a straightforward and innocuous form of childhood play. But they participated in a variety of nineteenth-century German cultural and social developments. Indeed, they must be seen within the rise and consolidation of the German *Bürgertum* from the second half of the eighteenth through the end of the nineteenth century. The German bourgeoisie's *Bürgertum* can mean “middle-class,” but in Germany, this social formation defined through a series of concepts

and practices, not the least important of which was the concept of *Bildung*, or education in the broadest sense. The practice of *Bildung* began with the education of children, both in school but also at home. Indeed, *Bildung* was a central element in the new, nuclear, bourgeois family:

For bourgeois culture, a specific ideal of family life was essential: the family was a purpose in itself, a community held together by emotional ties and basic loyalties. Dominated by the husband and father, it was an inner sanctum protected from the world of competition and materialism . . . a sphere of privacy, although not without servants, whose work made it possible for the middle-class mother to give sufficient time to the cultural dimensions of family life, including the transmission of the “cultural capital” to the next generation.¹ (Kocka 6-7)

Theater and opera were essential components of this cultural capital. During the eighteenth century, the rising urban middle-class began to militate for the construction and licensing of “national theaters” after the French model, theaters fundamentally intended for bourgeois rather than court audiences. These theaters began to be constructed in the 1770s and 1780s, just as playwrights like Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe began to provide them with a repertory built around values appropriate for the new class (see Haider-Pregler and Graf).

The cultural capital of such theaters included much more than the plays, however. As Kocka suggests, they served as essential meeting places, as part of a public sphere in which the *Bürgertum* acknowledged and elaborated itself. Not only the content of performances, but their basic *Gestus* affirmed values essential to this self-definition. One of these values was knowing how to attend the theater, mastering the customs of theater going. Another was the sense of mastery over the proper codes of aesthetic appreciation—including appreciation of the rules governing the arts of scene painting and costume.

The importance of theater as cultural capital is reflected not only in the widespread distribution of play texts, but also in the appearance just after the turn of the century of *Bogen*, depicting figures costumed precisely as they were in operas and plays mounted in the theaters of cities like Vienna or Berlin; frequently, the figures themselves bore likeness to important actors. The *Bogen* publishers also published versions of the new German plays.

These *Bogen* have proved invaluable to theater history, but for our purposes, the practice suggests how much the new paper theater was a means of materially appropriating the bourgeois institution of theater into the home. And indeed, at first, the paper theater was not intended for children; it was a theater performed by adults for adults, although their children were certainly part of the audience. Paper theater performances substituted for real theater visits for those who could not afford them. And Dietger Dröse has gone so far as to suggest that such paper theater performances served to train members of the *Bürgertum* uneasy or unfamiliar with the conventions of theatrical performance and spectating.

By mid-century, the conventions and practices of *Bildung* had been elaborated and stabilized. Transmission of these conventions to children through the family began to replace the performance of paper theater among adults. This transition took two forms. On the one hand, a paper theater performance by the father for the family became a regular part of Christmas festivities, which had themselves been introduced in the early nineteenth century as one of the self-definitional activities of the new bourgeois family. At the same time, theaters began to appear as an integral part of the *Kinderstube*, or “children’s room.” The dedication of a separate space for child’s play was itself a signal element in the development of a new concept of childhood during the nineteenth century, of childhood as a time for the acquisition of bourgeois values through focused play. The development of this concept of childhood helped bring about explosive expansion in the toy industry during the second half of the nineteenth century.²

Color lithography remained unprofitable until the development of fully automatic chromo-lithography in 1870.³ The *Bogen* produced before 1890 were printed in black and white and either sold uncolored or carefully hand-colored by small armies of mostly women and children. Even after the rise of color lithograph, many bourgeois children continued to buy uncolored *Bogen* so that they could color them themselves. Colored *Bogen* were soon produced in greater numbers than uncolored ones, however, and the price difference gradually became insignificant.⁴ Moreover, children also cut out and colored other figures on *Bogen* not related to paper theater, including soldiers, people from exotic lands, etc. Playing with paper theater was an activity closely related to playing in general in the *Kinderstube*.

Whether they bought them plain or colored, German children still had to cut out the figures and carefully mount them as scenery or “actors.” They functioned, then, as scenic and costume artists, playfully and actively appropriating approved aesthetic standards. I think the same can be said for the appropriation of the texts. By the 1860s, these included children’s texts, but not exclusively. For example, the three most popular texts published by Schreibers Kinder-Theater between 1871 and 1891 were *Snow White*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *Cinderella*. But Weber’s opera, *Der Freischütz*, is fifth on the list, and Schiller’s *William Tell* is eighth, followed by his *The Robbers*, and a version of Goethe’s *Faust* (see Jacoby-Zakfeld 10). To be sure, these texts bear little resemblance to the originals. The Schreiber version of *Tell*, for example, by one Ernst Siewert, is in five acts, but only sixteen pages. The story has been reduced to bare essentials and a straightforward morality: Tell is the hero, Gessler the villain, and good wins out against evil.

Such a simplified ethic is, of course, an integral part of children’s theater. But the ideological education afforded by the paper theater is, I think, more sophisticated. It derives, in the first instance, from the active integration of theater into childhood play; the child comes to “own” not simply the material elements of the performance, but the performance itself. In this regard, it’s worth noting that the children playing with paper theater tended to play more than one role—often, one child played all the roles. If one can speak of “identification” with this kind of theater at all, then it would be identification with the director, with the performance apparatus itself, rather than psychological identification with any one character. Indeed, paper theater began to die out in the twentieth century in part because the sensuous pleasures of its baroque scenery wasn’t matched by realism and because the acting style required in realism couldn’t be pleasurably transferred to a children’s theater.

The ideological elements of paper theater also work in the combination of text and production. Take, for example, the interaction of figure and text in the Schreibers Kindertheater version of *Gockel, Hinkel und Gackeleia*; published around 1920, this is third-last Schreiber text. The text by Marianne Sartori is based on a fairy tale by Brentano. Sartori uses the 1847 text, published after Brentano’s death, in which a Jew is one of the important characters; in the version Brentano himself published, the character is a bird. The Jew in Sartori’s version is not an overtly “bad guy.” However, the character



is structurally placed as the obstacle to the hero's desires. (He wants to buy a chicken that Gockel and Hinkel need to help them win back their place in court). Equally important is the simple aligning of a human character with birds, an animalization accomplished graphically by the depiction of the Jewish nose and the chicken beak. And, of course, the dehumanization of the figure would have been carried out, not only by the artist who drew the figure, but by the children who performed the piece's latent antisemitism.

Something similar also takes place in the piece Schreiber published immediately before *Gockel, Die Russen in Ostpreußen* (*The Russians in East Prussia*). Subtitled *Patriotic Play in One Act*, this play is set in a German village near the Russian border in 1914. (East Prussia became part of Poland after World War I.) Russian troops occupy the village. They're not depicted all that negatively, but their captain is. He's clearly the bad guy, against whom the play's heroes, the mayor and his wife, struggle. The piece seems intended for older children, but it does illustrate the fluid boundaries between toys and playing and coming to terms with an outside, adult world.

It's tempting to speculate on how much the adults in this world retained the relationship of play and the acquisition of cultural capital that marks the children's theater. Certainly, consideration of children's theater play suggests that adult audiences did not relate

to the theater as passively as theories of affect suggest; spectatorship would seem to be an active undertaking, one grounded in a childhood background in equally active production. Similarly, the children's theater suggests one reason why the nineteenth-century bourgeois audience considered its theater to belong to it in all respects—particularly the theater of classical drama and the opera. It's hardly surprising that this close relationship didn't survive the decline of the *Bürgertum* as a coherent, ideological identity group in the early twentieth century. It's also interesting to speculate why so many other aspects of the institution of paper theater seem to have stumbled on in the absence of this group.

Notes

1. All translations in this article are mine.
2. The industry's workers included women and children manufacturing in home production; childhood was reserved for the *Bürgertum*.
3. The mass production of color lithographs was also made possible by the labor of children, working in industrial plants staffed by as many as 350 workers. See Jacoby-Zakfeld 10.
4. This is in direct contrast to England, where paper theater was from the start marketed to working-class as well as bourgeois children, and where *Bogen* could be had for "Penny Plain, Twopence Colored." See Speaight.

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John Rouse, Associate Professor, University of California, San Diego, is the author of *Brecht and the West German Theatre: The Practice and Politics of Interpretation* (UMI 1989) and coeditor with James Harding of *Not the Other Avant-Garde: On the Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Michigan 2006). He has published numerous articles on German theatre.

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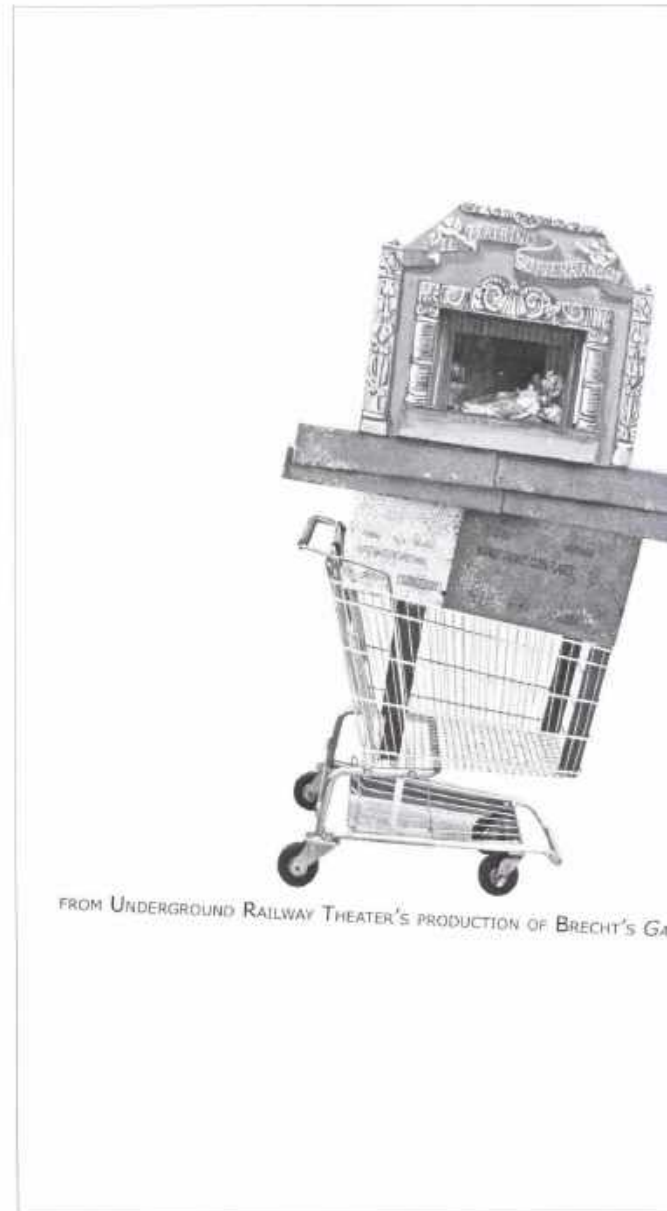
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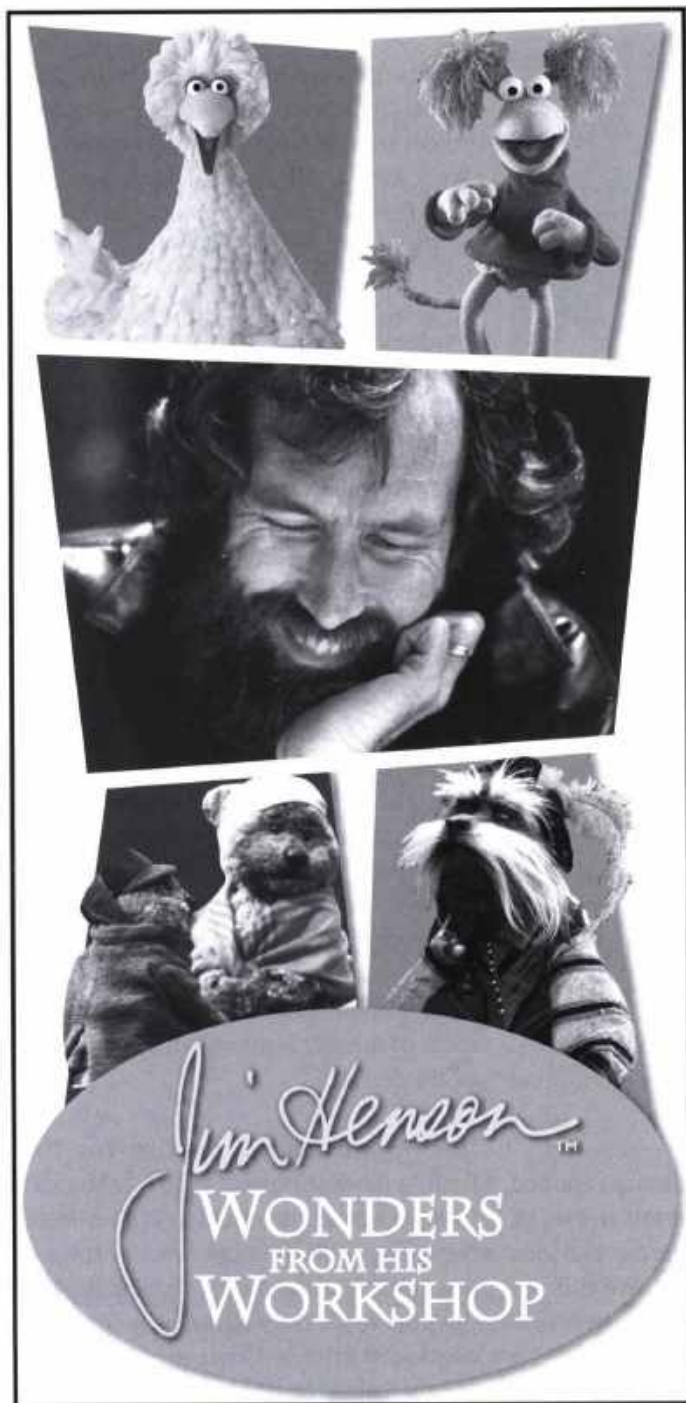
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It's tempting to speculate on how much the adults in this world retained the relationship of play and the acquisition of cultural capital that marks the children's theater. Certainly, consideration of children's theater play suggests that adult audiences did not relate



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by Trudi Cohen

Great Small Works has been intimately involved in Toy Theater since 1990, when, in our ongoing investigations into popular theater and puppetry techniques, we stumbled upon the form. We were looking for ways to tell the urgent stories of the moment—in particular, the impending Gulf War. We cut out pictures from newspapers and magazines, framed them in a cardboard box on a tabletop and narrated our own versions of the news. Toy Theater spoke to us, as a direct, immediate, personal way to respond quickly to the events of the day.

The tradition of Toy Theater as do-it-yourself parlor entertainment enticed us. Here was a means for a low-budget theater company to tell stories of pressing concern. It did not cost thousands of dollars to create glorious effects such as explosions, trap doors, and fanciful lighting. We did not need a huge rehearsal space. And we could transport a show in a few suitcases.

We made many episodes of our “Toy Theater of Terror As Usual” news series on topics ranging from the Gulf War to the Los Angeles riots to NYC real estate to American gun culture to, most recently, the BP oil spill. And we moved on to other types of Toy Theater plays as well, including classics like “Olivier’s Hamlet” and “Faust” and adaptations of texts by Italo Calvino, the Strugatsky brothers, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Ana María Menocal. We sometimes designed our own images and other times appropriated images from a wide range of sources; we likewise used both original and found texts. And we discovered that artists of wide-ranging

persuasions could be similarly inspired by this low-tech means of storytelling. Soon many puppeteer friends were also employing Toy Theater. We jokingly referred to our little corner of the Toy Theater world as a “revival.” But now, 20 years later, it seems the revival was for real.

At some point in the mid-90s we learned about a delightful festival of Toy Theater which is held annually in Preetz, a small city in northern Germany. Collectors and practitioners from Holland, France, Denmark, Sweden, England and Germany meet there every September to share their performances and to keep the tradition alive. We were amazed and excited to learn that there continue to be Toy Theater guilds, publications and shops, and that Toy Theater is very much alive today. We performed at Preetz in 1999, 2002, 2003 and 2007. It is a wonderful festival, intimate, convivial, including some extraordinarily successful interpretations of the Toy Theater tradition. We were the welcome representation of the New World, younger (back then) than most of the performers, and—imagine that!—from the United States. There are, however, naysayers in the Preetz Toy Theater community, who disdain our occasional use of three-dimensional figures and our encouragement of the reinvention, rather than preservation, of the form.

In 1993, we mounted our first Toy Theater festival, a modest project with a lobby exhibit and four theater companies, held at Theater for the New City in Manhattan. In 1994, we presented a second festival there, similar in scale. Over the course of the following years, the festival continued to grow, as we produced two festivals at Los Kabayitos Puppet Theater, two at HERE Arts Center, and three at St. Ann’s Warehouse, most recently in June 2010. The festivals have become international in scope, and we now create multiple intimate spaces for simultaneous performances; the Temporary Toy Theater Museums have become expansive exhibitions, juxtaposing traditional Toy Theaters with contemporary interpretations of the form. For the opening of our last festival we made the first-

Toy Theatre Exhibition, the Bruce Museum, Greenwich, CT

October 30, 2010 - January 30, 2011

The Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut, presented *A Child's View: 19th-Century Paper Theaters*, which took a novel approach to the Museum's popular tradition of offering holiday shows featuring the world of miniatures. The exhibition showcased approximately 35 colorful, antique paper theaters plus related materials from the personal collection of Eric G. Bernard of New York City.

Nearly every major European country as well as the United States developed its own tradition of paper theater during the 19th century into the early 20th century. It was *Juvenile Drama* in England, *Papiertheater* or *Kindertheater* in Germany and Austria, *dukkeater* in Denmark, *teatro de las niñas* or *teatrillo* in Spain, and *théâtre de papier* in France. England had over 50 publishers, Germany 54, Spain 14, France 13, Denmark 10, Austria 9, and the United States 5. All of these versions to some degree were derived from the ability to mass produce the printed image, initially from engraved copper plates, followed by color lithography in the mid-19th century.

Visit the museum website at www.brucemuseum.org.

On our cover::

Proscenium, *Prozenium mit Musikkapelle*,
Scenery for *Kriegerzelt* (War Tent), Figures for *Siegfried*
Germany, ca. 1901— Publisher: J.S. Schreiber
Collection of Eric G. Bernard



A PAPER THEATER PERFORMANCE FROM *VIER GENREBILDER*
(FOUR GENRE PICTURES), BILDERBOGEN NR 78,
WINCKELMANN & SÖHNE, BERLIN, GERMANY, c. 1860

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



Proscenium, The New Paper Theatre
Scenery and figures, "Ønskeringen"
Denmark, 1918—Publisher: *The Illustrated Family Journal*
Collection of Eric G. Bernard



Proscenium, sheet number 1028
Scenery and figures, *Don Juan Tenorio*
Spain, ca. 1900—Publisher: Paluzie
Collection of Eric G. Bernard



Proscenium, *Théâtre Française*
 Scenery and figures, *Cendrillon* (Cinderella)
 France, ca. 1866—Publisher: Imagerie Pellerin
 Collection of Eric G. Bernard

ever Greatest Smallest Parade, and 60 miniature floats were pulled along the sidewalk accompanied by a full-size marching band. Hundreds of visual artists, hundreds of performing artists, dozens of volunteers have all participated. Each festival now attracts 1,500-2,000 ticketed audience members, and an unquantifiable number of visitors to the Museum, which is free of charge. We have presented programs for adult audiences and programs for family audiences; symposia discussing the significance and relevance of Toy Theater in broader contexts of performance, the miniature and technology; public workshops; and the involvement of NYC public high school students. As we like to say, a colossal event of miniature proportions!

Toy Theater functions for Great Small Works in multiple ways. It is an inspiring structure within which to create our own new pieces of theater. It is a form that has brought together a real and extensive community of artists. And it is a remarkable teaching tool, direct and accessible. Students, young and old, who find it impossible to speak their minds or stand up in front of anyone, are able to create and perform original Toy Theater shows. It is a source of continuing gratification to understand that with Toy Theater we can help people tell their own stories.

I believe that in Toy Theater we have discovered a universal form of storytelling, and along the way, a clearer definition of theater itself. During one of our festival workshops, a small girl and her father created a Toy Theater which continues to resonate for me. Their stage was shaped like a tooth, and in the stage were two girls and a table made from paper and popsicle sticks, and a lovely backdrop painted like a room. It was titled "Yesterday My Friend Sarah Pulled Out My Tooth." By framing the space (a simple cardboard box), and framing the moment (probably about 30 seconds), this happy team was able to tell a real story of immediate significance to them. And in its simplicity, it was the perfect show.

Trudi Cohen was an early member of Bread and Puppet Theatre, and is a founding member of Great Small Works.

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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

TOY THEATER AND TERROR AS USUAL: the political properties of miniature and flat

by Clare Dolan

WHAT IS IT?

A metronome with wings hovering in the air, a skeleton driving a car through a burning city, a parade of cut-out politicians dressed in white robes, flagellating themselves with tiny whips. This was my introduction to Toy Theater, as realized by Great Small Works in their Terror As Usual series—hardly the stuff of parlour entertainment or children's play which the phrase "Toy Theater" conjures to the uninitiated. To some, this kind of Toy Theater seems a huge departure from historical and typical incarnations of the form. The Terror As Usual series catapults the spectator into a world where the serious investigation of power relations, politics, and history finds materiality in miniature, flat cut-outs framed by a proscenium arch. These shows inspired a revival of interest in the Toy Theater form among North American artists, activists, and puppeteers that amounted to no less than a revolution in the way the form is practiced in America today. But is this "really" Toy Theater?

Of course seriousness of subject matter and the use of complex narrative strategies does not automatically fall outside the realm of "real" puppet theater. Many puppeteer/artists in the United States have an uncomfortable relationship to the seemingly inevitable association of puppet theater with children's entertainment. Even while some of the greatest American puppet theater has been created with children as its intended audience, an enormous body of puppetry, intended for adults and dealing with complex subject matter, continues to pine for articulate, intelligent reviewers and an audience who is prepared for the nuance and seriousness of its methods and aims.

But the question of seriousness is not necessarily what underlies the feeling of raw discovery—and sometimes discomfort—toy theater aficionados may experience when watching the Terror As Usual series and others of its ilk. What is truly startling about this "new"

kind of Toy Theater is its radical use of the traditional format, its bold exploitation of the qualities that make toy theater Toy Theater: the miniaturization, the flatness, the power of the proscenium as "frame," and the accessibility of the materials and processes used to produce it. Great Small Works and the artists it has inspired have discovered the exquisite ways this format is perfectly suited to exploring the chaos of current events and everyday life, while unraveling modern narratives that illuminate the workings of power and the politics of creative resistance.

MINIATURE

Tiny men, giant rats, tabletop cityscapes, tulips the size of a skyscraper, the Universe in a disco ball: The most obvious defining feature of Toy Theater is that it is miniature and that it allows easy manipulation of scale. Miniatures are distilled, concentrated replicas of life-sized things. The smaller the thing, the more concentrated its essence. In the Terror As Usual series, GSW exploits the power of the miniature with careful precision, using it to illuminate political relationships between people, things, and institutions. In the episode "Crusade," a teeny, tiny scholar gives a speech on terrorism against the looming backdrop of an enormous city, ingeniously amplifying the power of his words. The effect is as if this little man were shouting his warnings at us with all of his might from a great distance (when in reality the puppeteer speaking his lines is using a perfectly normal tone of voice). The wisdom of his speech, and the knowledge that it goes unheeded, imbues this tiny cut-out figure with the incredible poignancy of the miniature: The figure is ridiculously small, the content of his speech sincerely big, and serious.

Miniature also lends itself to nostalgia and intimacy. Tininess suggests privacy, the insides of drawers, secrets of a treasure-chest, confidences of a diary. Toy Theater provides the perfect platform for examining the small

TERROR AS USUAL!!



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TERROR AS USUAL!!



mundanities of private life, and also the possibility of juxtaposing these against the looming forces of history and politics. When we watch miniature toy theater characters moving about on a miniature stage, we enjoy a God's-eye view of the machinations of humanity. As a spectator of a *Terror As Usual* show, one gets the dizzying sensation of floating above the earth with a pair of very powerful binoculars, seeing the "big picture" (the breadth of everything from above) and the "little picture" (the miniature made giant inside the toy theater's framing arch) simultaneously.

This largeness/smallness also can be expedient: The manipulation of scale possible in Toy Theater allows the artist to create stage pictures which elucidate power relations without saying a word. In the *Terror As Usual* episode "Doom," for example, a miniature community center building is hunched alone center stage while a group of out-of-scale rats surround it on either side. The juxtaposition of the small defenseless-looking building against "giant" real-estate-mogul rats makes us laugh, but also underscores the feeling of helpless isolation the besieged community feels as it watches Big Development dismantle its public spaces piece by piece.

FLAT

A flat object has a front and a back. One side is always hidden from view. This allows for *transformation* and *revelation* – the two most powerful tools for articulating political relationships. The powers of revelation are literally built into the flat object, and can be instantly exercised by simply flipping it over to reveal its backside. A flat human figure in a toy theater can present a predictable appearance when facing one way, only to flip and expose the unexpected. This can be exploited in a myriad of ways. To reveal, quite literally, what's "behind the facade" of a given character can be a serious act of unmasking deception, or a playful acknowledgment of human frailty. Buildings of New York City flip over in the *Terror As Usual* Episode "Metro Section," becoming skeleton-inhabited graves of former slaves interred in a forgotten, long hidden metropolitan burying ground. The simple flip-and-reveal is wordlessly articulate. We are reminded that a building we see everyday, perhaps on the walk to work or coming home, is all at once that same familiar building and *simultaneously* something completely different from what we know it to be. Our well-known building is exactly also the grave of a man who was buried with shackles still chaining his feet.

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

A flat object can also become something entirely new when flipped around: it can *transform*. This property embodies the politically radical notion of *agency*, the idea that true change is possible, that things can become something other than what they are now.

GSW and the Toy Theater artists they've inspired often choose to deviate from flatness and incorporate three dimensional objects into their stage pictures, which may, in fact, be a sore spot with the more traditional toy theater practitioner. This "new" variation in the format can be a very potent theatrical tool. Just as manipulation of scale is useful for exploring power relationships, the contrast between flat and 3-D lends itself well to constructing visual allegories of political relationships. Who is flat and who is three dimensional? When the speechifying pundit is a flat xerox cut-out, but the giant boots that dance over the heads of the populace are the real steel-toed thing, this violation of flatness is both sassy and illuminating.

The collage of flat and 3-D together produces neither-flesh-nor-fowl figures that transcend both the flat and 3-D universe. By pasting flat white paper wings on a real metronome, Great Small Works creates a haunting embodiment of a very complex idea: Walter Benjamin's concept of the "angel of history." The angel exists in all places at all times, his back toward the future, eyes fixed on the accumulating tumble of debris that is the past. The metronome clicks and hovers and witnesses. The very realness of the metronome's ticking and swinging pendulum and the flat paper wings, turn Benjamin's complicated idea into a moving and ethereal theatrical presence.

PROSCENIUM ARCH

The action of Toy Theater is contained within a proscenium arch that serves as a conceptual as well as physical frame. When we watch characters and landscapes move inside a frame, the box itself becomes significant. Distinction between what is inside and what is outside becomes possible. Greater worlds and lesser worlds, heaven and earth, the personal and the global, all of these dichotomies come to mind. Once again, the form proves ideal for exploring the diverse forces at play in contemporary life. In the *Terror As Usual* episode "Doom," the giant head and arms of New York's mayor appear over the top of the proscenium

arch and in an instant the stage curtains become his legs and feet. This violation of the stage is a total brutal surprise. In no other format would it be possible that a character can subsume the entire theater (and, yes, the world) into his corpus! This horrible/wonderful allegorical image is possible because this is Toy Theater.

PAPER

Paper is cheap. Paper is everywhere. Even a child can make things out of paper. To make Toy Theater doesn't require a producer, stage manager, tech crew, expensive equipment or even much of a budget. It can be made by anyone, at home, with what is lying around. This populist aspect of the art is built into the form. Toy Theater is naturally suited to DIY political empowerment, its material substance perfectly complementing the content and concerns of shows by Great Small Works and those it has inspired. The simplicity and portability of the form has allowed GSW to give many Toy Theater workshops, inviting participants to create their own toy theater productions. From the Crossroads Middle School in Manhattan, Brooklyn grade schools, to the Museo de Culturas Populares in Coyoacan, Mexico City, and the National Theater Workshop for the Handicapped in Belfast, Maine, the company has introduced the form to a wide variety of people. The accessibility of the materials and methods of producing toy theater renders it perfect for this kind of activist art-making outreach.

WHAT IS IT?

An intelligent accumulation of ideas, translated into beautiful and terrifying images. The enthusiastic embrace of a traditional form with a rich and interesting history. A bold fearlessness about breaking the rules. A metronome with wings hovering in the air. Great Small Works and the *Terror As Usual* series has opened up a new chapter in the practice of modern toy theater and in our understanding of what it is. And though it may push some uncomfortable limits with the form, the inherent properties of Toy Theater seem to perfectly invite this kind of content, this kind of use.

CLARE DOLAN is a performer, director, and cheap artist based in Vermont. She was a puppeteer for twelve years with the Bread and Puppet Theater,

PUPPET SLAM NETWORK



Photos by K. Basta, W. Duffee-Braun, Puppet Uprising, K. McClenahan

MARCH

- 4th, 5th & 7th - Bobbindoctrin (HOUSTON)
- 7th - Nasty, Brutish & Short Puppet Cabaret (CHICAGO)
- 11th - Winnipeg Puppet Cabaret (WINNIPEG)
- 11th & 12th - Dolly Wiggler Cabaret (CALGARY),
Bobbindoctrin (HOUSTON)
- 18th - Blood from A Turnip (PROVIDENCE)
- 18th - 19th - Noches de cabaret (SAN JUAN, PR)
- 19th - One Night Slam (TORONTO), Beady Little Eyes (PORTLAND)
- 25th & 26th - Puppet Uprising (PHILADELPHIA),
Puppet Playlist (NYC)
- 26th - Puppet Showplace Slam (BROOKLINE, MA),
Puppet Slamwich! (BALTIMORE)
- TBA - The Puckin' Fuppet Show (ATLANTA)

APRIL

- 1st & 2nd - Great Arizona Puppet Theatre (PHOENIX)
- 21st - PUNCH (NYC)
- 23rd - Dad's Garage (ATLANTA)
- TBA - UConn Puppet Slam (STORRS, CT),
Adult Puppet Cabaret (SAN DIEGO)

MAY

- 20th - Blood from A Turnip (PROVIDENCE)
- 21st - Bedlam / Barebones Puppet Romp (MINNEAPOLIS),
Puppet Showplace Slam (BROOKLINE MA)
- 23rd - Nasty, Brutish & Short Puppet Cabaret (CHICAGO)
- 27th & 28th - Puppet Playlist (NYC)
- TBA - CalArts Puppet Cabaret (VALENCIA, CA)
The Puckin' Fuppet Show (ATLANTA), PUNCH (NYC)

JUNE

- 3rd & 4th - Great Arizona Puppet Theatre (PHOENIX)
- 5th - Puppet Slamwich (BALTIMORE)
- 18th - Dad's Garage (ATLANTA), One Night Slam (TORONTO)
- TBA - Pinocchio's (ALTAMONTE SPRINGS, FL)

JULY

- 23rd - Puppet Showplace Slam (BROOKLINE, MA)
- TBA - Puckin' Fuppet Show (ATLANTA), PUNCH (NYC),
Adult Puppet Cabaret (SAN DIEGO)

AUGUST

- 12th & 13th - Puppet Playlist (NYC)
- TBA - Pinocchio's (FL), The Puckin' Fuppet Show (ATLANTA),
Wham Bam Puppet Slam (ASHEVILLE)

SEPTEMBER

- 14th - PUNCH (NYC)
- 26th - Nasty, Brutish & Short Puppet Cabaret (CHICAGO)
- TBA - Puppet Pandemic (NYC)

OCTOBER

- 7th & 8th - Puppet Uprising (PHILADELPHIA)

NOVEMBER

- 4th & 5th - Puppet Uprising (PHILADELPHIA)
- 8th - 11th & 15th - 18th - Band of Puppets (BROOKLYN, NY)
- TBA - PUNCH (NYC), Adult Puppet Cabaret (SAN DIEGO)

DECEMBER

- 2nd & 3rd - Puppet Uprising (PHILADELPHIA)
- TBA - Puppet Parlor (NYC), PUNCH (NYC)

Underground puppet slams are popping up everywhere. They feature contemporary short-form puppet and object theater for adult audiences, often late at night in small venues, nightclubs, and art spaces. Puppet Slams exist at the nexus of vaudeville, burlesque, and performance art through the intersection of experimental theater, art, music, and dance as a viable alternative to the culturally homogenous digital mass media. Spearheaded by IBEX Puppetry, The Puppet Slam Network aims to catalogue, connect, support, and raise awareness for the Puppet Slam Nation. The Puppet Slam Network fosters connections in the growing field of independently produced puppet slams, cabarets, and showcases so that puppet artists know where they can perform, venues can find puppet artists, and audiences can enjoy this intimate, tactile and compelling form of entertainment.

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Toy Theatre Unbound: Little Blue Moon Theatre

by Kathy Foley



The Anglophone toy theatre has roots in stirring representations of early 19th century theatre's romantic epics, stirring melodramas, and spectacular pantomimes shrunk to fit the hands of juvenile presenters with playbooks replicating the texts of adult performances (George Speaight, *History of the English Toy Theatre*, Boston: Plays, Inc. 1969, pp. 11-27, 92-95). As the Victorian period developed a stricter conception of childhood, content and materials became more staid—edited versions of pantomimes and melodramas, diverged from theatre's Victorian drawing room comedies and realist dramas as the child audience vanished (Speaight: 144-145). Toy theatre from 1850 into the 20th century was a world where the only adult viewer, conceptually, was a doting parent applauding a child presenter.

This short article will explore reflections of the Victorian history and show how now these small figures have been taken up by adults, with a discussion of California performers Michael and Valerie Nelson (Little Blue Moon Theatre <http://www.magicalmoonshine.org/bluewelcome.htm>, hereafter LBMT) who make what was once child's play, tasteful but suggestive foreplay with an "R" rating.

Victorian Toy Theatre and Childhood Innocence

Literary reflections on toy theatre are wrapped in nostalgia for childhood. Charles Dickens writes: "My thoughts are drawn back, by a fascination . . . the toy-theatre—there it is, with its familiar proscenium, and ladies in feathers, in the boxes . . . a teeming world of fancies. . . . Let the benignant figure of my childhood stand unchanged!"¹

Robert Louis Stevenson remembered the juvenile playbooks as a respite from his strict Presbyterian household and a boyhood escape to a world of fantastical adventure:

In the Leith Walk window, all the year round, there stood displayed a theatre in working order, with a "forest set," a "combat," and a few "robbers carousing" in the slides; and below and about, dearer tenfold to me! the plays themselves, . . . to undo those bundles and breathlessly devour those pages of gesticulating villains, epileptic combats . . . it was a giddy joy.²

Stevenson as an adult found childhood visions provided by printer Skelt more artful than adult theatre or life itself:

If I go to the theatre to see a good old melodrama, 'tis but Skelt a little faded. If I visit a bold scene in nature, Skelt would have been bolder; there had been certainly a castle on that mountain, and the hollow tree—that set piece—I seem to miss it in the foreground. (ibid)

Victorian viewpoints on toy theatre, a passion of youth lost in adulthood, contrast with 21st century toy theatre where grown-ups collect or perform.³ Our children click computer mice to explore panoptic vistas that earlier youth found in toy theatre's proscenium arch. Today, adults play with the diminutive figures and juxtapose childlike associations [smallness, toys] and adult genres [social criticism, sexuality] to create ironic dissonances. Paul Zaloom and Great Small Works create thought-provoking political commentary and laughter. Hotel Modern's *Kamp* depicts Auschwitz as populated by 3,000 three-inch figures, creating Brechtian *Verfremdung*. Little Blue Moon Theatre of Vallejo uses cutouts and Barbies to explore the exotic erotic, using the bondage of figures' minimal movement, to show how sexy toying around can be.

Little Blue Moon Theatre

Michael Nelson is the initiator of these shows. He and wife, Valerie, have been working with music, large flexible figures, and minimal scenery for child/family audiences for thirty years. This repertory, except for music, is the obverse—puppetry with small, stationary figures (7"-10") and abundant scenery (often in a 19th century-style proscenium) for adults. Nelson says it is "just for me," and a response to mid-life: others buy sports cars—he builds toy theatre shows.⁴ Shows are not commercially viable, as the audience "doesn't know what the form is": the company's one children's show, *The Grasshopper and the Ant*, has not sold widely. Still, the productions have won national/international-touring invitations, including four visits to Germany and one to France.

If children's shows are the couples' day job, toy theatre is their nighttime romp that may compensate for limits inherent in American performance for children. The pieces with numerous scene changes, set pieces, and characters in multiple states of undress have an exuberance of creation that reminds the viewer of 18th and 19th century scenography with its panoramas and scrolled vistas. Nelson notes it is "is way too much work" and accommodates too small an audience for commercial viability. Nelson took up the art wondering, "How I could adopt an odd static form and see how it might work." A workshop

with Robert Poulter at a Puppeteers of America festival a decade ago was followed by a second with Dutch master Harry Ouderkerk, who did not feel sexual material was feasible. Nelson took up this challenge. Inspired by the understated style of Edward Gorey's book, *The Curious Sofa: A Pornographic Work*, where sex is implied not depicted, Nelson developed a version of Gorey's *The Hapless Child*, but encountered copyright restrictions. Then he did a relative's life story for her 70th birthday.

Nelson's breakthrough piece was *Natalie*⁵: a puppeteer in Paris (who performs *au naturel* in her booth) encounters a wind gust. She loses her garments, but finds true lust and fame. The fifteen-minute show "contains puppet nudity (tasteful, of course) and implied adult situations" (LBMT). The performer who has no clothes must have struck a chord in UNIMA-USA 2008 award reviewers in its willingness to reveal eroticism rarely let out of the booth, and won an UNIMA citation for excellence, along with a ballad piece, *The Widow*, in which Valerie sings/manipulates the story of a sex-starved widow who wears out the devil in her search for satisfaction. Nelson credits his spouse for keeping narratives tasteful and cites Isabel Allende's idea, "Erotica is when you use a feather. Pornography is when you use the whole chicken," to explain their approach (email, 14 Dec. 2010).

Scriptwriter Nelson finds humor in "our method of reproduction that our society is so convoluted about." The sexual content fit the venue where works debuted: Napa's Wild Swan Aphrodisiac Factory. Ticket sales for performances and factory's tour never justified the hundreds of building hours that "take my [Nelson's] attention from real paying work," still, shows allowed exploration of adult themes.

Paper, Shadows, Toys

Little Blue Moon Theatre work can be divided by the objects used 1) classical proscenium toy theatre, 2) shadow shows, and 3) pieces with dolls/toys. The narratives draw on two major sources: 1) traditional myths or 2) Euro-American popular literature/cinema. Very often these two story strains intertwine—culturally Americans use the exotic other (European, Oriental, vampire, mummy, ghost, jungle dweller, or dancing god) to let sexuality free.

The mythic material explores multicultural sexology: Roman, Japanese, Egyptian, Turkish, and Indian. Film themes and orientalist images impact, too. Wordless *Roman Reverie* (2010) uses 110 figures and scenic images for the metamorphosis of an American couple separated on Roman holiday: Harold sports with nymphs and becomes a gladiator; Eve becomes a centaur's "pet" and drinks with Bacchus. Transformed more than a Jamesian couple by their Italian interlude, they are, literally, reunited. *Japanese Ghost Story* draws on Japanese prints and *kaidanshu* (ghost tales). Puppeteer Tamaki Nobuko consulted on a story of a spirit wife. She



Dracula del Lobo

warms her husband's bed until his body is found, locked in her skeletal embrace. Necrology, Buddhistic "attachment," and Japanese bondage combine. A tale of Osiris has horror film tropes and Egyptian lore in *Shaft of the Mummy*. Isis, to revive the world, must find the lost penis of her divine husband. It turns up "in the hands of the young archeological assistant, Chastity Innocenti. All seems well, but the priestesses of Isis have vowed to search for the missing phallus even after death. In this campy play . . . it is dangerous to mess with 'mummy dearest.' Contains nudity, mummies with their wrappings coming off, . . . and mummy sex (in the wings)" (LBMT). Design element combine hieroglyphics, mummy cases, and Edwardian drawing rooms.

Nelson has three sexy shadow plays: *Celebrity Kama Sutra* based on Sir Richard Burton's translations of the Indian text to explain how they do it, as "an educational, public service for the community. . . . Running time varies depending on the number of positions covered (or uncovered)" (LBMT). *Krishna and the Gopis* (cow girls) uses North Indian miniatures as visual inspiration for a tale of *gopis* wild for the god. In *Picnic*, the bawdy Turk, Karagoz, hooks up with beauties and outwits the Pasha's guards.

Mutiny on the Bounty, visually inspired by Hawaiian postcards, depicts the South Seas where Tahitian dancers abound and "clothing is only for decoration." Moral implications of actual mutiny are tossed overboard "in favor of the archetypical island fantasy. Contains no sex, but lots of dancing, ukuleles, surfing, bathing, and a few tropical drinks in the hammock. Oh. And some long rowing for Captain Bligh. And some tattoos" (LBMT). *Dracula del Lobo* in 1920s Argentina jumbles conquistadors and sexual conquests. Two young women encounter the vampire next door. Sizzling tango music of Astor Piazzola accompanies stake driving, beheading, and lust of "the world's favorite monster" (see film, www.magicalmoonshine.org/toy2.htm). The 10" figures require two manipulators, rather than the musician-narrator and a single manipulator of previous shows. *Tango for Tarzan* is Nelson's *Night in the Museum*: Jane visits a natural history museum and enters the diorama. Captured and bound, she escapes the trappings of civilization, a literally bareback rider cavorting atop rhinos. Finding Tarzan, Jane abandons culture for nature.

Nelson uses dolls in *Barbie Diaries* (2004, revised 2009) and *The Lady or the Tiger*. The first finds Barbie living in a Salvation Army shelter and split from Ken after 43 years of union. She recognizes her need to be controlled; imagery includes leather and whips. *The Lady or the Tiger* uses Barbie and G.I. Joe to make the fateful choice.

Conclusion

What do we make of this playing around? Tropes come from American ways of framing sex—other people do it. We can go on vacation from traditional American restraints and, when in Rome, do as the Romans. Escapes to the South Pacific, "Oriental" of the "Mid-" or "Far" East, or global south let characters throw off constraint and clothes. Debates of orientalism, colonialism, culture vs. nature are echoed in these playful replays of civilization and its discontents. Of course stories are not about faraway places but about "us." In *Tango for Tarzan*, Jane's inner animal is released. Barbie can face her bondage to the materialism and become a dominatrix. Nelson finds puppeteer Kevin Menegus' comment, that he has a lot people in knots, perceptive: "In toy theatre, the

figures can't move anyway, so bondage and toy theatre go well together." The stories are about cutting cultural knots. Foucault, who highlighted Western culture's tendencies toward discipline and punishment, would probably applaud these miniature pieces that combine beautiful visuals, music, and psyches unbound. The play is erotically enhanced due to the unexpected form: diminutive figures.

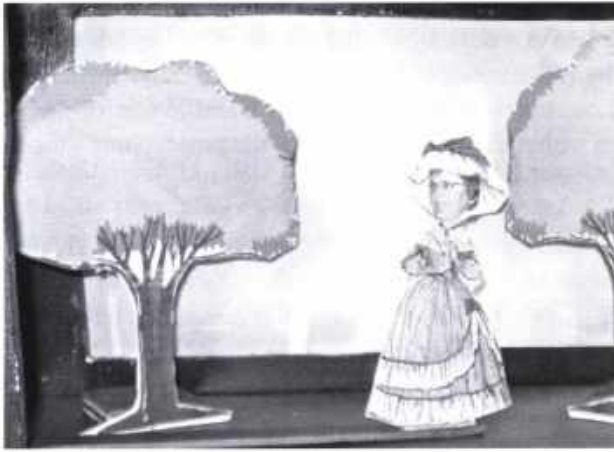
The Little Blue Moon Theatre reacts to American approaches to sexuality: while seemingly free it has puritanical constraints. The company illuminates the contradictions in a "harmless" and "comic" mode. Blue Moon slides under the radar with figures of childhood innocence to point out the deep fascination that sex exudes and the ways we displace desire. The sizzling romance of the Regency Theatre lured the hearts and minds of boys who became the masters of the British Empire. Their tales of travel and colonialism still haunt our popular films and media. The toy theatres of Victorian nurseries are gone but Little Blue Moon picks up characters for adult viewers. They're only playing, but these little figures are hot to the touch.

Foley Kathy is a professor of theater arts at UC Santa Cruz, the editor of *Asian Theater Journal* and has performed as a dalang of wayang golek rod puppets and wayang orang dance drama for more than twenty years.

Notes

1. Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Tree" (1850) <http://library.educationworld.net/clas10/sc11pg1.html>, accessed 6 December 2010.
2. Stevenson, "A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured," *Magazine of Art* [1884] and *Memories and Portraits* [1887] <http://www.toytheatre.net/JKG-Frame.htm>, accessed 6 December 2010.
3. Only Hans Christian Anderson, his memories clouded perhaps by his own childhood penury and experience of parental neglect, allows his writing a more strident note that invites Marxist analysis. In "The Money Box," the fat piggy bank stuffed with coins lords it over the toys as they "have a game at being men and women, that is something worth playing at [. . .]. The little toy theatre was set up in such a way so that the money pig could look directly into it." The play "was not worth much, but it was very well played, and all the characters turned their painted sides to the audience, for they were only made to be seen on one side. The acting was wonderful, excepting that sometimes they came out beyond the lamps, because the wires were a little too long." Through it all, "each one thought most of himself, or what the money-pig could be thinking." www.fairytalescollection.com/hans_christian_anderson/The_Money_Box.htm, accessed 6 December 2010.
4. All quotes unless otherwise noted are from a personal interview 5 December 2010.
5. Nelson discussed this piece in "Natalie Undressed" in *Puppetry International* #14 (Fall and Winter 2003).

From On High in the Basement by Joe McCormack



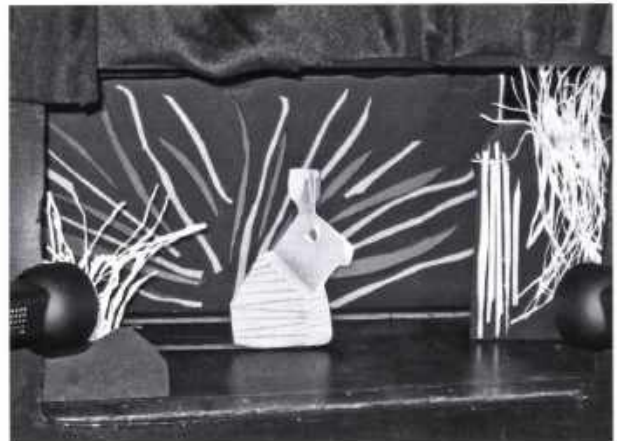
Like building a boat that could only be transported from the basement by Hercules; my first toy theater could house a few small children at one time, but only in the basement and just the whole idea of children in the basement is the subject of local news. So another stage was built and finally some success, with the construction that is. I was at the other end of the tunnel where there was no light except for the few light fixtures that I placed on this small metropolitan opera stage. The first gig was the occasion of a gentleman's 80th birthday for which I was not only a guest, but was asked by the hostess that maybe I could do something with my puppets for the event. A children's birthday party show for this very sharp 80 year old business man wasn't going to make it. I planned ahead by taking close-up photo shots of many of the intended guests over morning coffee. I reduced the photo to the proper size to paste on a craft stick and used paper doll cut-out clothes to "dress" the stick-figured guests. A sailor, a ballerina, a princess, a small girl-child, and a cook were going to be in my stage show. Creating a script that hearkened back to my high school days of writing goofy stories that non-sequitured from one thing to another, I knew I could tell this ridiculous story and keep it within 15 minutes. That would be just long enough for the real guests to be polite and put up with the escapades of a grown man introducing these people to toy theater.

There was enough of a thread in the story to follow and the little characters were in a strange way curious to look at, but the audience couldn't control their laughter when one of them in stick-figure form

slid out on stage and became part of the story. Each successive character brought more laughter, bringing my storytelling to a halt until the shrieks and snortings subsided, only to flair up again when one of them showed up in a bathing suit and another popped out of the birthday cake to finally bring the curtain down to end this little puppet show.

The guests said they never saw anything like it and quite frankly neither did I. The learning curve was quick. This thing was a hit and what other unimagined and unplanned stories could unfold on this miniature stage to delight small children? This should work. After all, much of my childhood play was moving plastic figures around in a fort of building blocks and creating those floor stories for my own amusement. Kids like this kind of thing, on the floor, animating dolls and toy figures as their stories unfold.

So the experiment is back in the basement and a paper country mouse and a paper city mouse await to tell a story that suggests it is good to be where one is and gladly accept it. Shadow scenery for the cityscape and a cornfield for the country motif will add some colorful sophistication for this performance along with a few other scenery fly-ups to amaze and delight. In a darkened room with the glow of lights from the miniature theater, we are the overseer, a roll that pleases us because we can for a moment believe that we are all-knowing in this fantasy world as we sit on Mt. Olympus or in these special box seats and watch a story unravel before us as we spin its meaning.



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Playing with Toys

by Mark Sussman

A proudly marginal genre, the Toy Theater originates in the history of the printed image, parlor entertainments, and *allegorical storytelling*, which, according to philosopher (and Great Small Works patron saint) Walter Benjamin, always involves stories referring to *other* stories outside the narrative frame. In toy theater, the narrative frame of the storyteller becomes literal in the sequence of pictures – real-time photomontage of (mostly) two-dimensional elements – shown inside the proscenium.

“It is by a strange combination of nature and history that the allegorical mode of expression is born,” Benjamin writes in his early study of the *trauerspiel* or baroque tragic drama. Allegories are more like paintings, by definition framed apart from the person or landscape they signify. By contrast, he associates the symbol with sculpture and the transubstantiation of religious icons – immediate, material stand-ins for the god, saint, or character. We typically associate the latter with puppets: marionettes, dolls, mannequins or figures given life by human performers. The church statue of the saint answers prayers, performs miracles. Punch is always Punch. No interpretation required!

Not so for the toy theater, however. In Benjamin’s terms, practitioners of toy theater work less in the realm of the symbolic figure and more in the realm of allegory: for the Toy Theater performer’s task is to animate the entire world of the stage, to point to the small proscenium, slide the flat figures on and off stage, all the while narrating the construction of the image within the frame in the mode of children who, according to Benjamin, “form their world of things by themselves, a small world in the large one [...] full of the most incomparable objects that capture the attention of children who use them,” especially “garbage and junk left over from building, gardening, housework, sewing, or carpentry.” The Toy Theater combines this juvenile tendency towards improvisatory *bricolage* with the realm of children’s literature, given its origins in printing and its powerful ability to show big ideas within the limits of the tiny proscenium frame.

A theatre of two dimensions using tracks, sliding panels, lighting dissolves, and cardboard and paper cut-outs, the Toy Theatre in its heyday afforded amateurs of all ages the means to perform stories using printed cut-out characters and scenery, sometimes double-sided to allow for primitive special effects. It has been resurrected by contemporary practitioners and a community of fans and devotees (some of whom even attend and perform at

entire festivals dedicated to the sub-genre of Toy Theater – most notably in Germany, Denmark, France, Brooklyn, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles). And, it appears as an avatar of the small screen within the larger window of the proscenium – the small box within the big box.

In Toy Theater, as in all forms of puppetry, the paradox that the *inanimate* has much to teach us about the *liveness* of live performance – about presence – emerges. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that the presence of the operator or manipulator is *both* negated *and* heightened by the intense transfer of focus required 1) to make the puppet or found object perform as desired; 2) to magically attract the audience’s attention *to* that object, *away* from the live performer, despite the fact that s/he may be speaking, singing, grimacing, or otherwise embodying the virtuosity of the task at hand; and, 3) to encourage a *suspension of disbelief*, which is a belief in the concrete gesture of the puppeteer, and its results. If all goes well, the audience believes in the truth of the act and endows the proceedings with a sense of magic and the illusion of illusion. In the theater of the performing object, belief and artifice, truth and faking, reality and magic are never opposed. The spectator, as Roland Barthes said famously of the art of professional wrestling, “does not wish for the actual suffering of the contestant; he only enjoys the perfection of an iconography.”

The “perfection of an iconography” brings to mind, in the flow of live, performed art, the freeze-frame of the modernist tableau. Following Benjamin, Eisenstein, Weimar collagist John Heartfield, and others, the practitioner of contemporary Toy Theater depends on the art of low-tech montage; here we might include the patient cut-and-paste collage filmmaking of Lewis Klahr, or the hand-drawn, charcol-and-paper animations of William Kentridge, narrative forms that proceed from state to state, in the sense that Hans-Thies Lehmann means, when he uses this painterly term to refer to narrative progression in the (post-dramatic) theatre. “As is well known,” he writes, “it is generally painters who speak of states, the states of images in the process of creation, states in which the dynamics of image creation are crystallizing and in which the process of the painting that has become invisible to the viewer is being stored. Effectively, the category appropriate to the new [post-dramatic] theatre is not action but *states*.” “Scenically dynamic formations” here displace linear narrative progression.

WALTER BENJAMIN AS A TOY THEATRE FIGURE
THE ORIGINAL ART WAS AN AD BY J H BUFFORD'S SONS
FOR MAX STADLER & CO., CLOTHIERS.

The Toy Theater stage proceeds by sequencing tableaux, presenting a “montage of attractions” (Eisenstein), whereas the “actors’ theatre” is better suited to presenting narrative flow borne by language. A focus on the presence of the *inanimate* in performance – puppets, miniature proscenium stages, tabletop object shows, and mannequins – evokes Lehmann’s category of the *post-dramatic*, certainly not limited to puppet theatre, a genre he barely mentions. Yet, convergences appear.

Traditionally, the English Toy theater – which reached the height of its popularity as an amateur entertainment, created and performed in middle- and working-class homes in the years between 1811 and 1830 – was a *flat* performance form. Sold in shops specializing in books, maps, and prints, Toy Theaters began as printed *sheets*, containing arrays of characters, scenery and proscenium elements, and, later, scripts for enacting plays in the home. Scholars debate whether these sheets were sold first as mere souvenirs of the legitimate, adult stage – representations of “real” productions, reproduced in two-dimensional, take-home miniature – or whether they emerge simply from an existing market of printed broadsheets and other so-called *juvenalia* produced by “sundry printers, mapmakers, stationers, globemakers, and lending library proprietors who played a role in developing a lucrative juvenile market.”

The scholarly nuance here is useful. As practitioners, teachers, and theorists of contemporary object performance approach the question of presence on stage, a debate emerges as to whether the authority – in the sense of original authorship – of the image belongs to the three-dimensional world of the life-sized production, smartly copied by watercolorists whose images, transferred via the magic of lithography, brought the melodramatic spectacles of the West End, in miniature, to the bourgeois family parlor? Or, rather, does it emerge from the printed sheet of characters, scenery, and stage elements, ready for mounting, customizing, and animation?

If the latter, how can we account for this transfer of “stage presence” from the printed page? The answer may come from a broader look at the realm of toys through the keen observational eyes of Walter Benjamin, who noticed the particular relationship between toys as a particular category of commodity-objects, and play as a formative practice for children. For it is not in the toy that play exists, but in the playing – in improvisation and imitation; not in mimicry of the world of adults, as some theater historians claim, but in the completion of tasks where they toy becomes a necessary accessory.

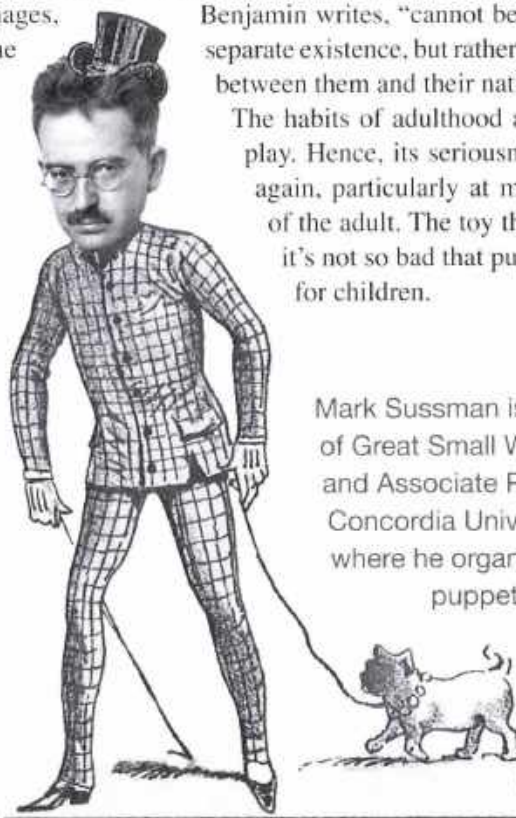
Benjamin wrote a series of meditations on toys and an essay on the politics of children’s theater in the years 1928-29, a period in which he published newspaper and magazine articles, short aphoristic “thought pictures” – the German word is *Denkbild* – and gave radio lectures on diverse topics. This was the height of his short-lived career as a public intellectual in Germany. Writing reviews of toy histories and toy exhibitions in Berlin, as well as specifically on the topic of proletarian children’s theater, Benjamin is careful to emphasize the radical otherness of the world of the child.

“Surrounded by a world of giants,” he writes, “children use play to create a world appropriate to their size.” Fair enough. But then comes the more cunning dialectical insight: “But the adult, who finds himself threatened by the real world and can find no escape, removes its sting by playing with its image in reduced form.” Here, Benjamin accounts for the adult’s “growing interest in children’s games and children’s books since the end of the war.” The adult is not simply regressing to childhood but, rather, making light of a life grown unbearable. And this is only 1928, one world war ten years in the past, another not quite yet on the horizon.

The play world of the child, then, may itself be a world of escape created by adults, for adults. Think of the testimonies by Great Men attesting to the importance of the English Toy Theater in their boyhoods: Laurence Olivier, Robert Louis Stevenson, G.K. Chesterton, Winston Churchill, Charles Dickens, J.B. Priestly – all played melodramas of the Toy Theater as children – and as members-in-training of a nation and a class. “[T]heir toys,” Benjamin writes, “cannot bear witness to any autonomous separate existence, but rather are a silent signifying dialogue between them and their nation.”

The habits of adulthood are tried on for size in child’s play. Hence, its seriousness. Hence, the desire to play again, particularly at moments of crisis in the world of the adult. The toy theater teaches us that, perhaps, it’s not so bad that puppet theater is perceived as art for children.

Mark Sussman is a founding member of Great Small Works in Brooklyn, NY and Associate Professor of Theatre at Concordia University, Montréal, Québec, where he organizes an experimental puppetry cabaret, Café Concret.





Or You Could Kiss Me

written by Neil Bartlett, directed by Neil Bartlett.
National Theatre, Cottesloe Theatre, London Fall, 2010

In recent years, London's National Theatre has found success exploring the possibilities offered by large-scale puppet productions. Nicholas Hynter's 2003 production of *His Dark Materials* relied on puppetry to bring the fantastical world of Philip Pullman's trilogy to life, and in 2007, the National mounted *War Horse*, its spectacularly successful co-production with South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company. The life-size horse puppets of *War Horse* and the mythical daemon puppets of *His Dark Materials* proved that puppets were capable of bringing to the stage characters that human actors would be hard-pressed to portray convincingly. The puppets stepped in when their living counterparts could not possibly fit the bill.

Or You Could Kiss Me, a new collaboration between Handspring Puppet Company and playwright/director Neil Bartlett, asked something different of its puppet performers. It was an intimate story of human proportions, and the protagonists were neither animals nor daemons, but rather two old men facing the end of their 65-year relationship. As Adrian Kohler suggested in his program note, this play strove to elucidate what puppets could bring to a human story; for me, the production was certainly up to the task.

The plot was simple. Mr. A and Mr. B were two elderly South African men who had spent the majority of their lives together. Eighty-six-year-old Mr. B suffered from emphysema and a rapidly deteriorating memory, and the doctors had warned Mr. A that the next time he admitted his partner to the hospital would likely be the last. The play tracked their final week together in their home, as Mr. B struggled to remember their youth and Mr. A painfully grappled with the reality of the present. But this simple summary belies the complexity of the performance. A and B had many faces in production—some puppet, some human. Handspring co-founders Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones performed the present-day A and B respectively, but they also provided movement and voices for two sets of puppets: The youthful, virile A and B of 1971, and the aged A and B of 2036. Four other male performers assisted with the puppet manipulation and fulfilled other roles as necessary, including memory prompters, gossipy aunts, and even a young version of A and B without the aid of puppets. A simple story about two men required a bevy of performers and puppets to bring it to life.

The result of this staging was that the characters were able to face their younger selves, dramatizing the process of memory in a way that only puppets can do. The past, present, and future of the characters shared the stage, and the interdependence of puppets and puppeteers allowed for a fluidity of character that seemed to transcend time altogether. In the opening scene, for instance, Jones lit a cigarette for Old B, fixed it in the puppet's wooden hand, and moved the hand to and from the puppet's lips. Jones' labored breathing became Old B's, and he blew the smoke swirling from the tip of the cigarette to create the illusion of the puppet's exhale. Kohler and Jones have often emphasized the importance of breath in their puppetry, and in this instance it was easy to see why: breath united the character across time, blurring the line between where Present B ended and Old B began. In another scene, the opposite occurred: the assistants manipulated Young B while Jones looked on, struggling to remember what his young counterpart had said and how he had acted the first time he met A. Whether amicable or alienating, the puppet-puppeteer relationship in this play stages a confrontation between different versions of the same person, separated by time, but intrinsically linked. And given the semi-autobiographical nature of the story, the experience of watching Kohler and Jones animate their past, present, and imagined future selves felt all the more complex, combining memory with imagination and fact with fiction.

Despite its metaphoric significance, the number of bodies on stage occasionally created some practical issues. The Cottesloe is a challenging space for this kind of puppetry; audience seating surrounds the stage on three sides, making it difficult for puppeteers to ensure that the puppets remain visible. From my seat on the lowest of three levels, there were a few moments

when the puppets disappeared amidst their puppeteers, and the powerful bond between puppet and audience was briefly severed. Designer Rae Smith reduced these sight line issues by keeping the set pieces minimal and mobile, and ultimately the intimacy of the space superseded its minor drawbacks. The proximity allowed for closer inspection of Kohler's wonderful puppet design, which combined exquisite detail with reminders of the puppet's wooden materiality, such as the rough chisel marks visible on the startlingly expressive faces. It also emphasized the realism of even the most subtle movements, like the way Old Mr. A climbed into bed after a long day, or the way Old Mr. B's black eyes caught the light and seemed to glisten with tears. The obvious lifelessness of the puppet made these ordinary movements into something extraordinary.

Not surprisingly, the play worked best in these simple moments, and Bartlett succeeded in weaving together a series of vignettes that maximized the puppet's gift for finding meaning in minutia. However, the dialogue often offered only cryptic glimpses into the minds of the characters, and I found myself wondering whether I was missing important pieces of the puzzle. The use of a narrator, capably played by Adjoa Andoh, at times offered cohesion among the parts, but frequently seemed to complicate the simple narrative beyond necessity. In the end, the shortcomings of the script were of little importance. *Or You Could Kiss Me* was an affecting piece of theatre with a keen understanding of its medium, as well as a compelling case for the appeal of puppetry on a human scale.

Review by Dawn Tracey Brandes,
Northwestern University



PHOTOS: SIMON ANNAND

Wx3

Handspring on the web

www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/59865/productions/or-you-could-kiss-me.html

The National Theatre Photographer, Simon Annand:
www.flickr.com/photos/handspring/

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Leo's Heroes

by Mo Heard

Then he did a strange thing. Leo saw him take a small twist of paper from his waistcoat pocket, unfold it, and scrutinise the contents. 'Have you seen this before Leo?' He held out the scrap of paper. There, glowing brightly, was a tiny sliver of blue rock.

Leo peered into the paper. 'No, never seen anything that colour.'

Mr. Pollock shook his head. 'I got this last night from a friend of mine. He was telling me some strange nonsense about ...' The man put his hand on Leo's shoulder. 'I was wondering if you might be linked to it ... you seem ... so different to my usual boys. As though you don't belong here.'

Leo put his finger to touch the blue rock, and as he did so, Benjamin Pollock shimmered before him in the growing darkness, his voice echoing, 'Don't, don't,' while Leo's insides somersaulted, and he was tossed through a hot whirlwind to land on his duvet in his room, staring up at the red Chinese paper lampshade which was twisting crazily above his bed.

LEO'S HEROES ISBN: 978 1 84624 469 8
Book Guild Publishing.



It's not often a book is written about toy theatre, let alone a book for children – let alone a book where it's woven into a larger, fantastical storyline. I recently read a new juvenile fiction book that does just that.

"Leo's Heroes," by UK author Mo Heard, incorporates real historical persons and events in a challenging yet appealing and approachable style.

Aspects of the book are reminiscent of the television series, *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*, because it incorporates well-known (and some not so well-known, but fascinating) real people and real events from history – Benjamin Pollock, John Logie Baird, Frederick James Camm (and his brother Syd), to mention just some. The vernacular spoken by these characters bring the story alive and will immerse the reader, helping them lose themselves in the story – and that's just what a good story SHOULD do!

What struck me was how vibrant and alive his world is. Leo's mother (or *Mum*) has a wonderful sense of humor, and both his parents show an intelligent and patient style of relating to him. His excitement of obtaining and collecting toy theatre sheets reminded me of the excitement I've seen on many occasions of kids nowadays in comic book shops excitedly asking about this week's latest Magic-the-Gathering cards. There are words in the story that might not be familiar to American readers, but are fun to discover and learn, such as *stookie*, *boffin*, *mudlarks*, *Billys & Charleys*, *chink*, *stum*.

One of Leo's heroes is Doctor Who, and ironically Leo himself ends up being a kind of Time Lord, participating in key ways in various people's lives and events in the past. The ultimate answer as to how and why Leo can time travel is eventually revealed...but you'll have to read "Leo's Heroes" to find out!

"Leo's Heroes" is available now through Amazon.com or Amazon.co.uk. Find out more details about the book at the author's blog:

www.moheard.wordpress.com/

review by Trish Lewis

Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry at the University of Connecticut



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#1 Oral Toy Theatre (Puppetyranny)



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<http://www.papiertheater.eu/galerie/epernay09/epernay09.htm>

Wordpress celebrating 100 years of toy theatre:



read At Punch you plainly see - and Joan his wife both full of life

Published by W. WESTON, Exeter Street, Strand.

www.toytheatres.wordpress.com/

"Toy Theater" collage, Erica Harris



www.ericaharris.org/

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www.unima-usa.org/publications

Rainer Sennewald's Forum Papiertheater:

www.papiertheater.eu/index.htm

- *Das Papier Theater*, web edition
www.papiertheater.eu/z_20/z_20.htm
- Toy Theatre festival
www.papiertheater.eu/galerie/brooklyn/brooklyn_05.htm

Pollock toy theatre sheets from Nigel Peever's collection:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=PlqSMxlEqFk&p=7737A5B7C7EE6FC2

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Joseph Merrick:
A Three Act Tragedy

*inspired by the legend
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www.arcanifacts.blogspot.com/2011/01/like-other-people.html

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The Colour of Her Dreams

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La Divina Caricatura

Now or Never Theatre
The Odyssey

Photo: Courtesy of the Artist



Red String Wayang Theatre
The Struggle for Justice

Photo: Matt Linn



Stefano Brancato & Michael Bush
Icarus

Red String Wayang Theatre
The Struggle for Justice

Redmoon Theater
The Tempest

Rogue Artists Ensemble
Pinocchio

Sinking Ship Productions
Powerhouse

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Stefano Brancato & Michael Bush
Icarus

Visual Expressions
The Monkey King

Photo: Matt Hicks



The Monkey King
Visual Expressions

2011 Grant Review Board: Cheryl Henson, Jane Henson, Allelu Kurten, Louis Borodinsky,
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Photo: Janaki Ranpura



Grace
Janaki Ranpura

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Animal Cracker Conspiracy
The Collector

In The Heart of the Beast
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What If?!

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Idle Hands

Kyle Loven
Blink

Laurie O'Brien
The Collector of Lies

Open Ink Productions
Triangle

Janaki Ranpura
Grace

Lake Simons
*Wind Set-Up: a composition
for materials & elements*

Hanne Tierney
Strange Tales of Liaozhai

Urban Research Theater
Bag Lady

Amanda Villalobos
Light Keepers

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Nature Boy

Penny Jones & Co. Puppets
Four Seasons Puppet Show

David & Jennifer Skelly
David and the Phoenix

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Teatro SEA
Legends of the Enchanted Treasure

Whorls of Wonder Puppet Theater
Terran's Aquarium



Photo: Iain Gunn

The Collector
Animal Cracker Conspiracy

2012 GRANTING CYCLE

The Foundation awards grants at the end of each year for the creation and development of innovative and contemporary work for adult and family audiences. The postmark deadline for letters of intent is **April 8, 2011**. Guidelines are available at: www.hensonfoundation.org

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The Collector of Lies
Laurie O'Brien



Poster for Great Small Works' 9th International Toy Theater Festival at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn, NY, 2010. Design by Erica Harris – www.ericaharris.org