# Handspring
Puppet Company

In 2007, Handspring Puppet Company's *War Horse*, based on the novel by Michael Morpurgo and commissioned by the National Theatre in London, won Olivier, Evening Standard and Critics' Circle Awards. The extraordinary success of this production has drawn attention to Handspring's decades-long experiments and innovations in the art of puppetry and their remarkable contribution to theatre in South Africa.

Handspring Puppet Company is the first book on Handspring to be published in South Africa. It explores their work in puppet theatre, from *Episodes of an Easter Rising* to *War Horse*, providing insights into their philosophy of puppetry and their technical innovations. It is richly illustrated with images from the Handspring archive and includes essays by theatre practitioners and writers who have collaborated with the company over the years.

Handspring
Puppet Company

Edited by Jane Taylor

With thanks

This book focuses on puppet theatre and the substance of various Handspring productions. But none of these could have been realised without the support, over twenty-eight years, of many theatre professionals: lighting designers, stage managers, producers, funders, costume makers, set designers and builders, composers, sound designers, sound technicians, interns, sculptors, animatronics experts, musicians, singers, company managers and, of course, the directors, writers, puppeteers and actors.

The list of colleagues who have helped to create our shows is long. Some have worked with us for decades, others just once. All have made inestimable contributions to Handspring.

We could not fail to mention Busi Zokufa, the puppeteer who has been in almost every production since 1990; Wesley France, our production manager and lighting designer of every tour since *Woyzeck on the Highveld*; and Fourie Nyamande, the sublimely talented puppeteer who joined us for *The Chimp Project*, moved on to *Confessions of Zeno* and *Tall Horse*, and would have played a leading part in *War Horse* had he not died of a sudden illness in November 2006. Other long-standing collaborators who have worked behind the scenes include Bruce Koch and Kim Gunning (stage management) and Simon Mahoney (sound).

The photographers who have documented our productions have created a very important archive of Handspring. In particular we thank Ruphin Coudyzer for his exceptional photographic record of much of our work.

We would also like to thank Bill Curry, who directed almost all of our children's shows between 1981 and 1985. He set us on our feet as actors, so that with new skills and a little confidence we could venture out onto the roads of southern Africa to perform in schools.

Funding for this book project would not have been possible without William Kentridge. We thank him for his generous support and for our many years of happy and rewarding collaboration.

– Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler, September 2009

FRONT COVER Puppet Topthorn's head from *War Horse* in the paint frame at the National Theatre, London, 2007.

FRONT AND BACK FLAPS *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1997.

INSIDE FRONT COVER Pattern board used for shaping cane components for the horse puppets in *War Horse*.

FRONTISPIECE Puppet Johnson from *Faustus in Africa*, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

TITLE PAGE *War Horse* puppets, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town, 2007.

OPPOSITE Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler with The Rhino. *Woyzeck on the Highveld* rehearsal, William Kentridge studio, Johannesburg, 2008. Animation by William Kentridge.

OVERLEAF William Kentridge studio during rehearsals of *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, 2008.

This book is dedicated to Thelma Kohler

DAVID KRUT PUBLISHING

Contents

'skull'

'skull'

'WAR HORSE'
JOEY HEAD SCHEME
HANDSPRING PUPPET COMPANY
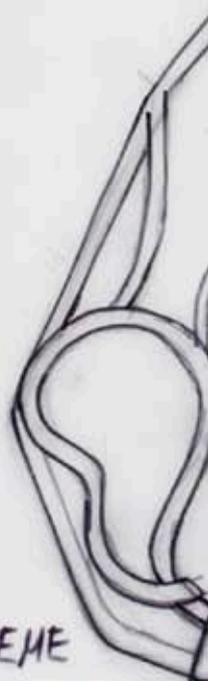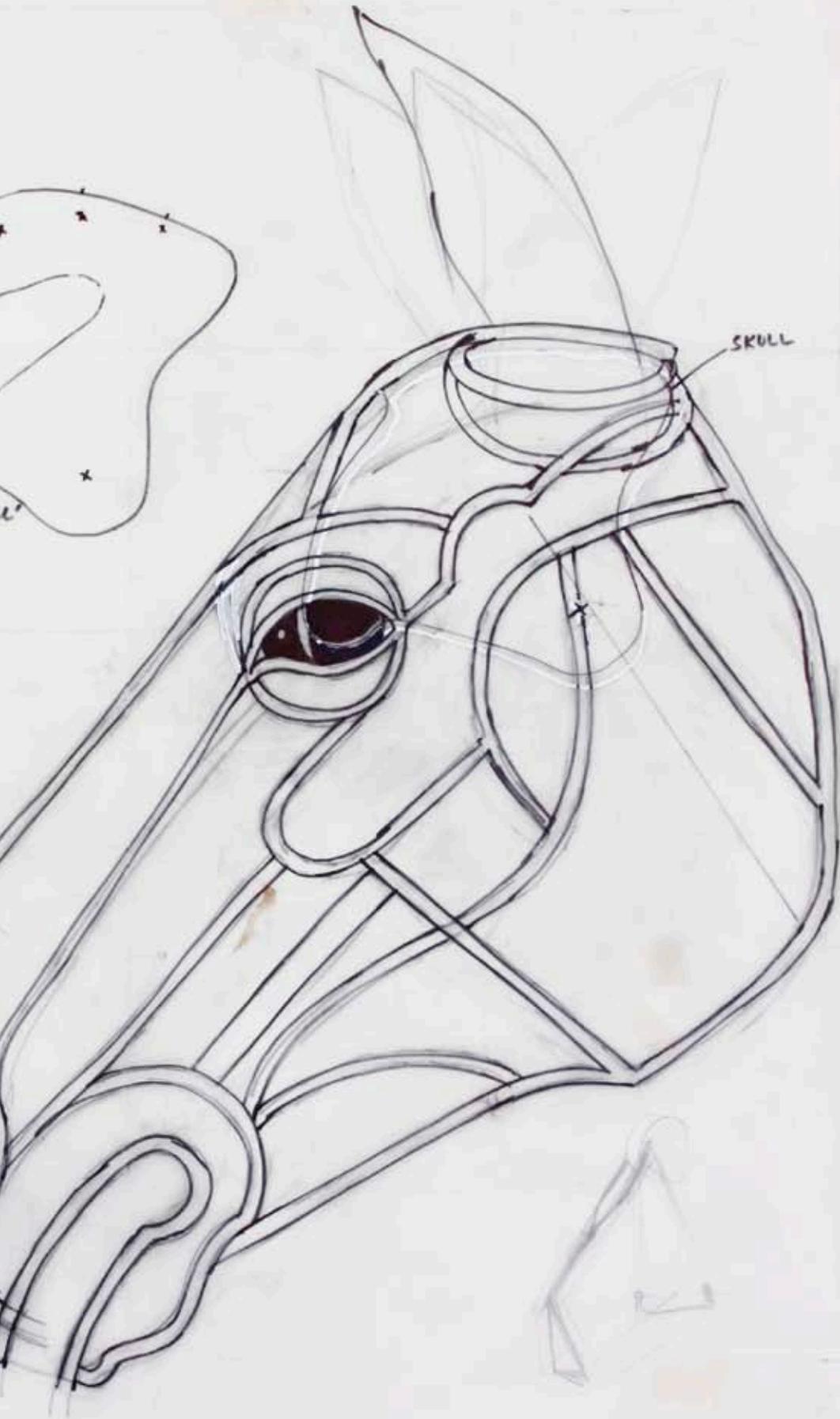
SKULL

Preface

Jane Taylor

South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company have been acclaimed in local and international theatre arenas for the past two decades. In the past year, however, the Company have received global attention on a new scale, owing to the enormous success of *War Horse*, a production, commissioned by the National Theatre in London, which won a Laurence Olivier Award in 2008. Of all its many strengths, the life-sized horse puppets of *War Horse* have been the wonder of the show, winning Handspring an award for Set Design. But the award itself demonstrates the ambiguity around the status of puppetry. In *War Horse*, the cane-and-wood creatures, designed and made for performance, are neither wholly *performers* nor simply part of the *set*. Nor are they really *costumes*. Herein lies the difficulty of categories, particularly in the realm of theatre. As long as theatre arts are circumscribed by conventional terminology, the truly innovative productions will be superseded by works in which such categories as 'set' and 'actor' are more stable. The essays included in this volume challenge assumptions about these categories and habits of thought.

The instability of categories seems to be at the heart of Handspring's creative strength. As if in emulation of this instability, all of the contributors to this volume have careers that cross the boundaries of various disciplines. Adrian Kohler, Basil Jones, William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx have all made work that moves between performance and the visual arts. Lesego Rampolokeng and Jane Taylor, both of whom have written playtexts for Handspring, routinely work outside of theatre. Adrienne Sichel, whose essay for this book charts Handspring's career, is a theatre critic who writes extensively about contemporary dance as well as other arts.

In his essay, Adrian Kohler comments on the creative breakthroughs in his career as a performer and puppet master. As he explores the various technological thresholds that he has crossed in the making of various plays, and considers the philosophical and aesthetic significance of each of these moments, Kohler gives us unique insights into the work of one of the leading theatrical inventors of his time. It is not often, as Kohler himself remarks in his essay, that a theatre practitioner is in a position to engage in such sustained self-critical analysis through writing.

Basil Jones's essay makes the claim that the puppet generates a particular genre that has, at its core, the single extraordinary idea of the will-to-live. It is this that makes the art uniquely meta-physical. Jones also explores the puppetry performance as an authorial process. The puppet itself has characteristics and potentialities that can be released only in the performance itself, because it is only here that these are identified. The puppetry performance is in this sense a fully creative, authorial act.

....
PREVIOUS Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of the head of puppet Joey in *War Horse*, 2007.
....
LEFT *War Horse*, the National Theatre, London, 2008. Puppet Topthorn with (left to right) Tommy Goodrich, Finn Caldwell and Tim Lewis.
....
THIS PAGE Working drawing by Adrian Kohler for *War Horse*.

In an interview about his work with Handspring, William Kentridge discusses the collaborative process. The interview reveals that through working together, Handspring and Kentridge have evolved unique theatrical strategies, combining puppetry and animation techniques. Their artistic strategies have been challenged and transformed through that encounter. One great testimony to the durability of the collaborative work is the recent restaging, to great acclaim, of both *Woyzeck on the Highveld* and *The Return of Ulysses* (*Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*), and this at a moment when Kentridge and Handspring are at the height of their respective – separate – creative powers.

Similarly, Gerhard Marx writes about his own encounters with Handspring, and the significance of these for his creative evolution. Marx, who works both as a fine artist and in theatre, is concerned to understand the object both in its materiality and as a signifier. His work explores the distinctive qualities of the 'black box' of the theatre and the 'white cube' of the exhibition gallery.[01] The dialogue between the 'sculptural form' and the 'stage prop' is therefore implicit in his essay.

Adrienne Sichel provides an audience's insights into Handspring. She has closely followed the evolution of their art and, in considering the performance traditions that inform their work, describes Handspring as an African company for whom the dialogue between contemporary metropolitan performance and African arts is of utmost importance.

Lesego Rampolokeng's rap essay comments on his collaboration with Handspring Puppet Company on an edited and 'disrupted' reading of Goethe's *Faust* for their playtext of *Faustus in Africa*. The essay begins as a poetic 'complaint' about the condition of the post-colonial writer who stands beneath the shadow of Goethe, but gently and affectionately it turns into a tribute to the collaborative spirit of the production company, where creative rigour as well as mutual care feed both the physical and the spiritual man.

My own essay for this book seeks to locate the meaning of the puppet within contemporary theoretical terms. Where, I ask, is the boundary between the human being and its objects in the world? My enquiry brings together discourses from philosophy, anthropology, psychology and economics.

In our various ways then, and working both inside and outside of conventional theatre categories, we have sought to describe the special artistry of Handspring Puppet Company. But, more than this, we have tried to understand the metaphysics of puppets, the ways in which they incite both joy and fear, and what it is that they teach us about ourselves.

Il Ritorno d'Ulisse, Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008. Puppet Ulisse with (left to right) Anna Zander, Julian Podger, Basil Jones and Luc De Wit (director of the *Ulisse* revival production).

The photographic archive of Handspring's productions is the combined result of the work of several photographers who have captured for posterity the ephemeral performance events. This book would have been all but impossible without their work. In particular, we are grateful to John Hodgkiss for his keen visual intelligence. Puppets are difficult to photograph because their essence is fundamentally about change, about movement. Always creatively engaged, Hodgkiss led us in several conversations about how to capture this essence. Should the puppets be shot in their boxes? Should they be on plinths and treated sculpturally? Ultimately what Hodgkiss chose to do in most cases was to reanimate the puppets, neither treating them as objects, nor recreating faux performance contexts. In this spirit, he paid homage to the singularity of this ephemeral art form. All the photographers represented here demonstrate a commitment to capturing an instant in a seamless flux, in order to provide an archive of a lost event. Wherever possible, these contributions are acknowledged throughout the book.

When this project was first mooted, Ellen Papciak-Rose was our first choice for the book design, because of the sympathetic and subtle dialogue in her designs between language, space and image (all integral to theatre, after all). Bronwyn Law-Viljoen (of David Krut Publishing) has been a key interlocutor in the production process, and a careful reader of the essays. For great companionship and careful engagement, I am most grateful to all the contributors.

Finally, Handspring have been exemplary partners in this project because they have kept such scrupulous archives of their work. This is an unusual achievement in South Africa, where the resources for such endeavors are indeed scarce. Few experiences have been as marvellous as being led through the sheaths of designs and drawings; boxes of wigs, boots, spare limbs, giraffe heads; catalogues and photographic folders that represent the work of Handspring Puppet Company.[02]

The essays and images included in this book provide points of access to the extraordinary work of Handspring Puppet Company over the past three decades. Theatre arts have been of tremendous significance during South Africa's tempestuous transformation from an Apartheid state to a multi-party democracy, and Handspring's archive gives insight into the complexity and wealth of theatrical creativity in this country during those important years.

NOTES
01. This is Marx's own formulation.
02. For cast lists and production facts, please refer to the Handspring website (p. 279).

Flight cases, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town, 2009.

Introduction

Jane Taylor

What is a puppet? The question often gets a common-sense answer, which does not entirely satisfy. A puppet is a doll, figurine or object that, through skilful performance strategies, is made to seem alive. But the *enigma* of the puppet is not captured by such literal definitions. In their own work, Handspring Puppet Company have never put aside the riddle, and in every performance the puppeteers demonstrate a regard for the strange processes within which they are making meaning. Their commitment to the negotiation of belief between puppeteer, puppet and audience is total.

In the past decade, audiences have become increasingly aware of the particular character of a Handspring production. The purpose of this book is not to provide a history of the company, though a significant proportion of the book is given to Adrian Kohler's detailed account of his own evolution as a creative artist working within the sculptural and the performance realms of puppetry. In some ways this *is* a history of the company, but not in the conventional sense. Any reader wishing for an overview of Handspring Puppet Company and their work would be well advised to begin with this essay. The purpose of the book, then, is to identify what makes the work so distinctive. In addressing this question, I began by enumerating various features of the plays in order to determine if there is a recognisable formula. What is the typical Handspring playtext like? Who are the 'usual' collaborators? What is the dominant aesthetic style?

Remarkably, the evidence suggests that while Handspring productions have a unique quality, that distinction is not so easy to locate. The plays do not follow any particular set of forms. Each one is an experiment. It seems, what's more, that the productions are in large measure driven by theatrical explorations that have arisen from the company's previous creations.

Nonetheless there are abiding questions that reach across the plays. Much of the writing in this book addresses some of those fundamentals. What is the relationship between 'beings' and 'things'?[01] What are the limits of the human; why are we enchanted by an ostrich (say), which feels, thinks and talks; what is it that makes us believe in the puppet while we are conscious of the puppeteer; what kind of life inhabits a puppet? Why do we allow ourselves to feel so strong an identification with the inanimate, as we project ourselves into a carved piece of wood, or a stone with painted eyebrows? How do *objects* provide the metaphors through which *subjects* can model their lives?[02]

This book is a meeting place of ideas. It is addressed to those expressly interested in the arts of puppetry. At the same time I trust that it will be of use to general theatre audiences, as well as those interested in anthropology, psychoanalysis, the visual arts. Preparing to write this introduction, I separated out several distinct explorations from the agglomeration inside my mental filing system under the category Human Subjectivity, in particular as it relates to the philosophy and the practical and aesthetic interests of Handspring.

....
PREVIOUS Detail of costume for The Prefect of Marseilles from *Tall Horse*. Costume and hand-printed fabric design by Adrian Kohler; costume made by Hazel Maree, 2004.

....
LEFT Puppet Drovetti from *Tall Horse*, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

....
THIS PAGE Working drawing by Adrian Kohler for *Tall Horse*.

The Human, the Animal and the Object

War Horse, commissioned by the National Theatre in London in 2006, explores the interspecies communication between soldiers and their horses during the World War I.[03] Handspring's philo-sophical and creative concerns are at the core of this work.

The subject matter of the play is often shocking to contemporary audiences unaware that horses were deployed on the front in the 'war to end all wars'. At some level, the image of horses on the battlefield alongside the newly invented armoured tanks is an emblem of the death of a way of life. The novel from which the play is adapted has a horse as its narrator, a device that enables author Michael Morpurgo to explore the trauma of war in distinctive ways. Horses stand in as exemplary victims, and can elicit our sympathy more completely than would be possible with human suffer-ers, who are at some level implicated (at least as a species) in their circumstances. Morpurgo's novel imaginatively enters into the experience of the horse. In the theatrical adaptation, however, the horse has no voice. The complex and thoughtful considerations of how to make the shift from novel to stage are integral to the essays by Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler included in this collection.

The soldiers in *War Horse* are performed by live actors, while the horses are puppets manipu-lated by puppeteers housed in a cane and fabric shell, or carapace, or exoskeleton. Rather unpre-dictably, given this convention, the little girl, Emilie, the naïf in the play, was in the first season performed not by a live actress but by a puppet animated by two adult puppeteers who are clearly visible as they manoeuvre themselves around the stage without a playboard to conceal their presence.[04] Such conventions of the performance become almost instantly naturalised for the audience, and hold our attention as long as the implicit rules invoked are not randomly disrupted. Thus an audience member can simultaneously recognise the on-stage humanity of an actor playing a terrified soldier undergoing artillery attack, and the function of an actor/puppet-eer who is manipulating a wooden figure of a young girl stranded on a farm in the middle of the war-torn French countryside.[05]

These contradictions do not undermine but seem actually to sustain the mystery of the piece. Constantly we are surprised and moved by our capacity to defy logic. In the first instance – the live actor as soldier – the actor represents that soldier, or stands in for him. In the second case – the live puppeteer as animator – the performer surrenders up her/his expressive mobility to the puppet. Both are acts of surrogacy, through which the self inhabits another.[06] It would seem from this delineation that both acts must have had religious and metaphysical origins.[07] Somehow it is also possible for a cane-and-plywood horse to be enlivened and considered as an entirely sensate, thinking and feeling being.

In a recent interview, Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler muse aloud about their evolving enquiry into interspecies dependency, our uses of surrogacy, as well as the subjectivity and sovereignty of animals. Jones speaks about the affection they receive from pets in the homes of friends and associates while they are on protracted tours with Handspring productions. In cities around the world, friends and colleagues provide the familial and affectionate substructure of their social context on tour, but these interactions have specific constraints and limitations because of the transient character of the contact. However, in the chance encounters with the cats and dogs in these visited homes, a legitimate exchange of caresses and tender attention becomes possible. Generally animals will welcome, embrace and adopt the kindly stranger.

War Horse, the National Theatre, London, 2008. Puppets Joey and Emilie with (left to right) Craig Leo, Alice Barclay and Mervyn Millar.

Handspring have increasingly sought to pay regard to the textures of interspecies communication and dependency upon which human existence is premised. By and large we consider ourselves (the children of modernism) to be a humane and animal-loving generation, yet the animal rights movement has foregrounded the ways in which human interactions with animals are embedded in an increasingly complex matrix of good and bad faith. Most of us both *know and do not know* the conditions for animals in late-industrial breeding and farming practices. Our lifestyle depends upon what is, at best, a barely sustainable fiction.

One of the most chilling early examinations of living with these half-truths is Samuel Beckett's short story, *Dante and the Lobster* (1934). Beckett was never one to look away. The protagonist of the story is Belacqua, who delivers a lobster up to his aunt for her to prepare for dinner. South African art critic Colin Richards recently cited a fragment from the piece. His distillation of the kernel of the story is so deft that I will rely on his retelling.

> [A]fter a long saga Belacqua eventually discovers that a lobster he has been carrying through thick and thin is 'alive'. He panics. Discovering the beast is ready to boil he pleads with his aunt: 'You can't boil it like that.' She retorts with all the accumulated wisdom of those who prepare food: 'Lobsters are always boiled alive. They must be . . . they feel nothing.'
>
> This provokes a third, disembodied authorial voice: 'In the depths of the seas it had crept into the cruel pot. For hours, in the midst of its enemies, it had breathed secretly. It had survived the Frenchwoman's cat and his witless clutch. Now it was going alive into scalding water. It had to. Take into the air my quiet breath.'
>
> This voice dies. The aunt berates Belacqua for his hypocrisy. He would be only too happy to 'lash into it' for his dinner. 'Well', thinks Belacqua, 'it's a quick death, God help us all.' The third voice revives: 'It is not.'[08]

Richards points to Beckett's unerring use of narrative 'voice' to posit a consciousness which exceeds and escapes that of the commonly 'human'. The lobster talks back from the cauldron. 'It is not.'

'The consciousness of animals' has provided an evolving set of metaphors in Handspring's oeuvre. Some of their earliest successes involved puppets that were neither strictly animal nor entirely human in conventional terms (although, as we discover, these are complex and variable categories). In an early production, *Gertie's Feathers* (1983), Gertie the ostrich is effectively a surrogate for the farm workers who are alienated from what they produce. The farmer, Snorrie, colludes with the milliner and the fashion mogul, both of whom add value to the ostrich feathers through the engine of mimetic desire. Everyone, it seems, wants what others want, and suddenly everybody needs ostrich accessories. At one level, *Gertie's Feathers* is a light farce but, in the best traditions of *buffo*, it provides a sharp-edged critique of exploitation, capital and class. The Gertie puppet is not intended to 'be' the enigmatic flightless bird as species, nor the fables that surround it. There is no attempt to consider the evolutionary narrative through which a feathered creature ends up too big to escape gravity. Rather, the plot turns around an allegory, in which the sale of ostrich feathers becomes a figure for the exploitation of the working class.

Faustus in Africa, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1995. The Hyena with Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler.

∨ The Hyena who is the side-kick of Mephisto in the Handspring/Kentridge production *Faustus in Africa*, is one of the best loved of their creations.[09] He is an unscrupulous cynic, and has the gift of psychic insight apparently common to many sociopaths. His probing questions expose Faustus's vulnerabilities, and he engages in philosophical wordplay that both flatters and provokes his master. In his insinuations there are echoes of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, a play in which Thomas Becket (Archbishop of Canterbury until his assassination in 1170) is tempted in various ways. Most powerful of all seductions for the sober cleric is the temptation of his own pious *vanitas*. The man-who-would-be-saint is vulnerable to the seductions of saintliness itself. This is not wholly unlike Faustus the scholar who is tempted with a promise of great intellectual understanding and knowledge.

Both Kohler and Jones comment that it was The Hyena's personality and character that provided the point of conception for the puppet. It was, from the start, imagined as a type of human being ('a bad second lieutenant human being' is the description) rather than a careful study of the hyena species. Nonetheless, as Kohler notes, there are inevitably attributes of the hyena as it is known through popular mythology as well as certain of its physical habits, which accrue to the puppet. Much of the specific embodiment of this hyena derives from close observation of the species' movement. Thus what we witness is not anthropomorphism in the classic sense, where human behaviour is projected onto the animal; rather, the fully animal puppet is given identifiably human values and strategies.

The Chimp Project inaugurates a new kind of enquiry through which Handspring begin to investigate what can be learned about non-human species and their complex relations with humans. The production was the culmination of years spent investigating research into primate intelligence, in particular positing questions about language transmission and interspecies communication. One of the core questions raised in the production owed its origins to current scholarship in the field. Is it possible that a chimp who has learned to communicate by signing with humans, will spontaneously transmit that sign language to other chimps in the wild? Does the process of acculturation get transferred, either socially or across generations? The Chimp Project raises the question of whether a young chimp, Lisa, at the centre of the drama, will pass on sign language to her offspring. In the scientific literature, opinion is divided, although research suggests that the transmission of sign language between chimps can take place via the informal process of communicative eavesdropping. Here chimps pick up vocabulary through watching signing between other chimps that have been formally trained. It has been suggested that this closely mimics the usual transmission of language in human communities.

This puzzle, of the shared universe of the human and the animal, is explicitly one of the creative fields of enquiry for Handspring. Tall Horse, a collaborative project between Handspring and the Sogolon Puppet Troupe from Mali, investigates this central question through mixing formal and aesthetic modes. Handspring's puppetry (a contemporary, hybrid idiom) engages in a direct and complex dialogue with traditional Malian performance styles. (Malian puppetry is integral to many aspects of social organisation. It manages gender relations, generational hierarchies, and sacred and secular spaces.) The crossing of boundaries also provides the substance of the action of the play. Tall Horse dramatises the story of a giraffe given by the Viceroy of Egypt as an ambassadorial gift to the King of France in 1825.[10] In both form and content, the work is about transmission and transition.

ABOVE The Chimp Project, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2000. Puppet chimpanzees with (left to right) Louis Seboko, Fourie Nyamande, Basil Jones, Tau Qwelane and Rajesh Gopie.

OPPOSITE Okasan, the mother chimp from The Chimp Project, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

OVERLEAF Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of Lisa's infant, Hair in The Chimp Project, 2000.
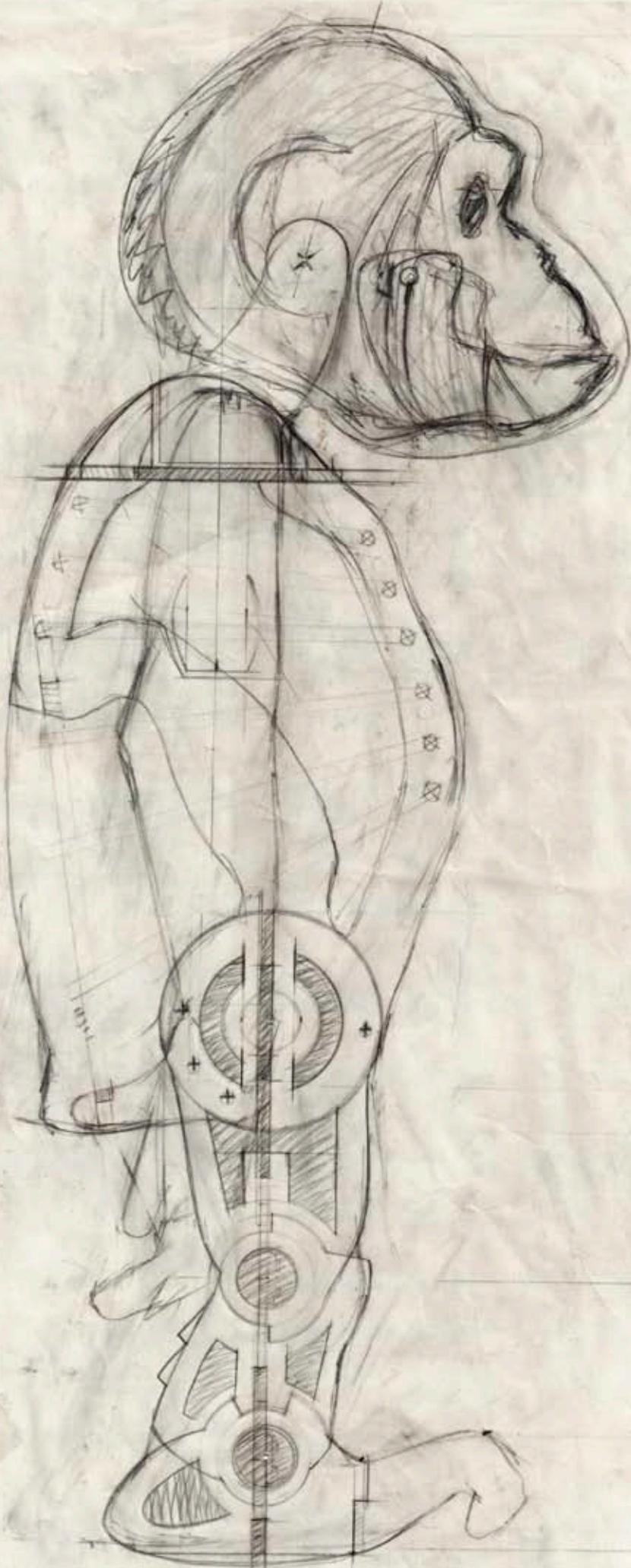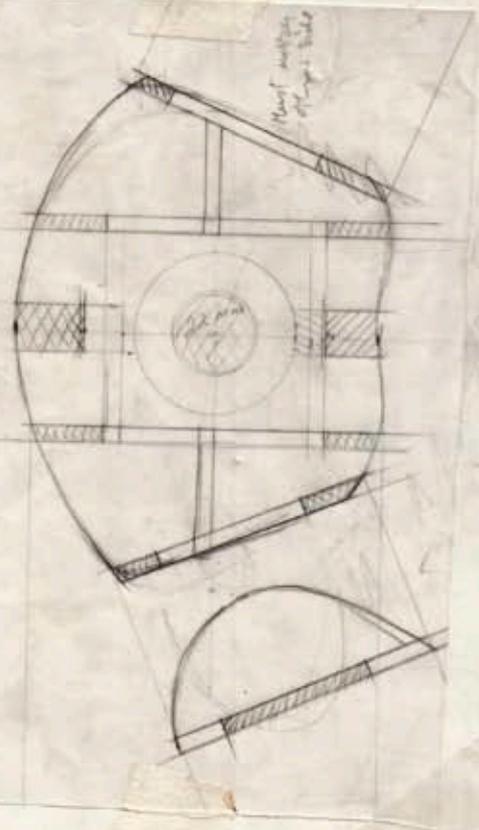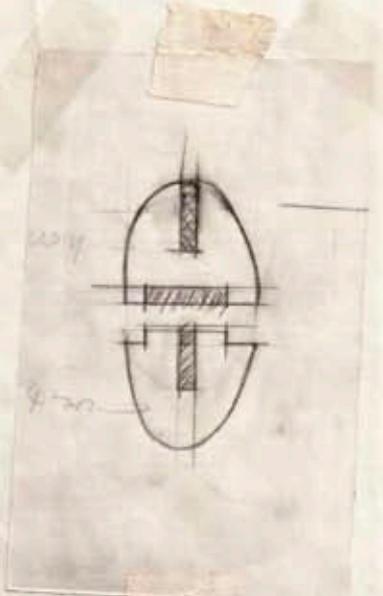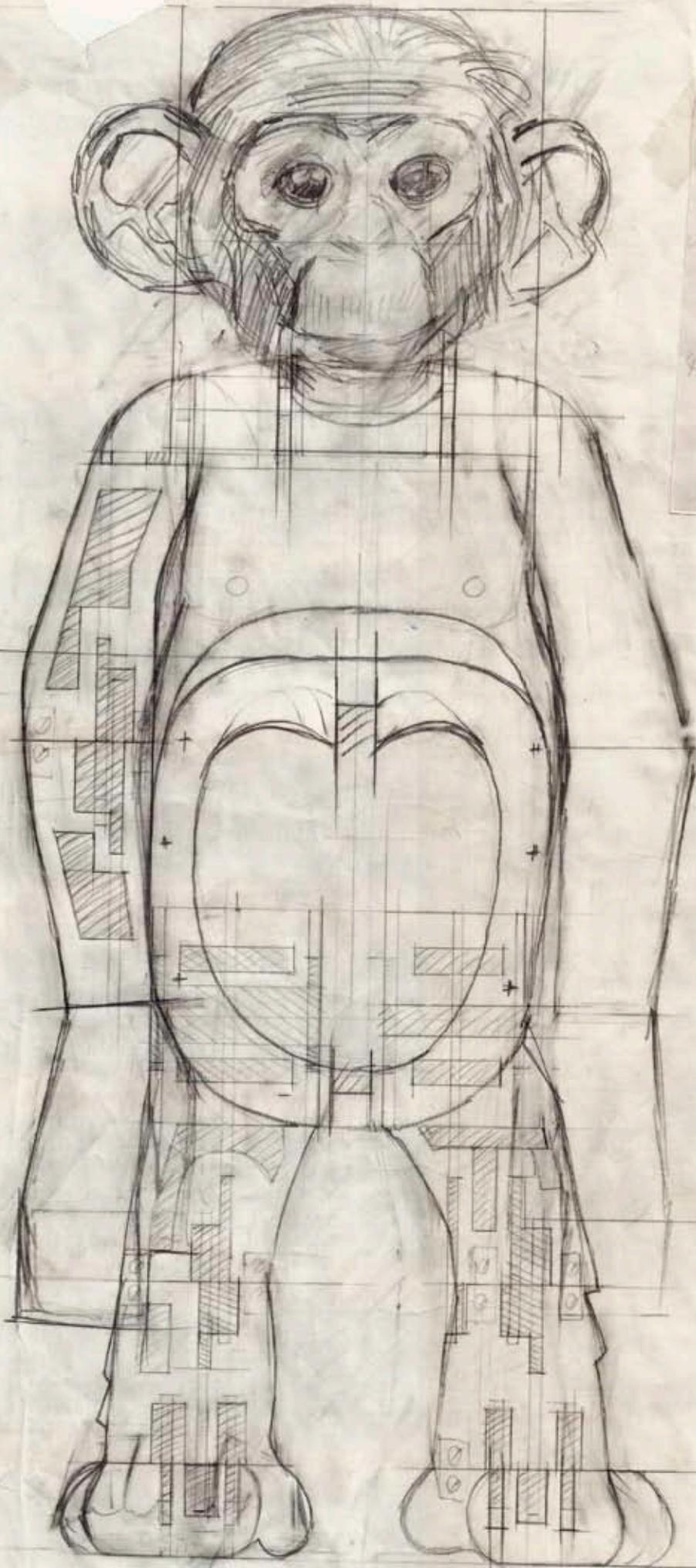
Hoffman

The Anthropomorphic Impulse

Irresistible, it seems, for the human, is the imperative to project human attributes onto non-human entities. An apple wearing a hat attracts our gaze and invites conversation. This instinct seems strongest with things or animals close in appearance to the human infant: so a round, largish head shape with something designating eyes or a mouth becomes a magnet to the anthropomorphising habit in us. Perhaps it is our species' instinct to parent, or to take care of, which predisposes us to project human capacities onto a puppet 'as if our very lives depended on it'. Of course, they do. The puppet is the infant who relies on another's recognition of its humanity in order to survive. It cannot exist without us and, if it is to live, must manage to persuade us to believe in its potentiality.

These thoughts are triggered in me by a scene, dense with meaning, in Handspring's interpretation of Büchner's *Woyzeck*[11] (directed by William Kentridge, 1992, 2008). This classic production has been resurrected for a recent international season, and so is fresh in my imagination. It consolidated and developed several of the philosophical enquiries which had been evolving in the company from their early work in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Episodes of an Easter Rising*.

A dramatic climax of the play is anticipated when an adult woman puppet (Maria) gazes into a small hand-mirror, making a wry and envious comment about the full-length looking glasses of the upper classes. Her infant lies watching her from his little cot. She is a complex of longing, ambition and disappointment. Frustrated in her relationship with the humble soldier Harry, Maria has taken a lover. In this scene she is rediscovering her sensual self, falling into narcissistic reverie. At the same time, because such feelings are illicit, she projects her anxious recrimination onto The Baby who lies on his belly watching his mother considering her face in the mirror. Maria imagines that the little fellow is staring at her full red lips.

> MARIA:
> Go to sleep, son! Shut your eyes tight. Tighter – stay quiet or iGogo[12] will come and get you.
>
> We only have a little corner in the world and a small piece of mirror, but my mouth is just as red as the ladies with their mirrors from head to toe and their handsome men who kiss their hands. I'm just a poor woman. Shh, son, eyes shut! Look, the igogo! He's running along the wall. Eyes shut, or he'll look into them, and you'll go blind.

The infant, in turn, gazes up with childish wonder and incomprehension at his mother. The Lacanian model of the mirror phase is too familiar to rehearse here, but it is striking that this scene enacts a triangular relationship between the mother, the mirror and the child.[13] The mother rebukes her boy, using the familiar threatening playfulness ubiquitous in domestic relations. The Baby's ache for affirmation and affection is diverted by Maria into a somewhat veiled maternal vehemence. It is a very disquieting moment, both familiar and familial.

This scene is so mysterious partly because of the way in which Handspring has explored the full potential of an episode that must, presumably, have had rather different resonances onstage in the original production. A mother's interaction with her baby is the most commonplace of events, but in the theatre it is a great rarity. We do not as a rule see babies on the stage, even though the infant is at the centre of the great drama of the Western religious system. Since a real infant cannot be counted on to be anything but unpredictable in performance, there have been countless generations of rag bundles 'got up' to simulate the Christ-child at Christmas time. Surely in the original production the audience's gaze would have been directed almost wholly toward the mother.

Woyzeck on the Highveld, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Puppets Maria and The Baby with Busi Zokufa.

This must have been the playwright's intention because the infant would have been so obviously a doll or similar contrivance. There is thus something singular and commanding about this event in the Kentridge/Handspring production of *Woyzeck*, in which the puppet baby 'plays' The Baby.[14] His parents too are puppets. This is not a given; rather, it is an aesthetic choice which has specific effects in performance. It allows for a shared existential reality between the adults and their infant. All are dolls claiming our regard as fully human subjects.[15]

What we remember through watching the *Woyzeck* scene is that the human adult is conditioned to project subjectivity into the little cipher that is The Baby; somehow it is in the reciprocal call and response that consciousness arises. But in each instance it is a necessary precondition that the adult anticipates 'the separate yet alike', nascent identity which will be conjured up inside the child. Without that mystical belief, the extraordinary process of psychological development cannot occur. We are thus predisposed to recognise an infant which is not yet human as having the mark of humanity upon it. This process seems to me absolutely to mirror the remarkable projection and identification necessary in the art of puppetry generally. As audience, we participate in an 'as-if' transaction, an activity that allows for the production of subjectivity.[16] In these terms, the humanity of Maria and Woyzeck, as puppets, is precipitated through our investment in the belief in the human potential of The Baby.[17]

v

Our species is preconditioned to respond in particular ways to an infant, because each of us is born so prematurely. Something elicits a psychic commitment from us, and draws our attention to the reciprocal return of gazes necessary for the tenuous and complex summoning up of human subjectivity. We 'recognise' that inchoate, pre-formed little presence as human and privilege it, tacitly affirming its fundamental 'sameness', taking it into our community. The principle is, I suspect, well known amongst animators, who understand that a figure with a slightly too-large head, big eyes and somewhat infantile form elicits a high level of commitment from us. The principle is deployed to compel us to engage with and to believe in the personhood, say, of a talking mouse. It is the similar potentiality for subjectivity that we invest in when, through an act of faith, we accept that a mewling, puking, ill-coordinated cluster of needs and drives is actually human. Puppetry in these terms is an extension of this extraordinary psychological alchemy, in which the 'as-if' principle allows us to recognise ourselves in the infant.

For Emmanuel Levinas, this reciprocal gaze is key to the fostering of fellow feeling and mutual human regard.[18] It is a Hegelian mutual attention that founds our humanity. In an interview with Richard Kearney, Levinas posits the primacy of such a visual dialectic for the production of human subjectivity:

> My ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness . . . . To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question. In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other. The ethical rapport with the face is asymmetrical in that it subordinates my existence to the other.[19]

A brutal tenderness dominates the mood of *Woyzeck on the Highveld*. Through a particular conjunction of factors, the production gains its affective meaning. Some of this complex emotion arises from the key philosophical enquiry of Büchner's *Woyzeck*, the original play on which the work is based. Büchner's text is a meditation on the vortex of meaningless misery that dominates the experience of the working-class eponymous character. And yet. And yet the tragic anti-hero is driven by the imperative to interpret and make sense of his world. This conflict between the material brutishness of Woyzeck's universe (in which he is little more than an instrument for the ruling classes) and his will to self-knowledge is part of his catastrophe. Based on a celebrated criminal case in which an ex-soldier was executed in 1824 for the murder of his girlfriend, the play is a combination of nihilism, wit and compassion. Büchner's piece is revolutionary, and this production finds a performance idiom that captures both the mute physicality and the metaphysical complexity of the characters at the centre of the work. In this sense, then, much of what makes the production both affecting and shocking arises from the materiality of the medium of puppetry itself. In part it is because the fact of the puppet obliges us (as audience) to wholly attend to the mechanisms of the human body: we observe the puppet undertake the wondrously banal tasks of the everyday. Also we are compelled to take on trust that consciousness and humanity exist within the puppet. In some sense then, puppetry is an ideal medium for exploring and challenging assumptions about labour, being and subjectivity.

It is with some melancholy that we watch the futile actions of the Woyzeck puppet. As 'the soldier' he inhabits his body as if it is a foreigner to him. He has become a technology used to fight and to labour, and his reluctant limbs seem blunted, for example, when his wooden hands grope at the cloth of his girlfriend's dress. He is a combination of tenderness and violence, and is constantly frustrated at his failure to inhabit his own complexity. The physical prowess of

his erotic rival amplifies this self-alienation. And yet, again. 'And yet'. In unpredictable ways, the surprising turn of his head or the art of a small gesture summon up wonder in us, and we see in him an aesthete's meticulous care as he lays a table or unpacks a crate. These complex, expressive meanings in the puppetry performance combine with the animation field drawn by artist/director William Kentridge.

Woyzeck was the first of several Handspring/Kentridge collaborations. Kentridge's expressionist sketches are projected onto the screen upstage of the action, and these 'drawings for projection'[20] provide what we interpret as the thought-world of Woyzeck. They are at times the enigmatic symbols of the unconscious, at times emblems of desire, or violent streams of rage. It is in this complex exchange of gesture and action, on one hand, and mental attention, on the other, that the Handspring/Kentridge production achieves Büchner's intention. The brutalised foot-soldier is revealed to have a great existential world of longing and aspiration. An idiom that fulfils and exceeds the language of the play arises through the exchange between mental and physical spheres, and the performance that evolved out of this pays careful attention to stillness, which in turn allows the audience to apprehend that even this puppet has an imagined universe full of longing, fear and fury.

Such meanings are difficult to anticipate, and it is through the workshop process that the artists generate a performance that conveys the impoverished material world of Woyzeck and Maria, as well as the complex entanglements that make up their emotional landscape.

Woyzeck on the Highveld, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Puppet Woyzeck by Adrian Kohler, animation by William Kentridge.

The Dispersed Body

In an interview about the making of *War Horse*, Basil Jones breaks into a dynamic and thrilling whinny as he demonstrates the vocalisations of horses onstage during the production, when they are excited, shocked or challenged. The horse has a lung capacity approximately six times that of a human being, I learn, and so in order to capture both the volume and extension of the horse's voice on stage, a small knot of actors huddle together in a scrum, their arms over one another's shoulders, to produce the sound through a choral event. The horse's whinny is passed between the actors' voices in order to reproduce a sound that is something like the rise or fall of a horse's cry.

The image thus conjured up is an extension of the transgressive mode of performance inevitable in puppetry, through which one being is 'possessed' by another. Depending on the aesthetic chosen, this can have a magical, or threatening, or mystical, or nightmarish, overtone.

The commonplace, naturalised understanding of the human individual is that the self ends at the surface of the skin; however, even a simple understanding of sensory systems makes evident the fact that we are porous and extensive in ways that are becoming increasingly apparent. Moreover, our projections of ourselves through emotional attachments to objects in the world (and here I mean both those 'psychic' objects through which subjectivity is precipitated in the individual, and the 'things' through which we express and circulate ourselves) enmesh us in a vast complex of representations that are approximately without limit.

Over the past two decades, this extension of the self has been bolstered through new technologies. When I leave home, an answering machine responds to my telephone calls; a video recorder or personalised television service selects and archives broadcast transmissions 'in my name'. This is a technological revolution with vast ideological implications. In a not dissimilar way, in the eighteenth century, with the radical transformation of political and economic relations as the feudal system broke under emerging capitalism, a new discourse of 'feeling' and 'sympathy' emerged which linked persons together through affective fields of mutual care and sentiment. This idea was a cornerstone of the Scottish Enlightenment. Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is a key philosophical exploration of the principle, and novelist Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* its clearest literary instance. This was, it seems, a discourse that arose partly as a reaction against the atomisation of society.

It is simultaneously wholly mysterious and wholly natural that in a Handspring performance, the audience immediately has to embrace the conventions of performance, the terms upon which the art is founded. One of the most striking visual facts is that each of the characters in the piece will usually be played by more than one puppeteer. There often is a 'lead' puppeteer, the dominant manipulator who will execute the most nuanced and complex aspects of the puppet's actions, while a second manipulator may be deployed for a variety of factors – an expressive quality, perhaps, or a particular performance dimension. (In the case of the opera production, *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, the opera singer vocally inhabiting the puppet would have acquired limited puppeteering competence during the brief rehearsal period. She or he would have the competence to make simple gestures; however, the complex puppetry would be executed by a second puppeteer standing opposite the singer, guiding the puppet's other hand.) Thus across the multiple figure (puppet and often two manipulators) a single being is represented. This apparently pragmatic decision has profound ontological and existential meanings for an audience.[21]

>

Il Ritorno d'Ulisse, La Monnaie/De Munt, Brussels, Belgium, 2007. Background: puppet Telemachus with Craig Leo and Adrian Kohler; middleground: Kaori Uemura and Sabina Colonna of Ricercar Consort; foreground: puppet Ulisse with puppeteer Louis Seboko. Animation by William Kentridge.

What becomes realised in material terms is the substantial interdependence of human subjects upon one another. No man is an island. Many of the potentialities of this set of artistic choices are contingent and arise from happy accident. The differences between each of the players' interpretations of the same moment for the same character, are evident only in the act of performance itself, and the asymmetries can be imaginatively interpreted. Kentridge has discussed the complexity of the Woyzeck figure (*Woyzeck on the Highveld*) who is performed by the two puppeteers, Adrian Kohler and Louis Seboko. Woyzeck's complex self is given an astonishing richness that is a combination of physical dullness and existential acuity because of the different puppeteering styles and capacities of the two performers, making the psychic split inside the character manifest across the players deployed in the role.

At certain points in the seduction scenes between Maria and her suitor The Miner, Basil Jones switches from manipulating Maria to taking on The Miner's role. There is not so much a conscious as an unconscious knowledge in the viewer, as the seduced and the seducer are melded into one another. Jones releases the hand of Maria and deftly picks up the hand of The Miner in order to caress her. The dynamics of gender and power are thus in a state of marvellous flux and motion.

Adrienne Sichel's essay in this volume comments on the magical elements in the staging process, with a puppeteer establishing a metaphysical bond with the puppet, holding it against her or his breastbone. This may of course be a matter of pragmatics, in that the substantial weight of the puppet is best supported by the performer's own spine during moments off-stage. Nonetheless this action surely evokes a sympathy and a tactile identification between creature and creator which is eons old.

In preparing these notes, I watched a performance from backstage and was struck by how much apparently 'redundant' activity takes place 'behind the scenes' while the puppeteer finds the performance that will be imparted to the puppet. So a puppeteer awaiting an entrance fully inhabits the character in his/her body before the puppet steps onstage. This will at times be integral to elements of the performance itself. In one memorable scene, I watched a puppeteer whose body was hidden by a playboard, dancing and gyrating (though invisible to the audience) in order to transmit to his arms and hands those rhythms which his puppet was performing aloft. The moments before a puppet's entrance are marvellous to see. The puppet, which hangs slumped on a hook backstage, anticipates its entrance like any performer. Once it is held by the puppeteer, it is inhabited well before it is seen on stage. There seems to be an electrical charge that passes from the body of the puppeteer into the puppet. So, for example, Woyzeck adopts a wary, shuffling set of small postures, or Maria arches herself, turns her head from side to side to see who might be observing her. These may be technical effects, yet nonetheless . . .

War Horse, the National Theatre, London, 2008. Topthorn with Patrick O'Kane as Friedrich.

v

In our increasingly automated and animated world, the horizon that once seemed so absolute between the 'live' and the virtual is becoming porous in a way that confounds our understanding.[22] Am I supposed to feel for the termination of a machine? And can machines be designed that imagine what it is that I suffer? Or do they just 'seem to'? Robotic androids mimic compassion in order to provide consolation and companionship for the elderly in day-care centres or for those who are bereft. These experiments are proving challenging to our ethics of aesthetics. Sherry Turkle, who has reflected much on these matters, describes how her young daughter reacted at seeing a jellyfish in the Mediterranean. 'Look, a jellyfish! It looks so realistic!'[23] Some years later, while standing in a queue outside an exhibit on Darwin at the Museum of Natural History in New York, mother and daughter observed a turtle in a tank. The creature displayed few signs of life, and the incident prompted a series of meditations amongst those in line, on the live/technological cusp in contemporary experience. Was it really necessary to have a 'live' turtle when it had so little *to do*? (Here Turkle in some measure sides with her daughter. The large primordial creature does little more than drift in a seeming slumber inside the tank.) 'For what the turtles do, you didn't have to have the live ones.' The water is dirty, and clearly a robotic turtle would be cleaner than the 'real thing'.

In her discussion of 'relational objects' (things with which we have relationships), Turkle cites the seventy-four-year-old Japanese woman who describes her affection for her Wandukun ('a furry robot designed to resemble a koala bear'): 'When I looked into his large, brown eyes, I felt in love after years of being quite lonely.'[24] While in some ways this seems a strikingly postmodern observation, it is as well to remember that puppets and religious figurines have always undermined the unique claim of the human to its communicative capacity and to consciousness.

Fear of Play

> I think that people who don't like puppet theatre will always not like it. There
> are quite a few of those. And a lot of people think puppet theatre's not sexy.

Adrian Kohler's comment arises from a career of creative commitment to an art form that has
had a beleaguered history. Both Kohler and Basil Jones are aware of working within a tradition
that has often been trivialised in the West. However, in the past few years Handspring have been
responsible for a massive transformation of popular attitudes to this rather esoteric medium.

The implicit anxiety which puppetry summons up is evident in Michael Rosen's review article on
the Little Angel Marionette Theatre.[25] Rosen interviews Ronnie le Drew, the puppeteer:

> Ronnie, as himself, turns to a boy puppet and says, 'What do you think of the
> show?' and the puppet says, 'No, I don't like it very much. I don't like puppets.'
> A puppet saying that he doesn't much like puppets. I love it.[26]

Ingrid Schaffner, curator of The Puppet Show (an exhibition in 2008 at the ICA, Philadelphia) has
commented on Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater in ways that help to interpret some
of the ambivalence that puppets evoke:

> [F]or Schumann, the puppet that fails to rebel against some party line may as
> well be a person. People exist as citizens and puppets are insurrectionists and
> therefore shunned by correct citizens unless they pretend to be something
> other than what they are, like: fluffy, lovely, or digestible."[27]

Schumann suggests that it is the volatility inherent in puppetry as a medium that prompts us
to denigrate it. It is not that puppets are not serious business. It is, if anything, that they are too
serious. D.W. Winnicott, the object-relations psychoanalyst, has expanded significantly our un-
derstanding of how it is through play with objects that the child learns to manage anxiety about
loss, control and order in its universe. The biblical injunction to 'put away childish things' sug-
gests our disquiet about the power of these formative experiences.

Within an economics logic, 'play' is emblematic of time lost. However, Kohler suggests that the
power of the horses in *War Horse* is precisely due to the obvious investment of time and artistry
in the making of the magnificent creatures. The puppet horse, when it explodes onto the stage
is, in Kohler's understanding, an embodiment of congealed time. All of the months of mental and
physical effort which have gone into its making are released as dynamic energy in that moment
because it fulfils its purpose – that is, it performs.

Adrian Kohler working on a
'mustering' horse, Handspring
Puppet Company studio,
Cape Town, 2007.

These writings by South Africans provide a distinctively local point-of-view on the work of Handspring Puppet Company and the significance of their artistry in an era of great historical change, locally and globally. Handspring Puppet Company remains a significant creative force in southern Africa, challenging assumptions about human identity and mutual responsibility. Their commitment to their art has led them to challenge many of the assumptions in mainstream theatre culture, and has made them a critical presence on the world stage.

....

War Horse, the National Theatre, London, 2008. Topthorn and Joey ridden by Simon Bubb and Ashley Taylor-Rhys.

NOTES

01. This question necessarily raises the problem of time and duration. What is the meaning of our own flux in relation to an object not subject to decay within a human time-frame?

02. In recent years, related questions have been at the core of several intellectual projects in literary studies, anthropology and exchange theory. Some key texts include Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects* and Bill Brown, *Things*.

03. A very detailed and observant analysis of the process of making this production is Mervyn Millar's *The Horse's Mouth*. London: Oberon Books, 2006.

04. This was the mode of performance only in the first season of the production. In the second season, the puppet figure of Emilie was, after much consideration, displaced from the work and replaced by a live performer. Basil Jones's own comments on this change are worth noting: 'Puppet Emilie was exchanged for a living Emilie. We all agreed that the form of manipulation we had chosen, which involved one of the puppeteers working on their knees, was not appropriate for the scale of the Olivier stage. As you know, we often use puppets without legs, but we realised that in this case, anything less than a fully articulated three-person Bunraku puppet would not have worked within *War Horse*'s overarching naturalism.' (Personal communication.)

    Japanese Bunraku puppetry forms were used in several early Handspring productions. In Bunraku, the puppeteers are masked by black gauze so that while the audience is aware of the animators' presence on stage, they do not register the animators as beings within the world of the play. For Handspring, however, those unseen presences became increasingly important to the conception of the work. (See the detailed discussion of the Bunraku elements in Handspring in Kohler's essay in this volume.) As the company's work matured, they began to feel dissatisfied with this idiom. It was as if there were a slave class doing the work of holding the world in place and the convention felt inappropriate in the radically altering relations of power in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. In the past decade, the puppeteers have become wholly integrated into the performances, and the uniqueness of the productions is partly a function of the audience both seeing and not seeing the puppeteers who have become fully realised performers rather than simply manipulators.

05. Handspring have experimented with a range of such choices: for example, in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, the two lead protagonists (Ma and Pa Ubu) are performed by live actors, but they are surrounded by puppets – both of other persons and of animals. In *The Chimp Project*, both chimps and humans are performed by puppets. In *Confessions of Zeno*, there are four human performers (father, son, wife, mistress) whose world is animated by myriad dream figures – all puppets. At one point the four daughters in the household are figured as dining-room chairs of various designs. Adrian Kohler's essay discusses in detail how the choices arise around 'live' and 'puppet' performers in any production.

06. Theatre historian and theorist Joseph Roach deploys the notion of surrogacy in his discussion of how, in carnival, performers often will play at being a member of another group – this is common within both racial or gendered classifications. See his essay 'Culture and Performance in the Circum-Atlantic World' in Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds.), *Performativity and Performance*, New York: Routledge, 1995.

07. The two strands seem evident, for instance, in the Greek performance traditions in which actors deploy masks that at some level transform those actors into puppets. It is useful also to bear in mind Karl Marx's famous formulation of how, through commodity fetishism, a table made by human agency can seem to possess an autonomy and vitality that have ceased to inhabit the worker who made it (*Capital*, Volume 1).

08. From *Art South Africa* 6.1 (Spring 2007) p. 54. The Beckett story 'Dante and the Lobster' is from *More Pricks than Kicks*. London: Picador, 1974, pp. 18–19.

09. Artist/director William Kentridge has been involved in several joint productions with Handspring. Their first show together was an adaptation of Büchner's *Woyzeck*. *Faustus in Africa*, a post-colonial treatment of Goethe's great text, was their second collaboration.

10. For a fuller description of this event see note 14 in the essay by Adrienne Sichel.

11. Büchner's play is one of the acknowledged masterpieces of nineteenth-century German theatre. The dark play, noted for its realistic depiction of the working class, is a psychological study of the murder of a young woman by her soldier boyfriend.

12. 'iGogo' is a colloquial term for a bug or spider. Here it is non-specific: a bogey-figure used to discipline the restless child.

13. For Lacan, the infant misapprehends the mother as an extension of itself until, at about the age of eighteen months, through a complex series of psychic events, the infant begins to realise its mother as an other. This is referred to as the mirror phase, and is associated with the child's ability to recognise its mirror image.

14. It is intriguing to consider how Büchner might have anticipated the scene working. His stage directions suggest a live performer ('Child puts its hands over its eyes') so presumably the child implied here is generally either played by a youth rather than an infant, or is mimicked via some device as a doll of some kind. Because of the creative decision to have the role realised and enlivened by a puppet playing an infant, the central focus of interest in the scene is altered, and our attention is directed at times toward Maria and the mirror, at times towards The Baby. The erotic and the maternal in Maria are activated by turns.

15. The significance of this set of performance choices is consonant with Basil Jones's meditations on authorship and puppetry in his essay in this volume. The puppeteer can conjure incident on stage in ways not available through other media or conventions. The mastery of the form thus in many ways is evident as a set of distinctive authorial interpretations which allow for the medium of the puppet to invent new strategies or creative opportunities. The puppet in some ways authors the play.

16. I have explored some of these questions in a paper on 'The 'As-If' Reality of Puppet Theatre', a catalogue essay in *The Puppet Show*, Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 2008, pp. 52–60.

17. In one sombre sequence the Woyzeck puppet fetches a simple, small wooden crate. It contains his meagre life: a grey jacket, an enamel plate, an alarm clock, an ID book (the *dompas* or Passbook notorious during the Apartheid era as a means of controlling human mobility) and three photographs. An audience member commented to me after the performance that she thought that the crate was going to become The Baby's coffin. This meaning was presumably not one anticipated by the performers, but there is no question that the implicit peril to the child, whom we have been called upon as audience to care for, is hideous for us.

18. Levinas was born in Lithuania, where he received his early education. In 1923 he studied at Strasbourg where his life-long friendship with Maurice Blanchot began. He studied under the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl and met Martin Heidegger. His philosophy addresses the substance of the relationship between the Self and the Other. Profoundly influenced by the rise of Nazism, Levinas's work seeks to outline an ethics of inter-subjective dialogue.

19. From *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 56.

20. Kentridge's term. See Adrian Kohler's essay in this volume for further discussion of Kentridge's 'drawings for projection'.

21. See Kentridge's interview in this volume for his comments on simultaneous multiple readings available to the audience.

22. Freud's essay on 'The Uncanny' has given rise to a substantial debate on the destabilising impact of the mechanical doll, the simulacrum and the automaton in our contemporary world. The essay underpins many contemporary debates about the psychological processes of subject formation and the ways in which psychic projections are taken for extensions of the self. Western modernity has been premised on clear limits and boundaries to the individual, such that the diminishment of Subject/Object limits is perceived to be perilous to that individual. RD Laing was a pioneering challenger of these terms of reference within the psychoanalytic tradition. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in *Anti-Oedipus*, confront the bourgeois assumptions underpinning that tradition.

23. 'Diary' in *London Review of Books* (20 April 2006) p. 36.

24. 'Diary' in *London Review of Books* (20 April 2006) p. 37.

25. The Little Angel Marionette Theatre was founded in London in 1961 by John Wright (a South African) and became a base for puppetry arts in the UK and abroad. It is still a centre that regularly undertakes new productions and provides training in puppeteering.

26. www.michaelrosen.co.uk/littleangel.html (accessed 19 March 2008).

27. *The Puppet Show*, p. 33. The Bread and Puppet Theater, under the directorship of Peter Schumann, originated in Vermont and was an energetic group of performers who used various puppetry forms to mobilise anti-establishment youth culture in the United States. They held periodic outdoor festivals and 'happenings' in which vast figures were used to lampoon Washington during the turbulent late 1960s and 1970s. Bread was distributed at these events, as an expression of communal care.
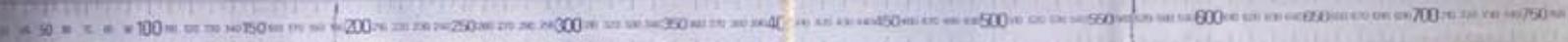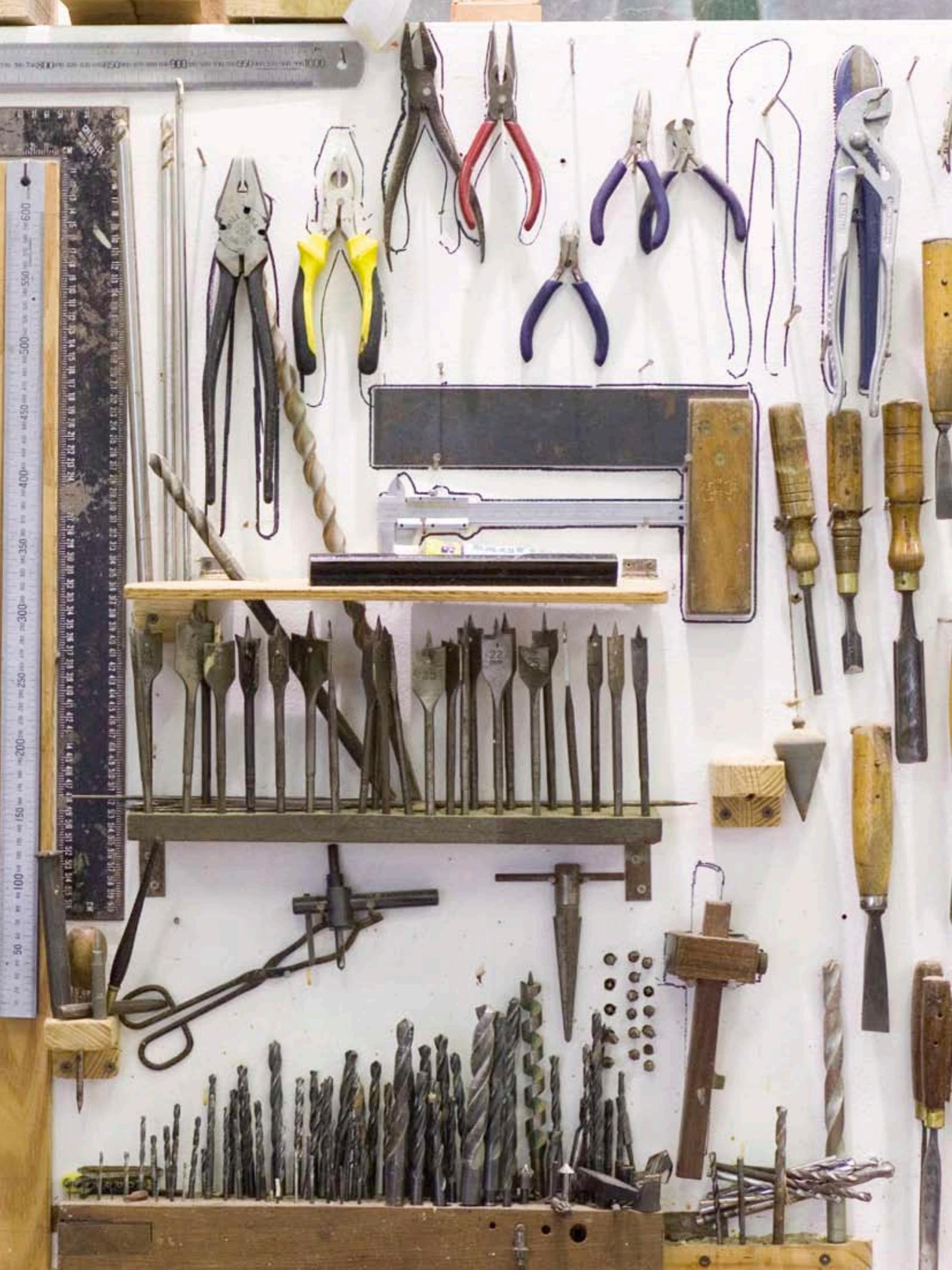
Thinking Through Puppets

Adrian Kohler

When we established Handspring Puppet Company the most frequent question was, 'Why puppets?' Subsequently we have been asked what makes us choose our projects. There is no easy answer to either question, but they are linked. Finding out what audiences have responded to over a period of nearly thirty years has gone some way towards an explanation. Thinking about what it is that we do in order to write for this book has brought this out into the open.

People who make puppet theatre are to be found all over the world, though proportionally we are a smaller community than in other areas of the performing arts. As a result, there are very few schools where our profession can be studied. Traditionally, skills were passed down through families. Nowadays we learn from one another. Puppeteers are by nature a generous bunch, which is a good thing, since assisting the profession to gain a foothold is as necessary as developing one's own company. Whatever facility Handspring now have is the result of practical experience and the help of people with whom we have worked, who have all deepened our understanding of our work, regardless of whether they were puppeteers or not. These notes provide a brief practical overview of the origins of the company as well as some of the more philosophical aspects in the evolution of our performance ethics and aesthetics.

Four former students of the Michaelis School of Fine Art established Handspring in Cape Town in 1981. Jill Joubert, Jon Weinberg, Basil Jones and I regrouped five years after graduating in order to test whether a professional puppet troupe could survive under the prevailing cultural conditions. We had two main aims: to produce new children's theatre with puppets that reflected life on the continent on which we lived; and to stake a claim for puppet theatre as a legitimate part of our local theatre vocabulary. We gave ourselves two years to swim or sink.

PREVIOUS Tool board, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town, 2009.

THIS PAGE Sketches by Adrian Kohler of unrealised figures, for *Faustus in Africa*, 1995.

RIGHT Johnson, manservant to Faustus and later Emperor, in *Faustus in Africa*. Designed and carved by Adrian Kohler, the puppet is based on Patrice Lumumba, first Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo.
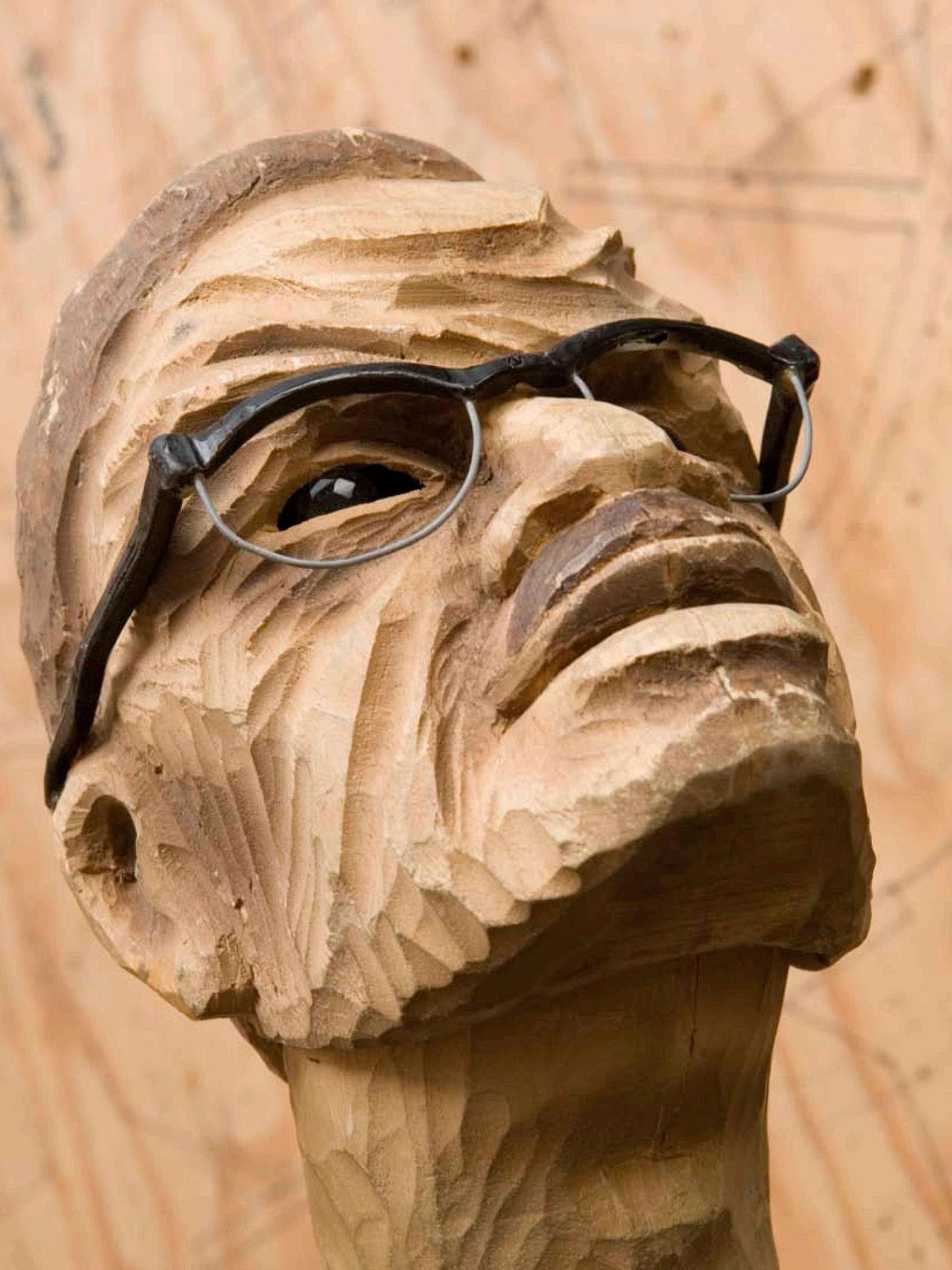
In the first five years of the company we made one new children's show every year and toured it around southern Africa in a truck. The four of us had no training in theatre and were extremely fortunate that very early on, Bill Curry, whom I'd met a few years before when he'd been part of the acting company at The Space Theatre, happened by and watched one of our rehearsals. He observed that we didn't seem to have a director and offered his services (strictly on a non-professional basis). We gratefully accepted and patiently, over the next five years, he, and the children we played to, taught us how to act.

Nearly a decade earlier, in 1972, The Space Theatre had opened in a disused factory in the centre of Cape Town. Racial segregation was entrenched in South Africa across all spheres of society. The Space stood for the breaking down of these barriers, and provided a platform where new work could be performed and watched by everybody regardless of official state divisions. The diet of plays on offer was rich. New work by South Africans Athol Fugard, Fatima Dike, Pieter-Dirk Uys and others was interspersed with plays by their contemporaries from abroad like Tom Stoppard, Sam Shepard and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

Always on the brink of financial ruin, with performances often attended by security policemen in dark glasses who could cause a show to be banned, the theatre was a visible symbol of the covert political struggle taking place throughout the country. Here, in the basement, the visionary Lily Herzberg had established PuppetSpace. She was the founder of UNIMA[01] in South Africa and a communist with links to the rich puppet tradition of Eastern Europe where the rod puppet was in favour. Hers was the most visible public (albeit semi-professional) puppet group around so it was towards her that I was drawn after spending four years studying sculpture at the University of Cape Town. Although my mother was an amateur puppeteer, it was Lily who was to convince her and my father that a career in puppetry was possible. My mother, Thelma, had qualified as an art teacher at the training college in Grahamstown in the 1930s. There, glove puppets for young children and string marionettes for older audiences and performers had fairly recently come into the curriculum and her interest in the subject soon developed into a passion. My carpenter father built her a marionette theatre in the garage next door to his workshop in the backyard of our home in the village of Redhouse outside Port Elizabeth, and here she taught puppet-making to village children and ran workshops for teachers. Making figures and performing for friends in the neighbourhood gave me an early sense of the power of the animated figure. Very occasionally, troupes from abroad toured to South Africa and sparked fantasies of joining the profession. John Wright, originally from Cape Town, but later the founder of the Little Angel Marionette Theatre in London, toured southern Africa in the fifties. The Salzburg Marionettes appeared occasionally in the sixties and seventies.

Documentary films shown at the Port Elizabeth Theatre Appreciation Group hinted that great traditions existed in Czechoslovakia and Japan. Little by little, I began to sense the scale and diversity of the medium: a cowardly prince stumbling backwards down a dark passage pursued by his own fears and tripping over a bowl of jewels in a Jiri Trinka[02] stop-frame, puppet, animated film; a white-faced Japanese Bunraku woman with a tiny needle embedded in her wooden lip to simulate teeth biting on a cloth to contain emotional turmoil. These were two particular moments that reinforced a growing belief that animated figures could communicate great drama and express complex human emotion despite (and possibly because of) their artificiality. I was beginning to discover that puppets had been doing this for many years.

Storage boxes, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town, 2009.

Episodes of an Easter Rising
From the radio play by David Lytton
Directed by Esther van Ryswyk
Produced in 1985
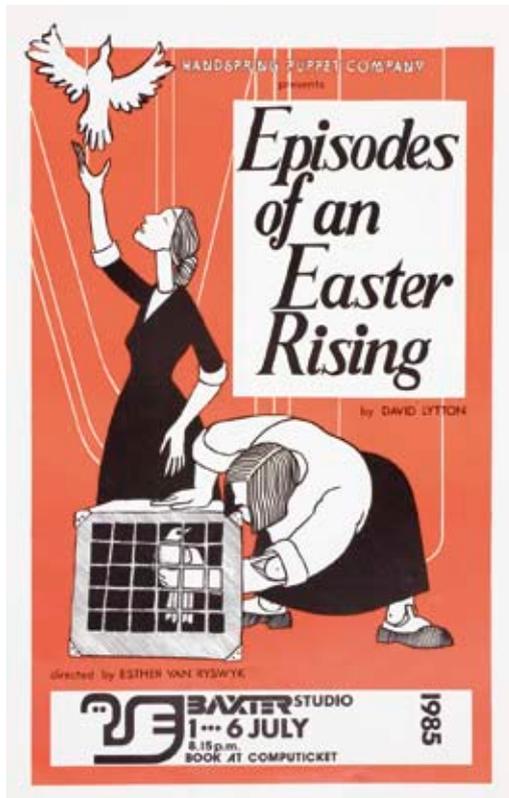
From the day that the company was launched, there was a strong desire to make work for an adult audience. That we didn't consider ourselves writers led us on a constant search for plays or other material that might be appropriate for adaptation to a piece with puppets. Basil Jones and I have had many discussions about the criteria for this search and we did feel even at the beginning that we shouldn't be confined to those subjects that were obvious puppet fare: ghosts, animals, mythical creatures.

Before Handspring, I had tried in 1976 to engage with the idea of a puppet piece for adults whilst still at The Space Theatre. *Hanjo*, the modern Noh play by Yukio Mishima, seemed a possibility. I built the three characters, which I had conceived as short-string marionettes to be operated in the open. However I did this before applying for the rights, only to find later that the royalties were prohibitive. The costs were the same whether human actors or wooden ones forty centimetres tall performed the play. There were thus economic considerations, but there were also ideological factors which were impediments to the realisation of this piece. 1976 was the year of the Soweto student riots in South Africa. Anti-Apartheid solidarity demonstrations had spread throughout the country and with running tear-gas battles raging against the police in the streets outside The Space, a Noh play for puppets was too off the wall to find support. So *Hanjo* was abandoned.

Two years later, having left The Space and moved with Basil to Botswana, I discovered *Episodes of an Easter Rising* in a bookshop in Gaborone. Written as a radio play for the BBC by exiled writer, David Lytton, it had short scenes, a limited set of characters, dealt with the political situation in South Africa head on and also explored gay identity in that the two leading women characters happened to be lovers. This becomes integral to the plotline because social isolation leading from that fact prompts the two women into a set of political choices. It seemed an ideal vehicle to establish puppetry for an adult audience. However, starting the life of our new company with a piece for adults was out of the question. In the end, the project would take five years to come into being. There was no single reason for this. For one thing, given that Basil and I had our training in the fine arts, we first had to learn how to perform, because *Easter Rising* would demand a high degree of expressive competence. During these five years we produced and toured five new puppet plays for children all over the (then) four provinces of South Africa and to the neighbouring countries of Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland. Throughout this time, *Easter Rising* remained a possibility in the background. The question hanging over the project was 'how?'

What puppets to use? How to make visual the dialogue of a radio play? How to deal with the instant scene changes? The play is naturalistic, drawing on a set of conversations around a table on a farm stoep,[03] at a bedside or in a factory.

Poster for *Episodes of an Easter Rising*, 1985, designed by Adrian Kohler.

The received aesthetic amongst puppeteers of the time was that puppets should not be naturalistic; they should not mimic the look of real people. Modernism and abstraction had both played their part in the design of 'art' puppet figures in the twentieth century, just as Disney and Norman Rockwell had set a sentimental benchmark in the realm of caricature. Sketches for the representation of the *Easter Rising* characters fluctuated wildly between all these influences, yet they placed equally powerful constraints on puppetry design and performance.

Eventually, a naturalistic, short-string marionette based on the classic John Wright prototype was chosen. The form I had selected for the Mishima play nearly ten years before would be actualised here. I designed settings for the farmhouse stoep and an interior bedroom with bits of suggested architecture and furnishings. The piece was to be performed with the puppeteers leaning over this set. At this point Esther van Ryswyk agreed to direct. Her approach to theatre was minimalist, asserting that the visual should only be added as a support for what was necessary. The piece was developed from the centre of each character outwards. As trained visual artists, Basil and I had a tendency to expand on the visuals when insecure, so it came as a shock to see Esther strip away

this crutch and settle for only the furniture. Image theatre was still to become a distinct field, and her instinct about *Easter Rising* was the correct one. The playtext, having been created for radio, the theatre of the mind, already contained a mass of imagery.

A further positive result of losing the sets was that without the barrier of walls the manipulators were free to work all around their figures. Traditional marionette theatre design limits the way figures can move in relation to each other. If you are leaning over a wall or from a bridge to operate, the blocking of a scene tends to be either fairly static or in a line. It is also difficult for manipulators to pass one another, so characters tend to stay where they are. Now, without sets, there was a lot of space and the puppeteers could kneel down and assist their figures when they needed to handle props. (Remote props-handling is a perennial problem in string-puppet plays, requiring elaborate and often imperfect technical solutions.)

....
ABOVE The Man, Edith, Adelaide and Inspector Gorman. Puppets by Adrian Kohler, costumes made by Caroline Littlewort.
....
RIGHT Adelaide, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

The characters were pared down under Esther's direction. She would say, in relation to a scene which involved sitting around a table, 'Using a chair, show me three sequential and important positions of your own body that tell me something about the character at this moment.' Then these 'corners' of movement would be set as goals for the marionette to attempt to hit every time. Esther, not having previously worked with puppets, instinctively devised this system of 'picture' sequences, which would allow the audience into a scaled-down world by placing visible stops that gave clarity to the shifting dynamic of the scene.

Yet another discovery was the significance attached to the presence of the revealed manipulators. The four were dressed in black as in Bunraku, signifying the performers' absence, even though they were physically visible. Lighting was directed at the puppet-playing area. But because the manipulators assisted the puppets in their practical tasks of passing things to one another, their faces and of course their hands intruded into this light to a degree. Audiences attached a completely unplanned meaning to this, and interpreted these dark giants alongside each character as their 'destiny' guiding them through the story.

Finally, the piece needed music, both to link scene changes and to add atmosphere at the top and the tail. Niels Erlank, an ethnomusicologist working in Namibia, composed a simple pentatonic score to be played live on an early, portable, battery-powered electronic keyboard, which he found at a flea market.

This first experiment in the Bunraku or 'exposed' style of performing turned out to be enormously liberating for our work and we used it in every subsequent project. The trappings of the puppet stage we had used in our children's productions, with its black curtains to mask the puppeteers and its boom microphone system (essentially a more elaborate version of the traditional puppet booth) fell away. Audiences were not put off at all by the visible mechanics. On the contrary, it became clear that the inner workings of the puppet performance were of interest. No longer was it necessary to collude with the trickery of the puppet booth. The audience could settle down more comfortably with the puppet figure as metaphoric rather than as literal. This breakthrough has informed all of our subsequent work in one way or another.


Inspector Gorman, Adelaide and Edith. Iziko South African National Gallery exhibition, 2002.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

**Written by William Shakespeare
Directed by Esther van Ryswyk and
Fred Abrahamse
Produced in 1988**
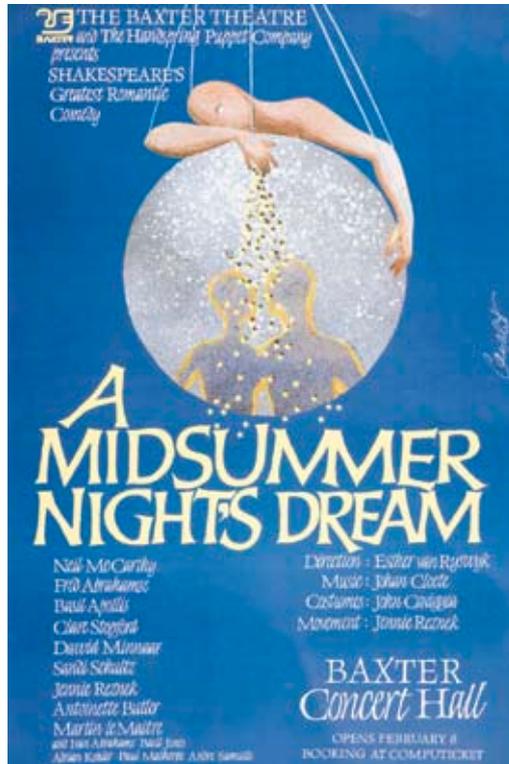
Episodes of an Easter Rising was a surprising success in South Africa, and played its final performance at the Seventh International Festival of Puppet Theatre in Charleville-Mézières, France, in 1985. It was here that Handspring was first exposed to a truly representative assortment of international puppetry aimed at an adult audience. Particularly impressive was a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the legendary Czech puppet company, DRAK. The fairy world was a dark, funny and dangerous place. There was superb clowning from the mechanicals and the concept for the flight of Puck who, in the text, travels great distances at speed, was simply brilliant. The green puppet figure representing him was at times ingeniously replaced in an instant by an inflated green balloon which, when released, shot away into the darkness in a series of unpredictable and rapidly diminishing loops. The production proved that a time-honoured classic could be hugely entertaining for a modern audience in a reconception using puppets.

On our return, Esther van Ryswyk received a full description of all the work we had seen at the festival, and a few months later proposed that we do a *Dream* of our own. Basil and I were reluctant. The influence of the DRAK version would be too strong. Then we began studying the text and other possibilities emerged. We sent a proposal to The Baxter Theatre and John Slemon, the CEO, agreed to back it as a piece that combined human and puppet performance. This was to be the first large-scale collaboration with which Handspring was to become involved. One by one, more resource people would be drawn in as the complexity of the task became apparent. With each new input, the project would change its shape and in the end our original proposal gave way to a completely new project that emerged out of those collaborations.

The Baxter was looking for another vehicle that might capitalise on its recent popular success with the comic actor Basil Appollis, who had been such a hit in David Kramer and Taliep Peterson's *District Six – The Musical*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a perennial favourite and is the one play by Shakespeare that obviously lends itself to adaptation for puppets. The world of the humans and that of the fairies represented a clear enough division for John Slemon to feel that the play would justify the use of puppets and win over critics and audiences.

We, however, thought that this divide between the real and spirit worlds was too predictable, and fought for the boundary between people and puppets to be challenged, so that the world of the fairies and the world of people infiltrated one another, fairy puppets becoming people, people sometimes represented by puppets. This was after all South Africa in the 1970s, where boundaries and divides were all too common. Our creative choices were aimed at undermining the logic of Apartheid, with its fixed categories and classifications. We wanted to suggest that experiences were more complex, and that lives moved between realms. In the end this was a battle that we all but lost.

....
ABOVE Poster for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1988, designed by Peter Cazalet.
....
OVERLEAF Puppet Mustardseed with Adrian Kohler and Jennie Reznek as Puck. The Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, 1988.
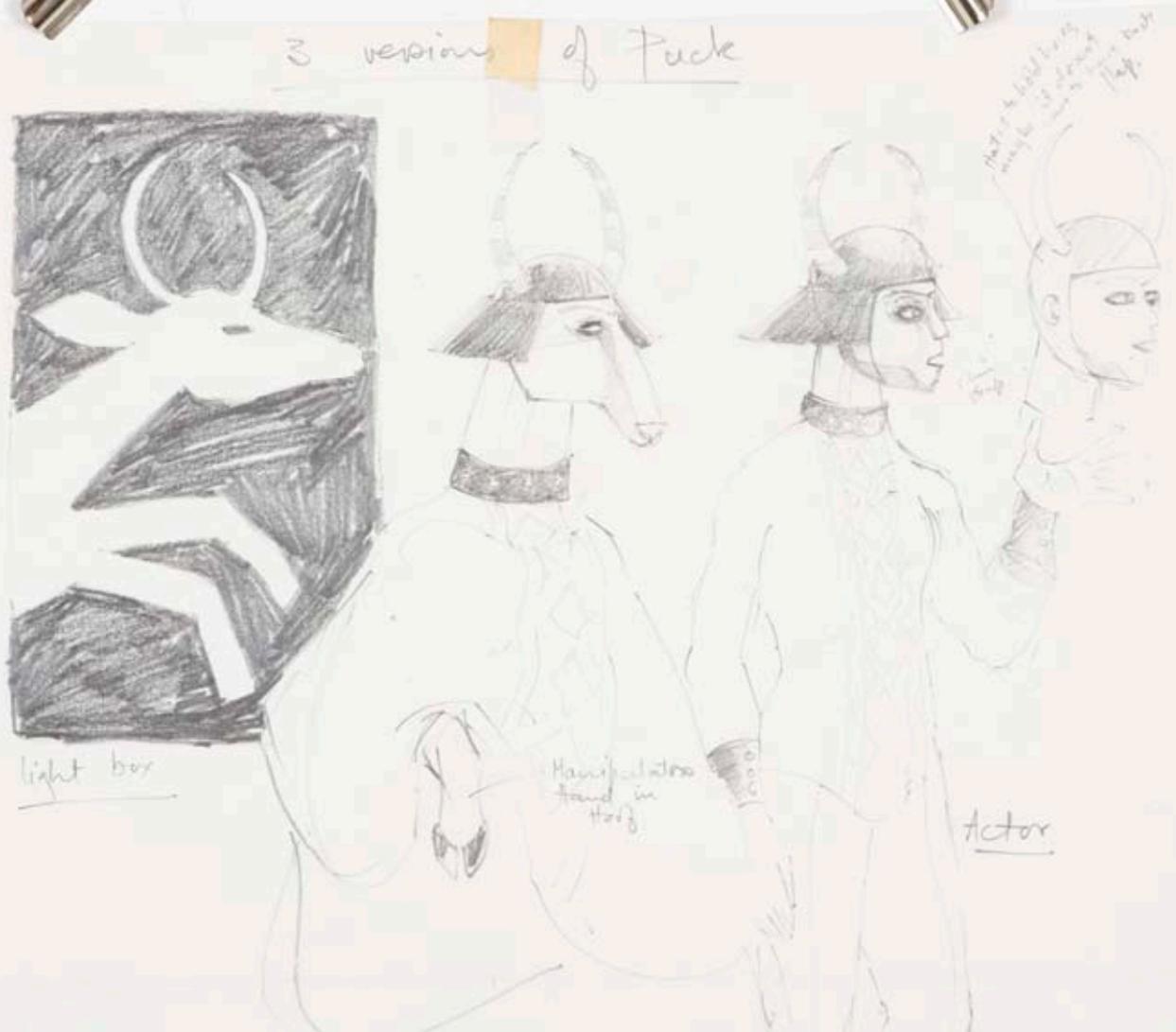
Another ideological question was that of language. Shakespeare in translation, like the Czech version which we had seen in Charleville, once removed from the original, can be re-conceived by the translator. The understanding is, 'it's not Shakespeare. It's "after" Shakespeare.' A translation of the Bard by a contemporary author can make the play feel more modern, but to update the work into current English is not so straightforward. The language itself is cherished and, to some degree, holy. Shakespeare's plays have often been destroyed in highschool classrooms as English set-works, particularly in the colonial context for those students who have English as a second language, and who find the archaic expressions alienating. So John Slemon argued for a translation into more accessible English, to bring the play to the broader audience he wished to woo into his theatre. He also wanted it adapted for a smaller cast to keep production costs down. Cape Town playwright Peter Krummeck was engaged to try. However this was one battle John lost. Peter found the beauty of the original language impossible to challenge. The subject matter, the characters and the rhythms of the original poetry are all so bound up with one another that they cannot be easily parted. So we went back to the original text, which we trimmed to fit a cast of fourteen, doubling roles wherever possible.

Delving into the Elizabethan era, we found a world full of playful, impish and even malevolent sprites that would translate very well into a treatment with puppets. Because flesh-and-blood actors wouldn't be playing them, our fairies didn't have to walk on the ground but could fly and didn't have to resemble people. Next came thoughts about where to locate the Athens of the play. As the play was being cast outside of the accepted norms of 'received' Shakespeare (in the Cape Town of 1988),

ABOVE Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of three versions of Puck: as a light shadow, a rod puppet and an actor.

OPPOSITE Basil Appollis, Fred Abrahamse and Martin le Maitre with puppets by Adrian Kohler from Titania's fairy train. The Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, 1988.

Africa became the obvious choice. In those utopian days we opted for an idyllic future, where African democracies would prevail in the end. For the design of the fairies we borrowed from all over the continent. Benin, Egypt and the Makonde masks of Mozambique informed our designs, and for the main images of Oberon and Titania it was to the Bambara puppets of Mali that we turned for a second time. Within the Bambara puppet canon there are some figures that don't exist anywhere else. One of these is the *meren habitable*, a large figure that can walk on the ground and is 'inhabited' by the puppeteer who supports the shoulder and head structure above their own head with a backpack, the whole being covered with a voluminous costume that extends down to the ground, completely hiding the person inside. The bare-breasted Yayoroba is one of these. She is a figure with elaborate carved headdress and open mouth as if singing and represents a legendary ancestral beauty; in contemporary performance she embodies the beauty of all Bambara women. We felt she would make a great Titania. For Oberon, a Dogon carved staff of an extremely stylised horse head with curved zigzag mane was the inspiration.

These two images evolved into figures three metres tall and supported by backpacks worn by the actors. The performers' heads could manipulate the puppets' heads by means of a cap attached to the head axle, hidden inside the chest of the figure. The arms were operated with rods from inside the costumes made of layered gauze so as not to muffle the words spoken from inside. The backpacks had quick-release buckles so that in an instant the actors could shed their large impressive masks and step out as the very scantily clad essence of their characters to perform scenes requiring greater intimacy, such as Titania's infatuation with Bottom in the ass's mask. New techniques were developed for the flying puppets. A Central European rod marionette became a little monk-like fairy that could quickly take off and land and immediately start walking. A skeleton with wings that didn't walk at all well could nonetheless spread its wings, flap them, take-off, glide high and then land convincingly. Most interesting were the fish. These were magnified versions of those tiny deep-sea predators with feelers and vicious-looking teeth. Essentially *marots* (the simplest kind of puppet, a 'fool's stick' with a head on a central rod), they had kite-like tails that could catch the air and side fins that expanded if the fish swam backwards, both of which were passive actions not requiring active puppeteering. Their effect onstage was to transform the world from one medium into another by turning air into water. They also gave a marvellous sense of gravity-free movement. Holding them aloft above their heads, the puppeteers could run with them and also change direction easily. With their big teeth at times hidden, sometimes bared, they were Oberon's 'tigers' intended to intimidate Titania's more ethereal retinue.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Bax‚ter Theatre, Cape Town, 1988. Puppets Titania and Oberon with their retinues. Puppeteers (left to right) Fred Abrahamse, Claire Stopford, Dawid Minnaar, Adrian Kohler, Basil Appollis, and Jennie Reznek as Puck.

This was our first production where actors and puppets would be occupying the same space, essentially the stage floor, with no playboards at all, and no specifically designated puppet playing area. The flying helped that of course. The air became the playboard. Actors who were playing the lovers or the mechanicals doubled as puppeteers by donning black cloaks for the big fairy scenes. The Pyramus and Thisbe play-within-a-play was performed by the mechanicals as a hastily made rag rod-puppet piece, this time with a playboard provided by Wall. The design of all the puppets had to be such that actors could quickly learn their manipulation with no previous experience of puppeteering and in a relatively short rehearsal period. The result was a production that ran to three incarnations: in Cape Town, at the Grahamstown Festival[04] and at The Market Theatre, Johannesburg.

OPPOSITE David Alcock as Bottom and Jennie Reznek as Puck. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1989.

ABOVE (Left to right) Basil Jones with Peaseblossom, Fred Abrahamse with Moth, Antoinette Butler as Titania, Basil Appollis as Bottom, André Samuels (obscured) with The Indian Boy and Ivan Abrahams with Cobweb. The Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, 1988.

Tooth and Nail

Written by Carol Steinberg, Nicola Galombick and Malcolm Purkey
Directed by Malcolm Purkey
Produced in 1989
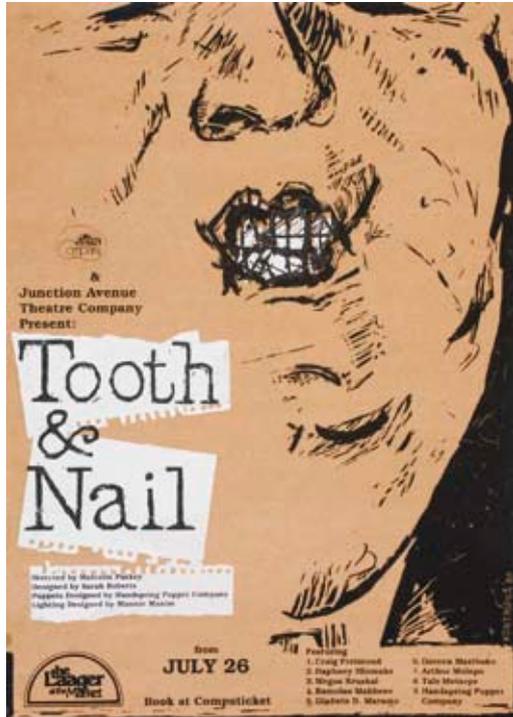
In 1988, Handspring was invited to join a workshop with the Junction Avenue Theatre Company based in Johannesburg. After many years of groundbreaking, politically engaged work in South Africa that had earned Junction Avenue widespread respect, their latest project *Sophiatown*, an a capella musical about the destruction of the legendary 'mixed' Johannesburg suburb of the same name, had been a huge success. In the mid eighties, the period of South Africa's deepest isolation, their triumphant tours overseas (which had followed repeated sell-out runs at home), brought back stories of the new performance they had seen on the international festival circuit, a lot of it physical theatre. Tadeusz Kantor always received a special mention. With their new project, they wanted to bring some of this experimental energy home.

The workshops for the piece, later titled *Tooth and Nail*, took place two nights a week in the studios of the Drama Department at the University of the Witwatersrand. A group of twenty actors, writers, a photographer, a designer and ourselves, met voluntarily for just on a year before the production went into rehearsal. Improvisations, physical exercises, singing and confessional storytelling were the substance of the sessions exploring the question, 'What kind of madness will we find ourselves in if the divisions in our country are not bridged soon?'

In 1987, two years before the Berlin Wall fell and three years before the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, it was impossible to imagine what South Africa would look like should we emerge miraculously on the other side of this dark period. Townships were ungovernable and often in flames, shopping centres had become war zones, some who could, took their money and 'packed for Perth'. The economy, in a state of almost total blockade, was grinding to a halt. The punishment of dissent became ever more brutal. It was a great year in the workshop. There were ideological arguments, but mainly huge enjoyment and excitement and slowly a set of characters emerged: a trade unionist and his interpreter; a mother/sangoma[05] and her revolutionary daughter; a trio of yuppy businessmen. Handspring's involvement in the process was experimental in the sense that we would attempt to place life-sized puppet figures as presences equivalent to two of the actors in the piece.

ABOVE LEFT Poster for *Tooth and Nail*, 1989, designed by William Kentridge.

ABOVE RIGHT Saul the photographer, designed and made by Adrian Kohler, 1989.

OPPOSITE Puppeteer Adrian Kohler with Madam. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1989.

OVERLEAF Madam and Arthur Molepo. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1989.

One of these characters is Saul, a photographer. He reports on the ongoing carnage of the regime, but has always stood by as a recorder of events, never becoming involved, destined only to tell the story. When envisaged as a puppet, he had a camera where his right hand aught to be, his body a skeletal wooden framework, and his head looking singed. Behind the figure was its manipulator, directly controlling its head with his head, its arms with Bunraku elbow controls, and its feet with controls attached to his own feet. The weight of the figure was supported by a harness belt attached to the waist of the manipulator.

The second character is the opera-loving Madam who lives in a mansion with her opera-loving servant, Angelo. When they are forced to flee, Angelo pushes her in a wheelbarrow. Angelo was played by a live actor (Arthur Molepo) while Madam came to be represented visually in several different ways.

TOP Puppet Saul with Basil Jones in the Junction Avenue Theatre production of *Tooth and Nail*, 1989.

BOTTOM Saul with Basil Jones, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town, 2009.

Sometimes she was a puppet operated from behind like the photographer. However, because she needed a moving mouth to sing, there was a Bunraku head control, operated from inside the chest by one of the puppeteer's hands. His other hand operated her left arm. Her right arm was therefore worked by Angelo when he was nearby. Sometimes she was just the puppet, un-manipulated like a shop dummy in the wheelbarrow, sometimes just the manipulator without the puppet, dressed in her clothes. Additional puppets included a drunken Noah who materialised in pieces that assembled into a giant figure; some blue spirits; and ghosts.

The style of the piece was collage-like and energetic. Played on a huge ramp that swept up from the stage around two sides of the theatre and out over the heads of the audience, it was dark, funny and passionate in tone. In the final apocalyptic scene, the whole cast, now wearing asbestos gloves soaked in methylated spirits, dipped their hands into a lighted brazier; they then lined the ramp with flaming fists raised as the lights faded.

Initially audiences struggled with the play, though a small cult following developed, returning again and again. In form it was very different to *Sophiatown*. There was no easy story to follow.

A while later a revival, with some re-working, became possible at the Grahamstown Festival. A real opera singer was cast as Madam and the production finally received the acclaim it had worked so hard to achieve.

The chance to help devise a piece with a non-racial, cutting-edge company had been hugely rewarding for Basil and me. Invited in from the margins of the profession, we had plunged into a whole year of heated debate and theatrical risk-taking with a large, committed group. A puppet person stood next to a human actor with no apology, fitting well into the fragmented picture of our society that the piece set out to portray, with the puppet appearing as a mask for a character hiding behind it. As a result of this base-line experiment, we have asked stringent questions about the role of puppets in each subsequent production where they have shared the stage with human actors.

Starbrites!
Workshopped by Barney Simon and performers
Directed by Barney Simon
Produced in 1990

By Februry 1990, Nelson Mandela had been released after twenty-seven years in prison and the mood of optimism sweeping the country was something local artists were exploring. Barney Simon, the artistic director of The Market Theatre in Johannesburg and guru for a whole generation of young actors, approached us to collaborate on a new project that would capture this mood. Those who had worked with him often quoted Barney and his signature workshop process. Those not yet within his realm sought every opportunity to be noticed. Not every actor could deal with the total honesty he demanded whilst working. Many felt too exposed as he delved into their own private perspective on the world. But it was the authenticity of the lives that these improvisations brought into view and which he then shaped, that audiences recognised and that made his body of work iconic in the South African theatre of the seventies and eighties.

ABOVE Poster for *Starbrites!*, 1990, designed by Adrian Kohler.

OVERLEAF Puppet Gertie manipulated by Busi Zokufa and puppet Sally manipulated by Doreen Mazibuko, with Fats Dibeco as The Uncle. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1990.

Most of the work was political but it was always filtered through his humanistic gaze.

Barney had for some years dreamt of starting a laboratory, a place where new work could be formulated and chewed over without a looming opening night to inhibit experimentation. A space was found in a disused flour mill behind the theatre and funding found to modestly employ a group of actors for a couple of weeks at a time. To kick-start the whole process, Barney undertook to lead the first project with something he had never done before, a piece of puppet theatre. The actors he chose were veteran Fats Dibeco and Junction Avenue stalwart, Arthur Molepo; the puppeteers were Handspring. In the spirit of a Mickey Rooney 'let's-all-pull-together-and-make-a-show' movie, there would be a young man from the country who comes to the big city to find his uncle, the musician, and leader of the famous band, The Starbrites. Instead he finds the band has broken up, and his uncle numbing himself with booze. With youth on his side, he rekindles the music in the older man, they search for Aunty Bettie, the band's front singer, and finally the band plays again and all is well with the world.

Barney was about to take a big chance by making a piece with puppets, but he was also covering himself by keeping the two protagonists safely human. In workshopping the piece, Arthur Molepo (who had been cast as the nephew) was sent out into the streets of central Johannesburg, dressed as a young man recently arrived in the big dangerous city. He had to improvise the part of someone who knew nothing about how to get around in order to observe how ordinary people in the street either helped him or tried to take advantage of his inexperience.

For the role of The Uncle, Barney turned directly to Fats Dibeco's own life. A veteran actor from the Dorkay House era,[06] known as 'the professor' for his love of Shakespeare and insistence on his daily newspaper, he nevertheless had often been out of work. At the time of the Lab workshop, he was living in a rented Zozo[07] shack in a Soweto backyard, had pawned his mattress and downgraded to opened-out cardboard boxes for a crude palliasse, and had resorted to selling ladies lingerie door-to-door when no acting work was forthcoming. He had also been known to enjoy a good tipple. All these elements found their way into the play. In the last years of his life, all of these circumstances changed when he became a household name on TV.

OPPOSITE Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of Aunty Bettie, lead singer of The Starbrites (new puppet for the revival tour, 1991).

ABOVE Adrian Kohler, Barney Simon and Basil Jones with the original Aunty Bettie, 1990.

RIGHT Dancing petticoats by Adrian Kohler from the dream sequence of *Starbrites!*.

Our role was to create The Uncle's Soweto neighbourhood. Our sphere included the ghost of his grandmother, disgusted with him for giving up on life; some neighbourhood cats who fight over the chicken bones he throws out; lingerie customers; the neighbourhood gossips; people outside in the street; and a minibus taxi arriving from the countryside out of which steps a small puppet version of The Nephew. This meant designing a space that combined the human and puppet areas, allowing them to operate in sympathy with one another.

ABOVE Arthur Molepo and Fats Dibeco with puppet Aunty Bettie manipulated by Busi Zokufa and Adrian Kohler. Set designed by Adrian Kohler. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1990.

LEFT Costume sketch for Aunty Bettie by Adrian Kohler, 1991.

The shack had a floor raised by two fairly large steps from the stage floor. A portion of the shack's back wall was cut away behind the bed to reveal a space overhead where rod figures and humans could be seen together. The manipulators in a pit behind the wall would not be seen; only their puppets were visible. Later Aunty Bettie would appear downstage at the bottom of the steps, as a life-sized Bunraku figure with three visible manipulators. Here Barney asked for the manipulators to wear full Bunraku black costumes complete with face veils. This was the first and last time we ever used veils. In Japan the manipulators don't speak for their figures. However Busi Zokufa spoke and sang for Aunty Bettie, and discovered the practical difficulties involved. The veil means that the manipulator is constantly getting a mouthful of gauze. For us, gauzed or not, manipulators dressed in Bunraku blacks are problematic. They are a presence, however much they symbolise an absence. They require an explanation. Our decision has been that manipulators need to wear a costume if they are visible in a show. What they wear is integral to the conception of the piece. It is a decision that needs to be made early on in a process, and it lets an audience know who these people are. They are outside the story but they have a reason to be there.

Working with Barney was a lesson in brinkmanship. The process remained fluid for a long time because he wanted the story to come out of the work. He repeatedly said that he could easily write everything himself but then it would be based on what he knew, whereas what he was most interested in were the surprises that emerged by chance. This was very testing because puppets take time to make. Their theatrical potential takes even longer to comprehend. Some of the figures were very hastily put together, like a life-sized girlfriend for the nephew, manipulated in bed partly by Arthur himself.

Starbrites! was green-lighted by The Market Theatre and went on to introduce a large audience to a popular piece of theatre with puppets. A warm, funny piece, it had a capacity run in the upstairs theatre for eleven weeks.

Woyzeck on the Highveld
**Based on the playtext *Woyzeck* by Georg Büchner
Directed by William Kentridge
Produced in 1992 and 2008**
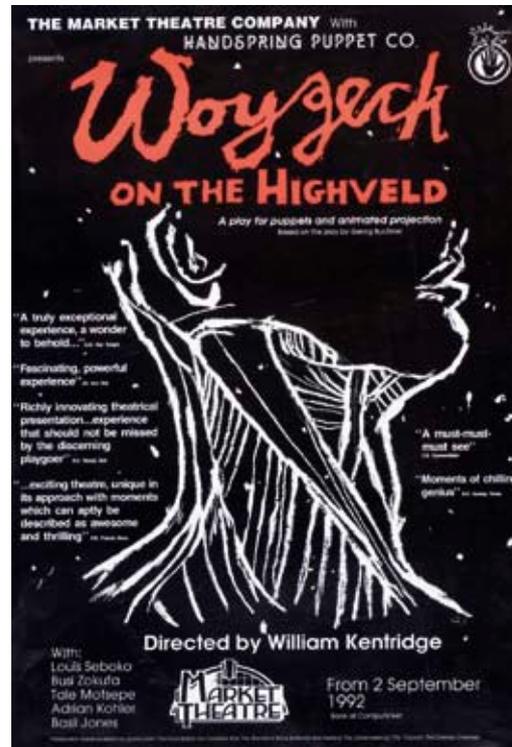
Why did we want to do this play, Sydney Kentridge, the renowned lawyer[08] asked when he heard we were about to embark on a production of *Woyzeck*. Clearly, by the way he asked the question, he could see several reasons not to touch it. We had met his son William through the Junction Avenue Theatre Company, arguably the most daring and experimental independent theatre collective working in South Africa in the seventies and eighties. He was a longstanding member of the company and had studied at the École Jacques Lecoque in Paris, but in recent years had moved from performing to directing. Kentridge is perhaps the best-known contemporary visual artist in South Africa and has a substantial international following. He has become a master of many diverse media, particularly his signature medium of projected animation films, out of which the idiom he calls 'drawings for projection' has emerged.

In 1991, when still at the beginning of this body of work, he began looking laterally at other possible applications of the technique. Could these moving drawings tackle theatrical space? Could they combine with live performance? The drawings for projection are created by attaching a large sheet of paper to the wall, erasing and redrawing while recording the developing charcoal drawing with a stop-frame movie camera. By the time William began talking of a collaboration with Handspring, he had already produced a series of short six- or seven-minute films. Shunning the prescription of a movie script but retaining other classic elements of film – editing, sound effects and dedicated new musical compositions – the drawings evolve around a series of related images that, through the technology of film, have a distinctive created life. Each sequence dissolves into the next, and an arc of events is generated from out of the drawings, which in turn becomes a filmic narrative of sorts. Thus, in long shot, the movement of a crowd across the landscape is achieved by progressively adding figures in the front of a procession, and then subtracting some at the back by rubbing them out. A bird flying or a piece of newspaper blowing across the sky moves in a similar way, leaving a poignant 'ghost' trail of the erased charcoal embedded in the paper. However, any animation of a figure in close-up requires a huge amount of drawing and rubbing out to create a fairly simple result. A head turning left to right means all the features of the face have to be redrawn many times as it moves, leaving a residue of charcoal too heavy for the eraser to shift. Perhaps the puppet could be this foreground, Kentridge puzzled. Being

already a 'distilled' representation, the puppet might be aesthetically compatible with the animated drawing.

Initially *Woyzeck*, Georg Büchner's proto-modernist classic play, was to be a reference, a kicking-off point for this experiment with puppet figures and animated film. Harry, a homeless person living in the neighbourhood, who had acted in a live-action film made some time before by William, was to be the central character. Scenes were to evolve organically around events that could be joined by the magical ability of film to dissolve from one moment to the next. But projects require funding and funders require deadlines and an opening date at the National Arts Festival materialised. The writing of the story would have to be fast-tracked. Without a script with which to proceed, we put our trust in Büchner. Johannes Woyzeck, the lowly German soldier of the early nineteenth century, became mine-worker Harry Woyzeck, living from hand-to-mouth in the industrialised landscape of twentieth-century Johannesburg.

William began asking many questions about the puppet options. What forms were possible? Rod figures worked from below, string figures from above, was that it? And what about shadow figures? Could any of these combine in the same performance? Where would the operators be? What was the optimum scale? How could we design a performance space so that puppet figure and animation film could work well together? Were there types of puppet work that we hadn't attempted up to now? The questions in themselves were exhilarating. In addition, not since *Easter Rising* had we made a piece for an adult audience where

Woyzeck with his thoughts. Puppet by Adrian Kohler, animation by William Kentridge.

all the characters were to be portrayed by puppets. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had in the end used a clean division between the fairies and the humans. *Tooth and Nail* had experimented with life-sized puppets as equals to the actors who made up the bulk of the cast. In *Starbrites!*, puppets of varying scales portrayed all the characters apart from the two main protagonists. In each case, the weight of the piece was carried by the actors, with the puppet figures providing an exotic, 'colourful' setting. We were keen to further test the puppet in the centre of a piece. Could the puppet figures handle infidelity, madness and murder? Could they communicate existential chaos?

William wanted to explore shadow figures. They would work well combined with projection. He brought specific creative questions to the project, as did Basil and I. We were particularly interested in working with close-controlled rod figures on the scale of the Japanese Bunraku. I also wanted to work in wood. Not since *Easter Rising* had I made wooden carved figures. Now that the puppets would inhabit their own world and not have to compete with or complement the world of the human actors, the scale could be the one most appropriate to them. We were selecting projects based on what it was that we wanted to explore within our own creative endeavour.
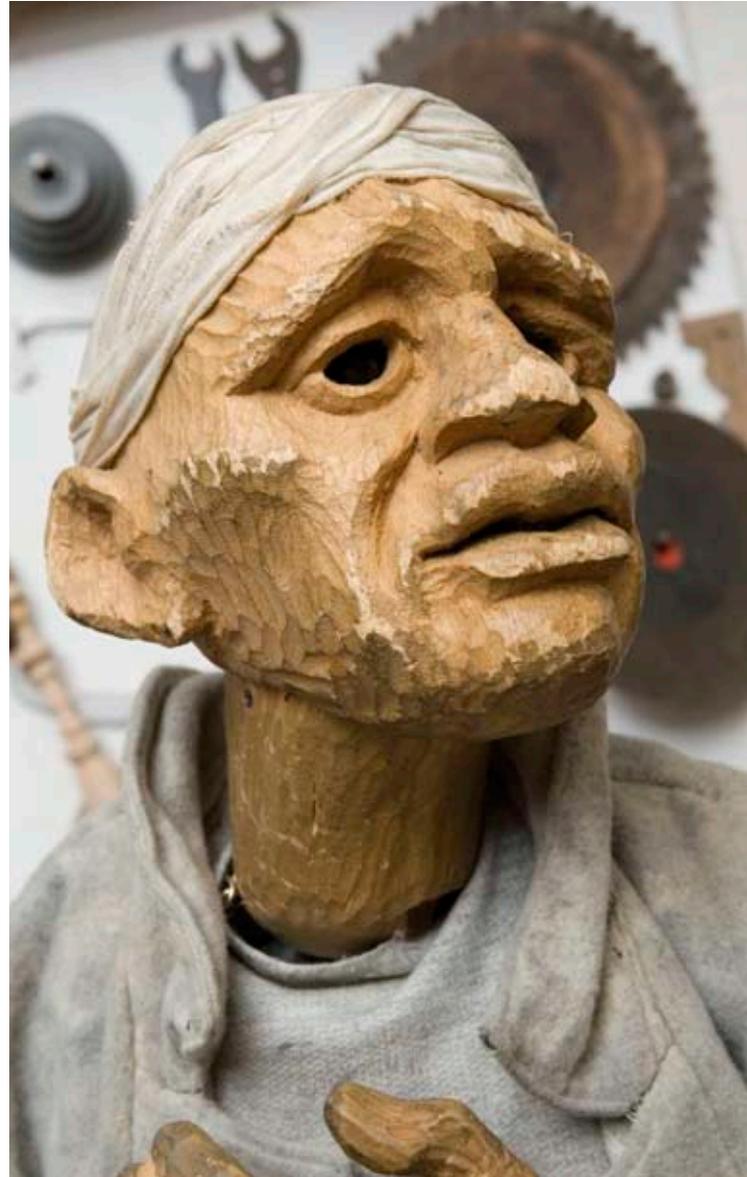
The single biggest practical consideration with wood is weight. The scale would be determined by the amount of weight a puppeteer could hold above his head for any length of time. For authentic texture we scoured rubbish dumps, looking for objects that would flesh out Woyzeck's world. We seized on anything that seemed to fit into his meagre existence: old bits of iron studded with bolts, pieces of wood that had served their time in a factory, a little, battered zinc bath. Carver of birds, Francois Viljoen, who built the sets for *Spider's Place*, joined me making puppets in the workshop.

....
ABOVE Shadow figures and projection. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008.
....
RIGHT Woyzeck by Adrian Kohler, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

FRONT ELEVATION FOR BASE SCENIC PAINTING.

DO NOT WORRY ABOUT THE ITEMS OF "SET DRESSING" SUCH AS PIPES & LAMPS AS EXPLAINED IN LETTER.

The 'huts' of various sizes which are stuck on various flats will be provided by Handspring.
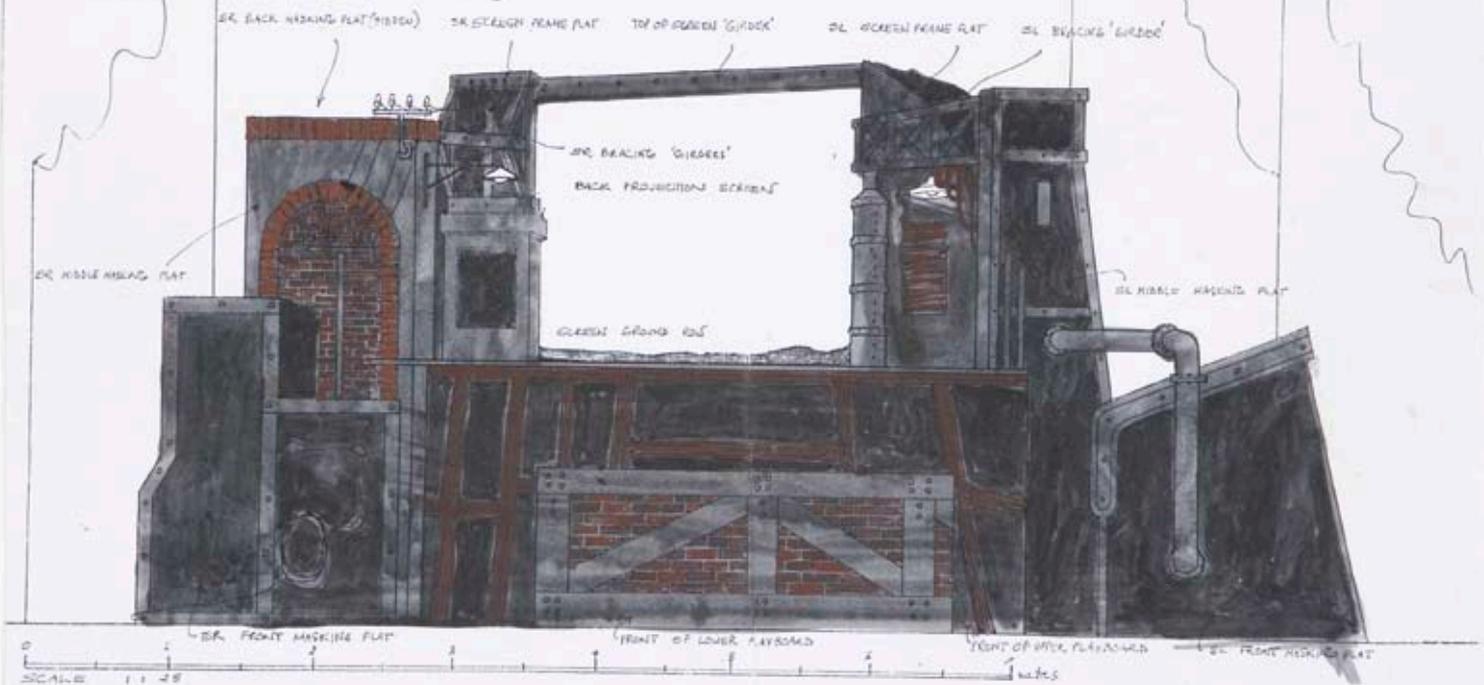
WOYZECK ON THE HIGHVELD

The performance space that evolved had four areas: a waist-high, table-top area downstage, where more intimate, domestic scenes would take place; an upper-playboard area where figures could be worked overhead so that interaction with the projection screen would not be complicated by the presence of the manipulator; the projection screen itself; and the area behind it where shadow figures could be manipulated. The style of the puppets was largely determined by William. He needed a carving style that matched the expressionist gestures of his charcoal drawn landscapes. So he provided some designs, sometimes sourced from photographers like August Sander for The Doctor, and David Goldblatt for Andries, sometimes from his own drawings of Harry done over the previous years, for the head of Woyzeck.

Various woodcarvers whose work I had seen, from Mali to Bavaria, had one thing in common. They were able to leave the mark of the chisel as part of their carving technique. I had studied art during the minimalist era, when techniques of representation were out of fashion and so my carving was self-taught. The smaller wooden puppets I had made in the past had been highly finished with any hint of the cut of the chisel sandpapered away, and then the wood painted. I had wanted to make rougher carvings but didn't know how, particularly on a small scale. Go too rough and you lose your way with the character you are trying to achieve. The heads were to be bigger than any I'd carved before, so it simply became a question of diving in. Over my shoulder, William was saying, 'Make them rougher!'

Colour-reference set drawing by Adrian Kohler, 1992.

With an opening date at the National Arts Festival set for July 1992, the exhilarating period of making all too soon gave way to rehearsals. Here we were shocked to realise what it meant to be working in conjunction with an animated film. Instead of the focused character work we were used to, from the beginning we seemed to be rehearsing links between scenes. The main directorial instructions appeared to be determined by the stopwatch. After repeated testing of timings, the video went off for re-editing, whilst we worked out how to begin the next scene.

At the same time, William was discovering that working with puppets was, in his terms, 'like swimming in a pool filled with rocks'. Puppets manipulated overhead needed hand-rods to be removable for the work done close to the body when the puppets relocated to the lower playboard, a waist-high table behind which puppeteers were visible. The Rhino, designed to work on the tabletop, had controls protruding horizontally from the upstage side and as a result could only perform in one direction.

With a week to go before the move to Grahamstown, Barney Simon wanted to watch a run-through. As Artistic Director of The Market Theatre, the venue where we were heading after the Festival, he was entitled to monitor the progress of a show. Far from ready, the company felt very vulnerable after the rehearsal. Barney asked what we intended to change in the week we had left. He knew the play well and commented that the face we had given Woyzeck was the face of the man at the end of the play. The implication was that the way we were playing him made him too deeply troubled from the beginning and as a result the character had nowhere to go. Conventionally a puppet only has one face.

Opening cold in Grahamstown without previews is a terrifying experience. Establishing coherence whilst trying something completely new for all of us within a precariously short rehearsal period meant that by opening night no one knew whether the show we had made would work. The first night was full, but the applause at the end was subdued. Basil sought out a bar where he hoped not to be recognised. I bumped into Barney who, to his credit asked, 'Doesn't it make you feel sexy to have

made a piece people love?' The production went on to tour for four-and-a-half years. Owing to ongoing interest, the play has recently been resurrected, after a fifteen-year break.

The big revelation of the *Woyzeck* experiment was that the animation screen could play an active part in a stage performance. It need not be a passive background but could assist the audience in reaching into the thoughts of a puppet. Woyzeck sitting alone one night under a star-filled sky is looking out at the audience. The stars begin to shoot across the sky behind him and join into images of the things he is pondering. He hardly moves but the scene is very clear, and we have access to his inner world.

In the longer term we have discovered that this stillness, which allows an audience into the head of a puppet, does not always require a screen. Stillness alone, as a moment between two activities, is informed by what went before and explains what comes afterward. *Woyzeck* pointed to this element of performance that has become one of the basic principles of our puppet work.


Woyzeck on the Highveld premiere, National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, 1992. Woyzeck with puppeteer Louis Seboko.

Faustus in Africa

Adapted from *Faust* parts I and II by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe with additional text by Lesego Rampolokeng
Directed by William Kentridge
Produced in 1995
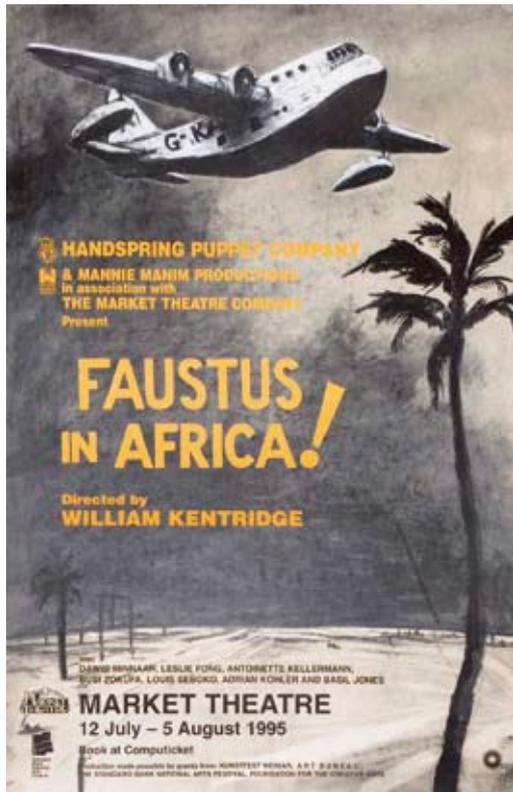
The unexpected recognition given to *Woyzeck on the Highveld* by audiences and festivals, meant that the production was able to tour extensively internationally. What had begun as an experiment now became a commodity. Audiences, newly introduced to this multimedia experience of puppets, video, acting, music and sound, were expecting a sequel.

The longer we performed *Woyzeck*, however, the more risky a new production appeared. Could we do it again? Would the bluff be exposed? Fear has never influenced William's work. We have seen him embrace a new piece of technology with the delight of a kid with a new toy whilst simultaneously mastering its potential to stretch the bounds of what is achievable artistically. So he promptly upped the stakes and proposed, as the successor to *Woyzeck*, Goethe's *Faustus*.

He was suggesting a leap from the taut, proto-modernist minimalism of Büchner to the work of dramatic literature everyone regards as the romantic highpoint of the German Enlightenment. When both parts of Faust are played together it can take longer than seven hours. When performed with every detail and dance lovingly in place at the Steiner Goetheanum, it takes seven days.

Setting the play in Africa, as had been done with *Woyzeck*, we'd need a hook, a context. William's wife Anne joined William, Basil and me on a research trip to Mozambique, where we stayed in adjoining rooms at the top of the newly re-opened Polana Hotel in Maputo. As I was by now discovering, William needed to find something. Some object, some texture, something authentic and unimagined that could spark off a chain of thought and provide a new direction.

Though the civil war still flared in remote parts of the country, the promise of a peace deal was in the air and the capital, Maputo, was remembering that it was once known as Africa's Havana. The city bore testimony to the effects of a protracted struggle since Independence. Crumbling buildings had last seen paint twenty years before. The crowded ferries leaving the harbour for the islands were severely rusted. Some colonial palaces were now partitioned with cardboard, and housed hundreds. But the flamboyant trees were in full bloom, the villas and embassies on the Corniche were being renovated, the market was crowded, the beaches as spectacular as ever and amongst the artists, a spirit of optimism and creativity was clearly evident.

Walking down at the fairground as it was closing one night, we witnessed something totally unexpected. In a dark street up ahead there was a dim light surrounded by a small crowd of people, laughing uproariously. Peering through a gap, we saw that the light was coming from a little, portable shadow puppet theatre. The light source must have been some kind of flame because at the top of the compact structure there was a little smoking chimney. The shadows on the screen were fuzzy and we couldn't understand the

Poster for *Faustus in Africa*, 1995, designed by William Kentridge.

words of the story. The subject however, was clear. Porn. The tiny figures were humping away. A sodomy turn particularly delighted the audience. Porn or not, I haven't seen a portable shadow play anywhere else.

Being in a neighbouring country with its parallel set of colonial relics did give us a perspective on events unfolding in our own context. The negotiations that would finally close the door on Apartheid and pave the way to a constitution and our first elections were in their final stages. Compromises were being struck to break through some of the deadlocks. The promise of a new broom that would sweep the country clean looked like it would be put aside for a while. Perhaps this was the deal Faustus had made with Mephisto? Perhaps Faustus the colonial could be given the continent to play with, as he pleased, in return for his soul. Perhaps he would get away with it.

With this in mind William was up and running, cutting great holes in the Goethe text. During a *Woyzeck* season in Brussels, he had visited the African Museum at Tervuren on the outskirts of the city. Unchanged, and with no recent revisionist assessment, the museum still extolled the 'civilising virtues' of the brutal Belgian colonisation of the Congo. William called it the Tintin Museum. It was to provide an authentic source of the colonial archive he required. Mephisto's headquarters would be a telegraph office, with its electric web connecting him to every remote region. His clerks and receptionists would perform the play in this office.

The South African poet, Lesego Rampolokeng, was invited to fill in all the new gaps in the script, to write in Goethe's style but to tailor the meaning to fit the new scenario. Auerbach's tavern would be in Dar-es-Salaam, Gretchen would be an African nurse, Helen of Troy a seductive colonial siren in thirties bias-cut white satin. The cat in Bulgakov's tribute to Goethe, *The Master and Margarita*, was too delicious a character to be ignored so he/she was borrowed and became Helen's pet, now a cowardly Hyena, a minor devil.

Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler with the unfinished Hyena puppet, 1995. Animation by William Kentridge.

With Faustus carved to look like the Belgian explorer Brazza and with the face of his servant, Johnson (who at the end of the play becomes President) based on Patrice Lumumba, the next question arose – who would play Mephisto? It would be the only part not played by a puppet. Could he be black? What would that say?

After a couple of quiet years whilst we had been away touring, the studio at Handspring was once again buzzing as we built the large cast of new puppets. Francois Viljoen had moved with his family out to the country, so Tau Qwelane, the boyfriend of Busi Zokufa (a core performer and puppeteer in the company) joined me as the new workshop assistant. A whole host of period props, a number of shadow figures plus sixteen two-thirds-life-sized rod puppets were needed. The latter would be carved in the same rough way as the figures in *Woyzeck*. Indeed, we hoped that now we would be able to re-explore and deepen

our understanding of the relationship between the puppet and the animation screen that *Woyzeck* had opened up.

The Hyena would be the one puppet to require new technical developments. Perceived as the clown of the piece, it had to smarm, act duplicitously and play drafts. Its domain would be a waist-high downstage playboard masquerading as an office desk. In essence the playboard demands were the same as for The Rhino in *Woyzeck*, plus The Hyena must play drafts and demonstrate characteristics of personal duplicity. Once again the figure would have its leg controls protruding from the upstage side of the figure. As with The Rhino, it could never turn around on the spot and would always have to enter and exit in the same direction, from stage left to stage right. But the similarities with The Rhino stopped there. A hyena has longer and therefore more articulated legs, plus this one had to smile.

When people play board games there is a moment when a hand hesitates above the pieces before making a move. Both the wrist and the elbow are elements in this hesitation. To play the game convincingly, The Hyena needed this double action. But with only one control string available from behind the figure, only one action could be manipulated. Experimenting on a maquette, I found how this double action could be achieved with one control string, provided that the second action was passively linked to the first action with fixed 'tendons'. With these two tricks up its sleeve, The Hyena was well equipped to charm and smarm, which it never hesitated to do.

Puppets in the theatre rarely need moving facial features because the audience is generally too far away to get the full benefit of these visual extras. From this distance, the language of the body is more articulate than that of the face. But occasionally a moving facial feature can be very effective if it comes as a surprise and is judiciously repeated as a sight gag. For a smile, one needs to see a flash of teeth. A hyena's teeth are very large. The muzzle of The Hyena puppet was to be made of wood and couldn't be retracted up sufficiently to reveal the teeth clearly. The solution lay in setting the teeth loosely in the mouth, pivoting them at the back so that they dropped down and revealed themselves only when the mouth was opened. This gave the appearance that the upper lip was pulling back into a snarling smile. Building up to a point in the scene when The Hyena would confide in the audience, it could then look in their direction, hold the moment and then reveal its teeth in a wily grin. It got a reaction every time.

The leg action developed here was later to be essential in building convincing leg movement for the horses in *War Horse* where, finally, due to the scale of the figures making it possible for the manipulators to control the figures from inside rather than from behind, the puppets no longer had to travel only in one direction, but could turn round as often as they needed.

OPPOSITE Puppets Gretchen, Faustus and Helen of Troy with (left to right) Busi Zokufa, Dawid Minnaar, Adrian Kohler and Antoinette Kellermann. Avignon Theatre Festival, France, July 1996.

ABOVE LEFT Faustus, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

ABOVE RIGHT The Hyena, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

At the first try-out performances of *Faustus* at The Market Theatre, the many elements of the play were still new to us. Perhaps because of this we managed to thoroughly baffle many in those first audiences. One close friend said, 'just give us a clue and we'll follow you.' It is our perception, though, that William prefers his layerings of images and meanings, however seemingly awkward and arcane, to rub against each other. Out of this friction comes his theatrical heat, a different heat to the one produced by a more straightforward narrative. The more we played it, the easier the links became. We were soon back at The Market Theatre, risking the main stage for the first time since *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The first reviews were lukewarm and audiences slow. Then the editor of the *Sunday Times* came to see it, vehemently disagreed with his own sceptical critics, gave us a huge spread that weekend and audiences picked up immediately. Soon we were playing to packed houses and they lasted till the end of the run. *Faustus* then went on many tours, sometimes in tandem with *Woyzeck* as several of the cast performed in both productions.

Louis Seboko, Busi Zokufa, Basil Jones and Dawid Minnaar. Animation by William Kentridge. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1995.

Ubu and the Truth Commission

By Jane Taylor, with source testimony from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Archives
Directed by William Kentridge
Produced in 1996
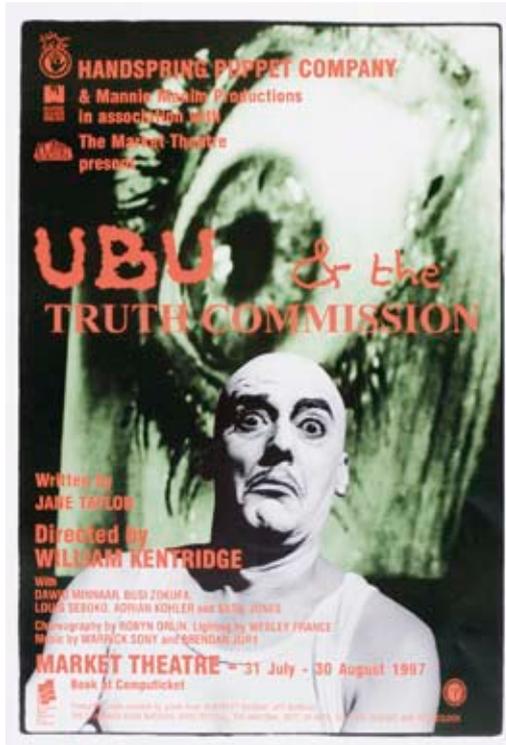
In 1995, after *Faustus in Africa* had played its final performance in Northampton, Massachusetts, the need for a new project once again arose. After the success in South Africa, Europe and the US, of the two adaptations of German classics, (*Woyzeck on the Highveld* and *Faustus in Africa*), producer Thomas Petz of Art Bureau Munich, was very keen for a third work to make up a trilogy. Critics were beginning to ask whether we would be ploughing our way steadily through all the great German plays.

*Waiting for Godot* had been discussed several times but seeing as the Beckett estate repeatedly had refused permission for productions that deviated from the stage directions, (such as an all-female version of the play) they almost certainly would not countenance a version that included puppets and video projections and located the play in a South African landscape.

Southern Africa, however, was itself in a period of waiting. The wars in Mozambique and Angola were finally coming to an end. As stability spread in the region we knew there were many stories that people had waited a long time to tell. A new project was talked of. It had a provisional title, *The Waiting Room*.

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was launched in South Africa, suddenly our own stories of waiting began pouring out. At the time, William was making a series of images that coincided with the centenary of the writing of Alfred Jarry's great absurdist play, *Ubu Roi*. He was also in discussion with South African choreographer Robyn Orlin about a related Ubu dance piece. Jane Taylor was meanwhile curating a series of cultural responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Called *Fault Lines*, the project sought to add artistic interpretations to the legal/judicial processes of the Commission. For one of these initiatives, she approached William and Handspring about making a theatre piece to engage directly with the Commission. At first, an interpretation of Beckett was discussed but this quickly shifted to a consideration of Alfred Jarry. The grim reality of the material from the public hearings seemed, however, an unlikely match for the wild humour of Jarry's plays. Then Jane produced a couple of test dialogue scenes, using the two main characters, Ma and Pa Ubu, but in the completely new context of the Commission hearings. The tone immediately felt right. The *Waiting* piece and the Ubu combined into a bizarre mix of comic horror and harsh tragedy. Our tested form, using puppets and acting with William's animated video, now added the dimensions of dance and documentary. *Ubu and the Truth Commission* would also provide a nod to the literature of France with the potential of opening up a new audience.

We travelled several times to the hearings when they were in the Gauteng region, each time experiencing the intense emotion of witnesses and the compassionate structure of the proceedings. The colonial period in our country had seen a judicial process undermined by the conducting of legal proceedings in the language of the coloniser.

Poster for *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, 1996, designed by The Market Theatre.

Defendants, for whom this was a second or third, or perhaps an unknown language, had experienced the severe eroding of their legal rights over a period of three centuries because of this language barrier. Now for the first time each witness could testify in any of our eleven newly official languages and this in turn was translated by a team in a row of glass booths and broadcast to the audience via headsets that could be tuned to any one of the official languages.

Antjie Krog, who chronicled the TRC proceedings in her book *Country of My Skull*, assisted the *Ubu* project by providing verbatim transcripts of the public hearings, from which Jane worked in constructing the drama. These were by turns serious, tragic or horrific, or a combination of all three and it became the job of the Ubus in the play to leaven these dark and personal accounts with their own brand of absurd, black comedy.

The fact that these stories were so personal raised a dilemma. Could we have an actor learn them and then act someone else's pain? When the structure for the Commission was determined during the pre-election negotiations, one main purpose was the recovery of ordinary histories by everyday South Africans who had suffered under Apartheid. There was a separate amnesty process by which perpetrators of so-called 'political crimes' could apply to have their record cleared of criminal wrongdoing. This double process in effect meant that a cross-referenced archive of crimes began to emerge. The aim was for a process of national reconciliation through the recovery of an oral history. The media played a huge part. Newspapers and television reported daily on developments, and on Sundays there was a televised hour-long summary and analysis of the week's revelations. Through this process, the stories came to belong collectively to the whole country. But still an appropriate method of representing them in the theatre was needed.

Perhaps the puppet figure that strives so hard to live would be best able to recount the stories people had waited so long to tell. Perhaps the Ubu couple, representing the perpetrators, people who had fallen from grace, ought best to be played by humans, who through choice had forsaken their humanity. As the elements came together a web of metaphorical allusions began to form.

ABOVE Busi Zokufa as Ma Ubu, Dawid Minnaar as Pa Ubu, and one of The Witnesses manipulated by Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones.

OPPOSITE Busi Zokufa as Ma Ubu with animated eye by William Kentridge, 1996.
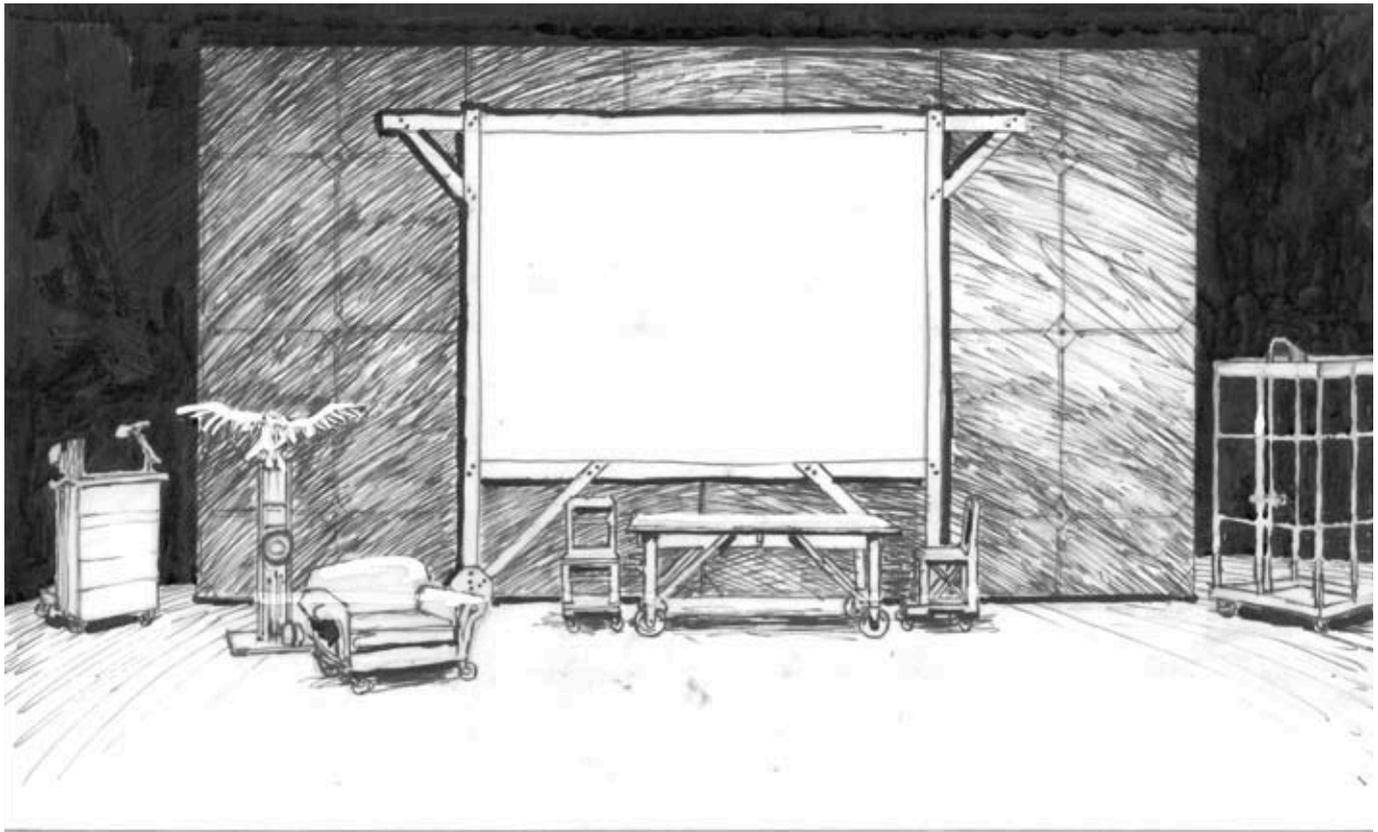
"UBU AND THE TRUTH COMMISSION"

THE ELEMENTS OF THE SET.

2ⁿᵈ DRAFT 30-3-97

THE GLASS SHOWER BOOTH

Here Pa Ubu tried to shower away the memory of the night's evil doings. It doubled as the translators' booth. Using the handheld showerhead as a microphone, a human actor, simulating simultaneous interpretation alongside a victim telling their story, broadcast the translated testimony of the puppet to the world at large.

Each of the Witness puppets had two visible manipulators, one providing the voice. Within the structure of the TRC hearings, provision had been made for the person giving testimony to have a comforter, a relative or friend beside them to offer support should it be necessary. Here the puppeteers echoed this role.

THE BARE STAGE

Save for a canvas wall upstage containing the back projection screen, the play would start with a completely bare stage with no obvious playboard. In all our productions to this point, the puppet playboard had been indispensable. Legless rod puppets need a visual cut-off at roughly knee-height to help ground the figure. The upstage canvas wall represented the lounge of a temporary home, in a military suburb made of tents. It was furnished with outsized table and chairs of brutal wood-and-steel construction plus a big overstuffed armchair covered in khaki canvas that had seen better days. All these, including the shower booth, could be wheeled on and off as needed. In effect, the furniture became a series of moving playboards. The puppet Witnesses appeared from behind the furniture but remained unseen by Ma and Pa Ubu, providing a visual metaphor for the intersection of the two halves of the divided state.

Set-design drawing by Adrian Kohler, 1997.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE THREE PETS

1. The Vulture on its Perch

The idea for this character actually began with a baboon on a pole. In days gone by, on isolated farms, it was common practice to secure a baboon to a platform mounted at the top of a long pole. Baboons have extremely sharp eyesight and can observe unusual movement from a great distance. On the pole it begins to bark, acting as an early warning system. Ubu in his line of work would need an early warning system. But lighting a figure high above the playing area would prove difficult and manipulating it would be problematic. Lowering it would remove the reference and the meaning. Perhaps

then, it could be a mechanical bird operated like a kitchen pedal bin. Ubu could stumble on the pedal and set it off. This would necessitate the plotting of some awkward moves, such as stepping backward onto this pedal. This would be technically tricky and not foolproof.

Peter Schumann of Bread and Puppet Theater has always warned against using figures that are over-complicated. Too often, valuable time is spent on making the figure function at the expense of work on the content of the play. I decided to disregard his warning and make a mechanical vulture with counterweighted body, head and tail, powered by electric motors, with two drive actions – a rocking and an opening and flapping of the wings – to be operated by remote control from the sound desk. The effect of the bird in the Ubu household was as a kind of programmed commentator on the action and emotion of the moment. It had a loudspeaker mounted on its perch and could squawk and rock and flap with the sense of what it was saying being translated as supertitles on the screen. It would then be able to burst into life without the agency of anyone onstage. One-and-a-half metres below its perch was a machine painstakingly designed by Dean Pitman, with wooden drive disks activated by a series of relay switches. It worked perfectly – some of the time – but developed chronic ailments as time went on, when parts wore out, often when we were touring far away from Dean. One night in Norway I found myself doing welding repairs on the machine at the fifteen-minute call, burning holes in the socks of my costume. Peter Schumann was right though. It had become a thief of time.

LEFT Puppeteer Adrian Kohler with The Vulture.

ABOVE The Vulture.

nostril at the side

double row of spines

soft gullet
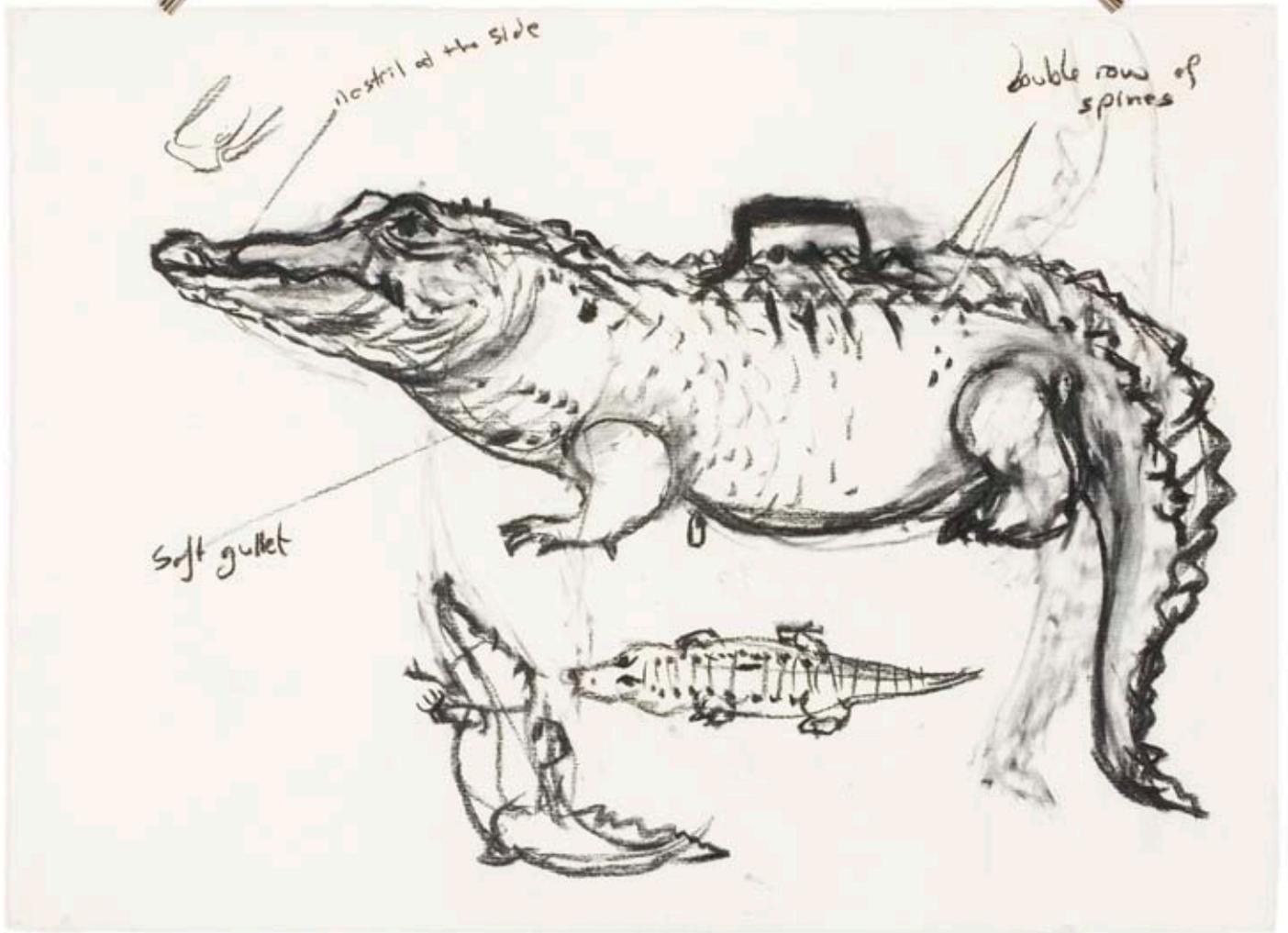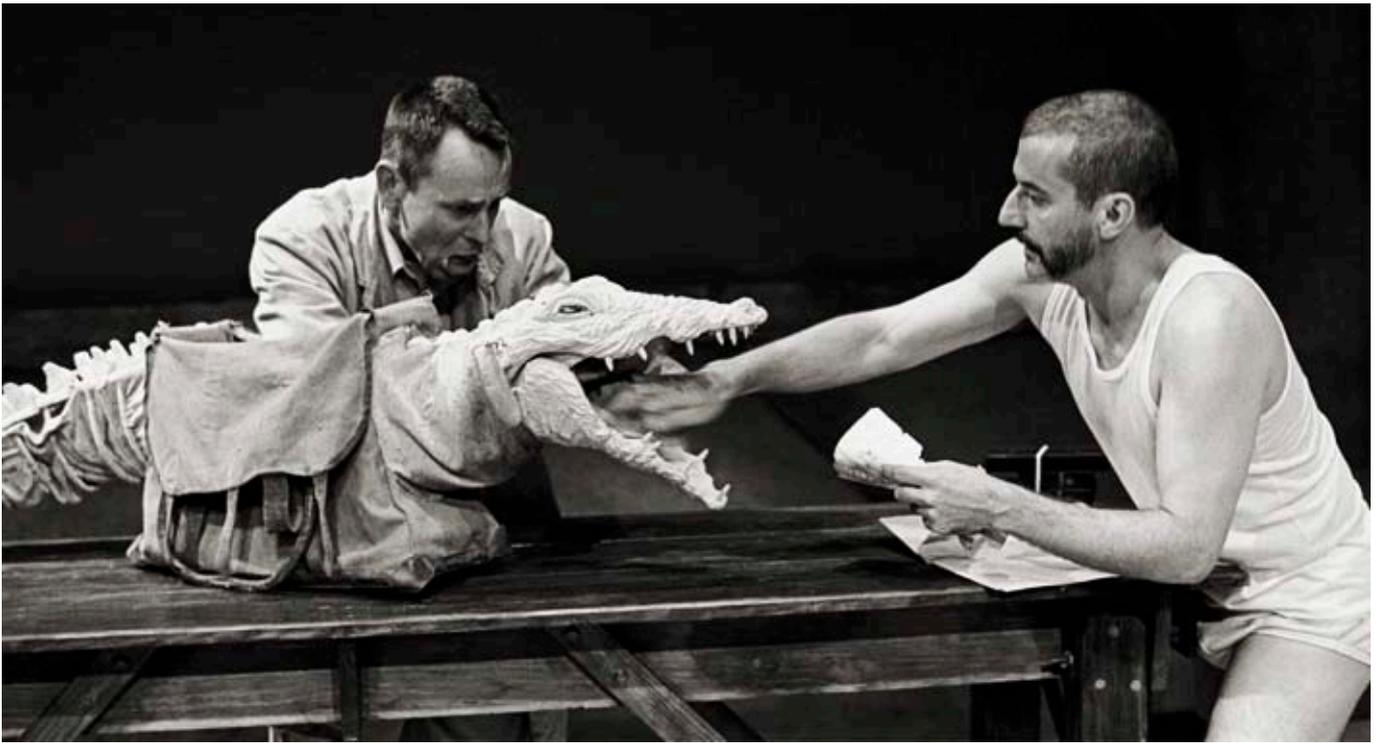
2. Niles, the Crocodile Handbag

This one figure became the solution to three needs of the production. An evidence shredder was necessary for Ubu to destroy documents and other artefacts that might be used to incriminate him, as he had no intention of applying for amnesty. Ma Ubu needed to discover this secret stash of evidence so that she could sell his story to the media. Ma Ubu also needed a handbag. An office shredder was proposed for the evidence, but rejected as too literal and too cumbersome. It was proposed that Ma Ubu get a crocodile handbag. This could be her 'familiar' while also serving as some kind of shredder. At first glance, a bag that was actually a crocodile character was a great idea. The realising of it looked problematic. A head, four legs and a tail would require two manipulators. The space around the handbag would become very crowded. Nevertheless, when stuck with a problem it is sometimes better just to start. I made a heavily jointed tail that could flip in two directions, a head with a gaping jaw, and four short legs that would have claws loosely fitted into holes in the feet. I was working on an idea for the stomach when William saw an old canvas-and-leather army duffel-bag hanging in the studio and thought it would be ideal as the bag, with its military look. It was not available, since it had belonged to Basil's late father during World War II in the desert in North Africa and had tremendous sentimental value. A bargain was struck. William had a battered briefcase also of sentimental value that had been given to his father, Sydney Kentridge by Bram Fischer. His father had, at the time, been a junior member of Fischer's legal team defending Nelson Mandela in the Treason Trial of the early sixties. This briefcase would be forfeited to become Pa Ubu's luggage if Ma Ubu could get the bag from Basil.

Attaching the head and tail of the crocodile to either end of the bag meant it now filled all of the three required functions. As her handbag, it remained un-manipulated when carried about by Ma Ubu with the head and tail flopping passively. As soon as she abandoned it on a table and left the room, it needed only one operator to bring the bag to life. By sliding about on the flat bottom of the bag, the legs were now no longer needed, and with its jaws, it could catch, eat and swallow all the evidence, from shoes to film and videotape, that Pa Ubu could throw at it. It became a character with two faces. The first, Ubu's willing accomplice, would eat up all the evidence and the second, a passive bag, would reveal all to Ma Ubu as soon as its belly was opened.

....
OPPOSITE TOP Design proposal by William Kentridge for Niles the Crocodile, 1996.
....
OPPOSITE BOTTOM Niles, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.
....
ABOVE Niles with Adrian Kohler, and Dawid Minnaar as Ubu. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1997.

Ubu and the Truth Commission, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1997. The Dogs of War puppet with (left to right) Adrian Kohler, Basil Jones and Louis Seboko, and Dawid Minnaar as Pa Ubu.

3. The Dogs of War

At night Pa Ubu goes out to wreak havoc on the enemies of the State under cover of darkness. Every foul method is at his disposal. His accomplices are his Dogs of War. A dog as a rod puppet would need many working parts: four legs, a head with moving jaws, a versatile tail. An early prototype for the dog had interesting features: a large head with jaws made up of two saws joined in profile so that the teeth faced inwards. The tiny legs sticking out of a small box-shaped body, moved back and forward mechanically, operated by a simple lever mechanism. The tail, made out of an Ubu-style toilet brush, had an equally simple action: up and down. Sculpturally it had a pleasing look of brutal collage. Dramatically it was too cute, too lightweight for the job. William sketched a Cerberus dog, with three heads joined to one body. This was the solution. I carved three large, vicious heads with opening jaws – a bull mastiff, a bull terrier and a wolfhound – with elasticised necks that could stretch out eagerly and then retract, and attached these to the body which by now was Bram Fischer's briefcase. The short crocodile legs came in useful here. Minus their claws, and echoing the little legs of the prototype, they were given wheels and attached to the lower sides of the case. Finally the tail was mounted on the end opposite the necks. Under the handle, inside the case, was a mechanism controlling the wagging of the tail. Ubu himself could operate it as he carried the case by means of a lever hidden in the handle. The briefcase end still functioned as a piece of slightly articulated luggage on wheels. It could still snap open to receive the printed orders that dictated the night's targets but at the other end of the creature, the necks could become as vicious as snakes incorporating the singing and barking manipulators as part of the picture of a grotesque killing machine.

ABOVE The Dogs of War with Dawid Minnaar and puppeteers Adrian Kohler, Basil Jones and Louis Seboko. The Market Theatre, 1997.

OPPOSITE Working drawing and notes by Adrian Kohler of the dog lead for the Dogs of War puppet, 1997.

The final category of puppet was purely mechanical. Two articulated microphones mounted on a podium are what Pa Ubu hopes to use to sway the crowd. As he attempts to justify his work, the microphones operated by a hidden manipulator from inside the desk refuse to cooperate.

Ubu and the Truth Commission was the most integrated piece we had been involved in to date. The two larger-than-life characters played by the actors, the stilted text they spoke, the simplified style of the accompanying video which incorporated a lot of stop-frame and live-action cut-out work, The Witnesses speaking from behind the moveable household furniture, the function of the animal puppets in the story and even the outer frame, a code very difficult to get right, all worked for the story. If the manipulators are not dressed in black, signifying that they are 'not there', the costume choice for the puppeteers is a vital one. Here, dressed in khaki dustcoats, they appeared as minor civil servants, meekly oiling the wheels of the State they served.

But it was a harsh tale to tell. As was the case with the high officials of the old order in South Africa, who gave the orders carried out by the Ubus of that regime, Jane Taylor allowed our Ubu to escape from the punishment due to him, albeit in a boat made from a sieve!

At the first try-out of the play, some youths in the audience demanded that if we were indeed to end the play like that, we would have to provide an Ubu effigy in the foyer and hand out sticks with which to beat it.

South African audiences were thrilled by the play but found the painful realities depicted in it hard to take. It was only when the play went abroad that we were able to gauge its universal nature. At the European premiere in Weimar, Germany, a woman from Romania, clearly moved, said she couldn't believe that the piece had not been written about her country. Indeed, wherever we played many people decried the fact that in the aftermath of a conflict in their own history they had allowed the memory of many events to be buried without closure. They too had needed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
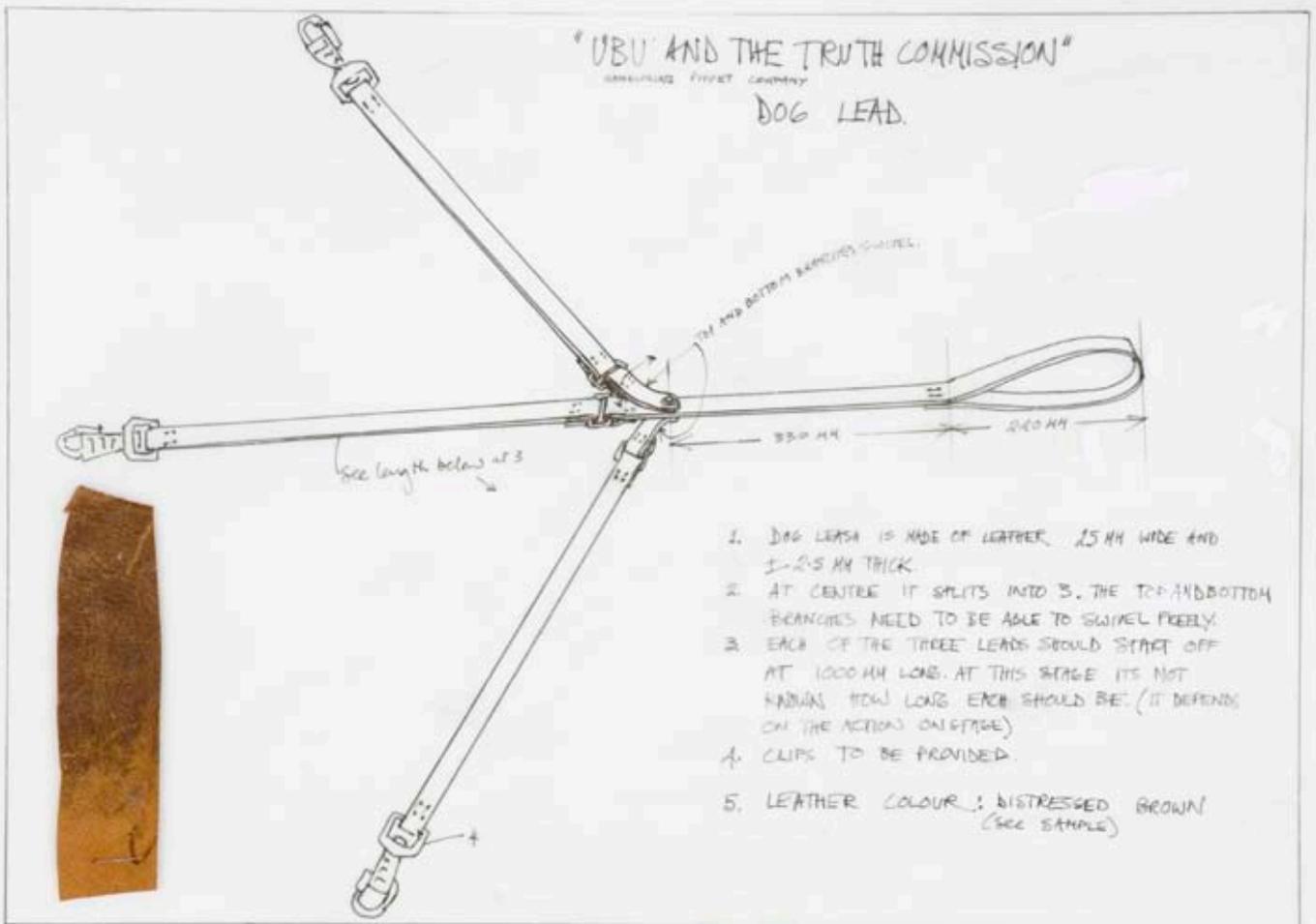
Il Ritorno d'Ulisse

Music by Claudio Monteverdi
Musical direction by Philippe Pierlot
Directed by William Kentridge
Produced in 1998 and 2008
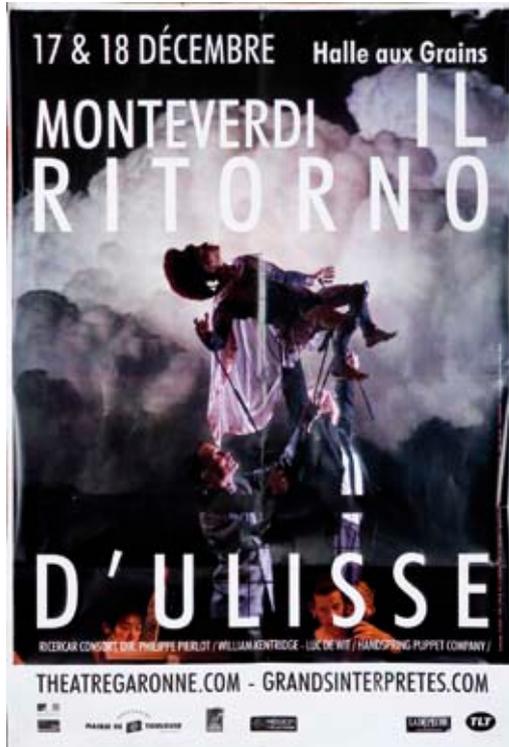
The Importance of Breath

Frie Leysen, formidable director of the KunstenFESTIVALdesArts, the annual international gathering of performing and visual artists in Brussels, had been a big supporter of the work William had made with us. In her own words she 'didn't book productions, but followed the ongoing work of particular artists'. In pursuit of innovative work, she travelled extensively and had been instrumental in giving exposure in Europe to cutting-edge artists from the Middle East, China and further afield. Having booked all three of our pieces, she had clearly demonstrated that William was a firm favourite. Now she encouraged him in a new direction, music theatre. William had long been interested in opera.

LEFT Poster for *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, 2008, with photograph by Johan Jacobs.

BELOW Shadow puppet Telemachus by Adrian Kohler. Animation by William Kentridge, 2008.

OPPOSITE Puppet Ulisse with Basil Jones and singer, Julian Podger. Animation by William Kentridge. Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008.

With the inevitable burden that musicians and singers would place on the budget, however, a partner with the festival and Handspring would be needed. In the world of opera, a piece with animation and puppets could appear risky, could be 'too much tampering'. Frie went to the top, to Bernard Foucroulle, Director of the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, and twisted his arm until he finally came on board.

Finding a work that could be performed with a limited number of singers and musicians was the next task. Monteverdi might be good. A large version of his *Orfeo*, with singers, dancers and singer/dancers, directed by Trisha Brown and René Jacobs, was already scheduled for the same festival. Two Monteverdi productions could create a festival theme. *L'incoronazione di Poppea* was out, having recently been performed at La Monnaie, so *Ulisse* it would be.

Philippe Pierlot, a specialist in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, was identified as the musical director. His ensemble, Ricercar Consort, would play, and together Pierlot and Foucroulle would hire singers who would embrace the principle that, while they did the singing, puppets would be playing the parts.

The Prologue to the opera is a meditation on human frailty and the effects of time on the human body and its ability to love. William wanted to set the piece with reference to the historical context of Monteverdi's composition. Monteverdi wrote the work in 1640, just twelve years after the discovery of the circulation of blood. This discovery had contributed to a new understanding of the human organism. Anatomy theatres were the rage, and members of the public paid to attend dissections performed by eminent surgeons in purpose-built operating theatres. It was within one of these 'theatres' that William wanted to set our piece.

Usually circular with rising wooden tiers looking down on a central area where the body would have been displayed on an operating bed, the theatre was, for our production, cut away into a series of semicircular tiers for the small orchestra of Baroque instruments as well as for some of the puppet action. I topped each wooden panel that made up these tiers with an openwork metal grille at chest height, so that the voices would not be blocked.

For William's video there were new demands. The characteristic soundtrack with atmospherics (such as the wind, explosions or machine noises that usually complimented his charcoal-drawn sequences) could not be used because of the need to retain the integrity of Monteverdi's musical score. Music was now the sound-picture, and the video effectively a silent movie. Synchronising the video to the performance would be tricky. With the music played live, agreed-upon tempi would have to be rigidly adhered to, or the live music performance would effectively become a moving target. There would be a breakdown between the musical performance (with all of the implicit variance which that entails) and the absolutely precise and unvarying digital recording on the videotape.

For the design of the puppets I turned to Greek sculpture and Baroque portraits. What would be the experience in performance? We didn't know what to expect. Perhaps it would be like a normal play, but sung. What we discovered is that in normal plays a lot more happens than in a Monteverdi opera, which is a much more static event.

LEFT William Kentridge directing *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008.

OPPOSITE Ulisse with Sabina Colonna and Romina Lischka of Ricercar Consort. Animation by William Kentridge. Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008.

The manipulators would be visible as usual, the image of each character consisting of three figures: on one side, a puppeteer working the head and a hand; the puppet in the middle; and, on the other side, a singer operating the other hand. Our concern was whether, with music as the substance of the scene, the puppetry would seem merely an add-on, an irrelevance.

Meeting the singers in a wintry warehouse rehearsal space in Brussels was like entering a parallel world. In a play, where the meaning of a scene is explored through blocking, directors generally prefer that lines be learnt only once this has been discovered. In the case of opera, however, the singers know their music and the speed at which it should be sung from day one of rehearsals. The rehearsal period is not so much about 'finding' a performance as adapting it. Singers are a special community. One minute they are normal people having a conversation; the next, they open their throats and the most beautiful music pours out. When these singers laughed, it was with an unworldly resonance, and when they ventured outdoors, it was always with swathes of scarves protecting their throats.

As rehearsals progressed and the puppeteers became more familiar with the music, the clue to how each character's three elements would be joined began to emerge. It was *breath*.

OPPOSITE Ulisse by Adrian Kohler.

ABOVE Romina Basso and Adrian Kohler with puppet Penelope, Luc De Wit with puppet Ulisse, Busi Zokufa (obscured) and Anna Zander with puppet Melanto; background: Giovanna Pessi, Philippe Pierlot, Kaori Uemura, Sabina Colonna, Romina Lischka and Charles-Edouard Fantin of Ricercar Consort. Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008. Animation by William Kentridge.

Breath is the start of any physical movement, providing oxygen to the muscles that must sustain the action. Singers take a breath before launching into a new phrase (and some train for years to make this imperceptible). If the puppet breathed in at the same time as the singer, and then performed the next sung phrase as a slow breathing out, the energy and the impulses of the singer and the puppet could blend. As this realisation dawned on us, the task before each puppeteer became enormous. We would have to know the music intimately, down to each breath of our partners. We would not only have to know the meaning of each Italian line but, since lines are often repeated, we would have to know the emotional effect of each repetition so that this could be visibly performed in the body language of the puppet. In other words, we could not simply be a moving sculpture letting the singers do all the work. We were absolutely in this together.

What happens when a puppet doesn't breathe? Effectively it holds its breath. Without being aware of it, the audience, empathising with the figure (as it must if it is to suspend disbelief) also holds its breath. The tension created becomes uncomfortable. Eventually the audience breathes out and the bond of trust between audience and puppet breaks down. The puppet has demonstrated itself not to be bound by the same physical laws as the viewer. With this breach, part of the life of the figure is lost.

Performing *Ulisse* has always been a pleasure. In the twelve years since it was first toured, it has been revived four times. At each revival we have had the opportunity to go more deeply into Monteverdi's amazing creation. Each time one is astonished anew at how sophisticated is the web of meaning that floats between the music and the libretto.

The conscious understanding of the importance of breath in puppet performance has been the lasting legacy of this opera on all our work since *Ulisse*. Most recently, when we were designing the horses for *War Horse*, one of the first priorities was ensuring visible horse breath.

PREVIOUS Pisandro and Penelope backstage at Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008.

OPPOSITE Adriana Fernandez as Minerva with Kaori Uemura of Ricercar Consort, Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008. Animation by William Kentridge.

ABOVE Romina Basso and Adrian Kohler with puppet Penelope, and Stephan MacLeod and Luc De Wit with puppet Anfinomo; background: Julian Podger and Ricercar Consort. Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008.

The Chimp Project

**Written by Peter Esterhuyzen
Directed by Adrian Kohler and
Kurt Wustman
Produced in 2000**
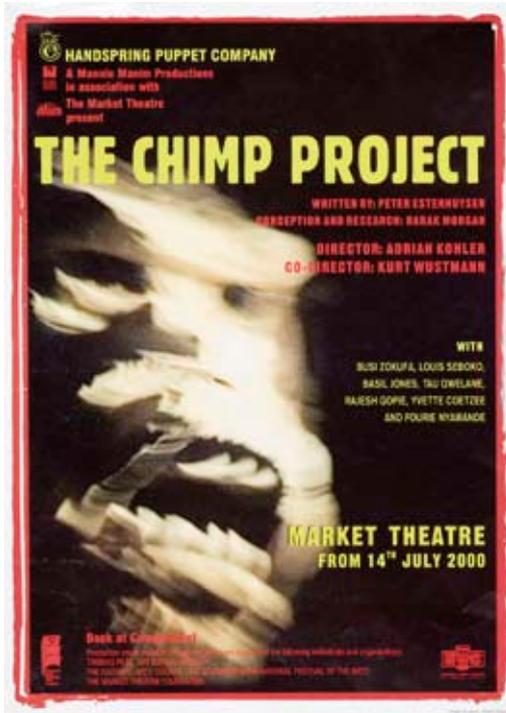
After four internationally successful collaborative Handspring/Kentridge productions, the drive to extend artistic enquiries in new directions triggered fresh ways of making work. We had explored the rod puppet and the shadow figure and their interaction with the video-projected animations. William, anxious not to repeat himself, continually asked to pursue those puppetry areas of interest that we had not yet tackled together. We, on the other hand, felt that there was still a world of exploring to do with the current type of figure and its relation to the screen. From our perspective, it was not so much the form that needed to be renewed, but the demands placed on it. From the inside, from the position of the puppeteer, we were concerned with how much dramatic weight our 'new', optimum scaled rod puppet could bear. In other words, we had arrived at distinct points of our enquiry into

the rules of behaviour of the puppet in a dramatic situation, begun with *Easter Rising* and continued with *Woyzeck.* This was increasingly central to our conception of puppetry.

Moreover, by this point there was also a question of dependency that was both creative and professional. Over the previous ten years, as each production neared the end of its touring life, Handspring members had experienced a rising anxiety about what the next show would be. This was always followed by a great sense of relief and joy when rough ideas coalesced into a project and we were again up and running. Although we generally discussed various options, during this period the choice of what to do next was always determined by William. Each new theatrical piece would become part of a larger body of his artistic work that could include two-dimensional, sculptural and animation pieces. We could begin when he felt ready. But by now a group of puppeteers and technicians was waiting in the wings, ready to explore their own creative impulses.

After four collaborative productions, the Kentridge/Handspring identity had become well recognised. At the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, we were no longer fringe, but mainstream. Festival directors and theatre programmers abroad were interested in our work as a creative team, whilst at home we were seen by other potential theatre-makers as having a partnership that couldn't be interrupted.

Then Peter Esterhuyzen suggested a joint project. He was one of our scriptwriters on *Spider's Place* and had since become one of the head writers on the hugely successful TV series *Yizo Yizo* depicting the gritty world of a modern township highschool. He wanted to branch out into theatre: if we were interested he'd take a stab at it. Perhaps the year 2000 was a time to reflect on issues other than the legacies of Apartheid. When he indicated an interest in chimpanzees, we immediately saw the potential for working with puppets and said yes.

Our producer, Thomas Petz of Art Bureau Munich, had organised funding for both *Faustus in Africa* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* on the understanding that Handspring would keep itself available to tour. Now, in the absence of a new Kentridge piece, he generously offered

ABOVE Poster for *The Chimp Project*, 2000, designed by Basil Jones and The Market Theatre.

OPPOSITE Fourie Nyamande and Busi Zokufa with puppet Lisa. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2000.

to continue funding us on our own, setting a date for the premiere in Hannover, Germany, to coincide with the opening of the Millennium Expo 2000.

As this was not to be a project with William, a new director was needed. I proposed myself. Basil and I had been talking about stepping down from performing. We knew that this moment would come sooner or later. By always being in the performance, one has a limited perspective on how things are developing in the rehearsal. As the puppet-builder, I would always make each figure with a projected range of movement. Still, it would be up to the director to realise this on stage. If not a puppeteer her- or himself, a director is not always aware of the full potential embodied in the puppet figure. Similarly with the sets: when I handed over the design of the physical environment to the director, I was effectively only experiencing that space from within, as a performer. This meant that I was unable to see new ways of using it, nor able effectively to 'tune' the design in order to accommodate developments that arose in rehearsal.

With every new project, I encountered this inside/outside conflict. Because I was within the work, I was unable to play an overall role in defining many elements fundamental to a work's conception. Directing, it seemed to me, would give me an opportunity to explore these dimensions. An added benefit of not having to execute every performance myself would arise in the form of time saved to conceive and produce new projects, whilst allowing existing work a longer performance lifespan. In other words an expanded company would allow a production to tour with one group of players while another work was in development.

At the time, productions were often called to a halt prematurely by the development needs of a next project. The stop-start nature of the work in our studio also meant that no permanent puppet-making team could be established. For our small-scale company, the reality was similar in terms of administration. Basil constantly bore the full weight of running the office both at home and while he was performing on tour, because we shut up Handspring too regularly to keep staff employed in an office and studio that were so often closed.

I had directed the puppets on TV in *Spider's Place*. Perhaps now was the time to direct our own theatre work. Basil agreed to risk it. Regular meetings commenced with Peter and Barak Morgan, a doctor and philosopher who became the project research co-ordinator. A trip to Gombe Stream Chimp Reserve on Lake Tanganyika was planned. Jane Goodall, whose study of chimp troupes at Gombe is now well into its fifth decade, has been the prime mover in creating awareness both of how close wild chimp social behaviour is to that of humans,

and of the dire threat to their habitat posed by human encroachment. A chance to see chimps in the wild would be invaluable. The other part of chimp lore of interest to us concerned chimps in captivity, particularly those in the experiments involving chimps and human sign language in the USA and Japan.

Philosophers are divided between those who see intelligence as something possessed by all creatures, honed to the needs of their environment, and those taking the position that the animal/human intelligence divide is absolute. The work with chimps and the attempts to teach them human language carried out in the sixties and seventies as documented by R.A. and B.T. Gardner and Roger and Deborah Fouts in the United States, amongst others, raised numerous scientific and ethical issues. These began to inform our creative choices. Whilst touring Ubu in the US we were fortunate to meet some of the players in these various studies directly, including Joshua Fouts, Roger's son, who had grown up with a chimp called Washu as his 'sister'.

ABOVE Yvette Coetzee and Basil Jones with puppet Sonya; Louis Seboko and Tau Qwelane with puppet Shadrack. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2000.

OPPOSITE Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of Sonya, 1999.
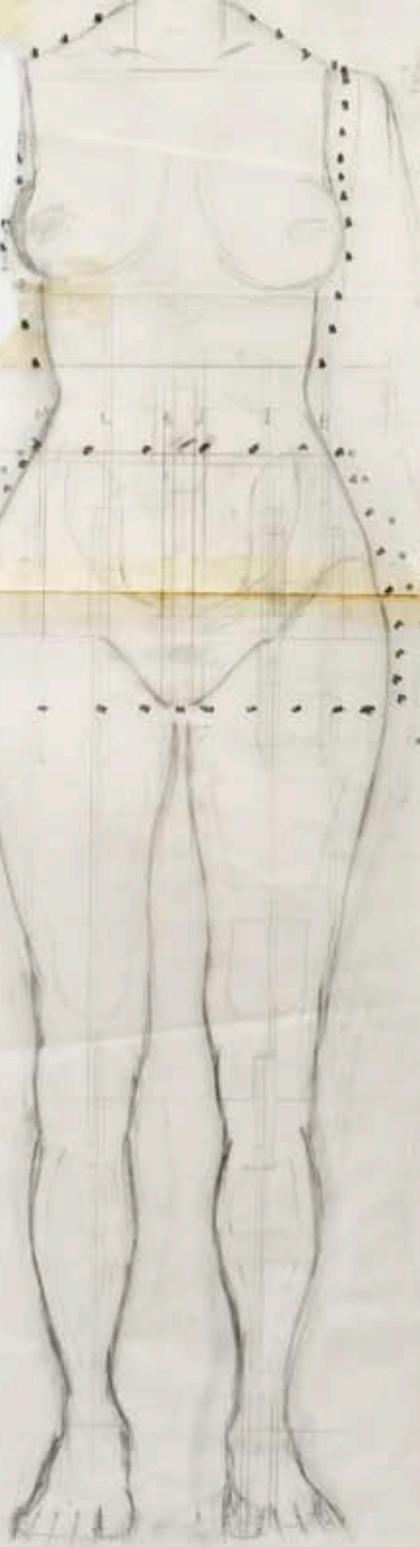
Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of Lisa, 1999.
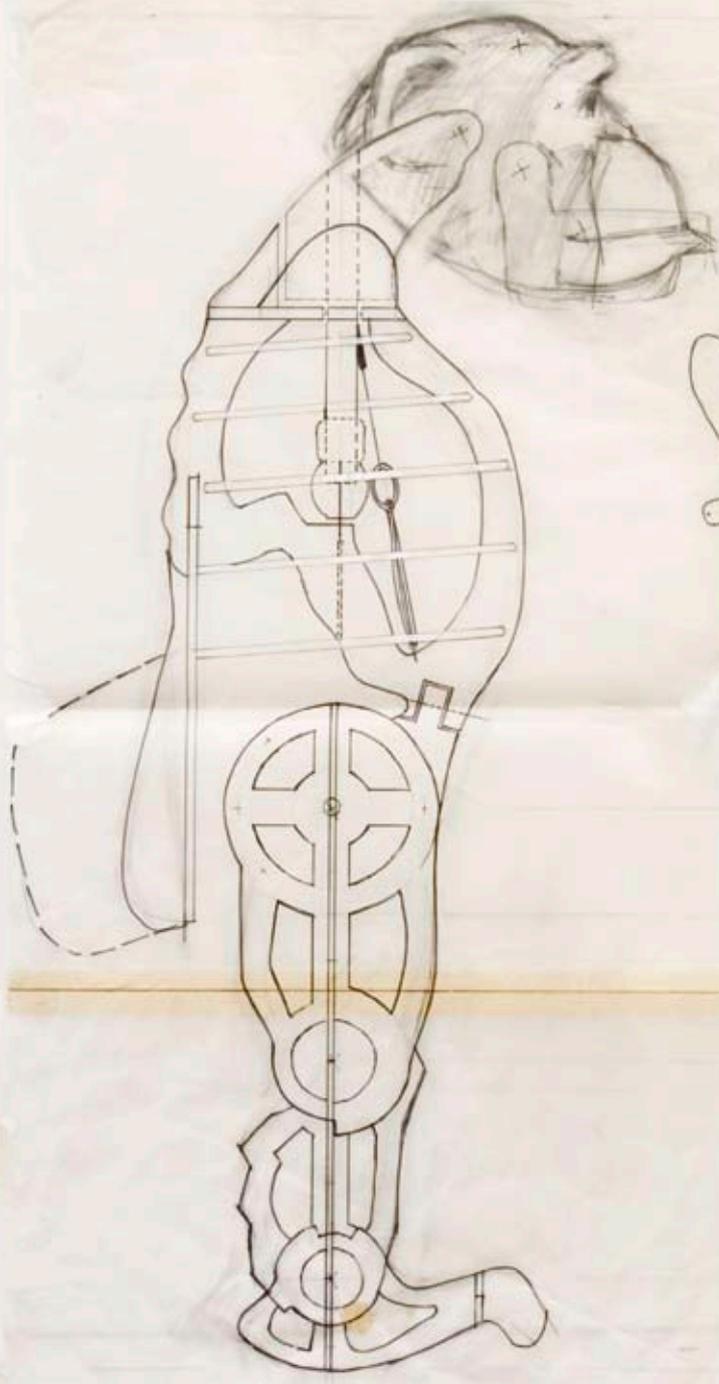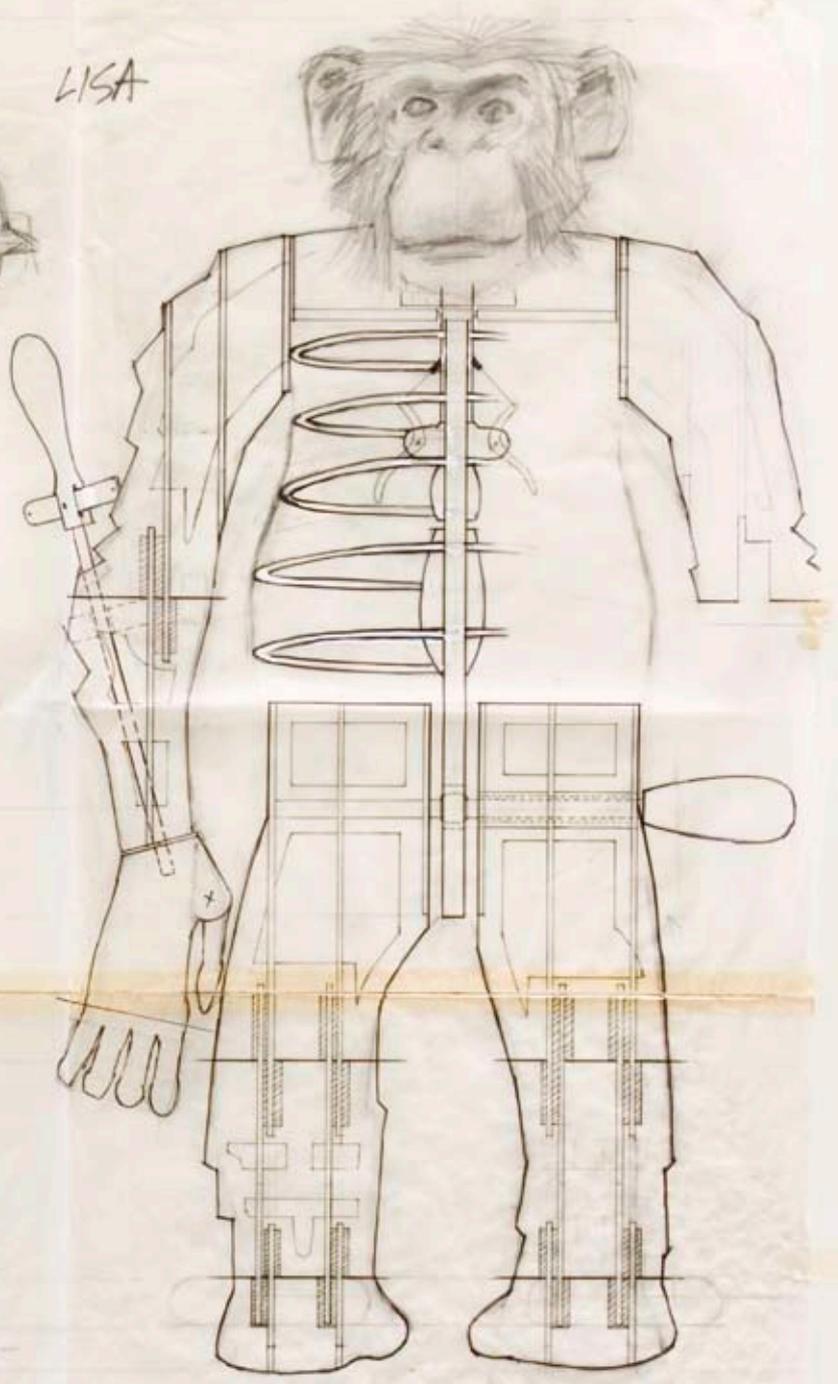
At Gombe Stream National Park, actually being with the chimps made it clear what a daunting task we had set ourselves. These animals are so agile. They can hang from a branch with one hand, ten metres from the ground for twenty minutes plucking fruit and then quickly disappear through the forest. Strength and speed would have to become key elements of the puppets' design. Another puzzle related to their fur. Fur plays a hugely important part in chimp social life where time is measured in the hours spent in mutual grooming, checking for grubs that might be lurking on one another. In display mode the fur can be made to stand on end to make a body look more fearsome. These would all pose serious performance and design challenges.

By now, there was a fair idea of where the storyline of the projected play was heading. A chimp, living inside a community of human language users, on growing into a sexually mature young adult, becomes frustrated and violent, and is sent to a rehab sanctuary in Africa. There she is abducted when wild chimps at-

tack the sanctuary. Inside her new community she teaches human sign language to her wild offspring. At Gombe, meeting the people who had been tracking the lives of these remarkable animals for over forty years, we could ask our important question and get an authoritative answer: 'Under what circumstances would a chimp, raised in a human environment, be allowed to join a wild troupe?' The initial response was, 'Never – any stranger to a troupe would be killed', but probing the issue further it seemed that there was an exception. If that chimp had been captured from the troupe in the first place, it might be remembered. If it were a female in oestrus, then its chances would be even better. This was an important narrative loophole. Our story had been narrowed down to that of a human-raised chimp teaching her human language skills spontaneously to wild chimps. Now we simply had to construct the surrounding circumstances. The demands of scientific research and of the creative aspects of plotline and structure were beginning to come together.

....
ABOVE Basho the alpha male with puppeteer Busi Zokufa, Okasan with puppeteer Basil Jones and Taiji with puppeteer Louis Seboko. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2000.
....
OVERLEAF Basil Jones and Rajesh Gopie with puppet Tadashi, Tau Qwelane with puppet Hamisi and Fourie Nyamande and Busi Zokufa with puppet Lisa. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2000.

The process was both pressured and cumbersome. Peter regularly reported back to us with each new piece of writing so we could monitor its 'puppet-appropriateness'. Then of course there was the looming deadline of the opening in Hannover in 2000.[09] The puppets themselves were a design challenge. Barak gained access for me to the chimp skeletons in the anatomy department of the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School in Johannesburg, and I had some discussions with and advice from Professor Phillip Tobias, the great palaeontologist. Unlike many of the other animals we'd made in the past, the chimps had to have four articulated limbs, which implied at least two and sometimes three manipulators per puppet. They also needed to be both lightweight and strong. Interlocking plywood sections were used for the limbs and bendable nylon rods for the rib cages. The structures were covered with a skin of nylon gauze. This decision ruled out

any attempt to achieve a natural-looking fur, a strategy that had been tried on a prototype and rejected.

Because the hands would need to approximate sign language, they had to be more articulated than usual, yet strong enough for the chimp to use them for locomotion. Several new movements and controls emerged in the process. Baring the teeth would be an unusual performance dimension as it is an important emotional indicator amongst chimps. For this I adapted the opening mouth mechanism of the big fish fairies I had designed for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A new, side-operated leg control meant that although the chimps had four moving limbs, they could still be operated by two people instead of three. The building of the chimps, begun in Johannesburg, continued in Cape Town after Handspring relocated to a new studio in Kalk Bay whilst Peter worked on final drafts of the script in Johannesburg where Nadia Cohen's set was being built.

....
OPPOSITE Okasan by Adrian Kohler.
....
ABOVE Louis Seboko with puppet Taiji and Basil Jones and Busi Zokufa with puppet Okasan. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2000.

During the four projects with William, we had come to believe that a video element was crucial. It had become one of the actors in the cast. How could the puppets think without the screen onto which thoughts were projected? How could we hint at the life of chimps in trees without the instant images and transitions video could give us? Unable to wean ourselves from William's poetic and witty screen world, we enlisted Gerhard Marx to produce an animated visual field. A graduate of the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town, Gerhard is an artist with a strong conceptual leaning, and a keen empathy with puppets. Now he needed to acquaint himself with basic video animation using the resources of the art school at Pretoria Technikon where he was teaching.

Film-maker Debbie May joined us in Cape Town from London, to film shadow-puppet sequences. She also drew on her past experience with stop-frame animation. Warrick Sony composed an atmospheric palette of music and sounds which would later become the score. Finally, Kurt Wustman came on board as assistant director. Our intention was that he would take over performing when Basil felt the time was right to bow out.

In April, back in Johannesburg, a three-week training period commenced to acquaint the new company members with the demands the chimps would be making on them. This included some basic Tai Chi lessons because Tadashi, the leader of the chimp sanctuary in the play, was a Tai Chi practitioner. We also had South African sign language lessons. After-hours, I continued working with Debbie and Gerhard on the video links.

If this is a moment to soul search, the 'do-everything-yourself' way of running a puppet company still remained the way I approached each new project. The use of the minimum number of personnel had always been a matter of economic necessity and I have often fooled myself into thinking that this one-man-band approach was a virtue. So here I was, besides intending to direct seven performers, taking on the role of puppet designer, chief puppet-maker and costume designer. At least I wasn't doing the set, but as the training came to an end and rehearsals began, each of

TOP Tadashi and Sonya. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2000.

BOTTOM Tadashi by Adrian Kohler, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

my other departments started to make their usual demands. It dawned on me that I was way out of my depth in my role as director. I didn't know how to flesh out a scene through improvisation and I found it very difficult to 'muster the troops'. Slowly, without talking about it, Kurt and I exchanged roles.

Part of the difficulty was that *The Chimp Project* was a 'devised' piece. The great South African director, Barney Simon, with whom we had worked on *Starbrites!,* had been the master of the devised piece. He was able, in fact he loved, to marshal the creative input of a group of people. Through his unique filter and his director's perspective, many voices became one. By contrast, our many authors struggled to harmonise, probably because I had not marshalled them sufficiently. Though he had not been there at the start, and therefore not as close to the process as I had been, Kurt had the know-how to make things work in the theatre.

After a try-out in Johannesburg to a packed and highly critical audience keen to see how we managed without William, the show transferred to Germany for its premiere and a small European tour, before returning to tour in South Africa. The responses to the play were many and varied. The comment that makes the heart of a puppeteer sink faster than any other is, 'we thought the puppets were marvellous'. This implies that everything else wasn't. Advice flew in from every quarter. More often than not, there was harsh comparison to the four previous productions with Kentridge. Trying to alter the piece whilst on tour proved to be very difficult. To a degree, one has to lie in the bed one has made. A cast and crew can't adapt to too many alterations on the hoof. At some point they lose heart.

However there was one ray of light. Peter Brook was attending the same festival in Hannover with his production of *The Suit*. He came to see *The Chimp Project* shortly after the premiere and loved it. He loved the issues of language that the play raised and felt that while watching it you were witness to the very beginnings of human language itself. He agreed that there were some difficulties but that these were minor and he continued to encourage us to rework and repeat the piece. This is beginning to look more likely.

Zeno at 4 am / Confessions of Zeno

Libretto by Jane Taylor, based on the novel by Italo Svevo
Music by Kevin Volans
Directed by William Kentridge
Produced in 2000
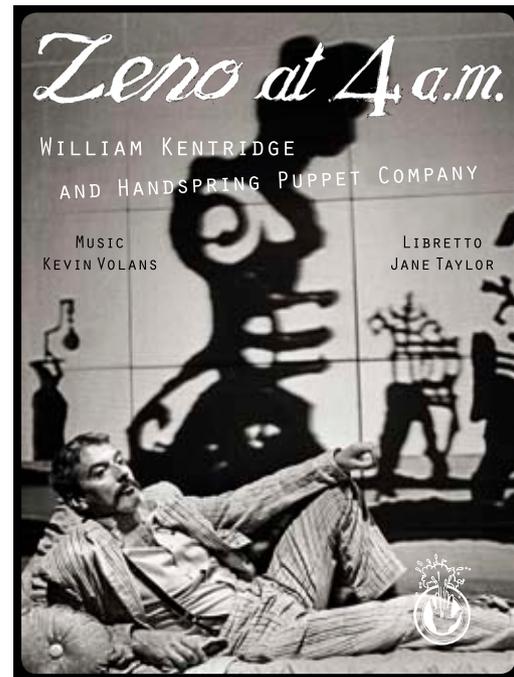
William Kentridge contacted us in Cape Town shortly after we had returned from the final *Chimp Project* tour, with the proposal that we make a short shadow-puppet film to accompany a piece of music theatre he was devising with Jane Taylor and Kevin Volans. It was based on Italo Svevo's humorous novel about Zeno's need to give up smoking and his mistress.

A first workshop was held at The Dance Factory in Johannesburg. Live performers initially included an actor playing Zeno, three soloists, a chorus and some musicians. The shadow film we were due to make was to accompany the music, which the live chorus would sing during a dream sequence.

In the back corner of the stage, we set up a three-dimensional landscape with live video feed projected onto a large screen behind the downstage performing area. Being 'live', we'd be able to test and modify the look of the film while we were in the same room as the chorus.

Before the workshop, William, Tau Qwelane and I had prepared a number of shadow puppets and some large body-extension backpacks, which could turn the puppeteers into large shadow puppets. It wasn't long before it became evident that the strange little film set upstage, with Handspring manipulators interweaving in a complex side-on manipulation-dance, was an astonishing visual event, much more interesting in fact than watching a chorus sing. At the same time, the audience was witnessing the live-feed of the shadow puppet movements as a kind of animated shadow film on the screen up-stage. The shadow event was strangely surprising, especially when compared with the scene of the manipulators who were making the shadows move. So the tables were turned. Now the chorus would be recorded, and the shadow puppets entered into the project as a live component.

The appearance on the market of small, inexpensive digital video cameras had made live video an affordable special effect in the theatre. Robin Orlin, South Africa's arch-deconstructor of dance (with whom we had worked on *Ubu*) had used it very effectively as a finale to a recent piece when some of her demented performers had finally fled the stage and then left the theatre. The audience was able to follow them running away down the street outside The Market Theatre with the aid of live video. These cameras have a remarkable depth of field for their size and when utilised to film our silhouettes in a landscape, suddenly real depth and perspective with shadows became possible. Close to the camera, the silhouettes could be huge, in the distance, appropriately small, and both were in focus. With this camera and a video projector, shadow puppetry was getting an unexpected shot in the arm though perhaps, truly speaking, it was silhouette theatre. What the camera filmed was black cardboard silhouette figures viewed against a lit cyclorama.

....
OPPOSITE *Confessions of Zeno* rehearsal, The Dance Factory, Johannesburg, 2002. Dawid Minnaar with shadow puppets designed by William Kentridge and made by Adrian Kohler and Tau Qwelane.
....
ABOVE *Confessions of Zeno* rehearsal, The Dance Factory, Johannesburg, 2002. Lwazi Ncube, Otto Maidi and Dawid Minnaar. Animation by William Kentridge.

Gradually this miniature 'film set' expanded in versatility, and included scrolling acetate with drawn landscapes that constantly changed as the silhouette figures promenaded. Locations could change instantly by sliding in backdrops, as in a toy theatre, and finally, because we were using a video projector, pre-recorded animation and archival film of World War I could be interspersed during the performance, controlled from the lighting booth.

The traditional transforming shadow figure – which has two different images built at ninety degrees to one another on a central rod that, when turned through ninety degrees, changes from one image to the next – became extremely useful in this context. A figure seen first in profile could enter the scene, turn into something else and then walk forwards getting bigger and bigger until it filled the screen. This all captured the strange surreal quality of dreams. A set of three-dimensional articulated chairs with see-through Perspex rods could dance and fly around each other. Trees growing in a desolate landscape could slowly turn and walk off as people with the branches still growing out of their heads.

PREVIOUS *Confessions of Zeno* rehearsal, The Dance Factory, Johannesburg, 2002. Adrian Kohler, Otto Maidi, Fourie Nyamande, Dawid Minnaar, Basil Jones, Tau Qwelane and Busi Zokufa. Puppets designed by William Kentridge and made by Adrian Kohler and Tau Qwelane.

ABOVE *Confessions of Zeno* rehearsal, The Dance Factory, Johannesburg, 2002. Dawid Minnaar and shadow puppets.

The music of Kevin Volans, whilst being part of a movement that calls itself 'The New Simplicity', is notoriously difficult to play. Kevin wanted to work with The Duke Quartet who had performed his work in the past. They performed the tour of the short work, *Zeno at 4 am*. However, when we reworked the piece into *Confessions of Zeno*, Basil as producer was all too aware what an imported string quartet would cost for an extended tour and set about looking for a local quartet with the competence to perform the demanding score. With the help of Michael Tuffin of the UCT School of Music, he identified four young musicians. After a lot of work on their part and a four-day tutored audition, Kevin embraced the task of tutoring them musically and Sontonga Quartet was born. After their time with *Zeno* they developed an extensive career of their own, specialising in contemporary classical music.

The project known as *Zeno at 4 am* was meant to be a short experimental exercise. Its dramatic design took us all by surprise. It didn't look like a stage set at all. Taking up a large part of the stage was a big back-projection screen, hung from the flies and made up of sheets of butcher paper taped together, giving the screen a grid-like appearance. The bottom edge of the screen touched the stage but was light, ephemeral and drifted lightly if you walked close-by. In front of it, 'enclosed' by it, was some stage furniture for the human action. Upstage left was the 'movie set' with puppeteers and playboards making the shadow-puppet theatre – which was projected as a 'live' film event on the screen. Downstage left were the quartet with instruments, microphones and music stands.

The fictional space of the story only emerged theatrically once all three of these spaces had been activated, all realms continuing to work in their own separate areas with very little physical cross-fertilisation, each element 'manufactured in the moment' finally blended together only in the imagination of the spectator. The shadow play projected on the screen showed the work going on in the unconscious of Zeno, who was performed by Dawid Minnaar on stage, and the puppet manipulators who were making that shadow

play happen suggested his mind at work. This experiment provided the basic structure of the full-length work that emerged with the re-working of the piece into *Confessions of Zeno*.

Confessions of Zeno rehearsal, The Dance Factory, Johannesburg, 2002. Otto Maidi and shadow puppet.

Tall Horse

Written by Khephra Burns, from the book
Zarafa **by Michael Allin**
Directed by Marthinus Basson
A joint venture between Handspring
Puppet Company and Sogolon Puppet
Troupe of Mali
Produced in 2004
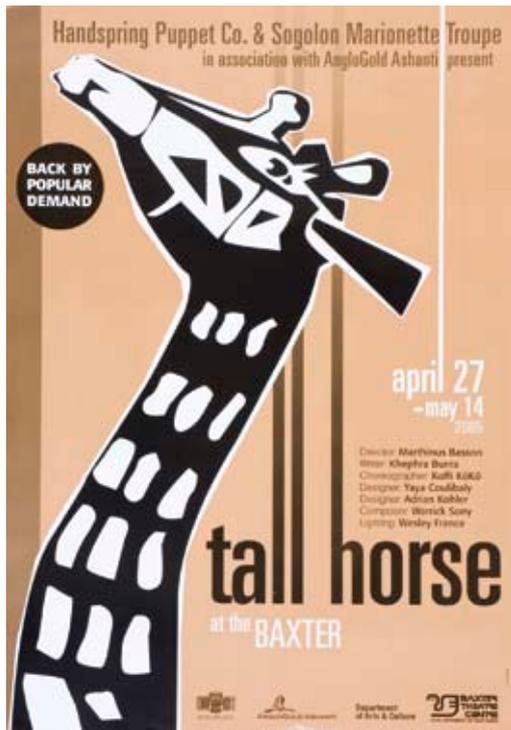
In 1978, the puppet figure in the window of Totem Meneghelli Gallery told of a far-off performance, separated from downtown Johannesburg by distance and time. It was a fragment that hinted at a distinct puppet universe in West Africa, which was nevertheless parallel to our own. That the carving was an authentic puppet figure was beyond doubt, as under its perished cotton costume was hidden a set of rods which controlled a range of elegant movement. That it belonged to a tradition that had developed completely unique forms of figure performance was only revealed with subsequent research as the few books in English describing the puppet theatre of Mali came to light.[10]

So began a one-sided romance. Our knowledge of figure theatre had developed through a hands-on sharing of ideas between puppeteers and from books and films that, with the exception of the Bunraku theatre of Japan, had a decidedly Western bias. The puppet theatre of Mali was a puppet phenomenon from our own continent, not subject to any colonial influence. Even from a distance its effect was powerful. The design of the figures of our 1984 children's play *Mbira for Pasella* was inspired by the look of Malian puppets with their angular carved heads, internal controls and costumes of bright, hand-printed fabric. Later the *meren habitable*,[11] one of the unique Malian forms, became the puppet representation of Oberon and Titania, King and Queen of the fairies, in our *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Then the unbelievable happened. Twenty years after buying that figure in the window, we were invited to collaborate with a puppet troupe from Mali. The Sogolon Puppet Troupe had been presented in Washington, DC by Alicia Adams, director of special programming and curator of the African Odyssey Festival at the Kennedy Center and at whose invitation both our *Faustus in Africa* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* had played. Now she proposed the joining of our two companies in a project to be produced by the Kennedy Center.

Yaya Coulibaly, of the Coulibaly royal family, is the leader and patriarch of the Sogolon Puppet Troupe. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, for each of the six generations before him, a member of his family has been elected to this position. He is the seventh leader. Raised a puppeteer from an early age, he had his rebellious years. Representing Mali at football felt more important than the puppets when he was a young man. The puppet theatre in Mali is fundamentally connected to the social and spiritual conventions of the broader community. Any challenge to this tradition cannot be undertaken lightly. Once it became clear, however, that he was to become the next leader of the troupe, he accepted the position on his own terms. He studied contemporary puppetry at the Institute Internationale de la Marionette in Charleville-Mézières, France, and on his return home, applied for permission to build his own marionettes.

ABOVE Poster for *Tall Horse*, designed by Thys Botha, O2 Communications.

OPPOSITE Sandile Matsheni with puppet Sogojan manipulated by Téhibou Bagayoko and Yacouba Magassouba. Set by Adrian Kohler. The Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, 2004.
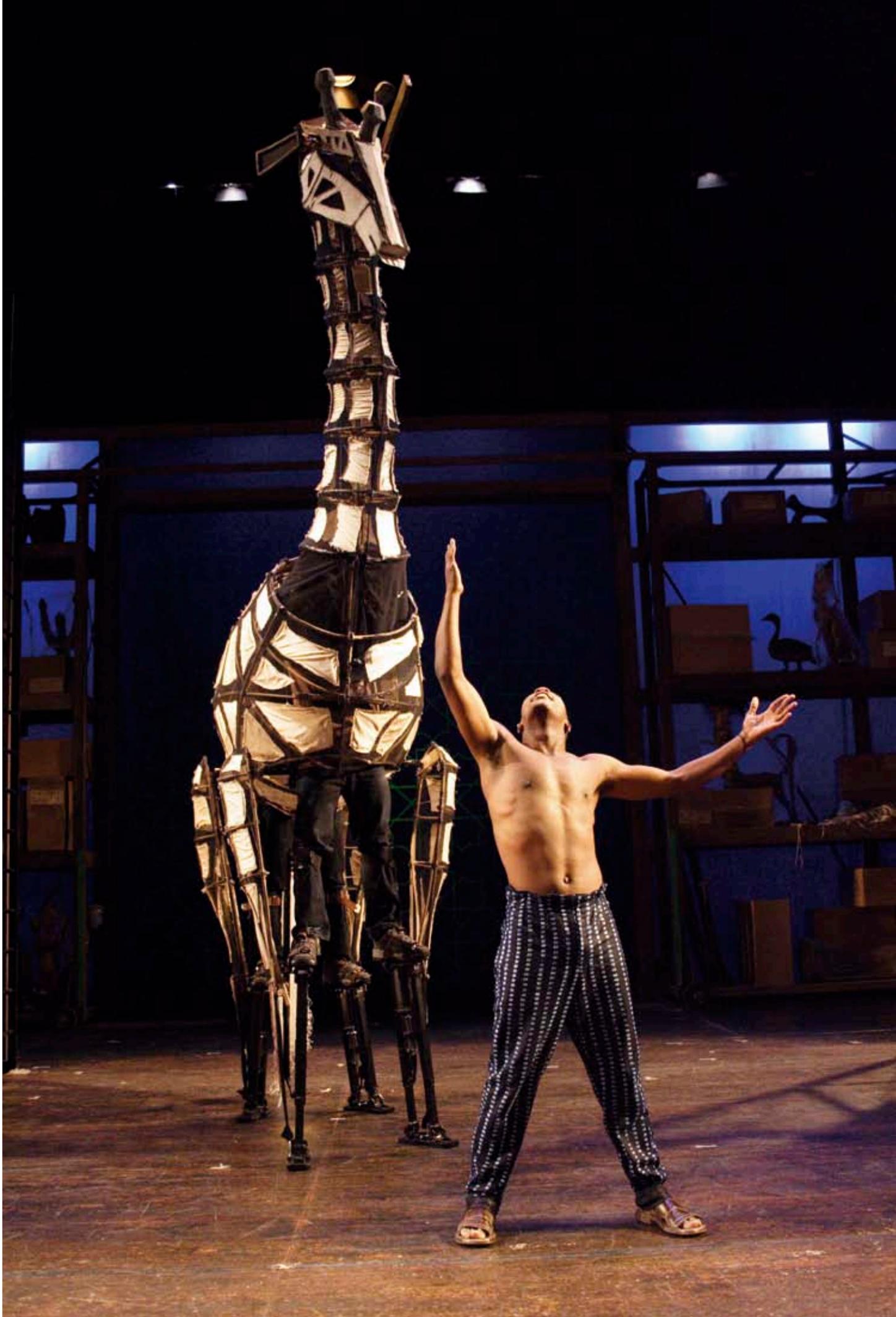
A strong guild system protects all traditional art and craft forms in Mali. Within the puppet theatre, the carving of puppets is the work of blacksmiths. Any new figures are ordered in advance and the price is determined by the complexity of the figure and the renown of the sculptor. Being a sculptor himself, Yaya wanted to carve his own. Ten years after applying, he received this permission to break with tradition.

Yaya's house in Bamako, where he lives with his immediate and some of his extended family, is also home to the Sogolon Troupe. Built on four levels, it provides storage for the thousands of performance figures that constitute the priceless material legacy of his family's involvement with puppets. In any collection it is rare for figures to survive from periods earlier than the nineteenth century. Puppets get used. They wear out and are replaced. Here, as you wind your way upwards past many rooms filled with mounds of puppets, there are figures dating from all eras of the troupe's existence and the sculptor of each is known through oral account. The top floor of the house, really an open-sided loggia with a view out over the rooftops of Bamako, is where new figures are built and productions rehearsed. Meals are eaten here too, where a faint breeze can take the edge off the heat of the day.

Alicia Adams proposed the vehicle for the collaboration. She had been looking for a story that was neither Malian nor South African but that could allude to something beautiful coming out of Africa. What she found was the

The rehearsal loggia at the home of Yaya Coulibaly, Bamako, Mali, 2004.

true story of the giraffe that was given to the King of France by the Pasha of Egypt in the 1820s. Though this gift of an extremely rare animal was initially intended as a means of political persuasion, the journey of the giraffe from Sudan, where she was caught, down the Nile, across the Mediterranean Sea and on the road from Marseilles to Paris allowed her to be seen by tens of thousands of people. She became a hugely popular symbol of African grace and beauty, qualities not commonly associated with the African continent by the outside world at the time.

The journey from idea to fruition was almost as long as the giraffe's from Africa to Paris. Alicia assembled a creative team that attended two workshops and travelled to Mali. Between workshops we corresponded by email. Then, two years into the process, production budgets at the Kennedy Center were slashed and Alicia was forced to withdraw from the entire project. Handspring and Sogolon were by this time deeply invested creatively, with decks cleared for the giraffe. Basil, through a chance social meeting, found a new sponsor in the form of a gold-mining company and Handspring became the producer.

AngloGold Ashanti have, amongst their extensive dealings, mines in both South Africa and Mali. Though they don't, as a rule, see art and theatre as compatible with their usual concerns in heavy industry, this cultural collaboration between Mali and South Africa caught the imagination of CEO Bobby Godsell. Perhaps it mirrored his own cross-cultural experience in the business world. After reading the background literature and challenging the budget, AngloGold became the sole sponsor and took their support of *Tall Horse* as seriously as any of their other business dealings. They were always available to help with the logistical difficulties of communication and transport between South Africa and Mali and closely monitored the progress of the play through its subsequent stages.

Alicia's original team had included a writer, choreographer, composer, designer and director. American artists had filled several of these positions. Now the distances to be travelled for joint meetings proved to be unaffordable. We had to consider as many local resource people as possible whilst retaining the momentum already achieved by Alicia's list.

Yaya and Handspring by now had discovered how much we had in common as puppeteers. Our primary difficulty was one of communication. The colonial division of Africa had left us on opposite sides of a language divide. French is the lingua franca in Mali and English in South Africa, but Yaya is a great talker whether you understand him or not, and with each period spent together, our smattering of French expanded rapidly into something very closely approximating a dialogue. Being in each other's company was always engaging, but the separation of time and distance made things very difficult. Email communication was courtesy of the French Institute in Bamako and could result in delayed responses. A burning question for me right from the start of the project was how we would weld together our two very different approaches to making theatre. I always work things out in great detail on paper before committing to material. Yaya works directly in wood. Now that we were running the project, and the script was in English, how would we incorporate the very intricate nuances of the Malian puppetry system we had waited so long to explore?

....

Technical drawing by Adrian Kohler of the neck of The Giraffe, 2004.

Once the script had determined a list of characters, I went to Bamako to spend two weeks in Yaya's collection. There I knew I would find a whole visual catalogue. We split the cast list exactly in two: those figures Yaya would be making, and those for me to build. We settled on a size and type for each and then I left for Cape Town. Trust in the puppet-building process had now to extend to the other areas of the creative team. Kofi Koko, the choreographer from Benin, and Khephra Burns, the New York-based writer, both from Alicia's creative team, had agreed to continue with us on *Tall Horse*. Joining to direct was Marthinus Basson, one of South Africa's most prolific and courageous theatre-makers. Warrick Sony, who had composed the music for *The Chimp Project*, came on board again. I was to design sets and costumes and Wesley France would design the lighting as he had done for us many times before.

Though more of the team was now home-based, the writer and choreographer were not. With Marthinus we created a brief for Khephra and our communications continued by email as efficiently as possible. But as the production deadlines approached, we missed the immediacy of face-to-face discussions. A play is an organic creation. Often it felt like we were building the project by remote control. How does one convey the excitement of a new idea from a meeting in Cape Town to someone in another time zone halfway across the world? Then there was the issue of translation. It was too costly to have each early draft translated into French, so Yaya didn't see a French draft until a few weeks before actual rehearsals began.

A moment of great trepidation occurred some months before, at the final try-out workshop in Kalk Bay, Cape Town. The whole creative team would attend and a presentation would be made at the end to the sponsors. For this we had set a deadline on the puppet build. Two days before the workshop, Yaya and two puppeteers arrived with fourteen huge

Puppets from *Tall Horse*, 2004. Soiree Guests (left and right) by Yaya Coulibaly and The Fashion Designer (centre) by Adrian Kohler. Costumes designed by Adrian Kohler and made by Hazel Maree.

airfreighted canvas bundles. They were loaded onto our stoep, to be opened the following day. That night I didn't sleep. What was in those bundles? Negotiating the logistics of Yaya's requirements had been a long and complicated process. Twenty cartloads of Melina wood for the puppets had been ordered from a particular forest and transported sixty kilometres to Bamako. Although I hadn't finished my quota of the puppet build, Yaya's were all done and now wrapped up on our stoep. Had we understood each other well enough in Bamako all those months ago? There was no longer time to correct misunderstandings.

The next day Yaya and his men arrived from their lodgings in Kalk Bay and opened the bundles. There were the King and Queen of France, the tall ladies with their hair done à la giraffe, the antelope heads for the castelets, their huge elaborate horns and ears, the piroges for the trip down the Nile, the crowds of France. The stoep was covered with everything exactly as we had discussed,

with extras just in case. All in pinkish-blonde wood, freshly carved in the angular, energetic style of the adze, Yaya's primary carving tool.

Some time later, a month before rehearsals began in Stellenbosch, everyone from Mali returned to Kalk Bay to finish puppets and props. The studio at Handspring was full to bursting. The Malians, preferring to work outside, occupied the stoep and garden, building castelets and assembling the *merens habitables* and dyeing huge swathes of fringing in the trees to the sound of Malian dance music. The South Africans with our own music were in the studio. Puppets were being painted, Kevin Willemse was printing fabric for costumes and putting patches on The Giraffe, Thami Kiti, our freelance carver, having hollowed out all of Yaya's heads, was finishing The People of Marseilles. Basil, with his assistant Estelle Randall, was controlling the whole operation in the office in between, with earplugs. Out on the Cape Flats, the set, with its warehouse units of rolling shelves, was nearing completion.

....
Puppets from *Tall Horse*, 2004. The Prefect of Marseilles (left) and Drovetti (right) by Adrian Kohler, Soiree Guest (centre) by Yaya Coulibaly. Costumes designed by Adrian Kohler and made by Hazel Maree.

The Drama School of the University of Stellenbosch where Marthinus teaches, had made the extremely generous offer of the use of their theatre for the seven-week rehearsal period in return for allowing their students to observe any part of the process. On hand would be translation assistance from students studying French.

The rehearsals were long and gruelling. Kofi Koko was adamant that the choreography shouldn't feel like an element tacked on at the end. But he was only available for limited parts of the rehearsal period, one week at the start, and then again at the end. The first week was therefore his and he used the time to teach a method of commitment to the moment. His primary scenes were the hunt of The Giraffe, the seduction of Atir (an actor) by Clothilde (a puppet) and the presentation of The Giraffe to the King of France. It was a fascinating time,

but soon he was gone. Marthinus, champing at the bit to tackle the many set pieces of the actual story, was at last able to get going.

The language policy of the piece would be French for those characters played by Malians and English for the South African performers, with translation super-titles on the rear projection screen. But sometimes scenes were played by a mixed group of both and words had to be learned by rote. Busi Zokufa (from South Africa), as the Queen of France opposite Yaya's King Charles, began learning her French phonetically. With the working of the puppets there was also a great degree of mixing. We had a limited cast of performers, and it became clear very quickly that the South Africans would be performing Malian puppet forms and they ours. I believe that it is in this sharing of techniques that the lasting legacy of the *Tall Horse* collaboration lies.

Bheki Vilakazi as Dr Konate and Yaya Coulibaly as Museum Security, surrounded by puppets with puppeteers (obscured) Mbali Kgosidintsi, Nana Kouma, Fourie Nyamande, Enrico Wey and Basil Jones.

....
TOP Research sketches by Adrian Kohler of puppets from Yaya Coulibaly's collection, made during a visit to Bamako, 2003.
....
BOTTOM Prop carved by Adrian Kohler, 2004.

The hardest figures to learn were the castelets. These large antelope figures have a hooped body frame covered in fabric and fringed to the ground. The animal's head and neck is attached with strips of rubber inner tube to give it flex and bounce at one end, and a stylised tail tipped with a fringe protrudes at the other. From outside it looks like a solid, rigid figure. From inside however, once you get used to the substantial weight, it becomes a powerful dancing extension of your own body. Your personality and movement ability are completely readable from outside, although you are covered from head to toe by a seemingly rigid frame. These puppets require athleticism and large amounts of stamina, but their theatrical payoff is huge. Yaya continually stressed the technique of flicking the floor-length fringe surround as you moved so as not to tramp on it and trip yourself up. The South Africans, after a great deal of tripping, wanted to trim the fringe with the nearest pair of scissors. But the fringe is integral to the power of the figure. As soon as you become too aware of the feet of the manipulator, the illusion of gliding and hovering is lost.

The nature of the work in rehearsal was very physical and at the end of the day the cast members were often exhausted. Differences in rehearsal culture meant that

Antelope (castelet) manipulated by Téhibou Bagayoko and Enrico Wey with the puppet of Charles X (centre) manipulated by Yaya Coulibaly. Puppets designed by Yaya Coulibaly. The Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, 2004.

moves in scenes were often not noted and so had to be rediscovered the next time around, causing delays and irritation. But language became the main difficulty. It was not possible to have a translator on hand all the time, and at the end of the day when they were able to attend note sessions, they lacked the understanding of a particular problem because they hadn't observed it in rehearsal. So it fell to me and Mervyn Millar, who had come out from England to observe the project, to translate. This took time and was often inadequate.

The production was the biggest we had ever tackled. Although *Ulisse* had eighteen performers on the stage and *Tall Horse* only fourteen, this was a new play with a massive amount of performing hardware. The process was hard on the two actors who were not playing puppets, because eighty percent of the rehearsal energy seemed to be spent on getting the puppet ensemble pieces right. It was testament to Fezile Mpele's stage ability that he managed to keep his central character of Atir the giraffe handler charming and visible amongst this sea of puppet activity.

Tall Horse did extremely well in Cape Town, then transferred to Pretoria and Johannesburg where it picked up invitations to play at the Theater der Welt festival in Germany and at the Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York, out of which a seven-week tour of the United States materialised the following year. To date, it remains one of the happiest of the Handspring tours.

Reviews of *Tall Horse* were mixed. But, inevitably, they only talk about part of the picture. If we had known of the great difficulties we would encounter we would probably have dropped the project when Alicia was compelled to let it go. As it happened, we were not able to go deeply into the spiritual dimension of which Yaya's performing life in Mali is so much a part, but as a first encounter with the puppets of West Africa, the experience was valuable beyond words for us. A deep regret is that the play has never performed in Mali. This was very much part of the plan and almost happened, but logistics, international politics and, finally, a falling gold price all played their part in the passing of the moment.

Yaya Coulibaly in the costume of a sacred hunter with the puppet of Charles 10th. Puppet designed by Yaya Coulibaly. The Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, 2004.

War Horse

Written by Nick Stafford, from the novel by Michael Morpurgo
Directed by Tom Morris and Marianne Elliott
Produced by the National Theatre, London in association with Handspring Puppet Company
Opened in October 2007
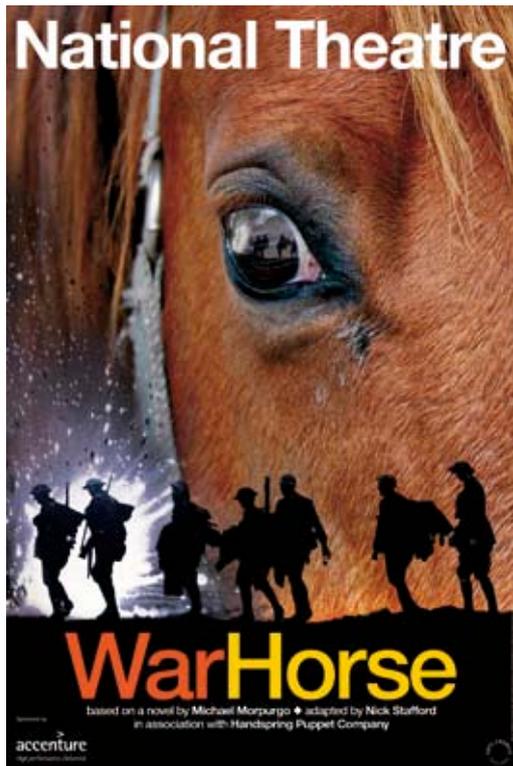
The opening season of *Tall Horse* was still in progress at The Baxter Theatre in Cape Town when we heard that London's National Theatre was sending out Associate Director Tom Morris and Executive Director Nick Starr to pay The Giraffe a visit. We began imagining that the Beautiful African might be invited to London. In the bar after the show, Tom and Nick were full of smiles but evasive, saying it would be lovely if we could work together sometime. Tom offered advice on our script. The next day they were gone.

Ten years earlier, we had met Tom Morris when *Faustus in Africa* was playing at the Battersea Arts Centre as part of the big Africa '95 Festival in London. He was then Artistic Director at the Battersea but hadn't booked our play himself. He had provided his venue to the Festival. The theatre was tiny, with no division between the stage and the audience. We have never played in a more intimate space. Tom loved the production, particularly the character of The Hyena. He suggested that we should stay awhile in London. He could show us around.

Some years later in 1997, we were back in the United Kingdom performing *Ubu and the Truth Commission* at LIFT, the London International Festival of Theatre. At a welcoming function at the Festival Centre one night, there was Tom again. He reminded me that we hadn't yet come to London to play. Three months passed after his visit to The Baxter, then Tom phoned me in Kalk Bay. There was a novel that could possibly become a vehicle for puppets. He outlined the story of *War Horse* by Michael Morpurgo. Albert, a boy on a farm, brings up a foal that his drunken father had bought by mistake. World War I breaks out and the father sells the horse to the army, where it is soon drafted into the German side after surviving a cavalry charge that saw its English officer shot off its back. The horrors of the war are told from the horse's vantage point. Of course, it doesn't take sides, but responds to food and kindness wherever they can be found, just as a horse would do. Albert joins up though he is under age and searches for his horse throughout the whole of the war. Miraculously, at the armistice, when both have been badly battered, they find each other.

My immediate response was positive: here was an epic war and love story in which one of the leading characters is a puppet horse. It even had a happy ending. We had made a good giraffe. A horse should be possible. Tom sent us the novel. Of course a novel isn't a play. Here, at the flick of a pen, the reader is whisked away from rural Devon to the trenches of Belgium, from a ploughing competition to a cavalry charge, to a full battle scene with tanks and mustard gas. How were we to depict the cavalry charge of one-hundred-and-fifty horses? With the adaptation of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (a trilogy of fantasy novels) into a two-part stage spectacle, Nick Hytner, the Artistic Director at the National Theatre, had launched a bold programme aimed at younger audiences.

Poster for *War Horse*, designed by Michael Mayhew, the National Theatre, London, 2007.

Surveys had highlighted the fact that, despite the undisputed quality and variety of contemporary and classic plays, the average audience at The National was becoming increasingly grey-haired. Cultivating a theatre habit amongst a younger crowd had necessitated a rethink in programming strategy. By turning to a well-known novel, Hytner sidestepped the patronising tone that plagues a large proportion of the plays (often laudably issue-based)

making up the children's and youth theatre canon. By using the huge Olivier Theatre, with its breathtaking stage machinery, and investing in high-end production values – a large cast with an a-list troupe of actors, atmospheric projections, epic sound – he had made it sexy. The ultimate accolade was that many adults also wanted to see *His Dark Materials*. After this huge success, Tom was proposing *War Horse* for the second in the series.

The National Theatre, London, 2007. Puppet Joey confronts the tank. Tank manipulators Emily Mytton and Toby Sedgwick; Joey manipulators Craig Leo, Tommy Luther and Toby Olié.

On our first *War Horse* trip to London in the summer of 2005, the return season of *His Dark Materials* was still running at the Olivier and we were taken to see it, and 'shown the instruments', as it were. We felt duly daunted by the sheer scale and audacity of the staging and the venue, but also heartened, because The National had taken the step of introducing its audience to puppets. Alongside the large cast of human actors, beautiful lantern-like daemons manipulated by puppeteers in black accompanied some of the characters. There were bears and witches and little people and two wispy and beguiling, ghost-like creatures that floated with no legs.

Unlike in Europe, theatre with puppets in the UK carries a stigma. At European theatre festivals we would hear English puppet companies complain that audiences were put off by the 'P' word. Through constant hard work over decades, theatres like London's Little Angel Marionette Theatre had cultivated a dedicated audience, but newer companies had kept 'puppet' or 'marionette' out of their company and festival names, substituting 'visual' or 'object' or 'figure' to fill the gap.

Now commercial successes that incorporated puppets, like Julie Taymor's *The Lion King* and *Avenue Q* had transferred from Broadway to London and public resistance was softening.

Tom Morris immersed us in as much new London theatre as we could take, so we would know what audiences could expect, and to scout for possible directors and writers. We then took a train down to the countryside that frames the story of *War Horse*, the villages and farms of Devon, and here we met Michael Morpurgo. Children's laureate and much-loved writer of over a hundred books, Morpurgo, with his wife, Claire, runs a series of farms expressly to bring disadvantaged inner-city children to the country to discover another way of life. He is a gentle man, passionate and emotional, and he was very excited about the prospect of his book going to the Olivier. He signed our copy of *War Horse*, then added, 'and don't mess it up'. Then, a bit embarrassed, he said, 'Tom made me write that'.

We spoke often between Kalk Bay and London during the next few months. A first workshop was planned. *War Horse* was now to become an official project at the National Theatre Studio, an institution where new ideas are grown into projects that can then receive a green light. There are rooms for writers, and rehearsal spaces small and large. Some ideas have left the building never to be heard of again, many others to achieve great renown. There are people there who still remember when Peter Shaffer's play, *Equus*, was in development.

This first workshop was held with a try-out writer and a group of actors. Among them was Toby Sedgwick, who would become the choreographer and create the role of Ted Naracott, Albert's father. Also present was Mervyn Millar, who would recruit the many excellent puppeteers we would be needing, write a chronicle of the genesis of the play, *The Horse's Mouth: Staging Morpurgo's War Horse* (as he had done with *Tall Horse*), and be one of the leading puppeteers in the first two seasons of the production. Alan Edwards from The National's prop department was seconded to us and has remained with the project ever since. We made quick mock-ups of horse heads and necks out of torn cardboard and shredded newspaper.
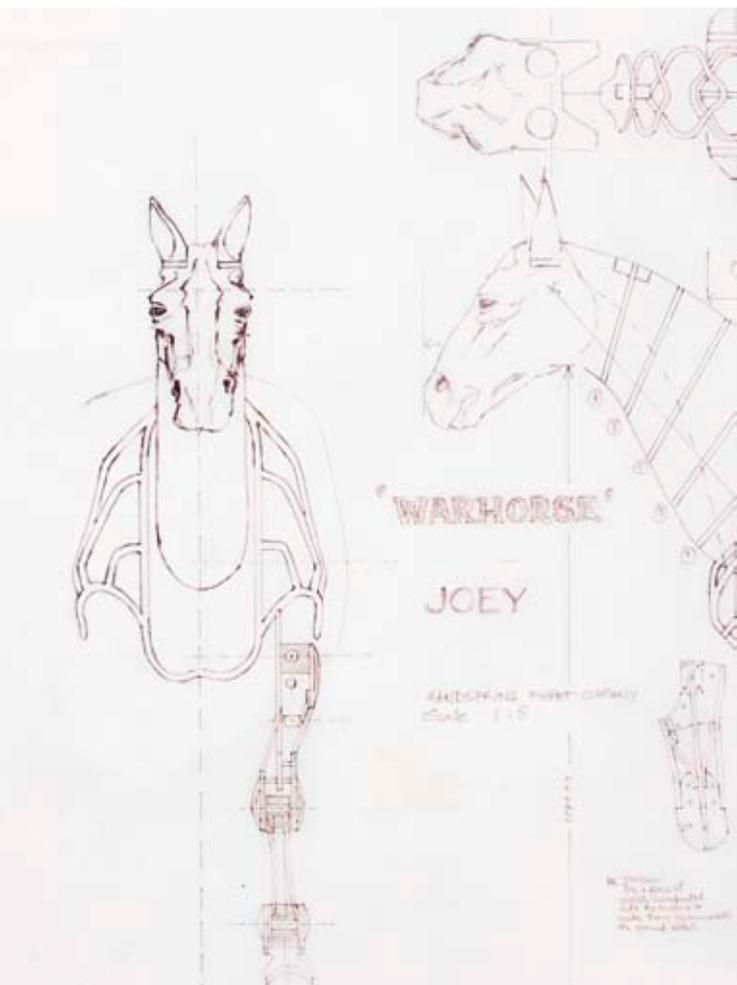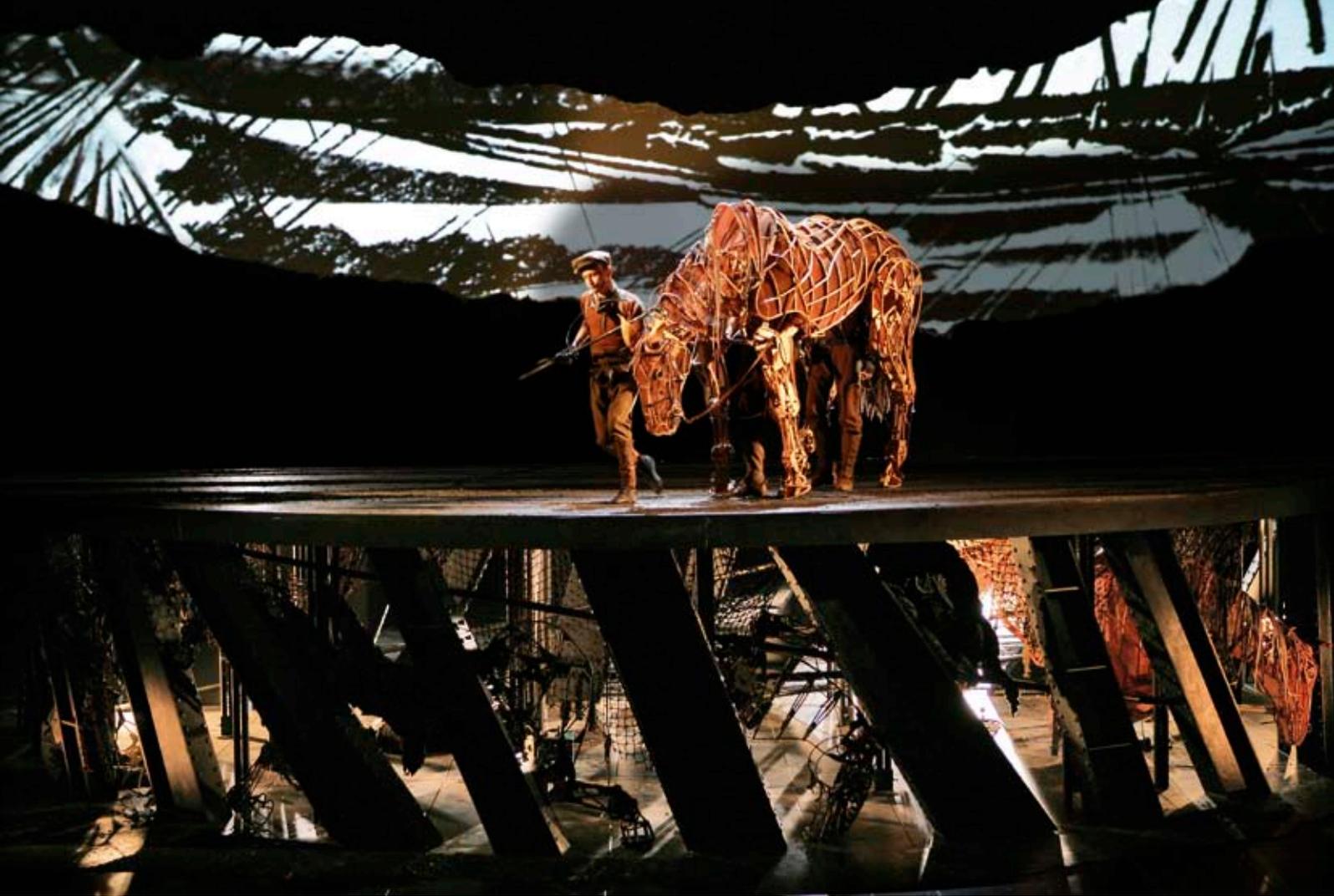
On a day when the Olivier Stage was absolutely clear, we were able to take these and a complete life-sized cardboard horse body onto the vast round stage. Sitting high up on the balcony looking down on these 'horses' trotting round, it seemed to me that the stage was built for them. In its bare state it was like a circus ring, an ancient Roman arena.

Tom Morris's inclination, as a director of puppets, is toward the non-literal. He likes to utilise the human body of the actor and those found objects that are part of the set, to fabricate the puppet before the eyes of the audience, thereby allowing a creature to materialise by activating the imagination of the spectator. However, given the level of artifice required in the useful provision of these found objects – both for their contextualising potential and their animation potential – I am not sure whether this inclination isn't still connected to a latent embarrassment about the legitimacy of puppet figures in the 'straight'

theatre. The outer frame, which these objects represent, still needs to be translated to the audience, and part of the resulting theatrical experience is a marvelling at the clever nature of this building of images. There is a danger of this transformation becoming the main story. My own priority lies in the provision of movement for a figure. The puppeteer, of necessity, works with the imagination of the audience, attempting to dignify his built creature with life. The more useful movements the puppet-maker is able to provide in a figure, the easier it will be for the puppet to seduce the audience into colluding with it.

In the novel, Joey the horse, like Black Beauty, is the narrator of the story. An early observation was that this narrative device would veer dangerously toward anthropomorphism in the theatre. Our decision was that Joey and all the horses would therefore be mute. The human/horse and horse/horse relationships would be represented as they are in the real world.

Olivier Stage, the National Theatre, London, 2007. Puppet Joey on the drum revolve with Craig Leo, Tommy Luther and Toby Olié. Sets and costumes by Rae Smith. Lighting by Paule Constable.
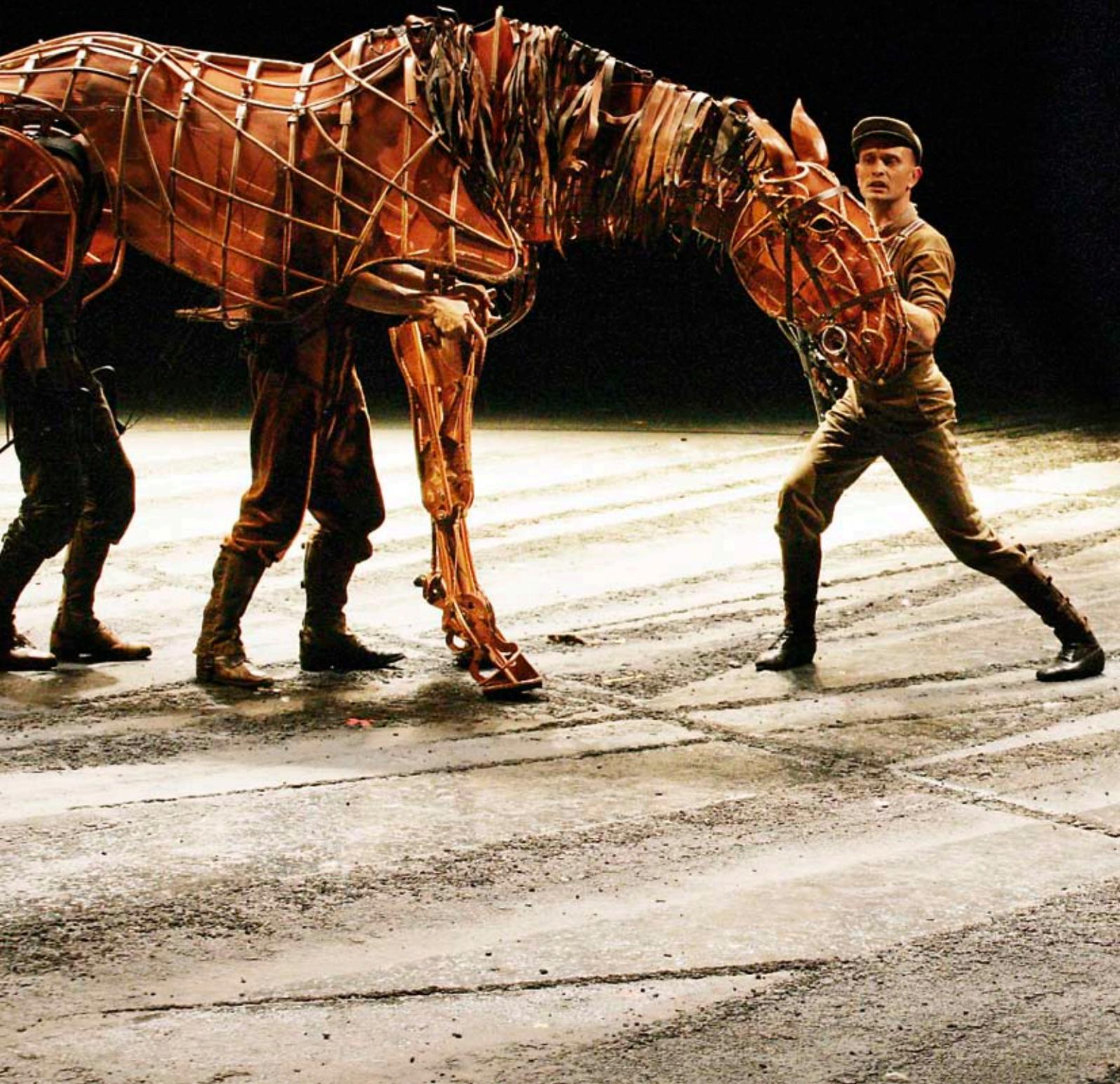
War Horse, the National Theatre, London, 2007. Toby Olié, Tommy Luther and Craig Leo with puppet Joey (left); Mervyn Millar, Finn Caldwell and Thomas Goodridge with puppet Topthorn (right).

To be credible, our horse behaviour would have to be authentic. We watched the videos of Monty Roberts in order to learn about 'equus' and the language of horses, and Tom devised a horse-walking exercise, which has become standard for the whole company whenever a workshop or rehearsal period begins. Everyone walks around the room using only their peripheral vision.

With actors and only the cardboard horse heads available at this first workshop, we needed quick renditions of horses. Tom coined the term 'unadorned' to describe a horse made of two actors, one behind the other, with the person at the back placing his left arm diagonally across the space between them to the right shoulder of the person in front. A semi-adorned variation of this was to rest a small ladder on the shoulders of the two actors, creating a spine to test whether two actors could support a third actor, sitting on the ladder between them. We found it was awkward but possible.

Back in Cape Town, I built a working cardboard scale-model. Realising that the anatomy of the horse's legs and those of the humans inside it would not correspond with each other as they had done with the giraffe legs (where the puppeteers' legs, standing on stilts, became the giraffe's legs), there would have to be eight legs under the horse and not four. But the hands of the puppeteers would be in close proximity to the puppet legs and therefore available for strong, hands-on manipulation, so the legs had the chance of being highly articulated. If I could successfully mimic the way a horse's hoof automatically curls under as it is lifted off the ground by the lower leg, I would be able to make credible horse legs that would easily pull focus from the human legs walking beside them under the horse. The evolution of the jointing of the horse legs in *War Horse* had begun with the front leg of The Rhino in *Woyzeck on the Highveld*. It grew into a more sophisticated lever control with passive movement in the front paw of The Hyena in *Faustus in Africa* and finally was enlarged and employed on all four hooves of the horses.

Whilst preparing working drawings for the prototype horse from the scale-model,

I realised I would be needing help to build the full-sized version. This was not a carving job for Thami Kiti, carver of heads on *Tall Horse*, who loves nothing better than to work his way into a solid block of wood. I knew I would be using cane as the basic material here, as previously with The Giraffe. With front and back legs, head, neck, tail, ears and weight-bearing body there were too many new systems to be developed. I put word out on the grapevine and Thys Stander answered. He was introduced to me by long-time puppet friend, Hansie Visagie, whose advice was, 'give him a problem, don't tell him how to solve it and he will be happy'.

Notwithstanding several false starts over the next four months, a horse with the potential for being ridden started to take shape. For the spine, which would do the job of the 'semi-adorned' small ladder that rested between the shoulders of two actors, I enlisted the help of a specialist aluminium welder who normally builds boats. The two puppeteers inside would each strap on an aluminium backpack. Above their heads, each backpack would be attached to this bridging spine, made strong enough to take a human rider. From the spine, the ribs would be attached, and at either end were the housings for the neck and tail. Apart from the raised centre of gravity, this all seemed straightforward. We asked our next-door neighbour's teenage daughter to get up and test it.

The legs presented the first major problem. They were to be cut out of plywood and then given three-dimensional shape with added cane. This plywood system had worked for smaller figures but scaled up to the full size of horse legs they became too brittle. Laminated with a strengthening plastic skin, they were too heavy. The amount of plywood would have to be reduced, but then more of the form would have to be described by cane, which would have to bear more weight and stress. The joining of the plywood to the cane now became the major issue. Any rigid gluing system would wear loose in time. The same would happen with metal straps.

Thys developed a way of literally sewing the two together. By pre-drilling holes in the plywood along the area to be joined and then

Craig Leo and Basil Jones with the prototype of Joey, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town, 2006.

stitching the cane to the ply with a wire needle and thick, waxed thread, a very effective join was achieved. Although the stitching was tight, it allowed the cane to flex slightly but always to return to its original shape. It was labour-intensive, and hard on the hands – a leather glove was required for extended periods of work – but the result meant that the size of the plywood components could be radically reduced to only those areas of the legs that required absolute rigidity, namely the joints and pivots and hooves. It was a breakthrough. The cane basketwork of the body could now be used structurally in the legs. They would be strong, slightly flexible and, above all, much lighter in weight.

The ear and tail movement would be the next two major challenges. Both would be very important acting elements for the horse puppeteers, being the indicators of the thoughts and emotions of the horse. Both would need to be cable-controlled. Since our very first Handspring play I have struggled to amplify the movement that the fingers of the human hand are able to achieve; in other words to make a larger movement in a moving part than the distance covered by the controlling finger. When supporting a rod puppet with one hand, the least amount of grip you can use on the support handle is with the small finger together with the ring finger plus the heel of the thumb. Available for use on controls then are the stronger digits, i.e. thumb, forefinger and middle finger. Each of these has a finite range of movement, enough to turn something at the other end of the connecting cable or string through ninety degrees. I'd never been able to get much more than that, but the ears on a horse need to turn through a hundred-and-eighty degrees:

pointing forward to indicate interest, backward to indicate fear or alarm; in the positions in between, the ears are listening.

One early morning the solution occurred to me. 'All I have to do is shift the drive point'. By using the pivot axle under the ear as the drive point and not the circumference of the ear itself as I had always done, I was able radically to increase the amount of distance the ear would travel by winding the drive string round this much narrower cylinder. It was my Eureka moment. Twenty-five years before I had tried to control the ears of a serval cat, the villain of *The Honey Trail*, Handspring's very first production, and failed. Now, when I showed my discovery to Thys, he immediately recognised it as the same as an old watch mechanism he had seen long ago. Discovering this puppet mechanism meant that not only the horse's ears benefited. It proved invaluable for the wing beats of the goose, the crows and the swallows. No doubt it will aid in developing the moving features of other puppets not yet born.

The solution to the tail movement lay in understanding the anatomy of a real horse. The spine of the horse extends almost halfway down its tail. You can't see it because it's covered in hair but that's why the animal can flick its tail so decisively. This spine tip is highly flexible and controlled by several tendons. These tendons would have to be mimicked by bicycle brake cables.

That left the head- and neck-controls. I was still aiming for the horse to be manipulated by two people. Personnel numbers in any production need to be kept down. In a piece with many horses, the size of the human cast would increase in multiples of the number of manipulators in each horse. Two, good; three, a lot more expensive.
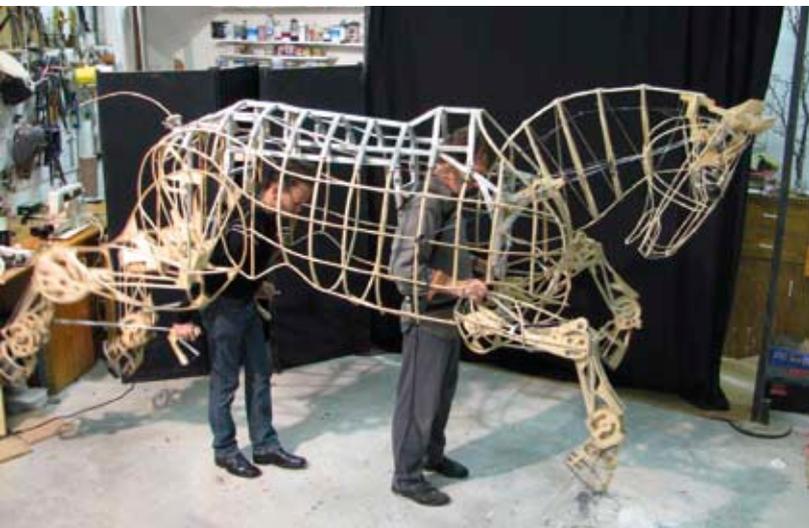
I built the 'steering wheel', a rocking bar with levers in it, and positioned it at the base of the neck. Its levers controlled the ears and could raise the head up. The rocking bar could curve the neck from side to side like The Giraffe controls had done. The one drawback with the system was that the head articulation could only be used when the puppeteer was not manipulating the front legs. Only when the horse stopped walking could the performing of the head begin.

We were due to give the prototype a test-run down the road outside our studio the day before it left Kalk Bay. But work was only completed after midnight. Thys had built a large crate for the sea voyage to London. The prototype was packed completely untested. A month later in London, Basil and I unpacked the huge box in front of everyone at the next *War Horse* workshop in the National Theatre Studio. On hand was a whole team of puppeteers that Mervyn Millar had assembled. We had requested beefy acrobats because of the need to perform the horse with a rider on its back. The group was a mixture of these and puppeteers with smaller physiques. In order for the heads of the manipulators to be safely protected inside the chest and rump of the horse, I had had to build the horse slightly bigger than life-sized. This of course raised the spine substantially higher than the semi-adorned ladder that had rested on the shoulders. My fear was that this increase in size had also raised the centre of gravity to an impossible height. With a feeling of immense relief we witnessed these beefy actors carrying an actor on the back of the horse almost immediately. The downside was that they weren't puppeteers. Over the next couple of days, after trying various combinations, I took a chance and sent the beefy acrobats home on their motorbikes and kept the trained puppeteers. Their empathy for the figure was what made them most valuable to us. For the endurance required, they would simply have to work out.

It became clear that the head had to remain articulated whilst the horse was in motion, so I attached a control rod to the neck just behind the head, and from then on a third manipulator worked the head and neck from the outside of the horse. This rendered obsolete the rocking

bar 'steering wheel'. All of its controls would have to be incorporated into the new external neck control rod. Then the physiotherapist from *The Lion King* was summoned to give an expert opinion on the effects of my operating systems on the physical wellbeing of the puppeteers. The elaborate triple-lever controls that worked the front-leg articulation would within weeks cause severe, repetitive-strain injuries, she said, and would have to be completely redesigned. This would necessitate the turning of the controlling hand through ninety degrees. Also the backpacks would need some more lumbar support. Other than that, a clean bill of health!

I can safely say that the prototype horse was a hit with the participants of the workshop. Once it was fully functional, Marianne Elliott, who had now joined Tom Morris as co-director, and Toby Sedgwick began working scenes with actors that would test it within the demands of the story. At night, when the studio had gone quiet and the prototype was hanging alone in the big rehearsal room, the Spanish cleaning ladies dubbed it Rocinante after Cervantes' horse in *Don Quixote*. As yet it had no skin.

OPPOSITE Gareth Kennerley, Stephen Harper, Toby Sedgwick and Angus Wright rehearsing with puppet Coco, the lame horse. Rehearsal Room 1, the National Theatre, London, 2007.

ABOVE Tim Lewis with Topthorn. Rehearsal Room 1, the National Theatre, London, 2007.

The next task would be to convince Nick Starr, head of finance at the National, that this project should go ahead. Factors militating against it were building up. The novel, even in distilled form, required a large cast of actors, each main horse character would now definitely require three manipulators, the battle scenes would need to be augmented with video, the script was still in development, more development time was needed on the puppets for which a full cast list had yet to materialise, and there was no way that the production could be anywhere near ready to occupy its designated slot in the Olivier Theatre. The day Nick Starr chose to visit the studio to assess the project was the day we were trying out a scene that Toby had devised for the moment the foal Joey grows up into the adult horse. This scene relied on the substitution of one horse puppet with another. I was sitting next to Nick as the improvised puppet of the foal exploded into pieces and was replaced by the prototype adult horse rearing up to its full extent. It landed, galloped toward us and I felt Nick's heart stop. *War Horse* was given extra time.

Rachel Leonard, Thomas Goodridge, Mervyn Millar and Luke Treadaway with Joey as a foal. Dress rehearsal, the National Theatre, London, 2007.

Foal Joey becoming an adult horse. Puppeteers Craig Leo, Tommy Luther and Toby Olié.
The National Theatre, London, 2007.

Coram Boy, another of Tom's projects was fast-tracked into our slot and, as fortune would have it, was so successful that it ran to two seasons affording us more time for the building of all that eventually came to be required. Rae Smith came on board as designer at this workshop and over the following two additional ones it became clear that she intended to keep the great Olivier Stage as bare as possible, adding only minimal objects to the space, like a doorway or a pontoon, which could be easily removed to restore the open space. By keeping all literal representations of locale as video projections up on the huge strip of torn white paper in the sky where they remained fleeting and ephemeral, she in effect left an open-ended space on the stage that was perfect for the horses and the epic sweep of the story. Toby Sedgwick would match this approach with his use of puppeted poles manipulated by actors. They became fences, an auction ring, a stable all accomplished with a few graceful swoops across the stage and they could disappear into the wings in an instant.

The lead-time for *War Horse* ended up being longer than anticipated, but perhaps this is the reason the theatrical experience of it has proved to be so satisfying to audiences. The rigorous leadership of Tom and Marianne, and the series of workshops where the discipline of pushing the production forward was unflagging, built a unity of purpose amongst the whole creative team. For instance, there was time for the skeletal 'cane-drawing' look of the horse to be reflected in Rae's conception of the huge World War I tank that confronts it.

War Horse became the first Handspring play in which neither Basil nor I would perform. Craig Leo, the superb South African puppeteer/actor/acrobat (who would play the head of Joey in the two Olivier seasons), was to be the sole representative of Handspring in the cast after the untimely death of our fine puppeteer, Fourie Nyamande. Basil and I took on new roles as directors of puppets. With the responsibility of the piece as a whole resting firmly on the shoulders of directors Tom and Marianne, we were able to analyse carefully for the first time what it is that we require from a puppet performance. From inside, onstage, it is not possible to judge the overall effect of each character on the others or even

whether the principles of puppetry are being effectively applied. In fact we had never formally conceptualised what these principles were, relying, in our work as puppeteers, on instinct and the needs of the moment. Now we needed to teach how a puppet thinks, the importance of stillness, the uses of breath. We had to develop a method.

It is fortunate when a new piece goes into a second season. It becomes possible to revisit those areas glossed over through the pressures of the moment in the first round. Although a puppet horse is the primary character in *War Horse*, it doesn't speak. In this first rehearsal period, as the directors grappled with a play adapted from a novel, essentially a devised work (as distinct from an authored piece), the bulk of each day was spent making the dialogue scenes successful. The time for working with the puppets was relegated to an hour at the end of the day. By then the actors were tired and it was a struggle to keep these sessions from seeming less important than the others. In addition, the process of developing fully formed puppet characters in a production as large as this one was made more difficult because their presence in the play was not as represented in the printed pages of the text as fully as the roles of the human characters. The puppeteers have now developed their own parallel text, used amongst themselves, to motivate actions from a horse's point of view. This text is passed down orally as experienced horse puppeteers hand over their roles to new teams. (An example of this generous transfer of skill is included at the end of this essay, in the form of a brief 'tutorial' note from Tommy Luther, one of our puppeteers, when he handed on the role to a new cast member.) But once the first season had passed and the central role of the puppets in *War Horse* had been acknowledged by the press, the public and the production, the second season's rehearsal period and the subsequent West End transfer rehearsals have completely accommodated the requirements of the puppets.

Rehearsal door, Rehearsal Room 1, the National Theatre, London, 2007.

Apart from the feelings of exhilaration and love for our craft that participating in *War Horse* has allowed us to feel, there are other, more lasting rewards. The technical advances which the construction of the horses demanded will be usable in many different ways by ourselves and anyone else who needs them, and the theoretical clarity that the horses forced us to formulate will be utilised whenever we are required to train new puppeteers or devise a new piece. Above all, however, the puppet has made a very loud claim for legitimacy that has been heard by record-breaking numbers of the London theatre-going public.

....
ABOVE Topthorn and Joey fighting. Topthorn puppeteers Thomas Goodridge, Finn Caldwell and Mervyn Millar; Joey puppeteers Craig Leo, Tommy Luther and Toby Olié. Olivier Stage, the National Theatre, London, 2007.

TOPTHORN

THOROUGHBRE

PROUD
NOBLE
VAIN
ALOOF
ATTENTION · SEEKING
SELECTIVELY RECEPTIVE]

ALPHA
AGGRESSIVE
HIGHLY · STRUNG
DISCIPLINED
MIGHT GIVE UP?
INFLEXIBLE
DELICATE
PREDICTABLE
SPOILED
PAMPERED
EXPERT
STRONG
FAST
BORN TO RUN
KEEN
LIKE AN ATHLETE

SUPER H

DISCIPL

INFLEX
[FRAGIL

VAIN

Joey

Mischeivious   Playfil   baby Joey
Spirited   Gd Stamina   IMMATURE   green inexperienced
Naugty   Neurotic
Aggresive   Adaptable
Sporty   Resiliat
Hunter   Sturdy
Open   Nervey
Determined   Volitile
Willing
WillFul
Lucky
Intuitive
Tenacious
Kind
Loyal
Protective
Well behaved
Responsive
Loves the Heard
Temperamental

NERVEY
DETERMINED
RESPONSIVE
MISCHEIVIOUS
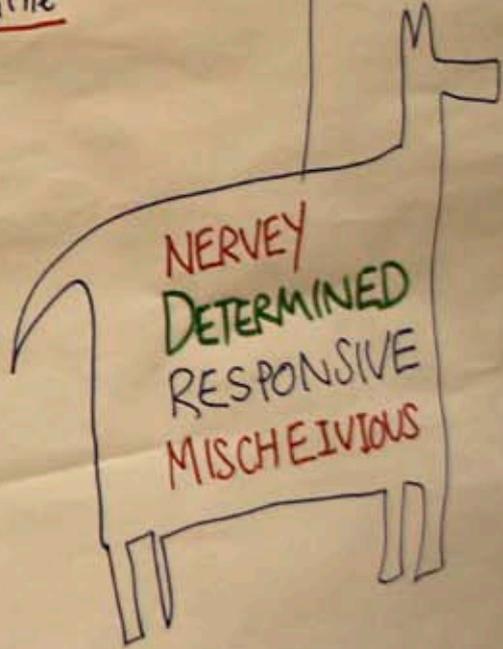
ORSÉ

INED

IBLE
E]

Postscript: Practical Performance

Tommy Luther, who played 'the heart of Joey' right from the first prototype workshop to the end of the second season at the National, decided not to move with the production to the West End. Here are the notes he wrote to the performer who would replace him. There is a suggestion here of the particular demands of the puppeteers inside the horses who, although ostensibly invisible, have to be wholly attentive to what their gestures and movements bring to the performance itself. The existence of such valuable notes for a successive performer is in the spirit of collaborative endeavour to which Handspring Puppet Company aspires.

PREVIOUS Character brainstorm notes by the *War Horse* cast, 2007.

ABOVE Toby Sedgwick as Ted Narracott with Craig Leo, Tommy Luther and Toby Olié in puppet Joey. Rehearsal Room 1, the National Theatre, London, 2007.

Here are some notes for people getting to grips with the heart of Joey:

Economy of tension

Try to avoid the entire body being in a complete state of tension as normally happens when learning a new technique. I always find when learning something new that I tense every muscle but the more you become used to it the more economical you can be. Find moments when you are not making an excessive amount of effort. This can be through gravity and the weight of the puppet, its natural swing and gait.

Avoid exhaustion

Walking round in circles becomes tiring and sloppy. Do an average of 12 rounds of '1, 2, 3, 4' then find an intention for the horse to stop, and another to start again. Use the pauses to discuss, as a unit, what's working, what feels right and what's missing.

Don't knacker the wrists

A lot of the momentum is in the knees, and allow the side-to-side movement to be dictated by the shoulders. The more you put into the body (distributing rather than putting everything into tension) the more you will protect the wrists. This will be extremely useful when you have a rider, when you have to kick or lash out and especially for the gallop.

Getting used to the pendulum or natural swing

The brain will say 'When I release the lever the hoof will immediately hit the floor', but in actual fact the release has to happen a moment before because the leg is so long. This will be more apparent in trotting, but be aware of it in walking mode. Practice stamping the foot, or doing a toe tap to get used to this.

Speak to each other

'1, 2, 3, 4', as infuriating as it is, is essential. Especially for the person in front. The person at the back can stamp down the hoof on their '1, –, 3' count, but the tendency of the person at the front is to clench the lever (which will bend the toe, elbow and shoulder joint) on the '2, –, 4' count, when they should be releasing it so that it is the hoof making contact with the ground in rhythm of ', –, 4'. Make sure it is '1, 2' (DeeDum), '3, 4' (DeeDum) with a minor gap in between.

Quality of movement

Trying to establish movement and rhythm patterns is monotonous and tiring. Add the different states of energy or intention and it tells a story and becomes interesting.

Breathing

There's only about 10 cm to work between full inhalation and complete exhalation, which from inside the horse might not appear like much but from outside can be extremely effective. The breathing can be felt by the other manipulators even without vocalisation (it's sometimes good to close the eyes to check that you can feel this), but vocalising is a huge help to the others. It carries the emotional resonance of the animal. It is essential that all three actors support this for the horse to achieve its full capacity. This varies between supporting, sustaining, beginning, ending or contributing a different tone or sound (like harmonising high with low, or mixing an inhalation with a snort).

Breathe in the knees

This may seem emotionally disconnected and awkward, and it might feel more alive if you communicate it in the shoulders or by arcing the back and flexing the core muscles, but it will save your spine if you get used to this early on. When you have a rider on your back you want to have full support on the back muscles and let the thighs do the breathing.

Thought process of the horse

As this all comes from the head, the two people inside the horse must always read what the head manipulator is suggesting with the head. Primarily, direction is the first concern. But the height of the head, the angle of the neck and head, the position of the ears communicate several intricate stories. Try to spend more time reading what the head is thinking and less time being meticulous over the feet patterns. Joey's reactions and inquisitiveness are more fun to do than walking patterns (and plenty of time will be spent on that).

Tommy Luther
London, January 2009

NOTES

01. Union Internationale de la Marionette.
02. Trinka was Czech and one of the first stop-frame animators. His celebrated work provided a challenge to the dominance of the Disney paradigm, in that his adult characters were complex creations, and his work often filled with dark explorations of violence and political oppression.
03. Covered verandah common in South African colonial architecture.
04. Also called the Standard Bank National Arts Festival.
05. A 'sangoma' is a traditional healer.
06. Dorkay House was a jazz venue that provided a home for emerging Soweto musicians. Basil Breakey remembers it as 'a place where artists used to meet – not only musicians but also all those in the creative arts. It was such a wonderful place … like a haven, an oasis in Johannesburg at that time, because you could be free there in a sense.' (Gwen Ansell, *Soweto Blues: Jazz, Popular Music, and Politics in South Africa.* London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005, p. 117).
07. An informal house or shack in a South African township, usually made of corrugated iron, plastic and board.
08. Sydney Kentridge QC provided legal defence for the family of murdered South African black consciousness activist Steve Biko. He is the father of artist/director William Kentridge.
09. Hannover was the host of Expo 2000, a giant World's Fair.
10. To date, the single most comprehensive and significant study is Mary Jo Arnoldi's groundbreaking *Playing With Time: Art and Performance in Central Mali.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
11. This is a mobile puppet stage or playboard in the form of an animal's bulk (say, an antelope). The back of the large carved animal provides a platform upon which several smallish carved figures frolic.

....

Puppet Topthorn's head from *War Horse* being painted in the paint frame at the National Theatre, London, 2007.
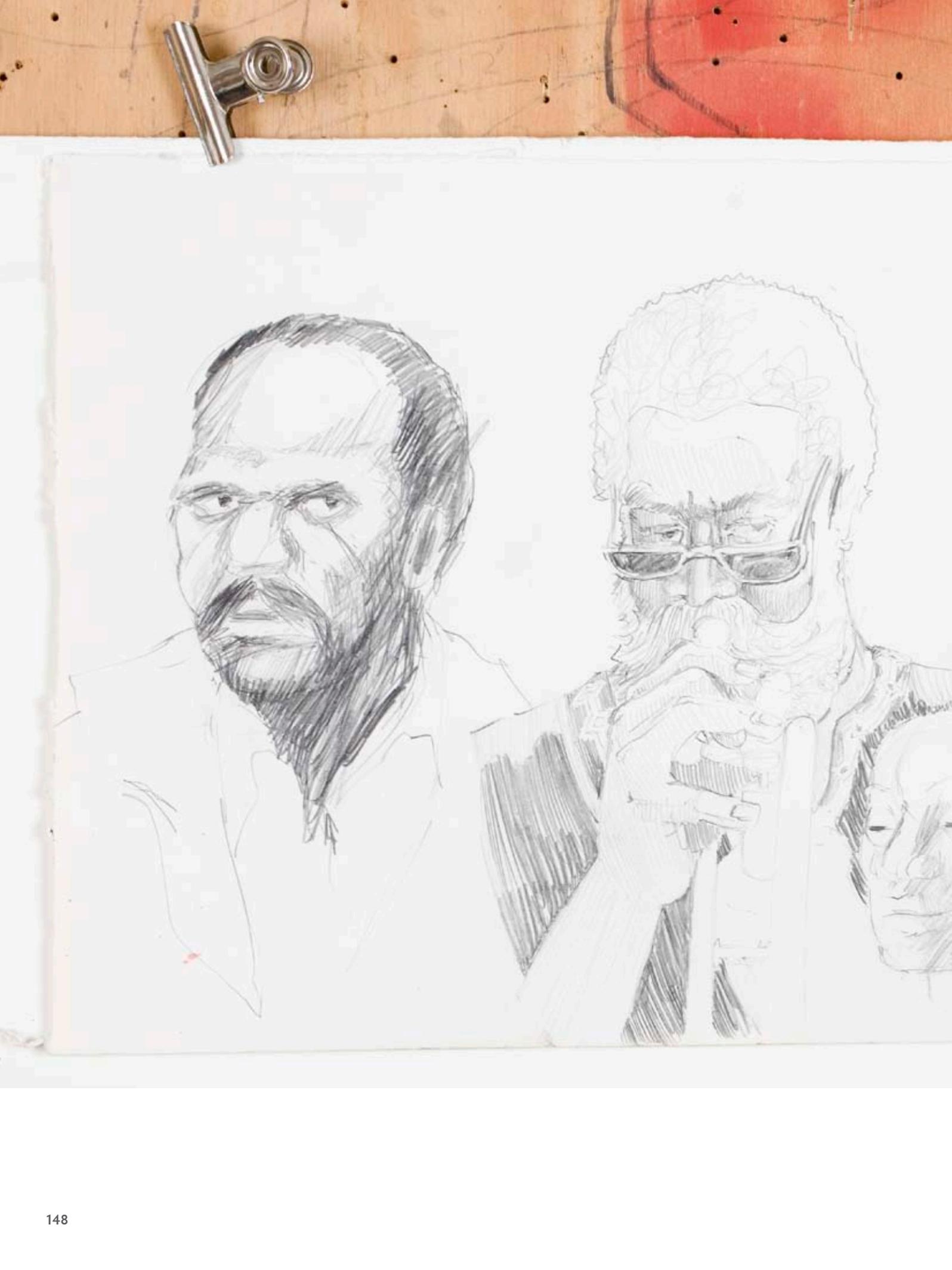
Character sketches by Adrian Kohler for *Episodes of an Easter Rising*, 1985.

Escaping the Puppet Ghetto

Adrienne Sichel

It started out as just another working day. My assignment as a theatre journalist was to see a play presented by a Cape Town puppet company. The production was Handspring Puppet Company's *Episodes of an Easter Rising*, based on David Lytton's radio play, directed by Esther van Ryswyk.[01] What I saw and experienced that morning in 1985, at the Wits Downstairs Theatre in Braamfontein,[02] had an immediate impact on my then keen interest in and developing critical sense of indigenous South African theatre-making. That encounter with Handspring Puppet Company's style and approach produced lingering impressions which informed my subsequent encounters with their various collaborations and productions. Any preconceptions I had about marionettes, glove puppets and Jim Henson's then very popular Muppets evaporated.[03]

Handspring's creative originators, Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones, revealed their passion for their chosen art form, which they were determined to practice within the context of contemporary South African theatre. This was an historically significant moment in the arts because it was the era of the international cultural boycott and considerable local political turmoil. The theatrical context was that of the activist, often work-shopped, theatre of Athol Fugard, John Kani, Winston Ntshona, Barney Simon, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya. The new plays were staged at institutions like Cape Town's The Space (Adrian Kohler had spent a year working in this historic theatre's puppet company in 1975) and The Market Theatre in Johannesburg. These were the independent homes of what was labelled protest theatre or the theatre of resistance. Elsewhere on the continent it was called popular theatre.[04] The storytelling style of *Episodes of an Easter Rising* was reminiscent, as I recall, of Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena*. The narrative was textured with gritty realism; it had a sense of real struggling, of people in a landscape, an African landscape.

The play pulsed with a series of personal and socio-political rhythms, qualities which I had never previously related to puppetry. Until then, unaware as I was of the Eastern European tradition, I had always associated puppets with fairy tales and fun, or the bawdiness of *commedia del arte*. *Episodes of an Easter Rising* also had echoes of Grotowski's poor theatre, which had been embraced and, to an extent, transformed in the South African context.[05]

Episodes of an Easter Rising displayed an intriguing political sensibility and (in terms of puppetry) unique aesthetic, which in hindsight I realise were essentially African. This profound little play laid the groundwork for Handspring's oeuvre, a repertory that has shifted and changed with every new project and director. Yet those original, saliently human essences and imaginative metaphors embodied in *Episodes of an Easter Rising* subsequently were key to Handspring's work, from *Woyzeck on the Highveld* (1992, 2008), *Faustus in Africa* (1995), *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1996), *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse* (1998, 2008) and *The Chimp Project* (2000) to *Confessions of Zeno* (2000), *Tall Horse* (2004) and *War Horse* (2007).

LEFT Edith from *Episodes of an Easter Rising*. Carved and painted by Adrian Kohler, 1985.

THIS PAGE Designs by Adrian Kohler for Adelaide in *Episodes of an Easter Rising*, 1985.

The pressing question is, what elements inform and propel Handspring's authentically African signature theatricality and art-making? One of the answers lies in Kohler and Jones's individual and joint history. They both started out as visual artists. Kohler, a puppeteer since his childhood in Port Elizabeth, specialised in sculpture at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Capetonian Basil Jones, who also studied fine art at UCT, began his career in cultural institutions working at the South African Cultural History Museum in Cape Town and, from 1978, the National Museum and Art Gallery in Botswana. Adrian Kohler also moved to Botswana where he directed the national popular theatre programme in which he combined theatre and puppetry as part of rural development and education.[06]

When they returned to Cape Town in 1981, they founded Handspring with Jill Joubert and Jon Weinberg. The company specialised in inventive children's puppetry, like the dental educational piece *The Mouth Trap*. Their first venture into an adult genre was *Episodes of an Easter Rising*. A major clue to the source of Handspring's connection to, and involvement in, African performance is contained in Basil Jones's introduction to the catalogue for *Patrimony*, a 2004 exhibition of Bambara puppets owned by the Coulibaly family of Mali. The extensive collection represents seven generations of puppet-making.

∧

ABOVE Puppets and masks from the family collection of Yaya Coulibaly, Bamako, Mali, 2004.

OPPOSITE *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, The Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, 1987. Puppet Titania manipulated by Antoinette Butler, Fairy (fish) puppet manipulated by Martin le Maitre, Jennie Reznek as Puck and puppet Oberon manipulated by Neil McCarthy.

Describing in the catalogue the central influence of the West African puppet tradition to Handspring's work, Jones tells the story of how a single African puppet sparked Handspring's love affair with this tradition. The puppet in question had been purchased at the Meneghelli Gallery in Jeppe Street, Johannesburg, for R120 on instalment, by Adrian Kohler while he was on a shopping expedition for the University of Botswana. Jones recounts the event:

> Some time later the elegant little figure arrived by post in Gaborone. I was immediately captivated by its simplicity and grace. It was a little yellow figure with flowing movement and seemed to possess what I can only describe as a remarkable independence of spirit. It came from quite a different world from the Western puppets I knew. And so some months later when Adrian suggested he would like to return to South Africa and start a puppet company, it was the Bambara puppets of Mali and the knowledge that puppet theatre was also an authentic African form of drama that helped persuade me to go along with the wild scheme.

The 'wildness' anticipated in this proposition would presumably arise from the dialogue between the very Western, colonial structure of theatre in South Africa, and the various performance traditions arising from within Africa. Politically and culturally, colonial South Africa was cut off from the rest of the continent. The new venture was additionally risky because both men had been politically active in Botswana with the cultural wing of the African National Congress (ANC), which was in exile. In fact Kohler and Jones were part of the planning group for the landmark Culture and Resistance Festival held in Botswana in 1982.[07] They regard this sojourn in Gaborone as 'an important and seminal time'.

In 1987, when South Africa was gripped by a State of Emergency,[08] Handspring's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Esther van Ryswyk and Fred Abrahamse, premiered on the main programme at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.[09] This annual event in the Eastern Cape was one of the few independent neutral platforms where certain politically conscientised, anti-government artists could present their work. Startling aspects of this Shakespeare production were the African texture of the design and, particularly noteworthy, the introduction of large-scale Bambara puppets. The actors portraying Titania and Oberon were encased in the puppets, bringing together Malian puppetry and European masquerading traditions. This was years before the general popularity of West African dance and the introduction of the *djembe* drum into South African cultural practice.

The body masks of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were dramatically yet straightforwardly innovative, recognisably 'African'. More complex is any attempt to define and decode what gives the eerily alive quality to Adrian Kohler's carvings of the puppet cast of *Woyzeck*. These qualities were pre-figured in the puppets of *Episodes of an Easter Rising*. Here, and in subsequent puppet characters for the five collaborations with William Kentridge over twelve years, what always struck me was how the puppet-maker infused the human, or animal, spirit into wood. This spiritual symbiosis, a series of artistic reincarnations, has a deeply ritualistic source linked to certain African theatre and dance (traditional and contemporary) performance idioms.

In a sense Adrian Kohler takes on the capacities of mask-maker and African sculptor, both roles given to traditional craftsmen. A description of what this entails is found in Laure Meyer's introduction to her book *Art and Craft in Africa: Everyday Life Ritual Court Art*. The objects she highlights hail from the nineteenth century through to 1960. The latter date is a cut-off point because that is the moment which inaugurates what the author cites as a time of negative Western influence on traditional arts and crafts practice. Of specific interest in relation to Handspring's art is the closing paragraph of Meyer's Introduction, which states that the objects depicted in the book (ranging from carved stools and headrests to bracelets and drums) 'can offer something to our culture which goes far beyond aesthetic pleasure. Although created for everyday use, they are charged with a spirituality that only awaits a receptive beholder to reveal itself. With African objects, one may truly say that there is always more than meets the eye.'[10] And certainly that is true of Adrian Kohler's puppets. This vital principle of 'animation', in the spiritual, ritualistic and mythical sense of the word, is not limited to the design and making of the carved puppets. It applies equally to the rehearsal process and performance.

ABOVE *Woyzeck on the Highveld* rehearsal, William Kentridge studio, Johannesburg, 2008. Busi Zokufa assisted by Adrian Kohler with puppet Maria. Animation by William Kentridge.

OPPOSITE Maria from *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, 2008, carved by Adrian Kohler.

During a rehearsal for the 2008 revival of *Woyzeck on the Highveld* in William Kentridge's Johannesburg studio, I observed that during scene breaks, or while waiting to make an entrance, the puppeteers would hold the puppets to their breastbones. This transacted a sacred connection between human and puppet, importing an element of the sacral to performance practices that have become fundamentally secular in the West. There were also moments when, from my position, only the puppet was visible waiting in the wings. Whether it was the world-weary Woyzeck (manipulated and performed by Handspring veteran actor and puppeteer Louis Seboko) or the beautiful Maria (manipulated and performed by Busi Zokufa) the puppets looked impatiently alive, eager to make their entrances. It also struck me that the puppets bore a more than striking resemblance to their puppeteers. 'I have to say that it is totally co-incidental,' noted Adrian Kohler in response to my comment during a break:[11]

> In *Faustus in Africa*, Antoinette Kellerman looked like Helen of Troy, Dawid Minnaar like Faustus. Louis now looks more like Woyzeck than he ever did. When we first did *Woyzeck* Barney Simon was at The Market and he was a bit jealous because he wanted to do *Woyzeck* with Solomzi Bisholo.[12] He came to the run-through before the opening, and looked at the puppet. He knew the play well. Barney said to us, 'You've made him look as he is at the end of the play. How is he going to change?' Of course puppets don't change.

'The audience's imagination makes the changes,' interjected Basil Jones,

> The fact is that the puppets *do* look like their manipulators. We are casting someone for the role of Woyzeck, so obviously the actor is not going to be at the end of the universe in looks to the puppet. The other thing is that the imagination of the audience is hopefully richly stimulated by the work. And the more we stimulate them, the more imaginative hoops that they will be prepared to jump through. They come up to us and ask, 'How did you make the eyes move?' In fact, the eyes don't.

v

Those imaginative leaps were compounded with the addition of William Kentridge's charcoal drawing animation, which was introduced to the stage in tandem with Handspring's puppets. 'We didn't know what the hell we were doing,' recalled Kohler, 'because he was using such simple animation techniques – background animation – he wanted a foreground that would be in the specific style of his animations. That's how the roughly carved puppets came into being.'

Woyzeck on the Highveld, based on Büchner's nineteenth-century play was, and remains, an exacting chamber piece representing the purity and clarity of Handspring's style. Jones agreed:

> We consider it really essential; without the detail you have nothing. There are moments in our bigger productions, but the smaller the show, the more modest the scale of the production, the more likely it is that we will be able to connect those detailed moments into one long magical moment. *Woyzeck* was the moment we understood what animation and puppets could do together. The big revelation of the piece was that with the animation, we could have the puppet standing still in front of a moving landscape, and the landscape becomes a metaphor for the thoughts of the puppet. That was massive for us – that you could actually get inside the wooden head of a puppet. It was seriously a new moment for puppetry, certainly for us.

Having noticed in rehearsal, and then in the subsequent performance at The Market Theatre, that at certain times the puppeteer's hands were visible, I wondered if this was tabooed. That led me to ask what taboos, if any, existed in the Handspring realm. 'It is not tabooed,' remarked Kohler, 'and we mind it less now'. Jones responded, 'We hate how in television, when you are shooting a scene, someone says: "I saw a head. Reshoot!" It is tabooed in TV and film; you just can't have a visible manipulator. It really doesn't work. That's the major reason we don't do TV and film. Ours is a very old-fashioned technology which doesn't mesh with film unless that's done deliberately.'

∧ What Jones is indicating is that for Handspring, the magic lies in knowing that the puppeteer is integrated with the puppet. What *is* totally tabooed for puppeteers in the Handspring book, is not watching the puppets throughout the performance. The actor has to make permanent eye contact with the puppet and not the other puppeteers.

Another rule, according to Kohler, is, 'If we are out front manipulating, we never make eye contact with the audience.' Jones embellished:

> In *Avenue Q*, manipulators do make contact with their eyes.[13] In *The Lion King* they also do. There's quite a lot of split focus between the actor and the puppet. It sort of works, but we don't love it. We are more purist. The moment the actor stops believing absolutely in the puppet you cannot ask the audience to believe in the puppet. If the actor loses concentration or goes: "Look how fabulous I am" or "how fabulously we sang that song" as they look at the audience and take the credit, the puppet loses out completely.

....
OPPOSITE Woyzeck from *Woyzeck on the Highveld*. The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Puppet by Adrian Kohler, animation by William Kentridge.
....
ABOVE *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Adrian Kohler (left) and Louis Seboko with puppet Woyzeck. Animation by William Kentridge.

The mention of Disney's musical *The Lion King*, directed and designed by Julie Taymor, raised the uneasy question about any possible influences for Handspring's work. Prior to the 1997 Broadway Disney premiere, the South African puppet company had at various points introduced a wildlife menagerie, including a wicked hyena and a rhino, to international audiences. Kohler thought aloud about the matter:

> She [Taymor] saw *Woyzeck* in the Henson Festival in 1994 and *The Lion King* came out a couple of years later. We did get asked in a *New York Times* interview, because people were saying there was an influence. We didn't know for sure. We are not hanging onto our ideas. If she finds something useful … When I did see *The Lion King*, I thought, okay, what did she take? Some of the animals were see-through like the rhino, they had the open structure.

'All artists steal' Jones responded. 'Who is to say whether it is stealing or borrowing? If all your energy goes into that, it's a waste of time,'

> … In the nineteenth century puppeteers were very secretive. That was part of their stock-in-trade. They had, say, a trick puppet. We've never been like that. In fact, in Cape Town we have a mutually supportive and flourishing puppet community. We pass jobs on to each other. There's one in New York like that, under Basil Twist, with puppeteers who are mutually supportive. It is not like that everywhere, but it's much healthier.

ABOVE Basil Jones (obscured) and Adrian Kohler rehearsing with The Rhino from *Woyzeck on the Highveld*. William Kentridge studio, Johannesburg, 2008. Animation by William Kentridge.

OPPOSITE *Tall Horse* rehearsal, H.B. Thom Theatre, Stellenbosch, 2004. Bheki Vilakazi as St Hilaire with puppet Sogojan manipulated by Téhibou Bagayoko and Yacouba Magassouba. Fezile Mpela as Atir lies upstage.

In October 2007 Handspring found themselves back in the international limelight, in the Olivier Theatre in London, with a commission that had come out of the production of *Tall Horse* (originally commissioned by the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.) Ultimately funded by AngloGold Ashanti, *Tall Horse* was a mammoth, experimental, rigorously cross-cultural venture with Mali's Sogolon Puppet Troupe; a work which received mixed critical reaction in the United States.

v

Mechanism for expanding
the ribs of the female
antelope as she gets
fatter
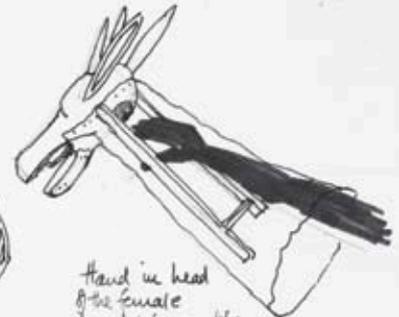
Hand in head
of the female
antelope enables
her to eat anything and drain
it through the neck into the body

ANTELOPE SYSTEM.

Clothilde (Adrian) *marionette a tige*.

Prefect (Adrian) *marionette a tige*.
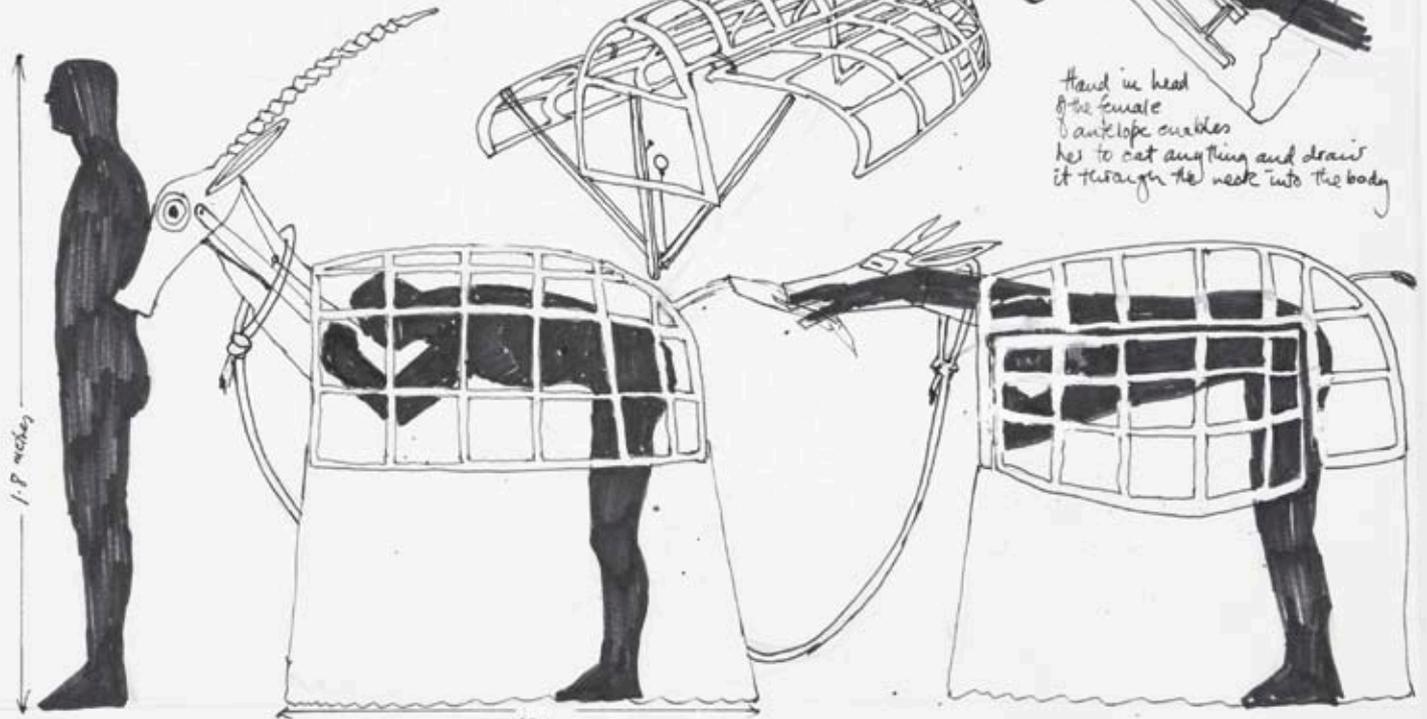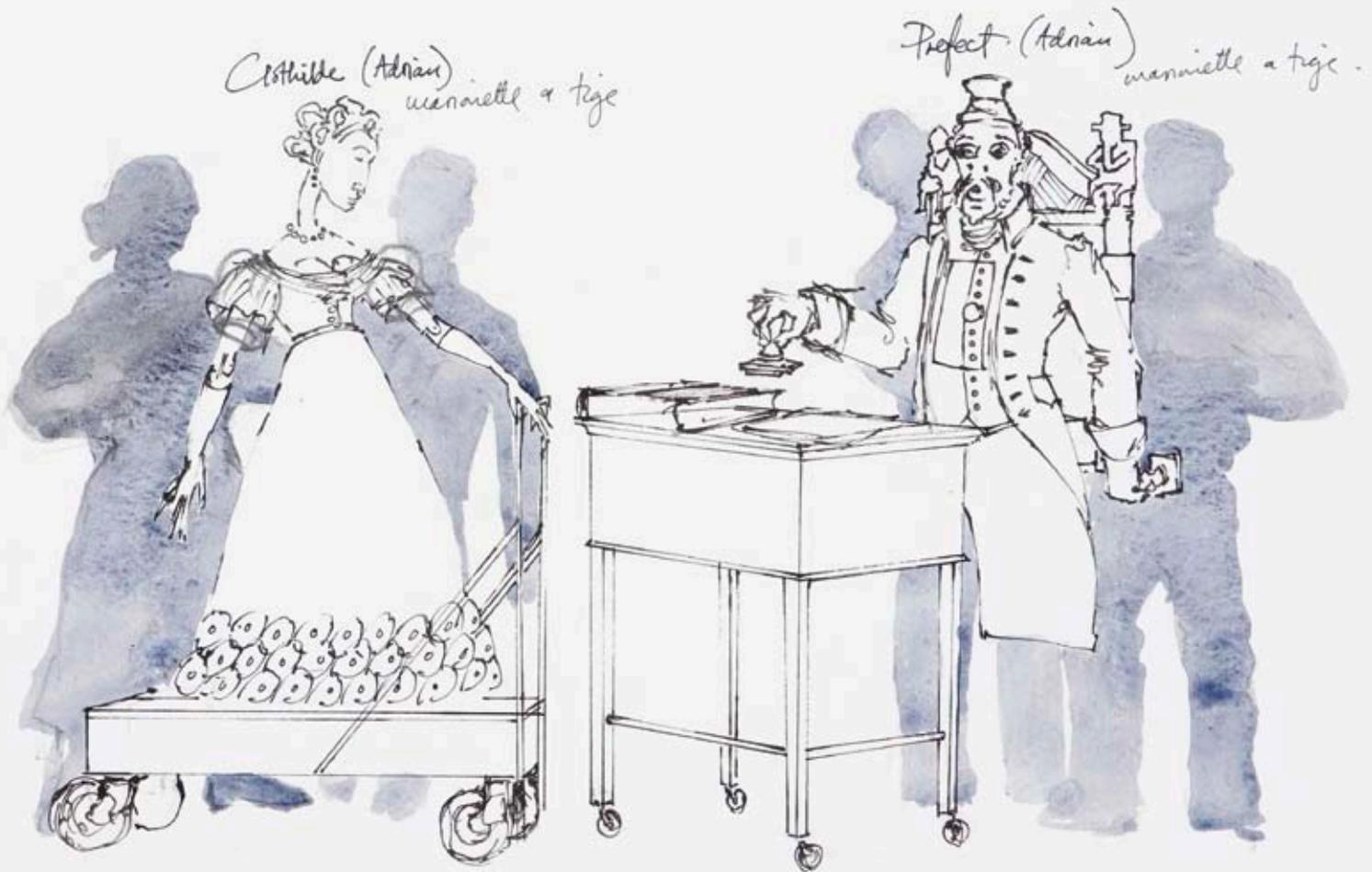
OPPOSITE TOP LEFT Yaya Coulibaly and Téhibou Bagayoko holding the puppet Queen and the head of her castelet from *Tall Horse*, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town, 2004.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT Head of The Giraffe, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town, 2004.

OPPOSITE Working drawings by Adrian Kohler proposing methods of manipulation for the antelope puppets in *Tall Horse*.

ABOVE Design by Adrian Kohler showing performance concepts for Clothilde and The Prefect of Marseilles in *Tall Horse*, 2004.

RIGHT The Prefect of Marseilles by Adrian Kohler, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

After London's National Theatre gave up on the idea of taking on the production of *Tall Horse*, starring a majestic giraffe based on an historical animal which had walked from Egypt to Paris,[14] they invited Handspring to develop puppets to perform in a production of *War Horse*. Based on Michael Morpurgo's youth novel, the acclaimed production features nine Handspring horses made out of cane, plywood and aluminium. These animals are manipulated from the inside by three puppeteers, with a fourth puppeteer on the outside, working the head. In this multi-personned animal there are echoes of Brutus, the three-headed dog in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1996), illustrating Handspring's ongoing development and continuity of concepts and ideas.

Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of the wounded horse Coco in *War Horse*, 2004.

The *War Horse* production adds to Handspring's gallery of animal iconography, which includes their diaphanously torsoed chimps for *The Chimp Project*, The Rhino from *Woyzeck* and The Hyena from *Faustus*. Each production extends the range and the depth of the company's art- and theatre- making. Surprisingly, the hallmark, open-weave, transparent puppets were inspired by the shape of the canoes built by Kohler's father. An important element of Handspring's work, which also, I would argue, imbues their art with an African aesthetic, is their use and creation of a range of movement for their puppets. There is a fundamental, technical reason for this. According to Jones, the master puppet-maker, Kohler, has moved the centre of manipulative control from the chest to the pelvis:

> That's an important change Adrian initiated. What he inherited from Europe was a rod control inside a puppet at chest level. He felt it was more appropriate, and better for us, at pelvis level. So he moved the central control of the puppet downward in the puppet. This was very important for us and gave a sense of African movement. It was a real but subtle innovation which made a profound difference.

War Horse, the National Theatre, London, 2007. Joey with (left to right) Toby Olié, Tommy Luther and Craig Leo.

TOP *The Chimp Project*. Puppet Lisa by Adrian Kohler.

BOTTOM *Woyzeck on the Highveld*. The Rhino puppet by Adrian Kohler.

OPPOSITE *Faustus in Africa*. The Hyena puppet by Adrian Kohler.

The use of breath is also a central Handspring ingredient in their movement style. 'It is the origin of all our movement; it is the source,' explained Kohler:

> The breath starts and ends a sequence with the puppets. The in-breath gives the energy, and the way the puppet breathes out ends the phrase, and passes energy to the next figure. In puppet theatre it is very important to signal to an audience where that energy is at any particular moment, otherwise, if there are arbitrary movements, it is very difficult to follow who is talking. If you are not talking you don't move.

Jones elaborated:

> The lead puppeteer will give an in-breath: we are about to go. It is a kind of signalling, a semiotic of movement. Of course it links to Tai Chi, Hindu movement forms, Feldenkreis; it has many links. We understand those links so well. It was something we really discovered after working with opera singers in Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse* directed by William Kentridge, in 1998. When they breathed in we knew they were going to move. We had to make our puppets sing for them. Or them for us, I'm not sure which. That was the beginning of our real dedication to breath. We started to become consciously aware of how important it was.

ABOVE *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008. Puppets Ulisse and Telemachus with (left to right) singer Julian Podger, puppeteers Luc De Wit, Adrian Kohler and Jason Potgieter (obscured), and singer Jean-François Novelli.

OPPOSITE *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008. Puppets Ulisse and Telemachus with (left to right) singer Julian Podger, puppeteers Luc De Wit (obscured), Adrian Kohler (obscured) and Jason Potgieter, and singer Jean-François Novelli. Animation by William Kentridge.

In their objective of 'always trying to escape the puppetry ghetto' (Kohler's phrase), Handspring Puppet Company, which often functions as a collective, has also endeavoured to be connected to South African, and African, culture and the prevailing political situation. This strategy has informed their evolving art. A commitment to artistry, and to form, underpins and informs their remarkable hybridity. They are loath to admit to any one authentic signature. 'Our style is completely eclectic. We have borrowed from absolutely everybody,' insisted Kohler. These influences include Asian shadow puppetry and Japanese Bunraku. Another major pointer is the origin for the company's name and logo. It is not aquatic but rooted in Russian puppet master Sergey Vladimir Obraztsov's philosophy that 'the soul of the puppet lies in the palm of the hand.'

'That,' explained Jones,

> was a way of saying glove puppets are best. We very much wanted to create a form of puppetry for South Africa that was dynamic and not the 'namby pamby' tradition which has very long strings. There, the resulting manipulation is dreamy and not at all robust. We wanted a robust form. The rod puppet, which kind of comes out of the glove, was the form we decided on.

ABOVE *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Puppeteers Adrian Kohler (obscured) and Busi Zokufa with The Miner and Maria.

OPPOSITE *Woyzeck on the Highveld* rehearsal, William Kentridge studio, Johannesburg, 2008. Puppeteers Basil Jones (obscured), Adrian Kohler and Louis Seboko with The Miner; Maria and The Baby (background). Animation by William Kentridge.

Another deciding factor in Handspring's modus operandi was Bunraku. This includes not only the elbow controls noticeable in productions such as *Woyzeck*, but the underlying, centuries-old professionalism and engrained theatricality. 'That whole lore of apprenticeship of ten years for a puppet hugely impressed us,' remarked Jones:

> Our puppet tradition was so amateur, *Punch and Judy*, the beach puppeteer. It had no credibility in the West. It was absolutely a marginalised, despised, fringe art. So to find a tradition, the Japanese tradition, which was strong, and a country where puppetry was central to the drama tradition was hugely impressive to us. We mythologised around that, in a way, and thought of ourselves as aiming at being *that* professional.

Other theatre professionals – directors, choreographers and actors – gradually took these renegade puppeteers seriously. Handspring's complex, multi-disciplined collaborations, some more artistically successful and evolved than others, have created a body of work in which the human (and sometimes animal) body and the wooden puppets are used as fascinating decoys.

As the puppeteers explain in their note in the printed script of *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, the puppets are wooden dolls attempting to be real people. As they attempt to move and breathe as we do, they cross the barrier of the here and now and become metaphors for humanity. In this case, two puppeteers manipulate one puppet. The manipulators, working in concert, split and somehow reduce their individual responsibility for the puppet's actions and the puppet's speech. This encourages us to enter into the illusion that the puppet has a life and responsibility of its own. But the fact that the manipulators are present also allows us to use the emotions visible in the puppeteers' faces to inform our understanding of the emotions of the puppet character, with its immobile features.

It's a case of carving, construction, manipulation and then layered theatrical performance segueing into sorcery, a sorcery fed by Handspring's process of conceptualisation and realisation that is infused with sensitive, cultural cross-pollinations and considerable intellectual interrogation. This wellspring of creativity has given birth to the mythical, the comical, the fantastical, the poignantly political and the ritualistic – at times concurrently. Handspring Puppet Company, as represented by Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler, have become an integral, consistently active and inspirational part of the South African performance tradition, as well as a well-respected contender on the world stage. Meanwhile, certainly in their homeland, Handspring have transformed, and in their way Africanised, the notion of puppetry and puppet-making.

ABOVE *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1997. Basil Jones and Busi Zokufa with one of The Witnesses.

170   OPPOSITE Witness puppet by Adrian Kohler from *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.

NOTES

01. David Lytton had also written several novels exploring the social impact of Apartheid political legislation.
02. The Wits Downstairs Theatre is a venue at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg. The theatre is a small black-box space used for experimental and avant-garde theatre-making.
03. The piece was also a breakthrough for Handspring, as it was their first work of puppet theatre intended for an adult audience.
04. This distinction is significant. Apartheid had produced a political culture based largely on an oppositional and binary logic.
05. Much protest theatre-making was informed by the work of Barney Simon, Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa. *Woza Albert!* was the collaborative piece that brought these talents together. Significantly this, and subsequent works like Ngema's *Asinamali!* and Mtwa's *Bopha!*, as well as other issue-based plays of the 1980s and 1990s, particularly theatre and dance works emanating from the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre at the Funda Centre, in Diepkloof, Soweto, represented a fusion of dialogue, languages, movement, traditional or urban dance, song and sometimes poetry, or some form of ritual.
06. In the last decades of Apartheid, many South Africans of conscience left the country and established themselves in neighbouring states where they often gained substantial political and organisational experience. Frequently, too, they played key roles in developing the ethos of regional democracy through cultural, social and political structures and the NGO sectors.
07. This was an event of real cultural importance, establishing a vital link between artists living in political exile and artists in South Africa. The role of culture as a key instrument of political transformation was a guiding idea deriving in large measure from the principles of Soviet Realist art. The symposium focused on the importance of cultural recovery and the valuing of indigenous arts.
08. In July 1985, the President of South Africa, P.W. Botha, had decreed a State of Emergency in the country in order to quell anti-Apartheid activism. The order was renewed in 1986, and only finally lifted by Botha's successor, President F.W. de Klerk, in 1990, the year in which Nelson Mandela was released from prison.
09. Now known as the National Arts Festival, the cultural events last for some three weeks in June/July annually, and take place in the small Eastern Cape settler city of Grahamstown.
10. *Art and Craft in Africa: Everyday Life Ritual Court Art*, Paris: Terrail, 1995, p. 11.
11. This and all subsequent quotations from Jones and Kohler are taken from a 2008 conversation.
12. A local actor who had performed in the highly successful production, *Asinamali!* The Market Theatre in Johannesburg was a forum for avant-garde and protest theatre, established by Barney Simon in 1974, during the height of the Apartheid regime.
13. *Avenue Q* (2003) is a multi-Tony Award-winning musical that uses a combination of Sesame-Street style puppets and live performers.
14. The giraffe, named Zarafa by its handlers, was a diplomatic gift in 1825, from Muhammad Ali Pasha, the Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt, to Charles X, King of France.

....

Opening-night card by William Kentridge for *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, 1997. Tipp-Ex on black card.
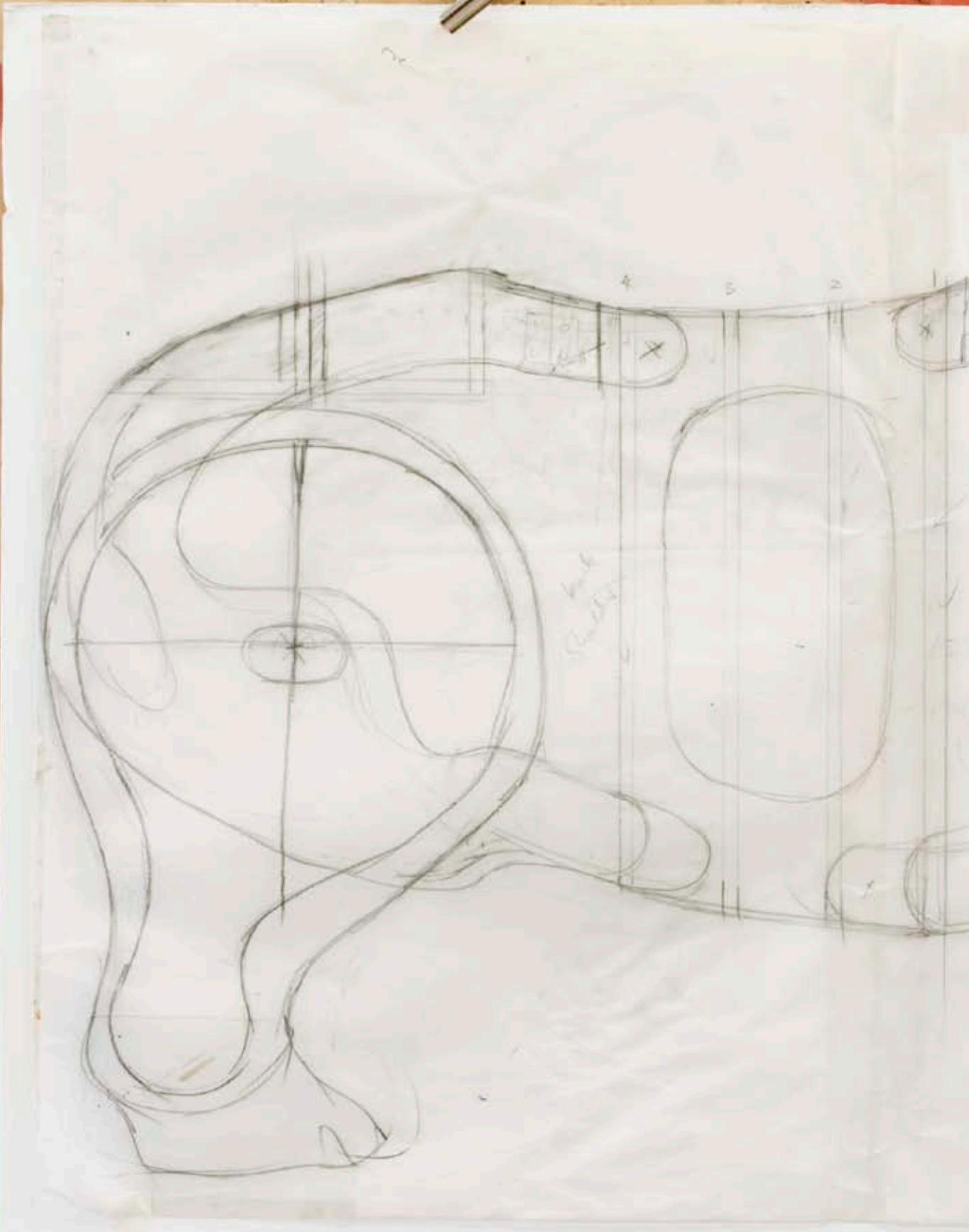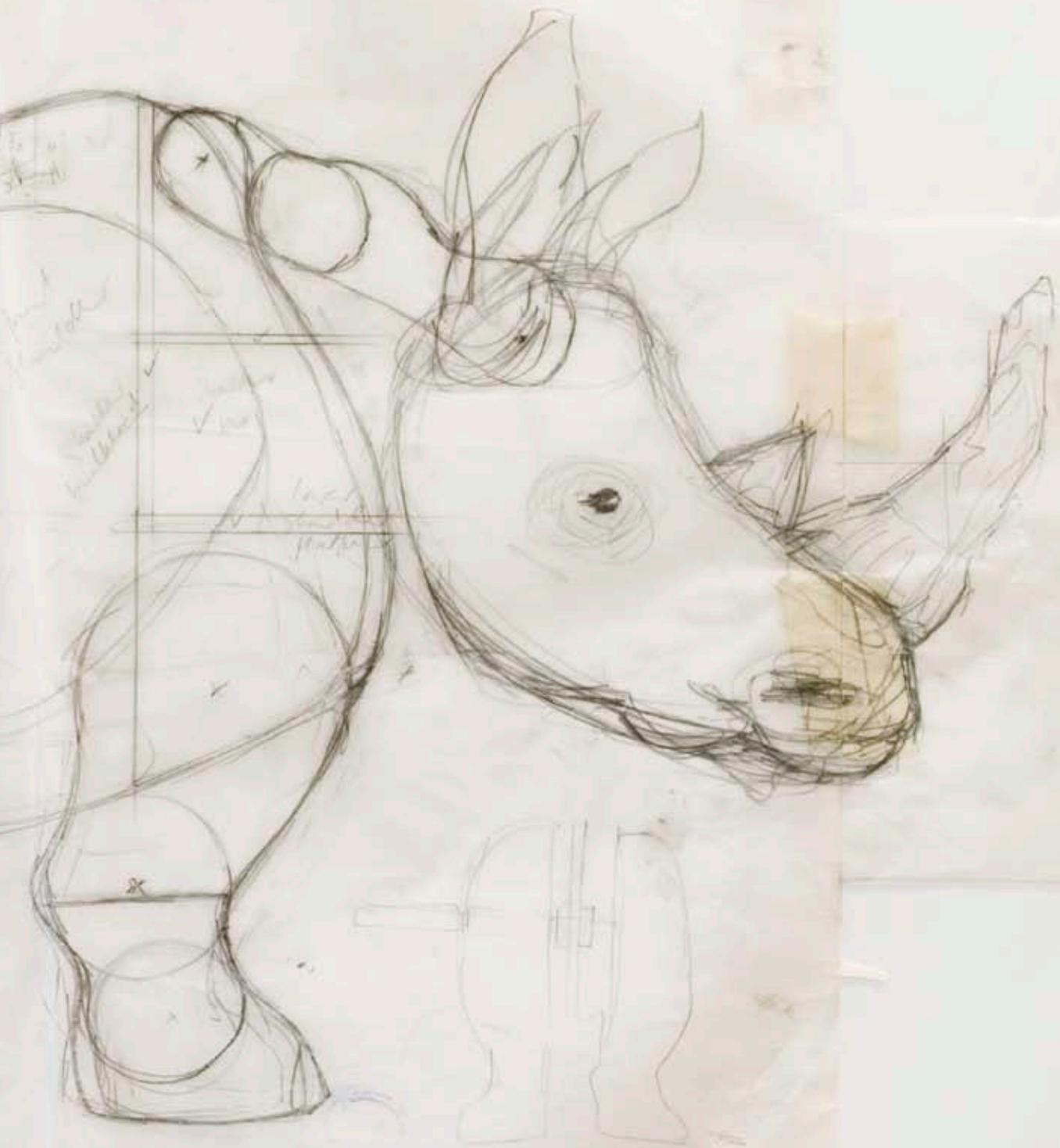
In Dialogue

William Kentridge with Jane Taylor

In 2008, Jane Taylor interviewed William Kentridge in his Johannesburg studio about his collaborations with Handspring Puppet Company.
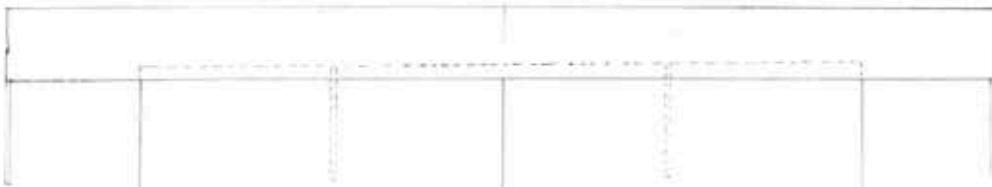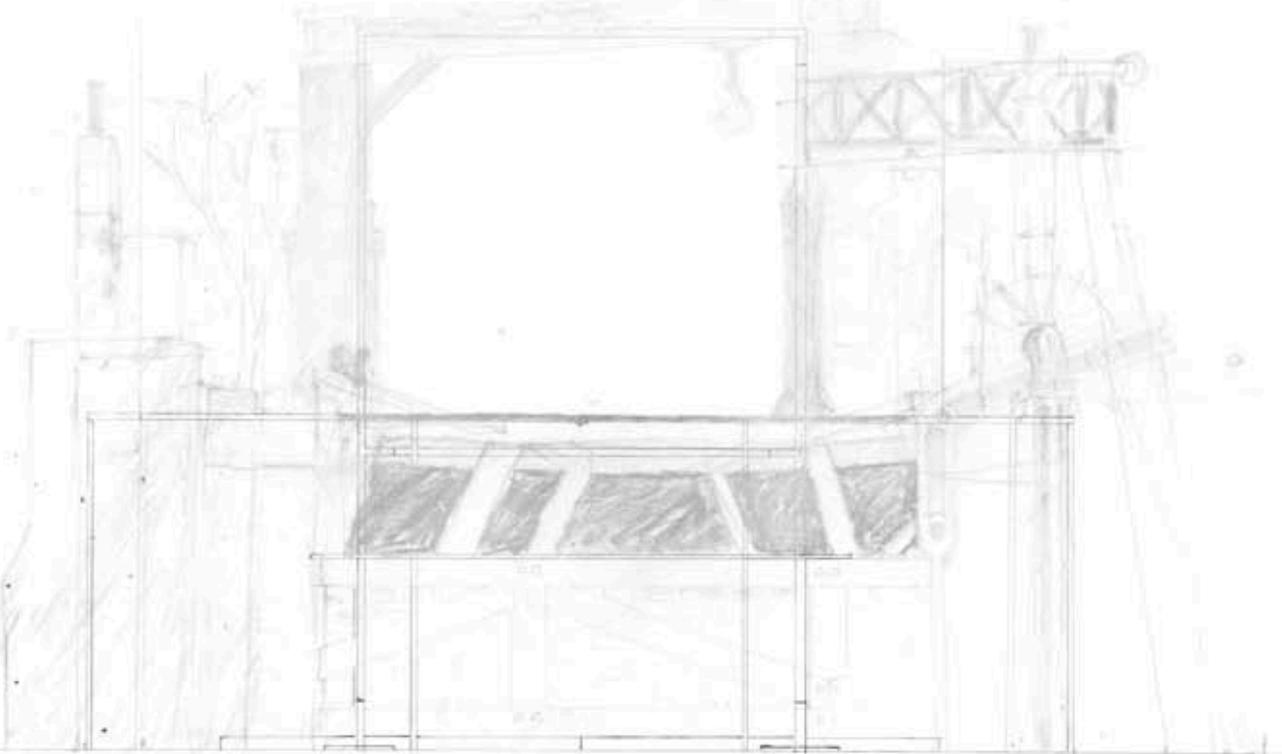
PREVIOUS Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of The Rhino in *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, 1992.

THIS PAGE Set proposal by Adrian Kohler for *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, 1991.

RIGHT Puppet Woyzeck by Adrian Kohler for *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, now in the Collection of the Stadtsmuseum, Munich, Germany.
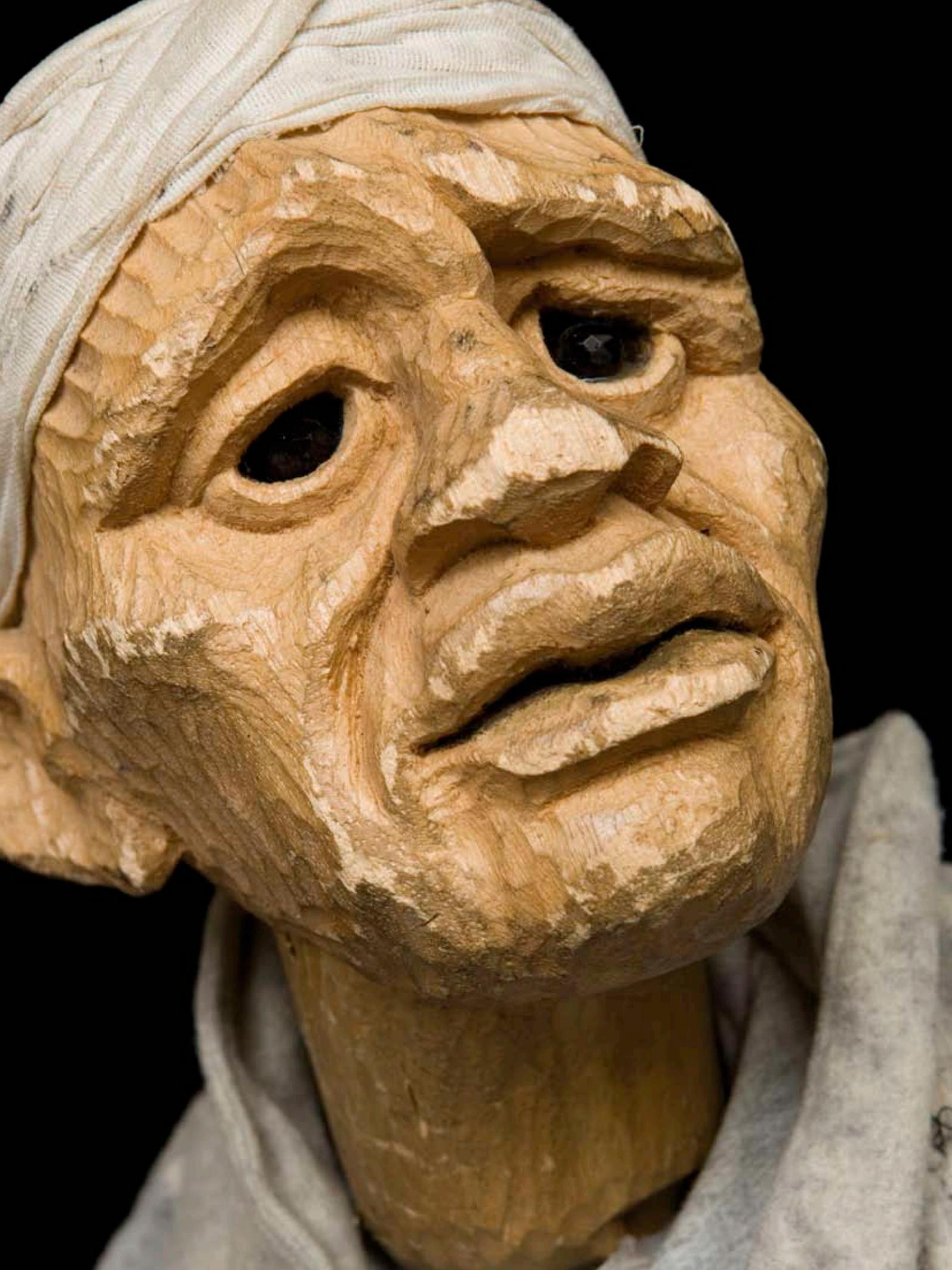
JT Given what you're doing at present,[01] I want to ask you whether your interest in illusionism, was part of your interest in puppets when you initially approached Handspring to work on the *Woyzeck* project? This is in some ways an 'after the fact' question. Looking back, can you recreate what drove you into that enquiry initially?

WK In the last years I've been looking a lot – not at the nature of perception, but the phenomenon of it – what it is that we do when we recognise something, how we construct the world from fragments. When I started working on *Woyzeck* in 1992, the first production with Handspring, one of the initial revelations for me was the appearance of agency in puppets. This was in the first days, of looking at films on puppetry, at other kinds of puppeteers; at the way in which we take pleasure in being fooled by ourselves, when we see an object that we know is an inanimate object. Then it starts to be manipulated in a particular way, and we *give* it a sense of agency, we *will* it to have agency, we are convinced, even as we know it does not have any agency … so when Adrian's hand picks up Woyzeck's hand and also picks up a cup … I mean not the wooden hand, but the human hand is picking it up and holding it in front of the wooden hand, yet nonetheless, at a certain level we actually see the puppet picking up the cup, the agency of picking up the cup is given over to the puppet, in spite of what we see. So that's part of the same enquiry (not an enquiry really, because it's more of an astonishment – it's nothing as scientific as an enquiry): I am looking at how we make sense of things in the world, what clues we are given which we then expand. So there is a human hand that picks up a cup, just as there is a breath given by the human manipulator, and we somehow feel that it's the puppet who is himself blowing on the hot tea. So you understand that a great deal of what is happening the viewer is constructing – the movement of the hand, the angle of the head to the cup – all of those things are clues, which we put together to sustain the belief in agency.

OPPOSITE *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1992. Foreground (left to right): Louis Seboko, puppet Woyzeck, William Kentridge, Tale Motsepe and Busi Zokufa; background (left to right) Basil Jones, The Rhino and Adrian Kohler. Puppets by Adrian Kohler.

ABOVE *Woyzeck on the Highveld* rehearsal, William Kentridge studio, Johannesburg, 2008. Puppeteers Louis Seboko and Adrian Kohler with Woyzeck,

JT It is interesting to me that The Baby, in particular, in *Woyzeck*, is such a powerful presence because one of the things that enables the whole puppeteering process is that we necessarily *have to* fool ourselves about what is a being in the world, in order for us to take the inchoate little mess that is an infant, and to invest enough care and attention into that thing …

WK A human infant?

JT A human infant. It's necessarily a puppet waiting to have consciousness infused into it through a dialogue with us. So one of the things that's so mysterious about the process is that puppeteering teaches us about the provisional subjectivity in an apparently inanimate thing, an unformed thing, and because, as human beings, we are predisposed to care for The Baby, in order to produce the next generation, that's part of the stock-in-trade that puppeteering takes advantage of. It's a necessary human condition, our desire to attribute subjectivity and agency to something which is performed. So I'm really interested in what these processes tell us about ourselves.[02] Did you have any experience with or delight in puppets when you were growing up?

WK No. I had the usual puppets, which is to say, three marionettes which were just a tangle of strings forever from three minutes after they were given to me.

....

OPPOSITE *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Puppeteers Adrian Kohler and Busi Zokufa with Maria and The Baby.

....

ABOVE *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Puppeteer Basil Jones with The Baby,

JT Where did you get these? Were they a parental gift?

WK They were gifts, I'm sure, gifts. And I'm sure actually that we also had glove puppets, as one always got as a child.

JT And did you make performances for your parents?

WK No, I don't think I did puppets then. Later, I did puppets for my children. The rule of the family puppet was that the character of the puppet could only be made on the morning of the puppet show, so it was a bread-roll with a finger stuck through it, and a doll's dress over your wrist. So puppets could only be made on the morning of the performance and out of household objects – and those fed more directly into the sculptures that I have done, rather than the puppetry. So, corkscrew ladies that can lift their arms, pairs of scissors that can walk along.

JT Okay, so try to imagine yourself back, before the journey with Handspring: what was it that you thought *then* that you were learning about the craft of working in three dimensions, that you hadn't understood beforehand?

WK No – it was a different thing. One of the starting points was an interest to be back in the theatre. I had done *Johannesburg, Second Greatest City After Paris* about the time that I started working on *Woyzeck*. It was also about working in the long form. The animated film was ten minutes long, and to do a full-length work, one would take, say, twenty years making the drawings! But if one worked with the human figures being made in real time, rather than animated or drawn, one could suddenly do a ninety-minute piece of a different kind of animation, of performance. So the idea was that instead of animating and rubbing out Soho Eckstein walking across the landscape, and spending a week to do ten seconds, you could move the puppet across, and the landscape could change and the puppet could change, and you could do a two-minute sequence directly in real time. It was partly about trying to solve problems with a longer form. So when I started with *Woyzeck* it was as this 'proto' film – a cinematic event in which you would have the background projected and the foreground performed by the puppet who looked like the charcoal drawings. They were, by the way, the most 'drawn' of the puppets that we have used in the different productions – I mean here, the exaggerated lines of the characters. The thinness of the Captain and the roundness of the Doctor were more evident than, say, in *Ubu* or in *Faustus* or *Ulysses* later.
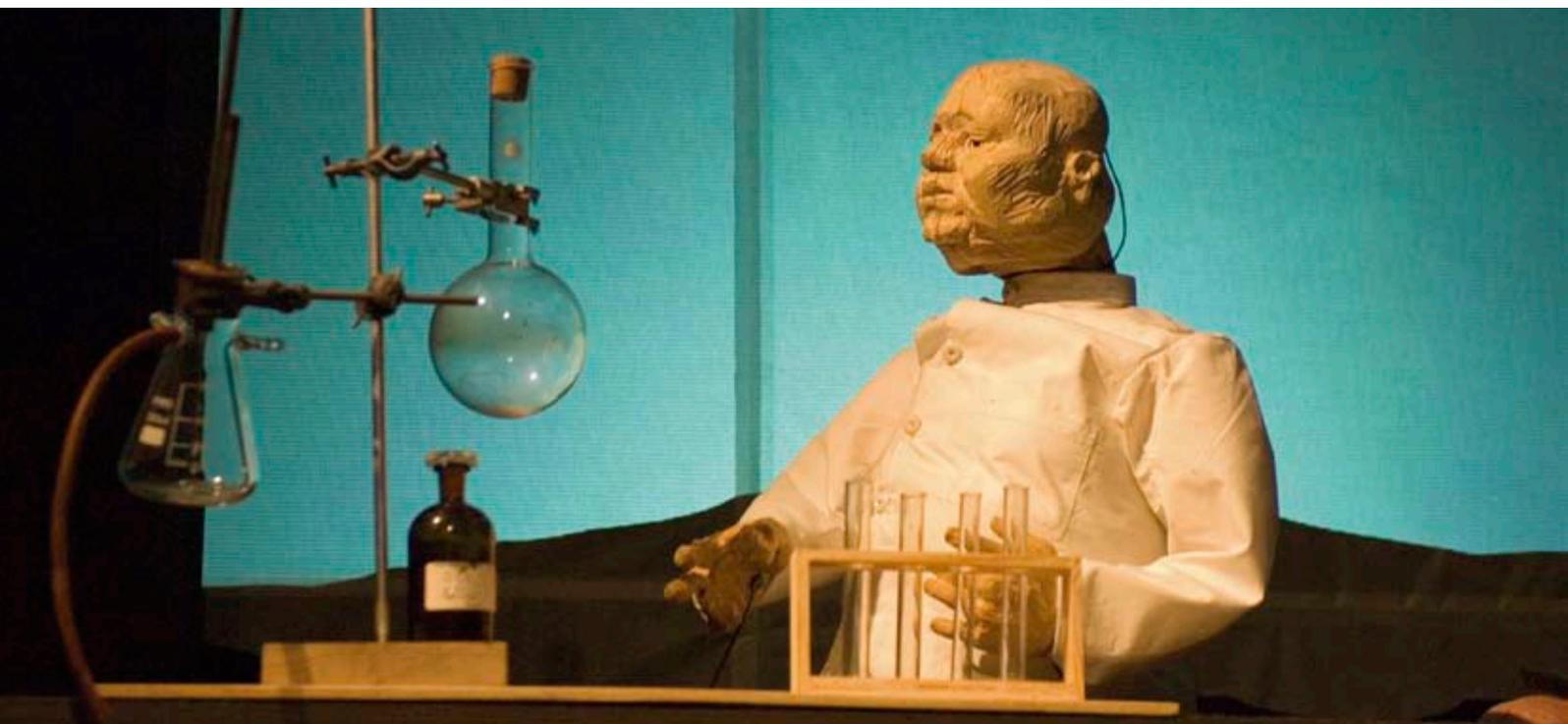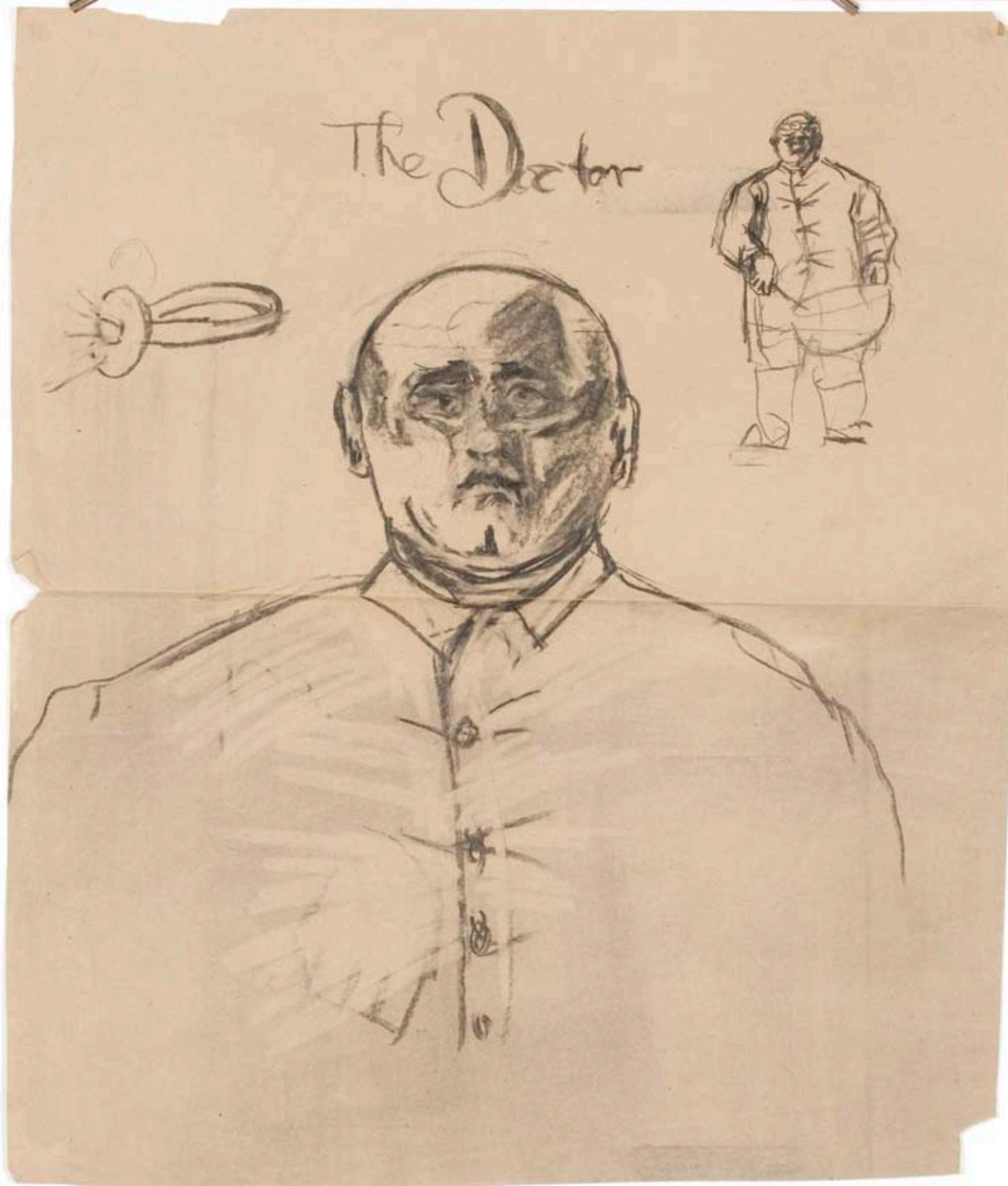
The Doctor

OPPOSITE *Woyzeck on the Highveld* rehearsal, William Kentridge studio, Johannesburg, 2008. The Doctor, carved by Adrian Kohler.

ABOVE Design (based on a photograph by August Sander) by William Kentridge of The Doctor in *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, 1991.
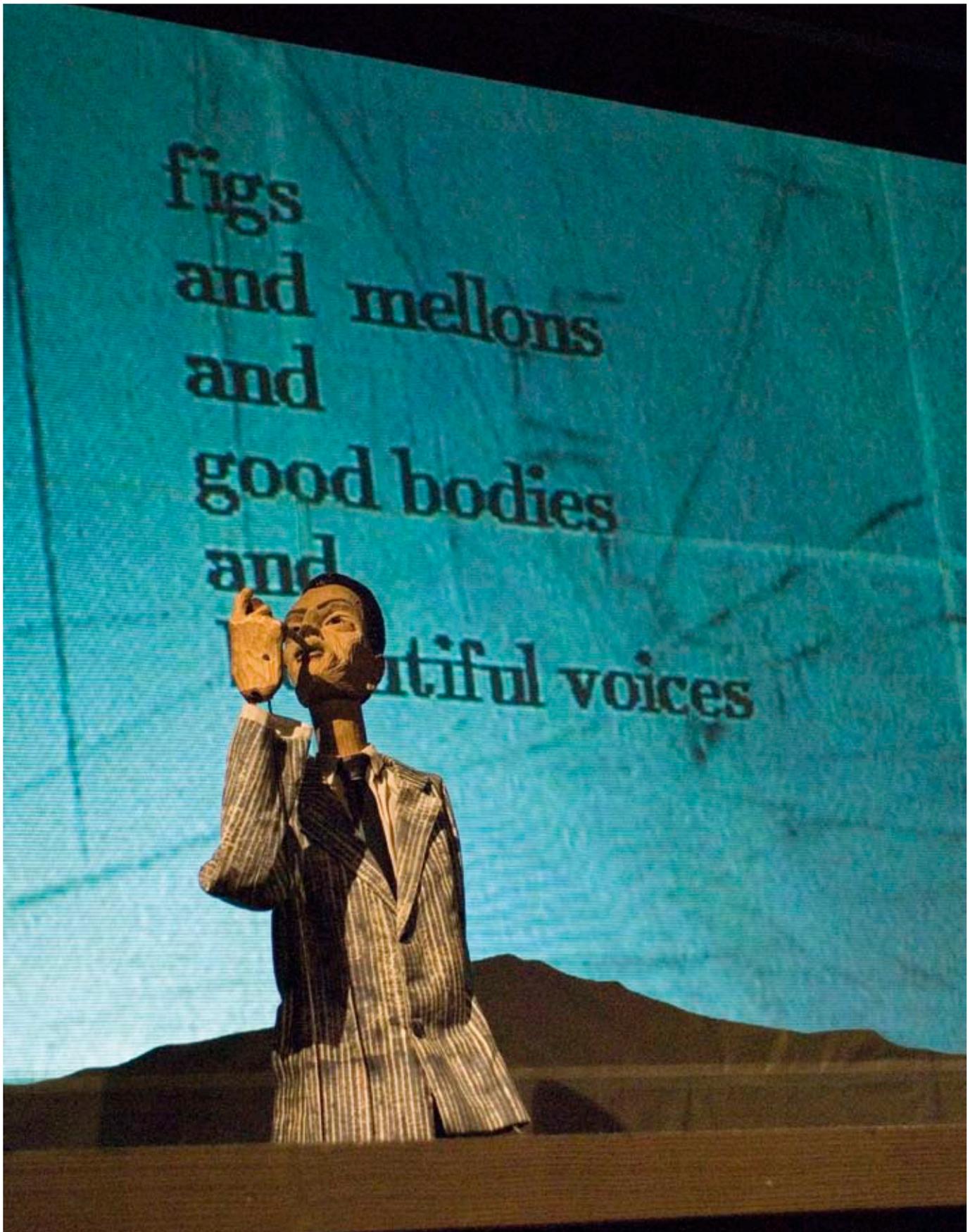
ABOVE *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. The Captain.
Animation by William Kentridge.

OPPOSITE *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. The Captain
manipulated by Basil Jones and Busi Zokufa.

JT How much did the resurrecting of *Woyzeck* in 2008 change your interpretation, or (as far as you're aware) was it effectively a reconstruction of the same production?[03]

WK It's a reconstruction of the same. It wasn't an attempt to rethink the play or its problems. Adrian wanted to fix up some of the puppets, and the manipulation this time around was much more sophisticated because of the years of art that had gone into these processes in the meanwhile, but the strategies were the same. The qualities that Mncidisi brought to the Barker (we now had a different actor) made it fairly different but it was rather like taking an old movie out and re-screening it. It wasn't re-shooting an old script by a new film-maker.
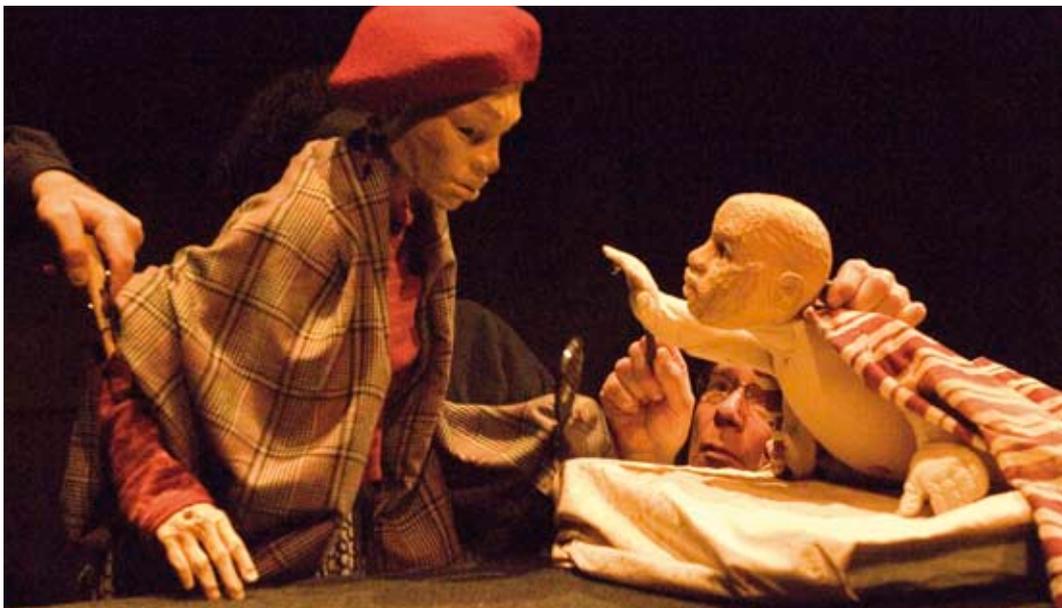
PREVIOUS *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, backstage at The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Puppet racks with (left to right) The Captain, Margaret, The Doctor and The Miner.

OPPOSITE Design by William Kentridge for puppet Woyzeck, 1991.

TOP *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1992. Puppets Woyzeck, The Baby and Maria.

BOTTOM *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Puppets Maria and The Baby manipulated by Adrian Kohler, Busi Zokufa and Basil Jones.
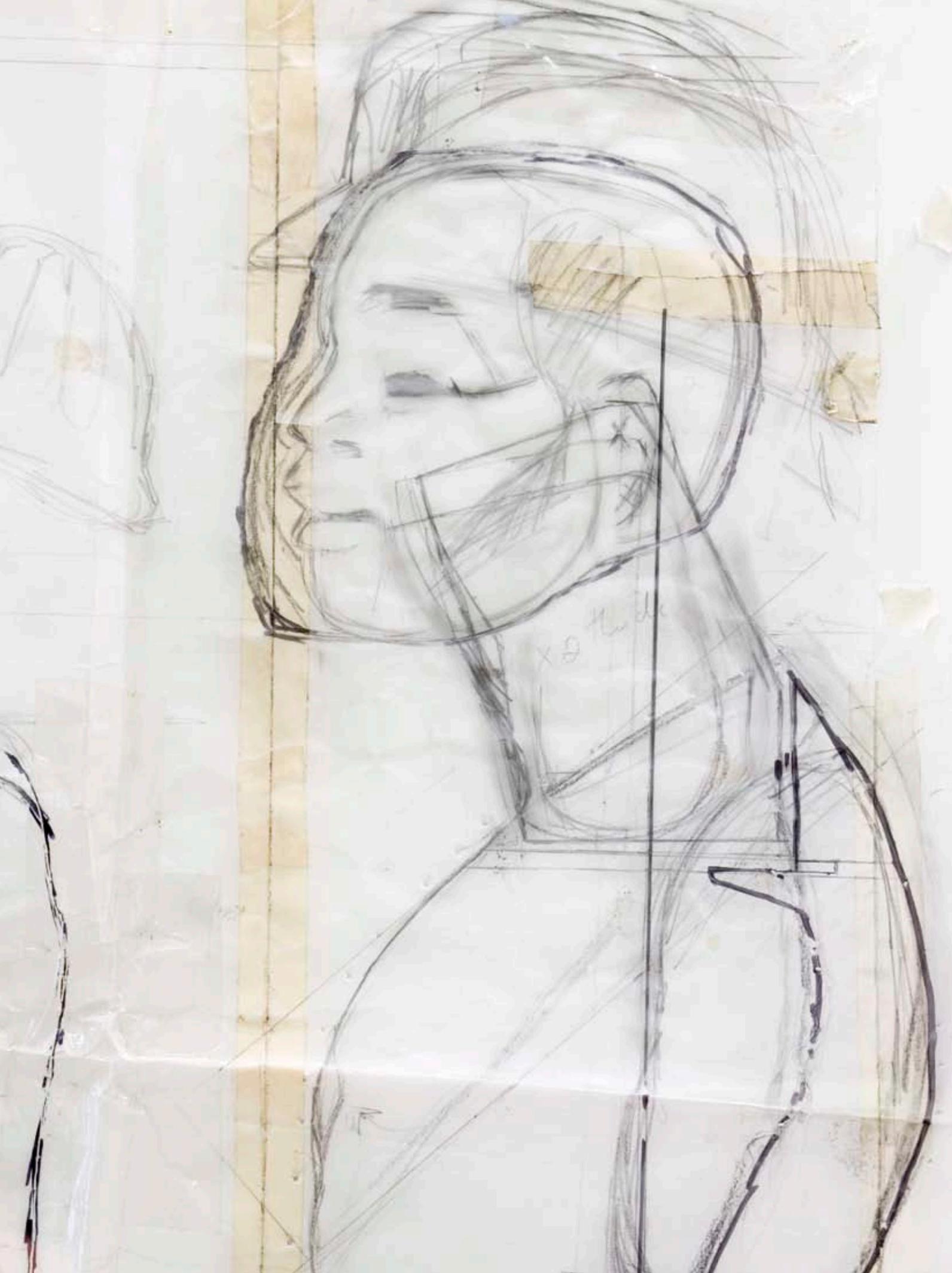
JT Had Basil and Adrian by that stage evolved the sort of logic which you would deploy, with several puppeteers working with one puppet in such an overt way?

WK They must have, they must have – but no, not in such an overt way. We tried at first to hide the puppeteers, putting them in shadows, putting them with boards above their heads, hoping to keep the light off them. And it was a kind of failure that we couldn't hide them. We didn't want to hide them with the black cloth, like Bunraku, and it took a while to understand that in fact the virtue of the performance was the double performance of the puppet and the actor both together. It took a while to know that it wasn't something that we were 'reduced to'.

˄

OPPOSITE Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of The Miner in *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, 1992.

ABOVE *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. The Miner manipulated by Basil Jones, Adrian Kohler and Louis Seboko, and Maria and The Baby (background) manipulated by Busi Zokufa (obscured). Animation by William Kentridge.

JT Now how do you think that the contract you make with your audience – how has that liberated you in your other arts? You've understood now that there's a particular mode of engagement in which you've established the terms of the engagement, and then you can take your audience more or less anywhere. What do you think that this understanding has done for your own artistry?

WK I almost always discover these things the hard way. In other words, I get dragged kicking and screaming to find 'what is the virtue of the work' rather than it being obvious to me from the beginning. So, for example, with the animated films: their interest had to do with the effect of erasure. In the same way that I initially didn't want the puppeteers to be seen, I didn't want the erasure to be seen. It took me a long time before others could persuade me that not only was it okay if the erasures were seen, but that they were the virtue of the piece. So in both cases I feel that, at some level, I can't really take credit for it. The credit comes in finding the right form. Everything comes from the form.

JT So you learn it after the fact.

WK We learnt that after the fact.

ABOVE *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, Theatre Malibran, Venice 2008. Puppet Antinoo, one of Penelope's three suitors, manipulated by Basil Jones and sung and manipulated by Stephan MacLeod.

OPPOSITE *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse,* Theatre Malibran, Venice 2008. Puppet Ulisse manipulated and sung by Julian Podger and Luc De Wit (obscured); puppet Telemachus manipulated by Adrian Kohler (obscured), Jason Potgieter and singer Jean-François Novelli (obscured).

JT And what about working in such diverse media, such as opera with puppets? Can you talk about the particular demands of the opera experiment?

WK The opera experiment was our fourth production. It had to do with two things. Firstly, that we'd always had a lot of music – music that was a very important part of the other productions, but it had always been recorded. So we wanted to do a piece with live music. The other thing had to do with the strange relationship of the manipulator to the puppet, the principle being that the manipulator focuses on the puppet and the puppet looks at the audience and the audience has to look at the manipulator, but then follows the manipulator's gaze (as you do when somebody is focusing on something) to the puppet and then back as they become aware of themselves watching the puppet. So there's a triangulation of the process with a fourth step (when it is working well) being that every now and then you find yourself sitting in the row behind yourself, watching yourself being fooled, and enjoying that. It gets amplified one step further. One of the problems for me with opera singers is what they are focused on when they're singing. Is it on the audience? Is it in their head? So now all the singer has to do is focus on the puppet and the puppet will do the role. Of course it's not quite that simple. And if the singer turns toward the audience, the puppet suddenly dies – it becomes this ridiculous piece of wood held in someone's hand.

JT And how difficult was that with singers, because singers are constantly opening themselves up toward the audience? It must have driven you nuts?

WK Some singers can do it very well, and some singers just can't do it. When we do it again next year[04] there will be some who do it very well, and some with whom we struggle.

ABOVE Sketch by Adrian Kohler of the shadow puppet Telemachus in *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, 1998.

OPPOSITE Detail of armour by Adrian Kohler for Telemachus in *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*.

THE SCREEN FRAME, HEADER PANEL, SIDE PANEL PS 1 + PS 2, SIDE PANEL OP 1 & OP 2,
AND THE 2 BRACES ARE ALL ASSEMBLED FACE DOWN, THEN WALKED
UP INTO ITS VERTICAL POSITION. THE CONSTRUCTION NEEDS TO BE STRONG
ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO BE RAISED.

N.B

THE GAP BETWEEN THE USTAGE ROSTRA AND THE ARENA ROSTRA NEEDS A FILLER
STRIP FIXED FLUSH WITH THE SURFACE OF BOTH SETS OF ROSTRA SO THAT THE
TELEMACHUS MOVEABLE ROSTRUM CAN TRAVEL ON ITS WHEELS
SMOOTHLY THROUGH THE BACK WALL OPENING

HEADER PANEL

CROSS
SECTION.

PS
4

SIDE
FLAT

SIDE
PANEL
PS 1

OP
4

BACK WALL
OPENING

N.B FILLER
STRIP

ARENA ROSTRA

SIDE
PANEL
OP 1

SIDE
FLATS

UPSTAGE

ROSTRA

2000 MM

1000 MM

PLAN 12
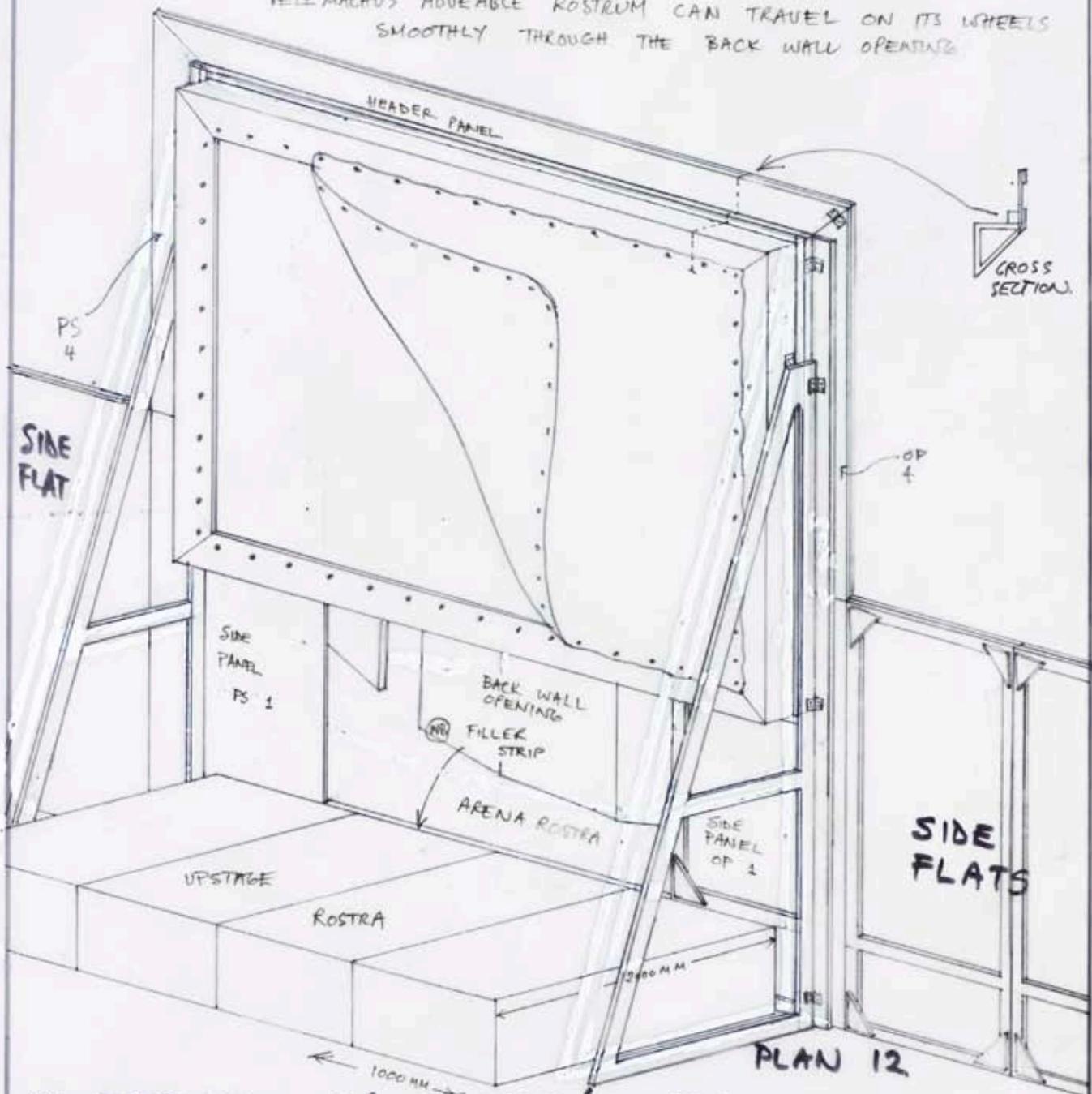
'IL RITORNO D' ULISSE BACK WALL
REAR VIEW SHOWING BREAK DOWN OF
ELEMENTS.
SCALE 1:25

HANDSPRING PUPPET COMPANY   MOD: 20-10-08

JT What happens, say, if there is a love duet between two singers? Do they sing into the puppets, and we believe that the puppets are wooing one another, or can they sing to one another if they are not looking at the audience but are looking at one another?

WK No, then they lose you. They have to do it through the puppets. So, as we had in *Ulysses*, you have Adrian manipulating Penelope and Basil manipulating Ulysses: so we had two puppeteers who are a couple, manipulating two puppets; and you have two singers. So in fact there are six figures on stage, two puppets and four manipulators, two of whom are singers. And the puppets are focused on each other and the four manipulators are each focused on their own puppet; and there's this extraordinary, strong bond. Your attention shifts constantly in the audience. At times you see the puppets, at times you see the singers, at times the manipulators. It is very much about impure viewing. It would be wrong to say you are completely lost in the moment and the singers disappear and you only see the puppets. You shift, the way your eye does when it changes focus. You are always watching things on different planes.

....

OPPOSITE Revised set-construction plan detailing the screen frame for *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*.

....

ABOVE *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, Theatre Malibran, Venice 2008. Puppet Penelope with singer Romina Basso and puppeteer Adrian Kohler; Ulisse 1 with puppeteer Luc De Wit; Ulisse 2 with puppeteer Basil Jones (obscured) and singer Julian Podger. Animation by William Kentridge.

JT What does that mean? What is that telling us? What has that said to you about the process of vision? Is it that there's something inherently satisfying in that variegated, multiple viewing?

WK For me it's satisfying because it's part of understanding that the world is something constructed, rather than *given*. What are we working with in *Ulysses*? There is a seventeenth-century Venetian text based on a story from Greece, from three thousand years ago, performed, say, in a European city, by manipulators from South Africa in the twenty-first century, with singers from other parts of the world who don't look necessarily like the puppets at all, and you are aware, I think, of those different layers. It's not like they disappear. You're aware of the historical references – where the opera is set – as well as the time in which you're watching it (that moment when you are sitting in the theatre). You are aware of being lost in it, then out of it again: you're shifting your gaze back and forth from the musicians to the singers. That's what one does. We are also given multiple contradictory fragments from which we will construct the world rather than from coherent wholes. The bedrock of puppetry is a demonstration of how we make sense of the world. Puppeteering makes apparent things that we know but don't really see.

ABOVE *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse* rehearsal, Theatre Malibran, Venice 2008. Julian Podger and Luc De Wit manipulating Ulisse with Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones.

OPPOSITE *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse* rehearsal, Theatre Malibran, Venice. 2008. The three suitors Antinoo, Pisandro and Anfinomo manipulated by (top to bottom) Anna Zander, Jason Potgieter (both obscured), Basil Jones, Stephan MacLeod, Busi Zokufa and Jean-François Novelli.

Il Ritorno d'Ulisse, Theatre Malibran, Venice. 2008. The three suitors Antinoo, Pisandro and Anfinomo with singer Stephan MacLeod and puppeteers Basil Jones, Luc de Wit, Busi Zokufa, Jason Potgieter and Anna Zander (all obscured). Puppets by Adrian Kohler.

JT In your work with Handspring you have worked together on projects of differing degrees of realism. Can you talk about what aesthetic medium is most satisfying for you, in relation to the question of a realist or a non-realist aesthetic in puppetry? There seems to be a difference between what's happening in *Confessions of Zeno* and what's happening in *Ulysses*. Or, in fact, do you *not* think there is such a difference?

WK No. I'm trying to think if there's any difference at all ... I mean the puppets are slightly more abstract in *Zeno*. A pair of scissors, rather than the figure of a man, walks across the stage ... but that was a case where I understood the significance of the form only after the work was in performance. That's a production I could imagine redoing to change it.

OPPOSITE *Confessions of Zeno* rehearsal, The Dance Factory, Johannesburg, 2002. Otto Maidi as The Father and Dawid Minnaar as Zeno. Animation by William Kentridge.

ABOVE *Confessions of Zeno* rehearsal, The Dance Factory, Johannesburg, 2002. Dawid Minnaar as Zeno. Shadow puppets by William Kentridge and Adrian Kohler.

The General

June 10 '99   Faust
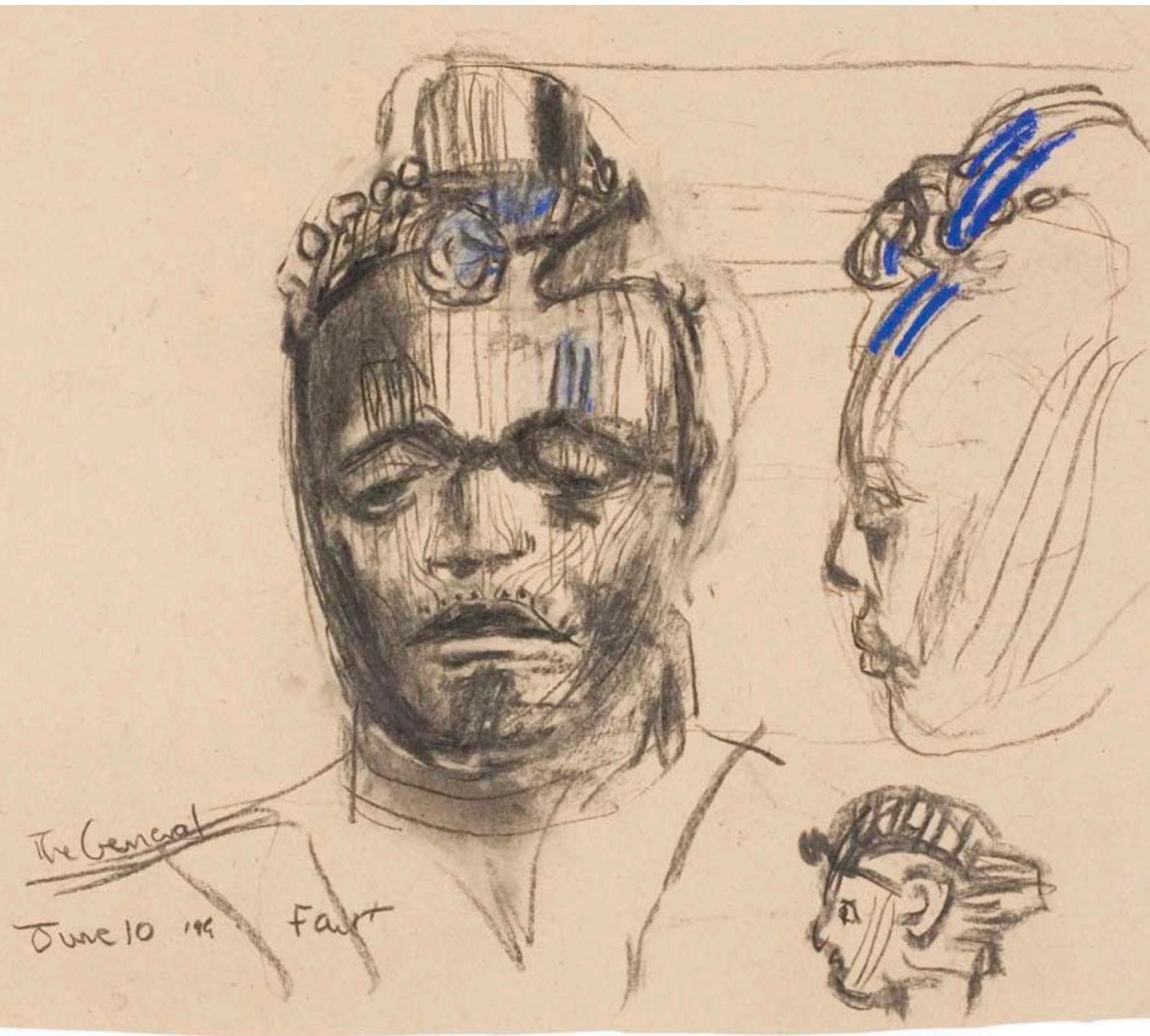
ABOVE Design sketch by William Kentridge for The General in *Faustus in Africa*, 1999.

OPPOSITE *Faustus in Africa*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1995. Puppets Faustus and The Witch with puppeteers (left to right) Dawid Minnaar, Adrian Kohler, Basil Jones and Antoinette Kellermann, and Leslie Fong as Mephisto (foreground).

OVERLEAF *Faustus in Africa*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1995. The Band. Puppets by Adrian Kohler and William Kentridge. Animation by William Kentridge.

JT On another tack, what do you want to say about the nature of the collaborative project? Are you a natural collaborator?

WK Collaborations work well when people from different fields cause provocations in each other's worlds. So there was something about the crudeness of the charcoal drawing that I was doing which gave Adrian a new way of carving. There was a discovery on my part of the flat, two-dimensional silhouette figures that Adrian used as one of his languages of puppetry that spawned all the paper cutouts and all of the torn figures that I've used since then. The meeting produced fundamental changes to our lexicon of ways of working, of thinking about the problem. Also with collaborations there's a mutual *heating of enthusiasms*, raising the temperature, which is essential for new ideas to come to the surface and bubble off. There are provocations that would never happen if I was working on my own, thinking on my own. One of the things collaboration does, even outside of the specifics of a particular work, is that it allows one to understand the making of a kind of applied arts, art in the service of some other, larger work, but which nonetheless also has an autonomy on its own. Also there are, on any project, demands of the narrative, demands of the specifics which you have to fulfill, but which, very often, while being solved in themselves, enable you to set off a whole new series of images, a new series of enquiries or ways of working. So while making *Faustus* I began working with maps and I went on to produce thousands of maps. I have now worked with maps a thousand times, ten thousand times in a thousand forms.

Collaboration allows one to think of one's own work as an applied art, an art in the service of some larger project which then provokes work that exists in another way. With collaboration, one of the starting points is of everything being possible, of everything being allowed at the start of the project.

JT You don't have to have the capacities inside yourself in order to realise things, so you have no constraints on your imagination, because you are working with people who have various abilities?

WK Yes. Yes, absolutely. I noticed this very much with puppets but also with sculpture. My know-how of techniques like casting or carving or construction is very limited, so I assume everything is possible. The sculptor who knows how technically difficult the task is might never attempt it. So in the same way, with the puppets it is possible to discuss an idea with Adrian which will provoke him to solve technical questions that he may not have tackled because he understands how difficult the process is. We produce different possibilities for each other.

NOTES
01. Kentridge's 2008 exhibition *What Will Come Has Already Come* had anamorphic drawings and an anamorphic film at its core, as well as several works derived from stereoscopic experiments. At the time of the interview he was making 'exploded' sculptures, three-dimensional images which can only be resolved into two-dimensional images when their disparate parts are viewed from one particular vantage point.
02. I examine this proposition in my introductory essay.
03. *Woyzeck on the Highveld* was originally staged in 1992.
04. 2008.

....

Puppet Faustus by Adrian Kohler for *Faustus in Africa*. Design based on the explorer of the Congo, Pierre de Brazza, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

FAUSTean HANDSPRUNG NOTES.
# BROKEN. BATTERED. BROUGHT.

Lesego Rampolokeng

Rampolokeng reworked the playscript of Goethe's *Faust* for the Handspring production of *Faustus in Africa.* He was invited to write a poem for this book about the process of collaboration.
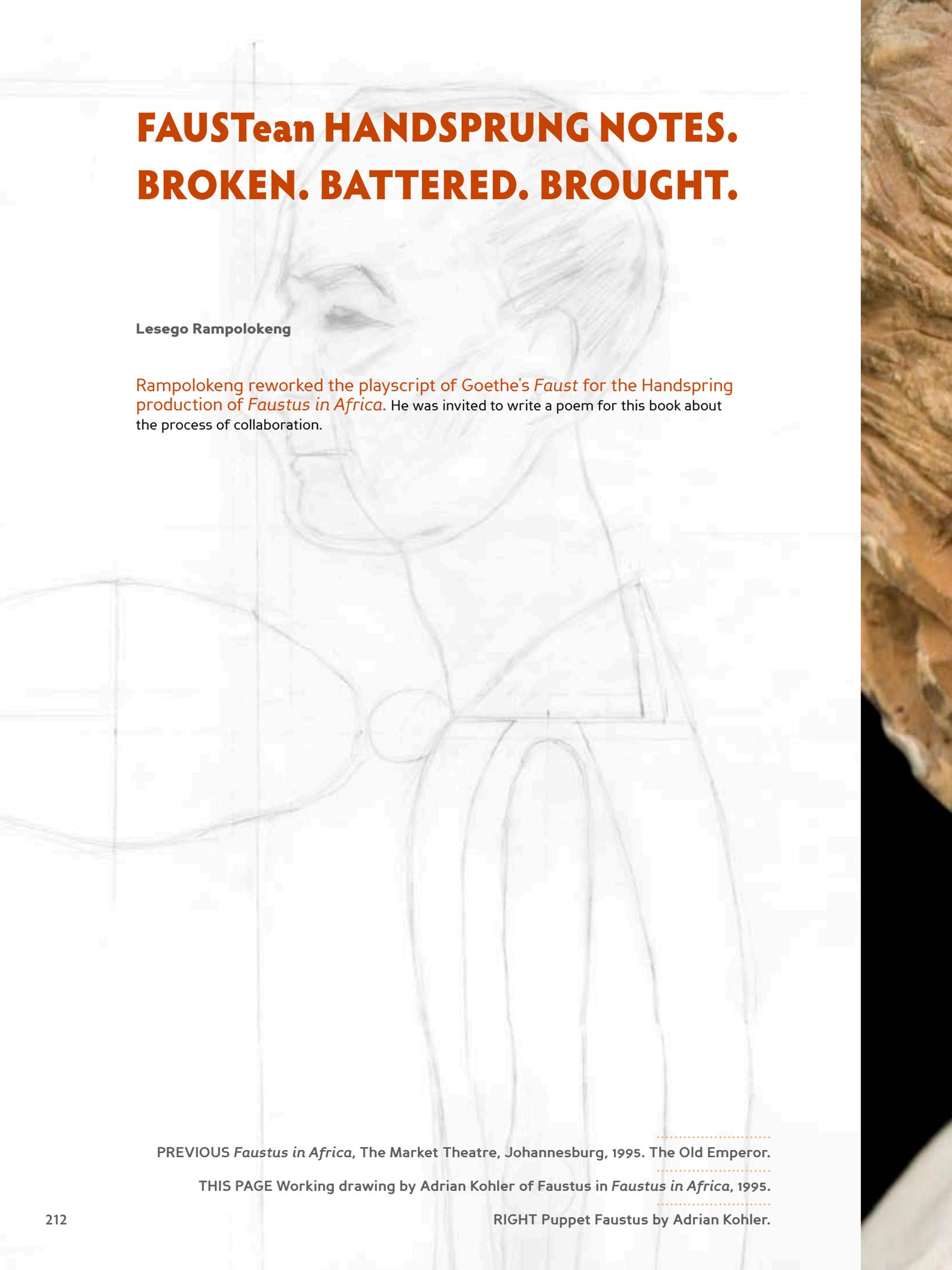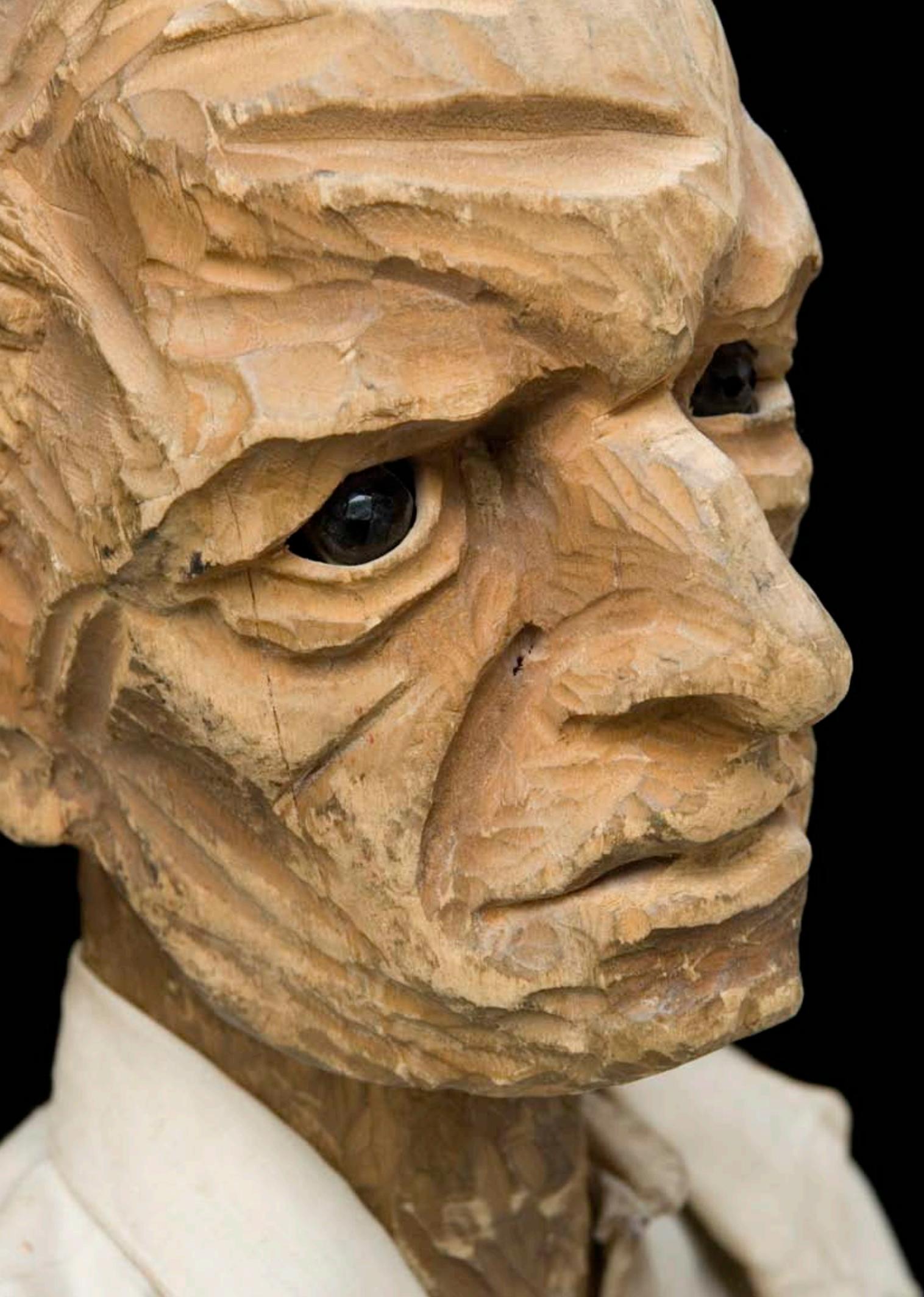
ABOVE *Faustus in Africa*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1995. Dawid Minnaar and Adrian Kohler with puppet Faustus, and Leslie Fong as Mephisto. Animation by William Kentridge.

OVERLEAF *Faustus in Africa*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1995. Puppet Faustus with Dawid Minnaar.

P. 218 *Faustus in Africa*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1995. Puppet Faustus with Dawid Minnaar and puppet Johnson with Louis Seboko. Animation by William Kentridge.

P. 219 *Faustus in Africa*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1995. Puppet Faustus with Dawid Minnaar and Adrian Kohler.

PP. 220–1 Design proposal by William Kentridge for The Hyena in *Faustus in Africa*, 1995.

Rockey street cafe & coffee William Kentridge dropped Grandmaster Goethe on me.
said he had puppets in the colony for him. part one Faust.
And we were waving fists in Africa, south of it.
where causes gladiate. with coliseum pretences.
A nation shaking fallopian shackles.

Sitting in a 'liberated zone' thinking on colonials.
My german time runs back. hostile.
& All of history came to bear on that one.
Genocide. Extermination. Inanimate. Voice into wood
The Decimation of a people. Wooden cries rising.
Puppets in tears. & all is stunted. trees were torn down for this.
wet wood smokes green.
—the disembodiment of Faustus in the tropics.
          gross. ugly. It strips the word naked.
Burnt flesh in my head.
The forest bleeds too, this we know.
Felt like desecration.
Call him mc wolfgang & put Goethe to a break beat.
But it was human bones that were broken so he could assume THAT crown.
Tongues turned rubber on the tarmac of human traffic. The Congo calls out. Silent.
Its cords cut.
Here Tarzan is Tin-Tin meets a genius Rambo running back.
In helmet & safari-suit.
& here comes Jane bearing the fruits of Eden.
This Gretchen is cute toting her skull-basket.
'descent into the abyss in quest of enlightenment'?
I walk the Nowhere streets. & come up against no one, not even myself.
From scratch it's defeat facing a 'blank' page trampled by the feet of centuries.
Was I to put my pen in a shrine? Ink on bent knee?
Literary prostration
then up & out mouthing Judas boasts boosted by wine-drunken rewards?
I was in the midst of persons around whom awards forever hover.
Much closer than just on the horizon.
Inspiration yes but by what driven?
I was hungry for much. Crisis of faith would be a laugh. I put my bloodletting boots on.
Ready for trudging thru the New South African dreamscape. Faust in my waving fist.

Thus Goethe tries to grind his powdered teeth.
The white dust chokes me even where I sleep.
My Faustus experience is one of NO balance.
Trying to strike equilibrium with zero theorem.
Better an academic treatise. Would deal with 'synthesis'... much abstraction.
But the hallucinated real, is here ... concrete. More than I am.
Has conked my dome from that time.
Wood—human—puppet
And somewhere between things emote.
Gesture in a dead time.
Three-pronged attack.
Distancing, alienating, static ...
at the same time more intimate-impact.
            their master purgative learnings

I hate Goethe for being overwhelming iconic—
For keeping all that is german-lit in his stomach
For submerging even that which was 'edge' in his 'waste' ...
So I came in to meet him from negative ground.
i dislike icons who won't let any light sprawl/sprout/spread out from under them.
& Goethe more than swamps the Germanic

Kleist on that lake's bank where a poet's brains splashed out in a death-pact. and
Squashed into the sand. He's messed with the master.
I knew Busi Zokufa & Louis Seboko.
Warrick Sony and James Phillips. The cherry-faced Lecher & the Kalahari Surfer were
scoring. Is death danceable? Once they were NOT dancing to THE alternative beat, they
were making it. I could not be ignoring.
Goethe is monuments, busts, cathedrals, statues.
Christopher Marlowe is -buster, -clast. I gravitate more towards this last.
Deviant, rogue literature. Killer lines kicking doors down frontline.

Oh yes Goethe, Hugo, and then that old man Bra Shakes, who struts out of Stratford.
upon Avon of course. Which one else?

In the lead-up, Japanese puppet-versions tossed in to balance the equation somewhat.
But we ground it occident. Pointed Sub-Saharan.
Could have been obscene. Taste of toxic waste. Even if served with champagne.

The visuals stun. The wood becomes more human than the hand animates it.
& then along is supposed to come The Word.

Icons suffocate. Giants stifle.
constrict imagination confine in proscription.
I was surplus people. of a new nation choked in its afterbirth.
not a glory story salesman.
Thus I prepared to do battle against *empire consolidation*.
wishing I wouldn't be seen as bringing some slum pyrotechnics to a hallowed resort
          text with the establishment's own stamp.
Black-of-beyond attempting the luminous.
Crawling up from the valley, hoping to be clawing my way out of the belly of that
colonial monstrosity … yes, another bill to pay … I set out for the house on the hill.
I felt I was coming in like a gutter mystic ghetto maniac, hoping not to go out a crying-
game/*crystal palace* clown. A kind of *'mission mind erase'*.
A mountain-goat for the slaughter.
caught in a form & content conundrum.

But the scene was domestic. Basil & Adrian.

Bread baked in the kitchen.

William is mean with a pair of shears getting at a whole fried chicken.

& I was glad it wasn't my bowels getting split.

Yes, further inside the mansion on the hill Tau fashioning a miniature coffin.

That vision's far from romantic.

Neutralization. Going to war in a situation that allows no hostility.

My romanticized 'fighting spirit' rendered redundant.

Took to tearing up text. Negative to anything that could remotely be considered sweet.

Tried to place Gretchen in gorgon-mode.

Faustus evil scientist of all that perverse, mad-magician flipping high-tech

back into a hag-load in my head was fine.

Still. From creation in isolation to putting limb-to-trunk the commune was a far way.

Here's a bit of skin. Cut off that ear. The nose is not right. Toe to the left.

Felt less god than carpentry. But in the end it was. And the years sway in the breeze.

It's a classic. & that's no regret.

not sprung from a negative place, i do not stand AGAINST the classics.
i just know the death of beauty when it's solidified.
rage rather against 'codified certainties'. like Pasolini.
& Goethe is concretized more than most.
i am of The Word, fluid, dynamic. handspring left it open, to flow. no stasis.
the irony of puppets. in repressive state service.
weighed against the freedom of things … to be sown, germinate …
& that's where the art WAS. human. rendered new.
that's how/where the word is born, lives. mafika gwala knows.
syntax … word fitting into system. or flailing out against 'control', ask burroughs.
from these i learn. & hope to toss bits in.
& thus i came, up against the weight of history. the colonial front. faustus.
& it was not a prayer-meeting …
nor prostration before a deified text.
some past & present merged … i hope something 'yet to be born' emerged.
from solitude, a cell … (i mean
my isolated 'creation') to the self-perceived 'hell' of collaboration
my uncertainty was 'expectation', what i was looked upon to contribute,
& so it was all my times & places came to bear on the situation …
felt a historical burden, as if i had to 'represent' … something. *scrap or insert spare-part.*
alien presences threaten the act of creation … though they be not hostile.
i feel finest bashing my senses against the walls. alone.
but as kentridge's images flickered, came alive … & hands sprung wood animate,
& the space shrunk between puppet & person & all became humanized & wooden at once,
I'd like to believe what i reaped was inspiration. bearing a singular stamp.
hope there's more than memory to be salvaged.
knock knock … where is posterity?

A Matter Of Life And Death: The Function of Malfunction in the Work of Handspring Puppet Company

Gerhard Marx

I got a call from J—, who said that Adrian and Basil needed a hand. Hands, really. For each puppet they made, they needed to carve two hands. I seem to remember that they were constructing twelve or so puppets; which meant that they needed twenty-four hands. It was with the carving of these hands that they needed a hand. I never got to help carve those hands, but it was a very appropriate way to meet them – through a gentle but intriguing confusion between the animate and the inanimate, the hand that makes and the hand that is made.

<

PREVIOUS Saul from *Tooth and Nail*, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

OPPOSITE Large Wild Chimp from *The Chimp Project*, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

THIS PAGE Design by Adrian Kohler for a shadow puppet of Lisa in *The Chimp Project*, 2000.
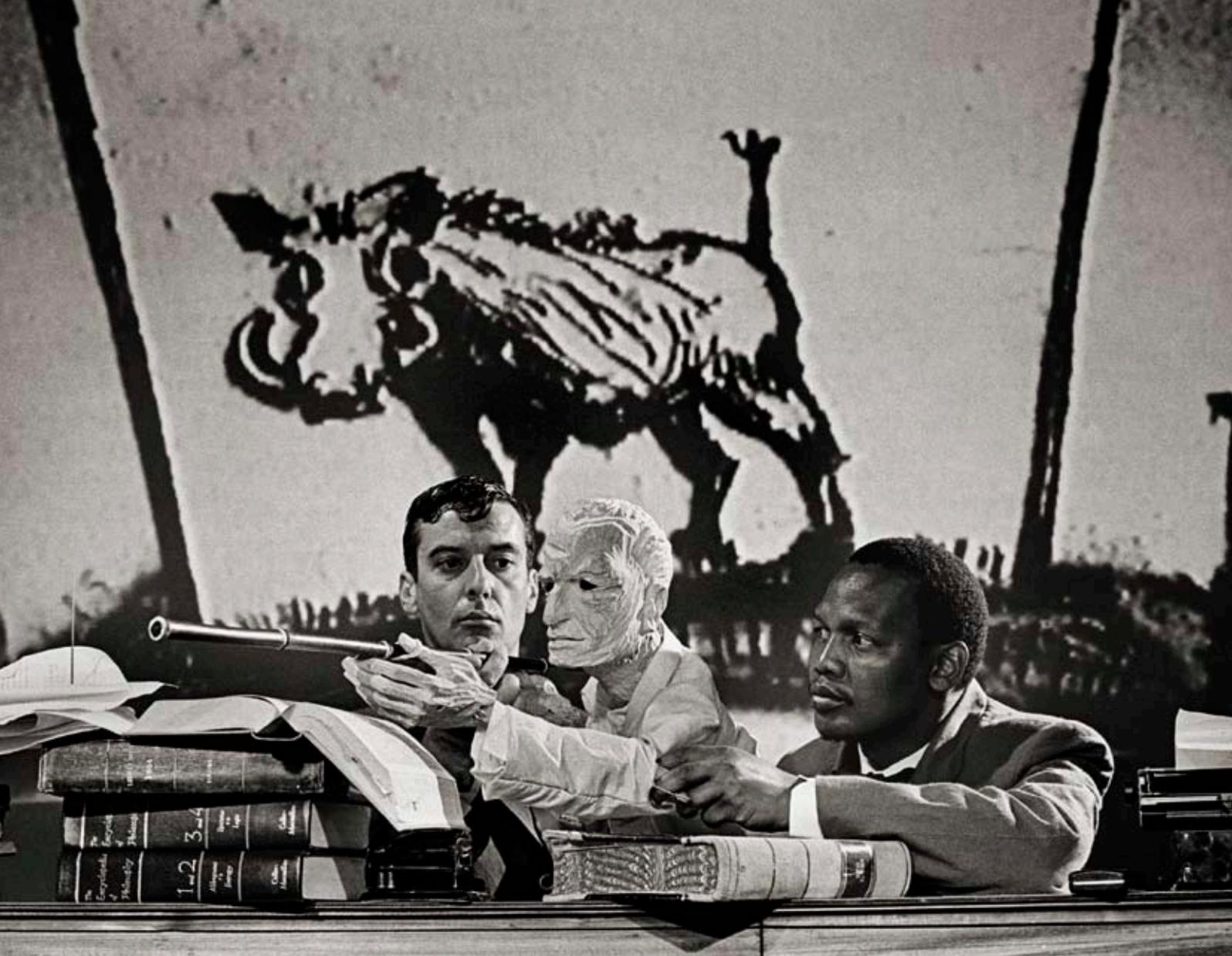
I should be frank in acknowledging my specific interest in their work at that time: carving and, ultimately, the object. But my interaction with Handspring soon added another dimension to my understanding of the object; let's begin by thinking of 'object' in the nominative form as *the noun*. Gifted sculptors, Handspring constructed the noun (the object) with remarkable skill, but what they brought to my understanding of the object was the notion of the object as something that is not only coupled with, but also lapses into *the verb*. Merging action with 'object', performing the object (through both construction and manipulation) introduces the possibility of myriad sentence constructions, meaning constructions, along with the infinite nuances that the introduction of ad-verbs affords these combinations. In this, it is possible to see the object itself as a verb, as a per-formance, rather than as a fixed material solidity with determined qualities. The addition of verbal interplay enables the object to enter into an infinite number of potential relations, which means that the object, despite its material solidity, has the capacity to melt into a semiotic fluidity.

ABOVE *Faustus in Africa*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1995. Faustus with puppeteers Dawid Minnaar and Louis Seboko. Animation by William Kentridge.

OPPOSITE The hands of Faustus.

Functional Malfunction

Functional malfunction is a seeming paradox or irony that has become central to my understanding of and admiration for the work of Handspring Puppet Company. The mechanisms invented and built for their puppets are ingenious, beautiful and masterful creations, which manage to function simultaneously within both the practical and the poetic realms. And so the term 'malfunction' does not pertain to the operational ability of their creations. In fact the calculated use of malfunction is implicit in, and crucial to, their artistry.

Let's consider the puppet in terms of function: as the body outside of the body, an *exosomatic organ*, to quote Karl Popper's beautiful description of the instrument.[91] The tool is of interest as an object that has been designed, created and exists only in relation to its function. It is similar in this sense to the utensil and other use-orientated, functional objects. It is an object that exists only in order to do something. The tool in its extreme form does not have any function outside of the mostly singular function it was intended for; its objectness, the physicality of the object, is but a by-product of its purpose. The tool as object is intricately interwoven with its subject; it cannot be understood as separate from its user or manipulator and in this sense always and necessarily carries an anthropomorphic trace.

OPPOSITE Puppet Saul from *Tooth and Nail* with Basil Jones, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town, 2009.

ABOVE Foot control for puppet Saul from *Tooth and Nail*, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

Heidegger argues that function or use value (what he refers to as 'readiness-to-hand' or, later, 'standing reserve') so dominates our approach to use-objects, that the actual 'objectness' of the object is lost to us,[02] so much so that when we approach even such a sizeable object as an airliner, we do not see the actual physical object; what we see is only the potential for transportation.[03] Even on that enormous scale, the objectness is lost to us. We know the object only through its use, only as a means to an end, it is a vehicle only, and its physicality becomes invisible in pursuit of its singular function. This idea manifests itself most clearly in the language used to describe it – when there is an amusing overlap of verb and noun, a point where it seems the relational fluidity of the verb (use, action) overlaps the material solidity of the noun (object). Jean Baudrillard says about the refrigerator: 'If I use a *refrigerator* to *refrigerate*, it is a practical mediation: it is not an object but a *refrigerator*' (my emphasis).[04] Even in the act of naming, the object and its function are merged; the name whereby the object is known is a designation of its function. A similar overlap occurs when Heidegger describes the *hammering* of a *hammer*[05] as a means to describe how the object is only discovered in use – in its *readiness-to-hand*. At its peak, the relationship between use-object and subject renders the object invisible through use: as long as the object successfully operates within its intended function, it is an extension of the agency of the subject, and this relationship (apart from perhaps satisfaction) is not an emotional one. What we see in the functional object is the means to an end. That is, until it breaks.

TOP Detail of head-control 'steering wheel' for one of the mustering horses in *War Horse*, designed by Adrian Kohler, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

BOTTOM Mustering Horse from *War Horse*. Rehearsal Room 1, the National Theatre, London, 2007.

ABOVE The Crow from *War Horse*, showing control mechanism, designed by Adrian Kohler. Rehearsal Room 1, the National Theatre, London, 2007.

OVERLEAF Coco from *War Horse* with puppeteers Stephen Harper and Toby Sedgwick. Rehearsal Room 1, the National Theatre, London, 2007.

War Horse, Olivier Stage, the National Theatre, London 2007. Actor Angus Wright as Friedrich with puppet Topthorn manipulated by Tim Lewis, Thomas Goodridge and Finn Caldwell.

As soon as the functional object malfunctions or the tool becomes dysfunctional, the relationship between subject and object is renegotiated. It is when the car does not want to start, that a space opens where we pour our subjectivity onto that object. You speak to the car as if it can hear, kick it as if it can hurt, insult it as if it has feelings. Note how the 'as-if' becomes part of our relationship with an object that previously only had a singular, very practical and well-determined use.

Two things happen at this point. The subject's emotional need for the object to function opens up a relation between the object and subject in which anthropomorphism flourishes and, perhaps surprisingly, our anthropomorphic projection seems not so much centred around function, as it is around fallibility. Simultaneously the object's physicality (which had been rendered invisible through use) becomes present; it now surfaces as visible physicality. Heidegger uses as example the hammer that is broken or too heavy to lift, to describe what he refers to as *unreadiness-to-hand*;[06] a renewed awareness of the tool in which the tool is no longer experienced through use, but rather presences as obstinate physicality in a moment that often leaves us with a distinct feeling of helplessness and frustration. This renewed presence is a physicality that allows for a multiplicity of poetic and metaphoric semiotic possibilities.[07] In the wake of this semiotic richness, even the defunct function takes on a semiotic significance: working or functioning become synonymous with the (lost) life force (anima) in the puppet, but this animated object only carries an awareness of its aliveness due to the risk of its collapse. It is as if we need to kill the tool to make the object come to life.

This is then where we find the puppet: at the end of the hand, or better, where the hand ends; where control and manipulation meet with the ever-present but very necessary risk of malfunction. The puppet is a tool made to flirt with malfunction; it is a tool made to harness the rich metaphorical potential of fallibility. The puppet functions practically as a kinetic and gestural tool, but it functions emotionally due to the visible risk of its malfunctioning. The puppet is always held up, but by the same token it is always on the verge of collapse, and it is the evocation of malfunction that summons up and manipulates the subjectivity and emotional investment of its manipulator, and by extension, its audience.

Il Ritorno d'Ulisse, Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008. Puppet Penelope manipulated by Adrian Kohler and sung and manipulated by Romina Basso (obscured). Giovanna Pessi, harpist, in background.

Il Ritorno d'Ulisse, Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008. Puppets awaiting rehearsal.

Visibility

The function of malfunction is an ironic device that operates primarily through the use of *visibility* on various levels in Handspring's work. Certainly all of the work produced by Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler to date has been marked by a deliberate *visual* aesthetic. But the importance of *visibility*, of *making visible* rather than concealing, particular to their work, functions on various levels and acts as a powerful strategy in the evocation of anthropomorphic transference and the audience's affect. In general, the handmade object passes from maker to user, from sculptor to viewer, only as evidence, repository or product of the actions imposed on it by its maker. Often the highest goal of craft and skill is to attain invisibility, to hide the marks of manufacture. Within the modernist aesthetic, machine-made, industrially manufactured objects are most commonly as well as ideally made without evidence of construction in order to maintain the myth of an autonomous object, which loses its physical, visible object-nature in favour of its function.

The stage, on the other hand, primarily provides a site for dramatic action. In terms of manufacture, this implies that revealing or dramatising the processes of construction can add significantly to the broader metaphorical and associative world of the staged production. In terms of the object, the physical objectness with all its metaphoric potential is much richer ground than the singular functionality of the tool; visible dysfunction is of more use on stage than the merely functional. In the case of the work of Handspring Puppet Company, we find that this notion has become implicit to their practice and can be seen in terms of the actual physicality of the carved puppets. Here the dramatic display of the carved markings becomes more than simply a question of aesthetics; rather it is integral to the object's life under theatrical light, providing character and (facial) expression to the inanimate object.

>

OPPOSITE Museum storeroom set model designed by Adrian Kohler for *Tall Horse*, 2004.

ABOVE The Fashion Designer from *Tall Horse*, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town. Puppet and fabric design by Adrian Kohler. Costume made by Hazel Maree.

239
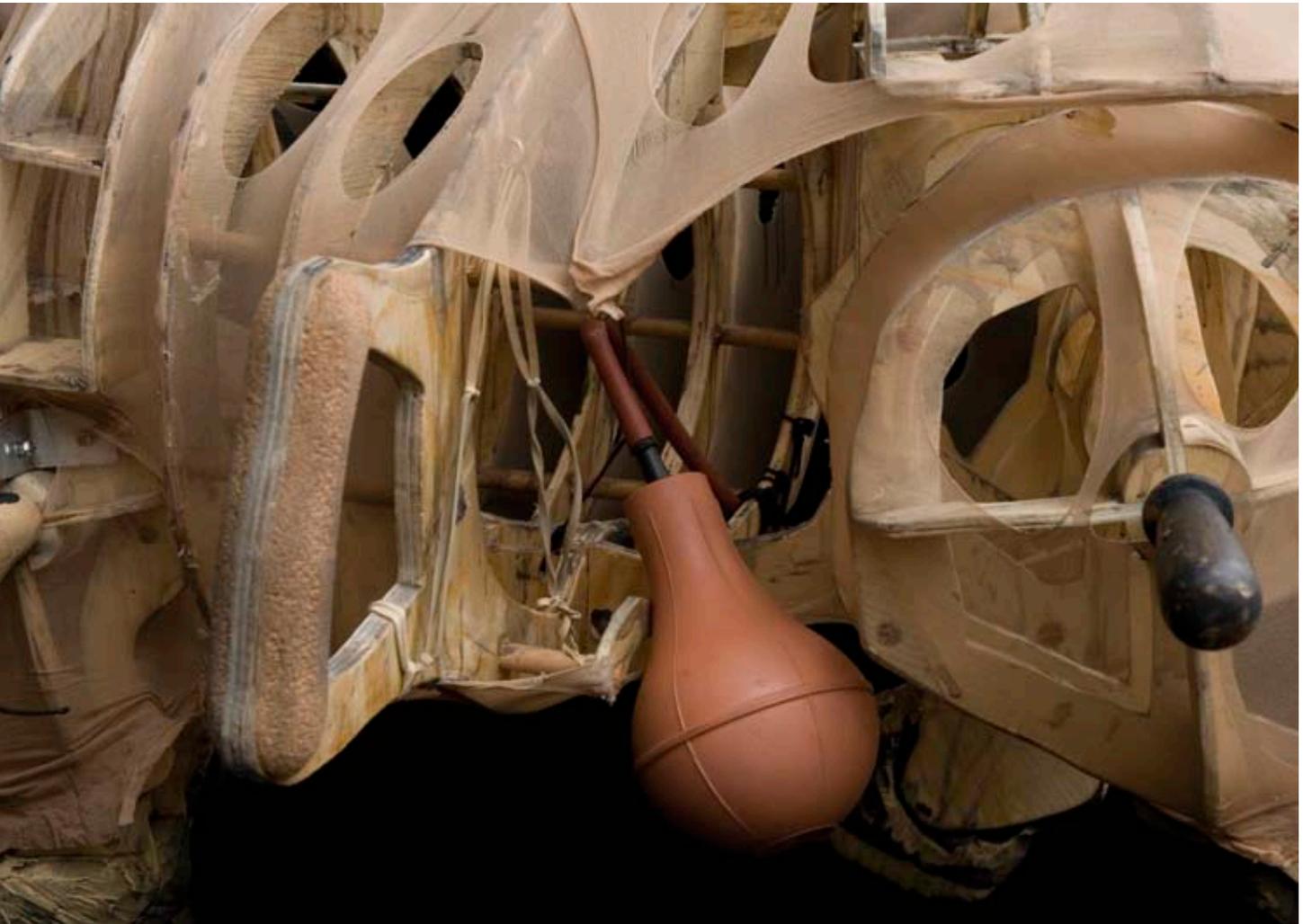
The puppet is a tool, but it functions as a dysfunctional tool. The puppet is sculpted, and yet it is not only a sculptural object. It is a strange conglomerate of the physical, sculptural, object-world and its more fluid and ethereal counterpart of performance and ever-changing gesture. The puppet is initially formed through sculptural techniques, but once it enters into performance it is constantly re-formed by its changing semiotic and gestural context, and so its form arguably never actually settles. Whereas the gestural, expressively carved lines and the sometimes splintered and worn edges (also the evocative marks of reparation; the constant, productive threat of dysfunction in this tool) on their puppets act as visible evidence of the fact that the puppet is a visual, sculptural construction with an implied biography, the mechanisms within Handspring's puppets are also not hidden. Often the skin of the puppet is transparent, even torn or ruptured to reveal the puppet's interior mechanism, to show how the illusion functions, providing a poignant reminder of the puppet's 'contructedness'. A common-sense assumption is that the puppet-makers would do all in their ability to hide the construction of the puppet in order to give the puppet the illusion of independence of movement and thus to sustain the illusion of the puppet having come to life. But Handspring reminds us in every aspect of the puppet's making, that the puppet is constructed and, by implication, that the puppet as an autonomous being is a fictional construct.

∧

The Rhino from *Woyzeck on the Highveld.*

How then is it that their puppets assume the life that they do, in our eyes, on stage, when it appears that these puppet-makers and manipulators are constantly trying to upset their own illusion? Here again, the puppet seems to function through malfunction. It works by not working; it creates illusion by rupturing illusion. It does what it does, by doing the opposite. Clearly the life of the puppet, particularly in the work of Handspring Puppet Company, functions as a physical irony. Its aliveness is sustained by revealing itself as a mirage, a trick of the eye, as if the puppet needs to be 'killed' in the process of bringing it to life. Perhaps in the realm of the puppeteer it is as important to create a well-crafted object, as it is to negate the preciousness of that object, so that the *thing* can be of lesser import than the *idea of the thing*.[08] It is the idea of the thing (not the thing), which is collectively manifested, manipulated and altered in the space between object, puppeteer and audience; it is the malleable idea of the thing (once divorced from singular function) that is the true medium of the puppeteer.[09]

Woyzeck on the Highveld, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. The Rhino with Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler.

Seeing the Puppeteer

The function of malfunction is of course of no use if it is not thoroughly embedded within function, if it does not take 'functionality' as a defining absolute. The puppet cannot come alive without our being aware of the risk of losing that aliveness, and by the same token the puppet cannot appear to embody the threat of 'losing' life without first being alive in our eyes. Beyond the construction of the puppet lies the true animating force behind and within the puppet: the puppeteer. The puppet's dependence on the puppeteer, as animator or life force, is the essential element that distinguishes the puppet from automaton and machine. The puppeteer is not only the provider of movement, which is central to the illusion of agency, but is also the presence of an intelligence behind the puppet, an intelligence which the audience can trust to operate in a multifunctional way, so that the puppet, unlike the automaton or machine, can reveal itself through a multiplicity of functions and can operate in a connotative poetical manner rather than simply a functional denotative one. In this sense the puppeteer is both an animator and a mediator, standing between the object and the subject (the audience member in this case), in a responsive dialogue. The audience member is helped not only by an ability to project his- or herself onto the inanimate object, but also by a physical human translator, a mediator or stand-in of sorts. Thus there is a double functioning within the practice of puppeteering: anthropomorphism and human identification are simultaneous in the coming to life of any single puppet. The audience members project themselves onto the puppet while reading themselves into the puppeteer.

Most puppeteering traditions hide the puppeteer in the same way that electronic and technical devices hide their engines 'under the hood'. Whether these techniques shroud the puppeteer in darkness, hide the puppeteer behind structures, submerge them in water or place them on the far end of a system of strings, the invisibility of these manipulators is part of a contract towards the suspension of disbelief that is shared between performers and audience. The logic here is to minimise interruption, to cut away all that potentially threatens the illusion: whether it is done physically with black cloth and light, or whether it is done with the collusion of the viewer who willingly turns a blind eye, ignoring certain disruptions to the seamlessness of illusion.

Even in terms of this most elementary strategy, Handspring favours visibility by choosing to align themselves with traditions that employ the visible puppeteer. There is an emphasis on the visibility of the puppeteer in Handspring's work, a tendency that persists in inviting irony, heightening the function of malfunction in their art. The visibility of the puppeteer is a 'dead give away', a sure way to rupture the illusion by revealing it as construct.[10] It seems that most forms of puppeteering rely on various degrees of this rupture, as if the life of the puppet exists in revealing its illusion as fiction. Even when the puppeteer attempts to hide, it is mostly a dramatic display of invisibility, a show of what should not be seen, the display of a secret that is shared, even if it is not revealed. In some manner we are as audience always aware of the construct, and in the puppets made by Handspring the awareness of construct is emphasised, paraded and very effectively, albeit paradoxically, utilised.

In 'The Concept of Irony', Paul de Man likens the rupture of narrative illusion through irony[11] to the buffoon's aside to the audience, a device with which the constructed fiction is broken. It is what is referred to in German as *aus der Rolle fallen* (to drop out of role).[12] But de Man pursues the notion of irony beyond the singular occurrence to what he refers to as 'permanent parabasis'; an ironic mode that is especially present in poetry whereby this rupture of the narrative illusion is not a singular interruption, but instead interrupts at all times, at all points.[13] In this mode the narrative illusion operates along with a constant ironic interruption of that illusion, a constant ironisation of form.[14] An ironic form, such as the form of puppeteering that Handspring employs, is one that always works against itself, in which the seams are always showing, in which the edifice is constructed through its own de-construction, thus constantly demonstrating 'the relationship of the work to the idea of the work itself'.[15] It is a form that contains within it a distance through which the self looks at itself from a reflective perspective. This self-reflexive device potentially shifts poetry (in our case, visual poetry) into the realm of the philosophical.

ABOVE Drovetti from *Tall Horse*, Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town.

OPPOSITE *Tall Horse*, The Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, 2004. Puppets Mehmet Ali and Drovetti with Téhibou Bagayoko, Zandile Msutwana, Nana Traore, Yacouba Magassouba, Craig Leo and Adrian Kohler, and Basil Jones inside Mehmet Ali.

There is no better literalisation of this self-reflexivity (the self looking at the self) than the intimacy between puppet and visual puppeteer[16] as it plays itself out in Handspring's work. Here the puppet and its visible puppeteer exist as a physical hybrid; the puppet grafted onto the puppeteer's life force, and the puppeteer grafted onto the puppet's likeness and visual association. In this sense the puppet (as visual illusion) always moves to occupy a space between the polarities that form it. It is reliant on liminality. The puppet, as visual illusion, functions best as neither the puppet-object nor the puppeteer, it is neither alive nor dead. It functions in the space between function and malfunction.

The liminal nature of the puppet-illusion is particularly visible when Handspring employs a number of puppeteers to animate a single puppet, something that has become a trademark of their work. In these highly choreographed semblances, the puppet-illusion occupies a space somewhere between a single puppet and a number of visible puppeteers. The puppet is animated through an almost-choral event, an entanglement of object, action, performance and various subjectivities. When multiple, visible puppeteers are deployed, the function of malfunction is more visible than ever[17] and, more strikingly, the intensity that exists within the puppet-puppeteers hybrid (or conglomerate) becomes a visual parody of the audience's resolve to give life to the puppet. Increasing the scale of the function of malfunction benefits the puppet-illusion in that it exists amongst a group of manipulators, which increases the illusion of its independence, but it also increases the scale of potential anthropomorphic projection by mimicking not so much the individual's need to see the puppet function, but by facilitating the group or audience's need to invest in the illusion.

v
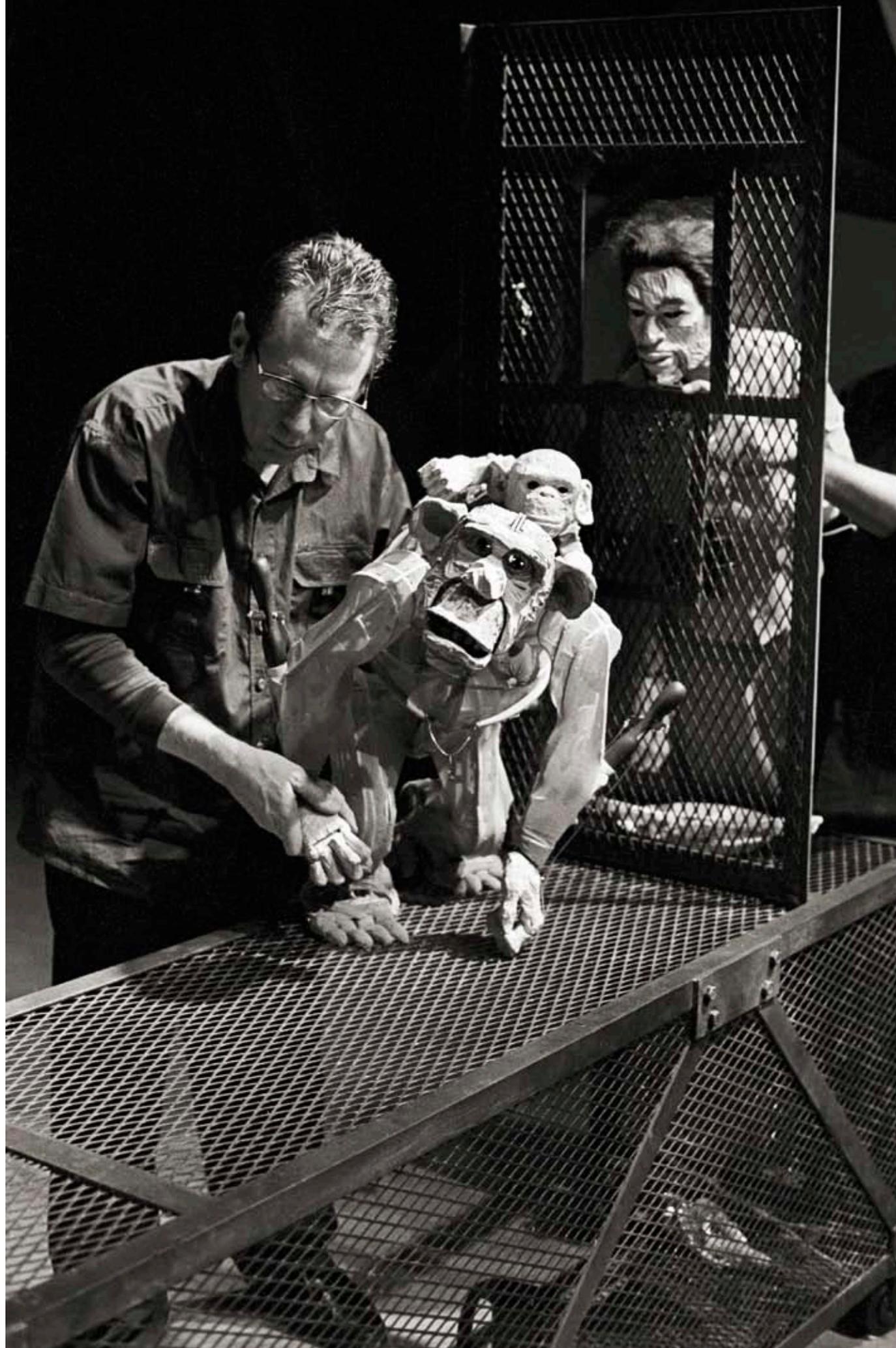
But the puppeteer is a Moses figure. The puppeteer can lead the puppet to the cusp of its utopia, the animated world, but he/she cannot enter into that realm, can never allow the puppet successfully to (appear to) make the transition from object to subject. The goal of the puppet is to *appear* animate (note the implication of an audience); and part of creating this illusion relies on the arts related to the fabrication and the manipulation of the puppet. But crucial to the illusion is the evocation of anthropomorphic projection, a process in which the puppeteer cunningly manipulates not so much the puppet, but the audience. In this sense the puppet and its audience are inextricably tied together and are reciprocally manipulated by the puppeteer. The ironic self-reflexive system, in which a distance within the self allows the self to look at itself, is not only embodied by the puppet-puppeteer dialectic, but more so by the puppet-audience relationship.

It is within the audience that the puppet comes to life, rather than in the hands of the puppeteer. The calculated use of the function of malfunction so cunningly employed by Handspring places fallibility at the centre of the audience's relationship with the puppet. This in turn lures the audience's anthropomorphic projection onto the object. The function of malfunction ruptures the illusion of the independent, animate puppet (the puppet as another self), in order to let the audience members into the shared intimacy between puppet and puppeteer. The puppet is a calculated succession of liminalities, activated through the interplay of opposites that irony makes possible.

OPPOSITE *The Chimp Project*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2004. Okasan and infant Taiji being fed bananas by Tadashi. Puppeteers Basil Jones, and Rajesh Gopie (obscured).

ABOVE *The Chimp Project*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2004. The Wild Chimps attack the sanctuary. Puppeteers Basil Jones, Yvette Coetzee, Rajesh Gopie and Fourie Nyamande.

NOTES

01. *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem: In Defence of Interaction*, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 13.

02. 'Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there so that it may be on call for further ordering ... we call it standing reserve [*Bestand*]' and later 'Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve *no longer stands over against us as object*' (my emphasis). Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology' in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. (Trans. R. Lovitt). London: Harper and Row, 1977, p. 17.

03. Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', p. 17.

04. Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, London and New York: Verso, 1966, p. 91.

05. 'Where we put something to use our concern subordinates itself to the "in-order-to" which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which is – as equipment. *The hammering itself uncovers the specific manipulability ... of the hammer*' (my emphasis). Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1962, p. 98.

06. *Being and Time*, p. 103.

07. Deleuze and Guattari refer to the 'desiring machine' as a system which capitalises on 'unreadiness-to-hand' due to the production of possibilities (as opposed to helplessness) by this state; the exploitation of the particular possibilities enabled by brokenness and dysfunction (the desiring machine) is a strategy familiar to contemporary art. Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004, p. 68.

08. I am referring here to Freud's notion of the 'omnipotence of thought' as central to animism; a system of thought that attributes living character to inanimate things. 'Omnipotence of thought' describes an attitude towards the world in which an over-valuation occurs of the value of thought as opposed to the 'real', i.e. 'Things become less important than ideas of things'. *Totem and Taboo*, London: Routledge Classics, 1950, p. 99.

09. The projection of mental experience onto the external world of objects is exemplified in Freud's observances, in *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, of a child who 'stages' the disappearance and appearance of his mother (as she leaves and enters the room) by manipulating a wooden reel with a piece of string tied to it. By lowering the reel over the edge of his cot, the child makes it disappear and by pulling it the child makes it reappear. The child's mental world is projected onto his physical object-world through distinctly marionette-like manipulation. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, London and Vienna: The Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922, p. 12.

10. Eileen Blumenthal, *Puppetry and Puppets*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2005, p. 72.

11. De Man defines 'traditional' irony as 'meaning one thing and saying something else', or 'praise by blame'. But there is an inherent difficulty in defining this 'trope of tropes' (de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 164) due to the very fact that irony, which upsets the expectation of logic, disrupts narrative structure. 'What is at stake in irony,' says de Man, 'is the possibility of understanding, the possibility of reading, the readability of texts, the possibility on deciding a meaning or on a multiple set of meanings or on a controlled polysemy of meanings ...' (ibid. p. 167).

12. De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, p. 178.

13. Ibid.

14. 'The ironization of form consists in a deliberate destruction of the form' (Walter Benjamin, quoted in de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, p. 183).

15. *Aesthetic Ideology*, p. 183.

16. The visual puppeteers in Handspring's work are insinuated as part of the puppet-character's self, they are part of the construct of an 'individual' – a mode of working that is distinct from that of the ventriloquist which depicts the puppet and its manipulator as separate, even rivalrous 'individuals'.

17. One is as aware of the limitations of the individual as one is of the limitations of the puppet (as tool).
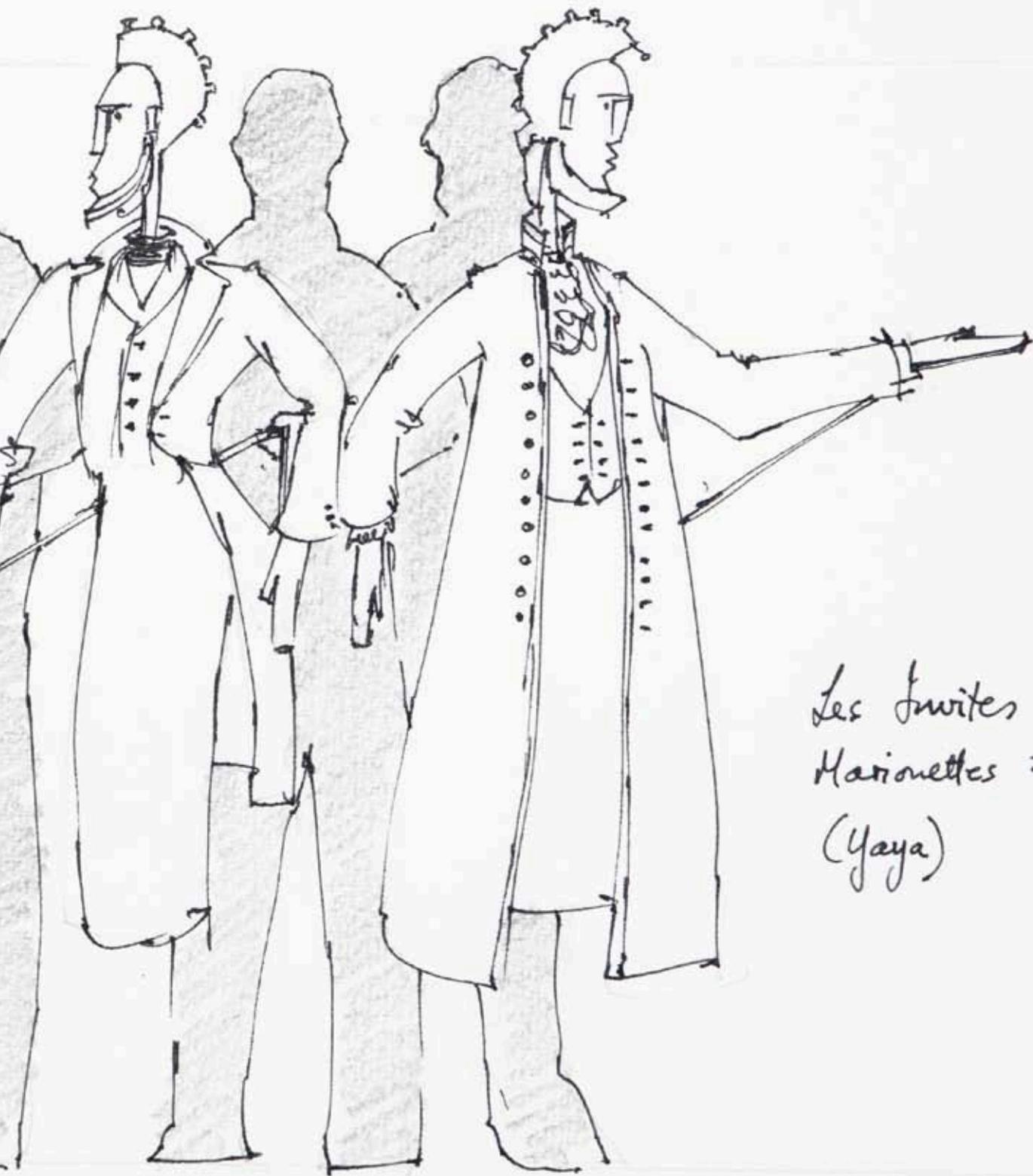
Les Invités
Marionettes à tige
(Yaya)

Puppetry and Authorship

Basil Jones

This essay has two objectives. The first is legal or forensic and aims to set out reasons why puppetry in design and performance is a form of authorship, and that puppeteers and puppet designers should therefore have authorial rights. I have always been uneasy with the traditional author's 'ownership' of a puppet play. This disquiet regarding the status of the text has often been explored in writings on authorship in general and workshopped theatre in particular. However, I believe that puppet theatre has a special case to plead and I will set this out as clearly as I am able.

My second objective is to attempt to describe what the puppet designer does and what the puppet achieves on stage in order to justify the claim to authorship. I see this as being the more important and interesting focus of this essay, which should not be read as a polemic against scriptwriting for the puppet theatre, or an attempt to devalue the scriptwriter. Handspring has worked happily and creatively with many writers over the years and continues to do so. I revere words and I believe puppets can handle them well and in an original and creative way. So we are definitely not moving away from the written text or from scriptwriters. Indeed I would be happy if, at some future date, we were to attempt to stage a classic word-rich text using puppets – a text, say, by Stoppard.

PREVIOUS Costume designs by Adrian Kohler for The Soiree Guests rod puppets designed by Yaya Coulibaly, *Tall Horse*, 2004.

LEFT Detail of costume for a Soiree Guest in *Tall Horse*. Costume designed by Adrian Kohler and made by Hazel Maree from found West African fabric and fabric block-printed at Handspring's studio. Puppet made by Yaya Coulibaly.

THIS PAGE Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of The Fashion Designer in *Tall Horse*.

The 'Work' of the Puppet

Perhaps it would be useful to begin by asking whether we can define what it is that characterises the 'work' a puppet does on stage and how this form of work is distinguished from the 'work' of an actor? The work of the actor is surely to perform the text written by the scriptwriter under the guidance of the director and informed by his or her own research into the character being interpreted.

Ostensibly, the same might surely be said for the work the puppet performs on stage. Both the puppet and the actor are interpreters of the playwright and the director's artistic vision. The traditional chain of meaning and interpretation starts with the playwright, passing through the director and finally to the actor or the puppet.

However, there is another level of activity that actors take for granted which is central to the meaning and function of the puppet's work. The actor is a living person and therefore automatically possesses life. Both the actor and the audience take for granted this fact. His or her *livingness* is obvious and certainly doesn't need to be 'performed'. The actor is in no danger, at any stage in the performance, of giving away the fact that he is not alive. However, by its very nature, a puppet is an object and therefore by definition, lifeless. The object which we call a puppet lives and breathes only because the puppeteer takes great care, for however long the performance lasts and at every moment during that performance, to make the puppet appear to be alive.

It is also worth mentioning that there is a designer/maker involved too. The designer/maker of the puppet is partially responsible for the life the puppet possesses in performance. The jointing (or lack of it) and the structure of the puppet allow for certain forms of expressiveness and not others. The expert design is acutely sensitive to the movement required by the puppet. So, a large part of the liveliness of the puppet is the responsibility not only of the puppeteer but of the puppet's designer/maker as well.[01]

Thus, the primary work of the puppet is the *performance* of life, whilst for the actor this fundamental battle is already won. The life – the viability – of the puppet is always provisional. So, a puppet is by its very nature dead, whereas an actor is by her very nature alive. The puppet's work, then – more fundamental than the interpretation of written text or directorial vision – is to strive towards life. This struggle, this 'play', is literally in the hands of the puppeteer and need have no connection to the scriptwriter or the director. Every second on stage is a second in which the puppet could die. The life and credibility of the puppet depend entirely on the vigilance of the puppeteer. The audience will take the puppet seriously only so long as they believe in this life. So the puppeteer is literally engaged in a parallel, low-key drama: a life or death struggle, dependent on the puppeteer's strength, stamina, muscle memory and, of course, artistry or talent. This is a drama that has nothing to do with the script written by the author, and it must be enacted by the puppeteer, whether or not the director is interested in it or even conscious of it.

LEFT *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1997. Puppet Niles with Busi Zokufa.

RIGHT Niles by Adrian Kohler.

Animism

∧ Why is it that audiences are so fascinated by this performance of life? Is there perhaps some reason, an early origin for this? I think there is and that the answer lies with our primordial religious impulses.

A belief in the life and agency of all things, including the dead, originated with early humans in Africa, from whence it spread to and became part of many religions across the world. This belief in agency is deeply engrained in our psyches. Just as the brain of modern humans has grown on top of our older, reptilian brain, so our contemporary religions and belief systems have grown on top of (and continue to utilise) our original animist beliefs. We are still animists at heart, even though science and scientific materialism have usurped earlier ways of explaining to us the world and the way things work and function. Victoria Nelson, in *The Secret Life of Puppets*, gives a convincing account of how, since the Enlightenment, the scientific materialism of contemporary cultures has repressed our spiritual instincts. She shows how, from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, our instinct for the supernatural – our animist beliefs – have been repressed and displaced from their religious origin, resulting in a welling up of dark imaginings in popular culture. These gothic stories, (Edgar Allen Poe) fantasy tales (*Lord of the Rings*) and horror films (*Chucky*) are, for many people, the new secular residences of the contemporary religious impulse.

In short, hardly any of us do not carry this ancient desire to believe in the supernatural. Apart from those who believe in a god per se, we would have to include all those who immerse themselves in fantasy novels, or become devotees of horror and sci-fi movies. Small wonder then that audiences entering theatres to watch puppet plays are so eager to suspend their disbelief and to believe in the life of the puppet. There is a powerful, ancient, psychic allure to stepping into a darkened theatre and being invited to believe again.

The Ontology of the Puppet

Returning then to our distinction between the work of the actor and the work of the puppet, perhaps we need to acknowledge that the puppet in performance possesses a significantly different ontological status to a human actor. The fact that the puppet is essentially a performing object (the more mechanical puppets could be called performing machines) definitely suggests a different ontology to the human. Also, the puppet's striving to depict and embody life means that it has a different ontological narrative from a human being. I'm not sure how you would describe the human actor's Ur-narrative. Perhaps it is the desire to function as the medium for stories and narratives. However, the puppet's Ur-narrative is something quite different to, and more fundamental, than storytelling. It is the quest for life itself. It is perhaps worth noting that this 'quest' is not an obvious part of the puppet's performance. However, it forms the impulse behind every move and every gesture the puppet makes. This quest is one in which no actor can engage as it lies outside an actor's ontological purview.

....

LEFT *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Set designed by Adrian Kohler and built by Just Sets.

....

RIGHT *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. The Miner and Maria made by Adrian Kohler for the 2008 revival.

Micromovement

So I would suggest that it is this dignified hunt for life, exhibited by all puppets in performance, that fascinates audiences because we are ourselves can identify with similar quests in our everyday lives. Thus, apparently minor quotidian functions, like getting out of bed in the morning, or reaching for a cup just beyond one's grasp, or avoiding the clash of spectacles when kissing a friend, can take on epic proportions for many observers when performed by a puppet. Audiences identify with this and feel a resonance with their own interaction with the world. The puppet, therefore, becomes the manifest incarnation of our own struggle to live, to be human, to act.

Once we as puppeteers begin seriously to play and to master these microdramas, we see they can trump the macroaction on stage, the action that would normally fall under the heading of choreography. Thus, when the audience becomes engaged with the micromovement of a puppet's performance, spoken dialogue tends to fade from consciousness, as if it has been bleached out of the performance. Often we hear the comment: 'lovely puppets, pity about the text'. Most often this remark is made not because the text is poor, but because it is hard to really *hear* or apprehend the text when one becomes fully engaged with, even mesmerised by, this more profound level of performance.

Of course the macromovement on stage is not at all insignificant. The choreography is undoubtedly an essential element of what happens on stage. In *War Horse* for example, it was expertly managed and masterfully executed.

Micromovement and Perception

Here I need to refer again to our brains and this time how they perceive the world. The human brain developed out of the reptilian brain and the frontal brain. The frontal lobe, which only humans and primates possess, is the most recent development. This section of the brain is used to rationalise the huge quantities of stimuli we receive from our sense organs. It helps us to distinguish between things and to think rationally. As Temple Grandin found in her book, *Animals in Translation*, we pay a price for the intervention that our frontal lobes make, because of the way they filter reality for us. People with normal brain function tend to see primarily 'the big picture', that is they tend to see what their brain can make sense of. We often fail to see the minutiae, the plethora of detail that animals and autistic people may be aware of.

Grandin asserts that, compared to humans, animals have 'extreme perception', because they don't filter out the information that doesn't make sense. She shows that our brain is perfectly capable of the most refined apprehension of sound and sight, if it weren't for the intervention of the forebrain and its tendency to filter out any incoming sensory perceptions that don't fit or make sense. What is startling in her analysis is the number of examples she provides that demonstrate how acute our visual and auditory perception can be on occasion.

Head of a Soldier from *War Horse* being glued together after hollowing out (see the Soldier opposite, second from right). Carved by Thami Kitti. Handspring Puppet Company studio, Cape Town, 2007.

I see this research as being important for puppetry, because it serves to vindicate an experience that we have as puppeteers, namely that if we treat the audience as possessing extreme perception, and we ensure that therefore everything that the puppet does will be finely apprehended by our audience, then we will indeed engage our audience's deeper, 'animal' brain. By providing the audience with highly refined and skilled puppet manipulation, we somehow encourage them to see and hear and, most essentially, feel (and I mean this in the haptic sense) the performance with what amounts to extreme perception. How else do you explain the fact that even from the back row of an auditorium, the audience is able to perceive the tiny movements a puppeteer makes when he 'breathes' the puppet? Or the fact that an audience is able to perceive the angle of a puppet's head and feel sure that it is looking into the eyes of another puppet across the stage?

So the puppeteer is performing on two levels, one is the macrolevel, which engages with the script and the choreography, the other is the microlevel, and is a performance of the Ur-narrative: the performance of life. Also, I am suggesting that the audience is fully equipped to engage with the puppet at this level, because of our residual animist belief systems and because our brains have the capacity for extreme perception, to 'notice' and engage with this other level of performance.[02]

....
War Horse, the National Theatre, London, 2008. Tim Lewis and David Gyasi riding puppets Joey and Topthorn; puppeteers Craig Leo and Mervyn Millar (left) and mustering horses with puppet riders (right). Puppet heads carved by Thami Kitti.

War Horse

In 2006, Handspring was commissioned to design and make nine life-sized horses for the National Theatre's production of *War Horse*, in London. The idea was to make a theatrical interpretation of Michael Morpurgo's novel of the same name. For many reasons, this would be a challenging adaptation. For one thing, in the novel, the central character and narrator is a horse. This horse, Joey, goes to war alongside the British army and it is through his eyes that we experience the horrors of combat. The horse's voice – producing a kind of 'equine reportage' – is a powerful narrative device in the novel, though one that we realised would not work on stage. So, the decision was made to keep the horse silent in its theatrical incarnation. This presented the playwright with a problem. How does one 'author' a character who plays the leading role in the drama but doesn't speak and is not even a person? Clearly the horse would have to be 'articulate' in languages that were not verbal.

From the start, it was clear that the scriptwriter was almost powerless to author scenes where the horse was central. Without an intimate knowledge of the capabilities of the puppet and without weeks of watching the puppet in action, it was impossible to 'write' these scenes in any but the sketchiest of ways. And here's where we began to realise how different our role was as puppeteers. Different that is, from the role of the actor. And what I am referring to here is the generative semiotics of our presence on stage.

From a semiotic perspective, the puppet's signing process is made up of two components: the design/making process and the manipulation process. The first is the signing potential that is built into the puppet itself. When designing the horses, for instance, Adrian had to decide *which* horse-like actions he would be able to include in the puppet's structure and *which not*. A thorough knowledge of the physical skeleton was necessary in order to be able to simplify the jointing and design a *workable* puppet. This was a process that required a deep intuitive understanding of the mechanical capabilities and ergonomics of the human hand and body and how the six hands of three puppeteers could be used to give the horse as much physical articulation as possible.

I would argue that this design process (which went through the building and testing of a small-scale model and then a full-sized prototype) was an act of authorship, because Adrian's design built into the puppet the semiotic grammar of which the horse would be capable. In a sense, then, the puppet design is a meta-script, which the puppeteers must interpret, guided by director, choreographer and puppet master. Andrew Macklin sees this way of generating (authoring) meaning as being corporeal, as being *generated by the body* and not reducible to words:

> To create the puppet mechanics is to devise a way of interpreting, hence returning language to its roots in physically actualized discourse from which language is derived. So the puppet-maker who devises ways of articulating concepts of the script (written language) in movement language, is authoring meaning in an embodied language.[03]

THE BREATHING SYSTEM FOR THE HORSE.

EAR MECHANISM

BICYCLE BRAKE CABLES

DRIVE CABLE

PULL-BACK ELASTIC

FLEXIBLE NYLON CENTER ROD

TENDONS WHICH CONTROL THE TAIL
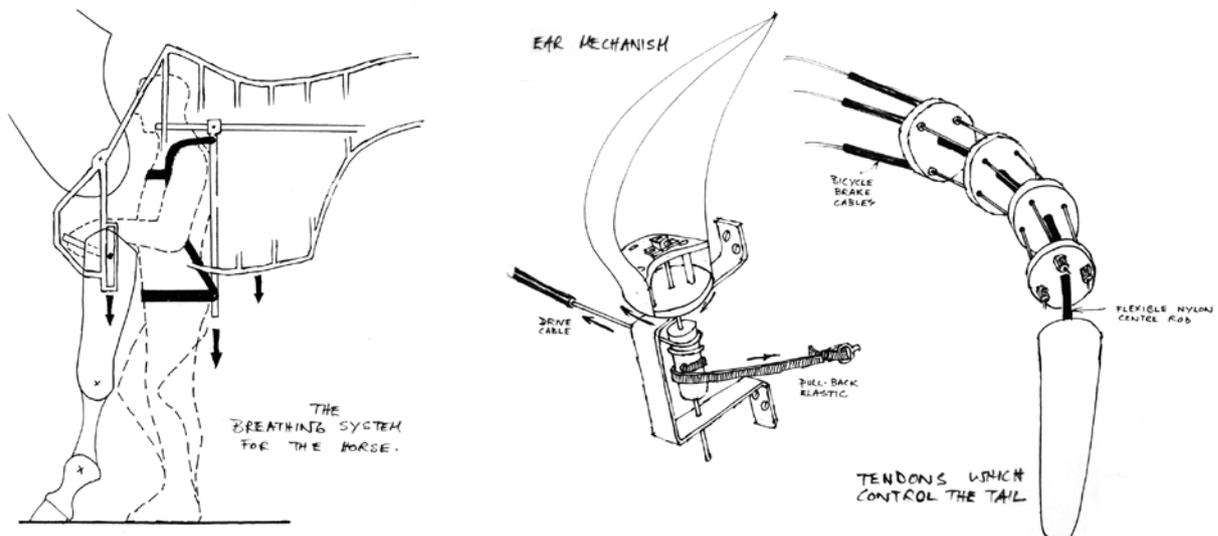
The second component of the horse's signing process is the expressive work of the manipulators themselves. Even though Adrian's horses are capable of a wide range of expression, *realising* that expression through movement requires of the puppeteers the development of a complex set of co-ordinative skills both personally and as a group. The two main horses each require groups of three operators. A convincing individual horse with a character of its own can be created only by a formi-dable act of 'group mind' – a level of co-ordination far beyond what a scriptwriter could predict.

Thus we came to realise that *authoring* a role for the horses functioned at levels that didn't have much to do with the traditional script author. Much of this 'authorial' work happened during periods of improvisation. In these periods, the scriptwriter effectively played the role of onlooker. Gen-erally what he did was to observe the various sequences, and those that were approved by the director were sometimes described by the stage managers and incorporated into the working script used to rehearse the play. This was a different script fundamentally from the one published.

So *ex post facto*, the written text incorporates what in fact began as a movement text. This is what Juhani Pallasmaa might call the 'haptic' text – the text of 'moving through space'.[04] The *War Horse* audiences are constantly wanting to know what the horses are thinking and feeling. Only by avidly watching the smallest movements of tail and hoof can they hope to 'read' these thoughts. They are modelling other modes of 'listening' or understanding that are not auditory and therefore can often lose track of the verbal level in the play. At these times, they make a major hermeneutic switch, a switch that is very unusual inside a theatre: the audience returns to the corporeal self as the site of interpretation.

....
OPPOSITE Breathing, ear movement and tail movement systems designed by Adrian Kohler for *War Horse*, 2007.
....
ABOVE *War Horse*, Rehearsal Room 1, the National Theatre, London, 2007. Puppeteers (left to right) Thomas Goodridge, Finn Caldwell and Tim Lewis rehearsing the death of Topthorn; Angus Wright as Friedrich (right).

259

The Primacy of the Text

Let us return to the legal side of this discussion. By convention, the written text is considered to be the play's witness 'of record'. In the past, if one contemplated producing a play, one went to a bookshop to buy a 'copy' of that play, not to a video store. So, even though in actuality a play may have been embodied in several parallel texts (which encompass the verbal, the visual, the haptic and the aural), the *written* version of these texts claims supremacy because of the way that, historically and even today, a text enters the public domain through print.

There is a long cultural tradition of the printed recording of plays. This is because originally the only available technology for recording a play was print. No doubt, studies of early plays exist which attempt to determine what actually happened on stage that was not about words and how the hierarchy between the verbal/visual/haptic/aural has changed over time. Traces of such archives do exist, for instance in travellers' diaries of performances they have observed. Prompt books may also provide us with some suggestion of a performed event, but even these survive as textual versions of the event itself. Opera of course has a long tradition of visual drama. And classical dance forms are entirely non-verbal. Various notational forms have arisen to capture such events.

Partially because of the way plays came into the public domain through published texts and because these texts could be bought and owned (in a way that a performance can never be owned), it was a convenient conceit to regard the author as the creator and therefore the owner of the play. There is of course a great deal of merit in this. It is the commonsense position: the author is the creator and everyone else involved is an interpreter of his (or, less usually, her) creation. This fits with ancient monotheistic ideas and with old ways of thinking of the world in binary opposites: author/interpreter, male/female, good/evil.

What is becoming undeniable, however, is that there is no singular author(ity) when it comes to making a puppet play. It is of course difficult to say who is more important: the text author or the directorial voice or the puppet designer/maker or the puppet manipulators. However, they are all to a lesser or greater degree authorial. And we should not forget the authorial role played by the many other creators: composer, choreographer, and set, lighting, costume and sound designers. Therefore a more accurate description of the authorial process of a play is of a multi-generational semiotic system with numerous authors, and including the authority of the audience.

ABOVE Horse limbs in the Handspring studio during the making of *War Horse*, Cape Town, 2007. Puppets constructed with moulded cane and cane-to-plywood stitching technique devised by Thys Stander.

RIGHT *War Horse*, the National Theatre, London, 2008. Puppet Topthorn with Patrick O'Kane as Friedrich, and Puppet Joey with Craig Leo (background).
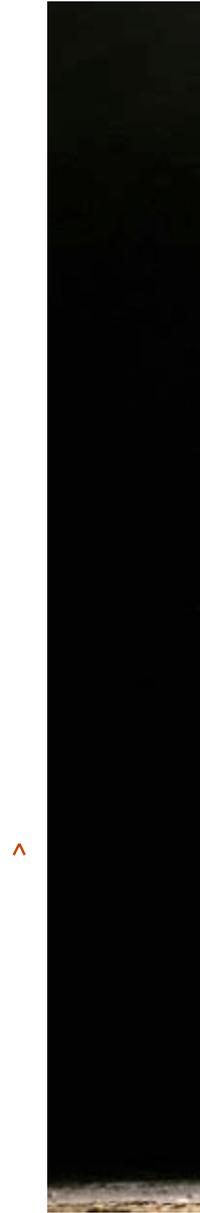
The Authorial Audience

Now let us also look at the phenomenon of the performed puppet play from the point of view of the audience. What happens to actors armed with words when they are sharing the stage with a puppet? For an example, I shall again return to *War Horse*. We were astonished to see what happened in performance when the horse puppets shared the stage with actors. The audience quickly develop an affinity and fascination with the horses. They clearly want to understand what the horse is feeling and thinking and as a result, they become avaricious readers of horse semiotics. Whatever the horse puppeteers do (from ear twitching, flank shivering and eye-line alteration, to whinnying, nickering and blowing), the audience hungers to interpret.

v The audience thus experience a strong feeling of empowerment. They feel themselves to be in a new interpretive territory concerning the meaning of animals within the context of a theatrical event. There are no rules for such forms of interpretation and thus the puppeteers give to the audience an *interpretive authority* that is not often imparted in more conventional forms of theatre. And so, as generators of meaning, it could be argued, the audience take up an auxiliary authorial role. The intensity of this interpretive focus has an unexpected result: the audience are so intently decoding the visual text that they may experience sections of the performance where the auditory dimension of the play is, as we say, bleached out. In a very real sense, the puppets are stealing the limelight.

The Authority of Breath

Indeed it may be said that there exist levels of authorship that arise neither in word, nor in movement, but in stillness. We find that one of the most eloquent ways of communicating on stage is indeed not through movement but through such stillness, or more exactly, a *breathed* stillness. Only when the puppet is still and just perceived to be breathing is the audience able to read its thoughts and emotions. So, paradoxically, even in motionlessness there exists a 'text' – the text of thought. This is truly an unwritten, an unwriteable text, one that is 'authored' by the puppeteers manipulating the puppet and, to some extent, by the puppet designer/maker who engineers such subtleties into the puppet's mechanisms.

But now we are at a curious site of exchange between the performers and the audience as authors. Truly this is the *inter-play*: a subtle realm of hermeneutic interchange between viewer and viewed, between actor and those acted upon, where meaning is being created, but we are not sure by whom. Breath and silence on the part of the puppet stimulate, in the minds of the audience, proposals as to the thoughts and emotions in the wooden puppet they are watching. These moments can be some of the most powerful experiences a puppet play produces. The audience, in noticing the tiny in breath and out breath of the puppet, enter into an empathetic relationship with the object that is being brought to life. This breathing is physical, yet it has a profound metaphorical power. This non-existent substance (air) that is passing through this mechanical being represents the very essence of life: the soul.

ABOVE *Tooth and Nail*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1989. Puppet Saul with Basil Jones and Ramolao Makhene.

OPPOSITE *Starbrites!*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 1990. Puppet Gogo manipulated by Basil Jones with Fats Dibeco as The Uncle.

Handspring's Movement Practice

I've spoken and speculated at length and theoretically about the importance of movement in the generation of meaning and in the ability of the audience to perceive and even co-author meaning in the theatre. By way of example, I'd like now to describe our movement philosophy from a set of practical principles we've developed over the years. This amounts to a Manifesto of sorts, one that describes our own practice.

Handspring's movement philosophy is based on restraint, on carefully planned and co-ordinated gesture, and on stillness. This philosophy acknowledges the puppet's lack of self-consciousness and invites the audience into a narrative space that lives alongside and may supersede the verbal text. It is because of the intensity of this moment that the spoken text is often washed out by a kind of *existential glare* of the life that the puppet is living at that moment, on stage. The existence of this phenomenon, where the puppet seems to offer its own simple moment-to-moment 'being' as the *Ur*-narrative to the audience, is why we as puppeteers make our claims to authorship. These then are the principles we apply when working with our style of puppets, which tend to be wooden and/or cane. The presiding concept here is that of naturalism, together with a consciousness of the audience as a participant in the generation of meaning and thinking. This doesn't mean that we don't occasionally move away from this to other forms, like the more expressionistic movement used for *Tall Horse*. And we certainly enjoy watching other puppeteers' movement styles, which differ from our self-imposed conventions and set up exciting alternatives.

With the puppeteers in mind, these are the principles I have framed:

1. DEVOTIONAL STATE Puppet manipulation often makes quite extreme physical demands on you. In order to make the puppet look natural, you, the manipulator, may have to assume an awkward posture. The puppet may have to be held aloft for long periods. Pain is part of the pleasure of performance.[05] Therefore, in order to work at the highest level, to ignore your pain whilst at the same time delivering a constant array of the most refined and difficult physical movements, you may need to adopt a devotion to your task that takes on a quasi-religious fervour. It is possible for you to enter a kind of trance state, a condition in which you will seem to be under the hypnosis of your own puppet. When this happens, you will always treat your puppet as a verb, not a noun and you will find that the other principles of movement mentioned below fall automatically and instinctively into place.

2. EYES AND EYELINE Watch your puppet's face, as you need to be constantly vigilant to make sure that the angle of the eye-line is appropriate. We as human beings are very fine observers of where someone else's eye is falling on our bodies. So assume that the audience too perceive exactly where your puppet's eyes are looking. More generally, always watch your puppet. If you 'abandon' your puppet by making eye contact with the audience, or by looking for long periods at the puppet to which you are talking, you can't expect them to pay attention to your own puppet.

3. BREATH Don't forget to breathe. You will need to breathe even though you are in the shadows, and you will need to breathe just before setting off on an action. The subtly changing tempo and amplitude of breath is a clear and powerful emotional indicator to the audience – and to your fellow performers. Never doubt that they can perceive this. Breath is also a signalling system to the puppeteers around you. A sharp intake of breath will tell them that you are about to start an action or change direction. Make your breath audible to your fellow puppeteers.

4. PUPPET VERSUS PUPPETEER Never allow the intensity of your commitment as a puppeteer to overwhelm the intensity of the puppet's performance.

5. STILLNESS Keep faith that the audience will be interested in your puppet even when it is doing nothing. In moments of pause, you give to your audience a *tabula rasa* onto which they can project the puppet's thoughts. Don't rush such moments. Allow them enough time to 'land' with the audience. First let two hundred pairs of eyes see. Then move.

6. MICROMOVEMENT Remember that the audience are acute enough to observe even the tiniest movement you make on stage. This includes 'you' as puppeteer and 'you' as puppet. A corollary to this is that you should be aware that the audience will attempt to read any and every movement, (even though it might be extraneous or unintended). In such cases, as they unsuccessfully grapple to interpret an arbitrary movement, the audience will become confused. Thus, you should be aware that all unintended movement is the equivalent of noise.

LEFT AND OPPOSITE *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008.

7. PASSING THE BALL Be scrupulous and disciplined both about seizing dramatic focus and passing this focus away from yourself and towards another performer. This can be clearly demonstrated when a puppet gives an object to another puppet. The puppet's arm extends at the moment of giving, and the giver momentarily freezes as the receiver moves away with the gift. Thus the audience's attention smoothly moves from one puppet to the other. This is a very technical description of something that becomes far more organic in the hands of a master manipulator.
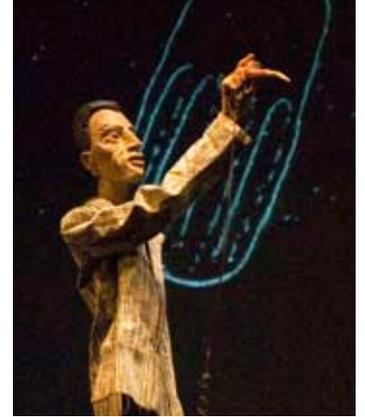

8. GESTURE When making an outward gesture (say, pointing), allow a moment of pause at the greatest extension of the gesture, thus ensuring that the whole audience is given the opportunity to notice it. The bigger the audience, the longer such moments of pause.

9. RHYTHM Avoid repetitive rhythms. This applies especially to walking and breathing. And the corollary of this is to avoid picking up the same rhythms as your fellow performers.

10. SPEED Bear in mind that if you are manipulating a figure that is half the size of a human being, then you will need to slow down the speed with which that puppet moves. It's easy to make very fast gestures with a small arm. It takes some practice and conscientiousness to move at a slower rate, on a scale suited to the size of the puppet.

11. TOUCH Touch is the sensory mode which integrates the puppet's experience of the theatre space with its fellow performers and, by extension, with its audience. One of your most important tasks as a puppeteer is to allow the audience to feel how the world touches the puppet and how the puppet touches those in the world around it. Remember that when your puppet touches another puppet, person or stage prop, your audience's fingertips feel that touch vicariously, intensely. That touch for them is an act of cognition, embodied in the hand of the puppet. So, pay special attention to all moments of contact, whether pulling, kissing, giving, taking, striking or embracing. Try to avoid the clunkiness of two pieces of wood colliding. Where this is a danger, the impulse of the touch can be arrested just before the actual point of contact, or the caress may be made on the upstage side of the other puppet, thus masking any awkwardness.
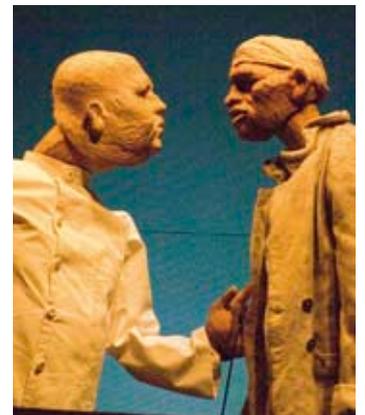
Movement as Thought[06]

Now we come to a counter-intuitive proposal and one that seems to contradict the principle asserted above, namely that in the puppet's *stillness* the audience can read its thoughts. This is indeed true. This is part of what in particle physics might be called 'the weak force'. However, parallel to this form of thinking (where the audience are really doing the thinking in that they 'read' the thoughts of the puppet), there exists also a form of thinking which is, one could say, generated more actively by the puppeteer. This may be termed 'the strong force' thinking, and refers to the totality of movement the puppet makes. This assertion comes out of a phenomenological way of understanding and describing events in the world.

The assertion is that the movement is the thought. Here we are talking about an *embodied* form of thinking, of thinking *incarnate* – well, in the case of the puppet, thinking in and through wood. Here we assert that we refuse to make a separation between mind and body; that is, the mind that thinks, and the body that moves. During an improvisation therefore, we would assert that the puppeteer is using the puppet to *physically evolve ideas that are incommensurate with script and scriptwriting*. This is thought given expression through gesture, timing, rhythm. Chaplin was the most eloquent and perhaps the clearest example of a performer whose thoughts were utterly embodied. Macklin quotes the philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone writing on dance improvisation as an act of thinking: 'In such thinking, movement is not a medium by which thoughts emerge but rather, the thoughts themselves.'[07] What we are really suggesting is that the movement of the puppet precedes and pre-empts the written script. Macklin observes,

> What phenomenology is saying is that the body thinks *before* language or concepts, it creates meaning in an immediate act, it is itself a language, both before verbal/written language and in a feedback loop, based on that very language. So when a puppeteer creates meaning with a puppet we have a language beyond language upon which meaning is based.[08]

I have to admit, then, that we do indeed feel a fundamental tension in puppet theatre between the scriptwriter and the puppet manipulator. In a sense, we, the puppeteers, sometimes experience language as a form of repression of our work. Traditionally in the theatre, language asserts its supremacy as thought. However, we the puppeteers instinctively know that we possess a powerful alternate form of thought, and that this form is at least the equal of words.

This resonates with one of the central tenets of Lacanian theory, namely that language systems are used by society as forms of control and repression. I believe that audiences sense and resent this dominance of the text, because often they choose movement rather than language as their hermeneutic focus. And as we have remarked previously, this diminished focus on the text often results in their assertion that the text is faulty.

LEFT *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008. Puppet Penelope with Adrian Kohler, and puppet Melanto with Busi Zokufa and singer Anna Zander.

RIGHT Penelope from *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*.

Clearly there is a very real limit to what is possible for a scriptwriter to script prior to the existence of the puppets themselves. Certainly, the writer can develop and describe the plotline and narrative and what the characters say to one another. But this doesn't necessarily make for a drama – certainly not a puppet drama. A drama for puppets is made from other finer and more fundamental levels of signification. This is the reason that the puppet and its inbuilt, inherent movement are so well imaged through the figure of Pinocchio, the little creature whose actions and destiny his father (his author) cannot anticipate. Much of what the puppet does, and hence much of what the puppet means, cannot be scripted. The production of meaning waits for the puppet to be created and then it arises out of the puppet. All that the scriptwriter (let's call him Geppetto) can do is to 'own' what his creatures do. But this ownership is hollow. So, in puppet theatre there is a shared authorship. Like opera, a puppet piece is by its very nature a *gesamtkunstwerk*.[09] The authors are the scriptwriter, the director, the puppet designer, the puppet-maker and of course the audience. Ranking these varied creators in a hierarchy is impossible, because things vary from production to production, but one thing is certain: the puppet-designer/maker and the puppet manipulators are essential to the production of meaning.

LEFT Costume sketch by Adrian Kohler for Telemachus in *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, 1998.

RIGHT Telemachus, backstage, Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008.

The work of the puppet therefore, can be seen implicitly as a rebellion against the word and against conventionalised forms of theatrical discourse. Perhaps this is why so many avant-garde artists have utilised this art form.[10] To grasp the origin of the thinking inherent in any puppet play and to understand how this thinking functions, we have to analyse the work that the puppet performs. We need to understand this process by which the performed play comes into being. Our enquiry has to come to grips with this work of the puppet and its manipulator, where meaning is generated more by process than by content, more by movement than by words. It is this process which reveals the workings of the play's thoughts. As Freud said of the *dream-work*, so too is the puppet's movement in and through a performance a 'disguised form of thought process' where the puppets use the modest gesture and the unassuming walk to embody the deepest meaning. This is where the puppets are doing their thinking and herein lies their authority.

>

NOTES

01. The designer and the maker may of course be two different people and indeed there may be several makers and (in the case of particularly complex puppets) more than one designer. For the sake of brevity, I'm referring to this person (or group of persons) as the designer/maker.

02. As puppeteers, we are very aware that when working at this level of performance, even unintended movement is assumed to have meaning and is therefore avidly read by the audience who try (unsuccessfully) to interpret it. So one has to be very wary because even small movements can become 'noise'.

03. Andrew Macklin, University of New South Wales (personal communication, 2008).

04. For a discussion advocating touch and 'hapticity' in architecture, see Finnish architect Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. London: John Wiley & Sons, 2005.

05. This sadomasochistic state is integral to many forms of performance and sport. It is true to say that the stronger and fitter one is, and the more accustomed one becomes to the required movements, and the more that one relaxes while performing them, the less pain one experiences. However this may take months to achieve. Often, the effortless, pain-free moment never arrives.

06. For this section I am indebted to Andrew Macklin, who read an early version of this manuscript and made many insightful comments and recommendations.

07. Rom Harre, *Physical Being: A Theory for Corporeal Psychology*, Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991, p. 29.

08. Personal communication.

09. An informative discussion of this phenomenon is to be found in Peter J. Wilson and Geoffrey Milne's *The Space Between: The Art of Puppetry and Visual Theatre in Australia*. Sydney: Currency Press, 2004.

10. There are many, as is evidenced by *The Puppet Show*, the touring exhibition focusing on the influence of puppetry on contemporary artists, curated by Ingrid Schaffner and Carin Kuoni of the Philadelphia ICA. William Kentridge, the artist with whom we collaborated between 1991 and 2002, is one. The list is long and includes Pierre Huyghe, Laurie Simmons, Gavin Turk, and Deborah Curtis and Nayland Blake. And the cohort from an earlier period includes Paul Klee, Picasso, Miró and Alexander Calder.

OPPOSITE *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, Theatre Malibran, Venice 2008. Puppet Telemachus manipulated by Jason Potgieter and Adrian Kohler.

OVERLEAF Puppet Ulisse with Basil Jones, Theatre Malibran, Venice, 2008.

Selected Bibliography

Allin, Michael, *Zarafa: A Giraffe's True Story*. New York: Walker, 1998.

Appadurai, Arjun, *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Arnoldi, Mary Jo, *Playing With Time: Art and Performance in Central Mali*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Badenhorst, Z., *South African Puppetry for the Theatre Since 1975*. Unpublished MT thesis. Pretoria: Tshwane University of Technology, 2005.

Baird, Bil, *The Art of the Puppet*. New York: Bonanza, 1973.

Baraitser, Marion, 'Theatre of Animation: Contemporary Adult Puppet Plays in Context' in *Contemporary Theatre Review* (1999).

Baudrillard, Jean, *The System of Objects*. London and New York: Verso, 1996.

Becket, Samuel, *More Pricks than Kicks*. London: Picador, 1974, pp. 18–19.

Birringer, Johannes H., 'Contemporary Performance/Technology' in *Theatre Journal* 51.4 (Dec 1999), pp. 361–381.

Blumberg, Marcia, 'Re-membering History, Staging Hybridity: *Ubu and the Truth Commission*' in Hal Wylie and Bernth Lindfors (eds.), *Multiculturalism and Hybridity in African Literatures*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000, pp. 309–318.

Blumenthal, Eileen, *Julie Taymor, Playing with Fire: Theater, Opera, Film*. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1995.

Blumenthal, Eileen, *Puppetry and Puppets*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2005.

Bolt, Barbara, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004.

Brown, Bill, *Things*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Coetzee, Yvette, 'Visibly Invisible: How Shifting the Conventions of the Traditionally Invisible Puppeteer Allows for more Dimensions in both the Puppeteer-Puppet Relationship and the Creation of Theatrical Meaning in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*' in *South African Theatre Journal* 12 (1998), pp. 35–51.

Cole, Catherine M., 'Theatre of Truth, Acts of Reconciliation: The TRC in South Africa' in John Conteh-Morgan and Tejumola Olaniyan (eds.), *African Drama and Performance*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Craig, Edward Gordon (ed.), *The Marionette*. Florence, 1918.

Davis, Geoffrey V., 'Addressing the Silences of the Past: Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid Theatre' in Yvette Hutchison and Eckhard Breitinger (eds.), *History and Theatre in Africa*. Bayreuth African Studies Series 50 and *South African Theatre Journal* 13 (2000), pp. 59–72.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*. 1984. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

De Man, Paul, *Aesthetic Ideology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Du Preez, Petrus, *Ikoon en Medium: Die Toneelpop, Masker en Akteurmanipuleerder in Afrika-Performances*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Stellenbosch.

Finch, Christopher, *Jim Henson: The Works, the Art, the Magic, the Imagination*. New York: Random House, 1993.

Freud, Sigmund, *Totem and Taboo*. London: Routledge Classics, 1950.

Freud, Sigmund, 'The Uncanny'. 1910, in The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 14. *Art and Literature*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, pp. 335–376.

Freud, Sigmund, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. London and Vienna: International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1922.

Fuchs, A., 'Manipulating Puppets in the New South African Theatre' in *Commonwealth* 14.1 (1991), pp. 78–83.

Harré, Rom, *Physical Being: A Theory for a Corporal Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*. New York: Wiley Blackwell, 1962.

Heidegger, Martin, 'The Question Concerning Technology" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. (Trans. R. Lovitt). London: Harper and Row, 1977.

Horowitz, Arthur, 'International Festival of Puppet Theatre' in *Theatre Journal* 34.1 (Spring 2003), pp. 11–30.

Hutchison, Yvette, 'Truth or Bust: Consensualising an Historic Narrative or Provoking through Theatre' in *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15, pp. 351–359.

Jones, Basil, 'Financing Handspring Puppet Company' in Martin Banham (ed.), *African Theatre: 7 Companies*. London: James Currey, 2008.

Jones, Basil, 'Puppetry as a Theatrical Art: Response to a Questionnaire' in *Contemporary Theatre Review* 10.1 (1997), pp. 1–4.

Kearney, Richard, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

Kohler, Adrian, 'Engineering Movement' in *Ingenia: The Quarterly Magazine of The Royal Academy of Engineering* 40 (September 2009).

Kohler, Adrian and Basil Jones, 'Puppet Theatre in Education: A New Approach' in *Journal of the South African Association for Youth Theatre* 7.2 (1986), pp. 15–18.

Kohler, Adrian, Basil Jones and Tommy Luther, 'Statement of Practice' in *Journal of Modern Craft* 2.3 (November 2009).

Kruger, Lauren, '*A History of Theatre in Africa*, *Playing for Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS* and *Theatre and Empowerment: Community Drama on the World's Stage*' in *Theatre Journal* 57.3 (October 2005), pp. 548–550.

Laing, R. D., *The Divided Self*. 1960. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990.

Lo, Jacqueline and Helen Gilbert, 'Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis' in *TDR* 46.3 (Fall 2002), pp. 31–53.

Marlin-Curiel, Stephanie, 'A Little too Close to the Truth: Anxieties of Testimony and Confession in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* and *The Story I am about to Tell*' in *South African Theatre Journal* 15 (2001), pp. 77–106.

Marx, L., 'Slouching towards Bethlehem: *Ubu and the Truth Commission*' in *African Studies* 57.2 (1998), pp. 209–220.

Meyer, Laure, *Art and Craft in Africa. Everyday Life, Ritual, Court Art*. Paris: Editions Pierre Terrail, 1995.

Millar, Mervyn, *Journey of the Tall Horse*. London, Oberon, 2006.

Millar, Mervyn, *The Horse's Mouth*. London: Oberon Books, 2006.

Moss, Laura, 'Nice Audible Crying: Editions, Testimonies, and *Country of my Skull*' in *Research in African Literatures* (Winter 2006), pp. 85–104.

Nelson, Victoria, *The Secret Life of Puppets*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Pallasmaa, Juhani, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. London: John Wiley & Sons, 2005.

Parker, Andrew and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds.), *Performativity and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Popper, Karl, *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem*. Oxford: Routledge, 1993.

Richards, Colin, 'Artless Beast' in *Art South Africa* 6.1 (Spring 2007), pp. 52–55.

Roach, Joseph, 'Culture and Performance in the Circum-Atlantic World' in Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds.), *Performativity and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Schaffner, Ingrid and Carin Kuoni, *The Puppet Show*. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2008.

Taylor, Jane, 'The 'As-If' Reality of Puppet Theatre' in *The Puppet Show*. University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2008, pp. 52–60.

Taylor, Jane, 'The Chimp Project' in *Connect* 2 (2001), pp. 153–159.

Taylor, Jane, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998.

Thomas, Nicholas, *Entangled Objects*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Turkle, Sherry, 'Diary' in *London Review of Books* 20 (April 2006).

Wilson, Peter J. and Geoffrey Milne, *The Space Between: The Art of Puppetry and Visual Theatre in Australia*. Sydney: Currency Press, 2004.

www.handspringpuppet.co.za/html/frameind.html .

www.michaelrosen.co.uk/littleangel.html .

Dog
AA2.021

Contributors

Adrian Kohler is Handspring Puppet Company's master puppet designer and maker. As a boy, Kohler made and performed puppets with his mother, an amateur puppeteer. He studied Fine Art at the University of Cape Town, majoring in sculpture. After graduating in 1974, he spent a year in the resident puppet company at The Space Theatre, and then became an intern at Cannon Hill Puppet Theatre in Birmingham, UK. In 1978, he and his partner Basil Jones moved to Botswana, where for three years he led the National Popular Theatre Programme, using theatre and puppets to promote rural development.

In 1981, Kohler and Jones returned to South Africa to start Handspring Puppet Company. For five years he wrote or co-wrote all their productions and took charge of puppet design and making. In 1985, he proposed the production of *Episodes of an Easter Rising*, the company's first play for adults and their first play to tour abroad.

Kohler's work has been influenced by Japanese traditional puppetry, German technical innovations and Malian puppetry traditions. His collaboration with the artist William Kentridge, which began in 1992, prompted a move to rougher carving, unpainted wood and a more expressionist style. In more recent years, he has moved towards openwork cane structures covered with translucent fabrics that give his figures a lantern-like appearance and allow the internal mechanisms of the puppet to be visible.

A major retrospective exhibition of Kohler's work was co-ordinated by the Goodman Gallery in 2001 and toured to most of South Africa's city galleries, including Iziko South African National Gallery in 2003, as well as to the Museum for African Art in New York in 2005.

Kohler has received numerous awards for set design, costume design and best production as co-creator of a number of productions with William Kentridge and others. He has received three British awards for the puppets he made for *War Horse*, including the Olivier Award for set design with Rae Smith. His puppets for *Woyzeck on the Highveld* have been acquired by the Munich City Museum in Germany.

Basil Jones was born in Sea Point, Cape Town, the only son of Natalie Joan Coetzee and Harold Louis Jones. He studied Commercial Law at the University of Cape Town, and did a BA (Fine Art) at the Michaelis School of Art, majoring in sculpture. Here he met fellow student Adrian Kohler. Jones received the Jules Kramer Grant and the Irma Stern Scholarship, and while studying towards an MA in Fine Art he was appointed as a graphic artist at Cape Town's Cultural History Museum.

Between 1976 and 1977, Jones travelled with Kohler to the United Kingdom, where he taught graphic art at the W.E.L.D. Community Arts Centre in Birmingham. He co-produced *Monkey and the Demon Lurker* for local art centres. In 1978, he and Kohler moved to Gaborone, Botswana, where he worked as a graphic artist at the National Museum and Art Gallery and was an active member of the ANC cultural group. In 1981, he and Kohler relocated to Cape Town and founded Handspring Puppet Company with Jill Joubert and Jon Weinberg. He produced, performed and toured nationally in *The Honey Trail*.

From 1982 to 1984, Jones produced, performed and toured nationally with *Kashku Saves the Circus*, *Gertie's Feathers* and James Thurber's *13 Clocks*. In 1985 he and Kohler moved to Kensington, Johannesburg. Jones produced, performed and toured nationally with *The Mouth Trap*, commissioned by the University of the Witwatersrand's Department of Community Dentistry. He produced *Episodes of an Easter Rising* by David Lytton, which toured in South Africa and to the Seventh International Festival of Puppet Theatre in Charleville-Mézières, France. In 1986, he curated an exhibition of puppets for the University of South Africa that toured to the Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria Art Galleries. In 1987, he co-produced (with the Baxter Theatre) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Esther van Ryswyk and Fred Abrahamse. The production won the Fleur du Cap award for Best Production of a New Play. In 1988, he co-produced *Carnival of the Bear* at The Market Theatre and the following year, Malcolm Purkey's *Tooth and Nail* with Junction Avenue Theatre Company. In 1990 he co-produced *Starbrites!*, with The Market Theatre, a work conceived and directed by Barney Simon. It had a six-week season at the Tricycle Theatre in London and participated in the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). From 1991–1993, he co-produced, with William Kentridge, *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, which had seasons at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, The Market Theatre in Johannesburg and various European and North American venues.

Jones was a founder of Handspring Trust for Puppetry in Education, and raised funds to produce *Spider's Place*, an innovative science-education initiative for schools. From 1994–1995, he co-produced *Faustus in Africa*, directed by William Kentridge, with Mannie Manim Productions and Art Bureau, Munich. In 1998 he produced *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, directed by William Kentridge and written by Jane Taylor. The work premiered in Weimar, Germany and toured to many international destinations. The following year, Jones co-produced *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse* with Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie and Ricercar Consort in Brussels, with a commissioned performance for the King and Queen of Belgium. From 2000–2001, he produced *The Chimp Project*, directed by Adrian Kohler and Kurt Wustmann. The show premiered at The Market Theatre and toured to Germany.

From 2002–2005 he managed the development and production of *Tall Horse*, with a premiere in Cape Town and seasons in Pretoria and Johannesburg, followed by a return Cape Town season in 2004 and an American tour in 2005, as well as performances as part of the Theater der Welt festival in Stuttgart, Germany. From 2006–2007, he oversaw the development of *War Horse* in collaboration with the National Theatre in London.

William Kentridge has had solo shows in many museums and galleries around the world, including the MCA San Diego (1998) and MOMA, New York (1999), since his participation in Documenta X in Kassel in 1997. In 1998, a survey exhibition of his work was hosted by the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, travelling to museums in Europe in 1998 and 1999. 2001 saw the launch of a substantial survey show of Kentridge's work in Washington, DC, travelling to cities in the USA and South Africa. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev curated a new retrospective exhibition of his work for the Castello di Rivoli in Turin in January 2004, which went on to museums in Europe, Canada, Australia and South Africa.

The shadow oratorio *Confessions of Zeno* was commissioned for Documenta XI in 2002 and the installation *7 Fragments for Georges Méliès, Day for Night and Journey to the Moon* was presented at the 2005 Venice Biennale. In 2005, he directed a production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, with René Jacobs as conductor. The opera toured to cities including New York, Naples, Cape Town and Johannesburg. In October 2005, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin commissioned *Black Box/Chambre Noire*, a miniature theatre piece with mechanised puppets and projection, and original music by Philip Miller.

Kentridge received the Carnegie Medal for the Carnegie International 1999/2000, the Goslar Kaisserring in 2003 and the Oskar Kokoschka Award (2008). He has received honorary doctorates from a number of universities. His recent work includes *Telegrams from the Nose*, a collaborative performance with composer François Sarhan, and *I am not me, the horse is not mine*, a solo lecture/performance piece and installation comprising eight film fragments for the Sydney Biennale of 2008. Kentridge is at work on a production of Shostakovich's opera *The Nose*, to premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in March 2010.

Gerhard Marx is an artist, theatre director and film-maker. He received his MA (FA) Cum Laude from the University of the Witwatersrand in 2004 and he lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa. He has produced four solo exhibitions and his works are featured in numerous public and private collections.

Marx's recent theatre productions have included *They Say*, written and directed by Marx for the Aardklop National Arts Festival and winner of the Bravo Award for Most Memorable Moment at the festival (2008) and *Rewind: A Cantata For Voice, Tape and Testimony*, directed by Marx, with an interactive film by Gerhard and Maja Marx and music by Philip Miller. *Rewind* performed in Brooklyn, New York, at Williams College, Massachusetts (2007) and at The Market Theatre, Johannesburg (2008).

Marx's collaboration with Handspring Puppet Company on *The Chimp Project* was his first foray into animation. Since then his film and animation works, most notably *And There in the Dust*, animated by Marx and co-directed with long-time theatre collaborator Lara Foot Newton, have been screened at more than thirty-five international film festivals and have won a number of local and international awards. In 2007 and 2009, Marx and Newton were selected as Sundance Film Fellows and participated in the Screenwriters' Laboratory (2008) and the Directors' Laboratory (2009).

In 2009, Marx created two large public sculptures for the city of Johannesburg, the first a collaboration with William Kentridge for the Queen Elizabeth Bridge, and the second a collaboration with Maja Marx, installed on Pigeon Square.

Lesego Rampolokeng was born in Orlando West, Soweto, in 1965. His schooling was disrupted by the student uprising of 1976, but he went on to study law at the University of the North for a short period. For the past two decades, he has established an international career as a rap poet and performer and has published several volumes of poetry, including *Horns for Hondo* (1990), *Talking Rain* (1993) and *The Bavino Sermons* (1999). He has recorded with various musicians, including the avant-garde South African band, Kalahari Surfers. Their collaboration *End Beginnings* was released in 1993. His recent publications include *The Second Chapter* (2003) and *Black Heart* (2004). Rampolokeng has performed at many arts and writing festivals in Africa, the United States and Europe and his works have been translated into several languages.

Adrienne Sichel is a South African-born theatre journalist. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech and Drama and English from the former University of Natal (Durban), she began her career as a journalist at *The Pretoria News* in 1970. In 1978, she began specialising in arts writing and criticism, transferring to *The Star* in Johannesburg, in 1983, where she has been employed as a specialist writer and critic on the daily arts and entertainment supplement *Tonight*. Sichel has a national profile as a theatre and dance critic and has tracked the development of contemporary dance in South Africa and elsewhere on the African continent.

Jane Taylor is a South African scholar who has a doctorate in English from Northwestern University. Her research explored the impact of the commodity form on subjectivity in early modern novels and drama. From 1985 to 2000 she was a lecturer at the University of the Western Cape. In 1987 she co-edited *From South Africa* with David Bunn (University of Chicago Press), and in 1996 curated *Fault Lines*, a series of events about truth and reconciliation. She also curated *Holdings: Rethinking the Archive* for the launch of the University of the Witwatersrand's new Graduate School, producing a catalogue and publishing an essay in *Rethinking the Archive* (David Philip). In 1996, Taylor wrote the play *Ubu and the Truth Commission* for Handspring Puppet Company and William Kentridge and, in 1999, directed Puccini's *La Bohème* for the Spier Theatre Festival in Cape Town. In 2001, she wrote the libretto for *Confessions of Zeno*, a musical theatre work made in collaboration with William Kentridge, Kevin Volans and Handspring Puppet Company, based on the novel by Italo Svevo, and commissioned by Documenta. In 2006 she won the Olive Schreiner Award for her first novel, *Of Wild Dogs*. Taylor has received several fellowships, including a Mellon Fellowship, a Rockefeller Fellowship and Visiting Fellowships to Magdalen College, Oxford and Wolfson College, Cambridge. In 2005, she was the Franke Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago, and from 2000 to 2009 held the Skye Chair of Dramatic Art at the University of the Witwatersrand. She has a keen interest in museums and exhibition curation, and for several years served on the Board of the South African National Gallery. She is a regular Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago. Recently, Taylor's work has included inquiries around the representation of remorse at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and at the World Court. She is currently working on a scholarly book on the performance of 'Sincerity', and has completed her second novel, *The Transplant Men,* exploring the history of transplant surgery (Jacana Books). She is at work on a book on William Kentridge's production of Shostakovich's *The Nose*, due to open at the Metropolitan Opera, New York in 2010. She has written extensively on Kentridge's work, on contemporary culture and theory, and on puppetry and object theatre.

John Hodgkiss was born in 1966 in Johannesburg, where he now lives and works. After obtaining his Bachelor of Fine Art degree from Rhodes University, he worked for various record labels, shooting emerging and established musicians, while pursuing his interest in fine art photography. In 2000, he had a solo exhibition, *negative*, at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, and the Cold Room in Cape Town. After 2000, Hodgkiss worked briefly in video, co-winning a Gold Craft Loerie Award for cinematography for a South African tourism video. He now specialises in fine art documentary, performance art and theatre photography. In 2003, Hodgkiss was commissioned by David Krut to do the photographic production and photography for the book *TAXI-008* on the performance artist Steven Cohen. This led to an ongoing collaboration with David Krut Publishing, resulting in work on five monographs to date on South African artists. In 2004, he was commissioned by William Kentridge to document his *Nine Films for Performance*, a project that has since led to his documenting of most of Kentridge's work. While at work on the rehearsals of *Woyzeck on the Highveld* at Kentridge's studio, Hodgkiss met Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones of Handspring Puppet Company. In 2008, he travelled with the company to Venice to shoot the production of *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*.

Bronwyn Law-Viljoen received her BA and MA degrees from Rhodes University, where she taught English literature from 1991 to 1995. In 1996, she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and went on to receive her doctorate in literature from New York University. She taught literature and documentary film and worked in the rare books collection of the New York University Library, before completing an internship at Aperture in publicity and editorial. In 2005, she took up the position of Managing Editor at David Krut Publishing (DKP) where she has edited and produced a number of titles, including *Dis-Location / Re-Location: Exploring Alienation and Identity in South Africa*; *Art and Justice: The Art of the Constitutional Court of South Africa*; *Light on a Hill*; *TAXI-013 Diane Victor*; *William Kentridge Flute* (for which she wrote an introduction and essay); and *TAXI-014 Mmakgabo Mmapula Mmankgato Helen Sebidi*. Law-Viljoen is also a freelance writer and a Research Fellow at the University of Johannesburg. She has contributed essays on South African photography, printmaking and other visual arts to a number of South African and international publications, including *Art on Paper*, *Art South Africa*, *Aperture* magazine, *Printmaking Today* and *Scrutiny*.

Ellen Papciak-Rose is an artist, graphic designer and illustrator. Although originally from the USA, with a BS in Studio Art from Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, she has been living in southern Africa for the past twenty years. In 1989 she went to Botswana as a US Peace Corps Volunteer to teach art in two rural villages and then relocated to Johannesburg, South Africa in 1994. Ellen's intuitive design and integrated illustration focus on community issues, cultural projects, museum display and the work of other artists. Her most recent art books include *William Kentridge Flute*, *Art and Justice: The Art of the Constitutional Court of South Africa* and *TAXI-015 Paul Stopforth* (all David Krut Publishing), and *William Kentridge: I am not me, the horse is not mine* (Goodman Gallery Editions). She has won two American Graphic Design Awards, is widely published in design and illustration publications and in 2007 was one of the creative speakers at AdobeLive. www.ellenpapciakrose.com

Episodes of an Easter Rising
17 Jun–6 Jul 1985 • Cape Town, South Africa
Baxter Studio Theatre
8–12 Jul 1985 • Grahamstown, South Africa
Dicks, National Arts Festival
19–31 Aug 1985 • Johannesburg, South Africa
Wits University Theatre
21 Sep 1985 • Charleville-Meziérès, France
Salle de Fêtes, Hotel de Ville, 7th International
Festival of Puppet Theatre

A Midsummer Night's Dream
28–30 Jan 1988 • Stellenbosch, South Africa
Oude Libertas Theatre
8 Feb 1988 • Cape Town, South Africa
Baxter Concert Hall
6–10 Jul 1988 • Grahamstown, South Africa
Monument Theatre, National Arts Festival
1 May–10 Jun 1989 • Johannesburg, South Africa
Main Stage, The Market Theatre

Carnival of the Bear
4 Sep–2 Oct 1988 • Johannesburg, South Africa
The Warehouse, The Market Theatre

Tooth and Nail
13 Aug 1989 • Johannesburg, South Africa
The Laager, The Market Theatre

Starbrites!
28 Aug–10 Nov 1990 • Johannesburg, South Africa
The Market Theatre
20–25 May 1991 • Cambridge, UK
Cambridge Arts Theatre
28 May–1 Jun 1991 • Dublin, Ireland
Andrews Lane Theatre, Mayday to Bloomsday
Festival, Dublin: European City of Culture
4–8 Jun 1991 • Oxford, UK
Oxford Playhouse
13–15 Jun 1991 • Birmingham, UK
The Cave Arts Centre
17–22 Jun 1991 • Nottingham, UK
Nottingham Playhouse
24–27 Jun 1991 • Copenhagen, Denmark
Kanonhallen, Images of Afrika Festival
2 Jul–10 Aug 1991 • London, UK
Tricycle Theatre, London International
Festival of Theatre (LIFT)

Woyzeck on the Highveld
9–11 Jul 1992 • Grahamstown, South Africa
Graeme College, National Arts Festival
2 Sep–31 Oct 1992 • Johannesburg, South Africa
The Market Theatre, Arts Alive Festival
24–27 Jun 1993 • Munich, Germany
Werkraumtheater, Theater der Welt
1–4 Jul 1993 • Antwerp, Belgium
De Zaal, De Ark
7–8 Jul 1993 • Fribourg, Switzerland
Theatre Halle 2C, Belluard Bollwerk Festival
12–13 Jul 1993 • Leeds, UK
West Yorkshire Playhouse, Pirates
of the Imagination
16–18 Jul 1993 • Stuttgart, Germany
Karlskaserne, Ludwigsburger Schlossfestspiele
21–24 July 1993 • Hamburg, Germany
Kampnagel Halle 2, Internationales
Sommertheater Festival
23–25 Aug 1993 • Basel, Switzerland
Reithalle, Welt im Basel
27–29 Aug 1993 • Zurich, Switzerland
Zürcher Theater Spektakel
13–23 Apr 1994 • Toronto, Canada
Harbourfront Studio Theatre, Harbourfront
World Stage Festival
1–4 May 1994 • Brussels, Belgium
Theatre 140, KunstenFESTIVALdesArts
6–8 May 1994 • Stuttgart, Germany
Alte Kelter, Ludwigsburger Schlossfestspiele
15–16 May 1994 • Granada, Spain
Teatro Alhambra Cinema, Xarxa Teatre,
Festival Internacional de Teatro de Granada
18–21 May 1994 • Glasgow, UK
Old Atheneum, MayFest
25–26 May 1994 • Bochum, Germany
Prinz Regent Theatre, Figurentheater
Spektakel Fidena
28–29 May 1994 • Braunschweig, Germany
Freizeit- und Bildungszentrum, Woche
Internationalen Puppenspiels Braunschweig

Woyzeck on the Highveld, The Market
Theatre, Johannesburg, 2008. Woyzeck and
The Doctor. Animation by William Kentridge.

1–5 June 1994 • Berlin, Germany
Hebbel-Theater
20–23 Aug 1994 • Göteborg, Sweden
Stadsteatern Studion, Göteborg Dans & Teater Festival
6–10 Sep 1994 • New York, NY, USA
Newman Theater, Public Theater, Henson
International Festival of Puppet Theater
15–17 Sept • Chicago, IL, USA
Athenaeum Theatre, Performing Arts Chicago
28 Feb–2 Mar 1996 • Hong Kong, China
Academy for Performing Arts Drama Theatre,
Hong Kong Arts Festival
6–10 Mar 1996 • Adelaide, Australia
Union Hall, Adelaide Festival
19–24 Mar 1996 • Wellington, New Zealand
Paramount Theatre, New Zealand International
Festival of the Arts
28 Mar–1 Apr 1996 • Bogotá, Colombia
Teatro de Bogotá, Festival IberioAmericano
31 May–6 Jun 1996 • Jerusalem, Israel
The Jerusalem Centre for the
Performing Arts, Israel Festival
11–13 Jul 1996 • Avignon, France
Théâtre Municipal, Festival d'Avignon
5–30 Mar 2008 • Johannesburg, South Africa
Barney Simon Theatre, The Market Theatre
8–12 April 2008 • Perth, Australia
Playhouse Theatre, UNIMA Congress and
World Puppetry Festival
15–19 April 2008 • Brisbane, Australia
Brisbane Powerhouse
6–17 May 2008 • Cape Town, South Africa
Baxter Theatre
14–16 Nov 2008 • Stavanger, Norway
Sandnes Kulturhus, Europeisk Kulturhovedstad
22–27 Sep 2009 • Paris, France
Grande Salle Centre Pompidou
30 Sep–2 Oct 2009 • Rome, Italy
Teatro Eliseo
6 Oct 2009 • Châlons, France
La Comète
10–11 Oct 2009 • Wroclaw, Poland
Scena na Strychu, Dialog Wroclaw
16–17 Oct 2009 • Girona, Spain
Teatro Municipal

Faustus in Africa

22–25 Jun 1995 • Weimar, Germany
Reithalle, Kunstfest Weimar
27 Jun–2 Jul 1995 • Berlin, Germany
Hebbel-Theater
6–8 Jul 1995 • Grahamstown, South Africa
Rhodes Theatre, National Arts Festival
12 Jul–5 Aug 1995 • Johannesburg, South Africa
The Market Theatre
6–9 Sep 1995 • Zurich, Switzerland
Pavillon, Zürcher Theater Spektakel
12–14 Sep 1995 • Stuttgart, Germany
Reithalle, Karlskaserne, Ludwigsburger
Schlossfestspiele
19–23 Sep 1995 • Munich, Germany
Carl-Orff-Saal, Gasteig
26–29 Sep 1995 • Prague, Czech Republic
Archa Theatre
4–8 Oct 1995 • Stuttgart, Germany
Halle 1 Theaterhaus Stuttgart
11–13 Oct 1995 • Hannover, Germany
Ballhof, Staatstheater
16–22 Oct 1995 • Basel, Switzerland
Reithalle, Welt im Basel
24–29 Oct 1995 • London, UK
Battersea Arts Centre, Africa 95
1 Nov 1995 • Remscheid, Germany
Theater Remscheid

4–5 Nov 1995 • Gütersloh, Germany
Theater Gütersloh
8–12 Nov 1995 • Erlangen, Germany
Markgrafentheater
16–18 Nov 1995 • Lisbon, Portugal
Grande Auditório
13–16 Mar 1996 • Adelaide, Australia
Union Hall, Adelaide Festival
9–12 May 1996 • Brussels, Belgium
Espace Temps, KunstenFESTIVALdesArts
15–16 May 1996 • Bochum, Germany
Figurentheater Spektakel Fidena
18–19 May 1996 • Hannover, Germany
Ballhof Theatre
22–25 May 1996 • Dijon, France
Théâtre du Parvis Saint Jean, Théâtre en Mai
4–6 Jun 1996 • Jerusalem, Israel
The Jerusalem Centre for the Performing
Arts, Israel Festival
10–11 Jun 1996 • Ellwangen, Germany
Stadthalle
14–15 Jun 1996 • Hamburg, Germany
Deutsches Schauspielhaus
18–21 Jun 1996 • Copenhagen, Denmark
Images of Africa Festival
26–28 Jun 1996 • St. Pölten, Austria
Donaufestival
1–2 Jul 1996 • Polverigi, Italy
Inteatro Polverigi
15–17 Jul 1996 • Avignon, France
Théâtre Municipal, Festival d'Avignon
30 Oct–2 Nov 1996 • Seville, Spain
Teatro Central
5–9 Nov 1996 • Marseilles, France
Théâtre de la Criée, Massalia Théâtre de
Marionettes et TNM La Criée
13–15 Nov 1996 • Rome, Italy
Teatro Vascello, Festival d'Autunno
19–20 Nov 1996 • Tarbes, France
Théâtre des Nouveautés, Scène Nationale
Tarbes Pyrénées
22–24 Nov 1996 • Toulouse, France
Théâtre Sorano
28–30 Nov 1996 • Strasbourg, Germany
Théâtre Jeune Public
4–6 Dec 1996 • Paris, France
Grande Salle Créteil
9–10 Dec 1996 • Sochaux, France
Maison des Arts et Loisirs
13–15 Dec 1996 • Bourg-en-Bresse, France
Théâtre Bourg-en-Bresse
17–19 Dec 1996 • Chambéry, France
Espace Malraux
4–6 Apr 1997 • Washington, DC, USA
Terrace Theater, The Kennedy Center,
African Odyssey Festival
10–13 Apr 1997 • Chicago, IL, USA
Athenaeum Theatre, Performing Arts Chicago
16 Apr 1997 • Springfield, MA, USA
Symphony Hall, Massachusetts International
Festival of the Arts
19 Apr 1997 • Northampton, MA, USA
Academy of Music Opera House, Massachusetts
International Festival of the Arts

Ubu and the Truth Commission

17–27 Jun 1997 • Weimar, Germany
E-Werk, Kunstfest Weimar
11–13 Jul 1997 • Grahamstown, South Africa
Rhodes Theatre National Arts Festival
19–23 Jul 1997 • Avignon, France
Théâtre Municipal, Festival d'Avignon
31 Jul–30 Aug 1997 • Johannesburg, South Africa
The Market Theatre

3–7 Sep 1997 • Zurich, Switzerland
Pavillon, Zürcher Theater Spektakel
10–12 Sep 1997 • Geneva, Switzerland
Forum Meyrin, Le Bâtie Festival de Geneve
17–19 Sep 1997 • Basel, Switzerland
Kaserne, KulturWerkStatt
25–28 Sep 1997 • Hannover, Germany
Staatstheater Schauspiel
2–5 Oct 1997 • Rungis, France
Théâtre de Rungis
8–11 Oct 1997 • Ludwigsburg, Germany
Kunstzentrum Karlskaserne, Stadt
Schauspiel Bühne
17–19 Oct 1997 • Nantes, France
Hangar Wilson, Fin de siècle à Johannesburg
24–27 Oct 1997 • Kristiansand, Norway
Hovedscenen, Agder Teaters
Internasjonale Figurteaterfestival
31 Oct–1 Nov 1997 • Neuchâtel, Switzerland
Théâtre Régional, Festival Semaine
Internationale de la Marionnettes
4–12 Nov 1997 • Dijon, France
Salle du Parvis Saint-Jean, Théâtre
National Dijon Bourgogne
15–19 Nov 1997 • Erlangen, Germany
Theater Erlangen
22–24 Nov 1997 • Munich, Germany
Schauburg, Out of Afrika Festival
13 Jan 1998 • Stellenbosch, South Africa
Spier Amphitheatre, Spier Summer Arts Festival
9–13 Sep 1998 • New York, NY, USA
Newman Theater, Public Theater, Henson
International Festival of Puppet Theater
18–20 Sep 1998 • Washington, DC, USA
Terrace Theater, The Kennedy Center
25–27 Sep 1998 • Los Angeles, CA, USA
Schoenberg Hall, UCLA
9–12 Oct 1998 • Antwerp, Belgium
De Singel Theatre
16–19 Oct 1998 • Stockholm, Sweden
Kulturhuset Stockholm, Cultural Capital of Europe
22–24 Oct 1998 • Göteborg, Sweden
Pusterviksteatern
27–29 Oct 1998 • Copenhagen, Denmark
Folketeatret
1–2 Nov 1998 • Randers, Denmark
Værket Theatre
6–8 Nov 1998 • Prague, Czech Republic
Divadlo Archa
13–15 Nov 1998 • Rome, Italy
Teatro Vascello, Le Vie Dei Festival
20–22 Nov 1998 • Toulouse, France
Théâtre de la Cité
27–29 Nov 1998 • Rotterdam, Netherlands
Schouwburg Grote Zaal
2–4 Dec 1998 • Paris, France
Grand Salle Créteil
10–11 Dec 1998 • Reggio Emilia, Italy
Teatro Cavallerizza
16–17 Apr 1999 • Saint-Denis, Réunion
Réunion Théâtre du Grand Marché
1–2 May 1999 • Wiesbaden, Germany
Hessisches Staatstheater,
Die Internationalen Maifestspiele
6–7 May 1999 • Lannion, France
Carré Magique
10–11 May 1999 • Saint-Brieuc, France
La Passerelle
17–18 May 1999 • Vannes, France
Palais des Arts
20–21 May 1999 • Quimper, France
Théâtre de Cornouaille
25–27 1999 • Amiens, France
Maison de la Culture d'Amiens

9–20 Jun 1999 • London, UK
Tricycle Theatre, LIFT

Il Ritorno d'Ulisse
9–22 May 1998 • Brussels, Belgium
Luna Theater, KunstenFESTIVALdesArts
28 May–1 Jun 1998 • Vienna, Austria
Sofiensäle, Wiener Festwochen
5–9 Jun 1998 • Berlin, Germany
Hebbel-Theater
22–25 Jun 1998 • Amsterdam, Netherlands
Stadsschouwburg, Holland Festival
1–5 Sep 1998 • Zurich, Switzerland
Werfthalle, Zürcher Theater Spektakel
29 Jun–2 Jul 1999 • Grahamstown, South Africa
Monument Theatre, National Arts Festival
7–10 Jul 1999 • Pretoria, South Africa
State Theatre
24–26 Mar 2000 • Lisbon, Portugal
Grande Auditório da Culturgest
4–8 Feb 2004 • Brussels, Belgium
La Monnaie/De Munt
2–6 Mar 2004 • New York, NY, USA
John Jay Theater, Lincoln Center
13–15 Mar 2004 • Caen, France
Théâtre de Caen, Le Mois á Caen
19–20 Mar 2004 • Luxembourg, Luxembourg
Grand Théâtre du Luxembourg
13–17 Oct 2004 • Melbourne, Australia
Playhouse, The Arts Centre, Melbourne
International Arts Festival
12–15 May 2007 • Brussels, Belgium
La Monnaie/De Munt
28–29 Nov 2008 • Venice, Italy
Théâtre Malibran
4 Dec 2008 • Girona, Spain
Teatro Municipal, Festival Temporada Alta
8 Dec 2008 • Besançon, France
Théâtre Municipal de Besançon
11–12 Dec 2008 • Nîmes, France
Théâtre de Nîmes
17–18 Dec 2008 • Toulouse, France
La Hall aux Grains
11–14, 20–21 Mar 2009 • Seattle, WA, USA
Moore Theatre
24–28 Mar 2009 • San Francisco, CA, USA
Artaud Theater
23–26 Aug 2009 • Edinburgh, UK
The King's Theatre, Edinburgh International Festival

The Chimp Project
9–12 Jun 2000 • Hannover, Germany
Theater im Ballhof, Festival Theaterformen
14–18 June 2000 • Reklinghausen, Germany
Theaterzelt der Ruhrfestspiele, Ruhrfestspiele
Recklinghausen
22–25 Jun 2000 • Weimar, Germany
E-Werk, Kunstfest Weimar
28–30 Jun 2000 • Munich, Germany
Schauburg
6–11 Jul 2000 • Grahamstown, South Africa
Graeme College, National Arts Festival
14–26 Aug 2000 • Johannesburg, South Africa
The Market Theatre
7–10 Sep 2000 • Basel, Switzerland
Reithalle, Theatre Festival Basel
27 Sep–7 Oct 2000 • Cape Town, South Africa
Artscape Nico Malan Theatre
25–28 Oct 2000 • Paris, France
Théâtre de Rungis
9–11 Nov 2000 • Saint-Denis, Réunion
Le Théâtre du Grande Marche
30 Nov–2 Dec 2000 • Nuremburg, Germany
Tafelhalle

Zeno at 4am

20–24 May 2001 • Brussels, Belgium
Luna Theatre, KunstenFESTIVALdesArts
23–28 Oct 2001 • Paris, France
Centre Pompidou, Festival d'Automne
2–4 Nov 2001 • Minneapolis, MN, USA
Walker Art Center
9–11 Nov 2001 • Chicago, IL, USA
Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art
14–18 Nov 2001 • New York, NY, USA
John Jay Theater, Lincoln Center
21–22 Nov 2001 • Angoulême, France
Théâtre d'Angoulême
27 Nov–1 Dec 2001 • Toulouse, France
Théâtre Garonne
4–5 Dec 2001 • Amiens, France
Maison de la Culture d'Amiens

Confessions of Zeno

14–17 May 2002 • Brussels, Belgium
Kaaitheater, KunstenFESTIVALdesArts
8–9 Jun 2002 • Kassel, Germany
Theateraufführung, Documenta 11
13–19 Jun 2002 • Frankfurt, Germany
Kommunikationsfabrik, Schauspielfrankfurt
24–25 Jun 2002 • Zagreb, Croatia
Croatian National Theatre, Eurokaz
Festival Novog Kazališta
3–4 Jul 2002 • Grahamstown, South Africa
Monument Theatre, National Arts Festival
26–28 Sept 2002 • Berlin, Germany
Freie VolksBühne, Berliner Festspiele
2–5 Oct 2002 • Hamburg, Germany
Musiktheater, Kampnagel Festival
24–26 Oct 2002 • Rome, Italy
Teatro Prima Nazionale, Romaeuropa Festival
14–16 Nov 2002 • Salamanca, Spain
Teatro Liceo, Ciudad Europea de la Cultura
20–24 Nov 2002 • Paris, France
Centre Pompidou Grande Salle, Festival
d'Automne à Paris
26–27 Nov 2002 • Caen, France
Théâtre de Caen
29–30 Nov 2002 • Angoulême, France
Théâtre de Angoulême
6–8 Feb 2003 • Stellenbosch, South Africa
Spier Amphitheatre, Spier Summer Arts Festival
3–4 Jun 2003 • Singapore, Singapore
Victoria Theatre, Singapore Arts Festival
18–19 Oct 2003 • Las Palmas, Canary Islands
Teatro Cuyás
23–25 Oct 2003 • Lisbon, Portugal
Culturgest Grande Auditório
28 Oct 2003 • Vitoria, Spain
Teatro Principal Antzokia

Tall Horse

9–18 Sep 2004 • Cape Town, South Africa
Baxter Theatre
22 Sep–3 Oct 2004 • Pretoria, South Africa
The State Theatre

5–9 Oct 2004 • Johannesburg, South Africa
Dance Factory
29 Apr–14 May 2005 • Cape Town, South Africa
Baxter Theatre
8–10 Jul 2005 • Stuttgart, Germany
Theatre der Welt
6–9 Oct 2004 • Johannesburg, South Africa
Dance Factory
30 Sep–1 Oct 2005 • Williamstown, MA, USA
'62 Center for Theatre and Dance, Williams College
4–9 Oct 2005 • Brooklyn, NY, USA
BAM Harvey Theater at Brooklyn Academy
of Music, Next Wave Festival
14–15 Oct 2005 • Pittsburgh, PA, USA
Byham Theater
18–22 Oct 2005 • Ann Arbor, MI, USA
Power Center, University of Michigan,
University Musical Society
5–6 Nov 2005 • Chapel Hill, NC, USA
Memorial Hall, University of North Carolina,
Carolina Performing Arts
11–12 Nov 2005 • Washington, DC, USA
Eisenhower Theater, The Kennedy Center

War Horse

17 Oct 2007–14 Feb 2008 • London, UK
Olivier Theatre, National Theatre
10 Sep 2008–18 Mar 2009 • London, UK
Olivier Theatre, National Theatre
3 Apr 2009 ongoing • London, UK
New London Theatre

www.handspringpuppet.com

....

OVERLEAF Maquette by Adrian Kohler of an abandoned idea for the back legs of a horse
for *War Horse*.

....

INSIDE BACK COVER Working drawing by Adrian Kohler of components of horse puppets
for *War Horse*.

....

BACK COVER *War Horse*, the National Theatre, London, 2007. Puppet Joey with puppet-
eers Craig Leo and Tommy Luther.
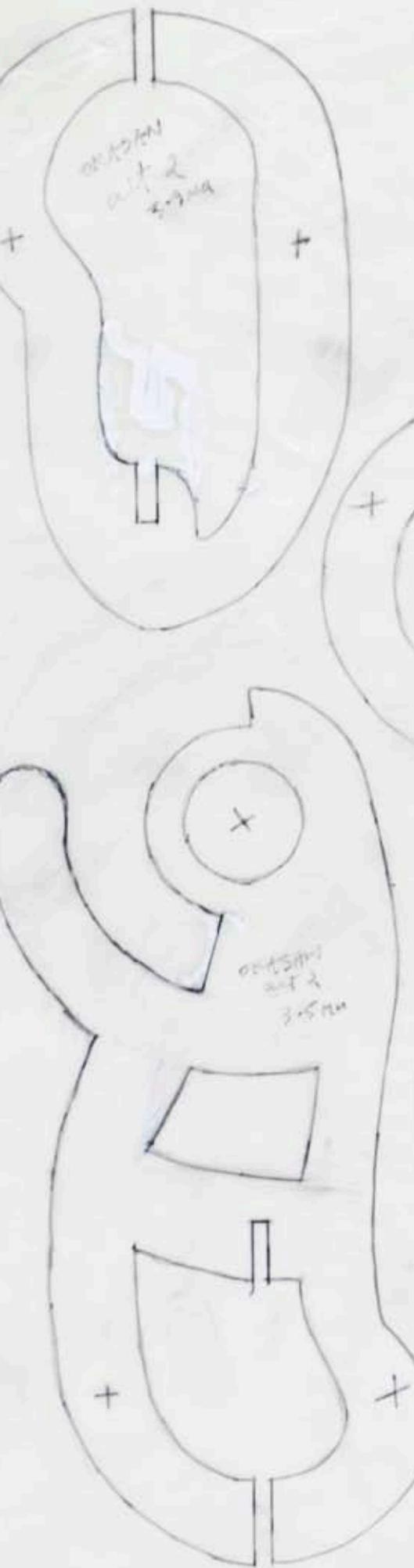
Handspring Puppet Company was founded by Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler in 1981. They have produced eleven plays and two operas, collaborated with many different artists—including Mali's Sogolon Puppet Troupe and South African artist William Kentridge—and opened in over 200 venues in South Africa and abroad. They have won numerous accolades, including an Olivier Award for *War Horse* at the National Theatre in London.
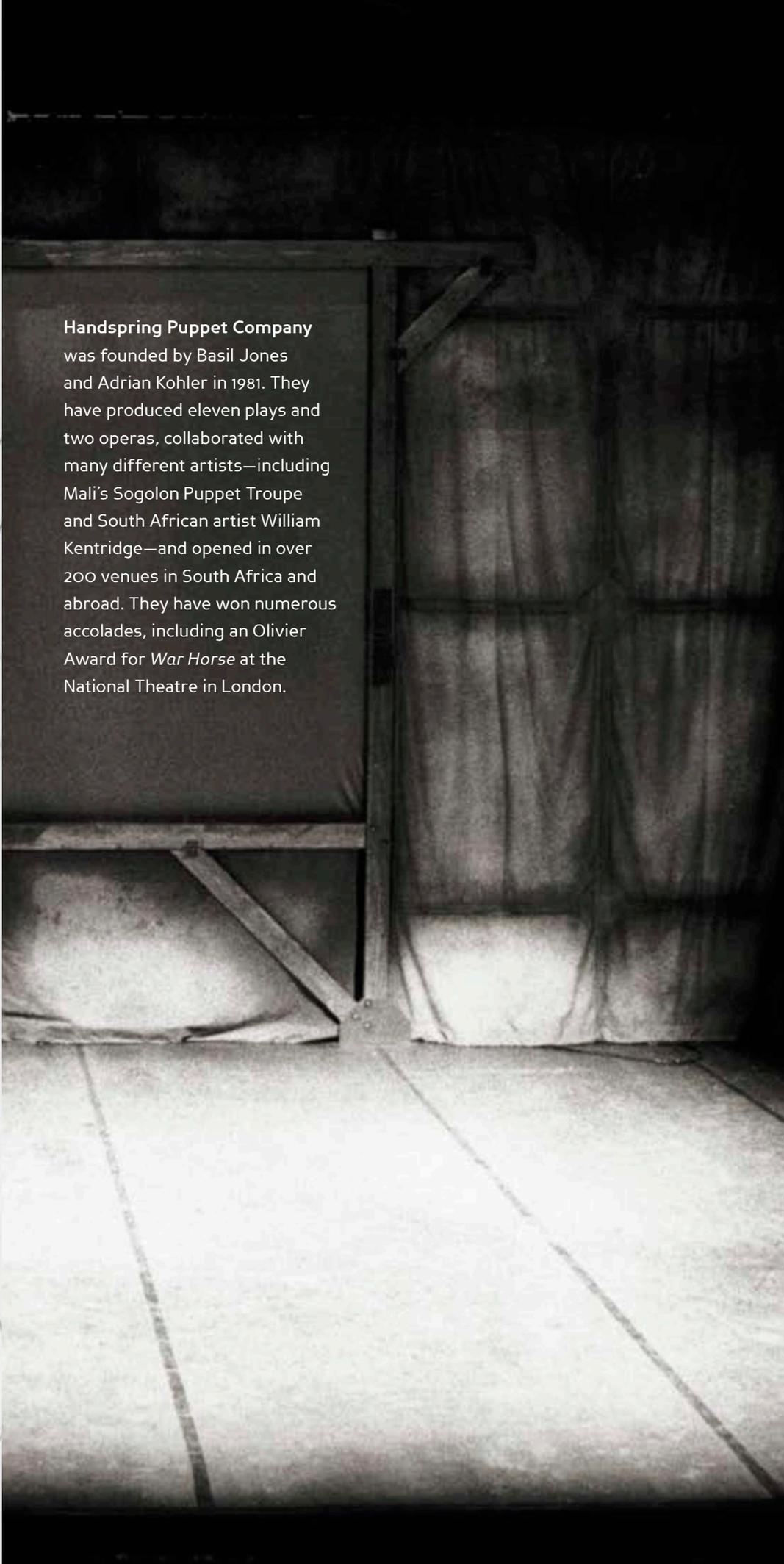
For the past fifteen years Handspring Puppet Company … have created compelling multimedia theater works that transform the psychology of life in post-apartheid South Africa into universal themes. — Chris Cooke, Art Institute of Chicago *fNews*

Woyzeck on the Highveld provides an ample display of the power of puppetry. — Lawrence van Gelder, *The New York Times*

This intra-African collaboration [*Tall Horse*] between South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company and the Sogolon Puppet Troupe of Mali scales the heights of theatrical possibility … — Charles McNulty, *The Village Voice*

… *War Horse* is a unique confluence of design, puppetry, music and spectacular theatrics. And it's all heart and sinews. Joey and Topthorn, each 'humanised' by three brilliantly inventive actors, are magnificent animals with a leaping, shining reality about them … — Michael Coveney, *The Independent*

… what elevates the staging into the realms of unforgettable visual poetry are the enchantingly beautiful, mysteriously animate and ingeniously engineered horse puppets … — Rupert Christiansen, *The Telegraph*