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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

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On the COVER

RAIN RITUAL
KURDISTAN OF IRAN, MARIYAN, NEY VILLAGE
PHOTO: BAHMAN SHAHRAZI

(see article, page 8)



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

Welcome to Puppetry International #31— Brave New Scholarship!

We are fortunate to have Dassia Posner on board as our Guest Editor for this issue. You'll learn more about Dassia's background in her introduction to this issue, but regular readers of this magazine are already familiar with her work. In addition to writing articles and reviews for PI, Dassia (along with John Bell) has been helping to plan our issues for the past five or six years. The process is congenial and a little dreamlike, as the three of us gather around a dining room table over a cup of herb tea and ponder the many facets of our chosen theme, and how it should be covered and who should write what.

Dassia has moved to Chicago to join the Theater Faculty at Northwestern University, but we still meet, her face on a laptop now thanks to video-conferencing technology.

What has impressed me about recent puppet scholarship, is that the new wave of MFAs and PhDs almost always began their careers as puppeteers. As you might suspect, the MFA's continue to create new work for the theatre, yet even some PhD's continue front their own puppet companies.

Perhaps this is why the new puppet research has such energy to it—these researchers know their topic from the inside out.

We hope you enjoy these articles. There are also reviews of some new books, and a look at the new documentary about Kevin Clash: *Being Elmo*.

—Andrew C. Periale

After the Academy Awards ceremony, I wrote to contributor Poupak Azimpour about how pleased I was that her fellow-Iranian had won an Oscar for Best Foreign Film.

Her response:

"I am so happy.... All of us are friend and in the art doesn't matter in cinema or music, theatre or puppet theatre we have a unit language and we love each other. I wish there were never ever war, politics, capitalism and dictatorship in the world. I wish all peace and love to all people are in the earth. No matter you are American and I am Iranian or he or she is African, Asian or European or...

"I thank you again because of your friendly opinion about *A Separation*.
Hearing warm voices from our friends from all around the world surprise us."

To Bonnie and me, this is the very spirit of UNIMA and why we continue to do this work and love it.

The New Vocabulary of the Puppet

My first foray into puppetry scholarship was a graduate paper on Julie Taymor's puppets and masks for Gozzi's *King Stag*, directed by Andrei Serban at the American Repertory Theatre (1984, remounted 2000). At the time, I was surprised by theatre critics' struggle to articulate the contribution of puppets and masks to the production. It was praised for its "Magic" and "Cross-Cultural Whimsy," and even for moving "Beyond Miss Piggy," but was not evaluated for its intercultural dialogue with Indonesian topeng and Japanese bunraku, nor for its playful use of estrangement in the form of light-blue-clad-and-hooded puppeteers who manipulated both the tale and its puppets.

With the increasingly visible presence of puppetry in U.S. and European theatre in productions like *The Lion King*, *Avenue Q*, and *War Horse*, theatre critics have now begun to express less surprise at, and more analysis of, the theatrical proliferation of puppets. The last few years have also seen a burgeoning of strong,

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A SCENE FROM *A DREAM PLAY*, ADAPTED AND DIRECTED BY JOSEPH JONAH THERRIEN,
BASED ON STRINDBERG'S ORIGINAL. CONNECTICUT REPERTORY THEATRE PHOTO: GERRY GOODSTEIN



Dassia N. Posner is Assistant Professor of Theatre at Northwestern University. She earned her Ph.D. in Drama at Tufts University and has received fellowships from Harvard and the Mellon Foundation. She is a puppeteer, theatre historian and dramaturg; research areas of particular interest include history of directing, Russian avant-garde theatre, popular entertainment, and world puppetry history and performance.

She is currently working on a book on Russian directors and co-editing (with John Bell and Claudia Orenstein) a collection of contemporary puppetry scholarship. She has been a contributing editor to *Puppetry International* since 2004.

international puppetry scholarship. The need remains for this body of scholarship to continue to grow as we seek meaningful ways to talk about puppetry, investigate the philosophical questions it raises, discover how the puppet functions dramaturgically on the stage, and trace the integral place of puppetry in world performance culture.

I was recently part of a committee that organized the first international scholarly puppetry conference in the United States. "Puppetry and Postdramatic Performance: An International Conference on Performing Objects in the 21st Century," was held April 1-3, 2011 at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. The conference brought together a hundred and fifty scholars and artists from fourteen countries across six continents to explore "new approaches to critical thinking and theorizing about puppetry and performing objects in order to enrich, expand, and enliven the field of discourse." It featured seventy-five academic papers, keynote addresses by Peter Schumann and Eileen Blumenthal, workshops and performances, a film series, tours, and a puppet cabaret. It was planned by John Bell, Janie Geiser, Nicole Hartigan, Claudia Orenstein, Bart P. Roccoberton, Jr., Susan Simpson, and myself, with generous logistical support by Mary Mell, Ted Yungclas, and many volunteers. We organized it in conjunction with the University of Connecticut, CalArts, and

the UNIMA Research Commission, with support from the Jim Henson Foundation, the UConn School of Fine Arts, and the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry.

This issue of *Puppetry International* is inspired by that conference. Several of the issue's articles, written by both established and emerging scholars, were first presented at the conference, while others are entirely new. These articles, while diverse in their geographical, temporal, and philosophical areas of inquiry, cumulatively investigate and celebrate puppetry's presence in the margins of theatrical culture. By this, I do not mean that puppetry is marginalized, but that its significance and appeal lie in its "betweenness," in its ability to be read simultaneously as human and object, as neither and both. As these seven authors observe, the puppet hovers tantalizingly between life and death, tradition and innovation, the serious and the satirical, the enthralling and the uncanny, ritual and theatre, and, as Chikamatsu Monzaemon famously stated, "between the real and the not real."

Puppetry scholars have recently been honing a vocabulary that articulates the uniquely rich, varied, sophisticated, and expressive language of puppet and object theatre. It is my hope that this issue of *Puppetry International*, the first to be entirely peer-reviewed, will help that vocabulary to grow.

-Dassia N. Posner

Peculiar Possibilities: Narrative Theory and Puppetry's Ability to Edit Reality

by Robert Smythe

In the preface to her book *Puppetry: A World History*, Eileen Blumenthal defines puppetry as “all kinds of constructed actors and performing objects” (7). This suggests that puppetry is the act of transforming an object into a puppet, perhaps by manipulating it or even just thinking of it in a different way; that the puppet is an end unto itself. I’d like to suggest, instead, that puppetry is a narrative form that uses performing objects to make it possible for authors to edit reality. Rudolf Arnheim, in *Film as Art*, and Scott McCloud, in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, use narrative theory to make the argument that their respective media have moved beyond mechanical representation and become narrative forms because their inherent abilities to manipulate space and time enabled them to achieve what previously only had been possible in literature: the creation of an imagined reality in the mind of the reader, based on an author’s descriptions of the real world. I believe narrative theory can do the same for puppetry.

Narrative theory grew out of the study of how the parts of language combine to create meaning.¹ Its precepts have been used to describe how the structure of film creates unique storytelling possibilities (Bordwell; Chatman; McCloud). It is a useful tool for understanding puppetry because it argues that narratives are the work of an author who controls the access a reader has to a story. It splits the *what* of the story (events, characters, time and location,

referred to as the *fabula*) from *how* the author tells it (the *sjuzet*). The author forms the *sjuzet* by revealing and suppressing the *fabula* through the manipulation of time and space; one example is the flashback (Bordwell 51). Narrative theory suggests that readers of any narrative form are not idle spectators: they interpret the *sjuzet* to actively construct meaning themselves. It also postulates that an author constructs *sjuzet* any time he reveals events to the reader in a precise order designed to develop and release tension, thereby building interest. Anyone who has told a joke knows that delaying the facts contained in the punch line increases tension and attention as the listener works out the story. Editing is extremely important, because authors choose the events that are most important for their story and leave out irrelevant ones. The process of constructing a narrative, then, is a shift away from representing the real world by showing everything, and toward constructing limited and therefore, imperfect, descriptions of reality, such as moving shadows on the wall or a wooden figure of a person, that prompt a reader to build a rich and personally fulfilling world in her imagination, beyond the immediate scope of her senses (McCloud 60-65).

Readers construct meaning by decoding the sequencing of basic units that each represent a concept (McCloud 25-58). In written texts, the basic units are words, which are set into sequences of sentences. In comics, the basic units are framed panels of hand-drawn art sequenced in pages. In cinema, the basic units are individual frames of film, containing visual compositions, set into sequences of frames, or clips. Each sequence describes part of the *fabula*: a unique event happening at a specific time and place. Narrative theory recognizes that certain media have the ability to arrange the chronological or spatial order of sequences to suit the story-telling needs of an author. As Arnheim observes: “Time and space are continuous. Not so in film. The period of time that is being photographed may be interrupted at any point. One scene may be immediately followed by another that takes place at a totally different time. And the continuity of space may be broken in the same manner” (21). Narrative theory holds that an author’s manipulation of space and time creates metaphorical triggers that give the reader of the narrative opportunities to make imaginative, perceptive leaps to fill in the gaps between sequences—think of the jump cuts in film—using the concepts conveyed by the medium’s basic units of meaning.

MARK RYLANCE AS ROOSTER BYRON IN JERUSALEM AT
THE ROYAL COURT THEATER, LONDON
PHOTO: SIMON ANNAND





JUDE SANDY AND PRENTICE ONAYEMI IN A SCENE FROM THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF GREAT BRITAIN PRODUCTION OF WAR HORSE, BASED ON THE NOVEL BY MICHAEL MORPURGO, ADAPTED BY NICK STAFFORD WITH THE HANDSPRING PUPPET COMPANY, DIRECTED BY MARIANNE ELLIOTT AND TOM MORRIS, PRODUCED BY LINCOLN CENTER THEATER AND THE NATIONAL THEATRE IN ASSOCIATION WITH BOB BOYETT AT THE VIVIAN BEAUMONT THEATER.
PHOTO: PAUL KOLNIK

Henryk Jurkowski and Penny Francis have already used semiotics to identify the puppet as puppetry's basic unit of meaning (54-55, 61). Puppets are therefore a potent tool that can give authors great control in assembling narratives because they are an edited representation of reality. Even the most realistic-looking puppet is an abstraction, given that the puppeteer has chosen what is important for the story and edited out irrelevant details. The horse puppets built by Handspring Puppet Company for the premiere of *War Horse* at London's Royal National-Oldivier Theater (2007) and subsequent international productions have carefully jointed limbs that eerily recall the movements of real horses, even while their manipulators can be seen through their conceptual wickerwork bodies. However, this fascinating contrast between the puppet's capacity for abstraction as a physical object and its potential for uncanny mimetic movement only hints at the true power of puppetry that narrative theory reveals. The power of the puppeteer lies not in his ability to manipulate the puppet, but in his ability to manipulate time and space.

The puppet is a conceptual stand-in for reality that releases the reader from the real world and its restrictive physical laws binding human actors. The cables holding up Spider Man, Mary Poppins or countless Peter Pans are clear reminders that a play takes place in a real world with gravity. If the spectator wants to imagine a world where people can fly, she has to mentally erase the wires herself so that the reality she sees on stage matches her imagination. Contrast this with puppetry, where the author has already edited out non-essential information from the puppet. Since the puppet exists on stage but lives in the spectator's imagination, it is not much of a stretch for her to include flying among a puppet's attributes. However, the role of the puppet in a narrative is not to serve as a placeholder in a story, but to keep the reader connected to the *sjužet*. As she constructs her understanding of the *fabula*, the reader has to use and interpret the information the author gives to her through the puppet. This was clearly illustrated in *Jerusalem* on Broadway (2011), a production with human actors so grounded in reality that living trees formed part of the set, yet what is arguably the most important moment in the play is only made possible through the use of puppetry. In it, Mark Rylance, in his Tony-award winning role as Rooster Byron, tells a story about having actually met a giant. He proceeds to act out the encounter by playing the giant while manipulating a cigarette lighter to represent himself. This sequence, simultaneously and vividly real and imagined, provides important information for

understanding the last image of the play, when the real trees begin to tremble to the sound of tremendous footfalls just before the stage goes black. Obviously, using the cigarette lighter as a puppet permits the audience to visually understand the humorous size difference, but more importantly, the puppet makes it possible for playwright Jez Butterworth to retain control of his narrative, keeping the audience tethered to the action on stage even while they mind-travel to the time and place where this crucial meeting took place.

Authors of narratives rearrange the chronological events of a story by ignoring two fundamental physical laws: that time is continuous, moving in one direction and passing at the same rate for everyone; and that objects must move through continuous space to arrive at a new location. Film's jump cuts violate those rules, enabling an author to create *sjužet* by manipulating the space-time continuum in order to instantly set characters in different places and times. These jumps suppress what is known amongst Hollywood script readers as "shoe leather": the mundane details of time passing while traveling from one place to another (Snedeker). Human actors use a lot of shoe leather as their characters move from event to event, so a play's forward movement drags and the tension of a scene relaxes. A puppet narrative keeps action moving forward because puppets do not need to use shoe leather: a puppet can suddenly pop into a scene without having to walk into it or waiting for lights to come up. Puppetry opens up the possibility of jump cuts in live performance.

Puppets also share film's ability to stop and reverse time: like a freeze frame, a puppet's action can completely come to a halt while the universe ages around it; like a flashback, it can travel through time, without aging. In *Hermann*, produced by Braunschweig, Germany's Theater im Wind in the late 1980s, one sequence of a naked puppet performing morning exercises abruptly ends with the appearance of a fully clothed puppet of the same character. In the story, time has clearly passed, yet in the real world of the performance, the events are practically simultaneous, forcing the reader to immediately account for the missing events: "Obviously, this character must buy clothes and live in a house where he stores his clothes, and he must get dressed in the morning." No matter how fast and skillful a similar costume change could be managed on a human stage, switching between the two puppets inspires the reader to create a richer and fuller life for the puppet character than its counterpart.



ENNO PODEHL IN THE MATCH-LIGHTING SCENE FROM *HERMANN* BY THEATER IM WIND

PHOTO: RUDOLF FLENTJE © 1992

Puppetry offers the author more possibilities for *sjuzet* than even the two-dimensional medium of film can, because puppetry takes place in three-dimensions, and authors who use it can therefore control space as well as time. In *Hermann*, the blank-faced, red-haired puppet of Johanna, a Gypsy woman living in Germany in the 1930s, is suddenly left sitting on stage, essentially in suspended animation; for her, a specific moment in time has stood still. Yet the narrative continues as Enno Podehl, the puppeteer, walks around to the front of the table that serves as the stage and stands directly in front of the audience; his use of three-dimensional space moves the narrative forward in time to the immediate present. He puts on a black leather glove and then suddenly jumps onto the stage table, the present bursting backward in time. He grabs Johanna by the throat—for her, no time has passed—then carries the puppet to a point as far upstage as he can, taking her from the present through the past and into a place where time does not exist. With a sickening thud, he lets the wooden Johanna fall to the floor, where the puppet disappears from audience view and the character disappears from the story. Podehl, as author, has shown that space, time and the narrative, are linked. No other live performance form can control time like this; no other narrative medium can use space like this.

Since puppet narratives consist of edited, constructed representations of reality, the puppeteer's creation of *sjuzet* is intrinsic to the form and therefore unavoidable: the puppet is inseparable from its narrative, a trait puppetry shares with film, as narrative theory reveals. Eighty years ago, when film theorist Rudolf Arnheim, among others, was developing the idea that film was a unique narrative form, he asserted that: "A film art developed only gradually when the moviemakers began consciously or unconsciously to cultivate the peculiar possibilities of cinematographic technique and to apply them toward the creation of artistic productions" (35). Puppetry, too, has peculiar possibilities, differentiating it from all other forms of live performance. They are worth cultivating. When authors, who may be puppeteers or storytellers from other media, realize that puppetry enables them to manipulate time and three-dimensional

space in live performance, they can transform spectators into readers of narratives who use their imaginations to construct deeply personal meaning by accessing the invisible world that lies beyond the immediate senses.

Robert Smythe is the recipient of many awards and honors, including Pew and Guggenheim Fellowships, and holds an MFA in Playwriting from Temple University. He is the founder of Philadelphia's Mum Puppettheatre and was its artistic director for 23 years.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Prominently through the work of Roland Barthes, the French literary theorist, philosopher, critic and semiotician.

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The Appearance of the Goddess of Water and the God of Rain as Forms of Iranian Theatrical Puppetry Rain Rites

by Poupak Azimpour

Rain in Ancient Iranian Civilizations

Modern Iran, as we know it today, is what remains of an ancient civilization that lived on the Iranian plateau. Throughout its long history, the Iranian plateau has been a dry land that has known many droughts. The need for water and rain were at the core of the myths of *Anāhitā*, the goddess of water, and *Tishtar*, the god of rain, who were the two sources of these two precious liquids. The thirsty people of the earth created two puppets—a little girl and a little boy—in order to communicate with the two water gods. The puppets were used in a ritual known as the Rain Rite, during which the puppets prayed to the gods in puppet-language. During the Rain Rite, participants use songs, prayers and words. Although these are said in human language, only in the presence of these ritual puppets do these sayings become meaningful and effective. When puppets are used as mediums, as in the Rain Rite, a kind of puppet language is created. The puppets thus become intermediaries between heaven and earth. This article illuminates the transformation process of the goddess *Anāhitā* into *Bouka Bārāna*, which means “girl rain puppet,” and of the god *Tishtar* into “*Houla Bārāni*,” the “boy rain puppet” as a way of exploring the significance of this ancient Iranian tradition.

Because of its geographical situation and the climatic conditions of the Iranian plateau, Iranians have always prayed for rainfall and the growth of plants. Water and soil, along with fire and wind, are the basic elements and determine the connections between human beings and the universe. Ancient people gathered around lighted fires and relied upon the spiritual powers of water and wind to bring forth fertility to the sacred soil.

The sanctification of water and respect for it was a very special issue for Iranians, and historians have often written about it. Herodotus wrote: “Iranians don’t urinate in rivers and they don’t spit in them either; they don’t even wash their hands in rivers, and won’t tolerate others washing their hands there either. They respect rivers and all flowing water.” Four hundred and fifty years after Herodotus, Strabo (64/63 BC – ca. AD 24) reported, “Iranians don’t bathe in flowing waters and they don’t throw into the water dirty things such as corpses. Whenever they make a vow for water, they go to a river or a lake, dig a pit nearby and perform a sacrifice in it. They pay extra attention not to pollute the water with any blood” (Rajabi 328-329).

Until several decades ago, Iranians followed their ancestors’ footsteps and relied on their spiritual beliefs to perform their agricultural activities. During a drought or famine, the people’s only hope was to pray to the rain goddess *Anāhitā*. In fact, the rain ritual is one of the rites born out of natural hardship; to insure rainfall, Iranian societies emphasized the importance of staying on one’s farm and making it productive. This meant that people didn’t leave their maternal land with every drought or famine; rather than run away, they remained and performed the rain rituals. *Bouka Bārāna* and *Houla Bārāni* are some of the most meaningful rites derived from the rituals connected to *Anāhitā*. This ritual is especially visible today in the Kurdish region of Iran.

The Goddess *Anāhitā*

Native tribes of the Iranian plateau had a matriarchal society long before the arrival of the Aryans (beginning of the 1st millennium BC), who brought along a new, patriarchal society to ancient Iran. The tribes’ strong mythological beliefs influenced the Aryans, who were migrating from the north of Russia to Iran. In fact, these matriarchal beliefs were so deep and powerful that, not only did they reject the patriarchal beliefs of Aryans,



SPOON BRIDES

CHART 1 Etymology of *Ardwī-Sūrā-Anāhitā*, Goddess of Water

	ardwī	sūrā	anāhitā
H.Lommel (linguist)	wetness	hero	pure
Hans Reichelt (linguist)	wet	powerful	pure
Mehrdad Bahar (mythologist and linguist)	fertile and blessed (a mythological river)	powerful	pure

but also strongly kept their status; the point that *Anāhitā* existed, as the goddess even in the patriarchal society of Aryans, is the proof of this matriarchal power. The complete name of the water goddess is *Ardwī-Sūrā-Anāhitā*, a combination of three words which: "Herman Weller has translated as **holy-wet-flow** and Lommel has translated as **wetness-hero-pure**" (Gaviri 37).

Iranian mythologist Mehrdad Bahar interprets the three words *Ardwī-Sūrā-Anāhitā* as follows: "In Pahlavi¹: *Ardwī sūrā*, in Avestan²: *Arədvī- surā*. *Ardwī* is the name of the mythical river; *sūrā* means "powerful." *Ardwī* is an adjective and usually follows another adjective. *Anāhitā* is the second adjective and it means "pure." In Pahlavi, it was pronounced "anāhīd" and in Farsi, the word becomes "Nahid." *Ardwī* means fertile and blessed (Bahar 80).

[SEE CHART 1]

The Indian goddess Saraswati, the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, and the Greek goddesses Demeter and Aphrodite can all be compared to the Iranian *Anāhitā*, although *Anāhitā* is perhaps closest to Saraswati because of the similarities in language and civilization between Iran and India. *Anāhitā*, the symbol of water, thus represents blessings and plenty, fertility and matrimony, motherhood, birth and victory. According to Razi:

[She] purifies the seed of men and the uterus of women. She keeps women fertile, facilitates pregnancy and childbirth, and keeps their breasts full of milk. She is known everywhere and is as powerful as

all the rivers of the world gathered together [...] She is the goddess of a thousand lakes and a thousand rivers [...] *Ahura Mazda* (the Creator) created the goddess through his will and from his soul, and made her the guardian of all people's lands and villages. She was created with white, plump arms, and *Anāhitā* is very beautiful (Razi 258).

Temples built for *Anāhitā* were luxurious and elaborate. People worshipped her with prayers and hymns, and they asked her to make the rain fall on their desolate farms and parched lips. The following is a description of her palace and her beauty:

Beside every river and sea, there is a magnificent palace, which is constructed with a thousand beautiful columns and a hundred bright windows; on a platform, there is a fragrant and beautiful throne laid on pillows. This great palace belonged to a beautiful girl who was young and shapely, and wore a golden belt. In Kardeha³, another Aban Yasht⁴, we see Nahid (also known as *Anāhitā*) as a beautiful, shapely, free girl who wears a belt and light shoes with golden laces which are full of beauty (Fareh-vashi 168).

Bouka Bārāna

Documents reveal that later *Anāhitā* is transformed into the earthly shape of the *Bouka Bārāna* puppet. This Kurdish word is the combination of two words of "*Bouka*" meaning bride and *Vārān* or *Bārān* meaning rain. Nowadays, the *Anāhitā* ritual is held with some changes and is known as *Bouka Bārāna* (Rain Bride) in some regions of west of Iran, especially by little girls in Kurdistan. In the past, this ritual was very prevalent in all Kurdish areas. The details of it show that the *Bouka Bārāna* rite is the same as the *Anāhitā* rite. In both of these rituals, certain parts remain the same: seeking rain, praying and singing religious hymns for *Anāhitā*, or in *Bouka Bārāna*'s words, moaning and entreating about humans, animals, the thirst of birds and nature, walking towards fountains, rivers and seas, sanctifying water, exchanging gifts between people, or making offerings to *Anāhitā*'s temples.

[SEE CHART 2]

The table shows many similarities between *Anāhitā* and *Bouka Bārāna*, but the most important is the prayer for rain.

In new rites of *Bouka Bārāna*, little Kurdish girls and teenagers, who represent innocence and purity, go to alleys and streets in most regions of Kurdistan. They nail together pieces of wood in the shape of a cross. People then dress it and create hair for it. Parts of its dress are the same as those of Kurdish women. The puppet's hair is decorated with glass beads (called "Moorag") and sometimes beautiful flowers are added to the dress. The person who carries the puppet is called the "Barhehl Gar" which means "The Carrier" or "Goreh



STRUCTURE OF BOUKA BĀRĀNA
KURDISTAN OF IRAN, MARIVAN, NEY VILLAGE



THE CARRIER OF RAIN BRIDE
KURDISTAN OF IRAN,
MARIVAN, NEY VILLAGE

PHOTOS: BAHMAN SHAHBAZI



KURDISTAN OF IRAN, BIJAR

PHOTOS: JAMSHID FARAJVAND



END OF THE RAIN RITUAL
KURDISTAN OF IRAN, MARIVAN, NEY VILLAGE

PHOTO: BAHMAN SHAHBAZI

CHART 2 Table of Similarities of *Anāhitā* and *Bouka Bārāna*

Name	Gender	Subject of the Rite	Starting Point	Destination	Starting Point	Main Rite Holders	Apparent Specialties	Gifts
Anāhitā Goddess of Water	Female	Seeking Water and Rain	Village or Town	Temples beside Rivers or Lakes	Prayers and Religious Hymns	Women and Girls	Elaborate Dress, Golden Belt, Shining Shoes, Beautiful	Carrying presents like Wheat, Flavor and Animals to Temples
Bouka Bārāna (Rain Girl Puppet)	Female	Seeking Water and Rain	Village or Town	Temples Beside Rivers or Lakes	Prayers and Religious Hymns	Women and Little Girls	Elaborate Dress, Shawl, Glass Beads, and Pearl	Eggs, Wheat, Walnut, and Sweet

Kach” which means “The Older Girl.” Once the puppet is ready, the following songs are sung by little girls and teenagers:

The bride of rain is coming, He-laran and Melaran.⁵
 O God, please fall the rain, for poor people
 Those who have nothing to eat
 They would die without the rain;
 we are going to the river for it
 We are walking with our Rain
 Bride so that she may pray for our
 rain
 We dip her in the water, we are
 innocent children, and we are pure
 and we say
 O dear Lord, save us for the sake
 of heaven and the clouds.
 You are so kind and generous, let
 it be for us;
 our wheat and barley are thirsty.

While the girls are praying and singing religious hymns, people pour water on the *Bouka Bārāna* puppet. They also give the girls eggs, walnuts and wheat. Sometimes they pin something sacred onto the puppet, such as a prayer written on paper, and the puppet is carried to the river or to a holy place. If, after three days, it hasn’t rained, they put the puppet into the water that it may sink and drown from shame. However, if it does rain, the puppet is carried back to the village and becomes a holy object. In other

words, *Bouka Bārāna* is an earthly puppet who plays the role of intermediary between earth and the supernatural and intercedes for rain to fall. Some of the other puppets similar to *Bouka Bārāna* are *Chomchek Galin* (“Spoon Bride”), *Chomchek Khatoon* in the Azerbaijan region, and *Katra Gishch* and *Katva* (“Spatula Bride”) in the Gilan region. Rituals to seek rain are held in these regions with the same qualifications as the Kurdistan region. Their form and content are almost always the same with some minor cultural, tribal and regional differences, such as the actual body of the puppet, which is a cross in Kurdistan and is a spoon or a spatula in other regions.

Considering the significance of water in human life, seeking aid from female rain puppets, rainmakers, exists in various parts of the world. The relation between fertility, motherhood and life is the main reason why female rainmakers are mostly seen. The other reason is that “mother” earth is capable of being fertile. These rituals are mostly centered on girls, and girls have been reported from different parts of the world with different names for example: *Chomchek Galin* (Spoon Bride) in Turkey and Azerbaijan, *Yagmurgalin* (Rain Bride) in Ankara of Turkey, *Rain Mother* in Syria, *Soskhatoon* (Water Woman) in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, *DolDol* in Bulgaria, *Dodola* or *Dodolica* in Serbia and the *Hantse Guashe* (Puppet Princess) in Abkhazia. The sign of femininity is the main similarity in all these rituals, whether in Iran or elsewhere. Other common features, such as collecting food from homes, pouring water on girl performers or puppets can also be seen.

Tishtar

Tishtar is one of the male gods of ancient Iran. In Aryan beliefs, he is under the influence of the goddess *Anāhitā*, and is therefore, not as powerful as she is:

[*Tishtar*] in Pahlavi: *t r or Tishtar*, *tištar* in Avestan - *tištrya* is a god whom the eighth Yasht belongs to. According to this Yasht⁶, *Tishtar* is a white star, shining from a distance. He has water nature, and is powerful... *Tishtar* is the master of all the stars. He is the greatest star, the one who rises from the east. His relationship with rain and water is obvious. In Iranian mythology, *Tishtar* appears in three forms: a young man, a horse, and a bull (Bahar 61-62).

Since the *Tishtar* rite is a masculine one, the masculine figure is transformed into *Houla Bārāni*, a little rain boy puppet. Contrary to the rites of *Anāhitā* and *Bouka Bārāna*, which are feminine in nature, *Houla Bārāni* is performed by fifteen-year-old boys, as *Tishtar* is also seen as a fifteen year old.

In contrast to *Anāhitā*, who has a romantic attitude, *Tishtar*, the god of rain, is a warrior, perpetually in battle with *Apoush*, the monster of drought. According to the *Bondahesh*,⁷ an ancient Iranian holy book, “*Tishtar* appears in the form of a white horse and fights with *Apoush*, the drought-monster who appears as a black horse. When *Tishtar* wins the battle, thanks to people’s prayers, rain starts to fall” (Shamloo 268, 270). The battle of *Tishtar* and *Apoush* is described as follows: “His battle with the drought-monster starts by the Faraxkard sea. In this fight, the three shapes of *Tishtar* appear: in the first ten nights, he is a lofty fifteen-year-old young man with shiny eyes and then the fight goes on with his other forms...” (Afifi 474).

CHART 3 Table of Similarities of *Tishtar and Houla Bārāni and Choli Chaghal*

Name	Gender	Subject of the Rite	Starting Point	Destination	Starting Point	Main Rite Holders	Apparent Specialties	Gifts
Tishtar God of Water	Male	Seeking Water and Rain	Village or Town	Temples by the Rivers or lakes	Village or Town	Men and young boys	Three different forms: young man, White horse, Bull	Performing sacrifice ceremony
Houla Bārāni, Choli Ghazak (Rain Boy puppet)	Male	Seeking Water and Rain	Village or Town	Temples by the Rivers or lakes	Village or Town	Fifteen-year old boys	Young boys that leader of them is a powerful Fifteen-year-old	Performing sacrifice ceremony and giving Wheat, and dried fruits

Houla Bārāni

Houla Bārāni is a Kurdish term that indicates a symbolic expression to request God to send rain. During droughts, fifteen-year-old boys make a little boy puppet and carry it in the *Houla Bārāni* rite, in the same way as *Bouka Bārāna* rites are performed. Nowadays, this ritual is no longer held, unlike the *Bouka Bārāna*. In the past, it was held less frequently than the *Bouka Bārāna*. Ayazi describes the performance of this rite as follows:

Boys of the Kurdish region make a cross out of pieces of wood; they dress it with a shirt and a coat, coil a turban around its head... and give it to the oldest boy. He carries this puppet and is followed by the other boys. He leads them to various local houses, and whenever they reach a door, they shout all together: *Houla Bārāni* or *Khowabvari*⁹. The boys sing this song until the owner of that house steps out and attaches a safety pin⁹ to the puppet. Then, the children move to next house and continue in this manner until they have stopped by all the houses. If at one of the houses, there was no safety pin, the owner's wife gives them some walnuts, berries, almonds, raisins, etc ... Because of purity of the prayers or the innocence of children, almighty God would listen to them and there are rain falls (Ayazi 336-337).

There are also other male rain puppets such as "*Attaloo*" and "*Mattaloo*" and "*Choli chaghal*" in the Khorasan region, which are similar to Kurdistan's *Houla Bārāni*. Their shapes are like *Houla Bārāni*

and the ritual is held in a similar way. The puppet wears a masculine dress and the carriers are young boys.

[SEE CHART 3]

Conclusion

In all of these rites, *Bouka Bārāna* is not as powerful as *Anāhūtā*, and *Houla Bārāni* is not as strong as *Tishtar*; they are just mediators in seeking rain. There is such power in these two puppets that can cause unity between gods, goddesses and the earth's inhabitants. *Bouka Bārāna* and *Houla Bārāni* are earthly puppets with supernatural abilities. Unlike gods and goddesses, who are not very tangible for children, these two puppets are very real for these children, who can easily communicate with them. *Bouka Bārāna* and *Houla Bārāni* become mediators between the people's need and heaven's generosity, just like *Anāhūtā* and *Tishtar*. Due to this fact in a ritual such as a Rain Rite in Iran, the innocence, charisma, kindness and tangibility make these puppets believable for children, which is why children participate in rain rituals along with their own hand-made puppets. Considering the historical background of the Kurdish people and the presence of the *Anāhūtā* temples in their areas, the transformation of the *Anāhūtā* figure into the *Bouka Bārāna* puppet and *Tishtar* into *Houla Bārāni* is significant. Kurdish boys, with the assistance of older or younger children, do the same thing that artisans did for the *Anāhūtā* in the past. In creating a mythical image, they give *Anāhūtā* to the people as an age-old symbol of fertility and of abundant, life-giving water.

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Notes

1. Pahlavi was the ancient language spoken in Iran before Islam.
2. Avesta is the primary collection of sacred texts of Zoroastrianism, composed in the Avestan language.
3. "Kardeha," from part of "Aban Yasht," is one of Ancient Iran's texts. Kardeh: Karta means chapter.
4. The 5th "Yasht of Yashtha" book is named "Aban Yasht" and is praising the goddess of water. Yasht is part of the Avesta and refers to those hymns that were composed as tribute in the worship of gods.
5. The name of two holy, highly trusted people who lived in the Kurdistan region.
6. Religious texts of ancient Iran.
7. Religious texts of ancient Iran.
8. "O, Lord let it rain."
9. Safety pin with prayers attached are used to ward off evil and mishaps from the puppet. In this text, safety pins are used in this way.

(continued on page 38)

Presenting Death: *Uncanny Performing Objects in Tadeusz Kantor's Dead Class*

by Jacob Juntunen



This article is indebted to Kinga Witek for her hospitality and friendship in Kraków, and for introducing me to Tomasz Tomaszewski who provided invaluable assistance at Kantor's archive, the Cricoteka. The paper also benefited from the comments of William Condee, Vladimir Marchenkov, Dora Wilson, and all the participants in Ohio University's Interdisciplinary Arts course, "Performing Objects." Finally, my knowledge of Poland would be far more shallow without my years of conversation with Meghann Pytko.

IMAGES FROM THE COLLECTIONS CRICOTEKA
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PHOTO: JANUSZ PODLECKI

In Tadeusz Kantor's performance piece, *Dead Class: A Séance* (1975, Kraków), human actors made up to appear dead mechanically circled weathered, pew-like desks to the rhythm of a waltz, while carrying mannequins that looked disturbingly like real children. For spectators of *Dead Class*, seeing distressingly life-like looking mannequins set against live bodies that appeared lifeless created an uncanny sight, that is, a type of fear based on repressed knowledge (Freud I). The unconscious horrors *Dead Class* brought to the fore were "memento mori, reminders that, unlike us, [convincing puppets] are forever unliving and yet never dead" (Wood xvii). This combination of seemingly dead actors with mimetically accurate mannequins of children created a quality in which the dead of Kantor's Polish WWI childhood seemed reanimated. Though previously unexamined as such, the performing objects in Kantor's *Dead Class* were distinctly uncanny and this gave the performance much of its otherworldly resonance, allowing Kantor to comment on his, and his country's, particularly traumatic past.

Dead Class was a turning point for Kantor, bringing international fame after over three decades of artistic creation. Many scholars, such as Michal Kobialka, lucidly highlight aspects of the performance that "differentiate it from [Kantor's] past theatre experiments" (Kobialka 197). But none suggest that Dead Class's success in part rests on the uncanny qualities of its performing objects. By examining the performance's context within Kantor's biography, by examining the play within the context of Kantor's theoretical writings, particularly what he called "The Theatre of Death," and by focusing on two mannequins from the performance, it becomes clear that the uncanny performing objects create a uniquely haunting performance, presenting death in a concretized form, what he called a theatrical "séance."

The images and inspiration for Dead Class came from Kantor's particular relationship to European history. Born in a small, rural village mixed with Catholics and Jews just prior to WWI in what is now Poland, Kantor began making theatre during the Nazi occupation of Kraków in 1944. Forced to create his first performance pieces as part of Poland's WWII resistance art movement, Kantor's work as a painter, sculptor, and theatre auteur continued under Stalin's oppressive Socialist Realist conventions and throughout the U.S.S.R.'s strict boundaries on thought and travel. However, Kantor always resisted government sanctions and created a spectral theatre of images that could not be censored as easily as dialogue due to its abstract visual nature, despite its relationship to Poland's grim history. The dead referred to and represented in the Dead Class were threefold: they were Kantor's childhood classmates, most of whom were killed in the World Wars; they were a synecdoche for the millions of World War II dead in Kantor's native Galicia, which, after 1917, was part of Poland; and they underscored the geographical proximity between his adult home, Kraków, and the nearby Nazi camps, Auschwitz and Birkenau, at which Kantor's father died.

Kantor made his desire to confront audiences with the essence of death clear in his writings about Dead Class. In his "Theatre of Death" manifesto (1975), Kantor insisted "performers were essential elements halfway between living beings and objects, and where their life depended on the means by which the objects were animated" (Witts 38). Actors, for Kantor, were not mimetic representations of living humans utilizing some method to create recognizable emotional states. Instead, the actor onstage, him or herself, existed in a liminal state between being and object. Actors onstage are not "real" in the same sense as humans sitting next to one in the auditorium, for actors onstage are portraying a fiction; but nor are actors "unreal" in the same way a mannequin is not a real human. This in-between space, for Kantor, was similar to the space of remembered dead; both spaces exist in the mind and have effects on the living, but one cannot interact with the dead or fictional characters. And, since the performing objects in Dead Class were attached to the actors in ways that constrained human movement, the

mannequins of dead children constantly hindered the actors just as traumatic memories of the dead hamper the living.

Kantor defied audience expectations by creating performing objects that seemed more lifelike than their human counterparts and, more important, created a sensation of the uncanny by inverting the actor/object relationship. According to Freud, "the uncanny is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (1). It is the opposite of the fear of the unknown; it is terror wrapped in nostalgia, in repressed knowledge. Kantor tapped into the uncanny's power by fashioning mannequins that, when joined to the human actor, restricted the human's actions rather than letting the puppeteer appear to manipulate the object. Kantor wrote of the relationship between his mannequins and actors:

It is possible to express life in art only through the absence of life, through an appeal to DEATH, through APPEARANCES, through EMPTINESS and the lack of a MESSAGE. The MANNEQUIN in my theatre must become a MODEL through which pass a strong sense of DEATH and the conditions of the DEAD. A model for the live ACTOR. (Kantor's emphasis, Kantor and Kobialka 112)

As the inanimate mannequin became a "model for the live actor," the spectacle audiences observed and decoded pushed beyond a typical puppet show and the inversed actor/mannequin connection illustrated the uncanny. To understand this accomplishment, the specifics of this performance need to be investigated.

Dead Class was first staged in a medieval brick cellar, with only a piece of string cordoning off one corner for a performance space; the audience sat in folding wooden chairs along the other two walls of the cellar. A bleak village schoolhouse was represented by wooden, pew-like benches in which students, played by adult actors dressed entirely in black rags and pale, greenish make-up, have returned from the dead; they acted out their lessons, all the time with Kantor as himself onstage subtly adjusting to the action. The "Old People," as Kantor called these live actors, sat in their desks and, for the first image of the show, slowly stood, raising their hands, to an unheard question. At a sign from Kantor, the Old People stood and walked backwards into the darkness of an arch behind them. After a moment, the class re-entered attached to mannequins of their child-selves. The Old People remained in their gray-green make-up and moved mechanically, but the mannequins were incredibly realistic, particularly their striking eyes. Accompanied by the Waltz Francois, a ballroom orchestra piece composed by Adam Karasinski in 1907, and played in Dead Class on a scratchy record, the Old People "circle[d] round the desks in jerky, clumsy movements, dummies on their backs" (Witts 59). In this moment, which Kantor called the "Grand Parade," the dolls appeared more alive than the human actors. Although Freud thought children wanted to see the living souls of their toys, this was a nightmare image for adult spectators separated from the performance by a mere piece of string.

In a 2011 conversation with Professor Stachura at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, he related that *Dead Class* induced fainting in some audience members (Stachura), suggesting a terror so great it had bodily effect, a dread created by the performance's uncanny nature.

Examining the introduction to the Grand Parade along with two particular characters and their mannequins will demonstrate how the uncanny crept into Kantor's performance and created a space in which spectators encountered ghosts of history's children. The fact that these corpse-like characters walked backwards into darkness before the Grand Parade presents a rich symbolic field: it suggests death, a return to the womb, and, since they walk backwards, a reversal of time. Perhaps given these three possibilities, it is no surprise that the Old People reemerge with concretized significations of their pasts strapped to their backs, the mannequins. Two figures that particularly demonstrate this uncanny mix of past/present and human/performing object are *A Woman With A Mechanical Cradle* and the *An Old Man With A Bicycle*.

A Woman With A Mechanical Cradle has a mannequin of her younger self behind her with its arms strapped around her waist, its head turned slightly to the left against her buttocks, and its feet dragging, as if it moves unwillingly.

The mannequin resembles a little girl with heavy black shoes and black tights, dressed in an all black school uniform dress with a high collar. During the Grand Parade, *A Woman With A Mechanical Cradle* carries a whip and she cracks the floor with the whip three times in rhythm with the waltz each time she reaches the front of the desks; her mannequin seems to grasp her waist, forced along. The audience sees *A Woman With A Mechanical Cradle* as a punishing automaton, dragging a poor schoolchild behind her. Her mannequin does not move; its arms are locked in an embrace with its adult, undead self, but from behind, as if trying to stop the forward movement of the actor, to halt time and the violence to come. Because spectators realize this child is dead, a victim of war, it creates a terrible knowledge, an uncanny terror that this mannequin will "die" if it cannot stop marching. This image of restraint juxtaposed with the violence of whipping the ground creates a tension in the interaction between human actor and performing object, as if they are engaged in battle.

The character *An Old Man With A Bicycle* straddles a penny-farthing bicycle with his child-mannequin strapped on the bicycle's handlebars, face up. The mannequin appears male and is dressed in an all-black school uniform with a collar buttoned to the throat. Its bare feet dangle down dangerously toward the smaller rear wheel, and one of its arms reaches down, while the other is bent slightly up, as if in supplication. Its lifelike eyes stare lifelessly towards the ceiling as its hair grazes the larger front wheel. The actor awkwardly pushes the bicycle around while turning a crank that rotates the large front wheel. The old-fashioned nature of the machine places the action of the performance in the past, and the child-mannequin's position, on its back on the handlebars rather than seated, creates another image of a child trapped, unwilling, but forced to circle the desks.

The mannequin's position calls to mind a corpse on its back, but contrasted with the lifeless-looking but animate actor pushing the bicycle, the audience is forced, again, to acknowledge that this child-mannequin, which should have been playing with toys, died. Thus, after returning from the void, the Old People appear with unwilling, perhaps traumatized, mannequins of children that we understand to represent the dead; the knowledge of millions of children's deaths in Kantor's homeland, repressed in our daily lives, is forced into our consciousness, creating an uncanny horror.

A BICYCLE FROM *THE DEAD CLASS* (1975)



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FRESH BAKED PUPPETS



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What gives the performance its uniquely uncanny appearance is its reversal of the effects often created by extremely realistic sculptures of humans. "Instead of [merely] wondering if automata [like the mannequins] were human, people now asked themselves how such purported humans [like the Old People] could contain the requisite 'machinery'" for life (Wood 208). The symbolic weight of the class's actions leading up to and during the Grand Parade throw "the human condition into horrible relief" (Wood xvii). To wit, the juxtaposition of seemingly dead actors and living dolls shows an anxiety, long-suppressed, that each of our living, breathing, human bodies are nothing more than inanimate matter briefly endowed with the qualities we define as life.

For Freud, the uncanny "is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged only through the process of repression... as something which ought to have been kept concealed, but which has nevertheless come to light" (12-13). Kantor's use of performing objects forces us to confront our "familiar and old" yet nevertheless "suppressed" knowledge of our inevitable death. Further, in the Polish context, performed in 1975 only a few dozen kilometers from the ruins of Auschwitz and Birkenau, *Dead Class* forced spectators to recall entire "classes" of humanity destroyed only thirty years earlier, within many of their living memories. Certainly Kantor projected his memories of WWII, that pinnacle of human destruction in Eastern Europe, into what he called, "The Theatre of Death." The mesmerizing quality of the performance, even to those with no knowledge of the Polish language, is a testament to the success of Kantor's visual creations, in large part due to the contrast between seemingly "dead" human actors and the uncannily life-like performing objects they dragged alongside them.

Jacob Juntuen's award-winning plays have been produced across the U.S., particularly in Chicago where he cofounded Mortar Theatre. His scholarship centers on the politics of theatre's reception. He attended Reed College (B.A. 1999) and Northwestern University (Ph.D. 2007). Currently, he is in the MFA Playwriting Program at Ohio University.



CHILDREN AT THEIR DESKS (1989)

PHOTO: JANUSZ PODLECKI, COURTESY THE AUTHOR AND CRICOTEKA ARCHIVE

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High-Strung: Marionette Melodrama in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain and France

by Stephen Huff



During the latter half of the nineteenth century, there was a boom in traveling marionette companies throughout Britain and France, especially in the newly industrialized towns of the British Midlands. While marionette productions had traditionally focused on folk drama, during this period companies began drawing material from the popular human stage as well—particularly from melodramas. Marionette productions of melodramas such as *Maria Martin*, or, *The Murder in the Red Barn* and *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, thrilled audiences with miniature versions of these theatrical sensations. Even elaborate scenic effects, such as the collapse of a burning building, were recreated on the marionette stage. Moreover, stringed actors mimicked the histrionics and physical conventions of their human counterparts. There are aesthetic and social implications of nineteenth-century marionette melodrama. I believe that theories of posthumanism can be used to analyze this phenomenon and thereby help to ponder the age-old question: What is a human being?

“Posthumanism” is very much a contested term; there is no single, agreed-upon definition or even consensus about the term’s origin. For this article, my interpretation of posthumanism has been influenced primarily by theorists Neil Badmington, Donna Haraway, and N. Katherine Hayles. Badmington asserts that posthumanism does not refer to a time after humanism. Rather, the prefix “post-” is employed much as Jean-François Lyotard uses it in his definition of postmodernism, which exists in tandem with modernism as its ever-present, self-conscious, analytical critique (Badmington 19–20). Badmington echoes Lyotard, as well as Jacques Derrida, in his remark that “the task of posthumanism is to uncover those uncanny moments at which things start to drift, of reading humanism in a certain way, against itself and the grain” (19). Humanism is understood here as a discourse which supports the idea of an essential humanity and a universal code of morality based on the superiority of “man” and “his” reasoning abilities. If this is the case, then it is the constant job of posthumanism not to deconstruct or destroy humanism, but to point out the inconsistencies and uncertainties within and throughout this system, and to ask questions such as: Who counts as human? Given the history of humankind, the answer to this question is not always self-evident.

A central feature within posthumanist theorizing is discussion of the cyborg. Haraway, whose work has been integral in this regard, defines the cyborg as a “hybrid of machine and organism...a condensed image of both imagination and material reality” (8). Cyborgs are, of course, prevalent in science fiction—and, increasingly, in real life. Characterized by irony, they straddle the border between the human and the non-human, troubling the discourse of humanism in the process.

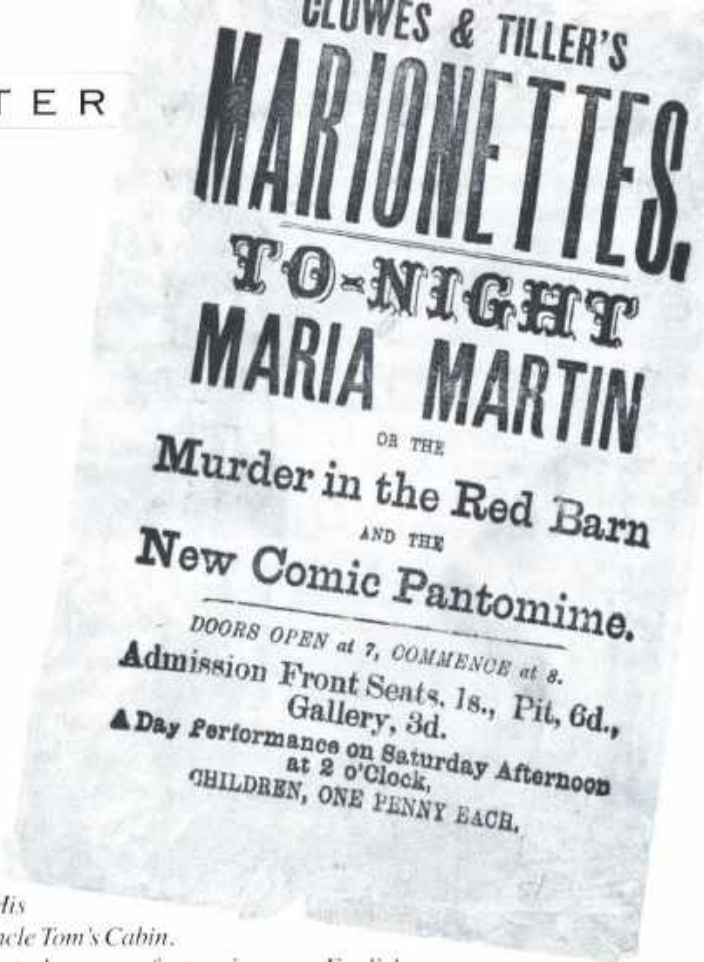
PUPPETRY INTER

The marionette, although it is not usually associated with the high technology of the cyborg, has certain affinities with this entity that endow it with the power to question humanist ideals. With its mechanical, wooden body and its (ordinarily) concealed, human-controlled voice and movements, the marionette in performance becomes a hybrid of the material and the imaginary, the human and the non-human. If melodrama, with its focus on the ultimate triumph of the human over the forces of evil and nature, can be seen as part of the narrative of humanism, then marionette melodrama, with the marionette as cyborg performer, seems to offer one of these “uncanny moments” to which Badmington refers (19). In other words, marionette performances, particularly those that seek to mimic the human stage, have the potential to cast new light on the conventional ways in which human beings are depicted on stage.

It is important to note, as Hayles does, that posthumanism need not be seen as antihumanist or apocalyptic. Hayles contests certain threads of posthuman theorizing that tend to view the material and the imaginary as separate, thereby “privileging the abstract as the Real and downplaying the importance of material instantiation” (13). Instead, she focuses on the inherent embedded-ness, or embodied-ness, and historical contingency of virtuality. Regardless of theoretical abstraction, mind and body are inseparable, and they are always grounded in space and time.

With historical contingency in mind, a few details about actual performances are in order. Most marionette shows during the nineteenth century were performed by traveling companies, usually small, family-based troupes. In Britain, the Tiller and Clowes families, who were often closely linked, were the most prominent performers on the provincial circuits. The number of marionettes in a company depended on the troupe’s resources and repertoire but usually contained the standard theatrical types, much the same as the human stage maintained its “lines of business” where actors were concerned. These companies appeared at fairs, in music halls, portable theatres, assembly rooms, barns—basically anywhere they could get an audience. Audiences were composed primarily of young, lower-class urban workers in towns that had recently grown up around the new mines and factories of the industrial age—people who could not normally afford a seat in the regular theatre, or who would not have chosen to go there.

Repertoires of marionette companies often contained a variety of sensational melodramas, which, although they were considered passé by big-city standards, continued to hold the attention of more provincial audiences. The most popular in England included *Maria Martin*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Black-eyed Susan*, *The*



Miller and His Men, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

While the last play was a feature in many English marionette repertoires, it was also popular in France, along with *Around the World in 80 Days*, *The Two Orphans*, and the plays of Pixérécourt. Plays were tailored to fit the needs of the particular company. Most often they were drastically shortened in order to make them fit into a mixed bill of entertainment including comic skits and songs. The number of characters was also modified for the number of puppets in the company. Sometimes, a role had to be created for regional puppet characters such as Jacques or Lafleur in northern France, or Tim Bobbin in England.

In order to explore some of the aesthetic and social implications of melodrama performed in miniature, a few commonplaces about this dramatic genre need to be established. In addition to the simplistic moral universe of clearly defined good and evil characters, a primary feature of melodrama is sensation—both visual and emotional. The production of nineteenth-century melodrama was characterized by an attention to scenic realism, which supported the general believability of the stage picture and helped to provoke an emotional response. This combination of scenic realism and heightened emotion was most evident in what were referred to as “sensation scenes,” such as the depiction of Eliza crossing the icy river in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Like the repertory of the human stage, the marionette theatre strove to mimic these effects.

Examples of sensation scenes in the marionette theatre can be garnered from the *mises en scène* of Émile Pitou, who ran a marionette troupe in provincial France during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Pitou was well known for his miniature versions of spectacular melodramas. He meticulously copied the scenography of the legitimate theatres in France, adapting details to the conventions of his marionette theatre. For his production of *Around the World in 80 Days*, he went so far as to create a scale model of a steamship that produced real steam. His melodramatic version of the opera *Mignon* was praised for its highly realistic depiction of the collapse of a burning building, complete with smoke, sparks, and falling timbers.

PLAYBILL FOR MARIA MARTIN

PHOTO: GEORGE SPEAIGHT PUNCH AND JUDY COLLECTION, VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

These miniature versions of elaborate scenic effects are significant both practically and aesthetically. In practical terms, it was quite simply easier and less expensive for a marionette company to show a scene such as a burning building than it would have been for a regular, human-sized theatre. Aesthetically, a sensation scene done on a smaller scale could impress an audience not only because of the skill involved in producing it within the conventions of marionette theatre production, but also because of how, as Susan Stewart notes, the phenomenon of the miniature “exaggerate[s] the divergent relation between the abstract and the material nature of the sign” (43). Whereas the burning building depicted to scale on the human stage would impress—and perhaps overwhelm—in its material likeness to real life, the miniature version could do this as well, but within a system of signs that would have allowed the audience to experience the performance with a greater level of aesthetic detachment.

Regardless of scale and realistic detail, scenic elements such as the steamship and the burning building remain, as their referents are, inanimate objects. Aside from being miniature, the melodramatic marionette itself had the task of standing in for a human being, and one of the biggest selling points for marionette players was the life-likeness of their puppets. The clear-cut typecasting of melodrama (i.e., heroes, heroines, and villains) along with its lack of psychological complexity, suited the genre perfectly to puppet performance. Further, the melodramatic acting styles of the period were appropriate for puppets, as these styles tended to concentrate on ideal forms of emotions portrayed in relatively codified gestures and

poses. For the audience of melodrama, one of the primary intended emotional responses engendered by the characters is empathy. But can one truly feel empathy for an inanimate object? How is this possible?

To field these questions, I want to turn to John McCormick, who has written extensively on the subject of nineteenth-century marionette theatre. He acknowledges that the “belief that a puppet might have a life of its own” transcends this particular period “and relates to an audience’s desire to empathize even with what it knows to be a figure made out of inanimate materials” (5). McCormick emphasizes the crucial aspect of the puppeteer’s disembodied voice to the marionette in this regard. Further, he states that while glove puppets, with their “patent unreality” were able to escape the nineteenth-century theatre’s ultimate concern with realism, “in the case of the marionette there was an extraordinary degree of ambivalence” (65). It is particularly within the space opened up by this ambivalence—this slippage—that I would like to focus on the dialogue between humanism and posthumanism in marionette performances of melodrama.

Take, for example, two of the most popular melodramas of the marionette stage in England: *Maria Martin* and *Sweeney Todd*. It is significant that these are crime melodramas—and bloody ones at that. Perhaps the popularity of these plays can be explained in part by the capacity of puppets to absorb violence in a way that human actors could not (witness *Punch and Judy*). Like the sensation scene of the burning building, violence portrayed onstage by puppets may have provided the audience with some distance to feel empathy “without feeling as if they were themselves the victims—to have experience without feeling overwhelmed,” as Jane Marie Law has argued with regard to the Japanese *Awaji Ningyo* puppet tradition (25). And even if audience members did get wrapped up in the emotions engendered by extreme villain-victim conflicts, there was often a familiar, regional comic character or clown—like *Tim Bobbin*—to break the mood, offer comic relief (and perhaps even social commentary), and restore the materiality of the puppets as wooden figures. For example, in one version of *Maria Martin*, scenes that further the main plot are alternated with scenes intended primarily for comic effect, where *Timothy Bobbin* courts *Maria*’s sister, *Anne*, and gets into fights with a character called *Johnny Raw*.

However, is the marionette simply a wooden figure? What about its status as the double of the human actor? Perhaps an argument can be made that the marionette in performance becomes one of those signal creatures of posthumanism—a cyborg. With its wooden body, attached in the spectator’s mind to the disembodied voice of the puppeteer, the marionette takes on the ontology of this type of human-machine. Granted, there is a question of agency here. Certainly everything the marionette does is controlled by the puppeteer. But given the ambivalence that happens from time to time within spectators’ minds during performance, the marionette could be seen as a cyborg. As such, it lends itself to the notion that the puppet has a life of its own.



A YOUNG HEROINE STOCK CHARACTER WHO POSSIBLY APPEARED IN MELODRAMAS
 PHOTO: TILLER-CLOWES MARIONETTE COLLECTION, VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

To continue this thought, it is necessary to consider the audiences for these marionette performances. Again, audiences were primarily composed of poor, urban, adolescent workers in provincial towns and cities. We also need to remember that the nineteenth century was a period of rapid industrialization. These particular audiences lived their lives surrounded by the violence of progress from agricultural to industrial society. Although it is impossible to know the exact age range of this audience, it is likely that, with people going to work at a very young age during this period, there were many in the audience who would today be considered children. Indeed, the link between marionettes and children may have led audiences of all ages in the marionette theatre to feel like children in some way—to let go of internalized responses to cultural institutions (such as the theatre of live actors) and open themselves up to a certain level of naïveté. Lyotard has remarked on the tendency of humanism to consider children as not quite human yet (3). Perhaps the marionette as cyborg offered these provincial audiences an opportunity to think about what it meant to be human in an industrialized society whose cultural and social institutions sometimes considered them “not quite human.”

As a genre, melodrama is ultimately concerned with provoking predictable emotional responses and presenting the triumph of humanity (in a predetermined and un-interrogated sense of the word) over adversity. As performers, marionettes impart subjectivities that are cyborg in nature—straddling, that is, the human and the non-human—and thereby offer a certain level of ambivalence and detachment that can undercut conventional responses to such material and open up a space for investigating who we are as human beings and what aspects of ourselves we choose to represent on the miniature stage.

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THE “DRUNKEN WASTREL,” ANOTHER STOCK MELODRAMATIC FIGURE. EYELETS ALLOW THE BOTTLE TO BE PULLED TO HIS MOUTH. PHOTO: TILLER-CLOWES MARIONETTE COLLECTION, VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

The Puppet, Irony and Political Satire

by Virginie Ganivet



When the movie *Team America: World Police* was released in France in 2005, French audiences flocked to see what soon came to be described by many as an “anti-American” American movie. This idea was rather odd, as the film tells “yet another” story of American heroes who, despite meeting strong criticism at home and abroad because of their heavy-handed approach, ultimately save the world. Perhaps French cinema-goers

were prepared to understand the film as essentially ironic. Many of them had seen *South Park*, by the same writers and directors. Most of all, many had assimilated the idea that puppets are especially suited to political satire from watching the television show *Les Guignols de l'Info*. This popular parodic news show has been broadcast since 1988 and is, for the most part, performed live with rod puppets with animatronic heads. Although *Team America* was not a news show and used marionettes, the form was similar enough for the audience to recognize *guignols*, or jokers, in the all-American puppets.

Les Guignols had a French predecessor called *Le Bébête Show*, which was partly influenced by *The Muppets*. Yet its main influence was possibly the British satirical TV series *Spitting Image* — both shows caricature real people, from politicians to sports and TV personalities. Britain itself has a long tradition of political satirical puppetry, which arguably started in the 18th century with the glove puppets of *The Punch and Judy Show*. The protagonists of *Punch and Judy* are often thought of as stock characters representing social classes and institutions, although some characters, such as Jack Ketch, are based on real people.

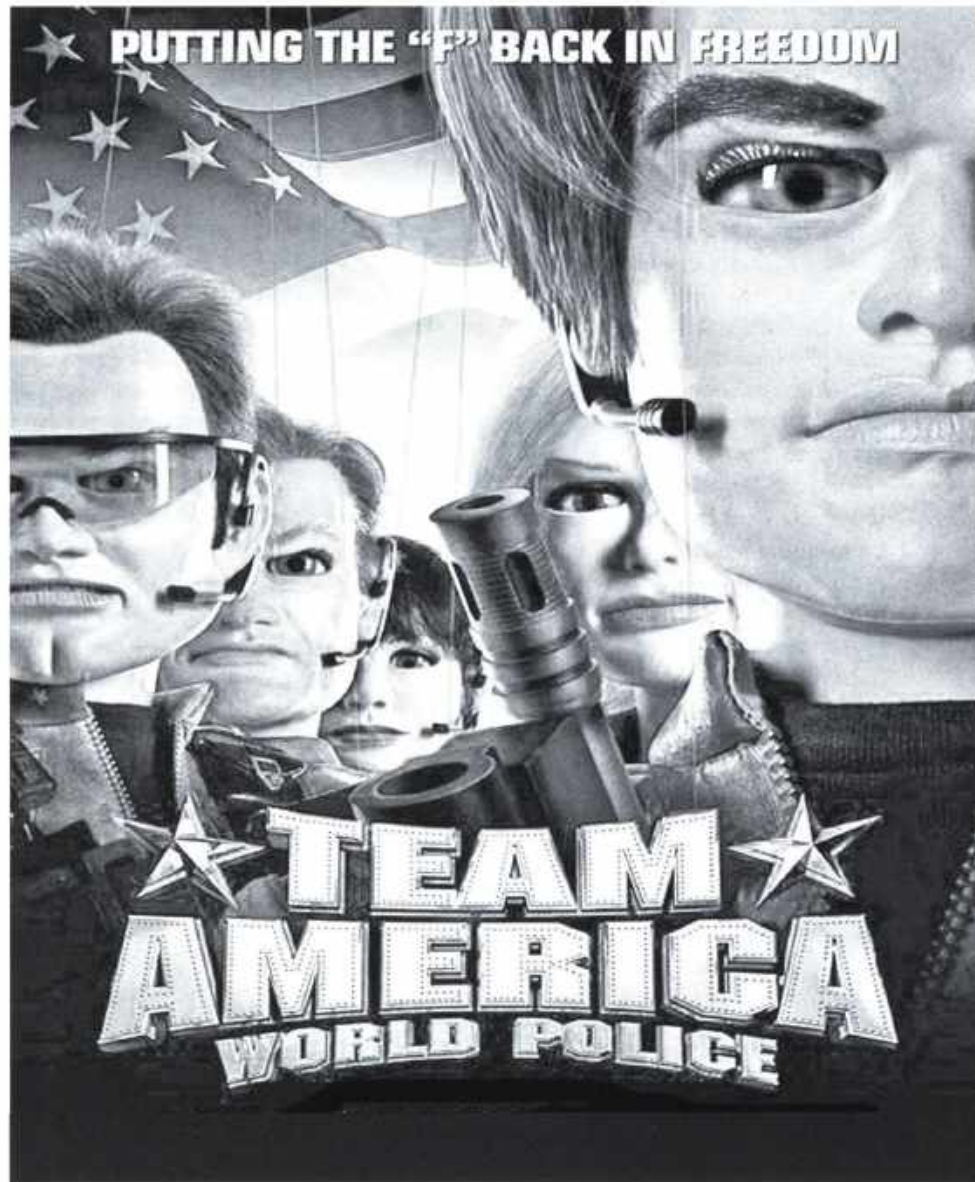
At different times, in different countries and with different means of representation, *Team America*, *Les Guignols* and *Punch and Judy* all offer some insight into the role of the puppet in satirical political performances, and in particular how it may affect the ironic discourse of political satire. The puppet, here, is understood simply as an object that is animated in such a way that it appears to have a life of its own. The term “irony” will be the object of further discussion, but it can be defined, chiefly, as a discrepancy, either between what is said and what is meant (verbal irony), or between intention

and outcome (situational irony or, in the case of a performance, dramatic irony). Although the United States, Great Britain and France are different nations with distinct traditions, they have enough cultural common points to allow their productions to be compared, as they define and understand satire and irony in similar ways.

Satire is built through several processes or tools, which may include irony, but also parody, caricature and exaggeration. Those are usually understood as comic, but, as many irony scholars point out, irony and comedy are two different things, and irony does not necessarily trigger laughter. D.C. Muecke contends that it is difficult for non-representational arts to be ironic (4), and later theorists such as Linda Hutcheon insist on the importance of the human agency in irony, either as creator or spectator (12). Thus an object can hardly be ironic, unless it is presented in a context that will make it appear so to a human onlooker — situational irony only exists if someone can acknowledge it. The puppet, however, is an object unlike any other, in that it is an object at the heart of the performance or representation. There is an obvious discrepancy between the object and its desired semblance of life — the puppet can thus be perceived as fundamentally ironic by the spectator. This predicament can trigger laughter, especially if, in the words of Henri Bergson, we see in the puppet “something mechanical encrusted on the living” (35). However, the same “ironic condition” can be read the opposite way and make the puppet appear tragic — the puppet, after all, fails to become completely human, and it almost appears as a living being condemned never to escape its mechanical shell.

The ironic, comic and tragic potentials of the puppet vary according to a number of factors. In *Team America* and *Les Guignols*, the directors chose not to try and hide that their actors are, in fact, puppets, although animatronic heads in particular allow puppeteers to recreate very realistic facial expressions. The bodies of complex marionettes like those used in *Team America* also allow one to recreate a very “human” body language. It would be much harder to get anyone to believe that Punch, as a glove puppet, is alive, let alone human. The sense of irony is heightened by the glove’s simplicity and its more limited range of movements, as the gap between the object and its apparent will to live is arguably at its most obvious.

When puppets are used in satirical political representations, the ironic object becomes part of an ironic discourse. In political satirical texts and representations, the audience expects to figure out what the “actual” message may be, but it seems surprisingly hard to reach a general consensus on the issue. Punch is often described as an anarchist, but such a description involves a slight



misconception of anarchy as well as the non-recognition, voluntary or accidental, of all the conservative elements of the show. These elements are so strong that the imaginary disappearance of the show is deplored in such a conservative newspaper as *The Daily Mail*. Because some of the issues and characters of the show are still perceived to be typically Victorian, some of the most outrageous scenes can be dismissed as archaisms: this, in effect, erases the need for the general audience to make sense of the paradoxical juxtaposition of anarchic and conservative elements, although this is a contemporary aspect of the show.

When the contents of the performance send us to a cultural and political context that is more perceived to be “news,” the interpretation issue remains. In France, in the early years of the Iraq War, *Team America* was generally understood as “anti-Bush” and as mockery by Americans of how Americans behave and see the world (AlloCiné). However, in the United States, it was also

understood by some as conservative, and rather supportive of the Republican Party's ideas. *National Review* rated it number 24 of their "Best Conservative Movies of the Last 25 Years": in the end, the members of Team America do save the world after going against everybody's advice and chasing terrorists and weapons of mass destruction (Anderson). This phenomenon is hardly surprising, as any cultural text offers scope for a multiplicity of understandings: Stuart Hall, for example, has demonstrated that the receiver of a media message can adopt several positions when "decoding" it as dominant, negotiated or oppositional (136-138). With verbal or dramatic irony, the various positions are more or less voluntarily offered within the message.

Although irony offers a choice of interpretation, it does not address a universal audience. The understanding of the ironic discourse can be narrowed down by several factors, including culture and language. *Les Guignols* for example is only accessible to French-speaking audiences, but the fact that it is made in France for a French audience does not mean that the whole of the French population can watch or understand the irony of the show, or make sense of its political message. It is fairly common knowledge in France that the show offers some sort of anti-globalization voice, but it is not always clear how it does so, and some people might miss it altogether and focus on other, more mundane, aspects of the satirical news report — especially with the puppets of artists and famous athletes. For Mireille Rosello, however, the show offers a clear anti-globalization discourse, especially through the fictional "World Company" and the Sylvestre character, a Sylvester Stallone look-alike (143). The World Company stands for a ruthless multinational company and has several mirror companies, such as Christ Company and World Pharmaceuticals. Rosello explains that Sylvestre made his first appearance at the beginning of the First Gulf War, during Operation Desert Storm:

The viewer is expected to decode the puppet in two stages: we are supposed to remember that Rambo is the hero of a typically action-packed American movie and to "recognize" General Schwarzkopf, the real protagonist of Desert Storm, the symbol of the American military in general. (144)

Rosetto also underlines that Sylvestre speaks, unlike other American characters, with a flawless French accent, which points towards "an already perfectly integrated French version of globalized Americanization" (145). As a spokesperson of the World Company and its branches, he is indeed an international figure. He is shown as an advisor to American presidents, but also as a Cardinal close to the Pope or as a director of French telecom company Orange, for example. Rosetto concludes that the "critique of globalization is addressed to globalized French viewers" (144). The "globalized French viewer" has to be aware already of the impact of globalization on his or her surroundings, and of global affairs — a fact which might explain why some viewers may miss out, if not on the anti-globalization discourse of *Les Guignols*, at least on its exact extent.

So it appears that the political message can be lost to the audience because of its use of irony. Still, it is worth considering what the puppet does to the ironic discourse. One obvious effect of the puppet is that it introduces the idea of manipulation. The analogy between puppets and politicians is common in the United States, Great Britain and France. The puppets also introduce some sense of fakery, because no attempt is made to disguise the fact they are objects: They are a reminder that the audience is watching a performance. Establishing a theatrical consensus is more difficult than it is with live actors. The flagging of artificiality and the lack of answers provided by the ironic content function as a constant invitation for the audience to search for another layer of meaning. Oddly, however, this detachment from the illusion of reality or certainty does not necessarily alienate the audience. The response of PPD, the well-meaning anchor of *Les Guignols*, to Sylvestre's interventions is often shock and outrage, followed by resignation. PPD shrugs or rests his head on his hand for a second, and moves on to the next news "sans transition." This position highlights that we, the audience, have something in common with the puppets: that we are being manipulated by forces we cannot even define clearly, and that we do not begin to fight. The puppet may thus be more demanding than the real news anchor in the sense that we cannot accept the validity of its message *per se*, but it is also surprisingly easy to relate to.



TEAM AMERICA DESTROYS THE EIFFEL TOWER IN AN (UNSUCCESSFUL) PURSUIT OF A TERRORIST.

In *Team America*, *Les Guignols* and *Punch and Judy*, the spectators are invited to evaluate their relation to power and authority — a very global issue indeed. *Punch and Judy* may not exactly be a tale of anarchy, but it certainly tells the story of an individual's relation to institutions and their power over him. The same institutions remain unchallenged by the characters of *Les Guignols*: demanding change is the role of the audience. In *Team America*, the divide is not only between Team America and the rest of the world — it also exists within the American nation — and all the protagonists are technically ma-

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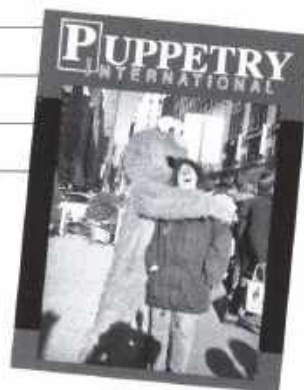
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In *Team America*, *Les Guignols* and *Punch and Judy*, the spectators are invited to evaluate their relation to power and authority — a very global issue indeed. *Punch and Judy* may not exactly be a tale of anarchy, but it certainly tells the story of an individual's relation to institutions and their power over him. The same institutions remain unchallenged by the characters of *Les Guignols*: demanding change is the role of the audience. In *Team America*, the divide is not only between Team America and the rest of the world — it also exists within the American nation — and all the protagonists are, technically, manipulated. Consequently, the film cannot be reduced to a supremacist or conservative discourse, unless part of its message is ignored. The film invites its audience to question their military and police forces, which are government-managed, and it also calls for them to evaluate the American nation's position in, for, and against the rest of the world. This invitation could be lost if the film used live actors: the illusion of reality would be stronger, and the irony would be harder to detect. Perhaps this is the greatest strength of the political satirical puppet: it makes the act of consuming entertainment more complex and more empowering as it forces us to question ourselves and our surroundings.

Virginie Ganivet is a PhD student at Loughborough University, UK. Her research focuses on the *Punch and Judy*.

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What/Where/When Is Canadian Puppet Theatre?

by James Beauregard Ashby



THE BRICK BROS. CIRCUS, ANN AND DAVID POWELL AND THE "FIRST CANADIAN BRICKONAUT"

PHOTO COURTESY OF PUPPETMONGERS THEATRE

Following an October 2005 performance of the Puppetmongers Theatre production, *The Brick Bros. Circus*, a young audience member exclaimed, "That wasn't a puppet show!" I was amused but surprised, as I had been entertained by the daring feats of the performers—all of whom are actual bricks, save for the Brick Contortionist, a cleverly disguised sponge—and impressed by the ability of the visible human manipulators to bring them to life. I had not been the only one. Earlier, having set up Brikko the Clown to perform his routine, the manipulators had sat down in front of the audience to watch. As one might expect, Brikko had been unable to provide much entertainment on his own. Still, some residual sense of imagined life had remained, since another child in the audience had felt compelled to shout, "Do something!" The outburst could conceivably have been directed at the manipulators, but given the direction in which the child was facing, that seems less likely.

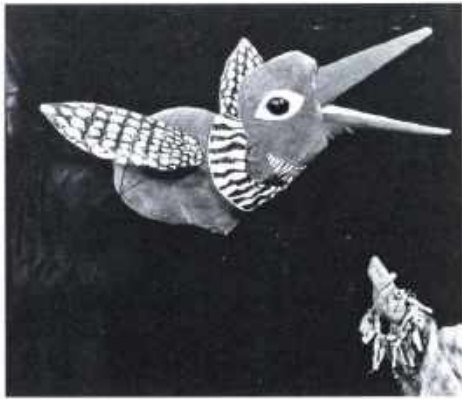
This production is obviously an example of object theatre, which, thanks to the pioneering work of David and Ann Powell (the brother-and-sister team who founded Puppetmongers in Toronto in 1974) and a few companies outside of Canada, has become an increasingly popular form of puppetry. A similar show could arguably now be created anywhere on earth, but was there anything distinctly "Canadian" about its genesis?

Describing the Canadian context in general, Kenneth B. McKay notes that this country "shares in the general North American culture, one based on that of Western European immigrants and modified by regional conditions and, more recently, by contact with other traditions and by technological changes." Another "overwhelming influence" on this nation has been the USA, since "[t]he attraction of a rich and powerful neighbor, so close and linguistically the same as most of Canada, is irresistible" (23).

When he begins to address the cultural context of Canadian puppetry more specifically, however, his chain of argument becomes more dubious. Due to "the relative youth of Canadian puppet theatre," he claims, "it has not developed any traditional puppet character, such as is found in many older cultures" (29). Although "[s]ome of the work done by our leading puppeteers does have a distinctive style," he continues, "it is that of an individual company, rather than of the country as a whole or even of a region" (29-30). There is indeed no Canadian equivalent of England's Punch, for example; moreover, it is unlikely that a single such character will ever emerge in such a large and culturally diverse country. Even so, McKay's attribution of this to "the relative youth of Canadian puppet theatre" (29) and of the country as a whole (23) is symptomatic of a larger problem: a national identity crisis.

The supposed youthfulness of Canada as a nation is a common trope in historical and theoretical constructions of the country, but Canadian theatre scholar Alan Filewod emphasizes that "[a]s a state, Canada is no 'younger' than Italy or Germany," since, "[l]ike them, it is a product of nineteenth-century liberal nation-building." Unlike them, however, Canada could not be validated through "a mythic invocation of racial unity" or related "originary myths located in immemorial time." This was of course due in part to a varied population, which led to the dominant multiculturalist discourse, but like other postcolonial states, Canada was founded on the "expropriation of Aboriginality," sometimes in grimly literal terms, from the original inhabitants of the area. As a result, lacking a cohesive etiological myth to explain its past and justify its present, Canada, along with other postcolonial nations, has been dogged "by recurrent crises of 'identity'" (2). Filewod observes, "This question of identity has compelled myriad scholars to ask what 'Canada' and 'Canadian theatre' are. Unfortunately, however, because of the persistent marginalization of puppetry in the popular and academic presses in Canada, markedly fewer authors have essayed to ask what Canadian puppet theatre as a whole might be. This question has nonetheless only become more pressing, given the complex of influences outlined thus far.

Puppet theatre is not new to Canada, just as the country itself is not especially young. As McKay reveals, "the first permanent puppet theatre in Canada operated near Quebec City from 1775 to 1837" (44). The first appearance of a puppet in a performance by Europeans in Canada could be dated much earlier, however, if David Gardner is correct in his suggestion that 1583 marked the "date for the beginning of play production in Canada" (226). Although the focus was generally on human performers in the



THE LEDO AND MIKCHIK FROM GLOOSCAP'S PEOPLE (1974), AN EARLY EXAMPLE OF A MERMAID PRODUCTION BASED UPON THE CULTURAL MATERIAL OF THE MI'KMAQ

EVEN AFTER CONSULTING TWO OF THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN THESE PRODUCTIONS, POSITIVELY IDENTIFYING RELATED PHOTOS IS DIFFICULT, AS SEVERAL OF THE LEGENDS WERE REGROUPED AND REWORKED FOR VARIOUS TOURING PRODUCTIONS.

PHOTO: MICHAEL GARBARY
COURTESY OF MERMAID THEATRE OF NOVA SCOTIA

kind of mummers' play that may have been performed in 1583 in or by St. John's, Newfoundland, this production seems to have involved a "Hobby Horse [sic]" (Haies qtd. in Gardner 227), a kind of body puppet that the performer wore and therefore controlled from the inside (229). If one can accept the puppetry traditions of the original inhabitants of the area now known as Canada in this discussion, one can trace this history even further back.

Although Aboriginal puppetry has in fact been largely ignored by later puppet artists based in this country, Canadian "theatre artists who chose to explore this ancient medium were forced to borrow concepts and techniques from the more established puppetry cultures" (13), as Jim Morrow—then the associate director and designer at Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia and now the artistic director—confirmed in 1998. He went on to identify an openly appropriationist and adaptive "approach" to puppet theatre as "truly Canadian." It could best be described as a tradition of innovative recycling, since

it entails "experimenting with proven techniques and adapting them to the processes which define our own theatre" (14). This is indeed an encouraging proposal, but Paul McPharlin has already shown us that many puppet artists across North America have adopted just such an approach in the past. Still, several puppet theatre companies have demonstrated through productions developed by means of this approach that puppetry in Canada can be a site of resistance to the supposedly "overwhelming" (McKay 23) cultural influence of the USA.

There are certainly many instances of Canadian artists successfully adapting "proven techniques" appropriated from other cultures. One example—or rather one cluster of related examples—has particularly attracted the attention of the Powells. In fact, they have gone so far as to assert that this method of puppet construction, the "Canadian control," not only originated in Canada but also soon became popular throughout much of the country, which would seem to challenge McKay's position that no "distinctive style" (30) could exist at the regional, much less national level. The Powells have argued since the mid-1970s that it should join the list of other control methods named for their respective countries of origin, such as the more famous "Czech control." David Powell explains that the term "referred originally to any puppet built to stand up on its own." An early source of inspiration that led the Powells to formulate this concept was the now defunct company Canadian Puppet Festivals, once known as Ledo Puppets, which was founded and led by the late Leo and Dora Velleman in 1950. Powell states that he first noticed their use of this method of construction while watching a performance of their production *The Firebird*. The puppets used in its staging were rod puppets, "some of which were built onto wheeled stands" ("Re: Canadian Control") and thus were able to remain standing without human assistance.

The impact that the Vellemans' style had on the Powells' own then emerging style should not be overemphasized, however. Their rod puppets were controlled from below, whereas the Powells discovered their passion for puppetry as children through playing with marionettes, which are controlled from above. Moreover, the Powells were by this time trying to reduce the distance between themselves and their puppets (A. Powell). They therefore adapted the "Canadian control" method to their own needs. For their very first show as *Puppetmongers*, *The Miller* (1974), the puppets representing some of the supporting characters were built upon bases, so that they could be moved onto the stage when required, but stand on their own while the Powells manipulated other puppets.



HELEN AND IVAN FROM MCKAY'S PUPPETRY IN CANADA: AN ART TO ENCHANT (37) CANADIAN PUPPET FESTIVALS (LEO AND DORA VELLEMAN), *THE FIREBIRD*

NOTE THE VISUAL SIMILARITY BETWEEN THESE PUPPETS AND THOSE OF THE WAYANG GOLEK TRADITION, PARTICULARLY THE COSTUMES, HEADDRESSES AND ROD CONTROLS.

PHOTO: ANDREW OXENHAM
COURTESY OF KENNETH B. MCKAY AND THE ONTARIO PUPPETRY ASSOCIATION



"THE SHAMAN AND THE BAGPIPE"
FROM *NOAH AND THE WOOLLY MAMMOTH* (1999)
BOY AND AJA PUPPETS MANIPULATED BY GRAHAM
PERCY AND JODY STEVENS

A CELEBRATION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NUNAVUT,
A COLLABORATION WITH INUK CHOREOGRAPHER
SIOBHAN ARNATSIQ-MURPHY
PHOTO: GERRI NOLAN-HILFNER
COURTESY OF MERMAID THEATRE OF NOVA SCOTIA

Other companies and artists discovered their own variations on this control method. These variations have proven to be so disparate, in fact, that subsuming them all under a single control style may seem like forcing the issue. Furthermore, a given freestanding puppet cannot simply be labelled as "Canadian" without taking its provenance into consideration. David Powell himself has remarked on some international antecedents, including "the use of the banana logs that hold characters on stage in the Indonesian wayang (both shadow [kulis] and golek)" ("Re: Canadian Control"). Consequently, McKay's contention that there is no one "distinctive style" (30) that could be designated as Canadian would seem to obtain. Nevertheless, since the "Canadian control" is a matrix of related solutions to the same problem, it could be thought of as a microcosm of the tradition of innovative recycling that was identified earlier. In fact, the ornate, flowing costumes and elaborate headdresses of the human characters in the Vellemans' *Firebird*, not to mention their rod controls, serve as evidence of a possible link between the very Indonesian traditions mentioned by Powell and the Vellemans' designs for this production, which in turn influenced the Powells.

As was noted earlier, however, even this broader understanding of a Canadian approach to puppetry is associated with a wider North American tendency. Nonetheless, to turn to the language of winemaking, there is a certain *goût de terroir*—literally "taste of the land" ("Goût")—with regard to how this tendency materializes here. A brief analysis of some key decisions regarding content and form will elucidate this claim with reference to resisting cultural encroachment.

With respect to content, a common strategy has been to draw upon material of national, regional, or local significance when developing new work. The artists at Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia—founded in 1972 in Wolfville, although it has been based in Windsor since 1987—have been particularly successful at following this approach, in both the sense that they have created engaging and formally experimental productions based on local history and folklore and that they have attracted a great many spectators to these productions. This is not to say, however, that all Mermaid productions have been local in content; indeed, its production history has been somewhat inconsistent in this regard. Still, the company established its admirable reputation largely through its stage adaptations of the myths and legends of the Mi'kmaq, beginning in 1973 with *Micmac Legends*. These adaptations raised the spectre of "cultural

appropriation" (Lewis 24), but the company has managed to counter this charge to a considerable degree by involving members of the First Nations whose cultural material they were theatricalizing as consultants and, sometimes, participants. Less controversially, Mermaid has also staged a number of productions based on folk tales, histories, and legends associated with European settlers and their descendants, as well as plays written by, adapted by, or adapted from works by local authors.

Form can be a subtler but no less effective means of resisting cultural influence. David Powell reveals that the initial idea for their production *The Brick Bros. Circus* resulted from just such a critical perspective. During a conversation with friends, the point was made that, since "marionettes [are] often pretty inanimate on their strings," one could conceivably replace them with bricks and still stage the kind of variety or cabaret show in which they are often featured. The Powells decided to accept the challenge, although they chose to forgo actually attaching strings to the bricks, perhaps because that would have been too pointed an attack on skating marionettes and the other "classic" ("Re: Sources/Creation") acts upon which some of those who would follow in the footsteps of Frank Paris have relied. They manipulate the brick circus performers directly instead, sometimes taking advantage of the "Canadian control," since bricks are obviously capable of remaining upright on their own.

In returning to the humble bricks, we can now address the question that was posed near the beginning. Puppetry in Canada has been shaped not only by the historical and geographical factors that were scrutinized above, but also—at least in the case of the work produced by our most exciting companies—by a compulsion to tell stories rooted in this land and a resistance to dominant, facile solutions to the question of how to tell these stories. These stories certainly need not be serious or even factual, nor do the solutions need to be overly complicated. The struggle to load "the first Canadian brickonaut" into a miniature cannon during *The Brick Bros. Circus* illustrates these points perfectly—and playfully.



CHILDREN FROM *THE MILLER AND THE MILLER'S WIFE*
ALL TURN TOGETHER ON THIS "CANADIAN CONTROL"-
STYLE BASE

PHOTO: JAMES BEAUREGARD ASHBY
COURTESY OF PUPPETNONGERS THEATRE



ANN AND DAVID POWELL, PUPPETS WITH THE CAST OF *THE MILLER'S WIFE* (1976), THE SEQUEL TO *THE MILLER* UTILIZING A VARIETY OF VARIATIONS ON THE "CANADIAN CONTROL."

PHOTO COURTESY OF PUPPETMONGERS THEATRE

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Some Self-Supporting Puppets:

-means of maintaining puppets on stage with minimal puppeteer involvement.



INFORMATION SHEET ON THE "CANADIAN CONTROL"
CREATED BY THE POWELLS, ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANN POWELL

PHOTO COURTESY OF PUPPETMONGERS THEATRE

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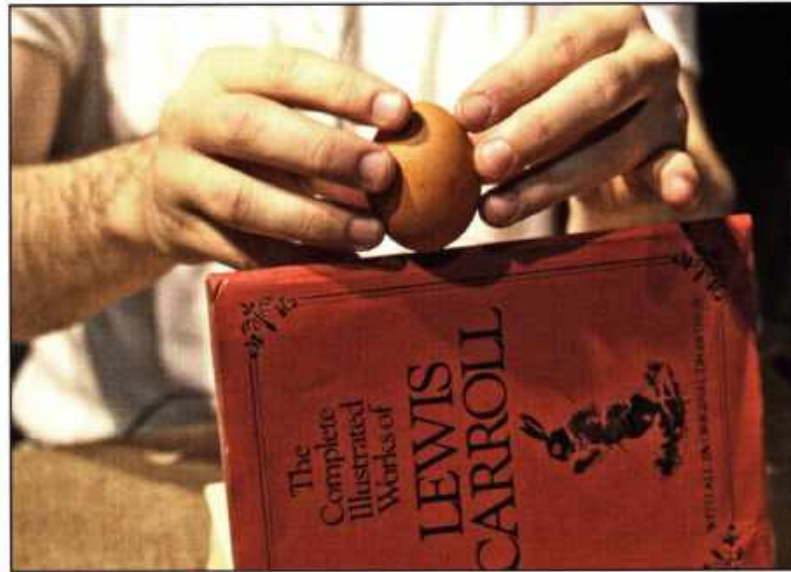
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Anthropic Objects and Anthropomorphic Things

by Shaun May

A distinction that I believe is essential for understanding the phenomena of the animated puppet is the difference between an object *looking* humanlike and it *being* humanlike. Often the term 'anthropomorphic' is used to encompass both, but it is my contention that the two are distinct and separable - the puppet does not have to look like a human to be humanlike, and an object can still be object-like even if it looks like a human. As such it is helpful to make a terminological distinction. I will use 'anthropomorphic' in reference to the object looking humanlike and 'anthropic' to the object being humanlike.¹ In the case of the former, the object looking humanlike, examples include a clothes store mannequin, Michelangelo's *David* and a Barbie doll. Now, I don't want to claim that photograph-like realism is characteristic of all anthropomorphism. In fact, there is demonstrably a tendency in animation and puppetry towards neoteny - that is, exaggerating the size of the head and eyes towards a scale similar to that found in a newborn child (much like Bratz dolls). Many anthropologists, such as Terrence Deacon, believe that there is an evolutionary basis to our fondness for such exaggeration (i.e. it reminds us of children, which we are "hardwired" to care about) but that is rather tangential to this essay. The main criteria for an object looking humanlike seems to be an arrangement of eyes, mouths, limbs etc. in a broadly similar configuration to the people one encounters every day. What, by contrast, does it mean for a puppet to *be* humanlike? To answer this, I will turn to the work of Martin Heidegger.

According to Heidegger (1996), we need to understand the human being as essentially being-in-the-world. This initially seems to be an obvious truism as very few people would disagree with the fact that we live in a world. However, when Heidegger claims this, he does not mean that we are in the world in the same way that water is in a glass - it does not refer to spatial containment. Rather, we are in the world in the same way one says one is in love or in the army. When you say, "Ted is in the army," you don't mean he can always be found at a particular location - for example, the barracks - but rather his being in the army entails an ongoing commitment to an activity, with corresponding equipment and the skills to go with them. Similarly, my being in the world is characterized by ongoing practical activities that matter to me - in this particular case, presenting my research in a journal article as clearly and concisely as I can. The anthropic object, then, is one which, rather than being a piece of equipment that I utilize in my practical activity, engages in projects with me.



FINNEGAN'S WAKE: A SOLO DRAMA (2010) © OLLIE EVANS
USED WITH PERMISSION

The worlds of science fiction are full of robots that move from being tools that humans utilize in their projects to anthropic beings that engage in projects with them, but there isn't a great deal of work within the theatre/film literature attempting to analyze this phenomenon. By contrast, the field of computer science is teeming with research programs looking at this transition. Due to the fact that "sociability" is one of the most commercially successful traits a computer system can have, there is substantial empirical literature on this topic that I feel is worth looking at in a little detail.

Clifford Nass (2004) of Stanford University discovered that computer programs that synthesize speech invoke a social response. That is, people are polite to a computer that speaks to them, and this response is not found when information is communicated solely onscreen. Now, obviously they realize that the computer doesn't have feelings, so there is no rationality behind their doing so, but nonetheless, politeness is a natural response to synthetic speech. This is something we are naturally inclined to do, and I think there is an obvious reason for this. Speech is a shared cultural practice that we all engage in - we speak as we do because of the world that we share, and so it is quite natural that this practice is subject to a certain normativeness. We pick this up alongside our other worldly activities - one says, "Bless you," when someone sneezes, thanks someone for opening the door, and so on - and this politeness develops to a level such that it is automatic in socially proficient adults.

Written language, including text displayed on a screen, is usually understood as a sort of vicarious sociality. When I see a note on the fridge saying, "Shaun, I think it's your turn to buy the milk," I tend to infer that it is expressing the wishes of my roommate rather than of the fridge. This is because I am familiar with a shared cultural practice in which people who live with each other occasionally write notes instead of discussing things in person. Part of the reason that some people find ventriloquism unsettling is perhaps that we are not used to such vicariousness in vocal discourse. What this means is that the puppet that chats to me or leaves notes on appliances can be said to be anthropic in a way in which the shop mannequin usually cannot.

The creation of anthropic objects is a project undertaken by Cynthia Breazeal (2002) and her colleagues at MIT, who create ‘sociable’ robots - most notably one called Kismet. Kismet was created not as a tool that one uses to achieve a certain task but as a social robot with which one interacts. Breazeal’s work was heavily influenced by research on child development and it was her intention that one feels naturally inclined to respond to Kismet as one normally does to an infant. Rather than speaking like a human adult, Kismet largely communicates with a child-like babble. As such, Breazeal’s work is a good exploration of the nonlinguistic aspects of this area.

It must be noted that there is more to language than semantic content. The newborn baby has been found to react preferentially towards the prosody, the rhythmic or musical aspects of a language, of the mother’s native tongue than to those of other languages. This is because *in utero* the fetus can hear the mother speak and thus develops a sort of ‘prosodic palate’ by the time it is born (Vihman 2002). Similarly, Kismet is sensitive to the meaning of the prosody of the language used by the caregiver, and, while the robot can’t understand precisely what the words mean, it can tell the difference between praise and prohibition. Furthermore, in taking turns to talk, the caregiver gets a sense from Kismet that they are conversing with each other. The babbling seems to carry intentional content by virtue of its role in this shared practice and the similarity in prosody between the two speakers.

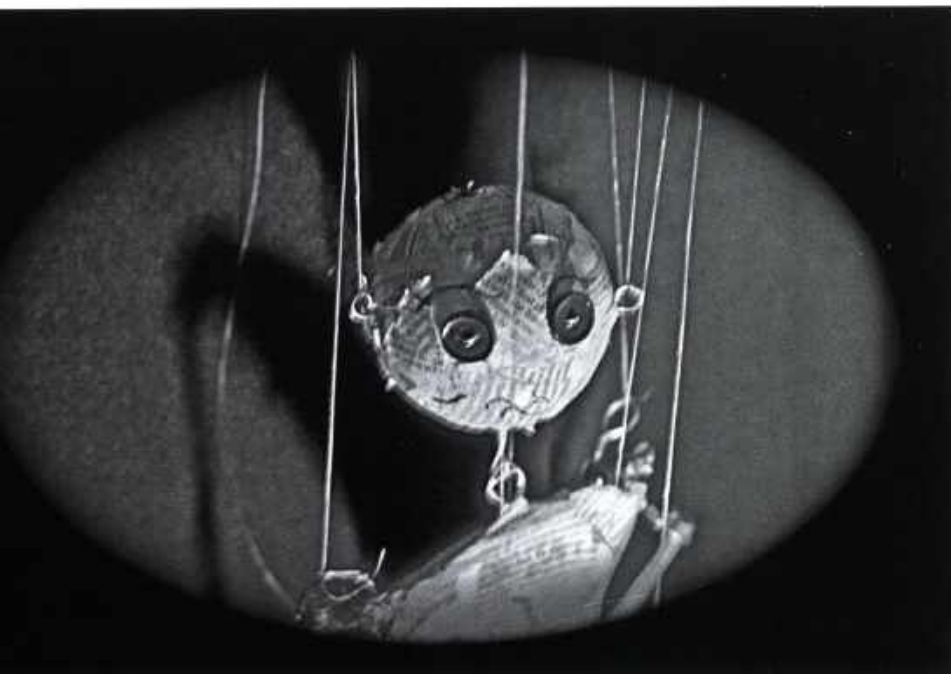
A crucial aspect of Kismet’s design is the way in which the robot and humans interacting with it share a sense of what is important or interesting in the environment. Breazeal achieved this primarily by making Kismet very attentive to faces. In addition to facilitating

the ‘reading’ of emotions on the face of others, this attentiveness allows Kismet to notice what things in the environment others find interesting and attend to those things as well. This sense of ‘shared saliency’ is fundamental to our everyday interaction with others. For example, if I were giving a lecture and then I suddenly looked out of the window and made a noise of excitement, the chances are high that many people would turn to see what distracted me. I might have to add specificity by pointing, but generally we are sufficiently familiar with what is normally found at a university campus to have a shared sense of what is salient. This sort of ability is shared by Kismet and by the developing infant, such that when the caregiver finds something salient in the environment, that sense of saliency becomes shared between everyone in that situation.

As Kismet has a body, it is able to use its posture and gaze to indicate that it finds something in its environment interesting, and if someone else finds something salient, then Kismet acts appropriately. Furthermore, in addition to responding to the speech and movement of humans, Kismet has a sense of personal space and responds affectively if this is violated. All this adds up to a system that is in the world with us; this is the essence of the anthropic object.

Until recently, there was an assumption in robotics that we are more likely to react socially to a system that is both anthropic and anthropomorphic than a merely anthropic one, but a study by Hinds et al. (2004) suggests that this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, we seem rather agnostic when it comes to such a convergence; we usually like it when the robot or puppet looks humanlike, but its doing so is not necessary for invoking a social response. This finding was surprising to many roboticists, but I would suggest that it might

be less so for readers interested in object theatre, in which everyday objects are routinely manipulated to become characters. For example, Little Bulb Theatre’s *Crocospia* (2008) features a truly touching moment in which three orphaned children first encounter their new foster parents, roles that are played by a running shoe and a perfume bottle and are no less convincing because of it. Similarly, the American performer Paul Zaloom is famous for creating political puppet performances using everyday objects as characters, for example his show *The Adventures of White-Man* (2010) in which the ‘White-Man’ in the title is played by different objects as the piece progresses. In both cases, despite the fact that the objects don’t look humanlike, they are nevertheless anthropic and are potentially capable of engendering the same rich social and emotional response that one has in relation to more traditional anthropomorphic puppets or human actors.



STOMUNCULUS AT THE LITTLE ANGEL THEATRE (2010) © OLLIE EVANS
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Let us consider a famous anthropic object from film - HAL from *2001. A Space Odyssey*. HAL was basically a light with a voice, but nonetheless he was a gripping anthropic character - perhaps the most compelling character in the film. I would claim that this was achieved by Kubrick showing 'him' engaging in shared practices with the rest of the crew, including vocal communication, opening doors and, of course, homicide. These activities were performed on the basis of them sharing a world together. HAL's communicating with the crew, for example, is possible only on the basis of this shared manifold of intelligibility - things being salient to everyone, so we all know what one is talking about when asking HAL to open the doors.

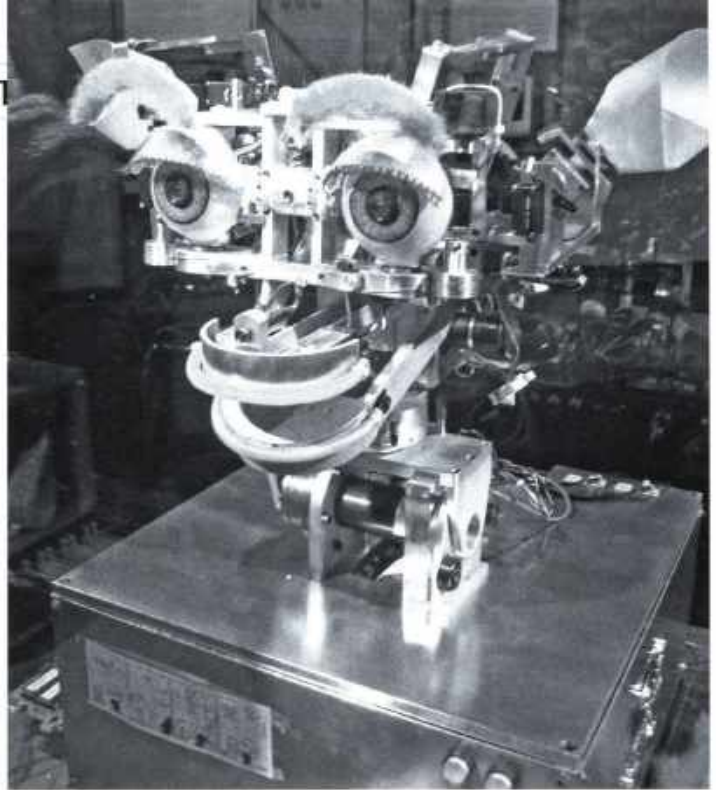
So, my principal claim is that there is a fundamental distinction between anthropomorphic and anthropic objects, and while they often overlap, the two are wholly dissociable. A puppet can be humanlike (anthropic) without looking humanlike and there are countless examples of objects, such as Barbie dolls, which imitate the human form without being anthropic. I am not convinced that there are any necessary and sufficient conditions of an object being anthropic, but speech, opening doors for each other, and leaving notes on the fridge are all examples of practical activities in which we can potentially engage as beings-in-the-world. An object becomes anthropic if it moves from being a piece of equipment that we use in our everyday activity to engaging in that activity with us and perhaps even having ambitions, feelings, and intentions of its own. For example, the anthropic spoon might refuse to go into my mouth because it is scared of the dark and the anthropic marionette might cut its own strings because it longs to be free. Indeed, the anthropic puppet can, like HAL and other anthropic robots in science fiction, decide that we human beings are completely superfluous and rise up against us.

If an anthropic object were to exist in real life (for example, if MIT managed to develop a robot as socially proficient as a typical human adult or if a puppet was mystically enchanted) then, despite being composed of a different substance to us, it would be 'in the world' with us and have the intelligence and social understanding that I believe is the defining characteristic of human beings. Moreover, as an interest in the anthropic object is what drives much research in both puppetry and robotics, I believe there is a great deal that the two disciplines can gain from dialogue with each other.

¹ I believe this is close to the original etymology, with 'anthropic' pertaining to human being and 'anthropomorphic' originally pertaining specifically to the human form.

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www.sh ShaunMay.co.uk



BREAZEL'S SOCIABLE ROBOT, KISMET
PHOTO: JARED C. BENEDICT © 2005

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Of Love & Puppets

A Review of Constance Marks's Documentary Film, *Being Elmo: A Puppeteer's Journey*

Surrounded by excited families waiting to watch Disney's new feature film revival of *The Muppets*, with Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* playing in the theater next door, I wondered if a puppetry renaissance might be occurring on the silver screen. *The Muppets'* protagonist, a new character named Walter, would be glad to hear it, having felt alienated as the only puppet growing up in Smalltown, USA. His feelings of isolation end when he discovers *The Muppet Show*, full of colorful creatures that help him not only to feel less different, but to feel like being different might not be so bad. As Walter presses his face to his television screen, trying to crawl inside to join his idols, I was struck by how much he reminded me of Kevin Clash, the subject of *Being Elmo: A Puppeteer's Journey*, a charming new documentary feature film by Constance Marks that won Special Jury Prize at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival.

Being Elmo tells of Clash's remarkable journey from a working class Baltimore family to becoming the man behind Elmo, one of the most famous and adored puppets in the world. As a child enamored with *Sesame Street* since its debut in 1969, watching with his face mere inches from the screen, Clash found puppetry fascinating and dreamed of joining Jim Henson's family of puppeteers. The documentary includes candid interviews with Clash's parents, George and Gladys, many of his mentors and colleagues, as well as remarkable archival footage of Clash's early work on television shows such as *Captain Kangaroo*.

In a particularly memorable moment in the film, the Clash family lovingly recalls Kevin at nine years old secretly cutting up his father's good winter coat to build his first puppet. While many parents might have chosen swift punishment, Clash's parents recognized their child's potential. And while Walter, like many American kids, embraces his newfound passion by collecting toys and memorabilia, Clash's parents were wise (and penny-wise) enough to channel his energies more constructively. Clash didn't merely watch, but studied *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet Show*, not only for inspiration on creating voices and characters, but to help teach himself building and operating techniques. His parents encouraged his interests by hosting puppet shows for neighborhood children, which Kevin performed behind a sheet hung on their backyard clothesline, driving him to auditions and gigs as he began to gain local popularity, as well as helping him to seek out mentors like Kermit Love, who eventually helped to get his talents recognized by none other than Jim Henson.

In developing a character and voice for the wide-eyed, fiery red puppet with which several more senior *Sesame Street* puppeteers had failed, Clash recalls in an interview, "I knew that Elmo should represent love." Marks' documentary makes clear that this love, so vital to Elmo's appeal and ability to communicate with children,

BEING ELMO

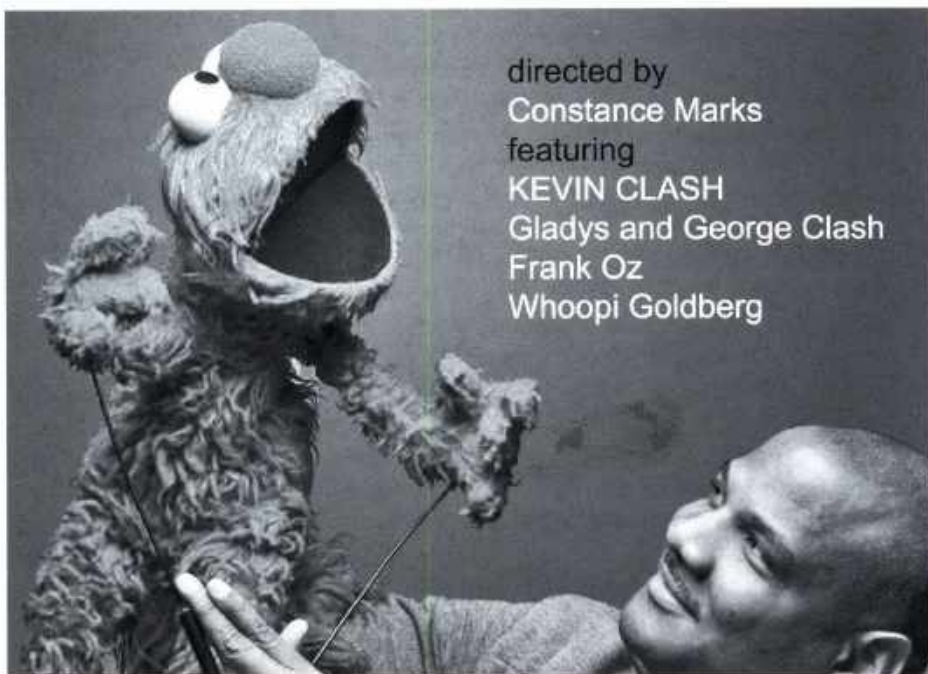
A PUPPETEER'S JOURNEY

blooms from the shy and kind-hearted puppeteer himself, but is rooted in the encouragement his parents and mentors showed him as he pursued his dreams. The film is a remarkable testament to puppetry as a global language of love and understanding, and to the power of love, encouragement and mentorship to put a young person, regardless of where s/he came from, on the path to success.

review by Amber West

For a video trailer, go to

www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRotWuJNIQA



directed by
Constance Marks
featuring
KEVIN CLASH
Gladys and George Clash
Frank Oz
Whoopi Goldberg



Gwen Bonar, photo: Nancy Smith / Andrea Detwiler & Heather Asch, photo: Sus Kessler / Egotrip Productions, photo: Bakky O'Neil / Mike Horner & Spencer Lott, photo: Paul

MARCH

- 2nd & 3rd - Great Arizona Puppet Slam #PHOENIX
- 5th - Nasty, Brutish & Short: a Puppet Cabaret #CHICAGO
- 8th & 9th - Dolly Wiggler Cabaret #CALGARY
- 10th - Puppet Showplace Slam #BROOKLINE
- 16th - Blood From a Turnip #PROVIDENCE
- 17th - Puppet Slamwich #BALTIMORE
- 22nd - 24th - Titeretada: Noches de Cabaret #SAN JUAN
- 27th - Great Small Works Spaghetti Dinner #BROOKLYN
- 30th & 31st - Das WunderKammer Puppet Kabarett #BROOKLYN
- TBA - Slam Noir #MELBOURNE, Sobre La Mesa #SAN JUAN

APRIL

- 13th & 14th - KC Puppet Slam #KANSAS CITY
- 14th - Puppet Manualifesto #PHILADELPHIA
- 14th - All The Saints Spaghetti Dinner #RICHMOND
- 20th - Blood From a Turnip #PROVIDENCE
- 26th - Das WunderKammer Puppet Kabarett #BROOKLYN
- TBA - King Friday's Dungeon #PORTLAND #ME, Spork In Hand #COLUMBIA, Wham Bam Puppet Slam #ASHEVILLE, Feed the Birds Cabaret #TORONTO, Fussy Cloud #SEATTLE, Puppet Underground Cabarets #DC, Set Up Punch #MELBOURNE

MAY

- 4th & 5th - Great Arizona Puppet Slam #PHOENIX
- 7th - Café Concret #MONTREAL
- 18th - Blood From a Turnip #PROVIDENCE
- 18th & 19th - KC Puppet Slam #KANSAS CITY
- 19th - Puppet Showplace Slam #BROOKLINE
- 26th - Puppet Rampage #FT LAUDERDALE
- TBA - CalArts Puppet Cabaret #VALENCIA

JUNE

- 1st & 2nd - Great Arizona Puppet Slam #PHOENIX
- 2nd - Strung Out #CINCINNATI, Puppet Slamwich #BALTIMORE
- 3rd & 4th - National Puppet Slam #ATLANTA
- 15th - Blood From a Turnip #PROVIDENCE
- TBA - All The Saints Spaghetti Dinner #RICHMOND, PUNCH #BROOKLYN, KC Puppet Slam #KANSAS CITY, Das WunderKammer #BROOKLYN, Puppet Underground #DC, Café Concret #MONTREAL

JULY

- 6th & 7th - Great Arizona Puppet Slam #PHOENIX
- 13th - CoLAB Arts Puppet Slam #NEW BRUNSWICK
- 21st - Puppet Manualifesto #PHILADELPHIA, Puppet Showplace Slam #BROOKLINE,
- TBA - KC Puppet Slam #KANSAS CITY, Feed the Birds #TORONTO, Fussy Cloud #SEATTLE

AUGUST

- 7th & 8th - Great Arizona Puppet Slam #PHOENIX
- TBA - Wham Bam Puppet Slam #ASHEVILLE, PUNCH #BROOKLYN

SEPTEMBER

- TBA - Great Arizona Puppet Slam #PHOENIX, All The Saints #RICHMOND, UConn Puppet Slam #STORRS, Das WunderKammer #BROOKLYN

OCTOBER

- 6th - Puppet Manualifesto #PHILADELPHIA
- 27th - Puppet Rampage #FT LAUDERDALE
- TBA - Wham Bam Puppet Slam #ASHEVILLE, Puppetzilla #LOS ANGELES, Sobre La Mesa #SAN JUAN, Great Arizona Puppet Slam #PHOENIX, Café Concret #MONTREAL, Feed the Birds #TORONTO, Das WunderKammer #BROOKLYN

NOVEMBER

- 3rd - Slam Noir #MALDON, #AUSTRALIA
- 3rd - Slam Noir #MALDON
- 17th - King Friday's Dungeon #PORTLAND
- TBA - Fussy Cloud #SEATTLE

DECEMBER

- 1st - Puppet Manualifesto #PHILADELPHIA
- TBA - Café Concret #MONTREAL, PUNCH #BROOKLYN, Great Arizona Puppet Slam #PHOENIX, Das WunderKammer #BROOKLYN

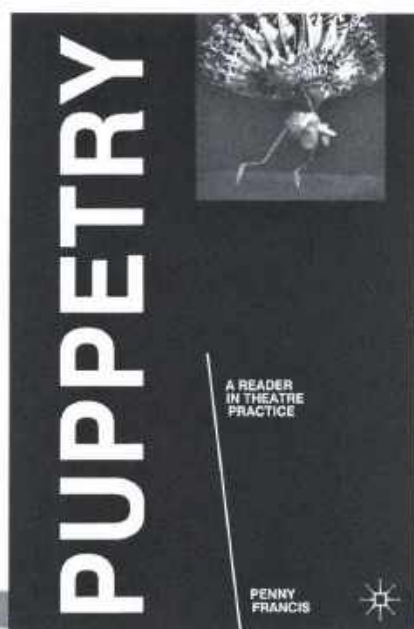
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The Puppet Slam Network aims to catalogue, connect, support, and raise awareness for the growing field of independently produced puppet slams, so artists know where they can perform, venues can find artists, and audiences can be entertained.

NEW BOOKS on PUPPETRY:

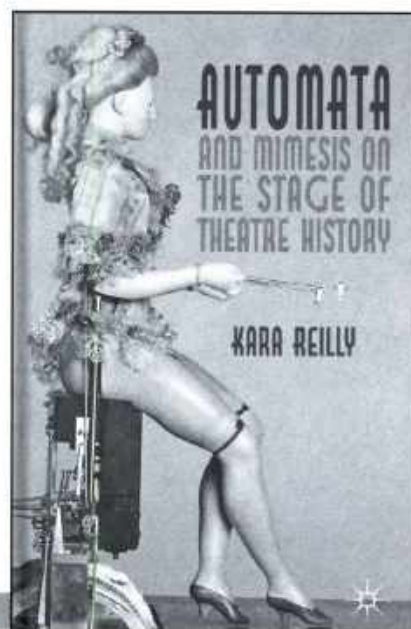


Penny Francis, *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 208 pages.

Prolific puppet scholar Penny Francis's new offering—*Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice*—embarks on the challenge of illuminating the multifaceted nature of European and North American puppetry, particularly as it has evolved over the last twenty years. With impressive clarity, Francis offers brief overviews of popular techniques, the elements of puppet performance, and theories of what defines puppetry as an art form.

As a scholar, I appreciate Francis's astute observations culled from her extensive experiences as a teacher, researcher, and avid spectator of both "puppet theatre" and "theatre with puppets" (a distinction she clarifies in her first chapter). But it is as an educator that I find this book truly remarkable. Until now, offering students an up-to-date primer in puppet history, aesthetics, and performance has involved an imperfect process of cobbling together a variety of sources published elsewhere. Francis's book expertly distills these diverse resources into a readable, affordable volume, peppered with lengthy, well-chosen quotations and suggestions for further reading. Five notable essays are reproduced in their entirety, including Heinrich von Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre" and Roland Barthes' "On Bunraku." Each brief section leaves the reader wanting more, but that is part of the charm of this volume: it opens beyond itself to a vast world of contemporary puppet theatre resources that have never felt more accessible.

review by Dawn Tracey Brandes



Kara Reilly, *Automata and Mimesis on the Stage of Theatre History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 232 pages.

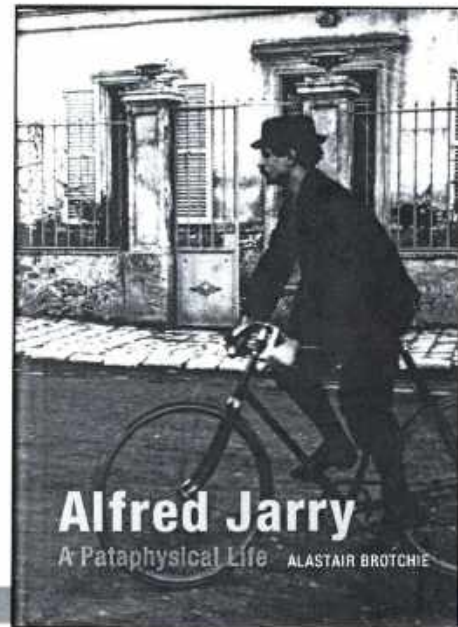
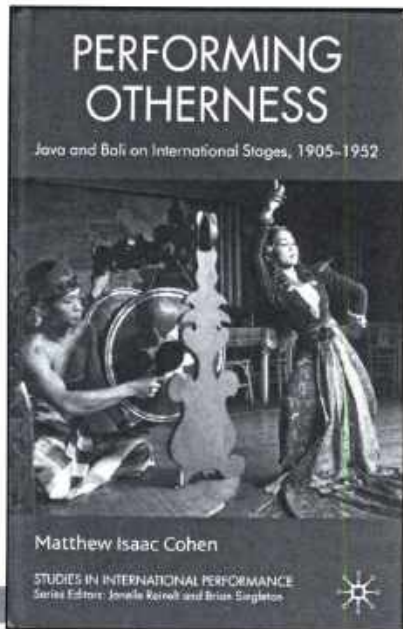
In Kara Reilly's *Automata and Mimesis on the Stage of Theatre History*, the reader is treated to a trans-historical exploration of automata and their theatrical manifestations, from the iconoclasm of the 16th-century English Reformation to the invention of robots in Karel Capek's 1920 play *Rossum's Universal Robots or R.U.R.* Reilly posits, following Walter Benjamin, that the historiography of an object reveals details about the societies in which it thrives; that is, understanding the automaton of a given era throws the fears and desires of its maker and its spectators into clearer focus.

Reilly's book is theoretically ambitious and impeccably researched, but I am most impressed by Reilly's commitment to the materiality of the objects she studies. Whether it is a charming picture of the author herself standing behind Pierre Jaquet-Droz's 18th-century automata, or a detailed stage history of E.T.A. Hoffman's literary automaton Olympia, Reilly always reminds her readers of the physical presence of these objects and performances, never over-simplifying the automata to mere metaphor or trope. Given the methodological difficulty of resurrecting theatrical performances from the past, this approach poses some challenges. In order to analyze the particularities of one Olympia performance, for instance, Reilly makes a substantial leap in chronology from 19th-century theatrical incarnations to a 2002 National Opera production. The dexterity of Reilly's performance analysis, however, justifies the temporal flexibility.

Overall, Reilly's first book is a fascinating read that will be of interest to historians and performing object enthusiasts alike.

review by Dawn Tracey Brandes

A Flowering of Scholarly Interest



Matthew Isaac Cohen, *Performing Otherness: Java and Bali on International Stages, 1905-1952*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 285 pages.

Earlier Western analyses of Javanese performance saw their subject through a colonialist perspective, or anthropology's study of a primitive "other." Matthew Cohen refuses to accept such separations, and understands not only how Europeans approached and appropriated Indonesian performance culture in the first half of the twentieth century, but also how in the same period Asian artists created versions of Indonesian forms in ways that involved both respect and reinvention.

Above all, these performances were hybrids. Artists were European, Asian, or of mixed race, and had widely different connections to the traditions they interpreted. Some, like Cléo de Mérode or Mata Hari, had only scant knowledge of Indonesian dance, and offered orientalist spectacle for Western audiences eager for the exotic. Others, such as Raden Mas Jodjana and Devi Dja, struggled to present Indonesian culture with integrity, bending classic Balinese and Javanese forms into a modern, international style.

In these contexts, Edward Gordon Craig's and Richard Teschner's fascination with Javanese *wayang* also makes sense as the development of modern, international culture. Craig saw Javanese puppetry as a complex cultural form worthy of "a lifetime of study"; it was also a weapon Craig wielded in his battles against European psychological realism. Richard Teschner saw Javanese rod puppets as living examples of the symbolist theater he and other Europeans desired. Teschner built puppets modeled on *wayang golek* to create what Cohen calls a "hybridized version of Indonesian puppet tradition," which nevertheless, as Marjorie Batchelder observed, was "like a strange tropical plant [...] suddenly transferred to a northern city."

review by John Bell

Alastair Brotchie, *Alfred Jarry: A Pataphysical Life*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011. 405 pages.

Alfred Jarry: A Pataphysical Life is the most extensive English biography of its subject to date, and shows how puppetry was deeply woven into Jarry's life and turn-of-the-century French culture. Like Craig and Teschner, Jarry was driven to reject European rationalism, realism, and middle-class norms, and he found in puppetry an alternative world of fantasy, violent rejection of authority, and happy transgression.

Brotchie shows how Jarry combined his passions for puppetry, writing, bicycling, anarchism, and alcohol to create himself as a modernist rebel. Despite his self-destructive nature, Jarry was a brilliant and serious writer striving for acceptance in the highly competitive literary world of Paris. Puppetry was not Jarry's constant concern, but he turned to it regularly, from the scandalous success of *Ubu Roi* (a puppet play for actors) in 1896; to the Théâtre de Pantins a year later (a marionette collaboration with Claude Terrasse and other symbolist poets and artists); and *Ubu sur la Butte*, a 1901 handpuppet production at the Quat'z'Arts cabaret in Montmartre.

Brotchie reveals the depth of Jarry's thinking, pointing out that his absurd "science" of Pataphysics had quite serious roots in his classes with Henri Bergson, one of the most important French philosophers of the time; and that despite his aggressive personality, Jarry was routinely recognized by his Parisian peers as the smartest person in the room. Jarry embraced the massive changes of the twentieth century, and puppetry was central to his understanding of his world, which is also now ours.

review by John Bell

Iranian Theatrical Puppetry Rain Rites

(continued from page 13)

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Red Gate: Pauline Benton and Chinese Shadow Theater in the United States

Pauline Benton revolutionized American puppetry in the 1930s with performances of the Red Gate Players: the first professional company to perform Chinese shadow theater in North America. Benton collected traditional shadow figures in Beijing, and also commissioned modern figures depicting contemporary lifestyles in urban China. These rare shadow figures, now owned by Chinese Theatre Works—directed by Kuang-Yu Fong and Stephen Kaplin—form the core of the exhibit, curated by Kaplin, which includes stages, scenic equipment and material from the Benton archives connecting her work to the historical contexts of the 20th-century puppet revival in the United States.

Frank Ballard: Roots and Branches

This exhibition examines the many influences on Ballard's work, from the 1930s travelling shows of Tony Sarg, Romain and Ellen Proctor, Martin and Olga Stevens, and Rufus and Margo Rose; to the puppet operas of Kungsholm Miniature Opera, and the puppet modernism of Turnabout Theater, Basil Milosvoroff, Dick Myers, Peter Schumann, and Jim Henson; and the continuing influence of Javanese wayang, Chinese shadow theater, and Sicilian marionette theater.



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Photo: Robin Frohardt

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The Children in Tadeusz Kantor's *Dead Class*
(see article, page 14)