

**THE HAND AND THE HEAD: THE HANDSPRING PUPPET COMPANY
AND THE ARTS ARCHIVE**

Emma Smith Minkley

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor Philosophiae in the Department of History,
University of the Western Cape.**



Supervisor: Professor Premesh Lalu

Co-Supervisor: Professor Jane Taylor

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DECLARATION

I declare that *The hand and the head: The Handspring Puppet Company and the arts archive* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.



Emma Smith Minkley

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KEYWORDS

Puppets

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Subject

Object

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ABSTRACT

My Doctoral dissertation, titled *The hand and the head: The Handspring Puppet Company and the arts archive*, is focussed on the hand as it appears variously in the production, performance and reception of puppetry as a metonym of care and comfort, but conversely of manipulation and tyranny. The shared proponent of the hand, so crucial to the puppeteer as a means of controlling the movements and “life” of the puppet, acts as the object of study which links the puppet to the modern human and the human body, both through means of creation and representation, in other words, both aesthetically and ontologically. The study thus initiates a set of dialectical connections between body and mind, intuition and intellect, practice and theory, all centred on the relationship between the hand and the head. This is an attempt to think through the human body as it functions in the academic institution, and reconceptualise the question of the modern human within the humanities through an inter-disciplinary inquiry which melds multiple strands of theoretical and practical research, including my own artistic practice as a mode of inquiry. The project is further concerned with the materiality and tactility of the puppet and the puppetry making process, which has been explored through the South African Handspring Puppet Company’s material practice in relation to both gesture and object, as well as through a series of artistic inquiries of my own creation which have stemmed from questions arising from the theoretical project. This practice has in turn helped me to reformulate the study in terms of the ways in which I think and write about it.

The puppet as a mimetic form acts as a means of conveying broader messages about the human and human technologies in emancipatory terms, but also further problematises the notion of the “inhuman” in its relation to racialised, gendered and other oppressed subjects. To explore this dilemma in a South African context presents a particular problematic in relation to race, one in which the puppet may be used to think a way out of biopolitical tyranny and into an ethics of care, a “biopoetics”, but which also highlights how human subjects still live as “puppets” in a post-apartheid state. Puppetry as an art form in South Africa has historically been used to address issues of race and politics, often used as a form of anti-apartheid protest art and as an educational tool for children under the apartheid state, and

more recently within the academic institution, as a means of questioning the humanities and the centralised notion of what it means to be human in the present moment. Drawing on Handspring Puppet Company's archive, my project serves as an exploration and documentation of Handspring's major influence on the genre of "puppetry for adults" in South Africa. The Company's oeuvre addresses the broader socio-political history of South Africa, and my work investigates its critical engagement with Africa and apartheid and post-apartheid era South Africa in relation to medium, subject matter and performance style.

The multi-layered PhD study, an inquiry encompassing archive, art and text, thus addresses Handspring's work both practically, in terms of puppetry as an art form, and theoretically, in terms of what puppetry has the capacity to *do* in the world outside of itself, both in the community and in the public sphere. A significant part of the project involved the intensive study of Handspring's paper archive, a previously unexplored aspect of their work which includes the preparatory designs, drawings and research material for over twenty of their adult puppetry productions. The exploration of Handspring's work has thus been channelled through the Company's drawings, the puppets (and their props) themselves, and the puppetry performances.



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INTRODUCTION: THE HAND AND THE HEAD

- A Five-legged Spider: The Thinking Hand
- Enchanting the Technical: Puppets, Humans and Technology
- A Hand in the Archive



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INTRODUCTION: THE HAND AND THE HEAD

This study positions the *hand*, interwoven with the puppet and its related theory, as simultaneously the central object of thought, and a means of thought or thinking itself, enabling a knowing of the subject that is at present unknown or unacknowledged. It draws together archive, art and text, and initiates a set of dialectical plays between subject and object, body and mind, intuition and intellect, and practice and theory, as read through the relationship between hand and head (which is also the expressive face, the seeing eye, the tasting and talking mouth) as it appears variously in the production, performance and reception of puppetry. Here the hand, so crucial to the puppeteer as a means of controlling the movements and “life” of the puppet, links the puppet to the modern human and the human body, both through means of creation and representation, in other words, both aesthetically and ontologically. Drawing on the South African Handspring Puppet Company’s self-assembled archive, the project concurrently serves as an exploration and documentation of Handspring’s major influence on the genre of “puppetry for adults” in South Africa and globally. The company’s oeuvre addresses the broader socio-political history of South Africa, and my work investigates its critical engagement with Africa and apartheid and post-apartheid era South Africa in relation to medium, subject matter and performance style, with formulations of subjectivity played alongside South African histories. My theoretical engagement with Handspring’s work for this project has also involved the practical task of digitally photographing and collating their paper archive, inclusive of the preparatory sketches, plans, and research material for sixteen puppetry productions created for adult audiences since 1985. The project is thus further concerned with the materiality and tactility of the puppet and the puppetry making process, which has been explored through Handspring’s practice in relation to both gesture and object, as well as through a series of artistic inquiries of my own creation which have stemmed from questions arising from the theoretical project, thus tangibly working *through* and *with* the hand.¹ This is to think more seriously about what *kind* of thought the hand, through making, performance, gesture and hapticality, can offer.

¹ See Elkins, *How to Use*; Elkins and Montgomery, *Beyond the Aesthetic*; Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*; Pollock, *Remembering: Oral History Performance*; Sommer, *The Work of Art*; Stiegler, *Technics and Time* and Von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things*.

It may be said that for many artists it is the hand which comes first and is followed by the brain, which responds to the actions of the former.² In the formulation of this dissertation I sought to develop a series of art object experiments which took their ontological cue from the form of the puppet, and were made to ‘perform’ questions derived from the study. This has in turn helped me to reformulate the study in terms of the ways in which I think and write about it. It emphasises the varying role of the hand the head in the three activities of *theoria*, *praxis* and *poiesis*, related to the activities of contemplation, action or practice, and production or making respectively; Aristotle’s “three modes of knowing truth”³ which are delineated “as the three activities essential to the well-being of the *polis*”.⁴ Here a further distinction can be made between *praxis*, “an action whose act of doing is also its completion” (in other words, it has an “ends” or “limit”), and *poiesis*, which “aims at an end separate from its actual process” and can be seen as a generative or growing activity.⁵ The “modern preunderstanding [...] antithetically opposes” *praxis* and *poiesis* to *theoria*, “(hence the well-known opposition of theory to practice).”⁶ Although it is originally Aristotle who hypothesises this split, Flusser believes that it is only “[s]ince the nineteenth century, [that] this sort of methodological schizophrenia, in which one-half of consciousness engulfs the other, in which theoretical and practical work are at odds, has led to a technologizing of work.”⁷ My intention is thus not to segregate the three activities, but rather to strengthen the bond between them as “mutual relations”.⁸

This is partly an attempt to think through the human body as it functions and is defined in the academic institution, and the ways in which it is often dissembled in the binary which breaks down human (and animal) anatomy into the conventions of “head” and “body”, or more symbolically head and hand, and reconceptualise the question of the modern human within the humanities through an inter-disciplinary

² As is explored in William Kentridge’s *I am not me, the horse is not mine* (2008).

³ Mei, *Heidegger, Work and Being*, 11.

⁴ Mei, *Heidegger, Work and Being*, 55.

⁵ Mei, *Heidegger, Work and Being*, 60.

⁶ Mei, *Heidegger, Work and Being*, 56.

⁷ Flusser, *Gestures*, 13.

⁸ Mei, *Heidegger, Work and Being*, 59.

inquiry which melds multiple strands of theoretical and practical research.⁹ The binary of head and body is further symptomatic of a set of hierarchical relations which often become the grounds for subjection and exclusion established amongst different modes of thinking and knowledge-making, the separation of “productive” and “unproductive” activities and work, both within and outside of the university, and divisions within one’s own sense of identity. There is a desire and urgent need in the context of the “trivialisation of the humanities and the privatisation of the imagination”,¹⁰ and in my own work to reassemble these parts of the same body in ways which allow the opening up of new modes of thinking and understanding of the self, and by extension the other, the immigrant stranger and the rival, in order to counteract the potentially violent and oppressive outcomes of these hierarchical divisions.¹¹ For Gayatri Spivak, this entails “rearranging desires” through a “productive undoing” in which one “must look carefully at the fault lines of the doing [...] with a view to use.”¹² What role does the hand thus play in the work of the head? And, conversely, what work does the head, mind or brain do for the hand?

This division is perhaps reflective of a reluctance to “give up the distinction between matter and mind because we cannot imagine matter thinking”, but John Gray’s discussion of Giacomo Leopardi’s thinking on this topic concludes that “we feel our thoughts corporeally” and thus “the fact that we think shows that matter thinks.”¹³ As “human beings we inhabit an ineluctably material world. We live our everyday lives surrounded by, immersed in matter. We are ourselves composed of matter.”¹⁴ As such, “[h]ow could we ignore the power of matter and the ways it materialises in our ordinary experiences or fail to acknowledge the primacy of matter in our theories?”¹⁵ In the context of puppetry, the relation of hand to head is descriptive of

⁹ Here I want to highlight a means of employing the hand in the conception of the document in a more significant sense than simply its involvement in the mechanical production, via handwriting or typing for instance, of the writing. This is also partly an attempt to situate writing within the space of a kind of ‘studio’, to be utilised in the same way that an artist may use materials and objects in the studio space, experimenting with ideas and methods, and opening up room for mistakes, false starts, deviations and even procrastination, thus situating writing, whether handwritten or typed, as a kind of making.

¹⁰ Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education*, xv.

¹¹ See Readings *The University in Ruins*, Mowitt *The Humanities* and Sitze *Response*.

¹² Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education*, 1-2.

¹³ Gray, *The Soul*, 31

¹⁴ Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 1

¹⁵ Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 1. For Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “there is an apparent paradox in thinking about matter: as soon as we do so, we seem to distance ourselves from it, and within the space that

the connection between the hand of the puppeteer and the head of the puppet, which is given life, a 'brain' or 'mind' – 'organs' or agency which let it live - through the mechanics of the former. This pre-empts the exploration of the object status of the human, a question the Handspring Puppet Company can be seen to engage with through the symbiotic or amalgamated relationship of puppet and human puppeteer that can be witnessed in their work. Simply put, the "puppet functions practically as a kinetic and gestural tool",¹⁶ while the practice of puppetry can be described as "the manipulation of inanimate figures by human hands in dramatic performance."¹⁷ What these statements contain however, is the notion that it is the "human hands" which offer the practical or physical means of animating objects, or in other terms the potential to "invest [them] with the powers to speak or move",¹⁸ as Handspring might have it, to "spring" forth or emanate from the hand. The puppet in this way serves as a kind of illustration or diagram of Derrida's thinking on the hand which establishes, via Heidegger, a complicated and indissoluble relationship between the two parts of head and hand through the notion that "[t]he hand must be thought. But the hand cannot be thought as a thing, a being, even less an object. The hand thinks before being thought; it is thought, a thought, thinking",¹⁹ further bringing into question "the teaching of thought, in particular in the university, as the place of sciences and technics."²⁰ The head *thinks* the puppet, but it is the hands which bring it sentience – both in its manufacture and performance. It moves from idea to substance or material that subsequently becomes 'lively' and takes on the expression of ideas,

opens up, a host of immaterial things seem to emerge: language, consciousness, subjectivity, agency, mind, soul; also imagination, emotions, values, meaning, and so on." (Cool & Frost *New Materialisms*, 1-2) However, Coole and Frost also refer to "scattered but insistent demands for more materialist modes of analysis and for new ways of thinking about matter and processes of materialisation. [...] This is especially evident in disciplines across the social sciences, such as political science, economics, anthropology, geography, and sociology, where it is exemplified in recent interest in material culture, geopolitical space, critical realism, critical international political economy, globalisation, and environmentalism, and in calls for a renewed material feminism, or a more materialist queer theory or postcolonial studies." They "interpret such developments as signs that the more textual approaches associated with the so-called cultural turn are increasingly being deemed inadequate for understanding contemporary society, particularly in light of some of its most urgent challenges regarding environmental, demographic, geopolitical, and economic change." (Coole & Frost *New Materialisms*, 2-3) For a more detailed description of the significance of new materialist thinking, see Coole & Frost *New Materialisms*, 5-7.

¹⁶ Marx, *A Matter of Life*, 236. The puppet can be situated as a kind of 'tool' insofar as 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." (Marx, *A Matter of Life*, 229)

¹⁷ Proschan, *Introduction: Semiotic Study*, 3.

¹⁸ Proschan, *Introduction: Semiotic Study*, 3.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand*, 171.

²⁰ Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand*, 168.

from hand *to* head, thus blurring the boundaries between subject/object and what is inside/outside the human body,²¹ and setting up a transposable relation between head and hand in terms of thought.

The study is also an exploration of the “thing”, the puppet being a prime example, “recognizing how, although objects typically arrest a poet’s attention, and although the object was what was asked to join the dance in philosophy, things may still lurk in the shadows of the ballroom and continue to lurk there after the subject and object have done their thing, long after the party is over.”²² I am taken with “the suddenness with which things seem to assert their presence and power: you cut your finger on a sheet of paper, you trip over some toy, you get bopped on the head by a falling nut. These are occasions outside the scene of phenomenological attention that nonetheless teach you that you’re “caught up in things” and that the ‘body is a thing among things.’”²³ Perhaps now more than ever we are surrounded by “a mounting confusion of people with things”,²⁴ ‘living’ objects which bid us farewell when we switch them off, and cry for help when their lives are fading, their yelping “low battery” tone repeating persistently until death. As much as they rely on us for life, however, they also become our constant companions and assistants, and while subjectivity may be “defined by the subject’s possession of itself and its objects, it is troubled by a dispossessive force objects exert such that the subject seems to be possessed – infused, deformed – by the object it possesses.”²⁵ Bill Brown, via Adorno, has pointed out the “alterity of things as an essentially ethical fact” in that “accepting the otherness of things is the condition for accepting otherness as such.”²⁶ The questions imbued in this inquiry are, following Brown, “questions that ask less about the material effects of ideas and ideology than about the ideological and ideational effects of the material world and of transformations of it. They are questions that ask not whether things are but what work they perform - questions, in

²¹ According to Bill Brown, Bruno “Latour has argued that modernity artificially made an ontological distinction between inanimate objects and human subjects, whereas in fact the world is full of ‘quasi-objects’ and ‘quasi-subjects,’ terms he borrows from Michel Serres.” (Brown, *Thing Theory*, 12)

²² Brown, *Thing Theory*, 3. “As they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture—above all, what they disclose about us)”, says Brown, “but we only catch a glimpse of things.” (Brown, *Thing Theory*, 4)

²³ Brown, *Thing Theory*, 3-4.

²⁴ Comaroff & Comaroff, *Occult Economies*, 286.

²⁵ Moten, *In the Break*, 1.

²⁶ Brown, *Thing Theory*, 12.

fact, not about things themselves but about the subject-object relation in particular temporal and spatial contexts.”²⁷ This is to open up “new thoughts about how inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects.”²⁸

In the discipline of puppetry arts, the puppet exists as a pedagogical apparatus, an often satirical device, which in performance “involve[s] conventionally shaped conceptions of how it is that humans, animals and spiritual beings behave: how they move, speak, interact, and ultimately, live and die.”²⁹ Because they point to conventional notions of human behaviour via “communicative systems of everyday life, or [through] the development of entirely new systems”,³⁰ puppets may be used to convey messages about how we as humans *are* in our worlds; our desires, beliefs and fantasies.³¹ The gesture of puppetry can in this sense be used to figure desire, belief or fantasy in the political and ethical, and connectedly, the biopolitical, and as an interdisciplinary entity, the puppet blurs subject/object relations, and further provides a means of thinking through the body which allows a simultaneous consideration of the arts and humanities, and perhaps further the natural sciences. To some extent the puppet as a “thing” adds to the continuous and endless network or system of “new artifices for survival” created by man, which according to Bernard Stiegler includes “first the flint, then the arrow, then finally the car, the rocket, the computer, whatever you like”,³² but there is also a sense that it ruptures or halts this network or “process of technical becoming”³³ in that the mimetic form of the puppet acts as a means of “conserving” (or preserving) man “as he is”, offering instead a moment of reflection on the notion of what it is to be human. As a mimetic form,³⁴ the

²⁷ Brown, *Thing Theory*, 7.

²⁸ Brown, *Thing Theory*, 7.

²⁹ Proschan, *Introduction: Semiotic Study*, 3.

³⁰ Proschan, *Introduction: Semiotic Study*, 3.

³¹ Agamben situates the puppet’s relative, the doll, as “the inexhaustible object of our desire and our fantasies” (Agamben, *Stanzas*, 58), while Freud refers to dolls as uncanny not in terms of the fear they evoke (although they do instil fear in some children and adults), but rather due to their attachment to the subject’s wish, desire or belief in the life of the doll, the treatment of the doll as a “live” person, blurring the distinction between “living and lifeless objects.” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 9) Puppets evoke this feeling too, and as such, can be seen as objects onto which we project our desires, wishes, beliefs or fantasies.

³² Stiegler in Barison and Ross, *The Ister*.

³³ Stiegler in Barison and Ross, *The Ister*.

³⁴ As a mimetic rather than an imitative or representative form, puppetry is thus figured as a practice which, through the inherently mimetic form of the puppet, means that the messages conveyed by puppets can simultaneously address the human subject through the focus on the body and the dialectical relationship

puppet thus acts as a means of conveying broader messages about the human and human technologies in emancipatory terms, but also further problematises the notion of the “infrahuman” in its relation to racialised, gendered and other oppressed subjects.³⁵ To explore this dilemma in a South African context presents a particular problematic in relation to race, one in which the puppet may be used to think a way out of biopolitical tyranny and into an ethics of care, a “biopoetics”,³⁶ or perhaps a “bioethics”,³⁷ but which also highlights how human subjects still live as “puppets” in a post-apartheid state. In Franz Kafka’s *The Castle*, the protagonist K describes one of his assistants³⁸, assigned to him by the state, as “this puppet, which sometimes gave one the impression of not being properly alive”³⁹ Kafka’s description of a puppet as “not being properly alive” confirms its status as a (sometimes) living object (Agamben’s description of *Pinocchio* as “[n]either dead nor alive, half golem and half robot” is apt),⁴⁰ but it also brings to attention the use of the puppet identity to describe bodies that are policed or disciplined, having no agency of their own.⁴¹ This mode of puppet defines bodies as regulated, regular, and repetitive machines, controlled by an authoritative power. Mowitt’s claim that “the word puppet is used to modify words like ‘regime’, ‘state’, [and] ‘government’” confirms this.⁴² He situates puppets “squarely within the sphere of the political”⁴³ in terms of how the typical “politics of the marionette is figured: the puppet controlled by, dominated by the

between object and subject. This form of mimesis, defined by Kara Reilly as “an ongoing tension between art and nature”, (Reilly, *Automata and Mimesis*, 5) aims to act communicatively and bring attention to the everyday relationships we have to and with objects and the ways in which they influentially shape our lives, suggesting alternatives for conventionally or repetitively held notions.

³⁵ See Taussig *Mimesis and Alterity*.

³⁶ See Gustafsson & Grønstad, *Cinema and Agamben*, 8.

³⁷ See Coole & Frost, *New Materialisms*, 15-24.

³⁸ For further description on the role of “The Assistant” (including that of K’s assistants), see Agamben *Profanations*, 29-35.

³⁹ Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, 147.

⁴⁰ Agamben, *Profanations*, 31.

⁴¹ One ubiquitous mode of discipline can be seen in the form of the police, which for Jacques Rancière is “‘first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying [...]; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise.’” (Rancière in *Education in the Realm*, 288) The police can thus be said to be “puppets” of the state, simultaneously disciplining and being disciplined or ordered itself. See also Benjamin, *Reflections*, 277-300.

⁴² Mowitt, *No Strings Attached*, 5.

⁴³ Connectedly to the notion of puppetry as a political genre, Rancière speculates on “the aesthetics of politics”, which can be said to “‘intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility’”. (Rancière in *Education in the Realm*, 289) Aesthetics thus blurs “boundaries between what can and cannot be said, can and cannot be seen, thus expanding, reconfiguring, hybridising, mixing notions of what is common to a community.” (Lewis, *Education in the Realm*, 289)

puppeteer; and, just as typical, domination rendered in the notion of a mechanism, a technics, that sacrifices the puppet to an excessive and thus abusive form of speaking.”⁴⁴ Here it could be said that the puppeteer brings the puppet from “bare life” or *zoē*, the “simple fact of living common to all living beings”, to a point of a “proper” or qualified life or *bios*,⁴⁵ in that firstly, the former literally creates or crafts the puppet from raw materials, this, according to Flusser, a gesture of resignation and of love,⁴⁶ and secondly, gives it life through its manipulation. Here the puppeteer also has the capacity of the sovereign subject to determine what *sort* of life is given to the puppet after it has been granted bare life.

In the puppet lies the existence of an uncanny technics; an “apparatus” or “prosthesis” made in man’s image, but which all the same, is made by a god who is inherently human in that, as Bernard Stiegler asserts, “man and technics are indissociable.” He concludes that “[t]he phenomenon of hominization is the phenomenon of the technicisation of the living. Man is nothing other than technical life.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, for Derrida “[t]he hand cannot be spoken about without speaking of technics”.⁴⁸ It is thus, for many, technics or technicisation that distinguishes us as human and distinct from other beings. The reoccurring monolith that appears suddenly at the “dawn of man”, and reoccurs to “infinity and beyond” in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) can be figured as an idol or motif representative of a kind of technics. It exists *before* the human, and it is what *makes* animals human – humans do not make it, it makes them. Its first appearance in the movie before a group of apes (who are in fact quite obviously humans dressed in ape suits) triggers something in them that leads to the creation of a weapon, a bone which is used to kill for food, and quite swiftly a cut in the film from prehistoric to space-age man. Flusser notes that “[w]e have learned that we cannot live without the apparatus or outside the apparatus... There is nothing beyond the apparatus [...] Beyond the apparatus, there is nothing to do.”⁴⁹ The Kubrick example also brings attention to the violence inherent in the apparatus, and its use by the self in (violent)

⁴⁴ Mowitt, *No Strings Attached*, 4.

⁴⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

⁴⁶ Flusser, *Gestures*, 47.

⁴⁷ Stiegler in Barison and Ross, *The Ister*.

⁴⁸ Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand*, 169.

⁴⁹ Flusser, *Gestures*, 16-17.

interactions with the other. Over and above the holding or grasping of objects as tools, the bare hands can also act as tools or apparatus in themselves – “steam hammers”⁵⁰ clapping or slapping, cups or hooks holding or catching, paddles, clamps, tongs, straps.

Integrally connected to this is the relationship we have with touching or handling objects (whether symbolically or in actuality) in the form of the commodity,⁵¹ “a thoroughly socialised [and social] thing”;⁵² objects which obtain value only by their worth as saleable, economically viable entities, in other words, in their use- or exchange-value,⁵³ a “doubling of the relation to the object.”⁵⁴ Moten, drawing from Karl Marx’s notion of the ventriloquised “commodity who speaks”,⁵⁵ has expressed how “the commodity discovers herself, comes to know herself, only as a function of having been exchanged, having been embedded in a mode of sociality that is shaped by exchange.”⁵⁶ Before, as Flusser elucidates, “the object was just there, passive, quiet, mute, stupid, and ‘available to be grasped’. [...] But suddenly, under the pressure of producing, the object begins to react. It defends itself against being transformed into a product, it resists its own violation.”⁵⁷ Exchange then, is seen as a social process that exists between subjects and objects, the latter usually in the form of money, the politics of *things* or commodities, which come to be valued not according to their inherent properties, but rather via “a judgement made about them by subjects.”⁵⁸ To focus “on the things that are exchanged, rather than simply on the forms or functions of exchange, makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is *politics*, construed broadly.”⁵⁹ The converse side of this discussion turns to the “workings of the body as the object of scrutiny”, for example the neoliberal use value of the working class body, or the gendering of

⁵⁰ This phrase is taken from Walter Benjamin’s writing on Kafka in which he notes that “[o]n many occasions, and often for strange reasons, Kafka’s figures clap their hands. Once, the casual remark is made that these hands are ‘really steam hammers’.” (Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, 795)

⁵¹ See also Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*.

⁵² Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, 6.

⁵³ Marx, *Capital* and Agamben, *Stanzas*, 36-40.

⁵⁴ Agamben, *Stanzas*, 37.

⁵⁵ Moten, *In the Break*, 5.

⁵⁶ Moten, *In the Break*, 9.

⁵⁷ Flusser, *Gestures*, 39.

⁵⁸ Simmel in *The Social Life of Things*, 3.

⁵⁹ Appadurai *The Social Life of Things*, 3.

bodies.⁶⁰ Moten links objects or commodities to bodies (specifically to black bodies) and in this sense addresses “the resistance of the object” and the “historical reality of commodities who spoke”.⁶¹

A Five-legged Spider: The Thinking Hand

The project thus attempts to think through the fraught intellectual and political crisis of the present moment as a crisis of the *body*, in its racialised and gendered constructions within identity politics, and as it is figured in relation to the anthropocene and the new technologies that come with it, for example Artificial Intelligence and robotics. The hand frames this problematic in its role in “an extremely long history both as an implement of social interaction and as the object of social attention”,⁶² and as such, as a means of exploring the ways in which the human body has come to be figured and utilised in different disciplines, both historically and presently. Vilém Flusser’s discussion on the “Gesture of Making” outlines how it is this way of thinking through the hands that is intrinsically “human”, to the extent that the historical “pathways taken by our hands” can be mapped or traced through the “world of culture”.⁶³ It is, by his thought, “the symmetrical relationship between our two hands [which] is among the conditions of being human”.⁶⁴ Creatures in themselves which can cast shadows that come alive, our “hands are hardly ever at rest: they are like five-legged spiders that never stop testing and touching and making noise and doing things to and in the world.”⁶⁵ They are “organs of perception, weapons of attack and defence, means of communication.”⁶⁶ The hand can turn into a cup, a vessel to nourish, a blank screen or surface such as a “mirror, a tablet, or a stage”,⁶⁷ and with its dexterous fingers and opposable thumbs, can transform into a multitude of tools for holding, grasping, pressing, turning. Gerhard Marx has also observed that this is “where we find the

⁶⁰ Taylor, *Occupational Hazards*.

⁶¹ Moten, *In the Break*, 6.

⁶² Wilson, *The Hand*, 147.

⁶³ Flusser, *Gestures*, 34.

⁶⁴ Flusser, *Gestures*, 32. It must be noted that for Heidegger the hand is always singular, except when referring to prayer or when the hands come together as one. (Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand*, 182)

⁶⁵ Flusser, *Gestures*, 34.

⁶⁶ Flusser, *Gestures*, 34.

⁶⁷ Farocki, *Expression of the Hands*.

puppet: at the end of the hand, or better, where the hand ends”,⁶⁸ further embedding meaning in the hand through its connection to the puppet. In some sense the human hand itself is the first and most basic form of puppet – used to create a being somehow separate or extended from the rest of the body without any other apparatus (or with very basic apparatus as utilized in the creation of a sock or glove puppet), as can be seen in shadow puppetry or when, as Farocki describes it, it “resemble[s] an animal” or figure which can run away and do forbidden things.⁶⁹ As such, the “hand, symbol of human agency and ownership, is also a part of ourselves that escapes us.”⁷⁰

In concert with the expressive face, the hand is where we may look to determine what the head is thinking or feeling in human interaction, through body language both conscious and unconscious where “[n]uances of meaning not conveyed by speech are communicated by gesture”,⁷¹ although the hand often “does something entirely different from what the face shows”,⁷² revealing that the hand and the head may work in collaborative separation.⁷³ This feeling is reinforced by the notion that we can contemplate our own hands – they become “other” or objectified through our gaze. In this regard, Derrida has noted that Descartes “said of the hand that it was a part of the body, to be sure, but was endowed with such independence that it could also be considered as a complete substance apart and almost separable.”⁷⁴ As Harun Farocki has pointed out, “[w]e can turn our hand and observe it from all angles. This is impossible with every other part of the body. A hand can pose before its owner’s eyes, like a man turning in front of a mirror.”⁷⁵ What then, does the mirror

⁶⁸ Marx, *A Matter of Life*, 236.

⁶⁹ Farocki, *Expression of the Hands*. It could also be said that the audience’s first visible reciprocal gesture to the puppet is made through the hands in the form of clapping, or, historically, throwing fruit at the stage to express their disdain at a performance.

⁷⁰ Leader, *Hands*, 4-5.

⁷¹ Wilson, *The Hand*, 147.

⁷² Farocki *Expression of the Hands*.

⁷³ The hand can be seen to turn against us, as illustrated by Thomas a Becket Driscoll’s (from Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*) description of the hand as man’s “deadliest enemy”, which “keeps a record of the deepest and fatalist secrets of his life, [...] treacherously ready to expose himself to any black-magic stranger that comes along.” (Twain, *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead*, 99) For Driscoll this exposure comes via the “black magic” practice of palmistry or palm reading, but applies equally to instances in which the hand makes unconscious gestures or tics, or body language which reveals what we are truly thinking.

⁷⁴ Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand*, 172.

⁷⁵ Farocki, *Expression of the Hands*. This reminds me of M.C. Escher’s lithograph *Drawing Hands* (1948) which depicts, in typical illusionist Escher style, a right hand drawing a left hand, while the left draws the right.

of the hand reflect in human relations? What is written on this tablet, performed on this stage? What kind of image, drawing or writing is projected onto this “living screen”? Is it aesthetic, textual or filmic? If it is manipulable, what can or does it become?

Hands, for Flusser, are so bound with human thought he postulates that “if we imagine a being that is just as capable of thinking as we are but that has no hands, we are imagining a way of thinking completely different from our own.”⁷⁶ Thus for Flusser, the hands themselves are far more significant in defining the human than thought and language or speech is. This may in fact be true, particularly in relation to asymmetrical handedness, as according to Frank Wilson who states that “[t]here is more and more evidence in biologic research that handedness may be nearly as old and as influential as bipedalism was in shaping human development and orienting our subsequent history.”⁷⁷ Heidegger reminds us of the multi-faceted functionality of the hand which “reaches and extends, receives and welcomes – and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hand of the other. The hand keeps. The hand carries. The hand designs and signs”.⁷⁸ Although the hand also grasps or grips, this, according to Heidegger, is not its “essence in the human being.”⁷⁹ He states that the “hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs – paws, claws, or fangs – different by an abyss of essence. [...] Apes, too, have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands.”⁸⁰ Flusser defines “grasping” as the moment in which the hands come “across something that inhibits further movement”.⁸¹ In this instance they “are not interested in the object in itself; rather, the object interests them as a ‘problem’, as an obstruction.”⁸² They must attempt to weigh it up, think it over, play with it, in order to understand it. Here “we are dealing with an imperialistic gesture, a gesture of dominance, distaining the world, and taking control over what does not resist.”⁸³ Grasping thus determines a particular kind of dialectic between the physical and psychological self and the other in that “[w]hile

⁷⁶ Flusser, *Gestures*, 32-33.

⁷⁷ Wilson, *The Hand*, 151.

⁷⁸ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, 16.

⁷⁹ Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand*, 173.

⁸⁰ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, 16.

⁸¹ Flusser, *Gestures*, 35.

⁸² Flusser, *Gestures*, 35.

⁸³ Flusser, *Gestures*, 35.

touching, we project a sensation outwardly, outside of us; at the same time we perceive it subjectively, on our skin".⁸⁴ For Farocki however, it is grasping that determines the "essence" of human life, as when the "will leaves the body, the hand cannot grasp anymore. The essence of life is set free."⁸⁵ Grasping as such takes on a spiritual character, the hand acting as the gateway through which the 'soul' enters and exits the human body.

Heidegger sees thinking itself as a kind of work, craft or manual labour, "man's simplest, and for that reason hardest, handiwork".⁸⁶ Although he observes that "[a]pes, too, have organs that can grasp",⁸⁷ for him they are not *hands* as apes do not communicate (speak) or think in the same way that humans do by an "abyss" or infinite degree.⁸⁸ Here Heidegger links the hand intrinsically to voice and speech, and by extension, to the head. The role that *sound* plays in portraying and sustaining life in the puppet is thus of significance. For Heidegger speech is tied to thought, but other forms of animal language are not considered valid means of thinking, not even speech that *sounds* human, such as when a parrot "talks". Insofar as their prehensile toes seem to work doubly as "fingers", it could in fact be said that apes function as entirely ambidextrous beings with a set of four hands or two pairs of hands, which perhaps only *become* hands in relation to the human, the "lopsided ape" whose hands are freed only by standing upright.⁸⁹ Establishing a hierarchy of humans and animals allows man to manipulate and perpetuate mastery over them. It could be said that animals are *grasping* to be recognised as human, for their lives to obtain the same status as human life.⁹⁰ In some sense the animal puppet functions as a receptacle or vessel for human desire, *holding* dialogue and gesture in a mode which alters meaning in relation to human puppets and actors. In the instance of Handspring's work, and perhaps in a more general sense, the animal puppet appears as a kind of "Trojan horse", a live animal which turns out to be a human, or

⁸⁴ Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining*, 2.

⁸⁵ Farocki, *Expression of the Hands*.

⁸⁶ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, 16-17.

⁸⁷ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, 16.

⁸⁸ Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand*, 174.

⁸⁹ Wilson, *The Hand*, 151.

⁹⁰ For an overview of the philosophical thinking since antiquity on the difference between the human and the animal see Simondon, *Two Lessons on Animal*. For more on the animal and its relation to the human, see also Blake, Molloy and Shakespeare, *Beyond Human*; Castricano, *Animal Subjects* and Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*.

multiple humans, masquerading as an animal, which further turns out to be a (dead) object, a false gift.

Heidegger further links the hand intrinsically to the (human) head in his assertion that “[o]nly a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands and can be handy in achieving works of handicraft,”⁹¹ but additionally to thought and language, for him the hand “belongs to the essence of the *gift*, of a giving that would give, if this is possible, without taking hold of anything.”⁹² The human is thus defined by “a system of limits within which everything [Heidegger] says of man’s hand takes on sense and value”,⁹³ upholding the conviction that everything produced by or in relation to the human hands is founded as a ‘gift’ to an imagined other, for “only the being that, like man, ‘has’ speech [...] can and must have the hand thanks to which prayer can occur, but also murder, the salute or wave of the hand, and thanks, the oath and the sign”.⁹⁴ How could it thus follow that the human hand’s essence is in gifting, but not receiving or taking, which for Heidegger appears to belong in the realm of grasping or gripping, ‘animalistic’ in character. For him the being that takes belongs in a category other than human, but for Flusser it is inherently the human hand which through the *grasp*, through a particular and potentially dangerous mode of play or curiosity, creates “the atmosphere in which our hands take possession of more and more of the world.”⁹⁵ Here Flusser emphasises what Derrida refers to as the “monstrous” nature of hands, “for their insatiable craving, their curiosity, subverts any order. Within the order of things, hands are in fact agents of provocation and subversion. They have infiltrated nature to subvert it, and, being unnatural, they become unsettling, even repulsive.”⁹⁶ For Derrida the “hand will be the (monstrous) sign, the proper of man as (monstrous) sign [...] presumably because man is a (monstrous) sign”.⁹⁷ Man’s “gift” or sign to the world is monstrous, his interactions with the Other are marked by a kind of sinister generosity which places all interactions made with the hand (from prayer to murder) on the same plane. This

⁹¹ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, 16. Here there is a further link between the human and the ability to be “handy” and achieve “works of handicraft”.

⁹² Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand*, 173.

⁹³ Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand*, 174.

⁹⁴ Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand*, 178.

⁹⁵ Flusser, *Gestures*, 37.

⁹⁶ Flusser, *Gestures*, 34.

⁹⁷ Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand*, 168.

“utilitarian” mode of touch can cause the tactile senses to “atrophy or become superfluous”,⁹⁸ but can perhaps be interrupted, disrupted, subverted or ruptured by different kinds of touching, or by the “cultivation” and development of empathetic touch.

Enchanting the Technical: Puppets, Humans and Technology

For both Flusser and Heidegger, the human hands are integrally tied with making and “handicraft” or “handiwork”, and thus with the manufacturing of a product, a means to an end. The danger here is in the apolitical, unethical cancellation of a social world, which for Flusser comes about via an excessive and skewed use of technics.⁹⁹ For Flusser,

hands armed with tools [...] do not possess the sensuality of naked hands. They cannot distinguish an object from a person. Everything can now be manipulated, made. People have become objects: they can be understood, researched, produced, and even turned into tools for producing other products.¹⁰⁰

These hands “are alone in the world and can no longer recognize other hands”,¹⁰¹ and it is here that grasping or gripping can be tied to the gestures of technology as figured in the obstructions of so-called human progress which “inhibit movement” of both subjects and objects in the world. According to Walter Benjamin, “technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training.”¹⁰² Here Benjamin refers to the changes in the “haptic experiences” of the early twentieth century, which have continued into the twenty-first century, from the movement of the whole body to movements of the hand – “switching, inserting, pressing and [...] ‘snapping’” – movements increasingly co-ordinated with the ever-evolving machines of new technologies, both in industrial factories and in the home, in places of both work and play.¹⁰³ While these acts or actions have become almost instinctual to us now – we are ‘trained’ to respond to objects of technology in a certain habitual way and perform these gestures without even consciously realising it - with the technological

⁹⁸ Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining*, 1.

⁹⁹ Flusser, *Gestures*, 45.

¹⁰⁰ Flusser, *Gestures*, 45.

¹⁰¹ Flusser, *Gestures*, 45.

¹⁰² Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 175.

¹⁰³ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 175. Such as the typewriter, which Heidegger saw as a “degradation of the word by the machine”, a machine which “tears” writing from the domain of the hand. (Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger’s Hand*, 179)

obsessions of the anthropocene saturating our lives with cell phones, computers, and other electronic devices which must be continually switched, inserted, pressed, snapped, scrolled and clicked in order for them to continue functioning effectively; in order for them to continue 'living', we are constantly presented with movements which become increasingly less physical (and more focussed on smaller movements) and more refined or restrictive, but which at the same time extend our bodies and their capabilities, including our interactions with others. In this regard, Mowitt has noted that "the marionette has today assumed the form of androids and software",¹⁰⁴ thus enabling the discussion of the puppet to extend beyond the human body and into its devices and apparatuses. The "selfie stick" extends the reach of our arms so that we may take more accurate photographs from a wider range, our own bodies being the subjects. The touch screens of cell phones and computers turn our fingers into the extended 'skin' of the device in use, while "hands-free" cell phone kits allow us to converse without having to make use of any of our appendages at all. Movements could also be said to have increasingly virtual results, so while the movement may be enacted with an actual object, the purpose is predominantly fulfilled in the virtual realm,¹⁰⁵ and "[m]ore recently, smart phones, tablets, and social media platforms have come to organise personal and professional life, encouraging newly accelerated rates of image production and circulation."¹⁰⁶

This relationship with technology is indicative of the move away from the use of our bodies and hands (in other words, the use of "touch") to perform everyday actions, and "liberate[s] our hands from the coarsest of manual labour, thereby potentially freeing them for 'aesthetic' perceptions."¹⁰⁷ This is both productive and limiting in that it means we may become more perceptive of the world around us, but at the same time may also experience it in an increasingly representationalist relationship; as something brought before us as a picture.¹⁰⁸ Even our own bodies become "pictures" in the technological marks of the individual human hand, which appear in two major

¹⁰⁴ Mowitt, *No Strings Attached*, 23.

¹⁰⁵ At times the hand may experience a confusion between the movements required for objects of digital technology and objects of the analogue realm, for example trying to use a finger to 'skim' through a piece of paper or page of a book, like it is the touch screen of a computer or similar hand-held device that automatically responds to the touch of the fingers.

¹⁰⁶ Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 137.

¹⁰⁷ Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining*, 1.

¹⁰⁸ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

forms; firstly, in the aesthetic mark or imprint of the finger – the fingerprint – and secondly, in the broader marks and gestures of handwriting and signatures, a means of validating personal identity. These marks become intimate expressions of the unique individual, who can allegedly be scientifically identified through the “ideological instrument”¹⁰⁹ of the fingerprint in bureaucratic and forensic identification processes, a “mechanism for converting the obscure qualities of the body into a textual object”,¹¹⁰ and via their supposedly unique signature or autograph, hieroglyphs representative of the individualised gestures of our writing hands. Handwriting analysis is further used to convey or validate personality type. These measures of the individual take on a more sinister side as technologies of surveillance in the practice of biometrics, used by the state to determine citizens in parts, continually and increasingly commodified into ‘bits’.

Indeed, the increasing mode of living through social media requires one to continually view the world as a “picture” to be recorded or documented and presented on platforms such as Facebook or Instagram. Suzi Gablik establishes that

[h]istorically the [visual] model we have in place is inherited from the Renaissance, which created the spectator who is outside the picture and separate from what he sees. The vision we need to develop is not one that observes and reports, that objectifies and enframes, but one released from these reifying tendencies and rooted instead in a responsiveness that ultimately expresses itself in action.¹¹¹

Gablik frames this within the space of a “re-enchantment” of art, and in this regard Jane Bennett calls for a further re-enchantment of life in a broader sense through giving “greater expression to the sense of play, [and] hon[ing] sensory receptivity to the marvellous specificity of things.”¹¹² For Bennett, to “be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday.”¹¹³ Here Agamben turns to “gesture”¹¹⁴ as a phenomenon that may bring about an “awakening” in the form of “a dialectical constellation of what-has-been and the now,

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, *Mark's Signs*, 15.

¹¹⁰ Breckenridge, *Biometric State*, 65.

¹¹¹ Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, 99.

¹¹² Bennett, *The Enchantment*, 4.

¹¹³ Bennett, *The Enchantment*, 4.

¹¹⁴ For more on gesture, specifically in its connection to language, see Agamben, *Potentialities*, 77-85 and Agamben, *Profanations*, 61-72. See also *Notes on Gesture* in Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 133-140.

blasting open the space of history, and, ultimately, ‘the space for an imagination with no images.’”¹¹⁵ This “post-representational argument” seeks to find a space where “the concept of expression” is rethought in terms which go beyond a “medium” such as image, word or colour and exist rather as a kind of thought or imagining which takes one beyond an insular mode of production or creation.¹¹⁶ Mowitt comes to a similar realisation while watching Janni Younge’s puppetry production *Ouroboros*¹¹⁷ where he finds that

the rather commonplace notion of something causing one to engage in the behaviour of thinking, had largely given way to the rather odd realisation that the puppets were staging [...] thinking in the form of an operation; thought not as a cognitive procedure, a logic, but thinking as a stylisation or form of the touch between and among things in the world.¹¹⁸

Heinrich von Kleist’s “strange theory in which marionettes seemed to become teachers”, formulated in conversation with an acquaintance, “Mr. C”, a “first dancer in the opera”, shows how one might learn from the gestures of a string puppet in movement.¹¹⁹ For von Kleist, “puppets have a freedom that humans could never achieve” as they are “incapable of affectation”,¹²⁰ in that they are not “cursed with self-reflexive thought” or self-awareness.¹²¹ The puppet, the body without a mind, is a free subject liberated from the self-conscious thought that limits or restricts the movements of the body. Through positioning gesture, and by extension the puppet itself, as thought, von Kleist and Mowitt reveal how this mode of movement enables an “opening up” of thinking, which “[i]n the world of images” may serve as, what Gustafsson and Grønstad refer to as “the point of flight from aesthetics into ethics and politics.”¹²² Gesture then is an aesthetic means of expressing (pressing) the ethical or political through the body, a “release of image into gesture [which] entails a turn from biopolitics to biopoetics: exhibiting the pure mediality of the human body in motion, unhinging biopolitical relations and grasping the potential of bare life.”¹²³ This turn from “biopolitics to biopoetics” will be explored further through a study of

¹¹⁵ Gustafsson and Grønstad, *Cinema and Agamben*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Gustafsson and Grønstad, *Cinema and Agamben*, 5.

¹¹⁷ Produced and directed in association with Handspring Puppet Company.

¹¹⁸ Mowitt, *No Strings Attached*, 2.

¹¹⁹ Von Kleist, *On the Marionette Theatre*, 22.

¹²⁰ Von Kleist, *On the Marionette Theatre*, 22.

¹²¹ Gray, *The Soul*, 2-4.

¹²² Gustafsson and Grønstad, *Cinema and Agamben*, 8.

¹²³ Gustafsson and Grønstad, *Cinema and Agamben*, 8.

puppetry as a gestural language, and by extension, a kind of “ambidextrous writing”, a penetrating or pressing into and out of the body,¹²⁴ writing as “a way of thinking [...] articulated through a gesture”¹²⁵ as it functions in its capacity to both “illustrate words and [...] replace words through visible body movements”.¹²⁶ This “suggest[s] a role played by images on the one hand (the illustrative power and visibility of gestures) and a role played by the body on the other.”¹²⁷

Writing may act as a “‘material supplement’ to memory”, an agreement or pairing of hand and head or “coupled system”; the “uncanny mechanism of writing displacing the subject with a reproductive apparatus or prosthesis that precedes it”.¹²⁸ In the case of “general paraphernalia of language, books, diagrams and culture [...] the individual brain performs some operations, while others are delegated to manipulations of *external media*”, apparatuses or prostheses of the mind.¹²⁹ This relation can be seen as a two-way interaction between human organism and external entity; a coupled system “where all components play an active causal role and jointly govern behaviour.”¹³⁰ Thus, the “use of external entities is not [only] a part of the action; it is part of *thought*”¹³¹ – a compendium of information and memory which “lies beyond the skin”,¹³² extending the reach of the brain/mind and of the self.¹³³ The puppet, as a body “controlled totally by gravity”, or more precisely, “resistant to gravity”¹³⁴ thus serves as this kind of apparatus or prosthesis in its capacity both as a mode of thought in itself and as an extension of the mind outside of the body, the mind figured as a kind of movement here, *moving* through the form of the puppet.

¹²⁴ The gesture of writing is described by Flusser as “scratching” or “pressing through a surface [...] making holes”. It is thus not “a constructive, but [...] a penetrating, pressing gesture.” It is a habitual activity or gesture; for him, “nearly an inborn capacity.” (Flusser, *Gestures*, 19)

¹²⁵ Flusser, *Gestures*, 24.

¹²⁶ Casini in Gustafsson and Grønstad, *Cinema and Agamben*, 142.

¹²⁷ Casini in Gustafsson and Grønstad, *Cinema and Agamben*, 142.

¹²⁸ Derrida in Mowitt, *The Sound of Music*, 183.

¹²⁹ Clark and Chalmers, *The Extended Mind*, 2.

¹³⁰ Clark and Chalmers, *The Extended Mind*, 2.

¹³¹ Clark and Chalmers, *The Extended Mind*, 3.

¹³² Clark and Chalmers, *The Extended Mind*, 6.

¹³³ Here the significance of writing as it appears in laptops and computers, cell phones, notebooks, sketchbooks and the tools used to write and draw in them as a kind of technics or memory support is revealed. For many people in the contemporary world, this coupling appears in the portable forms of the cell phone or laptop (or associated devices such as tablets, iPads, Kindles, etc) and the readily accessible encyclopaedia they offer in the form of Google. We trust completely what the device tells us and no longer have to rely on memory or even belief, which are embedded in the device itself.

¹³⁴ Von Kleist, *On the Marionette Theatre*, 22.

The performances in which puppets feature are “[n]ecessarily temporal and temporary, [...] always in a state of appearing and vanishing; by definition transient, they are immediate yet quickly become historical.”¹³⁵ They are thus marked by a movement of bodies through time and space, retrospectively tangible only in the memory or documentation of their proceedings. The performing object is thus also intrinsically the “kinetic” or mobile object; one which comes alive in movement. In this way the object, ordinarily defined as static or inanimate, becomes something both ephemeral and animate through manipulation (whether directly or mediated), made sentient by the movement and *life* bestowed to it on stage. As Frank Proschan puts it, performing objects can be seen as expressive of the “urge to give life to nonliving things”, or, more specifically the “impulse to create objects to act in our stead, objects through which we can project intensified, artistic, and often holy speech and action.”¹³⁶ Giorgio Agamben posits that “there has always been a realm in which creatures, intermediate between genus and individual, move: the theatre. And those hybrid beings are the characters, which result from the encounter between a flesh-and-blood individual – the actor – and the role the author has written.”¹³⁷ In this case, puppets and their accompanying puppeteers become these “hybrid beings” in more ways than one, in that their forms, a mix of human/puppet or subject/object, as well as the roles they take on, are both forms of hybridity. Puppetry makes the human and animal body visible in ways that bring into awareness conventionalised or habitual gesture. If it is made evident that gesture and movement is largely performative, as is made clear by the practice of puppetry which creates bodies for specific movements which must be rehearsed repeatedly to appear “naturalised”, routine movement can be brought into question alongside the creative process as a means of thinking gesture and movement more creatively.

Part of the gestural language of the puppet can be seen in its “breath”,¹³⁸ seemingly transmitted from puppeteer to puppet through a kind of continual resuscitation, but in

¹³⁵ Franko and Richards, *Acting on the Past*, 1.

¹³⁶ Proschan, *Introduction: Semiotic Study*, 3.

¹³⁷ Agamben in Gustafsson and Grønstad, *Cinema and Agamben*, 20.

¹³⁸ In this regard the puppetry production by Handspring Puppet Company titled *I Love You when You're Breathing*, a puppetry play in the form of a lecture on the significance of the puppeteer-puppet relationship, will be discussed in further detail in the chapters that follow.

actuality conveyed by the micro-movements of the puppeteer. To conjure the illusion of the breathing puppet the puppeteer must learn to move the puppet, walk the puppet, in such a way that the audience believes in the rhythmical up-and-down movement of the chest as indicative of a biologically functioning anatomy. In this way the subject of many puppetry productions is also body rhythms and gestures such as breathing and walking, and the biological laws that govern these actions. This “walking” could be seen as what Michel de Certeau refers to a “space of enunciation”, a kind of speech,¹³⁹ in this guise positioning the puppet as a “topographical system [...] a spatial acting-out of [a] place”,¹⁴⁰ perhaps the ‘place’ of the mind. This invokes a certain kind of blind mobility in the puppet,¹⁴¹ a walking without seeing, walking without a body that *can* walk – a body without organs or muscle - perhaps comparative to what de Certeau calls an “opaque and blind mobility characteristic of the bustling city.”¹⁴² What optical knowledge does the puppet thus have? Its sight is found through walking; it is its movement which conveys that it can see. The puppet thus sees through walking, through movement of the whole body, a kind of all-over tactile sight, enabled by the hands of the puppeteer. If this mode of (opaque, blind) sight is transferred to the human subject, what is it that is seen or unseen in this position? How do humans learn to see like a puppet, that is, through tactile sight? The amalgamation of all the senses or the mixing of “sensory compartmentalisation” (“synaesthesia”) within the aesthetic is taken up by Tyson Edward Lewis as a means of “opening up new spaces for new

¹³⁹ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday*, 98.

¹⁴⁰ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday*, 97-98.

¹⁴¹ There are several instances in *Woyzeck on the Highveld* which draw attention to the puppet’s (blind) sight. At the beginning of the play, Woyzeck tells his friend Andries not to look back for the horrific sights he will be faced with, which are truly Woyzeck’s own hallucinations, and when Andries looks behind him, despite his friend’s warning, he sees nothing. A second example comes when Maria tells her baby not to look outside at the wall or he will see “igogo” and go blind, but he too looks anyway. In this moment Maria is looking at herself in a small hand-held mirror, another version of puppet sight. Perhaps these moments are there as a reminder that the puppet’s world exists inside its own head, inside the head of the puppeteer, that’s its sight is blind, opaque. Jane Taylor has noted this latter instance as a scene which “enacts a triangular relationship between the mother, the mirror and the child”, (Taylor, *Handspring Puppet Company*, 28) but further as a clear example of the ways in which the audience is implicit in the “production of subjectivity” within the practice of puppetry, an act which requires “remarkable projection and identification”. (Taylor, *Handspring Puppet Company*, 29) In the play the puppets’ sense of hearing is also emphasised, as seen when the Doctor is examining Woyzeck with a stethoscope, listening inside his ears, and hears music. He listens to other parts of his body and hears other noises including the beating of his heart and a dog barking. This brings the audience’s attention to the apparently living, functioning organs inside the puppet’s body.

¹⁴² De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday*, 93.

forms of cognition (new metaphors) to take place”.¹⁴³ Lewis has used “the mixing, rerouting, and cross-contamination of divisions found within the aesthetic” to propose “a radical rethinking of synaesthesia as a particularly democratic machine able to produce new metaphors by mixing senses and significations once held apart by strict boundary principles.”¹⁴⁴ Of course, the senses must work in combination with each other, and it is more the ontological separation of the senses that is at issue here, that is, how we are conventionally taught and expected to use different senses in different contexts, for example that art is of the eye. In these terms, puppetry presents a synaesthetic means of transgressing boundaries, “alter[ing] the thing that is seen and transform[ing] the seer”;¹⁴⁵ between audience and object, artist and object, the ontological role of the object, sites of production or creation and, as has been established, between the hand and the head. Further however, is a mixing in the form of breath and movement, gesture and image. Thinking the visual through the hand, as opposed to through the eye, “[s]eeing” is thus “metamorphosis, not mechanism.”¹⁴⁶

This mode of blind sight through apparent mobility is the practice behind the trick of puppetry; “[i]tself visible, it has the effect of making invisible the operation that made it possible. These fixations constitute procedures for forgetting. The trace left behind is substituted for the practice.”¹⁴⁷ The puppet is a spectacle, a theatrical device imbued with a certain “exhibition value”¹⁴⁸ or “trickery”, which does not seem to have become more commonplace in the present, even in contemporary versions of the puppet as seen in robotics and Artificial Intelligence. Here Agamben posits that it is “perhaps only in the sphere of the human face that the mechanism of exhibition-value finds its proper place.”¹⁴⁹ In this regard, one may look to the face of both the puppet and the puppeteer to determine the exhibition-value of the former. The attention on the self as puppet, the puppet self as “punctum”, means a distraction from the studium of the human self, a diversion of subject to object, and there

¹⁴³ Lewis, *Education in the Realm*, 290.

¹⁴⁴ Lewis, *Education in the Realm*, 290.

¹⁴⁵ Elkins, *The Object Stares Back*, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Elkins, *The Object Stares Back*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday*, 97.

¹⁴⁸ A phrase which Walter Benjamin uses “to characterise the transformation that the work of art undergoes in the era of its technological reproducibility.” (Benjamin in Agamben, *Profanations*, 90)

¹⁴⁹ Agamben, *Profanations*, 90.

remains a kind of scepticism or suspicion around the form of the puppet, a fear or dismissal of the art form as “for children”, not for adults, who “know better”, which further seems to be a kind of self-consciousness around the suspension of belief, or more accurately, a suspension of *disbelief* required to create a stronger sense of “empathy” or trust between puppet and audience.¹⁵⁰ The suspension of “ordinary life” through play or work here requires a certain balance of attention and distraction in order to believe, and perhaps even find pleasure in a puppetry performance, which is marked by a “waiting”. Kohler has pointed out the significance of “stillness [...] which allows an audience into the head of a puppet” as a means of narration and duration “informed by what went before and explains what comes afterward”,¹⁵¹ but which also requires a certain kind of “still” attention from the audience, an anticipation, both a weight (or, for the puppet, a lack of weight, a weightlessness not governed by gravity) and a waiting.

For Richard Schechner, mimesis in performance is integrally connected to ritual and play which

lead people into a ‘second reality’, separate from ordinary life. This reality is one where people can become selves other than their daily selves. When they temporarily become or enact another, people perform actions different from what they do ordinarily. Thus, ritual and play transform people, either permanently or temporarily.¹⁵²

Puppetry in this sense can be seen to be governed by a kind of transformative ritual or routine of the interplay of self and other, seen in the repetitive nature of rehearsal and performance. The puppet itself is also a kind of art *work*, performed within a *play*; a puppetry performance is “unproductive” work, but is also called a play, a production, opening up a discussion of these activities as modes of thought, a question of work and play also to be posed to the humanities. To think through improvisation, or as Rosalind Krauss defines it, “the taking and seizing of chance”,¹⁵³ as a mode of *doing* in the humanities (following John Mowitt) a kind of focused distraction or serious play offers the potential to rework the tools and conditions of the exercise, situating the “studio” as both a physical and metaphorical space, an

¹⁵⁰ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 99.

¹⁵¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 73.

¹⁵² Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 52. See also Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 65-88.

¹⁵³ Krauss, *The Rock*, 11.

expansion of the brain space, opening up a constellation of ideas in varying arrangements, the collage, montage, and trusting in the randomness of free play and what William Kentridge calls the *stupidity* of ideas, “the edge of an idea”. In this regard, “Kentridge has consistently stressed the role of a kind of blind, childish aspect of art making, one that is grounded in an open, exploratory manipulation of materials, in which disbelief and analytic reflection are willingly suspended, and which is characterised by a kind of open and flexible play.”¹⁵⁴

A Hand in the Archive

Before I move onto Chapter 1, I want to briefly outline the significance of my work with Handspring’s archive, and its impact as a kind of “frame” for the project. The Company’s archive is expressive of the movement and vitalism of “kinetic objects” in an archive in continual process and progress, in some sense a personal collection of artefacts, but as will be shown throughout the dissertation, also a highly significant and substantial body of work which has the capacity for creating and instigating multiple futurities and openings. As a historical inquiry, this exploration looks to the objects defined as “historical” via their place in the archive, but many of the objects are also historical in their ontological being; puppets exist as vestiges of performances, and many of the other items in the archive can be seen as relics, traces or residues of Handspring’s creative process. These objects are also representative of relocations and mobility, between and within multiple performances, betwixt disciplines (theatre, art, history), from private to public space. My work with the archive thus addresses how the historical object moves, and is moved; how it is activated in the present – how a seemingly “dead” body of work is brought to life again. Diana Taylor’s notion of the archive in relation to what she calls the “repertoire” is useful here in the ways in which the latter helps to analyse performance. She describes a “rift [...] between the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge”.¹⁵⁵ The repertoire

enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral,

¹⁵⁴ Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 157.

¹⁵⁵ Taylor, *The Archive*, 19.

nonreproducible knowledge. Repertoire, etymologically ‘a treasury, an inventory’, also allows for individual agency, referring also to ‘the finder, discoverer’, and meaning ‘to find out’. The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there’, being a part of the transmission.¹⁵⁶

In some sense then, my work within and around Handspring’s archive can be seen as a kind of repertoire in itself, “both keep[ing] and transform[ing] choreographies of meaning.”¹⁵⁷

The mix of media within the archive is further layered with my involvement in photographing the work, making digital copies of physical work, and helping to organise and rationalise the collection. This is to look to materiality, but also the *disintegration* of materialities and technologies in the touching and handling of “untouchable” objects; objects which are delicate and vulnerable to the (in this case) destructive touch of the hand. The digitising of the work holds it in a certain ‘impenetrable’ capsule, safeguarded from disintegration (although of course, digital technologies can also be lost or “crash”), but removes the sensory aspect of the tangible objects – to some extent removes their “thingness”. Much of the material is not (yet) publicly accessible and is stored in such a way that each individual item requires some “digging” to be found, and my work with the archive was thus in part a means of organising and ordering the large folders of drawings and other paper paraphernalia representative of each production, with the idea that the archive will one day be made more widely available to scholars and practitioners through an intensive digitisation and cataloguing process. Apart from the paper archive, Handspring have also collected recorded versions of most of the productions – many of them on VHS, Betacam and other nearly obsolete or inaccessible technologies – photographic material including digital photographs, photographic albums, film negatives and colour slides, documents including scripts, financial records and correspondence in hard copy and on hard drives and stiffy/floppy discs, and multiple publications in the form of books and DVDs; all this material supplementary to the puppets, maquettes and props for each production itself. The scope of these materials is too wide to cover in its entirety here, but it is significant to note Jones and Kohler’s almost obsessive devotion to the conservation of Handspring’s legacy

¹⁵⁶ Taylor, *The Archive*, 20.

¹⁵⁷ Taylor, *The Archive*, 20.

through the archive, a legacy they are eager to extend. Many of the productions can now only be witnessed as secondary performances or in part via the mediated materials situated in the archive, and in this case the study has largely been formulated around what has been made available to me in the paper archive.

For Foucault, the “archive is not that which, despite its immediate escape, safeguards the event of the statement, and preserves, for future memories, its status as an escape; it is that which, at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset *the system of its enunciability*.”¹⁵⁸ It “begins with the outside of our own language [...]; its locus is the gap between our own discursive practices.”¹⁵⁹ Here the “gap” is between disciplines, those of history, art, puppetry and performance – through which openings and futurities are enunciated. Thus the “never completed, never wholly achieved uncovering of the archive forms the general horizon to which the descriptions of discursive formations, the analysis of positivities, the mapping of the enunciative field belong.”¹⁶⁰ If the archive is as such a space of enunciation, then it is bound intrinsically to the repertoire – the static and still, quiet nature of the archival inventory or library is disrupted, activated, made mobile, animated. Handspring’s work thus presents a South African archive which is no longer simply documentary, but rather representative of an aesthetic practice which troubles subject/object dialectics, an “unquietness”, the “world of things” utilised to re-script movement as thought.

The project, in its work with the archive, strives to be one of “emergence”, following Raymond Williams’ definition of the term, in that “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships are continually being created.”¹⁶¹ For Williams, in “authentic historical analysis it is necessary at every point to recognise the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance.”¹⁶² Here he recognises the “residual” and the “emergent” as “significant both in themselves and in what

¹⁵⁸ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 129.

¹⁵⁹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 130.

¹⁶⁰ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 130.

¹⁶¹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 123.

¹⁶² Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121.

they reveal of the characteristics of the 'dominant'.¹⁶³ For Verne Harris, an engagement with the archive should be positioned in a similar vein, in his assertion that "archival contextualisation, indeed archival endeavour as a whole, should be about the releasing of meanings, the tending of mystery and the disclosing of the archive's openness."¹⁶⁴ For Harris then, the "archive is a trilectic, an open-ended process of remembering, forgetting and imagining."¹⁶⁵ In this case, the "emergent" works to draw together archive, art and text as a set of "things" to be played with, to produce emergence through their interrelations; opening up the text to the "world of things", and reopening and reinvigorating questions often taken for granted around race, class, gender, capital, and questions of the local and the global.

The chapters that follow can be seen as an "assemblage of pictures", writing explored as a kind of practical aesthetic exercise, four sketches that play with ideas and are matched in a kind of bricolage, rather than striated layers that follow on one to the next. Each chapter figures the hand in a different guise, that is, each takes on a different role as an object/subject of thought as a means of opening up varying subjectivities and notions of subjecthood. Chapter 1 looks to the hand *spring*, Chapter 2 the hand as surface or screen, Chapter 3 the apparatus, tool or prosthesis *in* the hand, and Chapter 4 the hand as a vessel or receptacle. Chapter 1 provides an overview and outline of Handspring's work framed through a series of iterations plotted over the course of their life as a company, providing a ground on which to build the subsequent chapters, posing questions around subject/object, and conceptualising the puppet in relation to the self and the other through the hand. Chapter 2 looks more closely at Handspring's paper archive through the notion of the "blurred" or "broken" drawing. Here I elaborate on my work in the archive and connect it to drawing as a "migrant" and "place-making" practice, further linked to the discipline of photography and what I refer to as the "tactile unconscious". Chapter 3 turns to gesture and haptic experiences through the activities of work and play, as channelled through Handspring's *Woyzeck on the Highveld*. The puppet is positioned as a capitalist subject, and in this way offers provocations around the

¹⁶³ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 122. Williams defines the residual as that which "has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present." (Ibid)

¹⁶⁴ Harris, *A Shaft of Darkness*, 71.

¹⁶⁵ Harris, *A Shaft of Darkness*, 75.

labouring body, suggesting means of cross-pollinating the touch and gesture involved in work and play. Chapter 4 explores the notion of “living and “dead” objects, and includes an analysis of my own artistic work in relation to Handspring’s *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. Here the focus turns to the materiality of the puppet and the body as a means of becoming subject.



CHAPTER 1:

THE HAND SPRING: INTRODUCTION TO THE HANDSPRING PUPPET COMPANY

1.1 The Puppet as Self

1.2 From Beginnings to Transitions

1.3 The Human Other as Puppet

1.4 The Animal Puppet



THE HAND SPRING: INTRODUCTION TO THE HANDSPRING PUPPET COMPANY

Handspring Puppet Company's archive is at the crux of this project, and though it may not always be foregrounded in the writing, their oeuvre, as it appears in the archival collection, has often served as a "wellspring" of ideas for me. Over the course of the dissertation I will look more explicitly at a selection of Handspring's drawings and plans from the paper archive, but here I want to lay out the broader scope of their work, specifically in its varying relation to the other core focus of the project, the hand (and by extension the head), to serve as a foundation for the chapters that follow. In some sense my interest in the hand is derived from the way in which the Company's name itself situates puppetry, and *making* more broadly, as a practice that "springs" forth from the hand - nourishing, life-giving, alchemical, magical - and their logo, the image of a flat-palmed hand emitting a stream of liquid or steam from a central aperture, places the hand as a productive mechanism both naturally and mechanically operated. A "handspring" is also a gymnastic move, "an acrobatic feat in which the body turns forward or backward in a full circle from a standing position and lands first on the hands and then on the feet",¹⁶⁶ resisting the pull of gravity (like the puppet does), and displacing the natural positioning of the body, the hands the antipode of the feet. To (re)position the hands then as the parts which "move" us, places their mode of production or creation as a mechanism which has the capacity to transport, to continually shift us from one place to another, or from one state to another.

In this chapter I track what I see as five iterations Handspring goes through over the course of its life as a company; moving from the production of "new children's theatre with puppets that reflected life on the [African] continent", staking "a claim for puppet theatre as a legitimate part of [...] local theatre vocabulary";¹⁶⁷ through a transitional period instigated by South Africa's 1985 state of emergency (*Episodes of an Easter Rising to Starbrites!*). Handspring then moves to the production of politically attuned plays in collaboration with William Kentridge, which could perhaps be marked by a

¹⁶⁶ Merriam-Webster, *Handspring*.

¹⁶⁷ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 42. This selection of children's plays is not described in detail as part of the dissertation, but is included here as Handspring's first iteration.

focus on the human “other” as puppet (*Woyzeck on the Highveld* to *Zeno at 4am/Confessions of Zeno*); into an intense focus on the animal puppet, which remains the centre of the majority of their work in the present, and has won them much worldwide acclaim as a puppet company (*Woyzeck on the Highveld* to *War Horse*); and finally, back to a more “meta-theatrical” focus on the human puppet, particularly in its relation to the self (*Or You Could Kiss Me* to *Save the Pedestals*). Although there is, on the most part, a clear chronological progression from one phase to the next, the characteristics or nodes of thought inherent to each iteration also overlap and are not exclusively defined.¹⁶⁸ Handspring have predominantly selected stories based on the creation of the worlds in which the puppets exist for each production, and it is interesting then to note the compilation of plays they have ended up producing, and the common themes which can be tracked across these productions. The Company has always warded against “instrumentalist theatre”¹⁶⁹, which conveys a specific and often unyielding message for the audience, and has instead promoted individualised interpretations and understandings of each production. Strikingly Handspring’s oeuvre has given rise to the evolution of the puppetry forms with which they have worked, as each production generates its own demands both technical and philosophical. Along the way, they have impelled their audiences to engage in a similar evolution, enrolling them as “autistic” or highly sensitised to the material they receive,¹⁷⁰ so the content of the existent plays is shifted by the artistry of design and puppet conception, and technique weds itself to character in this way. Alongside this iterative evolution is the initiation of the Handspring Trust and a partnership with the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, thus further situating the (Handspring) puppet as a scholarly concern; an object of academic and artistic research. I will begin the Chapter with the final and most recent iteration, as this is where the theoretical underpinning of Handspring’s work is made most evident within the plays themselves, offering meditations on the puppet and the human which link hand and head, and retrospectively enriching the full body of work.

¹⁶⁸ There are also a number of recent productions currently in development including *Wolf Totem* and *The Elephant Whisperer* which I have not included in the dissertation.

¹⁶⁹ Samuels & Mbongwa, *Die Name*.

¹⁷⁰ Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts, *Great Texts: Handspring*. In other words, they suggest that an ‘autistic’ demeanour allows for more sensitised receptivity on the part of the audience.

Handspring has utilized the hand in varying ways in their puppet technologies which have evolved over time from marionette puppets to adaptations of rod puppets inspired by designs from African, Asian and European puppetry traditions. According to Kohler, the initial stages of the Company's "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 major influence of Japanese Bunraku puppetry theatre, had a decidedly Western bias."¹⁷¹ Their work with the Sogolon Puppet Troupe in *Tall Horse* (2004) exposed them further to a puppetry practice, as Kohler puts it, "not subject to any colonial influence."¹⁷² Kohler's drawing and carving style is clearly influenced by the graphic qualities of African puppetry and sculpture, particularly the stylised facial features of carved wooden masks and bronze heads, as can be seen in his designs for puppet faces, both human and animal. The progression of their puppet technologies has allowed a closer, more intimate relation between puppet and puppeteer, and because of the amalgamated design of puppet and puppeteer, what John Mowitt refers to as "handspring apparatus",¹⁷³ we may often look to the puppeteer (or a combination of puppet and puppeteer) in terms of gesture or body language and facial expression to determine the emotion of the former.¹⁷⁴ Handspring has noted the significance of the puppeteer as an extension of the puppet, that is, as much as the puppeteers are "absent" in performance, they are inevitably present, and maintains that instead of concealing or camouflaging themselves, the puppeteers should dress to complement the puppet's character.¹⁷⁵ This is a method characteristic of Bunraku puppetry, but can also be seen in examples from African puppetry as can be witnessed in *Tall Horse*, as well as examples in some of their earlier plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1988).

1.1 The Puppet as Self

Handspring's most recent iteration, which I've delineated as a meta-theoretical exploration of the self as puppet, is discussed here as a starting point in terms of how the Company situates their practice in relation to theory, having themselves also

¹⁷¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 118.

¹⁷² Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 118.

¹⁷³ Mowitt, *No Strings Attached*, 1.

¹⁷⁴ An uncanny formulation seeing as the puppet has no emotion other than that which is projected onto it by the puppeteer.

¹⁷⁵ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 69.

written and presented talks on the problematic of the puppet and its relationship with the puppeteer.¹⁷⁶ The self as puppet can further be seen as a doubling of the self; a doubling of the human in which the copy or double is bestowed with life and value akin to the “original”, to some extent playing out the “drama of the self’s enchantment with the self”.¹⁷⁷ In this way the human fulfils a “narcissistic longing”,¹⁷⁸ creating new life for itself, but simultaneously diminishing it. When the puppeteer takes on an entity which they must devote themselves to they are in some sense denying their own life; when they breathe life into the puppet they take away some of their own breath, a kind of empathy for the object,¹⁷⁹ a contradiction and an enigma.¹⁸⁰ It is the human hand which is the subject that creates or “births” the puppet, a kind of mutant love-child, however, for many puppet-makers there also exists the notion that the puppet is alive before the subject’s (in the form of the puppet-maker and later, puppeteer) intervention, and calls to be brought to live a more meaningful life; one

¹⁷⁶ A catalogue of their talks and publications can be found on their website (see Handspring Puppet Company, *Talks and Publications*) See also Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*.

¹⁷⁷ Taylor, *Mark’s Signs*, 1.

¹⁷⁸ Taylor, *Mark’s Signs*, 1.

¹⁷⁹ In *War Horse* Handspring made use of trained puppeteers instead of muscular acrobats and Kohler explains that “[t]heir empathy for the figure was what made them most valuable to us.” (Kohler *Thinking Through Puppets*, 137)

¹⁸⁰ However much life is put into it though, the puppet remains deaf, blind, mute to itself; it cannot regard itself through sight or voice, alive from the inside, but with a “dead skin” unable to absorb or respond to the touch or voice of another. The puppet is further akin to Franz Kafka’s strange entity “Odradek”, who expresses “only the kind of laughter that has no lungs behind it. It sounds rather like the rustling of fallen leaves.” (Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, 470) However, to describe the puppet’s laughter is really to describe the puppeteer’s laughter as we experience it through the puppet. It is perhaps in these moments that the illusion is further realised, that the audience becomes aware of the fact that the puppet’s lungs are empty, or more accurately, non-existent. The sound is an effect, like fallen leaves that crunch underfoot to describe an autumnal day. Odradek seems to exist between the living and the dead as a kind of immortal being, in that “[a]nything that dies has some kind of aim in life, some kind of activity, which has worn out; but that does not apply to Odradek.” (Ibid) The narrator of this tale finds this fact threatening in that “[h]e [Odradek] does no harm to anyone that one can see; but the idea that he is likely to survive me I find almost painful.” (Ibid) If Odradek is to be imagined as a sort of puppet, which becomes even more likely when his form is described as a kind of spool inter-spliced with a “small wooden crossbar” with “another small rod [...] joined to that at a right angle” (Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, 469), like a puppet’s supportive frame, it may become evident how a puppet (object) threatens the life of the puppeteer (subject). Further, “the whole thing can stand upright as if on two legs”, situating Odradek closer to the bipedal human form. If Odradek is indeed a kind of puppet, this would mean that the puppet is immortal, but also aimless in his desires and goals, meaning that the human must convince him or win him over in order to get him to do what the former requires of him. However, the title of the short story, *The Cares of a Family Man*, positions Odradek, and by extension the puppet, as a domestic entity. The narrator seems to possess a worry that he may be devoting more life, more time to this puppet-child called Odradek than to his human family, but also steers the puppet away from an instrumentalist relation to one of close kin, “rather like a child”. (Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, 470) Odradek is a menace but vulnerable, aimless, immortal, and domestic, a living-dead entity.

which can only be made possible through the puppeteer's support as "parent".¹⁸¹ Despite the uncanny or "unhomely" (*unheimlich*) feeling the puppet may provoke in the viewer in its mimetic similarity to the human body, the relationship between puppet and puppeteer could perhaps be described, quite contrastingly, as "homely" – the latter "inhabiting" the former, this seen quite clearly in Handspring's puppets which must be controlled from within, and the puppet most "at home", most "itself" in this arrangement.¹⁸² The puppet thus provides a kind of dwelling for the human self – a *private* space in the public realm, and a kind of protective armour or shell.

In the case of Handspring it is often the same subjects, Jones and Kohler, who raise the object up from its very conception; taking on the hybrid tasks of designing, crafting and then performing their puppets, the design of which places emphasis on the symbiotic or mutually beneficial relationship they share.¹⁸³ The term "manipulator", commonly used in the practice of puppetry to refer to the puppeteer, carries a complicated relationship in itself, in that to be manipulated, one is inadvertently controlled, influenced or exploited, and according to John Gray, the "puppet may seem the embodiment of a lack of freedom"¹⁸⁴ in that "it has no will of its own" and is "[e]ntirely controlled by a mind outside itself".¹⁸⁵ In this case, "[t]he organ [the hand] can *only* take hold of and manipulate the thing insofar as, in any case, it does not have to deal with the thing *as such*, does not let the thing be what it is in its essence"¹⁸⁶ or "spirit". However, "In order to feel a lack of freedom you must be a self-conscious being", in which case a puppet "cannot know it is unfree" as "it

¹⁸¹ This is akin to the impulse expressed by sculptors who describe how in the act of carving they 'find' the figure in the material with which they are working.

¹⁸² This is in alignment with Masahiro Mori's observation in his essay on the "uncanny valley" in relation to the Bunraku puppet, which, "on close inspection" does not, to him, "appear[...] very similar to a human being." For Mori, its "realism in terms of size, skin texture, and so on, does not even reach that of a realistic prosthetic hand. But when we enjoy a puppet show in the theatre, we are seated at a certain distance from the stage. The puppet's absolute size is ignored, and its total appearance, including hand and eye movements, is close to that of a human being. So, given our tendency as an audience to become absorbed in this form of art, we might feel a high level of affinity for the puppet." (Mori, *The Uncanny Valley*, 3) Mori use the puppet to articulate a view about the uncanny within robotics when he claims that "when an industrial robot is switched off, it is just a greasy machine. But once the robot is programmed to move its gripper like a human hand, we start to feel a certain level of affinity for it." (Mori, *The Uncanny Valley*, 3) Here the hand is significant as a body part which signals how we should approach an outside object or being.

¹⁸³ Here we can look to Agamben's belief that "one also finds assistants and helpers among the world of inanimate things." (Agamben, *Profanations*, 32)

¹⁸⁴ Gray defines freedom as "above all, a state of the soul in which conflict has been left behind" – a "freedom from choice". (Gray, *The Soul*, 6-7)

¹⁸⁵ Gray, *The Soul*, 1.

¹⁸⁶ Derrida, *Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand*, 175.

has no soul”,¹⁸⁷ or in other words, has no conscious essence. Here a “[s]peaking as, masks a speaking *for* that casts the puppeteer in the role of the sovereign”, however, “[s]upplementing this [...] is the fact that since puppeteers, especially the most accomplished and thus despotic, consider their puppets to be alive, they must get along with them, and behave in accord with the secret of the trade, namely, they must *yield* to the puppet, letting it have its way.”¹⁸⁸

If the human puppeteer is essentially acting as a set of organs, why is it necessary to build this set into a complete, and for Handspring, rather elaborately designed, body at all? It is usually clear that this human-like object is not anatomically correct and does not have life or a body which could offer it life, yet we may begin to believe that it is living.¹⁸⁹ Conversely, the human body can be presented to us in multiple different forms and out of numerous different materials, thus in some sense breaking down the living integrity of the body itself, and placing it on par with the object that it is represented by. So it is not actually only the fact that the puppet *looks* human that makes it a horrifying or uncanny entity; it is that we are told it is the subject, that the human subject displaces its status as subject by giving life to this object.¹⁹⁰ It could be that the anxiety around the puppet, an “anxiety about the boundary between the

¹⁸⁷ Gray, *The Soul*, 1-2.

¹⁸⁸ Mowitt, *No Strings Attached*, 5-6.

¹⁸⁹ Even a plastic shopping bag floating in the wind can become a living, breathing being, as can be witnessed in French Compagnie Non Nova’s *Afternoon of a Foehn* (2014).

¹⁹⁰ In the excerpt that follows, Freud describes how a child he is observing substitutes a wooden cotton reel for his absent mother, “staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach [...] The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive ‘o-o-o-o’ [‘gone’]. He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful ‘da’ [‘there’]. This, then, was the complete game – disappearance and return.” (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 9) The reel could never be seen as anything other (a carriage; a toy) than a stand-in for his mother – a living object. When the boy uses the cotton reel as a stand-in for his mother, she becomes that object. Here the curtained cot becomes a kind of theatre, and the reel a marionette or puppet on a string. Through this performance the boy gains power over the object he desires and now possesses; he can throw it/her away and then bring it/her back again. This scene reveals that mimesis need not necessarily operate aesthetically; something does not necessarily need to *look* like the thing we are told it is or believe it to be. We see this clearly in toys and make-believe games when children transform objects into scenes from their imaginations. A table becomes a boat, a tree becomes a house. Keir Elam echoes a similar concept when he states that a “table employed in dramatic representation will not usually differ in any material or structural fashion from the item of furniture that the members of the audience eat at, and yet it is in some sense transformed: it acquires, as it were, a set of quotation marks.” (Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre*, 6) These quotation marks transform an object from what it appears to be into what we imagine it to be.

self and the object of worship”,¹⁹¹ lies not in the puppet becoming a living being, but rather in the human “becoming puppet”, and by extension, at least in Handspring’s case, becoming animal. There is also something sinister or vampiric about these characters, which come with the risk of infection, the puppet’s relation with the puppeteer both symbiotic and parasitic, these dead objects relying on the warm blood flow of another to survive, sucking out life; the love for them somewhat necrophilic. It may amaze us that the puppeteer can give such convincing life to an inanimate object, birth it, breathe energy into it, god-like, but this life is also a trickery, a terror, in its refusal of the human subject, a trickery that the audience must play an active part in, maintaining and enabling the belief in the life of the puppet,¹⁹² which may in fact require a certain ‘numbing’ of the senses, that is, the human subject becoming numb to the fact of the object. This is evident in many audiences’ responses to *War Horse*, where it is often remarked that over the course of the performance, viewers began to believe that the horse puppets were *real* horses.¹⁹³ The question then arises in relation to Handspring: Why the need to perform *through* an object, *with* an object? One significant answer to this dilemma comes in the form of Harry Garuba’s proposal to “return to the logic of animist thought as a site for transcending the rigid dualisms consecrated by the modern/western epistemological order.”¹⁹⁴ Garuba believes that “[t]he logic of animist thought provides an opening for thinking other histories of modernity beyond the linear, teleological trajectories of the conventional historical narrative.”¹⁹⁵ In this way, a study of the Handspring Puppet Company archive serves as a means of re-visiting and opening up South African histories and conventional western epistemologies through the lens of object/subject, but further through notions of self and other.

Save the Pedestals (2018/2019),¹⁹⁶ Handspring’s most recent production, follows the monthly meetings of a “Comrade A” and “Ma Z”, as they ruminate on the role of

¹⁹¹ Taylor, *Mark’s Signs*, 2.

¹⁹² As Otakar Zich states “an audience can perceive a puppet performance in either of two ways: first as lifeless puppets, in which case their material reality overwhelms their pretensions to seriousness and they are perceived as comical; alternatively, they are perceived as living beings, evoking wonder and affecting spectators mysteriously.” (Zich in Proschan, *Introduction: Semiotic Study*, 13)

¹⁹³ See Parker-Starbuck, *Animal Ontologies*.

¹⁹⁴ Garuba, *On Animism*, 7-8.

¹⁹⁵ Garuba, *On Animism*, 8.

¹⁹⁶ Adaptation of a short story by Ivan Vladislavić. Directed and choreographed by Robyn Orlin with Handspring Puppet Company in collaboration with Puppentheater Halle.

statues and memorials in the past and present through dialogue on the recent removal of a sculptural monument to a previous president. In some sense this is a question of how the collective other culminates in the self, but also of the role of the self in a post-apartheid or post-colonial society, the permanence of monuments contrasted with the friability of memory and the body. This play, adapted from a short story by Ivan Vladislavić, raises the question of what should remain permanent, and what should be erased from South Africa's history; what is kept and what is discarded. It can be paralleled with the "Rhodes Must Fall" protests in South Africa, and it is interesting to compare this set of protests (in conjunction with the "Fees Must Fall" protests) with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee, and the differing ways in which these platforms have dealt with history and what should remain seen/unseen. (This to be discussed further in Chapter 4) The empty pedestal provides the puppet characters a blank slate to re-imagine what figures (which range from a mineworker, migrant worker, suited benefactor, politician, to a horse and a pig) could exist in the place of the "conqueror lording it over a free city",¹⁹⁷ in the process re-envisaging individualised notions of what "selves" make up a post-apartheid society. Monuments in themselves, the oversized puppets are controlled from within the abdomen sections of their bodies, which are made up of skeletal carbon fibre and aluminium frameworks with large heads, hands and feet, the puppeteers fully exposed. There are cameras set into the eye sockets of each puppet, and their perspective is broadcast onto a screen behind them, allowing the audience to see the details of their viewpoint, perhaps positioning the question of monuments as a visual dilemma, that is, of the gaze. The puppets' movement is emphasised with the use of wheels and moveable limbs, and their skeletal frameworks are much in contrast with the heavy bronze sculpture that is so common to the historical monument. The large hands and feet also draw emphasis to movement and tactility, bringing into question the permanence of monuments in comparison to their lack of movement – they do not usually welcome touch, but are made to last for a very long time rooted in one place. The contrast between living, moving touch and immutable statue is made very apparent, and is further emphasised in the contrast between statue and puppet here, the former static,

¹⁹⁷ Vladislavić, *Save the Pedestals*.

intransient, unmovable, un-mouldable, bringing to mind the stubborn permanence of apartheid and its (often very apparent) residues in the post-apartheid.

The “meta-theatrical” production *I Love You When You’re Breathing* (2011/2012)¹⁹⁸ is a useful starting point in outlining the company’s philosophy of puppetry in terms of “movement as thought” or movement as “generative of thought”, a process by which audience authors meaning, and a concept akin to Donna Haraway’s “semiotic of materiality”.¹⁹⁹ This “language” of material is here apparent in the crafted form of the puppet, as well as the gesture and movement expressed in its performance. *I Love You When You’re Breathing* is presented in the form of a lecture given by a male puppet protagonist, who guides the audience in the practice of the puppeteer in terms of the way in which he/she projects life into the puppet through the micro-movements of *breath*. The title of the play places emphasis on the importance for Handspring of the *living*, moving subject, and the significance puppetry has as a “life-giving” practice for them.²⁰⁰ Life is a “struggle” for the puppet, “a pile of sticks and cloth” which contains a certain “deadliness” into which the life must be designed.²⁰¹ The bodies of Handspring’s puppets are created like skeletons, their inner structures or armatures are revealed, sometimes covered with a sheer fabric which is ripped and laddered to reveal the parts it covers. (This material aspect of Handspring’s puppets will also be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) The audience can thus see that the puppets do not have inner organs. They are skeletons with transparent skins, constantly on the brink of death, further emphasised by the contrast in materials and the “materiality” of the human body – bone, flesh, wood, metal and plastic; human and puppet skins in close relational proximity. The puppet’s “life” is achieved by a “signing system” or simultaneously choreographed movement of puppeteer and puppet, the former ensuring that no matter what other movement the

¹⁹⁸ Written and adapted by Basil Jones and Jason Potgieter. Directed by Jason Potgieter. This production has been performed numerous times since its inception, often in the context of academic and art circles, for example at the “Love and Revolution” conference and at the opening of the Community Arts Project (CAP) exhibition, both hosted by the CHR.

¹⁹⁹ Handspring Puppet Company, *I Love You When You’re Breathing*. See also Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms* and Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*.

²⁰⁰ At a performance of this play that I attended in 2016 at the Cape Town Science Centre, the speaker who introduced it, upon reading the title, wondered out loud that “if you love me when I’m breathing; you don’t love me when I’m dead?” – a thought that has always stuck with me, and which feels significant but which I cannot quite comprehend in the context of Handspring’s work.

²⁰¹ Handspring Puppet Company, *I Love You When You’re Breathing*.

puppet may be involved in (walking, sitting, dancing), it also remains 'alive' in a rhythmically repeated micro-movement or micro-motion representative of breathing, the puppet 'gasping' for life. Handspring first made this observation whilst working on the puppet-opera *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*, when they realised the importance of breath in uniting the opera singers' vocals with the breathing movements of the puppets and their manipulators, thus also pointing to the significance of breath and the voice to maintain the illusion of life.²⁰² Through this breath, the puppeteer also technically acts a pair of lungs, and by extension a heart, a brain, blood flowing through veins, and a whole set of human or animal organs that are required to instil life in an organism. For Handspring breath is further significant in sustaining a "bond of trust between audience and puppet" in that when the audience witnesses the puppet "breathing", the latter is seen to be "bound by the same physical laws as the viewer".²⁰³ If the puppet doesn't breathe, according to Kohler, "[e]ffectively it holds its breath", causing the audience to mimic this action and hold their breath until they no longer can, creating an uncomfortable tension and breaking the "bond of trust between audience and puppet".²⁰⁴

In performance there is a sense that the rapport between puppet and puppeteer is genuine, the puppet itself subjected or 'taught', imbuing "potentialities that can be released only in the performance itself, because it is only here that these are identified."²⁰⁵ It is as though the material has memory which is activated through performance. The puppeteer in this way experiences real emotion in relation to the sense of care and authorship for the object that he or she has brought to life, to some degree acting biological human processes. In this regard Jane Taylor has suggested that puppets act as "powerful" or "emotional prostheses" for the puppeteers, which could also apply to an actor who performs *through* or *via* a role.²⁰⁶ The puppet thus serves as an assistive aid which helps the puppeteer or actor (who is sometimes the same person) deal with emotional or psychological trauma addressed in a play via the character they become. For the puppeteer to *become* themselves then in puppet form, as can be seen in Handspring's *Or You Could Kiss*

²⁰² Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 99.

²⁰³ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 99.

²⁰⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 99.

²⁰⁵ Taylor, *Handspring Puppet Company*, 11.

²⁰⁶ Taylor, *Omissions and Commissions*.

Me (2010)²⁰⁷ presents something perhaps quite surprising – a means to interrogate and imagine past and future versions of the self, a kind of therapy. *Or You Could Kiss Me* is, quite in contrast to all Handspring's other work, directly autobiographical, a poignant love story featuring puppet versions of Jones and Kohler's young and old selves (named simply "B" and "A") searching "for a way to say goodbye after a lifetime spent together."²⁰⁸ The narrative is "[p]oised halfway between [...] two stories – one imagined, one remembered", and the characters' "real-life counterparts bear witness to both the beginning and the ending of an incredible journey",²⁰⁹ sometimes controlling the puppets, sometimes voicing them, and sometimes just looking on as the scenes unfold. The play thus allows Jones and Kohler an opening to come to terms with ageing and human mortality, with the "strangeness" of the body that is so apparent to "modern man",²¹⁰ directly through the puppets they have created, here serving as emotional prostheses for personal concerns on multiple levels. To imagine oneself through and in material is a kind of self-portraiture, but manifested in the form of the puppet, this takes on another dimension, in that creating a moving, 'breathing' double of the self potentially diminishes the value of the actual human self. Being able to play out the disintegration of your own physical body however, in this instance both via the objectified puppet version of the body and in the ageing of that body, may allow psychological openings not possible or apparent before. The other significant aspect of this play, which also further links it to *I Love You When You're Breathing*, is that the old "B" character has emphysema, and the emphasis on the puppet's struggle for breath and life is in this way highlighted more than ever before. His ragged breathing powers, with intense effort, his movements; each laboured breath precedes a seemingly simple action assisted by multiple puppeteers, emphasising the fragility of life, both puppet and human.

1.2 From Beginnings to Transitions

I Love You When You're Breathing and *Or You Could Kiss Me*, in contrast to each other, offer meditations on life and death, self and other – contemplations on "I" and "you" – as a means of both explaining the puppet and of addressing the human self. There is also something evident here linking breath and the self which is inherent to

²⁰⁷ Written by Neil Bartlett and Handspring Puppet Company. Directed by Neil Bartlett.

²⁰⁸ Handspring Puppet Company, *Or You Could Kiss Me*.

²⁰⁹ Handspring Puppet Company, *Or You Could Kiss Me*.

²¹⁰ Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, 806.

Handspring's work, and which underlies their entire practice in the making and performing of puppets, and can be tracked through the other iterations. Taking my cue from *Or You Could Kiss Me*, and moving between past and present, I now turn back to Handspring's beginnings as a Company, their birth, followed by their life, through discussion of the remaining iterations in chronological order. Puppetry as an art form in South Africa has historically been used to address issues of race and politics, often used as a form of anti-apartheid protest art²¹¹ and as an educational tool for children under the apartheid state, predominantly in televised form, and more recently within the academic institution as a means of questioning the humanities and the centralised notion of what it means to be human in the present moment. Children's television programs broadcast by the South African Broadcasting Commission (SABC) of the later apartheid era (1980s-1990s), then strictly regimented by the apartheid regime, went through a phase of producing and airing children's shows which starred or featured puppet characters in English, Afrikaans and, less frequently, African languages, such as *Haas Das se Nuuskas* (voiced by newsreader Riaan Cruywagen), *Mina Moo*, *Professor Fossie* and *Spider's Place*, which Kohler and Jones worked on in differing capacities as designers and puppet-builders, as well as *Pumpkin Patch*, *Liewe Heksie* and *Kideo*.²¹² Although theatre was pivotal in this period, with a number of major directors and playwrights such as John Kani, Barney Simon and Athol Fugard focusing specifically on the political climate of the time, puppetry performed in the theatre "for adults" was virtually non-existent in South Africa at this point, and Handspring played a major role here in "normalizing" puppet plays for a more serious and mature audience, choosing specific plays with socio-political themes and creating relatable characters in the form of puppets. In this regard, Jane Taylor has noted that "[t]heatre 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

²¹¹ For example see Gary Friedman's "Puns en Doedie (Puppets against Apartheid)". See also the work of Gawie de Wet, John Wright (who in 1961 started the Little Angel Marionette Company in London), and more recently Jill Joubert, Janni Younge, Aja Marneweck of The Paper Body Collective, Conrad Coch, and the satirical television show produced by Both Worlds, *ZA News*. The Grahamstown National Arts Festival and the Out the Box Festival of Puppetry and Visual Performance have both also been instrumental spaces for the development of more subversive "adult" themed puppetry production. For a more detailed breakdown of the history of puppetry in South Africa, see Handspring Puppet Company, *South African Puppetry*.

²¹² Many of these were produced by Louise Smit of Louise Smit production Trust.

those important years.”²¹³ The Company was initially founded by Basil Jones, Adrian Kohler, Jill Joubert and Jon Weinberg in 1981 as a children’s puppet company, touring and performing at schools throughout apartheid-era South Africa with educational plays focused on life in South Africa. Joubert and Weinberg left the company in 1983 and Jones and Kohler have acted since then as executive producer and artistic director respectively, their “personal touch” evident in all of Handspring’s work. While Kohler predominantly designs and creates the puppets – with interchangeable teams of puppet makers – both Jones and Kohler take on multiple roles as actors, puppeteers and artists, including the production and construction of plays, scripts, sets and props; roles which inform each other – the physicality of being a puppeteer feeding into the production of more effectively moving and breathing, living puppets that take on human and animal forms.

The 1985 state of emergency in South Africa meant that Handspring was disallowed from touring schools in the country, and were forced to find work elsewhere. This marks the beginning of the next iteration, a transitional progression from children’s shows into adult themes which often reflected the unavoidably fraught political climate of the country through inter-personal relations. A number of new breakthroughs in puppet technologies and manipulation techniques are explored here and come to be used repeatedly over the span of Handspring’s work, and there is perhaps a way in which the evolution of these technologies is interconnected to political moods of the time. It is interesting how the move into “adult” productions triggers a development in more sophisticated, more naturalistically rendered puppets – adults seemingly need a different kind of illusion, one that supposedly removes “the trickery of the puppet booth”,²¹⁴ but in actuality further complicates it. For Handspring, this has a lot to do with the mode of attention and expectation of the audience in that with this aesthetic change in the puppet, “[t]he audience could settle down more comfortably with the puppet figure as metaphoric rather than as literal.”²¹⁵ However, Handspring’s puppet figures seem to remain quite literal in their naturalistic, if not realistic form,²¹⁶ and it is rather through other means such as the

²¹³ Taylor, *Handspring Puppet Company*, 15.

²¹⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 48.

²¹⁵ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 48.

²¹⁶ Defined in the context of art, where realism copies forms exactly, while with naturalism, there is some room for more stylised interpretation of the form, while still staying true to its essential shape and being.

materials used to make the puppets and the puppet-puppeteer relation that this metaphoric interpretation is evident.

Episodes of an Easter Rising (1985)²¹⁷ begins the move in puppet technologies and the ways in which they are linked to the puppet-puppeteer relation with a set of naturalistically rendered short-string marionettes “based on the classic John Wright prototype”, which required that the puppeteers would lean over and move around the set, separate from the puppets, but were able to bend down to assist with props when needed.²¹⁸ The puppeteers were dressed in black, a technique of Japanese Bunraku puppetry, “signifying the performers’ absence, even though they were physically visible”, particularly their faces and hands, which “intruded into” the light of the stage area.²¹⁹ According to Kohler, “[a]udiences attached a completely unplanned meaning to this, and interpreted these dark giants alongside each character as their ‘destiny’ guiding them through the story”,²²⁰ a “destiny” dictated by head and hands. This showed Handspring that the “visible mechanics” or “inner workings of the puppet performance were of interest”,²²¹ a point which becomes increasingly evident throughout their work, making transparent the process behind the “product” of the puppet and revealing the *work* inherent in the play. The Company’s rendition of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*²²² demonstrates the use of a number of new mechanisms informed by European puppetry traditions and puppetry design and form from Mali, Benin and Egypt and Makonde masks from Mozambique.²²³ This included several adaptations of rod puppets with the use of the central European *marot*, “a ‘fool’s stick’ with a head on a central rod”,²²⁴ and the use of a backpack mechanism (which is later intrinsic to the

²¹⁷ Adapted from the radio play by David Lytton and directed by Esther van Ryswyk. *Episodes* consisted of a group of human puppets about quarter life size made from carved painted wood with realistic fabric clothing, against the “received aesthetic amongst puppeteers of the time” which dictated that “puppets should not be naturalistic”, and apart from conventional “obvious puppet fare” which included “ghosts, animals [and] mythical creatures”. (Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 47) As Kohler points out, “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.” (Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 47)

²¹⁸ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 47.

²¹⁹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 48.

²²⁰ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 48.

²²¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 48.

²²² Directed by Esther van Ryswyk and Fred Abrahamse

²²³ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 53.

²²⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 53.

design of the horse puppets in *War Horse*) for the Oberon and Titania puppets. The latter was adapted from the *meren habitable*, a kind of Bambara puppet from Mali, “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.”²²⁵ This “inhabitation” of the puppet becomes crucial to the way Handspring designs and interacts with puppets, in later plays emphasising how the manipulator must “become puppet” in their performance; the puppeteer must live inside them, inhabit them, and it is perhaps in this walking through or via the puppet, a kind of extended walking, that a human mode of sight is diverted or subverted.

Additionally to these technical progressions came a more focused concentration on the ways in which “actors and puppets would be occupying the same space” in terms of the significance of the puppets as characters, and the structure of the set, which in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* meant the exclusion of playboards “and no specifically designated puppet playing area.”²²⁶ Here the first seeding of a consideration of the backdrop space as a means of additionally animating the puppets, which becomes a major characteristic of the productions in Handspring’s work with William Kentridge, is evident in that with the inclusion of flying puppets, the “air became the playboard.”²²⁷ *Tooth and Nail* (1989)²²⁸ presents life-sized puppets equivalent in presence and stature to the human actors. The puppet character Saul, a photographer equipped with a built-in camera, is an early version of a typical Handspring puppet in design with the bare armature left open, a “skeletal wooden framework”.²²⁹ The insertion of the puppeteer is also evident here, with the manipulator placed behind the puppet, strapped onto it with a harness belt at the waist, “directly controlling its head with his head, its arms with Bunraku elbow controls, and its feet with controls attached to his own feet.”²³⁰ *Tooth and Nail*, made

²²⁵ Here 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.” (Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 53)

²²⁶ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 57.

²²⁷ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 57.

²²⁸ Written by Carol Steinberg, Nicola Galombick and Malcolm Purkey. Directed by Malcolm Purkey.

²²⁹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 62.

²³⁰ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 62.

during “the period of South Africa’s deepest isolation” was for Handspring “a great year in the workshop”, and there is perhaps something to be said here in the contrasts between the political and creative economies of the time – what is it about this time of isolation and upheaval that creates the conditions for a more fruitful creative practice? The workshopping of *Tooth and Nail* explored the following question: “What kind of madness will we find ourselves in if the divisions in our country are not bridged soon?”,²³¹ and it is perhaps this playing out of the potentials of an imagined future that “opens up” the present in more creative ways. Here the photographer figure echoes the South African documentary photographer of the struggle era, attempting to frame or grasp the political through a creative means, the camera a similar prosthesis to the puppet which brings the other closer to the physical self. There is also however, a more troubling separation of the political and the creative – a sense that the creative flourishes best when removed or placed outside of the rest of the society, a problematic that is reflected in the way creative disciplines are treated and taught in schools and universities in South Africa – as on the borderline; marginal disciplines that are undervalued and low on the hierarchy of “productive” work.

The last play in which Handspring attempted to disguise the manipulators, *Starbrites!* (1990),²³² also used similar life-sized puppets to *Tooth and Nail* alongside actors and controlled by veiled Bunraku manipulators in black, but in softer materials with less structured forms, more akin to the earlier puppets produced for children’s productions. Thereafter the puppeteers always wore costumes to match or enhance the puppet characters.²³³ The more direct control of the puppet, strapped onto the puppeteer as a kind of doubled body, perhaps shows the desire for a greater control over the self and the role one would play in one’s position in the deteriorating South African state of the time in which, in Kohler’s words, “[t]ownships 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.”²³⁴ Concurrently, this new puppet design could also be expressive of the desire for a

²³¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 58.

²³² Workshopped by Barney Simon and performers, and directed by Barney Simon.

²³³ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 69.

²³⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 58.

more intimate, comforting relationship with an “other”. Does the isolation of South Africa thus bring the puppet, and by extension, the othered object closer, or push it further outside the realm of the socio-political? Handspring can thus be seen to offer commentary on South African socio-politics through a meta-theatrical exploration on the inner workings of the puppet, its audiences, and its place in performance. What can be tracked in South Africa through this evolution? The iterations that follow show a further move to the individualised human puppet, and later the animal puppet, but throughout this progression a focus seems to remain on the aesthetic rather than the conceptual content as seen in the storyline or script of a performance, which is increasingly selected according to “what it was that [Handspring] wanted to explore within [their] own creative endeavour”.²³⁵ Rather than creating “message theatre” then, Handspring offers meditations through messages of a different sort, through materiality, relationality and gesture.

1.3 The Human Other as Puppet

Handspring’s next iteration, which encompasses their work with Kentridge serving as director and collaborator from 1992 to 2000, is marked by a turn to European literature, and an intensified devotion to the human as puppet, perhaps more specifically the human *other* as puppet, focussing on the puppet as subject or central character in its own world, but working through pertinent political ideas linked to the notion of the other in terms of race and the human and animal body. All productions since *Episodes of an Easter Rising* had relied predominantly on actors to carry “the weight of the piece [...] with the puppet figures providing an exotic, ‘colourful’ setting”,²³⁶ in this way featuring as visual entertainment rather than significant objects of thought to be taken seriously. For Kentridge, working with puppets was initially like, in his words, “swimming in a pool filled with rocks”,²³⁷ a hindrance, a static obstruction from the flow of movement that was to happen around them, and there are a number of stylistic devices he introduces to rectify this.²³⁸ The inclusion of European texts presents a melding of European other with African “self” and a more insular look at South Africa through a European lens; a more intense

²³⁵ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 71.

²³⁶ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 71.

²³⁷ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 73.

²³⁸ Here it is also interesting to note that Kentridge found the puppets to be a distraction from the “pleasure” of the theatre.

interrogation of the state through European literature, but further an interrogation of different kinds of “others” within a South African context. There is a sensitivity to race and the racialisation of puppet characters, and what race represents in relation to the role bestowed upon the puppet or actor, for example questioning whether Mephisto could be played by a black actor in *Faustus in Africa* (1995).²³⁹ The animal puppet (to be discussed in more detail in the next iteration) offers a further take on the human “other” in ways which branch away from human identity politics.

The first way that the puppet’s world is expanded in this phase is via Kentridge’s “drawings for projection”,²⁴⁰ stop-frame animations made from a continual process of drawing, erasing and redrawing, which, it was discovered, “could assist the audience in reaching into the thoughts of a puppet.”²⁴¹ Where Kohler provides the objects/subjects for the plays, Kentridge thus provides their mental landscapes and physical settings, often hinterland, inland, mining scenes. Within Handspring’s performances these animations served the dual purpose of conveying the puppet’s “inner world”,²⁴² a “cheap” stage set which profoundly figures the inner workings of the puppet’s mind, and satisfying Kentridge’s enquiry into “performing” drawings amongst other more conventional theatrical media, which ultimately became, in Kohler’s words, “one of the actors in the cast.”²⁴³ The stillness of the puppet represents thought, a moment of focus, and the contrast between the blur or movement of the images on the screen in relation to the prolonged stillness of the puppet’s body was a risky move at the time. In accordance with the rough and gestural charcoal marks seen in Kentridge’s animations, the stippled marks of the chisel were left raw on the surface of the puppet’s carved wooden “skin”, shown in the hands and the head, akin with various puppet makers who Kohler had studied from Mali to Bavaria who “were able to leave the mark of the chisel as part of their carving technique”.²⁴⁴ Kentridge’s designs, in the case of *Woyzeck on the Highveld*

²³⁹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 76. The play *Faustus in Africa* was adapted from *Faust* parts I and II by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe with additional text by Lesego Rampolokeng. Directed by William Kentridge.

²⁴⁰ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 69. Kohler describes Kentridge’s animations as “[s]hunning 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.” (Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 70)

²⁴¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 73.

²⁴² Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 73.

²⁴³ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 110.

²⁴⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 72.

(1992 and 2008),²⁴⁵ were “sometimes sourced from photographers like August Sander for *The Doctor*, and David Goldblatt for *Andries*, sometimes from his own drawings of Harry [a local man Kentridge had worked with] done over the previous years, for the head of *Woyzeck*”,²⁴⁶ and in *Faustus in Africa*, “Faustus [is] carved to look like the Belgian explorer Brazza and [...] the face of his servant, Johnson (who at the end of the play becomes President) [is] based on Patrice Lumumba”.²⁴⁷ These characters provide a further inter-medial link, tying the puppet to the photograph, particularly the documentary portrait or identity document photograph, an idea which is explored further in Chapter 2. Here the puppet as a “‘distilled’ representation”²⁴⁸ becomes the “close-up” image that makes up the foreground for Kentridge’s animated backdrop screens, first seen in *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, replacing two-dimensional drawn forms in a filmic version of itself, and becoming intrinsically bound to other materials, a multi-media being. At the turn of the century, in a later work, *Zeno at 4am/Confessions of Zeno* (2000),²⁴⁹ the human body is flattened completely as the puppet form moves to the projection screen, used by Kentridge as a kind of “reverse drawing” to create shadow puppets using both actors and cut-out puppet forms, which show the subconscious mind.

A second means of expanding the human puppet’s being in the world, which is largely answered by the inclusion of animation in the puppetry performances, was through an attempt to communicate further the *head*, that is, human emotion and psychology; “[c]ould the puppet figures handle infidelity, madness and murder? Could they communicate existential chaos?”²⁵⁰ In other words, how is the mind visually depicted? Kohler has noted that “[p]uppets 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”,²⁵¹ and thus, rather than articulations built into the face, “the language of the body” is used to convey facial expressions and moods. Expressions of the head are channelled through the body. This required a more intensive

²⁴⁵ Based on the playtext *Woyzeck* by Georg Büchner and directed by William Kentridge.

²⁴⁶ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 72.

²⁴⁷ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 76. There is more work to be done here in relation to the puppet characters and the political figures they are based on.

²⁴⁸ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 70.

²⁴⁹ Libretto by Jane Taylor, based on the novel by Italo Svevo. Music by Kevin Volans and directed by William Kentridge.

²⁵⁰ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 71.

²⁵¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 77.

exploration of the human body itself, particularly the inner workings and structure of the body, which can be seen in the puppet and its relation to “breath” and “blood”, most obviously in *Il Ritorno d’Ulisses* (1998 and 2008),²⁵² a puppet opera created in aesthetic and conceptual collaboration with Kentridge, which helped Handspring to see the significance of the acted movement of *breath* in linking puppet to voice²⁵³ and in uniting 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.”²⁵⁴ It is thus for the puppet the interior of the body, the armature or infrastructure, which provides evidence of life more so than the exterior. Interestingly, the puppets for this play were based on Greek sculpture and Baroque portraits, transforming classically static sculptural pieces into moving figures, while the theatre set was modelled on a nineteenth century operating theatre complete with circular tiered seating, linking the puppet body to “the discovery of the circulation of blood [and] a new understanding of the human organism.”²⁵⁵ The audience here becomes more implicitly involved in the “life” of the play, both with the recognition of breath, and as viewers in a different mode of theatre, a more focussed attention required.

Medium and material also contribute to the centrality and positionality of the human puppet during this period, and the rod puppet mechanism is used broadly to construct characters which could be closely controlled at waist-level, but light enough to be held and manipulated overhead, this determined by the size of the puppet and the weight of the wood and other materials which make up the body. Created at about half life-size, and controlled at the hands and at a central rod which attaches to the puppet’s head, the intimate relationship between puppet and puppeteer is further

²⁵² Music by Claudio Monteverdi with musical direction by Philippe Pierlot. Directed by William Kentridge.

²⁵³ Kohler elaborates: “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. [...] 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.” (Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 99)

²⁵⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 95.

²⁵⁵ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 92.

enhanced by a more considered “costume choice for the puppeteers”²⁵⁶ which shows a progression in thought around the puppeteer and how they operate and dress to serve the puppets. In *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1996),²⁵⁷ for example, they are “dressed in khaki dustcoats” so as to appear “as minor civil servants”.²⁵⁸ This play for the first time does away with the use of fixed props for “moving playboards”²⁵⁹ which open up the space for the puppets’ movement and habitation, perhaps reflective of socio-political transition from the rigid structures of apartheid into a potentially more changeable or mutable society. These more stylised and sophisticated changes in mechanisms and technologies make the puppet’s body and gestures more lifelike, more in sync with the human audience; but a focus on the puppet in this way actually seems to render it *less* human as a subject. Partly emphasised by their smaller scale, more equivalent to dolls that the puppeteers play *with*, instead of playing *as*, but also partly to do with making the trick of puppetry more obvious, the puppet in this guise discloses another sort of trickery – a distraction from the human self. How are puppets less human if they are more lifelike? Although as a mimetic form they have the potential to convey messages about the human subject, this also blocks thinking about the human through the puppet. In other words, the more obvious separation of object/subject makes it harder to see this blur; the puppet subject becomes *more* object, more *other* through a more lifelike, realistic rendering, more human than human, reiterating and reaffirming the distance between self and other.²⁶⁰

1.4 The Animal Puppet

Handspring uses the animal form variously, and it can be seen to function alongside and independently from the human puppet, often used as a means of providing commentary or background information similarly to a Greek chorus. Apart from the more obvious use of animals as protagonists, evident in the later *The Chimp Project*

²⁵⁶ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 89.

²⁵⁷ Written by Jane Taylor, with source testimony from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Archives, and directed by William Kentridge.

²⁵⁸ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 89.

²⁵⁹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 82.

²⁶⁰ In *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, this is also derived from the attempt to hold in the audience’s mind that the testimony they are hearing does not arise from these performers, but rather from an “elsewhere” in the world.

(2000),²⁶¹ *Tall Horse*²⁶² and *War Horse* (opened in 2007),²⁶³ animals including the Rhinoceros, the Hyena and the Crocodile (as in *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, *Faustus in Africa* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* respectively) have featured in the role of the pet or familiar, the assistant, the clown and the commentator. In this use of animal puppets, the divide between human and animal is often blurred, not only in the role taken on by the animal, but also in the form of the puppet and its manipulator, which together become a multi-limbed, hybrid creature or cyborg. As objects, these animal puppets also serve as theatrical devices, machines or props within the proceedings of a play, as can be seen most clearly in the pet puppets from *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, particularly the Vulture, created as a “programmed commentator on the action and emotion of the moment”,²⁶⁴ guiding the narrative and providing direction for characters in the play. Niles the Crocodile and the Dogs of War from *Ubu and the Truth Commission* were both created from bags of sentimental and representational value, a duffel bag and a briefcase respectively, a relation which presents a kind of erratic movement, an uncertain path bound to and determined by its human carrier.²⁶⁵ Niles became the solution to three needs in the production, an evidence shredder “for Ubu to destroy documents and other artefacts that might be used to incriminate him, [...] and Ma Ubu’s handbag which simultaneously serves as her “familiar” and the site in which she discovers Pa Ubu’s secrets “so that she could sell his story to the media.”²⁶⁶ He is thus “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.”²⁶⁷ The Dogs of War, a three-headed Cerberus dog, serves as Pa Ubu’s accomplice in wreaking “havoc on the enemies of the State under cover of darkness”,²⁶⁸ while the “briefcase end still functioned as a piece of slightly articulated luggage on wheels [which] could still snap open to receive the printed orders that

²⁶¹ Written by Peter Esterhuyzen and directed by Adrian Kohler and Kurt Wustman.

²⁶² A joint venture between Handspring Puppet Company and Sogolon Puppet Troupe of Mali (Yaya Coulibaly). Written by Khephra Burns, from the book *Zarafa* by Michael Allin, and directed by Marthinus Basson.

²⁶³ 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.

²⁶⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 83.

²⁶⁵ These animal puppets are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

²⁶⁶ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 85.

²⁶⁷ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 85.

²⁶⁸ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 88.

dictated the night's targets".²⁶⁹ Their doubled and tripled statuses, as both animal (puppets) and bags, and the different modes of anthropomorphism at play in each guise, situate these characters as janus-faced, transitional characters emblematic of the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid within the context of the TRC, a space both concealing and revealing, forgiving and damning.

As the year 2000 and the new century is reached, Handspring turns more decidedly to "reflect on issues other than the legacies of apartheid"²⁷⁰, and there is a clear switch to productions centred entirely on the animal form. The advent of "Y2K" and a renewed emphasis on the machine and the powers it is capable of at this time, particularly AI, have an effect on the more advanced engineering techniques of the puppet in terms of more readily available personal technologies and more sophisticated materials such as carbon fibre. The development of Handspring's puppet technologies are thus most clearly seen in their animal puppets because of the timing of this iteration in alignment with the technological obsession seen in society, but also because of the constantly changing forms required to suit each animal, which further evolves from one to the next. This can be seen, for example, in the progression of articulated "tendons" which allow movement in the legs, which "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" from *War Horse*.²⁷¹

Here the animal may act as a stuck or "jammed machine",²⁷² seen in the way the puppet is created with the parts necessary to perform only a certain set of movements, demonstrated most evidently in Woyzeck's Rhino which, "designed to work on the tabletop, had controls protruding horizontally from the upstage side and as a result could only perform in one direction."²⁷³ Helen of Troy's "pet, now a

²⁶⁹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 88.

²⁷⁰ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 100.

²⁷¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 134.

²⁷² Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 31.

²⁷³ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 73. The Rhino puppet is explored further in relation to Lacan's notion of the animal as a "jammed machine" in Chapter 3.

cowardly Hyena, a minor devil”²⁷⁴ in *Faustus in Africa* is controlled in a similar way, in that “its leg controls [protrude] from the upstage side of the figure”, and thus it “would always have to enter and exit in the same direction, from stage left to stage right”,²⁷⁵ but is further developed in terms of articulated limbs and jaws,²⁷⁶ made *more* animal, but used to perform human activities. These animals thus operate on a kind of conveyer belt or procession line, more filmic than performative. The puppet is normally associated with an up-and-down movement, and something happens here that it is “grounded” to move only left and right, backwards and forwards. *Faustus in Africa* is the first Handspring play where human personality is obviously attributed to the animal puppet, where the Hyena is made to “play” like a human, “smarm, act duplicitously and play drafts”²⁷⁷ and “confide in the audience” through its “wily grin”.²⁷⁸ This included an adaptation of the wrist and elbow actions of the puppet to mimic the movement made by people in the “moment when a hand hesitates above the pieces [in a board game] before making a move”,²⁷⁹ again expressing the human through the head and the hands/paws. Many of Handspring’s animals are carefully crafted to be endowed with hands that partake in “human” activities such as gambling and sign language,²⁸⁰ but I would further argue that even the less obviously “handed” animals can be seen to have hands or, in other words, appendages which act out a gestural language meant to convey the thoughts of the puppet. What is really happening here however is that there is a human being doing the thinking *behind* and *for* the animal puppet, controlling the movements through the thinking of their own hands. These puppets thus become animals who think human thoughts; Joey of *War Horse* becomes a Trojan Horse, or Bucephalus the polydactyl, a horse with toes,²⁸¹ or perhaps Don Quixote’s horse and “double”, “Rocinante”, as the

²⁷⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 75. The Hyena character was borrowed and adapted from “[t]he cat in Bulgakov’s tribute to Goethe, *The Master and Margarita*”. (Ibid)

²⁷⁵ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 76.

²⁷⁶ In the development of the jaw, “[t]he 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.” (Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 77)

²⁷⁷ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 76.

²⁷⁸ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 77.

²⁷⁹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 77.

²⁸⁰ See the hyena in *Faustus in Africa*, and Lisa the chimp character in *The Chimp Project* respectively.

²⁸¹ See Franz Kafka’s *The New Advocate* (1917)

“Spanish cleaning ladies” at the British National Theatre dubbed the prototype War Horse.²⁸²

However, as Handspring enters into this phase, an anxiety with accurate and realistic storyline also seems to arise – the animals must behave as animals would, not as humans might imagine them to act. In fact, in *War Horse*, Handspring’s majorly acclaimed production initially performed as part of the British National Theatre’s “programme aimed at younger audiences”, which portrays “[t]he horrors of the war [as] told from the horse’s vantage point,²⁸³ anthropomorphism in the theatre is seen as “dangerous”, and Kohler expresses an anxiety around the “horse narrating” the story.²⁸⁴ Rather, “[t]he human/horse and horse/horse relationships would be represented as they are in the real world”,²⁸⁵ and the actors or puppeteers were to “become horse”, via a series of walking and looking exercises aimed at developing “authentic” animal behaviour.²⁸⁶ The human becoming animal is thus in this instance differentiated through gesture and vision. The War Horse puppeteers have, over the course of the show’s many performances, “developed their own parallel text, used amongst themselves, to motivate actions from a horse’s point of view”²⁸⁷ which is passed down and contains “suggestion [...] 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.”²⁸⁸ Similarly, the Castelet antelope figures from *Tall Horse*, made with fringed cane hoops, became “powerful dancing extension[s]” for the puppeteers, their “personality and movement ability [...] completely readable from outside”.²⁸⁹ Here it could be said that humans become animal via the puppet form, as opposed to the chimps in *The Chimp Project* who “become” human through their mode of language.

²⁸² Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 137.

²⁸³ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 128.

²⁸⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 131.

²⁸⁵ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 131.

²⁸⁶ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 134.

²⁸⁷ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 140.

²⁸⁸ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 144.

²⁸⁹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 126.

The thoroughly researched *The Chimp Project*²⁹⁰ shows an important emphasis on creating “realistic”, scientifically accurate storylines and puppet animal forms (also in the interests of moving away from anthropomorphism), following the story of a chimp called Lisa, “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 attack the sanctuary. Inside her new community she teaches human sign language to her wild offspring.”²⁹¹ This explores the connections and divides between humans and their chimp relatives, and further between animals in the wild and animals tamed or in captivity (for Kohler and Jones, “particularly those in the experiments involving chimps and human sign language in the USA and Japan”²⁹²), specifically in relation to thought and language. There is a significant link to the hand here as a mode of thought – both in relation to the animal’s intelligent use of the hand, and to sign language as literally a language of the hands. Kohler has noted that director Peter Brook “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”,²⁹³ highlighting the communication of the puppets and puppeteers as a further mode of thought which comes into being in the duration of the performance.

Animal-centred productions presented new challenges in adapting puppet design and performance to the agility, strength and speed of, for example, a chimpanzee or a horse; that is, matching the animal puppet to the biologically real animal. In the case of the chimpanzee the puppet is created with “[i]nterlocking plywood sections” for the limbs and bendable nylon rods for the rib cages²⁹⁴ while in the horse, the process of carving is put aside for a lighter plywood and cane structure “sewn” together with thick wax thread and supported by an aluminium spine “ladder” and backpacks on the puppeteers’ backs.²⁹⁵ The ear and tail movements, the “indicators

²⁹⁰ For this production Kohler and Jones visited Gombe Stream Chimp Reserve, studied chimp skeletons in Wits medical school anatomy dept with guidance from the palaeontologist Philip Tobias, and studied the work of Jane Goodall, RA and BT Gardner and Roger and Deborah Fouts. (Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 109)

²⁹¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 105.

²⁹² Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 102.

²⁹³ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 111.

²⁹⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 109.

²⁹⁵ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 134.

of the thoughts and emotions of the horse”,²⁹⁶ were cable-controlled, the tail tendons “mimicked by bicycle brake cables.”²⁹⁷ The horses were designed to be strong enough to carry a rider, and with two manipulators were ultimately made up of eight legs not four, as well as a set of four hands, in that “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.”²⁹⁸ Hands and legs thus work in close collaboration. In *The Chimp Project* the “chimps had to have four articulated limbs, which implied at least two and sometimes three manipulators per puppet” and “[b]ecause 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.”²⁹⁹ The hands thus play a particularly significant role in this play in multiple ways. The chimp fur in its social function, as seen in mutual grooming and display, was an important consideration in the chimp puppets and the way they would behave,³⁰⁰ and in the puppets was created from a sheer nylon gauze, the material in this context taking on a social function, becoming relational. The hands and fingers have always been of significance to the design of Handspring’s puppets and Kohler has since the beginning “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.”³⁰¹ In *War Horse* he managed to develop a wider range of movement in the horse’s ears, as well as the wings of the goose, crow and swallow puppets, through adjusting the drive point of control.

Tall Horse, a collaboration with the Sogolon Puppet Troupe of Mali led by Yaya Coulibaly, was for Kohler, a significant and lasting legacy of the “sharing of techniques” between the two companies, evident in a difference in approach and process but also in the relationship each maker has with materials; Kohler “always work[s] things out in great detail on paper before committing to material. Yaya works

²⁹⁶ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 135.

²⁹⁷ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 137.

²⁹⁸ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 134.

²⁹⁹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 109.

³⁰⁰ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 105.

³⁰¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 135.

directly in wood.”³⁰² The production revolved around the “true story of the giraffe that was given to the King of France by the Pasha of Egypt in the 1820s [...] initially intended as a means of political persuasion [...] 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.”³⁰³ This story was used as a means of alluding “to something beautiful coming out of Africa”,³⁰⁴ and here it is also interesting to note that the mining company AngloGold Ashanti takes over sponsorship of the production from the John F. Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts, linking the play to another “beautiful” commodity to come out of Africa; gold. The play ends when the “giraffe walks across Paris skyline and turns into the Eiffel Tower”,³⁰⁵ in this way linking Paris and Mali, Europe and Africa. Here Africa literally *becomes* Europe, from armature to infrastructure. In a similar sense the horse puppets in *War Horse* are the infrastructure of the colonial rider. To inhabit the armature of these puppets means to inhabit a European infrastructure, through both narrative and form. To walk in and amongst this infrastructure, using the puppet as a kind of armour, an emotional prosthesis, both shields and exposes the (South African) human subject to the colonial in the post-colonial. To use the puppet as a buffer but also a dwelling poses and mimics a certain kind of problematic inherent to post-apartheid South Africa, perhaps a kind of refusal of responsibility. But it is also perhaps through this imaginative that alternate channels become apparent; alternate modes of seeing, touching and doing. In the Chapters that follow I explore some of these potentials through Handspring’s work and it’s relation to South African society.

³⁰² Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 121.

³⁰³ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 120-121.

³⁰⁴ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 120.

³⁰⁵ Millar, *Journey of the Tall*, 277.

CHAPTER 2:

DRAWING ON THE PUPPET; UNFOLDING THE SUBJECT

2.1 Blurred and Broken Drawings

2.2 Taking a Line for a Walk: The Discipline of Drawing

2.3 Handspring's Paper Afterlife: Digging the Archive

2.4 The Tactical Unconscious



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DRAWING ON THE PUPPET; UNFOLDING THE SUBJECT

“The gesture of making is a gesture of hatred. It draws limits, excludes, overpowers, transforms. The gesture of presentation, conversely, is a gesture of love. It donates, gives something away, it offers itself and gives itself up. As they present their work, the hands offer themselves to another. They expose their work, making it public. The gesture of presentation is a political gesture. It is the gesture of opening. The gesture of making ends with the opening of the hands to others. Seen from its conclusion, the gesture of making is therefore a gesture of love with respect to another.”³⁰⁶

“The word ‘unfolding’ has a double meaning. A bud unfolds into a blossom, but the boat which one teaches children to make by folding paper unfolds into a flat sheet of paper. This second kind of ‘unfolding’ is really appropriate to parable; the reader takes pleasure in smoothing it out so that he has the meaning on the palm of his hand.”³⁰⁷

This chapter explores drawing and its integral connection to puppetry within the Handspring archive, through an analysis of the former discipline as a kind of gestural semiotics, both a “migrant” and “place-making” practice or “system of signs”,³⁰⁸ a “nomadology” defined simultaneously by a movement and a stillness, and a kind of “writing” which serves as a map for locating and reassessing the dispossessed, dislocated, marginal or fugitive subject, seen in this case in the form of the puppet. In other words, through drawing as a mode of analysis, as a visual practice which is equally bound up in tactility or *hapticality*, and one concerned with the signs that line and surface convey, the mode of making the Handspring puppet in its two-dimensional drawn form can be paralleled with the formulation of the human subject in its relation to place and processes related to place-making, both in terms of physicality and representation, that is, both empirically and aesthetically. Looking specifically at Handspring’s paper archive as a collection of “blurred” or “broken” drawings, relics or residues of the role of the hand in the creative process, which I am positioning as “horizontal” images, I see this section of their archive as

³⁰⁶ Flusser, *Gestures*, 47.

³⁰⁷ Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, 802. The “first is an organic process that the object of unfolding itself performs; the second is a mechanical process to which the object of unfolding is subjected. The first embodies the self-determination of the object and results in plurality and differentiation; the second is structured by relations of authority [...] and can only result in singularity.” (Beasley-Murray, *On Some Seminal Motifs*, 775)

³⁰⁸ Ashwin, *Drawing, Design and Semiotics*, 42.

demonstrative of “the great role works of art can play in the ethical project of *becoming* (collectively and individually) *oneself in a particular place*”.³⁰⁹

Drawing as a “migrant” practice can be figured as politicised, not solely in its subject matter but also as a process in that it

involves the movement of the body in relation to space and place; and it correlates with the movement of the eye scanning an object to be rendered or a plane to be traversed in coordination with a series of acts performed by the hand. Movement as process is paramount too in the making of a drawing: small thinking acts and decisions become material through connecting lines and the bringing together of nodes in a network of shifting trajectories. When the drawing is finished, it has become something else — a trace of the drawing.³¹⁰

Here “drawing’s friable, slight, erasable, partial and fragmentary qualities perform, enact and critique the very conditions that give rise to it.”³¹¹ This is, following Andrew Hewitt, “to ask how we might understand the relationship between the political and the aesthetic when the prevailing paradigm for art is performative – that is, when we focus on the dynamics of the ‘work’ of art as a system of production, rather than on the artefact itself.”³¹² For Leoni Schmidt “drawing as a practice can par excellence make the nomadism and marginality of the migrant materially manifest in its subtle ways of unsettling our conceptions of borders and their concomitant states of stability.”³¹³ To move and be in stillness or dwell in the *blurs* and the *breaks* of becoming subject, often, and this more so for certain oppressed and marginalised subjects, requires becoming object, destabilising or blurring the borders between subject and object. This can pose a danger, a threat; but what can the subject learn by being object - a notion which is evident in Handspring’s drawings – by dwelling “in the break”?³¹⁴ This is to ask, following Jack Halberstam, how “we resolve to live with brokenness, with being broke, which is also what [Fred] Moten and [Stefano] Harney call ‘debt’”, eternally bound up with “sometimes a history of giving, at other times a

³⁰⁹ Carter, *Material Thinking*, XII.

³¹⁰ Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 53.

³¹¹ Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 58.

³¹² Hewitt, *Social Choreography*, 5.

³¹³ Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 66. To elaborate, “[d]rawing can be done with the minimum of tools and materials. [...] Thus it lends itself to situations in which people are transitory or even fugitive. [...] But, more importantly perhaps, drawing is not only linked to the circumstances of migration, but is also akin to the process of migration through the movement involved in its making.” (Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 53)

³¹⁴ See Harney & Moten, *The Undercommons*.

history of taking, at all times a history of capitalism and given that debt also signifies a promise of ownership but never delivers on that promise, we have to understand that debt is something that cannot be paid off.”³¹⁵ Here there is “fear, trepidation, concern and disorientation”, even violence, but there is simultaneously a productive and nurturing “state of dispossession” formed collectively by “spaces and modalities that exist separate from the logical, logistical, the housed and the positioned”; what Moten and Harney refer to as “a ‘being together in homelessness’ which does not idealize homelessness nor merely metaphorize it.”³¹⁶ What this mode of “homelessness” offers instead is a “gesture to another place, a wild place that is not simply the left over space that limns real and regulated zones of polite society; rather, it is a wild place that continuously produces its own unregulated wildness.”³¹⁷ It allows an opening to

take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that, right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls. We cannot say what new structures will replace the ones we live with yet, because once we have torn shit down, we will inevitably see more and see differently and feel a new sense of wanting and being and becoming. What we want after ‘the break’ will be different from what we think we want before the break and both are necessarily different from the desire that issues from being in the break.³¹⁸

This wild place lies somewhere between the sea and the hinterland, bound to a state of fugitivity “separate from settling”³¹⁹ that is both, in Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s terms, a “smooth” and “striated” space. These smooth and striated “models of becoming” are marked by nonmetric, acentred and rhizomatic “flows” and “flux” and homogenous “conduits” and “channels” respectively – two different modes of thought and movement which nevertheless together allow for “both separation and

³¹⁵ Halberstam, *The Wild Beyond*, 5. “Debt, as Harney puts it, presumes a kind of individualized relation to a naturalized economy that is predicated upon exploitation.” (Ibid)

³¹⁶ Halberstam, *The Wild Beyond*, 11. This “disorientation, Moten and Harney will tell you is not just unfortunate, it is necessary because you will no longer be in one location moving forward to another, instead you will already be part of the ‘movement of things’ and on the way to this ‘outlawed social life of nothing.’” (Ibid)

³¹⁷ Halberstam, *The Wild Beyond*, 7.

³¹⁸ Halberstam, *The Wild Beyond*, 6. “[W]e must make common cause with those desires and (non) positions that seem crazy and unimaginable: we must, on behalf of this alignment, refuse that which was first refused to us and in this refusal reshape desire, reorient hope, reimagine possibility and do so separate from the fantasies nestled into rights and respectability.” (Halberstam, *The Wild Beyond*, 11-12)

³¹⁹ Halberstam, *The Wild Beyond*, 11.

mixing”.³²⁰ The former is defined by “vortical or swirling movement”, while the latter is “sedentary [...] striated, by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures”.³²¹ Striated space, however, is both limited and limiting; “limited in its parts, which are assigned constant directions, are oriented in relation to one another, divisible by boundaries, and can interlink; what is limiting [...] is this aggregate in relation to the smooth spaces it ‘contains,’ whose growth it slows or prevents, and which it restricts or places outside.”³²² Furthermore,

[o]ne of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space. It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations and, more generally, to establish a zone of rights over an entire “exterior,” over all of the flows traversing the ecumenon.”³²³

It is thus that “the response of the State against all that threatens to move beyond it is to striate space”,³²⁴ throttling the potentialities and possibilities of the smooth for both the collective and the individual, but perhaps when placed in a dialectic, the “interpenetration” of the two models can offer “alternatives” not possible with either model independently of the other.³²⁵ The Handspring drawings function, as I will show, as both smooth and striated images; blurred or broken drawings – or perhaps rather drawings “of the break” - that is, of a homelessness, a fugitivity, a nomadology which merges two contrasting models. What they thus contain is a means of refiguring or opening up channels of thought around the South African subject through an investigation of the practice and materiality of drawing in its connection to the “becoming subject” of the puppet.

This exploration of drawing is thus in some sense an investigation of surfaces and the marks made on them (that is, as smooth and/or striated), but further of the hand as it can be figured as surface or screen; a tablet or slate onto which the desires of

³²⁰ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 371.

³²¹ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 381.

³²² Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 382.

³²³ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 385.

³²⁴ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 386.

³²⁵ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 371.

our head are etched or projected and subsequently acted out. This “tabula rasa” is cross-pollinated by the mediums of film and photography, as art forms or disciplines concerned with “surface”, but further in their connection to movement and stillness (migrancy and settling).³²⁶ This line of inquiry is figured through Walter Benjamin’s conception of the “optical unconscious”, which I use to think further about the notion of a “tactile unconscious” in relation to Handspring’s drawings, and how seemingly inconsequential and accidentally made marks can be thought about in relation to the hands (and bodies) that made them, and to the subjects of the drawings they appear on. The tactile unconscious is connected to the materiality of the drawings, and exists in a smooth space as “a space of contact, of small tactile or manual actions of contact, rather than a visual space like Euclid’s striated space.”³²⁷ While Benjamin (and more recently Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski, among others) use the optical unconscious to refer directly to photography and the history it has as a certain kind of technology, I use the concept to look at the traces of the hand evident in Handspring’s drawings which come to stand in for a particular process; a touch which is intrinsically linked to the visual. Touch is inherent to the practice and performance of puppetry, but it is unavailable to the audience, the viewer, who must experience it through the eyes – a projected, imagined touch. The notion also attempts to draw attention to the multiple forms of touch inherent in Handspring’s drawings which often go overlooked – that is, Kohler’s hand as artist or writer of the images, the touch of the maker or craftsperson inherent in the puppetry-making process, the puppeteers’ touch required to bring the puppet to life, the excess marks of making here positioned as blurs and breaks, and finally the implied touch of the human and animal subjects within the drawings. The tactile unconscious has allowed me to think more extensively about the blurred or broken drawing and how it is

³²⁶ According to Rosalind Krauss, “[i]n its address to themes of movement, painting had always tried to precipitate out the *pose* that would constellate its idea, but in so doing, motion which [...] occurs *in between* the possible postures would always have escaped. For any given minute, however, the movie camera, in its total arbitrariness, captures twenty-four any-instants-what-ever, none of them infected with the fatal stillness of the pose, each of them capable of ceding its place to its successor in the relay that constitutes the in-between of a motion that is never *in* the moving subject but in the relay itself, in the space between two “nows,” one appearing and one disappearing.” (Krauss, *The Rock*, 18-19) Walter Benjamin, referenced by Tim Beasley-Murray, “says: ‘Let us consider the screen [*Leinwand*] on which a film unfolds [*abrollt*] with the canvas [*Leinwand*] of a painting. The painting invites the viewer to contemplation; before it, he can give himself up to his train of associations. Before a film image, he cannot do so. No sooner has he seen it than it has already changed. It cannot be fixed.’ Where painting remains a static part of the material world, film’s dynamic unfolding shows qualities associated with the organic and the animate.” (Beasley-Murray, *On Some Seminal Motifs*, 783)

³²⁷ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 371.

defined – thinking drawing alongside photography (and by extension, film), has opened up interpretations of the screen or surface and in this way allowed broader thinking around the marks made *on* the screen. Here touch, “skin talk, tongue touch, breath speech, hand laugh”, more specifically defined in Moten and Harney’s terms as “hapticality” is figured as “the touch of the undercommons, [...] the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you, this feel of the shipped is not regulated, at least not successfully, by a state, a religion, a people, an empire, a piece of land, a totem.”³²⁸ To discuss surface in relation to the human subject is to look to place-making in terms of the representation of the subject in the image, as in drawing and the mediums of film and photography, but it is also further connected to the skin as the “surface” of the human body. To situate Handspring’s drawings as “skins” then opens up a clear connection to the aesthetic figuring of race, perhaps particularly in South Africa; the blurs and breaks of the drawings position the subject as “marked”, stained.³²⁹ As Huey Copeland has pointed out, the black subject has “to endure the process of ‘epidermalization,’ which, as philosopher Frantz Fanon shows, constitutes the black subject as a text transparent to the anxieties thrown up on his skin.”³³⁰

According to Paul Carter, the “impulse to identify *poiesis*, or ‘making’, with *place*-making is no doubt a widespread migrant tendency”,³³¹ and in a South African context, the figure of the migrant is inextricably linked to labour (and by extension to mining - that is in the form of the migrant labourer),³³² and must continually make place, make “home”, but as migrant labourer must also simply *make* as a major part

³²⁸ Harney & Moten, *The Undercommons*, 98.

³²⁹ Fred Moten’s two interconnected books *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003) and *Black and Blur* (2017), both offer alternative definitions of “break” and “blur” in the context of subject/object relations and the resistance of the object in relation to the history of blackness. There is much more work to be done around these terms in their connection to race than I have included here, but I think they offer up productive and alternative openings.

³³⁰ Copeland, *Bound to Appear*, 120. Fanon also refers to a practice of “lactification” amongst black subjects, which “[i]n a word” expresses the desire for the (black) race to be “whitened”, (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 29) and presents a further comparison to the blank slate of the plain white page. Unlike Moten, Fanon is curious about the structural limits of what race calls forth – what can this affective turn mean for older problematisations of race?

³³¹ Carter, *Material Thinking*, 2.

³³² The migrant also holds a distinction between race and ethnicity in South African historiography and political discourse.

of existence, make work, make products - *produce*.³³³ The “place” made here then is one governed by labour, by work – one of continual movement and transition, the aim or outcome of which is to create capital, connected to “how South African racial oppression and dictatorship has been rooted in the need of South African capitalism for cheap labour”.³³⁴ Race is thus connected to work and its ties to place-making in terms of “[s]egregation as a labour policy (i.e., a migrant labour system based on reserves and compounds)”,³³⁵ which is carried through to apartheid as the “model for the organisation of labour supply in the urban areas”.³³⁶ This “racist ideology and policy and the State now not only appear as the means for the reproduction of segregation and racial discrimination generally, but also as what they really are, the means for the reproduction of a particular mode of production.”³³⁷ Thus in terms of race and labour, it could be said that, at its inception, the migrant is the “sign” or “definition” of apartheid, the “townships” or “locations”, “carefully segregated and police controlled areas that resemble mining compounds on a large scale”,³³⁸ built

³³³ Within the context of mining in South Africa, “[l]abour practices followed the existing migratory pattern for domestic and foreign labour in industry, a pattern which exists to this day. Gold miners, like diamond miners, were accommodated in compounds, often segregated by ethnic group, and contracted for 18-month stints with no certainty of reengagement. [...] The fact that these miners came from all over southern Africa meant that the migratory system of labour would retard opportunity for men to progress up the ladder of skills and would for a very long time establish that the barrier of colour became also a barrier to advancement.” (Harington, McGlashan & Chelkowska, *A Century of Migrant*, 65) Ruth First has pointed out that “from the start, the mines have had to find not only abundant supplies of labour, but labour that was cheap. These two rather incompatible aims were achieved in two main ways. The first was to use only contracted migrant labour at cut-throat wages, on the assumption that African mineworkers - brought from their rural homes to the Reef for stipulated contract periods - were really peasants, able to subsidise mine wages from the land. The second was to achieve a labour recruiting monopoly and to reduce costs of wages, food and quarters by setting up a highly centralised system for controlling wages. These methods have been preserved intact to this day.” (First, *The Gold of Migrant*, 8) See also Wolpe, *Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power* and Wilson *Historical Roots of Inequality*.

³³⁴ Legassick, *Review: Capitalist Roots*, 357. Here Legassick has noted how “white politics itself revolved around the issues of creating, regulating and distributing a supply of cheap African labour. For the owners of each of the main branches of production (mines, farms, urban commerce and industry) it was not enough to create a cheap labour force – each wanted government policy to maximise its own supply.” (Ibid) Harold Wolpe has also pointed out, without the intent to “detract[...] from the conception of the State as an instrument of White domination [...] that the South African state is also an instrument of class rule in a specific form of capitalist society.” (Wolpe, *Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power*, 429)

³³⁵ Legassick, *Review: Capitalist Roots*, 357.

³³⁶ Wilson, *Historical Roots of Inequality*, 6. Harold Wolpe has noted, via Legassick, that apartheid “in some ways, goes beyond the previous system in practice as well as in theory; and, in the economic sphere Apartheid ‘modernises’ the system of cheap *migrant* labour and perfects the instruments of labour coercion”. (Wolpe, *Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power*, 426) He establishes that “Apartheid is the attempt of the capitalist class to meet the expanding demand for cheap African labour in the era of industrial manufacturing capital; at the same time it is the realisation of the demand of White workers for protection against the resulting increased competition from Black workers.” (Wolpe, *Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power*, 427)

³³⁷ Wolpe, *Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power*, 429.

³³⁸ Legassick, *South Africa: Forced Labour*, 47.

initially as an extension of this system, still existent as a major part of geographical place-making for many black and coloured South Africans in the post-apartheid. It could further be said that South Africa as a country, and by extension the collective and individual South African subject, is in a continual state of transition or migrancy in terms of the place-making of a “post-apartheid” state; setting “sail for another place, a place that is neither the home [...] left nor the home to which [one] wants to return.”³³⁹

2.1 Blurred and Broken Drawings

Making place for the migrant puppet subject, Kohler and Jones act as “migrants” or *bricoleurs* themselves, conjuring up worlds and creating the subjects in these worlds, and in so doing, crafting a version of South Africa as a certain kind of space through theatrical narrative. The puppets are migrants within the stories chosen by Handspring, but also present a sense of making place for the migrant self; Handspring’s “place” being the mine, both in its historical significance in the place-making of South Africa, and in its geographical connections to surface and line which link it to both drawing and puppetry, the puppet on its strings akin to a kind of mine shaft or elevator. Many of their productions also seem to be set in a kind of hinterland, perhaps the Highveld; landlocked, bound to the dry and barren landscape of the mines. Handspring’s archival collection has been scrupulously compiled by Jones and Kohler, who are also partners, from the Company’s inception in 1981 to the present, and is now stored at their home in Kalk Bay, Cape Town, in cardboard boxes, filing cabinets and cupboards in the garage and in their studio. It must be read as both historical document and artistic work; the product of a self-archiving process which curates and keeps an artistic practice, and in so doing, “troubles the binary opposition between creativity and conservation.”³⁴⁰ For Achille Mbembe, “[e]xamining archives is to be interested in that which life has left behind, to be interested in debt. However, it is also to be preoccupied with debris”,³⁴¹ the “debt” or debris of the hand. In this case the conservative, disciplined nature of the hand in the keeping and collecting of the paper material is contrasted with the chaos of the hand, which is revealed in the unconsciously collected marks evident in this material, the

³³⁹ Halberstam, *The Wild Beyond*, 7.

³⁴⁰ Roberts, *Keeping the Self*, 301.

³⁴¹ Mbembe, *The Power*, 25.

uncontrollable, unpredictable or undisciplined actions of the hand, and in this sense the creative process is revealed in the drawings, but not necessarily through their subject matter. At the same time as this archive functions to store what is “dead” or “left behind”, it can be seen as a “living archive”, a constantly expanding and shifting body of work which is in continual use. With repeated performances of certain productions the puppets are hauled out of storage and into use again, and the “living” drawings provide recurring reference which Kohler consults in the creation of new puppets and productions, addressing Ronald Suresh Roberts’ question of “how the liveliness of art [...] can avoid extinction within the cemetery ethos of the archive”, so that the “archive begins to seem more womb [...] than tomb.”³⁴² For Clive Ashwin, “[t]he status of designers’ drawing may change with the passage of time and change of circumstances [...] If such drawings have any continuing value it is for their poetic or aesthetic function”,³⁴³ and Handspring’s archive shows this passage of time, this duration, and conveys something about changing economies of value, allowing the drawings to be figured as a system of signs to be semiotically decoded, offering further insight into the puppetry productions as a whole.

The material status or “nature of the archive – at least before digitalisation – means that it is inscribed in the universe of the senses; a tactile universe because the document can be touched, a visual universe because it can be seen, a cognitive universe because it can be read and decoded.”³⁴⁴ This intimate relation with the tactile forms of the archive has helped me to more extensively appreciate the materiality of the puppetry-making process in its entirety, particularly in terms of the initial conception of the puppet and the varying nodes of thought that go into it in engineering the move from two- to three-dimensions,³⁴⁵ but further to gain insight into the interconnected personal and political motivations and relations behind Handspring’s puppetry practice and performance. Working daily in this space, I was often reminded of the close proximity to the sea, to the harbour at Kalk Bay set within the wider expanse of False Bay, a fact that is often remarked on as a significant part

³⁴² Roberts, *Keeping the Self*, 302. Here Roberts explores the question of the “novelist as self-archivist” through the writing of Nadine Gordimer.

³⁴³ Ashwin, *Drawing, Design and Semiotics*, 50.

³⁴⁴ Mbembe, *The Power*, 20.

³⁴⁵ It may also seem counter-intuitive to discuss two-dimensional imagery in relation to an artistic practice in which the three-dimensional form is so integral, but drawing plays a major part in Handspring’s practice as both a preparatory or planning medium, and as a theatrical device within puppetry performances.

of Handspring's biography,³⁴⁶ the smell and feel of the heavy salty air often howling through the garden, sticking to the glass window panes which look out over the bay. Yet, as I became more familiar with the significant set of Handspring productions, I could not seem to find the sea, what Deleuze and Guattari see as the "principal" smooth space,³⁴⁷ in them. Where was the ocean, the beach, the port, the harbour? This may seem an arbitrary observation, but it becomes significant when one thinks of the importance of the ocean in South Africa's history as a colonised country, a history which Handspring's oeuvre otherwise seems eager to address or convey. As far as I can tell, the sea seems to exist only as an implied or transitory entity in their work; something to cross, to travel over, to overcome distance – a minor background detail, passing scene or means of exit, existent only in a space outside of the play, a place beyond.³⁴⁸ However, rather than in the content or subject matter of the productions, the sea is evident in another perhaps more surprising way; that is, *in the materials*, or rather in the material afterlife of the productions, the proximity of the fragile materials of the archive to the sea and the salty ocean air 'rusting' them, chemically altering their surfaces and structure. Handspring's puppetry-making practice is also rather like shipbuilding in the ribbed armatures and floating "weightlessness" of its material forms, and in building structures that bring Europe to Africa.³⁴⁹ The drawings are in this sense maps to both the mine and the sea in different ways, maps that can potentially assist in re-figuring the conception of the human subject in these spaces. To embrace the sea, the materiality, the hapticality, is to embrace a kind of constant unpredictability, possible sea change, to trust the process and the ever-shifting movement of things; while the "groundedness" of the mining landscape is in alignment with the more "rationalised" marks of Kohler's hand which structure and situate the puppet subjects in their formative stages. The puppets are slaves, shipped across sea, a precarious existence between subject/object, but they are also miners, they *are* the tools they wield, the ground they dig, dirtied, soiled; the drawings stacked in layered racks like the excavated

³⁴⁶ See, for example, Millar, *Journey of the Tall*.

³⁴⁷ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 387. The sea is defined as "the hydraulic model par excellence. But the sea is also, of all smooth spaces, the first one attempts were made to striate, to transform into a dependency of the land, with its fixed routes, constant directions, relative movements, a whole counterhydraulic of channels and conduits." (Ibid)

³⁴⁸ The most obvious example being Pa and Ma Ubu escaping in a sail boat at the end of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* – the sea a means of exit.

³⁴⁹ See my comments in relation to *Tall Horse* and *War Horse* at the end of the previous chapter.

layers of earth or the bunks in mining hostels. The horizontality of both these landscapes allows a discussion of surface and line – screens or surfaces broken, divided by line – but the “striated” space of the mine contrasts the transient, “smooth” nature of the sea, and it is such that the drawings “remain in the hold, in the break”,³⁵⁰ existent somewhere between these two spaces, both a separation and a mixing of them.³⁵¹ This serves as a reminder

that the proliferation of borders between states, within states, between people, within people is a proliferation of states of statelessness. These borders grope their way toward the movement of things, bang on containers, kick at hostels, harass camps, shout after fugitives, seeking all the time to harness this movement of things, this logisticality. But this fails to happen, borders fail to cohere, because the movement of things will not cohere. This logisticality will not cohere.³⁵²

The preparatory puppet drawings must somehow have movement drawn into their stillness, and it is partly in this way that they are images of the hands and feet, of walking, of movement; rather than of the eye or looking. They now have an ingrained memory of performance built into them – both a past and a present, a recollection and an anticipation. They are “stills” from the filmic play, doubles or infrastructures of the three-dimensional object.³⁵³ The drawings are smoothed out on the hand, but are also literally “underfoot”, their positioning on the horizontal plane, often laid flat on a grounded surface or floor in order to fulfil their use as templates for puppet bodies, and collectively layered and folded, placed underneath one another to be stored, positions them as already made for the stage – to be walked on and over. This is particularly apparent when they are contrasted with the vertical planes of art gallery display systems, which are aligned with “the conception of the picture as representing a world, some sort of worldspace which reads on the picture plane in correspondence with the erect human posture. The top of the picture corresponds to where we hold our heads aloft; while its lower edge gravitates to where we place our feet.”³⁵⁴ The horizontality of the drawings can be paralleled with the ground and the

³⁵⁰ Harney & Moten, *The Undercommons*, 94.

³⁵¹ See Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 371.

³⁵² Harney & Moten, *The Undercommons*, 94.

³⁵³ See Krauss, *The Rock*, 23.

³⁵⁴ Steinberg, *The Flatbed Picture Plane*, 1.

excavation of the horizontal earth in the practice of mining. To flip the screen onto a horizontal plane, to ground it, alters the image and the meaning behind it, paralleling it with “the horizontals on which we walk and sit, work and sleep”,³⁵⁵ and charging it “with further affinities for anything that is flat and worked over—palimpsest, cancelled plate, printer’s proof, trial blank, chart, map, aerial view.”³⁵⁶ Additionally, the “flatbed picture plane makes its symbolic allusion to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards—any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed - whether coherently or in confusion.”³⁵⁷

Over time I began to notice that certain marks – alterations or damage - what I’m posing as “blurs” or “breaks” occurred repeatedly on the surfaces of the batches of drawings I was processing. As markers of migrancy, these “broken” drawings position the subject, both in terms of the drawing’s surface as subject, and in relation to the changing subject matter of each drawing, as “blurred” – transient, processual – in line with Patricia Hayes’s notion of the blurred photograph, which suggests a resistance to focus, and questions the historical possibility of clarity.³⁵⁸ According to Hayes, “most contemporary modes of taking photographs have predetermined settings that push users towards clarity and sharpness and, by inference, an impression of narrative and even historical clarity.”³⁵⁹ For Hayes this is also to do with vision, and the way we are trained to *look*, but more so the way history is told through the visual. For Hayes, the “blur appears to destabilise the normative boundaries and centredness of the subject. It is also a stain on the taken-for-granted reputation for visual exposition of the present that is then ostensibly immediately past.”³⁶⁰ Blurring the (historical) subject is to take alternative perspectives on the subject, and Handspring’s drawings offer a means of rethinking the South African subject through its connection to the puppet, but also in relation to the marks or trace of the hand, both consciously and unconsciously made. The drawings are often

³⁵⁵ Steinberg, *The Flatbed Picture Plane*, 3.

³⁵⁶ Steinberg, *The Flatbed Picture Plane*, 3.

³⁵⁷ Steinberg, *The Flatbed Picture Plane*, 1.

³⁵⁸ Interestingly, according to Hayes, via Lindsay Smith, “[f]ocus’ as a term shifted from its theatrical definition as the ‘best illuminated part of the stage’ to the ‘best articulated part of a photographic image’.” (Hayes, *The Blur of History*, 156)

³⁵⁹ Hayes, *The Blur of History*, 160.

³⁶⁰ Hayes, *The Blur of History*, 164.

creased and puckered over their surfaces, sometimes quite badly so, and folded in half or into quartered sections, sometimes linear folds, and sometimes completely skew. This is done to fit them into the A1 and A0 sized folders they are stored in, which are made from sheets of thin card, usually recycled posters or the like, and sometimes from padded plastic-coated card, folded over once to create an open booklet which the drawings are slotted into. The drawings are often torn at the edges and folded or creased at the corners. Sometimes these tears are repaired with masking tape, but often they are not. The tears and folds are physical changes or interruptions in the drawings – abrasions or breaks which are in part made for practicality's sake, but change the bodies of the drawings. Many of them have pin holes at one or more edge, and some have holes punched into their surfaces from use as a kind of pattern or stencil template in the creation of puppet parts. On top of these more “physical” marks there often appeared marks and residue of various kinds – carbon copy blue ink, glue, tape and Prestik residues and, more frequently in the older batches of drawings, foxing, a process which is literally a kind of “rusting” of the paper caused by contact with acidic materials. Smudging of some kind – pencil, charcoal or pen - also often appears, and there are sometimes fingerprints or the prints of shoe soles where the drawings have been stepped on. These folds, tears and holes (physical), and stains, marks, residue and foxing (chemical) form a kind of material encyclopaedia, and I have taken them seriously as threads to be followed in this study.

2.2 Taking a Line for a Walk: The Discipline of Drawing³⁶¹

Drawing is predominantly practiced as “a support discipline aimed at facilitating outcomes in other areas”,³⁶² conceived as “‘preparational’ within Western arts academies”³⁶³ in areas such as painting and sculpture within the fine arts, or “as something leading to something else more important and more permanent”.³⁶⁴ With its ties to design and preparatory planning, it is also implemented as “an

³⁶¹ I borrow the phrase “taking a line for a walk” from artist Paul Klee’s playful description of drawing. The puppeteer could also be seen to be “taking the puppet for a walk” through a line in the form of the puppet string.

³⁶² Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 54.

³⁶³ Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 55.

³⁶⁴ Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 63.

extraordinarily versatile tool”³⁶⁵ in the teaching and learning of other disciplines outside art such as engineering, architecture and medicine;³⁶⁶ the activities of “[i]nventing, composing, outlining, mapping, diagramming, plotting, modelling, measuring [...] bringing things and their relations into visibility and under conceptual and practical control.”³⁶⁷ More recently it has “been consciously deployed as an exploration of space around the advent of flight and space travel”³⁶⁸ and there is also further growing research “connecting it to other fields of interest such as, for example, communication studies, semiotics and visual literacy investigations.”³⁶⁹ These links help to think of drawing, in its close relation to writing, as a kind of “language” or sign system, a “technologically rudimentary, [...] primary form of visual language that barely requires equipment”³⁷⁰ or, as Eileen Adams describes it, “a vivid shorthand”³⁷¹ which constitutes “a field of activity connected with semiotic modes of sign production which can function as registers for visual communication and literacy”.³⁷² Elsewhere, Schmidt has argued that “contemporary drawing provides a field of activity through which visual communication and literacy are performed and through which it can be learnt and understood by analysis of exemplars and their relationship with the codified art historical and theoretical context in which they are located.”³⁷³

Conventionally the act of drawing, and its textual counterpart writing, is thought about as a one-handed practice undertaken only with the ‘dominant’ hand, which for

³⁶⁵ Adams, *Power Drawing*, 2.

³⁶⁶ For example, Cape Town-based Leonard Shapiro, an Observation, Spatial Awareness and Drawing teacher, has developed a “Haptico-visual observation and drawing” (HVD) method, described as “a multisensory observation method which crucially employs the sense of touch (as well as sight), coupled with the simultaneous act of drawing”, which he uses to teach anatomy to Medical students and health care professionals. (Shapiro, *Leonard Shapiro*)

³⁶⁷ Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 139.

³⁶⁸ Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 54.

³⁶⁹ Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 54.

³⁷⁰ For Krčma, “[i]n relation to a contemporary world structured by the ever-expanding capacities of new media, to drive a stick of charcoal across a piece of paper seems archaic.” (Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 137)

³⁷¹ Adams, *Power Drawing*, 2.

³⁷² Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 54.

³⁷³ Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 61. Here Schmidt argues that within modern art there are four shifts which position drawing in its own domain; namely “drawing as a *connective act* across surfaces”, drawing as *sinopia* or cartoon which “lift the drawing out of the sketchbook or off the page towards a *sculptural and architectural scale*”, “drawing proceeding within the *expanded field* of the landscape” and drawing in the form of “dense *mindmaps*, tracing ideas and arguments with chalk on blackboard.” (Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 55)

a large percentage of the writing population is the right hand, but neurologist Frank Wilson's argument on how the hands work as an inter-dependent couple brings this convention into question, and allows drawing to be thought as "making" as Flusser describes it, that is, an agreement or gesture which brings both left and right hands together "on" or "in" an object, "press[ing] from two sides [...] so that the two hands can meet."³⁷⁴ Wilson's discussion of French psychologist Yves Guiard's study of the dominant and nondominant ('submissive') hands figure them not as an unequally weighted pair, but rather as an inter-dependent couple. For Wilson, via Guiard, the "question should not be which hand is dominant, but how the two hands interact, or complement each other's action in a given task to achieve an objective."³⁷⁵ He emphasises that instead of thinking about ourselves as right- or left-handed, we should rather consider the ways that the two hands work together in a symbiotic partnership. It could be said "that the nondominant hand 'frames' the movement of the dominant hand: it sets and confines the spatial context in which the 'skilled' movement will take place."³⁷⁶ (Within writing, "Guiard showed that the nondominant hand plays a complementary, though largely covert, role by continuously repositioning the paper in anticipation of pen movement".)³⁷⁷ Specifically, "the framing, stabilizing activity begins in one hand *before* the action of the other member of the pair."³⁷⁸ Wilson summarizes this right-left relation with the following phrase: "*the left hand knows what the right hand is planning, and the right hand knows what the left hand just did.*"³⁷⁹ The symmetry of the hands is such that they are "condemned to forever mirror each other",³⁸⁰ and it is through the "full" gesture of making that the two hands may overcome or "exceed" this condemnation, and make congruent "two opposites".³⁸¹ Metaphorically, this gesture also brings together what Flusser refers to as the left hand of "practice" and the right of "theory" in an "effort to ground theory in practice and to support practice theoretically".³⁸² Often the purpose of the two activities of writing and drawing is very similar; they are a means

³⁷⁴ Flusser, *Gestures*, 32.

³⁷⁵ Wilson, *The Hand*, 159.

³⁷⁶ Wilson, *The Hand*, 160.

³⁷⁷ Wilson, *The Hand*, 159.

³⁷⁸ Wilson, *The Hand*, 160.

³⁷⁹ Wilson, *The Hand*, 160.

³⁸⁰ Flusser, *Gestures*, 32.

³⁸¹ Flusser, *Gestures*, 33.

³⁸² Flusser, *Gestures*, 38.

of *expressing* something immaterial, an idea, through the hand.³⁸³ (Here the implement in the hand functions as the puppet does; a kind of “pen-puppet”.) This “expressing” functions doubly in that it refers to the expression of an idea and to the functioning of the tool, the pen, pencil, ink and brush, used in the practice of writing/drawing. As Flusser describes it, “the one writing is pressing a virtuality hidden within him out through numerous layers of resistance.”³⁸⁴

Drawing is at its core a visual practice, a means of learning “to look adequately at the world around”³⁸⁵ the self, but it is also inherently a practice of translation; from three-dimensions to two-dimensions, actual form to an abstraction of form, lived experience to individual expression of experience, a “personal ‘handwriting’”.³⁸⁶ To look *adequately* then, is to be able to translate the visual from head to hand, self to other. For Ed Krčma

Drawing moves between light and darkness, between the exercise of conscious control and its intermittence or abeyance. On the one hand, drawing is firmly allied with reason: the brilliance of the fresh open sheet presents a world geared to bringing forms into visibility; the tenuity of the line renders material at its closest relation to thought; the clarity of the grid organises space and distributes relations; and the levels of concentration involved in the drawing process itself gears the mind to understand and transfigure, and the imagination to design, prospect, project.³⁸⁷

This move or transition “between light and darkness” is a kind of translation or expression (a *pressing*) between hand and head, rendering “material at its closest relation to thought”; but in its darkness, “there is always a moment [in drawing] that is archaic, silent, rudimentary, and inassimilable to conscious purpose or reason”,³⁸⁸ showing the true opacity of the mind. As much as “drawing is about visibility, so its basis in tactility, in contact, means that it is also blind. And it drives fantasies, in which the hand colludes”,³⁸⁹ so that the “blind” practice of drawing relies equally on the hand as it does the head. For John Berger however, producing a drawing “is

³⁸³ Flusser defines “express” as “to press from somewhere against something” or “to press out from the inside”. (Flusser, *Gestures*, 21)

³⁸⁴ Flusser, *Gestures*, 22.

³⁸⁵ Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 55.

³⁸⁶ Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 55.

³⁸⁷ Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 139.

³⁸⁸ Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 139.

³⁸⁹ Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 139.

quite different from the later process of painting a ‘finished’ canvas or carving a statue”, which he claims is “an attempt to construct an event in itself.”³⁹⁰ Rather, a “drawing is an autobiographical record of one’s discovery of an event – either seen, remembered or imagined.”³⁹¹ It is an improvisatory “practice akin to the delayed beat in improvised jazz music”³⁹² or, again in Berger’s terms, a “serious game that works with appearances and disappearances, a ceaseless process of correction”.³⁹³ As a means of processing complex information “it can proceed ad infinitum without closure or completion, continually part of a process that is never-ending”.³⁹⁴ Drawing is thus also integrally bound to the head, and ongoing processes of thought that are continually “unfinished”,³⁹⁵ and as a medium can perhaps be paralleled more readily to film or performance in its attempts to capture transient moments of thought; in its “sketchiness” “it can carry a heavy political weight while its slight nature endangers it and takes it to the brink of disappearance.”³⁹⁶

To “draw from” is also a steeping, a pulling towards, a drawing attention to; “[t]he English *drawing* takes its form from the action of pulling, which is characteristic of so much drawing activity, but a similar etymological link can be seen in the words *sign* and *design*.”³⁹⁷ So drawing is a practice of “pressing” or “pulling” a line, *line* itself being the “main constituent of drawing” but also a means of “tracing ‘process’”.³⁹⁸ It is line that drawing and puppetry have in common, the line or “strings” which connect head and hand, self and other. Furthermore, as can be seen clearly in maps and mapping, “the drawn line ‘(/)’ can hold two exclusive and excluding territories together in an uneasy circulation. [...] the use of line between opposites or binaries can indicate their dependence on each other as well as the tension between

³⁹⁰ Berger, *Drawing is Discovery*, 1.

³⁹¹ Berger, *Drawing is Discovery*, 1.

³⁹² Fisher, *On Drawing*, 220.

³⁹³ Berger, *Berger on Drawing*, 110.

³⁹⁴ Dexter, *Vitamin D*, 6.

³⁹⁵ We see this clearly in “doodling”, seemingly inconsequential subconscious marks made while our immediate focus is elsewhere.

³⁹⁶ Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 63. According to Schmidt, this “‘sketchy’ nature has, of course, been assimilated into non-‘drawing’ language to signal any practice which is incomplete, fragmentary or in a preparatory stage. One could trace a history of ‘sketchiness’ and its attendant powerlessness in the archaeology of drawing (and potentially in that of many other ‘sketchy’ practices)”. (Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 63)

³⁹⁷ Ashwin, *Drawing, Design and Semiotics*, 42-43.

³⁹⁸ Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 55.

them”,³⁹⁹ offering further means of thinking through self/other. However “[i]t has been demonstrated that line can be subsumed within *surface*”⁴⁰⁰ or perhaps *skin*, which presents a differing mode of analysis fitting to “our era of visibility [...] seiz[ing] the totality of a picture’s surface at a glance”, the viewer working from “synthesis to analysis”, as opposed to “reading along a line [which] works from analysis to synthesis, just as we have to follow a written text if we want to get to its message.”⁴⁰¹ Here Schmidt, via Flusser, notes “how surfaces have become ubiquitous and metaphorically ever more important in our surroundings today; as against the importance of lines in the Cartesian model.”⁴⁰² The surfaces and screens of computers and cell phones have become the major frame through which we view the world, that is, from synthesis to analysis, and a discussion of line thus describes a certain mode of looking before the subject has even been brought into being, the act of creating line is thus significant in its action, in its preconception of the subject.

Following from Flusser’s “gesture of making”, drawing as an artistic activity can also be seen as a “hatred” or “exclusion” of the three-dimensional form and of movement, two fundamental aspects of the puppet. If however, the “gesture of hatred” is also a kind of transformation, this notion offers a means of thinking “hate” differently through the hands; that the private, self-absorbed activity of making, a “hatred” for the other, for the public, has the capacity to be transformed into love through an offering up of the self through something made and presented, a submissive, sacrificial gesture. To “unfold” the puppet from hatred to love means to move the “drawn” body, a body “all surface” into another form, (one which perhaps presents a different kind of hatred in the form of the puppet which excludes or overpowers the human subject) one at first seemingly self-evident, but on deeper inspection more like a “bud unfold[ing] into a blossom”. However, to think the “smoothing out” of the puppet as part of the “blooming” is intrinsic to the puppet’s life; something is discovered in the “writing” of the puppet, a smoothing out of the creative process, a literal surface unfolded by the hand and onto the hand. It could also be said that the process of drawing – a process of becoming - transforms the drawer themselves,

³⁹⁹ Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 58. Schmidt derives this notion of line in drawing from artist Marcel Broodthaers.

⁴⁰⁰ Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 56.

⁴⁰¹ Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 56-57.

⁴⁰² Schmidt, *Reflections on Drawing*, 56. See Flusser, *Writings*.

and in this way the drawing functions as a kind of “emotional prosthesis” akin to the form of the puppet. In some sense one *becomes* the object under scrutiny:

Following up its logic in order to check its accuracy, you find confirmation or denial in the object itself or in your memory of it. Each confirmation or denial brings you closer to the object, until finally you are, as it were, inside it: the contours you have drawn no longer marking the edge of what you have seen but the edge of what you have become.⁴⁰³

In Handspring’s case the unfolding of a puppet moves from Kohler’s technically executed drawings and plans to a process of sculpting and assemblage of parts, which in more recent productions come in the form of two-dimensional templates which are used by puppet-builders to cut out wooden puppet parts to be assembled like a DIY kit which ultimately forms the three-dimensional puppet.⁴⁰⁴ The presentation, the love, is thus not in the drawings themselves but in their culmination as puppet. The hand exists as a connector in the circuit of making of these two things – the drawing functions as a kind of “birthing” of the puppet, it is conceived in the head, and first made manifest as a plan, diagram or map. The drawings make clear that

[i]t is the actual act of drawing that forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind’s eye and put it together again; or, if he is drawing from memory, that forces him to dredge his own mind, to discover the content of his own store of past observations.⁴⁰⁵

The drawings appear to remember (or re-member) puppet bodies from previous productions and there is a sense that Kohler learns from his own processes of making from one production to the next through continual adjustments and adaptations to his own artistic and technical processes. Here his drawing is also *design* and as such is largely naturalistically or realistically rendered, “dedicated to the recording and transmission of resemblances”⁴⁰⁶ necessary for the creation of a practically functioning puppet. Its purpose is thus *instrumental*; “[i]ts ultimate justification is not pleasurable contemplation by the executant or the spectator, but

⁴⁰³ Berger, *Drawing is Discovery*, 1.

⁴⁰⁴ There is more to be said here on the work of the puppet as distinguished from the techno-genesis of the machine.

⁴⁰⁵ Berger, *Drawing is Discovery*, 1.

⁴⁰⁶ Ashwin, *Drawing, Design and Semiotics*, 44.

the communication of some important piece of information or value that will influence attitudes and future action.”⁴⁰⁷ This mode of drawing and design lies somewhere in between *representation* and *presentation*, where the former is defined as “the recording of a phenomenon already present to the senses” and the latter “the process of making material an otherwise immaterial form or idea that existed only as an idea or concept in the designer’s mind until its commitment to paper.”⁴⁰⁸ The puppet body thus begins as “all surface”; a kind of stretched and flattened version of itself, its skin made from the paper it is drawn onto, but in this way is also inherently “pulled” into being through line. The now “blurred” and “broken” surfaces or skins of the drawings from past productions have been transformed into skeletons with imagined inner organs.

2.3 Handspring’s Paper Afterlife: Digging the Archive

Having contextualised drawing as a discipline, I want to turn back to a more detailed analysis of Handspring’s paper archive here, including an overview of my involvement with the work there, and a breakdown of the different kinds of drawings the archive contains in terms of both content and medium; the Company’s “paper afterlife” comprised of a collection of drawings, plans, and other paper research material that forms a substantial part of their work and encompasses an underexplored section of their puppetry productions. The paper collection consists of multiple kinds of drawings made for different purposes throughout the puppetry making process; more “finished” drawings in charcoal, fineliner/felt-tip pen, pencil and ink; architectural or digital plans for puppets and prop and set design; research drawings and sketches, as well as research photographs and images collected from magazines and newspapers; templates for puppet parts; and sometimes shadow puppet maquettes. I know many of the mediums utilised here intimately because I’ve used them myself in my capacity as a visual artist, and in some sense this made it easier to record; I know what kind of mark different tools make on paper, what they feel like to the touch, and if they smudge or leave a residue or not, if they fade over time or remain permanent, if they’re shiny or matt, transparent or opaque. It is interesting to note the differing combinations of drawings from one play to the next - to an extent there is a clear progression or evolution from the early work to the

⁴⁰⁷ Ashwin, *Drawing, Design and Semiotics*, 50.

⁴⁰⁸ Ashwin, *Drawing, Design and Semiotics*, 44.

present in the way the puppet is thought through and researched prior to its design, but this also fluctuates, and in later plays is completely refined, with less experimentation, the puppet body conforming to a “type” which has been extensively tried and tested over the years. Technical issues in the movement of puppet bodies and aspects related to character development have been resolved through an iterative practice which could be seen to combine multiple disciplines within the arts. The preparatory stage includes graphic design, draughtsmanship and/or a fine arts drawing practice, while the later stages, which look more pointedly towards building the puppet, incorporate an almost architectural envisioning of the puppet body with a conceptual or artistic engineering, anticipating the use of specific materials. Most of the work is drawn or copied in black and white; not a lot of colour is used unless to indicate the colour of a puppet’s outfit or refer to a particular material used in the set design. This is indicative of the monochromatic palette of the puppets and the productions themselves, but I think it also further shows how these drawings were not necessarily created as finished products but rather as processual guidelines to be used by Kohler and other puppet-makers in the conception and creation of each puppet play. The drawings are done on various kinds of papers, depending on what their purpose is. Research drawings seem to be largely done on normal copy paper or weighted paper with some texture or tooth, and are more polished than some of the other drawings and plans. The plans and diagrams for the puppet template parts are largely done on tracing paper, and are often compiled of parts tacked together with masking tape. There are also often multiple photocopies or replicas of original drawings.

Because the paper materials were, on the most part, created for practical use within the puppetry-making process, individual items have not been titled, as is the conventional practice in art-making, apart from their designation as specific puppet parts when relevant, and their attachment to a specific production. This meant that part of my job was to name each piece, and although Kohler has a distinctive and methodical creative process when it comes to making puppets, which is reflected in the collection of drawings for each production, the archiving process was for me also an attempt to make sense of his creative practice from its conception, without necessarily having seen the productions of which these drawings are a “by-product”. This portion of the puppetry-making process in Handspring’s case seems to be

rather an insular, individually-driven practice in that the puppet is conceived predominantly through Kohler's draughtsmanship. In comparison to many other contemporary puppet companies, such as Bread and Puppet, Little Angel Marionette, In the Heart of the Beast, Open Eye Figure Theatre, and locally Janni Younge Productions and Aja Marneweck's The Paper Body Collective, who from conception seem to operate more collaboratively and spontaneously with materials, this is an unusual practice. So really this aspect of the puppet is perhaps excessive or even *unnecessary* to the ultimate finished form of the puppet, which can in fact be very simplistic, but for Handspring it is integral as a kind of anatomy lesson and forms a massive, if largely unseen (at least in its paper form), aspect of their work, a fingerprint or DNA of their practice, and again places emphasis on the importance of the hand-drawn and –crafted in their work.

I worked on the drawings related to each production, stored in large card folders (for example, see Figure 1) and housed collectively in large wooden and metal map filing drawers, one at a time, and I further divided or delegated each folder into four groups; Characters and Character Development, Mechanical Aspects, Prop and Set Design, and Research and Development. Before photographing the drawings I would have to iron many of them to eliminate creases, particularly if they had been folded. They were then attached to an off-white coloured wall with pins or Prestik and photographed with a studio flash set-up, which eliminates much of the textual or tactile detail. For each drawing I collected five pieces of information – a title, short description on the content of the drawing, medium, dimensions, and damage or alterations, which often didn't show up in the photograph due to the use of the flash, but included folds, creasing, puckering, tears and cuts, uneven edges, holes, attachments, residue, marks, smudging and foxing. What I recorded could be seen as a basic "condition report" on hundreds of paper artefacts, the figures of these drawings layered with a material encyclopaedia of the unconscious and conscious marks of the hand, these made by Kohler and Jones and the changing teams of puppet builders over the years, showing the degradation of materials, but further, the embodied evidence of the "life" of the drawings. The touch involved in the creation of this digital archive was an analogue touch – my fingers and fingernails were dirty after each session from handling the drawings, my hair saturated with the smell of mothballs and dust, my scalp itchy, the residue of the materials stuck to my skin.

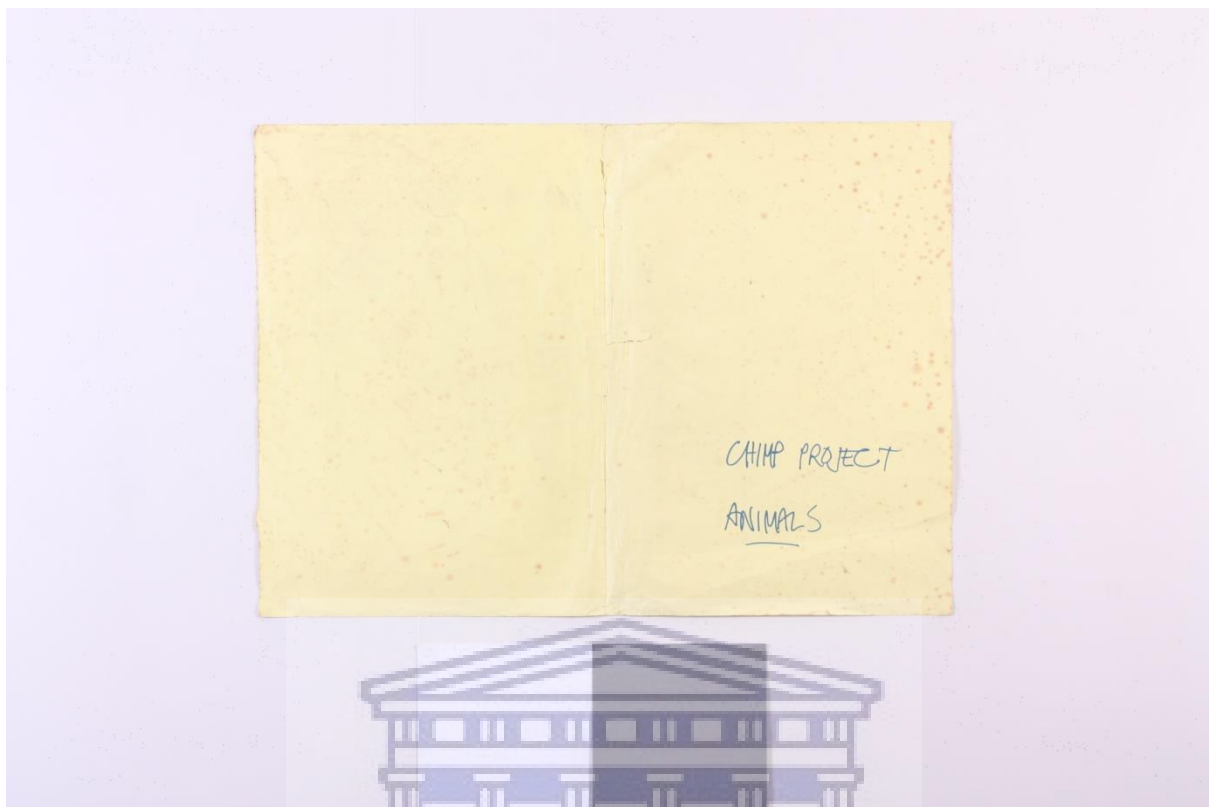


Figure 1: Card Folder for “Chimp Project: Animals”

In the descriptive section that follows I've used the example of *The Chimp Project* to go into further detail on Handspring's paper material, seeing as it has been cited as the production which required the most intensive research and preparation, but also because it offers an exemplar of the research and development process carried out for each production. It further provides an insight into Handspring's ongoing interest in animal-human relations. The scope of the initial research and development for each production is wide-reaching and encompasses multiple mediums, in this case, photographs taken by Kohler and Jones, found newspaper clippings, handwritten correspondence, and Kohler's preparatory sketches (see Figures 2-9), situating the puppet, for Handspring, as not only a practical and artistic endeavour, but also a scholarly concern from the outset. For this production Jones and Kohler studied chimpanzees at the Gombe Stream Chimp Reserve on Lake Tanganyika, taking photographs of the animals and sketching out character and set designs derived from these interactions and images which help to create the world the puppet would

inhabit.⁴⁰⁹ The set of research materials that appears in Figures 2-9 shows that even to begin with, the animal (or in other cases human) subject, sketched from life, is of both structural and behavioural significance in its transformation from living subject to puppet, and the naturalised movement of the subject, something which is often difficult to translate into static two-dimensional imagery, is of integral importance in both mechanical and characteristic developments. This movement and gesture can predominantly be seen in the drawings which lay out the structural and mechanical aspects of the puppets – in the ways movement is designed into the characters' limbs, heads and hands. Each specific puppet character is also derived from a number of overlapping sources and subjects, which can sometimes be identified in the final puppet form (more evidently in the human puppets), but more often than not, Kohler's characters are made up of multiple personalities and characteristics developed into a new character of his own creation.

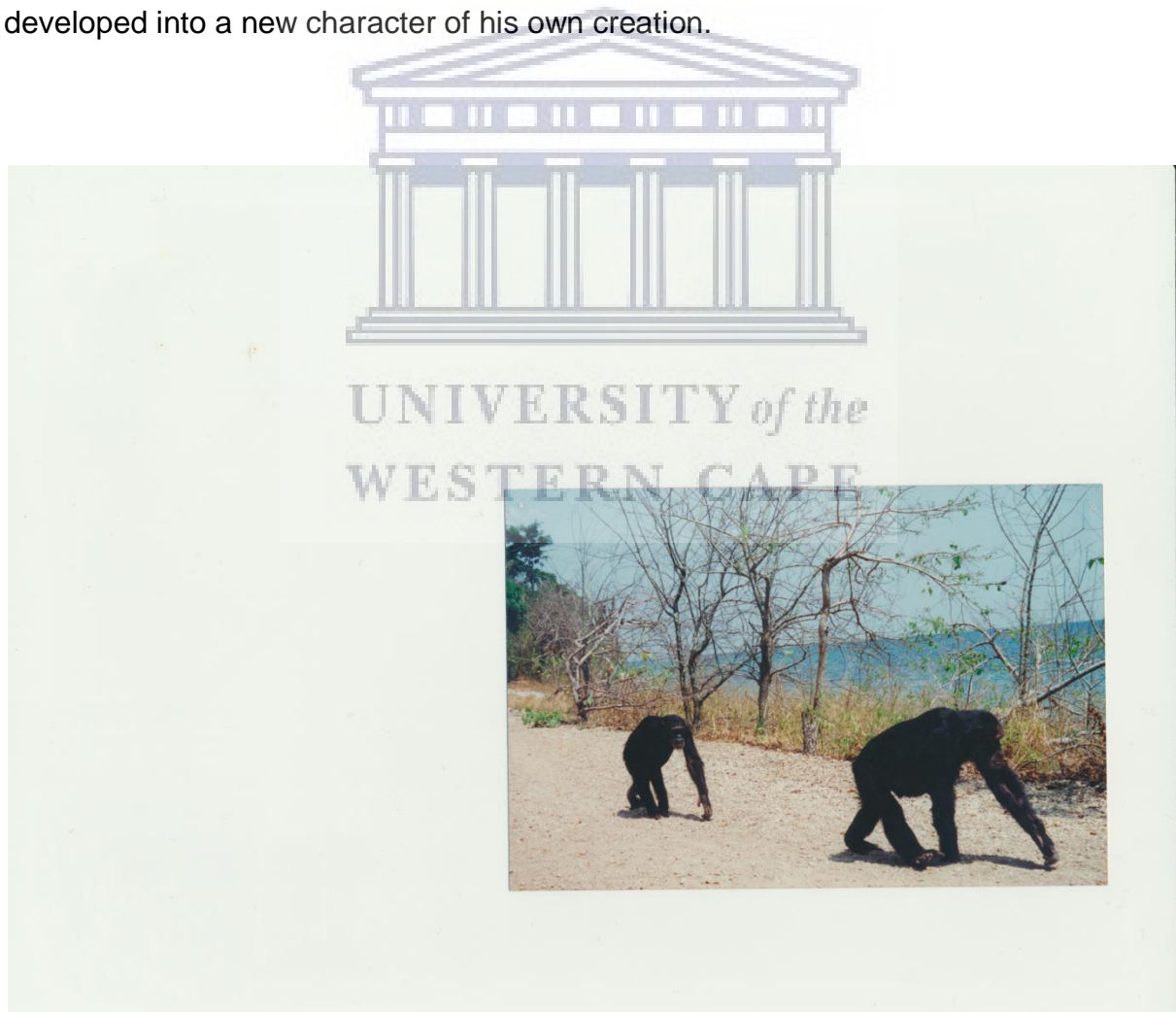


Figure 2: Photograph of Chimps Walking

⁴⁰⁹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 102.



Figure 3: Photograph of Chimps Eating



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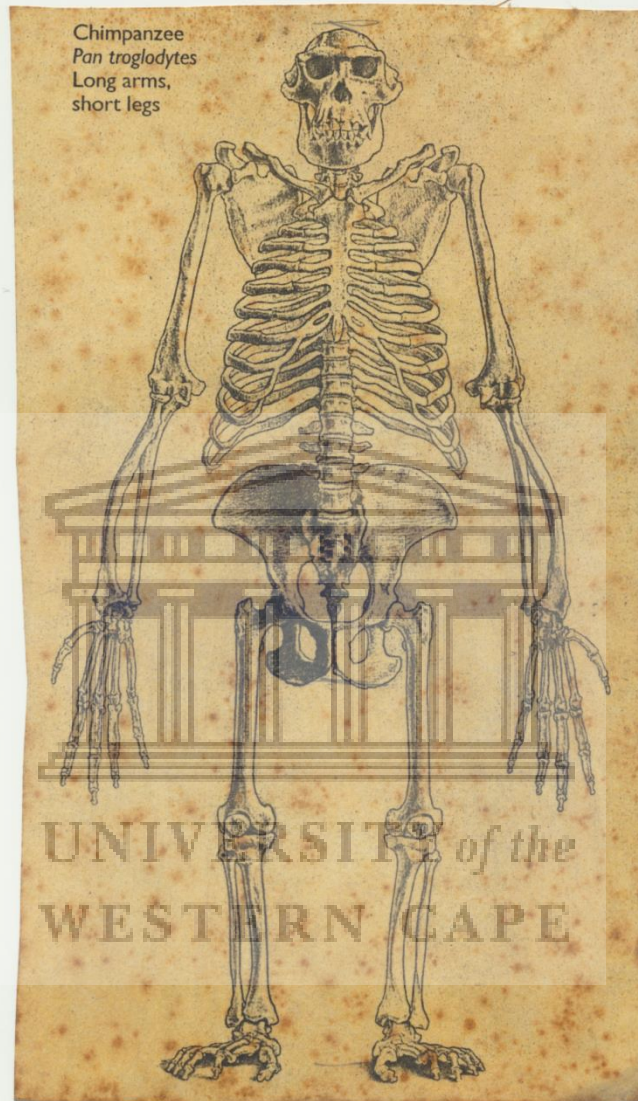


Figure 4: Chimpanzee Skeleton Print

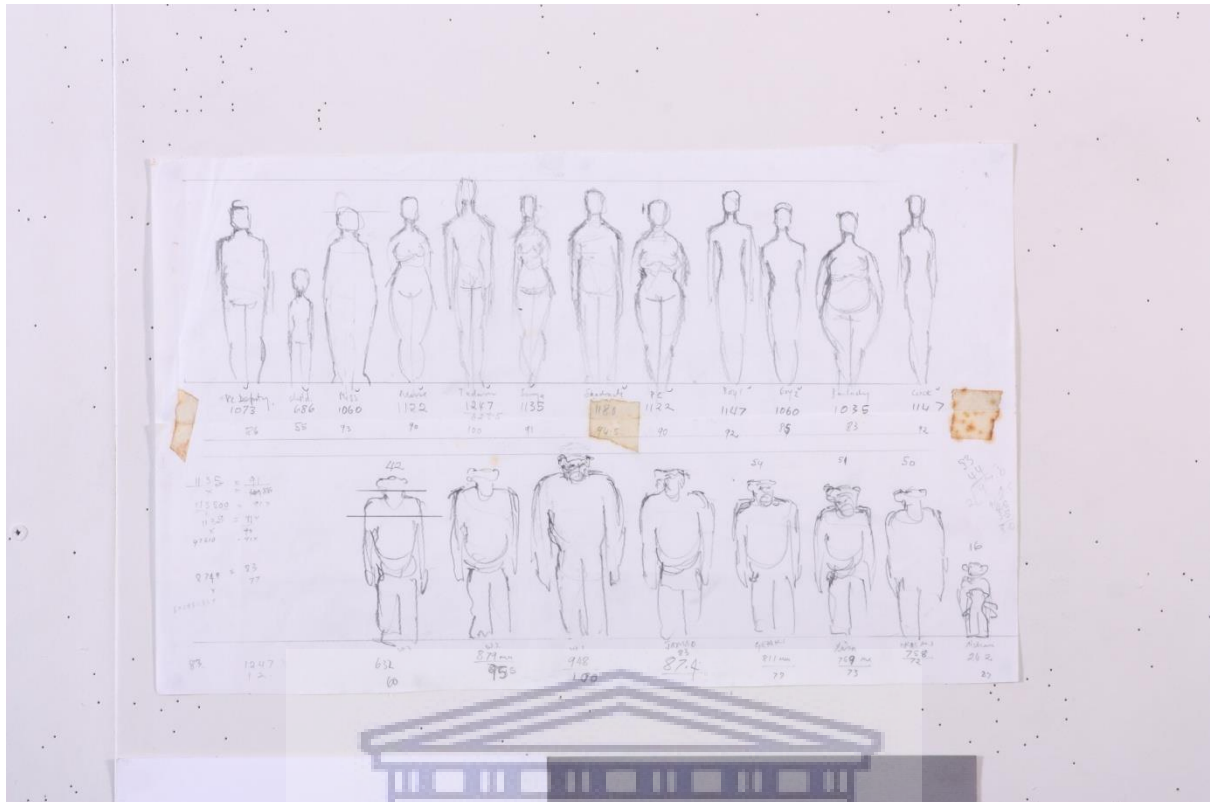


Figure 5: Human and Chimp Cast





Figure 6: Jungle Scene



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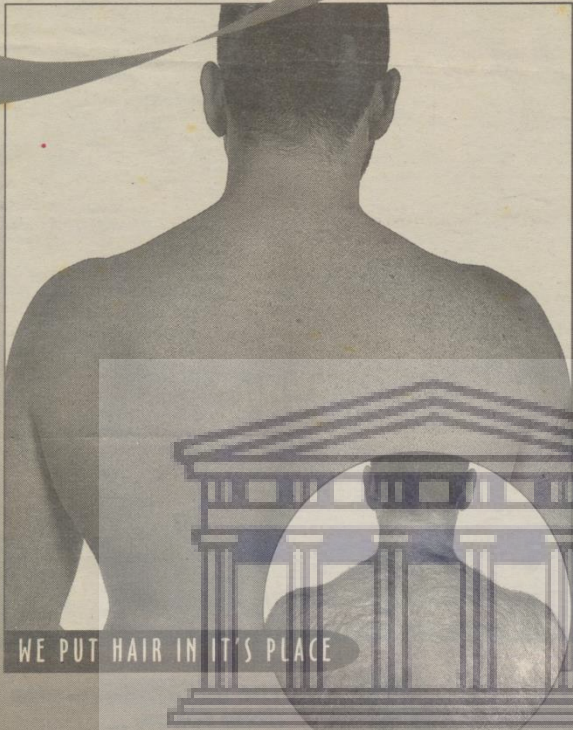
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FROM
BASIL JONES
HANDSPRING PUPPET CO. (PTY) LTD FOUNDED 1981
15A CLAIRVAUX RD
7975 KALK BAY

TO:

ALAN RESS
TRANSPLANT & LASER CENTRE
CAPE TOWN
TEL 783.7555
FAX

DEAR MR RESS

RE: USE OF YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS IN
THE CHIMP PROJECT.

ON BEHALF OF HANDSPRING PUPPET COMPANY
I WOULD LIKE TO REQUEST PERMISSION TO USE
THE TWO PHOTOGRAPHS THAT APPEAR IN YOUR
NEWSPAPER & INTERNET ADVERTS SHOWING
A MAN WITH & WITHOUT HAIR ON HIS
BACK.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS WILL BE INCORPORATED
IN A VIDEO WHICH IN TURN IS PART OF OUR
NEW PRODUCTION, "THE CHIMP PROJECT". THE
PLAY PREVIOUS AT THE MARKET THEATRE
LABORATORY BEFORE PREMIERING IN HANOVER,
GERMANY ON 3RD JUNE 2000.

WE WISH TO ASSURE YOU THAT THE PLAY
CELEBRATES OUR KINSHIP WITH CHIMPANZEES
& THAT THE PHOTOGRAPHS WILL NOT BE USED
TO SATIRISE OR RIDICULE HIRSVIT PEOPLE.

THE PLAY WILL HAVE A SEASON AT THE MARKET
THEATRE IN JULY/AUGUST & WE WILL BE
HAPPY TO ARRANGE TICKETS FOR YOU WHEN
YOU ARE IN TOWN.

Figure 8: Letter to Alan Ress Page 1 of 2

In the move from the preliminary research stages into more directed puppetry production, plans for specific puppet characters exist alongside more generic sketches of the characters as a type, as well as more generic puppet parts which are made to fit multiple characters. For example, in *The Chimp Project* there are character sketches and structural plans for the Lisa and Wild Chimp characters (for example, see Figures 16-17), but there are also many drawings of the facial expressions, gestures and skeletal structures of chimpanzees which are not expressly linked to specific characters, but which provide a good indication of the kind of thought that goes into the development of the puppets (see Figures 9-15). In these kinds of drawings I delineated between those that I saw as pertaining to aesthetic and behavioural aspects, grouping them as “character sketches” (Figures 9-12), and ones related to structural concerns which I grouped under “mechanical aspects” (Figures 13-15). Often these overlap, showing how the puppet body must be developed holistically in anticipation of its performance, and, perhaps surprisingly, how affect can be held within structure. In the former type there is also a sense that Kohler does many of these sketches as a means of processual understanding, rather than as reference material to consult at a later stage. In other words, a sketch is made in order for some shift of information to take place within his own head; a shift which will then later inform the three-dimensional modelling of the puppet, but which is not necessarily visible as a process. This can be seen clearly in Figure 12, “Chimp Skull Character Sketch” (but is also evident in many of the drawings which I’ve labelled as character sketches), in which Kohler draws out multiple angles of the Chimpanzee skull that, in combination with a photograph of a clay prototype of a Chimp puppet head, show structural undertaking and understanding of the form, but with the loose, gestural mark-making evident in the drawing, some of which is smudged or erased, the piece seems to function more as a “thinking sketch” for Kohler. The use of charcoal, black fineliner/felt-tip pen and sometimes pencil, on a heavier weight paper with some texture or tooth (of the type conventionally used by artists for more “serious” drawings in both dry and wet media) is typical at this point, allowing for a more expressionistic rendering of the subject, and more room for play in terms of expressive or animated mark-making and what it can convey about the character of the puppet. Although I have situated these character sketches as thinking drawings for Kohler, they also seem to function as more “finished” pieces

which can serve as stand-alone artworks representative of *The Chimp Project* production.



Figure 9: Chimp Body Character Sketch

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Figure 10: Chimp Bust Side Profile Sketch

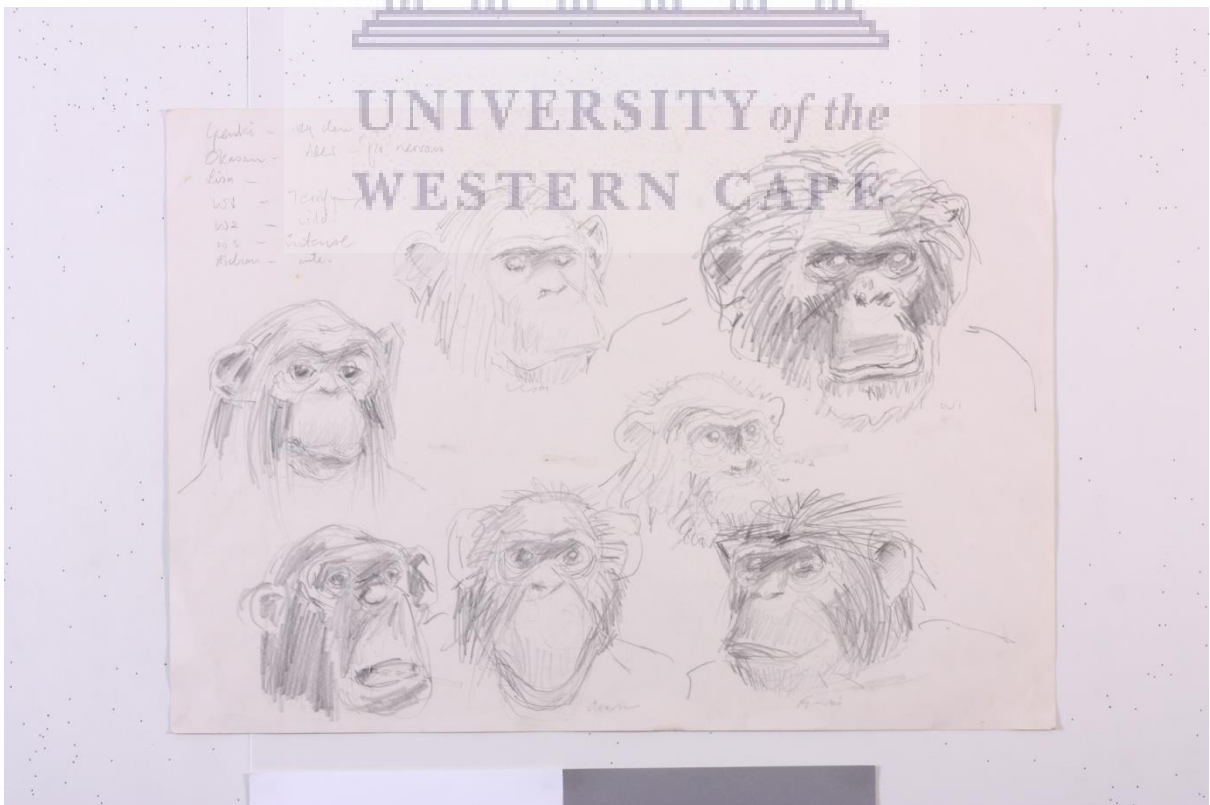


Figure 11: Chimp Character Heads

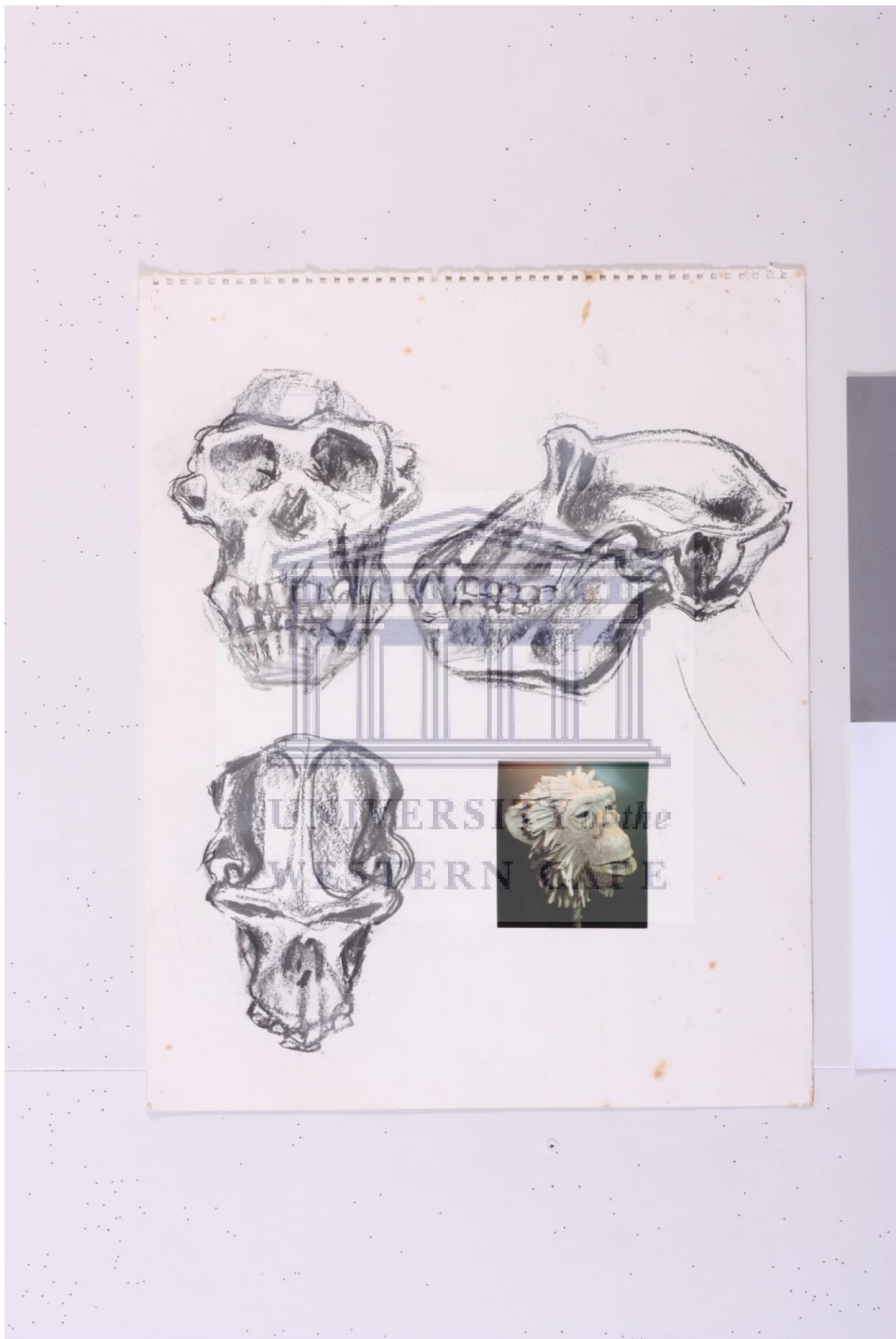


Figure 12: Chimp Skull Character Sketch

Implied movement can be seen most clearly in the two-dimensional images focussed on the structural design of the puppets, that is, the drawings grouped under mechanical aspects, in the contoured segmented body parts and the joints that connect these parts, reminiscent of the anatomy of the living animal or human, as well as in the puppeteer's controls or handles which are drawn into some of the plans. This imagined or anticipated movement is enhanced by the knowledge of what is to come, so it is only in witnessing the eventual performance of the puppet that these drawings can be fully appreciated. Simultaneously however, the Handspring puppet must go through the life cycle which spans from two to three dimensions, in order to obtain movement, to obtain life; a transformation from stillness to movement, and a mutual fulfilment evident only at the culmination of the puppetry performance. Within these structural plans, puppets also progress from an assortment of abstract pieces into more recognisable forms made up of these shapes like a jigsaw puzzle, in the same way that individual bones make up a skeleton, and certain shapes become recognisable as fitting into a specific place in the puppet body. For example, Figure 16 shows a flat layout of the individual parts of the limbs, head and neck which make up the recognisable puppet body of the Lisa chimp character in Figure 17. These kinds of drawings are usually done on transparent tracing paper (when photographing these I would have to layer them over a plain white sheet of cartridge paper so that all the line work was visible) or normal copy or cartridge paper with pencil and black permanent marker, often with many replicas of the same image redrawn or photocopied and then drawn into (see Figure 13 for an example of the latter). The use of the permanent marker in combination with erasable pencil shows a working process that is developed as it goes, with room for alteration and changes, but the different mediums also indicate which parts are changeable and which are permanently set. The pen and pencil, in combination with the type of paper used, in this sense become communicative tools; the mediums themselves convey different instructives to the puppet-builders. Despite the impermanence of the pencil, which in combination with the transparency of the paper makes this kind of drawing seem quite fragile and ephemeral, the marks are usually much more clearly defined and intentionally made in comparison to the style of the character sketches. The transparent paper is used so that the line work of the

drawings is accessible as a template for crafting the individual puppet parts which make up the whole, and the structural drawings, which often appear with very few textual labels, must clearly communicate plans for builds and serve as instructive diagrams for Kohler and his puppet builders. In this process the drawings are pinned to other surfaces, tacked down with Prestik or glue, extended with masking tape, redrawn – activated, invigorated in dialogue with other materials. Here there is much visual evidence of the drawings coming into contact with other tools and materials of making; pin holes, folds, cuts, tears, white correction fluid, glue, tape and other adhesive residue are all apparent, showing that the role or purpose of these drawings is a more utilitarian one, particularly in comparison to the character sketches.



Figure 13: Chimp Face Side Profile View Template



Figure 14: Chimp Puppet Arm Template Plan

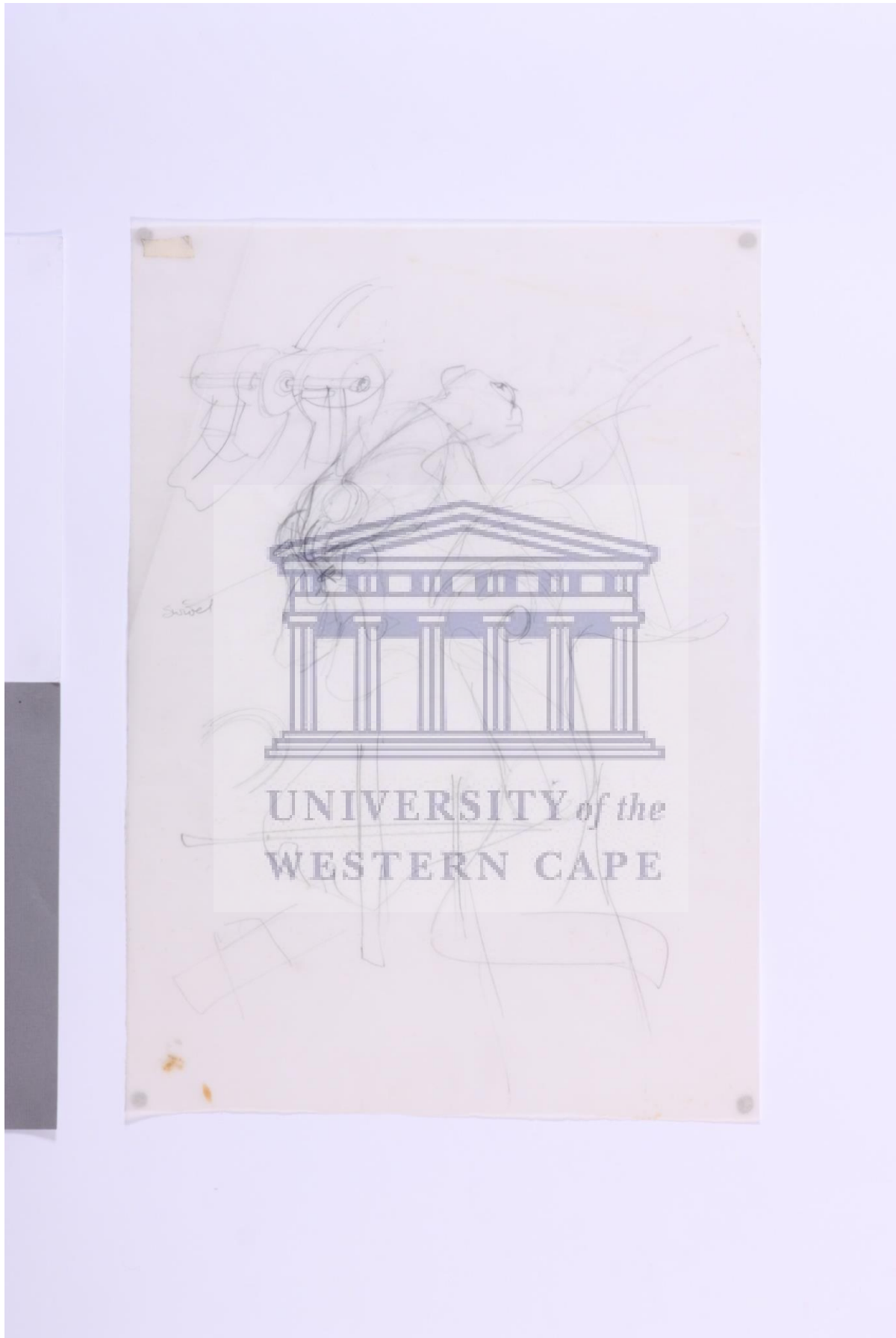


Figure 15: Chimp Puppet Swivel Hip Joint Sketch

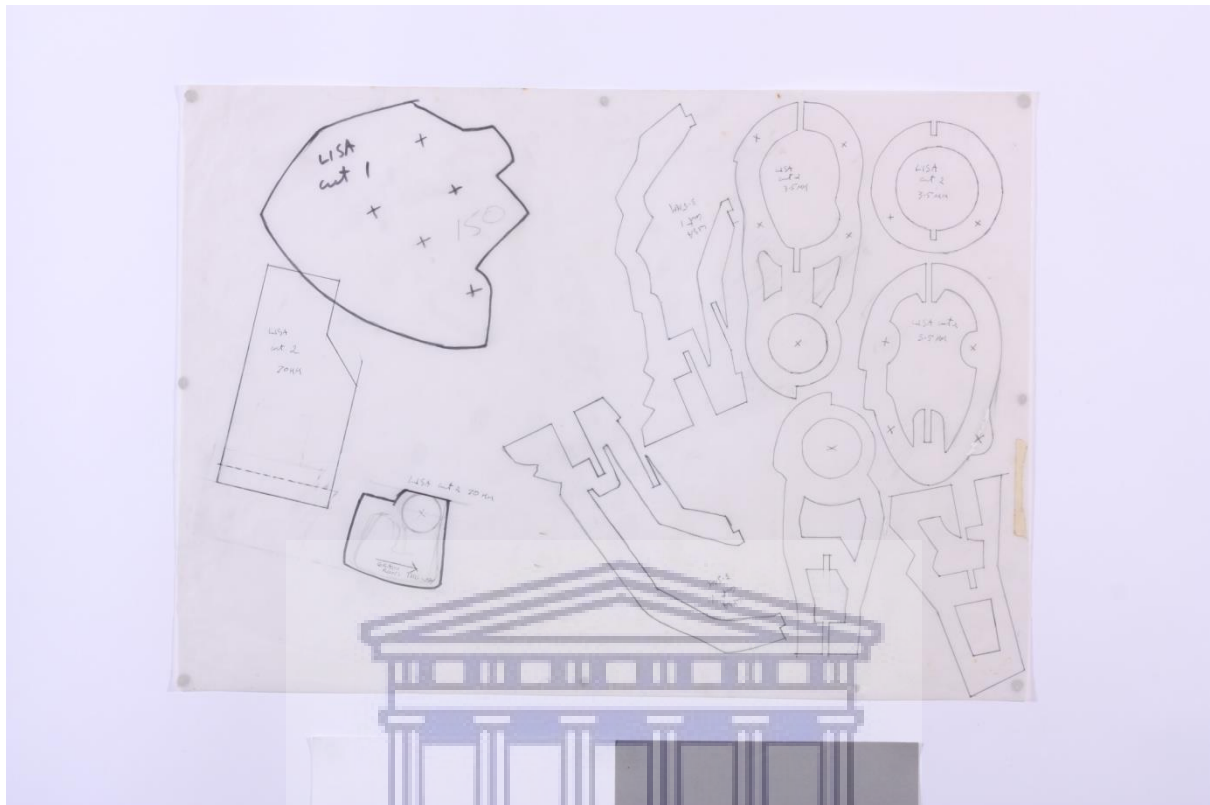


Figure 16: Lisa Template Part 2

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Figure 17: Lisa Chimp Puppet Plan

Kohler's drawings also encompass set and prop building, which in Handspring's case is fairly simplistic so as not to draw attention away from the puppets, with playboard design of prime importance in accommodating puppets and their connected puppeteers, and backdrop layout integral in creating the worlds the puppets inhabit. The basic structure of the portable playboards covers the puppeteer from the waist down and provides a surface on which the puppet can be performed, this armature adapted to fit in with the set of each play. The drawings in this category, as can be seen in Figures 18-20, incorporate more textual instruction, and range from rougher more conceptual sketches for scenery, to structurally sound plans drawn from multiple angles for building props and stage decor, to striking imagery, often incorporating shadow puppetry, made for use in the animated backdrop screen. Again, copy or cartridge paper and tracing paper, along with black fineliner/felt-tip pen and pencil, are the most frequently used mediums. These drawings appear less frequently than those related to the puppet characters, but they show how Kohler must also have a structural understanding of these kinds of forms in the creation of the transportable and changeable world in which the puppets exist.

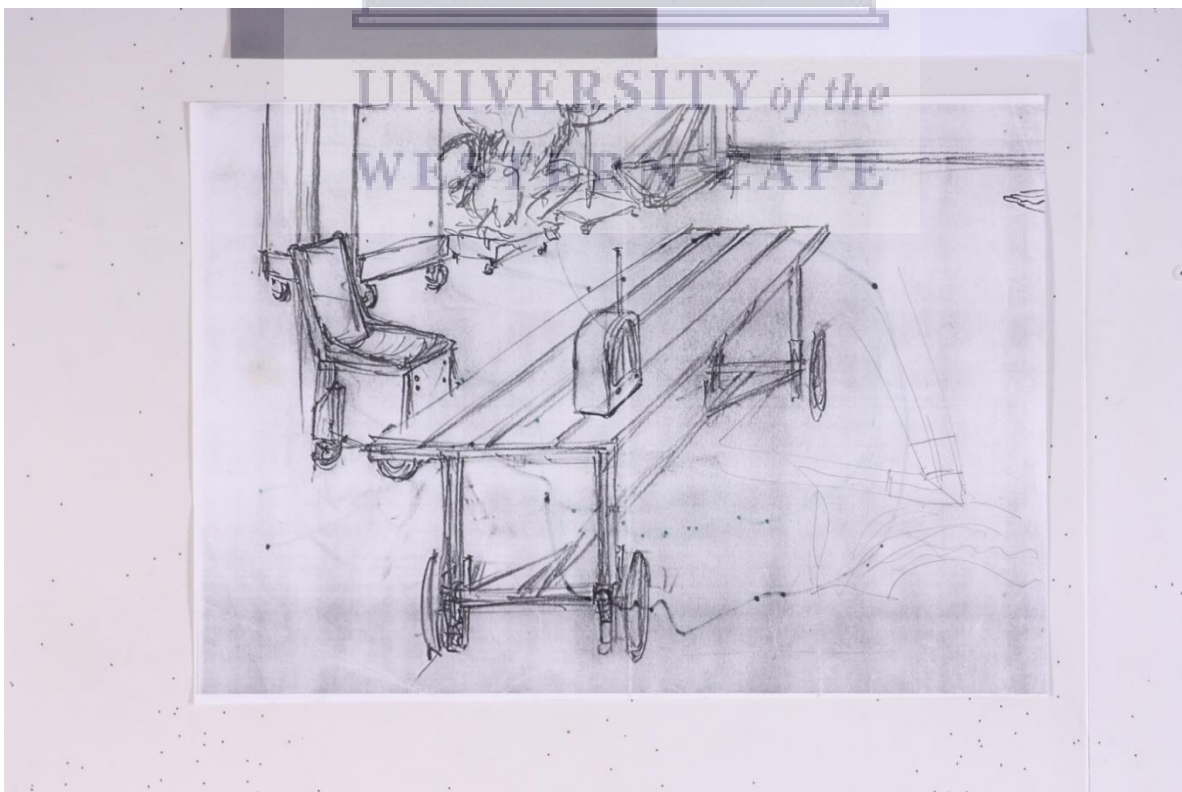


Figure 18: Portable Trolley Platform Set Design

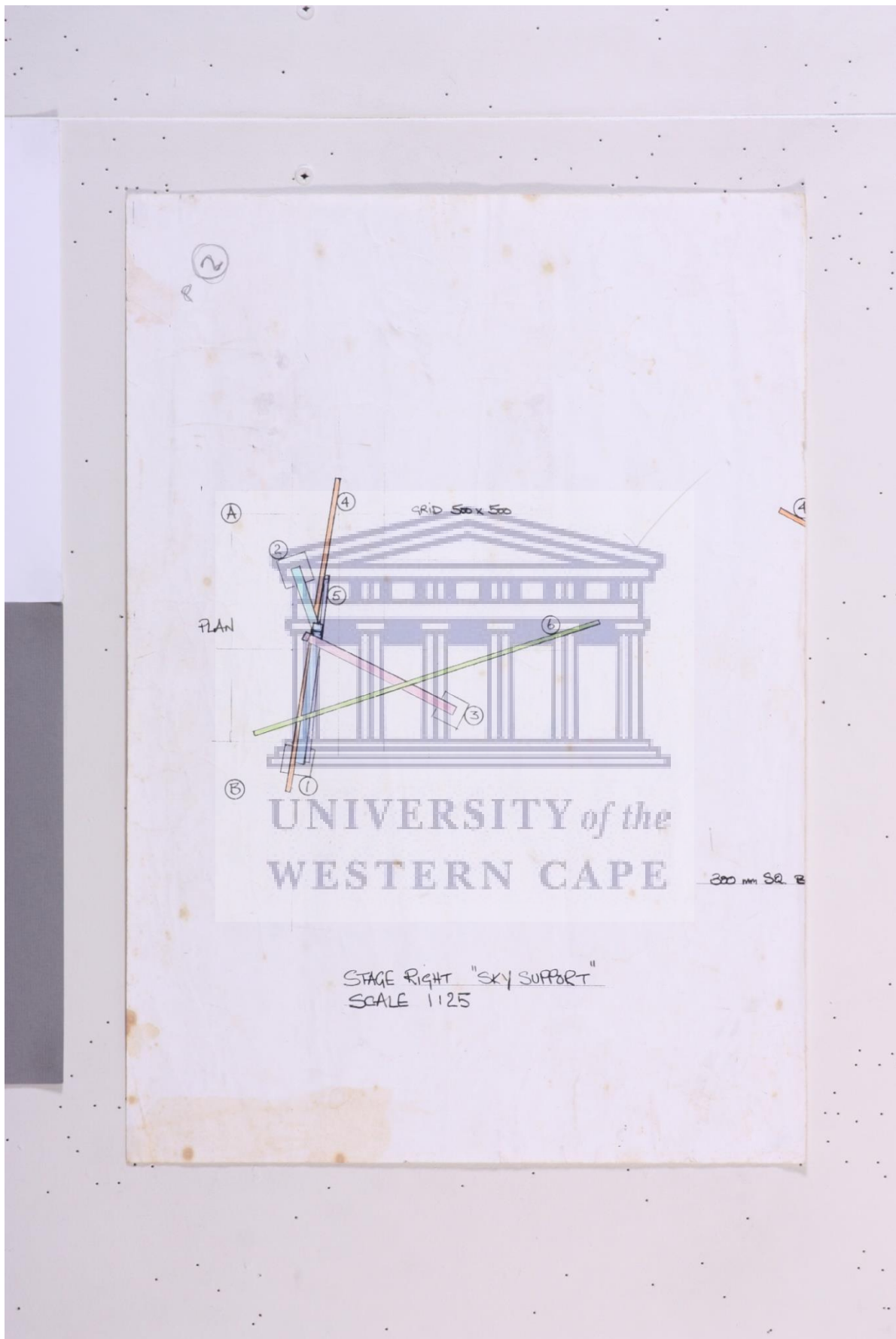


Figure 19: Stage Right Sky Support

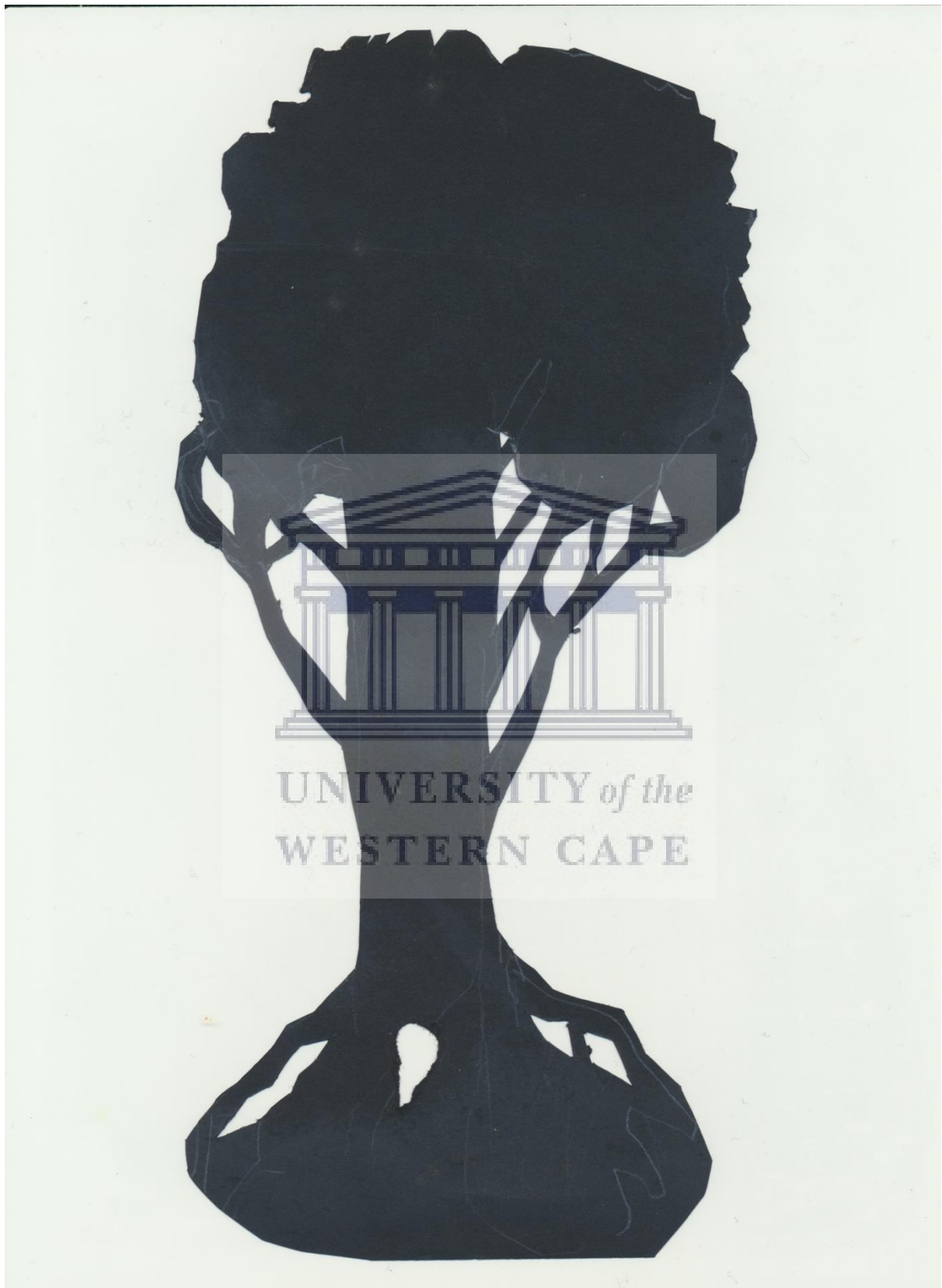


Figure 20: Tree Silhouette Cut-out

Perhaps what is most significant about these drawings is that they are not made for a viewer in the same way that the puppet, which is certainly, if not exclusively, made as a manipulable object for an audience. In my engagement with the material, I initially noted that the drawings were treated very much as “working drawings” – in terms of how they were made to begin with (processual or ‘unfinished’, scribbled on, overlapping images), how they were treated at the point of being *used* in puppet-making (torn, stepped on, smudged), how they are stored (folded, grouped and stacked into oversized folders and layered in drawers with mothballs, imbuing them with the intense smell of naphthalene, further torn), and how they are treated presently by Jones and Kohler as archival relics which offer very important and valuable trace of the past productions and processes, and which vitally need to be digitised to establish their posterity; but which nevertheless remain “working drawings”. As such they are treated differently, not held as precious untouchable art objects, but rather are roughly handled and can come into easy contact with other materials, for example, a cup of coffee may be placed on them without worry of the mark it may cause on the drawing. In this way they hold and reveal process much more readily; they are “transparent” (many quite literally, drawn on tracing paper) and become “tools”, like a hammer or screwdriver, which are there to serve a significant and irreplaceable job, but which do not need to be handled or held delicately, like an art object or artwork conventionally would be. According to Schmidt,

It is the drawing’s misfortune to be fugitive, to crumple, to be erased, to be stored away in a drawer, to be divorced from its body, from its very authenticity, to be overlooked and to be under-represented, seen as a mere facilitator or reduced to a flicker. Conversely, it is the drawing’s fortune to be sparse and impermanent, on the move to somewhere else and thus able to speak for states of migrancy.⁴¹⁰

This further places drawing as a discipline in the realm of touch, and is in line with the conventional treatment of drawings, which “have often been confined to sketchbooks, left in drawers, or torn up and thrown away when they had served their purpose”,⁴¹¹ but are nevertheless crucial to thinking and revealing the process behind the “product”, the “hidden abode of production”. Here the “work” is revealed

⁴¹⁰ Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 64.

⁴¹¹ Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 63.

through a kind of “tactile unconscious”, paralleled alongside Walter Benjamin’s notion of the “optical unconscious”, a concept I will return to shortly.

The Handspring drawings are leftovers, debris alongside the puppets, “unproductive” works as commodities, but highly productive in the life cycle of the puppet, a series of blurs representative of performance within the static archive. Their contact with other materials of making such as glue, masking tape, and cutting implements, places them in the realm of work – they are part of a process of making “on the move to somewhere else”, a move which needs to be made evident in the “final product” of the puppet, as is seen in Jones and Kohler’s desire for these drawings to be made public in their digital form. Whilst Kohler’s drawings are private designs to begin with, they are also inherently public and must serve a communicative purpose as diagrams vital in the puppet-crafting process, which is often performed by a team of puppet builders as opposed to just Kohler himself, a point which brings the conventional mode of individual artistic authorship into question. They are practical, working drawings rooted in realism or naturalism, but not meant to be looked at as aesthetic images; rather the visual subjects of the drawings *become* subjects in a slightly different way, through a process of making – via the hand rather than the eye. They could perhaps be seen as a “left-handed” form of drawing – a “deviant” form that situates them as tactile rather than visual. To use a created object assigns it a different value to that of an artwork. It lies somewhere in between the status of a tool, an artwork and a commodity, but what is crucial is that these drawings expose something about the puppet that remains hidden from the performance – they expose the “trick” of puppetry. The life cycle of the supposedly living being is revealed, like a magician’s book of tricks which discloses the secrets behind his repertoire, showing the entity broken down into parts.

2.4 The Tactical Unconscious

As a means of helping to define what I mean by the “tactical unconscious” I’d like to set up a comparison between one of Handspring’s drawings from *The Chimp Project* which I’ve titled *Tadashi Character Plan* (Figure 21), and a work by American artist Glenn Ligon, *Condition Report* (Figure 22), which, through the comparison of text and drawing in reference to the archival, help to explain and expand on the notion of the subject in relation to place-making and representation. The latter work is a

diptych print featuring two panels that use the text from a placard displayed by protesting sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968, which reads “I AM A MAN”.⁴¹² Ligon originally used the print that appears in the left panel in an earlier artwork *Untitled (I Am a Man)* (1988), but in this version contrasts the original with the condition report on the print compiled by painting conservator Michael Duffy, which contains notes on its material condition including “hairline” and “feather” cracks, “spots” and “marks”, “fingerprints”, “smudges” and “loss at edge”, as well as some speculation on whether certain marks were intentionally made by the artist’s hand. Apart from the more obvious comparison that can be made to the Handspring drawings in these material marks – which I refer to as blurs or breaks – there is also a link to the making and definition of the subject. In this textual phrase, the subject in this “antiportrait” or “bodily double”⁴¹³ is seemingly easily defined – “I am a man” – but the almost obsessively scrutinized and labelled condition report, layered over this explicit version of the subject, says otherwise; a straightforward statement or declaration contested by another exterior voice. For Ligon, the work “was about detailing not only the physical aging of the painting over time—all the cracks and paint loss and all of that—but also changing ideas about masculinity, [and] changing ideas about the relationship we have to the Civil Rights Movement.”⁴¹⁴ The blurs and breaks of this image then, built up over time and by numerous factors, dispute the simple fact of the subject and instead convey that it is unavoidably a kind of continuous palimpsest, a “transparent text”, here particularly in relation to race and gender. The phrase could thus perhaps read more accurately as “I am a man, but...” For Copeland, “Ligon’s aesthetic means reflect an understanding of how formations aimed at illuminating the contingency of the self are part and parcel of the epistemes of violence that continue to produce marked subjects.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² According to the Tate Gallery’s description of this work, “[d]isplaying these very few words en masse, the men vividly drew attention to the city’s long-term abuse and neglect of black employees following the deaths of two colleagues in the strike that preceded the assassination of the civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr”. (Rittenbach, *Glenn Ligon: Condition Report*)

⁴¹³ Copeland, *Bound to Appear*, 110-111.

⁴¹⁴ Ligon, *Interview by David Drogin*.

⁴¹⁵ Copeland, *Bound to Appear*, 113.

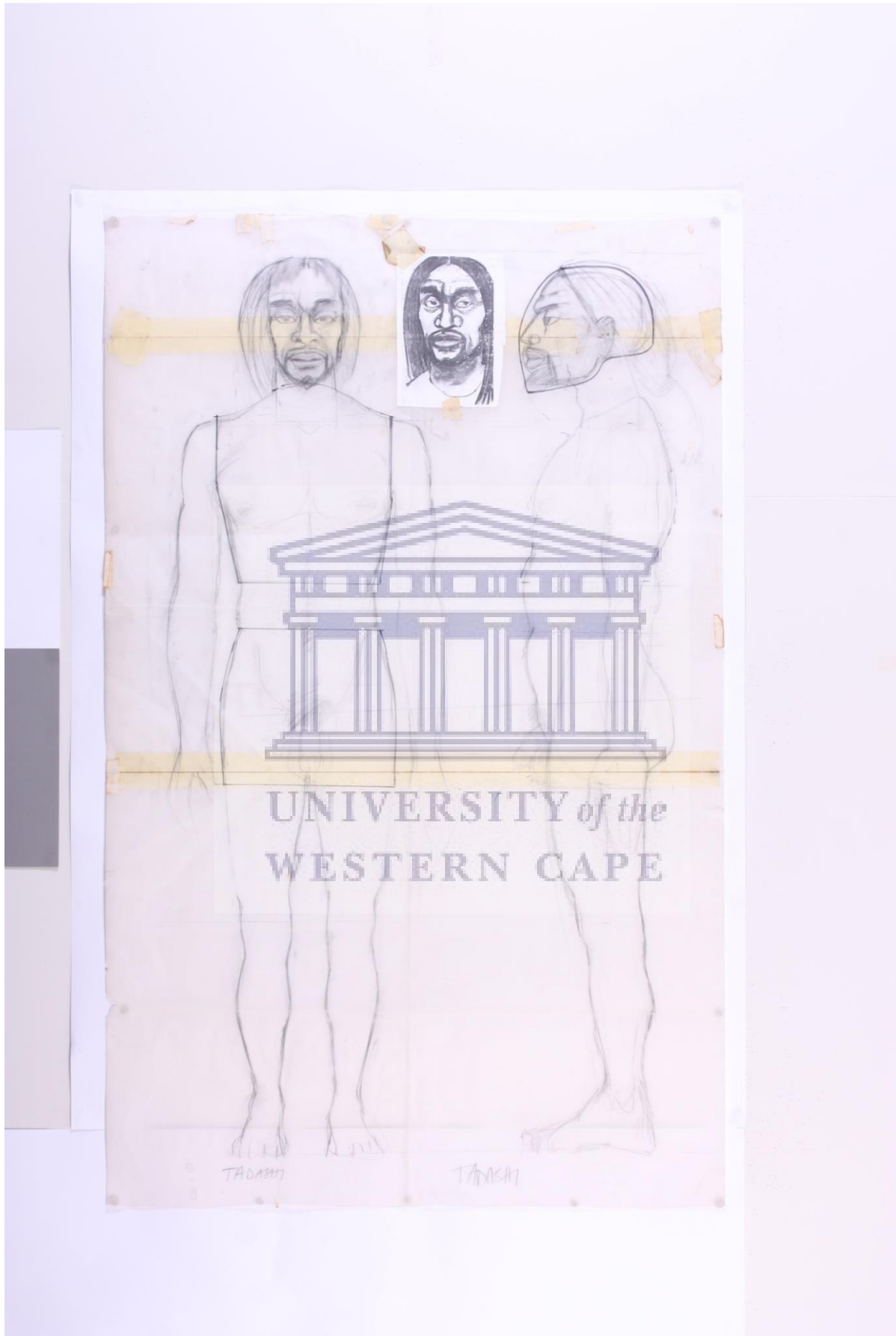


Figure 21: Tadashi Character Plan



Figure 22: *Condition Report* (2000) by Glenn Ligon

In a similar way the human puppet functions as a “man, but...”, and in this way serves as a map to guide a process of subject-making. In *Tadashi Character Plan*, the male puppet is shown in two positions – straight-on and from a left profile view, similarly to a kind of mugshot or identity document photograph, and in this sense the subject is very clearly stated, the purpose of these kinds of photographs or images being unambiguous clarity. Puppets and photographs have very similar traits in terms of reference to the living corporeal body, and more generally the Handspring drawings mimic photographs in multiple ways. Firstly, many of the puppet characters, both human and animal, are derived from photographs of specific people, reproduced in drawn form, as can be seen in the extensive research material contained in the paper archive. The drawings are similar to snapshots or “stills”, cartoons to be animated, or negatives to be developed. The style of the drawings, as mentioned above, is also reminiscent of ethnographic photographs or diagrams,

mugshots, identity documents or anatomical diagrams. This is obviously done for practical reasons, disassembling the body as a means of building it up in puppet form, but the drawings act as further evidence of the puppet as object-subject, one who is controlled, manipulated by the puppeteer; the puppet is from conception an object of scrutiny and oppression, while simultaneously serving as assistive prosthesis for the puppeteer, as has been mentioned. This can be linked to photography as a “disciplinary apparatus of the state”,⁴¹⁶ initiated amongst early technologies of surveillance in 19th century which are still in circulation at present; “during this period, police departments and other state agencies began producing archives in which bodies were transformed into images, and subsequently into types, which became the key tools of population control.”⁴¹⁷ Interestingly, “[c]larity is also what the state relies upon in graduated degrees for surveillance, for police footage, [and] ID photographs. A number of Afrapix photographers also refer to the state’s use of photographic and filmic documentation in the media to argue its case for repression.”⁴¹⁸ It is perhaps in the blurs and breaks of the drawings, in their ambiguous layering, that some of the repressive hold these kinds of “clear” images can slip or be loosened.

The photograph, particularly the photographic portrait, is described by Siegfried Kracauer as “demonic”, an entity which further “becomes a ghost because the costumed manikin was once alive.”⁴¹⁹ The subject in the photograph thus appears to have agency – it is haunting, frightening, but also transient and intangible and therefore not graspable, linking it to memory. It can become harmful and possess the viewer, the extension of the technical into the human. Here Benjamin’s notion of the “dialectical image”, a kind of stereoscopic image, is also akin to the doubled subject/object of the puppet. In fact, according to Sarah Kofman, “through the mediation of the notion of the negative, the theory of vision remains the same: to see is always to obtain a double.”⁴²⁰ Benjamin was “interested in the way the instruments of mass communication – radio, film and photography – served as virtual and actual

⁴¹⁶ Smith and Sliwinski, *Photography and the Optical*, 2.

⁴¹⁷ Smith and Sliwinski, *Photography and the Optical*, 2.

⁴¹⁸ Hayes, *The Blur of History*, 157.

⁴¹⁹ Kracauer, *Photography*, 429-430.

⁴²⁰ Kofman, *Freud: The Photographic Apparatus*, 75.

prostheses for human perception”,⁴²¹ and the camera itself has been referred to as a kind of “visual prosthesis” akin to the puppet. Indeed the camera strap and tripod extend the reach of the body, while the lens magnifies the eye and sight – what is visible becomes more accessible, but within a certain frame. According to Shawn Michelle Smith, Benjamin “seized on photography’s ability to make visible what usually evades perception” in that through mechanical features such as a fast shutter speed and the capacity to produce images of micro details, “photography revolutionised seeing, making new worlds visible beyond the limits of natural human sight”,⁴²² and revealing “entirely new structural formations of the subject.”⁴²³

Benjamin’s notion of the “optical unconscious” which he introduces in relation to photography and the camera, and which, according to Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski, “attunes us to all that is not consciously controlled in the making, circulation, and viewing of photographs, the contingency involved in the production and consumption of images, as well as the unexamined motivations and effects of this technology’s pervasive spread into wider and wider spheres of human and nonhuman activity”,⁴²⁴ is productive in terms of a study of the senses and their conventional use. According to Smith, “the optical unconscious is the recognition of ordinary blindness – the revelation of an unseen world that photography does not fully disclose, but makes us aware of it in its invisibility. [...] It draws us to the edge of sight.”⁴²⁵ At the heart of photography there is “both an intense desire, and a failure, to see”.⁴²⁶ Here the “edge of sight” could perhaps also be figured in relation to sight’s connection to other senses – where does sight stop and touch begin – but in this regard Siegfried Kracauer also notes photography and film’s “capacity to ‘reveal things normally unseen’” such as “‘the small and the big’”, “‘the transient’” and the “‘blind spots of the mind’” which “also include those things that ‘habit and prejudice prevent us from noticing.’”⁴²⁷ Here Smith notes that as much “[a]s photography shows us more, it also shows us how much we don’t see, how much of ordinary

⁴²¹ Smith and Sliwinski, *Photography and the Optical*, 2.

⁴²² Smith, *At the Edge*, 4.

⁴²³ Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 236.

⁴²⁴ Smith and Sliwinski, *Photography and the Optical*, 2.

⁴²⁵ Smith, *At the Edge*, 6.

⁴²⁶ Smith, *At the Edge*, 2.

⁴²⁷ Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 53.

seeing is blind.”⁴²⁸ Benjamin’s definition of the optical unconscious shifts from describing “an inherent property of a particular object [...] to an agency of perception itself. In this second iteration⁴²⁹ the optical unconscious names a particular structure of vision (which is not limited to the visible) that endows objects with the power of the gaze”,⁴³⁰ a “gaze that belongs to the other as something in excess of the spectator’s agency but which seems to show itself to the camera”.⁴³¹ It is thus “cultural, not simply physical, bars to seeing that photography exposes”,⁴³² and it is here – in the “blind spots of the mind” – that puppetry offers a mirror to reflect on these gaps, disrupting our sense of self and conventional notions of (self-)identity.

Despite the ostensible clarity of the image, the subject in *Tadashi Character Plan* is also evidently *not* “a man”. The body is simplified and segmented, made up of clearly defined contoured lines without much detail within these forms, apart from the face, which is drawn in almost expressionistic style – in stark contrast to the body. There is also another panel, a photocopied rendering of the man’s face, attached with masking tape to the top of the drawing. Here his face is drawn to show something of his personality and is perhaps the clearest indication of a “subject” present in the diagram, but in contrast to the disjointed body, the head seems somewhat uncanny, floating unmoored from the rest of the body, and is a reminder of the distinctions between “head” and “body” in subject-making. It is also rather like a funeral portrait displayed over a coffin, a kind of doubled portrait on the horizontal plane. The drawing is extended with panels of paper attached with wide masking tape at the top and bottom edges, cutting the man’s body at the top of the legs and through the centre of his face, and the body is further fragmented by multiple horizontal and vertical folds and creases in the paper. The tape seems to function to fix or mend this man’s broken body, further highlighted by some tears that have been taped up at the edges; the place or map, the metaphorical space in which he exists, also

⁴²⁸ Smith, *At the Edge*, 4.

⁴²⁹ Benjamin does not delineate one clear definition of the optical unconscious and it further seems to go through multiple iterations over time, some of which will be explored here. In a later iteration “Benjamin begins to elaborate a theory of mass communication that is centred on the notion of the unconscious rather than rationality or reason. Here photography becomes a key medium for the circulation of a culture’s unconscious desires, fears, and structures of defence.” (Smith and Sliwinski, *Photography and the Optical*, 9)

⁴³⁰ Smith and Sliwinski, *Photography and the Optical*, 7.

⁴³¹ Smith and Sliwinski, *Photography and the Optical*, 8.

⁴³² Smith, *At the Edge*, 6.

fragmented, in need of repair. Additionally, the whole surface of the paper is worn with erased and smudged pencil marks and foxing.

This drawing highlights how the subject is frequently determined through the image in multiple forms – flattened, segmented, disjointed, fragmented. The pictorial representation of an objectified subject may seem to function to further bind the human body to the gaze, further objectify it, diminish or devalue it, but I think there are also other potentialities here in which the blurs and breaks release the hold of the “clear” *image* of the subject by loosening the grip of the gaze and referring the viewer instead to the tactile aspects of the drawing, and by extension the body. The touch of making inherent in the image seems to also function to fill out the flesh of the body – the processes of sketching, taping up, erasing, folding, are a reminder that this body is also a living moving body, one *made* by another living moving body. What this set of tactile unconscious marks also show is how the subject is defined through quite arbitrarily determined factors – for example, race – layers which overlap and preconceive whatever formulation of subjecthood the individual may have chosen for themselves.

As a “striated” image *Tadeshi Character Plan* functions as a straightforward practical plan for puppet-building – the proportions are correctly put in place, and it is clear which parts make up the body and how they should be used. But as a “smooth” image, its surface a kind of “field” or “meadow”, it conveys something further about the subject. It is tactility or hapticality that allows this subject to exist in a nomad space – between striated and smooth, two- and three-dimensions, subject and object, and as such opens up interpretations around how the subject is constituted – allowing for definitions that exist in a more liminal space – in the break, in a wild place. I’m not sure yet what this place offers, but I would like to suggest that it offers it via touch – that it is touch that refigures and opens up the subject in a post-apartheid landscape. The “debt” of the hand left on the skins of the Handspring drawings calls for an unpacking of the processes around labour – here artistic labour - but in a broader sense the discussion of labour, and its connection to race in South Africa, could benefit from an investigation of the processes of work as they are related to touch and the hand. In other words, this exploration, which will be

unpacked further in Chapter 3, is also a call to think about how the sense of touch (hapticality, tactility) is figured in the post-apartheid.



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CHAPTER 3:

THE HAND: GESTURE AND HAPTIC EXPERIENCES

3.1 Between Movement and Stillness: The Hand at Play

3.2 Woyzeck at Work

3.3 Gesture in *Woyzeck on the Highveld*



THE HAND: GESTURE AND HAPTIC EXPERIENCES

This chapter looks to the tool or apparatus *in* the hand, a relation whereby the “hands turn away from their original, their ‘actual’ object. They move around its surroundings, in the objective world, to find another object, made in a different way, an object that is somehow ‘like a hand’, but not so vulnerable to injury, a stone, for example (that is like a fist), or a branch (that is like a finger).”⁴³³ The object in this guise is thus marked by a movement, a “turn away” from the subject, which is nevertheless a move toward making the subject more capable, more “complete”, in that with “every tool man is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or he is removing the limits to their functioning”.⁴³⁴ The inquiry thus looks to the movement and gesture these hand-like objects arouse at both intra- and inter-subjective levels, specifically in relation to modes of becoming inherent to the activities of *work* and its corresponding counterpart *play* as witnessed and illustrated in Handspring’s *Woyzeck on the Highveld* (1992). The sphere of work which is so central to our modern everyday existence (as Hardt and Negri put it, the “world is labour”)⁴³⁵ has, according to Kathi Weeks, “been relatively neglected not only as a practice productive of hierarchies – a scene of gendering, racialisation, and becoming classed – but as an arena in which to develop and pursue a freedom-centred politics.”⁴³⁶ To contrast work with play through a focus on gesture⁴³⁷ and haptic experiences offers the potential for different varieties of touch to cross-pollinate, allowing for “a more radical imagination of postwork futures”.⁴³⁸ This is not so much a refusal of work altogether, but perhaps more a rethinking of the gestures of and around work – a reordering or rescripting of the role of the hand within work

⁴³³ Flusser, *Gestures*, 44. In other words, “[o]bjects used in this way are transformed into simplified and more effective extensions of the hands. For this purpose, the hands grasp, comprehend, research, and produce these objects so as to then use them against the original object.” (Ibid) For Frederick Engels, “[l]abour begins with the making of tools.” (Engels, *The Part Played*, 13)

⁴³⁴ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 43. Here the “prosthesis” can be seen to function similarly to the tool, as an addition or attachment to the body which supports its efficient functioning, but acts as a “replacement” for a “missing” part of the body, and in this way extends beyond the hand in its capacity as an object which is “like” the body.

⁴³⁵ Hardt and Negri, *Labour of Dionysus*, 10.

⁴³⁶ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 23.

⁴³⁷ According to Flusser “many people will agree that gestures are to be considered movements of the body and, in a broader sense, movements of tools attached to the body.” (Flusser, *Gestures*, 1) In other words, “[g]estures are movements of the body that express an intention.” (Ibid) For Flusser, the question of gesture “is not an ethical, still less an epistemological, but rather an aesthetic one.” (Flusser, *Gestures*, 6)

⁴³⁸ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 15.

and play, re-placing gestures of play within the realm of work and vice versa. This situates work as Weeks figures it, “not only a site of exploitation, domination, and antagonism, but also where we might find the power to create alternatives on the basis of subordinated knowledges, resistant subjectivities, and emergent models of organisation.”⁴³⁹ The puppet is an object of both work and play, an art object or *artwork* situated within the context of a theatrical performance or *production*, also referred to as a *play*. The activity of play “is intrinsically part of performing because it embodies the ‘as if’, the make-believe”,⁴⁴⁰ which can “lead people into a ‘second reality’, separate from ordinary life. This reality is one where people can become selves other than their daily selves. When they temporarily become or enact another, people perform actions different from what they do ordinarily. Thus [...] play transform[s] people, either permanently or temporarily.”⁴⁴¹ Play can thus also be seen as a productive activity alongside work, in its role in learning and exploring, imagining and conceptualising.⁴⁴²

The “problems with work”, as Kathi Weeks puts it, include “the low wages in most sectors of the economy; the unemployment, underemployment, and precarious employment suffered by many workers; and the overwork that often characterizes even the most privileged of employment – after all, even the best job is a problem when it monopolizes so much of life.”⁴⁴³ Furthermore, places and spaces of employment and work are also largely significant as “sites of decision making, [...] structured by relations of power and authority; as hierarchical organisations, they raise issues of consent and obedience; as spaces of exclusion, they pose questions about membership and obligation.”⁴⁴⁴ Weeks argues that work has been “depoliticised”, and that “unionisation and consumer organising continue to represent not only two obviously important means, but often the *only* avenues for imagining a politics of work, [and] we are left with few possibilities for marshalling antiwork

⁴³⁹ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 29.

⁴⁴⁰ Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 89.

⁴⁴¹ Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 52.

⁴⁴² See also Veblen, *The Theory*.

⁴⁴³ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 1. Her focus is specifically on the United States here, but there is a sense that these issues are widely relevant as part of the experience of global capitalism.

⁴⁴⁴ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 2.

activism and inventing post-work alternatives.”⁴⁴⁵ For Weeks, an “effort to make work at once public and political is, then, one way to counter the forces that would naturalise, privatise, individualise, ontologise, and also, thereby, depoliticize it.”⁴⁴⁶ Harney and Moten point out that “for capital the subject has become too cumbersome, too slow, too prone to error, too controlling, to say nothing of too rarified, too specialized a form of life”,⁴⁴⁷ and it is as such that capitalism seeks to utilise the subject as commodity – as a streamlined and neutralised object that must keep up with the fast pace and flow of work organised within a neo-liberal structure that “increasingly objectifies, commodifies, alienates, fragments, and calculatingly measures our gestures.”⁴⁴⁸

Puppetry as a genre can be seen to “mirror” modes of capitalist production in terms of subject/object relations, which “reduce[...] the being of all beings – trees, animals, and even human beings – to the commodified condition of mere objects, things always either ready-to-hand or fixed in a state of permanent presence”.⁴⁴⁹ It is furthermore linked to the “hidden abode of production”⁴⁵⁰ or performance, the “eclipse of labouring activity that Marx identifies as the source of [the commodity’s] fetishization”,⁴⁵¹ or as David Kleinberg-Levin phrases it, the “invisible hands of capital and labour”.⁴⁵² According to Kleinberg-Levin the hand of labour “remains mostly hidden, suppressed by the practices and institutions of an economy organised around the exigencies of capital.”⁴⁵³ For Frederick Engels, “the hand is not only the organ of labour, *it is also the product of labour*”,⁴⁵⁴ and in this regard Kleinberg-Levin

⁴⁴⁵ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 4.

⁴⁴⁶ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 7.

⁴⁴⁷ Harney & Moten, *The Undercommons*, 87.

⁴⁴⁸ Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, 86.

⁴⁴⁹ Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, xxxv.

⁴⁵⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 279-280.

⁴⁵¹ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 2. In this regard Kathi Weeks has identified that there is generally “a focus on animation and meaningfulness of commodities” (Ibid) rather than an attention to revealing the “secrets” of the places where “capital produces and is itself produced”. (Marx, *Capital*, 279-280)

⁴⁵² Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, 80.

⁴⁵³ Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, 93.

⁴⁵⁴ Engels, *The Part Played*, 9. By this Engels means that “[o]nly by labour, by adaptation to ever new operations, through the inheritance of muscles, ligaments, and, over longer periods of time, bones that had undergone special development and the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more and more complicated operations, have given the human hand the high degree of perfection required to conjure into being the pictures of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen, the music of a Paganini.” (Ibid)

describes how the hands of alienated labour can become “spiritually severed”, the hand

a hand in name only, for it is separated from its subjective interiority, its function in meaningful gesture, its part in a meaningful whole, bodily felt to be such. Moreover, it is severed from the objective materials upon which it works, severed from the tools it uses, severed from the process of production, and severed from the surplus value enjoyed by representatives of capital.⁴⁵⁵

In this way the capitalist mode of work “splits” or segments the subject, some parts “visible” and others hidden, defined not as a “whole”, but as so many exploitable and expendable parts – the hand being an integral component – and “[b]ehind the worker’s alienated – or, say, severed – hand lurks the invisible hand of corporate capital, a hand of demonic powers concealed behind the spellbinding phantasmagoria that the system is designed to produce.”⁴⁵⁶

Woyzeck on the Highveld offers an exploration of the capitalist subject in the form of the human (puppet) body, via the hand, as tool of the state, here specifically in terms of the production and reproduction of race, class and gender, thus situating these markers of identity as methods of control. Connectedly, the production can also be seen to locate work as a “process of subjectification”⁴⁵⁷ in that it “produces not just economic goods and services but also social and political subjects”.⁴⁵⁸ In other words, the play shows that “the body’s experience of labour and of the material conditions of labour play a major role in the process of social construction”.⁴⁵⁹ Work is thus “not just an economic practice. Indeed, that every individual is required to work, that most are expected to work for wages or be supported by someone who does, is a social convention and disciplinary apparatus, rather than an economic necessity.”⁴⁶⁰ The production plays out the problem of labour in mining and migrancy in relation to the object, and is generative to thinking modernity in a South African context. This is to ask, following Veronika Ambros and Lawrence Switzky, “what is

⁴⁵⁵ Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, 84.

⁴⁵⁶ Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, 85.

⁴⁵⁷ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 9.

⁴⁵⁸ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 8.

⁴⁵⁹ Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, 92.

⁴⁶⁰ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 7-8.

Heinrich Woyzeck, the anti-hero of Georg Büchner's 1836 play *Woyzeck*, doing in the middle of the South African landscape?"⁴⁶¹

For Handspring the making of puppets is a professional endeavour, their life's work, and in this sense a relationship of care, of holding, is placed inside the heart of labour. What is Handspring then saying of the commodification of beings in labour? For Moten, the mode of subjectivity that capital both allows and disallows is disrupted or augmented by the "commodity who speaks",⁴⁶² and it is here that the puppet offers an opening in the context of work which disrupts or subverts subject/object relations. According to Moten, this "presence of the commodity within the individual is an effect of reproduction, a trace of maternity",⁴⁶³ and as such may be something we all hold within us. Thus to think the puppet as a kind of tool, and embrace a "becoming object" or more specifically a "becoming puppet" may inform a relation with work which moves from objectifying beings into animating objects - in other words, how might we think about the ways in which puppetry reverses capitalist tropes and pressures, and offers ways out of them? For Moten, there exists a "containment of a certain personhood within the commodity that can be seen as the commodity's animation by the material trace of the maternal – a palpable hit or touch, a bodily and visible phonographic inscription."⁴⁶⁴ This speaks to a "*being maternal* that is indistinguishable from a *being material*",⁴⁶⁵ the puppet a kind of "child" or kin to the puppet-maker and later the puppeteer and it is the materiality of the body, tied to its relations to other bodies (other subjects, other bodies of work) – the maternal found *in* the material - that offers prospective openings and means of mitigating the "split" capitalist subject. This is also to look to the activities of work and play at practice within the archive – in its collection, storage and in my engagement with it – which in many ways can be seen simply as a static storage facility for objects which once held movement, and in this sense are imbued with that vitalism, that potential energy, but are nevertheless still objects waiting to be *moved* by the subject. But in other ways it is the object which *moves* the subject, opening up new

⁴⁶¹ Ambros & Switzky, *Hungry for Interpretation*, 40.

⁴⁶² Moten, *In the Break*, 11.

⁴⁶³ Moten, *In the Break*, 17.

⁴⁶⁴ Moten, *In the Break*, 17-18.

⁴⁶⁵ Moten, *In the Break*, 16.

potentialities in thought and practice. There is thus a transformative play, a transformative labour, at practice in the work with the Handspring archive.

The nature of the Handspring puppet dictates that the puppeteer or manipulator-actor must sometimes “become” the object via touch or the handling of the figure, in that they are required to create movement from inside the frame or armature of the puppet’s body. This manipulation must be performed with *feeling*, with *soul*; “the puppeteer himself must dance”.⁴⁶⁶ In this way the puppet becomes a “vestige of human spirit”.⁴⁶⁷ In turn, the objects become ‘actors’ in a move that Jane Taylor has suggested transforms puppets into “powerful” or “emotional prostheses” for the puppeteers who may convey and process emotion through the puppet.⁴⁶⁸ The puppet thus acts as an assistive aid which helps the puppeteer or actor (who is sometimes the same person) deal with emotional or psychological issues addressed in a play via the character they become, building a kinship with these objects and the materials they are made out of. Although it is predominantly the puppeteers who benefit directly through this interaction, the audience who witnesses this tactile relationship may also experience the benefits by extension or projection, potentially challenging the relationships they form with quotidian objects on a daily basis. This may be attributed to Vilayanur Ramachandran’s concept of “mirror neurons” which convey a sense of empathy with other peoples’ sense of touch whereby, we may ‘feel’ this touch in the brain, but can simultaneously detect that it is not our own sense of touch.⁴⁶⁹ Ramachandran stipulates that in this sense it is only *skin* separating one person from another and in this way empathy is felt through the skin. If the concept of mirror neurons is applied to the relationship between puppet and puppeteer, it could be said that the puppeteer feels empathy for the implied life of the puppet. If the puppet’s ‘skin’ and sense of touch is inherently derived from the puppeteer themselves, then what they are really experiencing is a sense of empathy for their own self. Gesture is additionally evident in the unconscious movements made by the puppeteers in their manipulation of the puppets; seen in the contortions of the body and the emotional response in the face as they live through and *into* the puppet, particularly evident in Handspring’s conjoined puppets/puppeteers. Thus

⁴⁶⁶ Von Kleist, *On the Marionette Theatre*, 22.

⁴⁶⁷ Von Kleist, *On the Marionette Theatre*, 23.

⁴⁶⁸ Taylor, *Omissions and Commissions*.

⁴⁶⁹ Ramachandran, *The Neurons*.

puppetry acts as a double form of gesture in a combination of intentional and unanticipated movements, both of which serve to address our notions of touch or handiness, and our understandings of the human body, both our own and others. In Handspring's work a third form of gesture could perhaps be added by way of the artist's gesture, the trace of which can be seen in the material forms of the puppets, for example in the stippled carvings and the armatures or skeletons of the puppet bodies. The blurring of subject and object, body and puppet furthermore addresses our relationships with objects and brings into question how we define object as subject and subject as object in a space in which the puppet-object becomes human, while the puppeteer is made 'object'.

3.1 Between Movement and Stillness: The Hand at Play

"Gravity, *gravitas*" is positioned by Deleuze and Guattari as

the essence of the State. It is not at all that the State knows nothing of speed; but it requires that movement, even the fastest, cease to be the absolute state of a moving body occupying a smooth space, to become the relative characteristic of a 'moved body' going from one point to another in a striated space. In this sense, the state never ceases to decompose, recompose, and transform movement, or to regulate speed.⁴⁷⁰

There may, however, be a way of using this "essence" to realign the subject and allow more varied or "striated" modes of being and mobility through the form of the puppet, which is resistant to gravity. If the life of the capitalist subject comes to be determined through speed, progress and output, and for the puppet movement is indicative of life itself, it is perhaps in the *pause* or *stopping* of these measures – to *still* work, or to "play in stillness" through a greater freedom of movement - that the hand becomes visible beyond its use as a tool, the subject comes back into focus outside of its use-value, and the commodified body is sutured. Weeks has further suggested that

[c]apital requires [...] time both to 'consume' labour power and to produce (or reproduce) it, and the time devoted to one is sometimes lost to the other. The

⁴⁷⁰ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 386. As such it seeks to create "fixed paths in well-defined directions, which restrict speed, regulate circulation, relativize movement, and measure in detail the relative movements of subject and object." (Ibid)

competing requirements of creating surplus value and sustaining the lives and socialities upon which it depends form a potential fault line through capitalist political economies, one that might serve to generate critical thinking and political action.⁴⁷¹

So it is perhaps pausing in the fault lines between the dialectics of consumption and production, and work and play, that offers a potential opening to refiguring gestures of work, particularly in relation to means and ends. The activity that results from play “becomes a pure means, that is, a praxis that, while firmly maintaining its nature as a means, is emancipated from its relationship to an end; it has joyously forgotten its goal and can now show itself as such, as a means without an end”,⁴⁷² the end within the realm of work typically being a product of some sort.⁴⁷³ In this regard, Barthes, via Winnicott, frames playing as “process of manipulation, not the object produced”.⁴⁷⁴ To interrogate work in this way can be seen as a form of “studious play”, Agamben’s term for an adult form of “serious” play⁴⁷⁵ which he derives from “[c]hildren, who play with whatever old thing falls into their hands, make toys out of things that also belong to the spheres of economics, war, law, and other activities that we are used to thinking of as serious. All of a sudden, a car, a firearm, or a legal contract becomes a toy.”⁴⁷⁶ This studious play

consists in freeing a behaviour from its genetic inscription within a given sphere [...]. The freed behaviour still reproduces and mimics the forms of the activity from which it has been emancipated, but, in emptying them of their sense and of any obligatory relationship to an end, it opens them and makes them available for a new use.⁴⁷⁷

The danger in this mode of serious play lies in the fact that, if *anything* can be used in play, human subjects can also become “playthings”, commodities in a slightly different sense to the commodity found within work. To turn more explicitly then to the gestures of the state which are also linked to the structuring of (violent) work and play, and the ways in which they filter into capitalist production and consumption,

⁴⁷¹ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 27.

⁴⁷² Agamben, *Profanations*, 86.

⁴⁷³ It must be noted however that “pure play” is still expressive of experiment and learning or modelling of activities as its outcome in that the body too is an economy.

⁴⁷⁴ Barthes, *Cy Twombly*, 172.

⁴⁷⁵ An alternate version of serious play can be seen when people “mix bits of play – a wisecrack, a joke, a flirtatious smile – with serious activities in order to lighten, subvert, or even deny what is apparently being communicated.” (Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 89)

⁴⁷⁶ Agamben, *Profanations*, 76.

⁴⁷⁷ Agamben, *Profanations*, 85-86.

might suggest a further means of playing/working with “open hands”, and more open, perhaps more playful processes of labour.

Serious play is more thoroughly explained through Doris Sommer’s detailing of Antanas Mockus’s series of interventions when he took on the role of mayor in the town of Bogotá, Colombia, which offer a means of diverting violence into play; creating “citizens” out of what could be seen as bare life, from *zoē* to *bios*.⁴⁷⁸ This example is worth laying out in some detail in relation to rerouting the violence inherent in work, and a means of using play as a subversive tactic. Mockus, confronted with a city marred by violence and corruption, reverted the techniques and methods of the sovereign state into a version of serious play that ultimately debased the absolute power of state over subject. Corrupt traffic police had already entered into a state of dark or devious play, with their assigned roles as representatives of authority, making up the rules of their job as they go. The subject of their “games” is continually at the mercy of their cat-and-mouse antics; the mouse does not know however that it is part of a game.⁴⁷⁹ The broader state is further implicit in this game, the police becoming puppets of the state in a larger form of dark play. Here “the political power of the state is *polis*, police, that is, management of the public ways” and “the gates of the city, its levies and duties, are barriers, filters against the fluidity of the masses, against the penetration power of migratory packs”, people, animals and goods.⁴⁸⁰ Although “[i]ts power is formless, like its nowhere tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states”,⁴⁸¹ absent or transient but potentially ever-present, the state’s repressive control is, according to Benjamin, most easily “touched” or accessed by its citizens through the predominant mode of the police force, Kafkaesque “assistants” of the state.⁴⁸² For Pablo Oyarzún, the “spectral character of this institution not only suggests a haunting omnipresence - which tends to make people guilty a priori - but also indicates that the police are the

⁴⁷⁸ See Sommer, *The Work of Art*, 15-18.

⁴⁷⁹ Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 119.

⁴⁸⁰ Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, 12-13.

⁴⁸¹ Benjamin, *Reflections*, 287.

⁴⁸² Indeed in South Africa the state’s predominantly violent touch in the form of the police is felt across class, race and gender, to (often extreme) varying degrees and in multiple different forms, for example the removal of homes, violent force used at peaceful protests and the unwarranted murder of civilians at the hands of police.

most degraded and corrupted vestige of the mythic manifestation of the gods.”⁴⁸³ According to Oyarzún, “this institution could be considered the modern version of mythical ambiguity, being a power invested with authority and with the right to exercise violence in order to ensure law enforcement, that is to say, in order to ascertain in each specific case the (applicability of the) law.”⁴⁸⁴ Mockus can be seen to reassess the role of the police force, the “spectral mixture” of “lawmaking and law-preserving violence”⁴⁸⁵, flipping it on its head by replacing the traffic police in Bogota with mimes who speak through a language of touch or gesture, or perhaps more accurately an *absence* of touch, and who confront a formless, intangible presence or subject of interaction in their focus on imaginary objects. Communication between state and citizen is here achieved through gesture as opposed to speech or voice, removing the authority of the *voice* of the state. In the case of Bogotá, the traffic police manipulated or controlled a very significant area of life and death – the road. Traffic deaths were a major issue and corruption amongst traffic police was rife. By setting up these spectres or puppets as figures who partake in a game, ones who act without the punishing voice of authority, the mimes create a game where the worst outcome is ridicule as opposed to imprisonment or death. This could be figured as a means, rather than an end where the power of the state works to create citizens, rather than biopolitical subjects, “the production of a biopolitical body [being] the original activity of sovereign power.”⁴⁸⁶ Serious play of this sort is perhaps a means out of violence as an end,⁴⁸⁷ but a politics of ridicule also runs the risk of a kind of injury or ‘death’ of social status, a division between “insiders” and “outsiders”, and it is as such that the danger of the “ends” of play must also be taken into consideration.

In the above example a “playing” with the state, and playing with both state and public violence, can be witnessed by the replacement of the traffic police, a

⁴⁸³ Oyarzún, *Law, Violence, History*, 333.

⁴⁸⁴ Oyarzún, *Law, Violence, History*, 333. Oyarzún states that “[w]hat is secured is, if anything, legal violence *as such*. It is in this sense, I think, that Benjamin speaks of a suspension of the difference between law-positing and law-preserving violence in the case of the police, a suspension that makes it paradigmatic (in a way comparable only to the military) of all mythic and legal violence.” (Ibid)

⁴⁸⁵ Benjamin, *Reflections*, 286.

⁴⁸⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6.

⁴⁸⁷ A further example can be seen in Mockus’s ban on male participation in recreational evening activities – the “women’s night out” – in an attempt to bring attention to and halt violence perpetrated on women. (Sommer, *The Work of Art*, 18)

disciplining form of touch, with mimes who render touch in a different modes, the touch of an imaginary object. This imagined touch used in play within the sphere of work brings rise to two things. Firstly, it starts to change behaviours, and opens up a site typically associated with violence and destruction to imagination and the potential for a different kind of use of the space. Secondly, it refigures how the state touches its people, that is, via a typically violent touch in the form of the police, into a “kind”, playful touch which in turn changes the response of public to the state. For Agamben, “the first foundation of political life is a life that may be killed, which is politicized through its very capacity to be killed.”⁴⁸⁸ What then, if ridicule replaces death as politicizing activity, entering a state of play? Here citizenship is figured through participation, rather than through legal status - “[a]dmiration [...] is the basic sentiment of citizenship”.⁴⁸⁹

3.2 Woyzeck at Work

The puppet version of Woyzeck, “the lowly German soldier of early nineteenth century”⁴⁹⁰ is, in the context of *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, black “mine-worker Harry Woyzeck, living from hand-to-mouth in the industrialised landscape of twentieth-century Johannesburg”.⁴⁹¹ The play is an “adaptation of German writer Georg Büchner’s famous play of jealousy, murder and the struggle of an ordinary man against an uncaring society which eventually destroys him.”⁴⁹² It is significant within the development of Handspring’s productions and archive in a number of ways which have been outlined in the previous chapter, but is of further interest here as a form of commentary on South African society, both past and present. The replacement of the human Woyzeck with a puppet version of the character presents a means of renewed perspective on the working subject through the form of object, which also poses an added concern around the status of the commodity, that is, an anxiety that if the subject is replaced by an object (even one with ambiguous status), *it can never get back* to being a human subject, it can never topple the biopolitical pressures

⁴⁸⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 89.

⁴⁸⁹ Sommer, *The Work of Art*, 6.

⁴⁹⁰ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 70. The original *Woyzeck* play written by Georg Büchner, which, due to the death of the writer, was never actually completed, is based on an actual case of a soldier who killed his wife. (Richards, *Georg Büchner’s Woyzeck*, 2)

⁴⁹¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 70.

⁴⁹² Handspring Puppet Company, *Woyzeck on the Highveld*.

exerted on it. The troubling thing about puppets replacing human actors, coming to occupy the central position of a play, is this. If the puppet exists as the “living dead”, it is a threat to the subject, both as a potentially contagious being but further as one who will “consume” the untainted flesh of the subject, a threat to the life of the subject.⁴⁹³ In this regard, Bill Brown, via Michael Taussig, has pointed to how death has “the capacity both to turn people into things and to bring inanimate objects to life”.⁴⁹⁴ In a similar sense, the capitalist subject may be seen to be “consumed” by work; for Woyzeck, “Everything is just work, work! We sweat even in our sleep. Us people.”⁴⁹⁵ This can be linked to Jean and John Comaroff’s writing on instances in nineties-era South Africa where there were rumours that “some people, usually old people, were turning others into zombies; into a vast virtual army of ghost workers.”⁴⁹⁶ Here there is a claim that zombies were stealing work from the living, but also the sense that a certain kind of work transforms the living into the ‘living-dead’, into tools for raw manual labour in instances in which the worker is “[r]educ[ed] from humanity to raw labour power, he is the creature of his maker, stored up in petrol drums or sheds like tools. [...] Being solely for the benefit of its owner, the toil of the living dead is pure surplus value”,⁴⁹⁷ and the hand of the ideal capitalist subject takes on “a demonic, destructive materiality, already close to death.”⁴⁹⁸ Infection requires a close proximity or association to the body, tying this worry most prominently to the sense of touch, which can perhaps further be linked to an anxiety around the exchange of money, a notoriously “dirty” object, made this way from passing through so many pairs of unknown hands.

Hendrik Verwoerd’s 1948 speech on “The Policy of Apartheid” further highlights the connection between touch, work and race (or more accurately, racism) in the formation of the apartheid policy and economy, situating work in South Africa as structured around race. Beside the more obvious segregation of races in the creation

⁴⁹³ Here there is more work to be done around contamination and circulation as capitalist tropes, particularly in reference to the “stain” as it appears in *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, as will be briefly discussed later in the text.

⁴⁹⁴ Brown, *Thing Theory*, 7.

⁴⁹⁵ Handspring Puppet Company, *Woyzeck on the Highveld*.

⁴⁹⁶ Comaroff & Comaroff, *Occult Economies*, 285.

⁴⁹⁷ Comaroff & Comaroff, *Occult Economies*, 289-290.

⁴⁹⁸ Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, 85.

of “separate residential areas for European and non-Europeans”,⁴⁹⁹ which attempts to eliminate any form of social relation between races at all, Verwoerd’s doctrine seems to possess an intense anxiety around touch or physical contact, and calls for the elimination or “removal of friction”⁵⁰⁰ between races, an energy which in itself implies physical touch. His concern seems to lie in the “mingling” and “mixing” of races, a worry about ‘infection’ or a spreading of germs, but further in the question of labour – in “places where meals are served”.⁵⁰¹ The apartheid ideal of an entirely segregated state is not possible for Verwoerd because of the need for a cheap workforce, but the anxiety of the “behind-the-scenes” touch involved in this work still remains – the threat of infection, but perhaps further of becoming “object” through indirect contact with the black subject. The black Woyzeck puppet is thus in this context a threat or danger as a racialised subject, but when “matched” with a black puppeteer could perhaps further be seen as representative of a “doubled” or “split” self, two halves of the self touching at the point where puppet meets puppeteer. The schizoid character of Woyzeck is performed by combinations of three different puppeteers, Adrian Kohler, Louis Seboko and Busi Zokufa, at various points in the performance, playing out a kind of utopian “democratic” exploration of the dynamics of gender and race in relation to the theme of work. Touching the object of the puppet is to some extent an acceptance of the infection of touch, the acceptance of subject becoming object; and the coupling of puppet and puppeteer also presents a means of reuniting the split self, and uniting self and other through material relations.

Büchner’s original *Woyzeck* play is often interpreted as a representation of the “dehumanising” effects of military and medical institutions on the working class, but can perhaps further be read as an instruction on work and capitalism, particularly in the Handspring adaptation of it. The play, set in the context of the 1950s mining industry, presents a kind of “zombie state”⁵⁰² in the setting of a certain economy of labour power, and the commodity in human and object form, controlled by two representatives of the state, named simply the “Captain” and the “Doctor”. Although the puppets do not actually have race in terms of visible skin tone, their race is somehow discernable through their features. The race of each puppet is never

⁴⁹⁹ Afrikaner Broadcasting Corporation, *September 3, 1948*, 4.

⁵⁰⁰ Afrikaner Broadcasting Corporation, *September 3, 1948*, 9.

⁵⁰¹ Afrikaner Broadcasting Corporation, *September 3, 1948*, 8.

⁵⁰² See Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

otherwise explicitly defined, and in fact the audience may determine more about class than race in this play, but the setting of early apartheid-era Johannesburg further links class unavoidably to race. Woyzeck's progressively deteriorating psychic state reveals a material destruction of the human body through intense manual labour and medical experimentation (he is paid a menial fee to live on a diet of only peas), but the material forms of the puppets and projections in the play, particularly of the Woyzeck and Rhinoceros puppets, further present a kind of aesthetic deterioration, their bodies fragile and exposed like anatomical drawings in a medical encyclopaedia. For Handspring to reveal this opens the "consumer" up to something otherwise undisclosed, and shows a transparency in communication and method – disclosing a body without organs, and the "trick" of puppetry. If the capitalist state is considered as a "body without organs", it can be "filled" differently, structured differently; from biopolitics to biopoetics, figured as "the more or less simultaneous emergence of life as the medium of political *and* poetic power".⁵⁰³ Here it is also useful to think about the labour hours contained within a puppet, representative of processes of creative work such as I have discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

The play as an initial project was presented to Handspring by William Kentridge, part of his work which positions the European enlightenment in a South African context - both the literature and, as it turns out, the forms of the puppets themselves, are derived from a combination of Japanese forms and European modernist tradition⁵⁰⁴ - and he plays a large part in the character development and crafting of the puppets.⁵⁰⁵ Kohler cites this play as the Company's first adult production (since their first piece *Episodes of an Easter Rising*) that places puppets which inhabit and control their own world at the centre of the play.⁵⁰⁶ This can be witnessed in the ways in which the cast of puppets form psychological relationships with one another, all while engaged in the human activities of dancing, working, drinking, and playing

⁵⁰³ Guyer, *Biopoetics, or Romanticism*, para 3.

⁵⁰⁴ See Ambros & Switzky, *Hungry for Interpretation*, 46 for a more detailed breakdown of the puppet forms and influences.

⁵⁰⁵ Here Kentridge is clearly thinking in a multi-modal form, with puppet, text, projection and sound all part of a complex constellation. As much as Handspring are learning about the implications of their collaboration, so too is Kentridge, whose habits and experience as a director and art maker will be profoundly impacted by his work with puppets.

⁵⁰⁶ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 71-73.

musical instruments. When Woyzeck, who is driven progressively more mentally unstable, murders his wife Maria towards the end of the play, he experiences immense guilt and cannot seem to get the blood off his hands; the guilt will not wash away, the stain a “visual bridge [...] between Woyzeck and Maria,”⁵⁰⁷ and perhaps a reference to the intense emotional trauma of Shakespeare’s *Lady Macbeth*. A combination of rod and shadow puppets and Kentridge’s animated film projections are used, the latter of which further acts to show two-dimensional movement of three-dimensional objects that are not moving in actuality. These animations, an example of Kentridge’s drawings for projection (introduced briefly in Chapter One), bear “a kind of weight, density or drag” in that, both visually and conceptually, “the process of change takes effort and happens at a cost.”⁵⁰⁸ This is in alignment with Kentridge’s thematic “concern with history, memory and the weight of the past upon the experience of the present”,⁵⁰⁹ but in the context of *Woyzeck on the Highveld* is further emblematic of the binary which separates the work of the head in contrast to the body, which is overcome here in the multi-modal combination of puppet, prop and animation.

This is evident in Woyzeck’s hallucinations which show up on the projection screen behind him, wherein he imagines the objects before him take on life and move without his assistance; and in other instances he is completely still while his thoughts race behind him, the body stilled while the head is active. In a “special case of non-verbal action”,⁵¹⁰ the static cutlery and crockery he is using to set the dining table for the Captain, his boss, shifts and fragments on the screen, and what “seems to be an intentional mundane activity, performed by Woyzeck and the puppeteers, turns into a danse macabre that frustrates the viewer’s (and Woyzeck’s) expectations.”⁵¹¹ There is something significant here about the movement and stillness of the body in comparison to the head – the capitalist subject is split into two parts. The objects tied to the physical body, a dinner plate, a knife and fork, a wine bottle, match the objects of Woyzeck’s head in form, but do not correspond in their movements; they cannot be reconciled and eventually the head cannot bear the body’s burden. The

⁵⁰⁷ Ambros & Switzky, *Hungry for Interpretation*, 51.

⁵⁰⁸ Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 152.

⁵⁰⁹ Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 152.

⁵¹⁰ Ambros & Switzky *Hungry for Interpretation*, 51.

⁵¹¹ Ambros & Switzky *Hungry for Interpretation*, 51.

“thingness” of objects is apparent here, confronted when objects “stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily.”⁵¹² For Brown, the “story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation.”⁵¹³ Here Ambros and Switzky have pointed out the dire implications of the situation for Woyzeck in that

instead of the expected result, the sequence culminates in a black stain that marks the failure of the attempt to establish a certain order, and hints at Woyzeck’s state of mind. The transformational blurring of the intentional activity into chaos foreshadows Maria’s death (which is followed by a red stain) and eventually Woyzeck’s own demise.⁵¹⁴

Woyzeck’s psychic disintegration is in fact a result of the material deterioration of the body, in this way under-scripting or effacing the binary of head and body, and it is thus the object, or perhaps the *thing*, in both material and virtual form, which reconciles the divided subject. In this instance, after grappling with the objects on the table, trying to reconcile the two versions of them he is faced with, the Captain appears and reprimands Woyzeck; “Slowly, Woyzeck, slowly; one thing at a time. You’re going to finish ten minutes early today - what are we supposed to do with the extra time?”⁵¹⁵ Here the anxiety is not with the pace of Woyzeck’s work, but rather with the looming threat of an excess of *time*. With the *production* of labour the body must *a/ways* be at work – no time must be wasted doing “nothing”, being in stillness. It is surprisingly jarring to see the puppet so still, and here the significance of the subtle movement of the breath comes into play once more, a reminder that in stillness there is still life, still productivity, but a productivity that does not produce a “product”. Rather it is an internal growth, a transformation, a process, that often remains unseen and immaterial.

⁵¹² Brown, *Thing Theory*, 4.

⁵¹³ Brown, *Thing Theory*, 4.

⁵¹⁴ Ambros & Switzky, *Hungry for Interpretation*, 51.

⁵¹⁵ Handspring Puppet Company, *Woyzeck on the Highveld*.

In another instance Woyzeck's hallucinations situate "woman" as "beast" (the animation screen spells out the phrases "man and woman" and "man and beast" in succession, which could perhaps also refer to man as "not" woman nor beast), but also parallel Woyzeck and the Rhinoceros puppet, perhaps indicating that Woyzeck is treated "like an animal", seen in the ways in which the Captain and the Doctor "deny Woyzeck the ability to think and to act. They dismiss his dedication to the child and to Maria as well as his rich interior life."⁵¹⁶ Woyzeck faces a double manipulation – as a character and as a puppet – reflective of how the commodified body is manipulated as simultaneously a subject/non-subject. The above examples of Woyzeck's mental landscape already provide an indication of "the relationship of dominance and submission that is authorised by the waged labour contract and that shapes labour's exercise."⁵¹⁷ Here "it is not only inequality that is revealed, with the capitalist striding in front and the worker following behind, but subordination, with the former smirking and self-important and the latter timid and holding back. In other words, the critical analysis of work reveals not only exploitation but [...] domination."⁵¹⁸ Watching a puppet involved in banal domestic work; such as arranging cutlery and crockery, smoothing out a tablecloth, feels somehow unexpected. What happens when a puppet is put to work? Practically its hands have to be made to fit any appendages or tools it may require to do this work, but something further occurs when we see an object like the puppet at work. In the play, work becomes bound with Woyzeck's troubled relationship with Maria, and his apocalyptic visions increasingly contain blood, violent scenes, a spade an ominous object, a weapon. Despite the fact that "[i]n general, it is not the police or the threat of violence that force us to work, but rather a social system that ensures that working is the only way that most of us can meet our basic needs",⁵¹⁹ Woyzeck shows that work is violent in terms of what it does to the subject. In this regard, Harney and Moten have pointed out that "[t]o work today is to be asked, more and more, to do without thinking, to feel without emotion, to move without friction, to adapt without question, to translate without pause, to desire without purpose, to connect without

⁵¹⁶ Ambros & Switzky, *Hungry for Interpretation*, 54.

⁵¹⁷ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 21. As Weeks continues, "[t]his relation of command and obedience, the right of the employer to direct his or her employees that is granted by the contract, is not so much a byproduct of exploitation as its very precondition." (Ibid)

⁵¹⁸ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 20. Here Weeks refers to a passage by Marx which she cites in the text, but the quote nevertheless works here in relation to Woyzeck and the Captain.

⁵¹⁹ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 7.

interruption.”⁵²⁰ Woyzeck’s complex life, as it is revealed in the play, show us that despite the violence of the work he is subjected to, he still thinks, questions, feels emotion and meaningful desire, at times seen through his psychic landscape, and in other instances through his gestures.

3.3 Gesture in *Woyzeck on the Highveld*

The puppet, in its dislocated and dissected body, thus provides a means of surveying and deciphering the “values, norms, and ideals” of the severed capitalist subject, “[b]ut in their embodiment as gesture, these forms of measure can appear in different ways, different physiognomies: as metre, rhythm, restraint and excess, violence and tenderness of touch, different modes of tactility, and social practices of tact, the polite manners of social existence.”⁵²¹ Measure and gesture are thus equated, positing the hand as also a tool or apparatus of measure, and it is through gesture that we might recognise in the hand “an uncanny power: the power to bring things forth from nonbeing into being. [...] But we cannot yet see clearly enough the grace of a hand whose movement would be beyond availability, productivity, efficiency, calculation – a hand beyond use value.”⁵²² Roland Barthes says a similar thing when he claims that “in gesture is abolished the distinction between cause and effect, motivation and goal, expression and persuasion.”⁵²³ (In this sense gesture is also like play, is perhaps, a mode of play) Barthes reasons that it does have a kind of communicative use value however, in that a gesture is “[s]omething like the surplus of an action. The action is transitive, it seeks only to provoke an object, a result; the gesture is the indeterminate and inexhaustible total of reasons, pulsions, indolences which surround the action with an *atmosphere*”.⁵²⁴ For Flusser, gesture has “no satisfactory causal explanation”,⁵²⁵ but he sees it too as a kind of code or symbol of

⁵²⁰ Harney & Moten, *The Undercommons*, 87.

⁵²¹ Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, xviii. In this regard, Handspring has noted how, particularly with the animal puppets, they have “had to move into another form of text, namely the text of movement and of relationships, of hapticity.” (Kohler et al., *It’s Very Tied*, 30)

⁵²² Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, 93.

⁵²³ Barthes, *Cy Twombly*, 160.

⁵²⁴ Barthes, *Cy Twombly*, 160. Barthes defines “atmosphere” in “the astronomical sense of the word”. (Ibid)

⁵²⁵ Flusser, *Gestures*, 2.

communication, or a representation or expression of affect.⁵²⁶ Gesture appears in multiple forms within Handspring's work; more obviously in the movements of the puppets and accompanying puppeteers and actors, an intensely rehearsed and performative gesture, but also in the form of artistic gesture as can be seen in the preparatory drawings and plans, a more spontaneous and unintentional gesture. In any case, the hand is of much significance in the conveying and deciphering of gesture. Each puppet in this production is designed through a set of character sketches by both Kentridge and Kohler – following Handspring's typical puppetry-making process - beginning as more expressive charcoal drawings which are then adapted into structurally sound puppets through a series of diagrammatic plans for the body parts which make up the complete puppet.

The Rhinoceros puppet, which can be paralleled with the Woyzeck character, hailed as the "Astronomical Dicerrhonitas", appears as a carnival attraction in one isolated instance in the play, and is also proclaimed as "a professor at all our universities" who will "put human society to shame". He is a "favourite in all the capitals and all the boardrooms [and] a trustee of all charitable institutions", a sideshow character who is made to perform arithmetic and spelling and answer questions by stomping and scraping his foot along the ground. As the Rhinoceros moves its feet, speaking through gesture, numbers and letters are drawn out on the animation screen behind it. He is whipped into obedience with the dictum "Everything can be taught" – *with money* – with the biopolitical. The Rhinoceros puppet could be seen as an armature for the infrastructure of money as a commodified object, that is, an object which changes hands and stands in for value; and conversely money can be figured as a kind of "organless animal", a "jammed machine".⁵²⁷ The Rhinoceros has come to be valued for its horn, which is traded as a precious commodity, and thus situates the animal, and the puppet, as a precious object with high exchange-value to be mined.⁵²⁸ Coincidentally 1992, the year *Woyzeck on the Highveld* was first performed, was the year the set of South African "Big Five" animal bank notes came into

⁵²⁶ Flusser, *Gestures*, 4. Flusser attempts to sketch out "a theory of the interpretation of gestures", which he claims are currently "restricted to an empirical intuitive reading", by cataloguing a series of different kinds of gestures used by various types of people on a daily basis, for example painting, pipe-smoking, and writing. (Flusser, *Gestures*, 2-3)

⁵²⁷ Lacan, *The Seminar*, 31.

⁵²⁸ Here the dehorning of the animal could be seen as a kind of de-commodification.

circulation, featuring the five African animals promoted as tourist attractions in Southern Africa (Rhinceros, Elephant, Lion, Buffalo and Cheetah), the reverse showing sectors of industry (Agriculture, Mining, Manufacturing, Tourism and Transport and Communication), with the Rhinceros and the Agricultural industry featured on the green ten Rand note. There is thus a further link between the Rhinceros (animal), industry and money in terms of the imagery that comes to be associated with the South African banknotes and thus exchange value.

There are three drawings by Kentridge which present the initial character of the Rhinceros puppet. Two of these form a set of simplified pen sketches, loosely and playfully rendered, showing the Rhinceros from multiple angles (see Figures 1 and 2), and the third is an expressive charcoal drawing on brown Kraft paper which shows the full body of the puppet from the left side profile view. (See Figure 3) In some sense it is this type of sketch, which at this point marks a crucial aesthetic change in Handspring's work, that is not structurally conceived but rather thinks about the character of lively material, the character of the materials which become puppet. The drawing on brown paper shows the body and head of the Rhinceros character in a simplified expressive line, the kind of line that is distinctive in Kentridge's drawn and animated work. The left side of the body is drawn in flat profile with some dimension shown in the plated structure of the head, neck and upper legs. The legs on the right side of the body are shown only as sketchy outlines, and pivot points are marked at the shoulder and hip joints of the animal. These aspects of the drawing point to some structural thought on Kentridge's part, probably in relation to the creation of a shadow puppet, thus conceived of in two dimensions. Seemingly layered over this structural basis however, are a series of looser gestural marks made with charcoal and an eraser which indicate some surface texture and creasing of the animal's skin or hide. Marks show deep-set wrinkles on the Rhinceros's ribs, the hollow of its back and its legs. There is some indication of a split-hoof structure on both legs and a deep creasing in the neck which seems to indicate slight movement. The head of the animal has been paid the most attention and is surrounded by a blurred "halo" formed by a series marks made and then erased, drawn over, and perhaps purposefully smudged. This blur creates the illusion of movement in the head, as if the Rhinceros has turned or raised its head to look at the viewer with an opaque black beady eye. There is vague

indication of a mouth and nostrils, but most significant here seems to be the gesture and movement of the animal, seen through a focus on structural aspects, an anticipated or potential energy.

The legs of the Rhinoceros stand both static and in movement, the front-right leg lifted as if in mid-step or in a certain kind of display. A slight blur is indicated around the edges of the animal, and darker shadowing is drawn in at the joins between lower and upper leg parts, expressive of a weight pressing down from the abdomen. The wavy creases on the hollow of the back and the left thigh, created with a quick, loose hand, and in the upper abdomen a series of striated erased lines, indicate movement in the body. The marked joint pivot points indicate the forwards-backwards movement of the legs on the horizontal plane. Here the blurred marks of the drawing could indicate a further “blurring” of the status of the form in the drawing in a number of ways. The Rhinoceros is here both an animal and an object. It is clearly based on the biological body of a Rhinoceros, and in this way is correctly proportioned in terms of its existence as a representation of a natural specimen, but in the second layer of gestural rendering it becomes puppet, this further emphasised in a second kind of blur also present – a blur between two-dimensional and three-dimensional form. The two dots which indicate joint pivot points are perhaps the most telling in showing the animal to be puppet and not animal, particularly when compared to other drawings of puppets in Handspring’s archive, specifically templates for puppets which contain this kind of mark as an indication of where individual parts should be joined. The unevenly cut edges of the drawing offer a further (if unintentional) point towards a kind of movement; the bottom-left corner in particular, which is cut away at an angle below the figure’s head. A slight indication of the ground below the Rhinoceros’s feet leads into this angle, presenting a steep incline for the animal to traverse. The torn edges and creased paper surface mimic the folds in the Rhinoceros’s angular plated body.

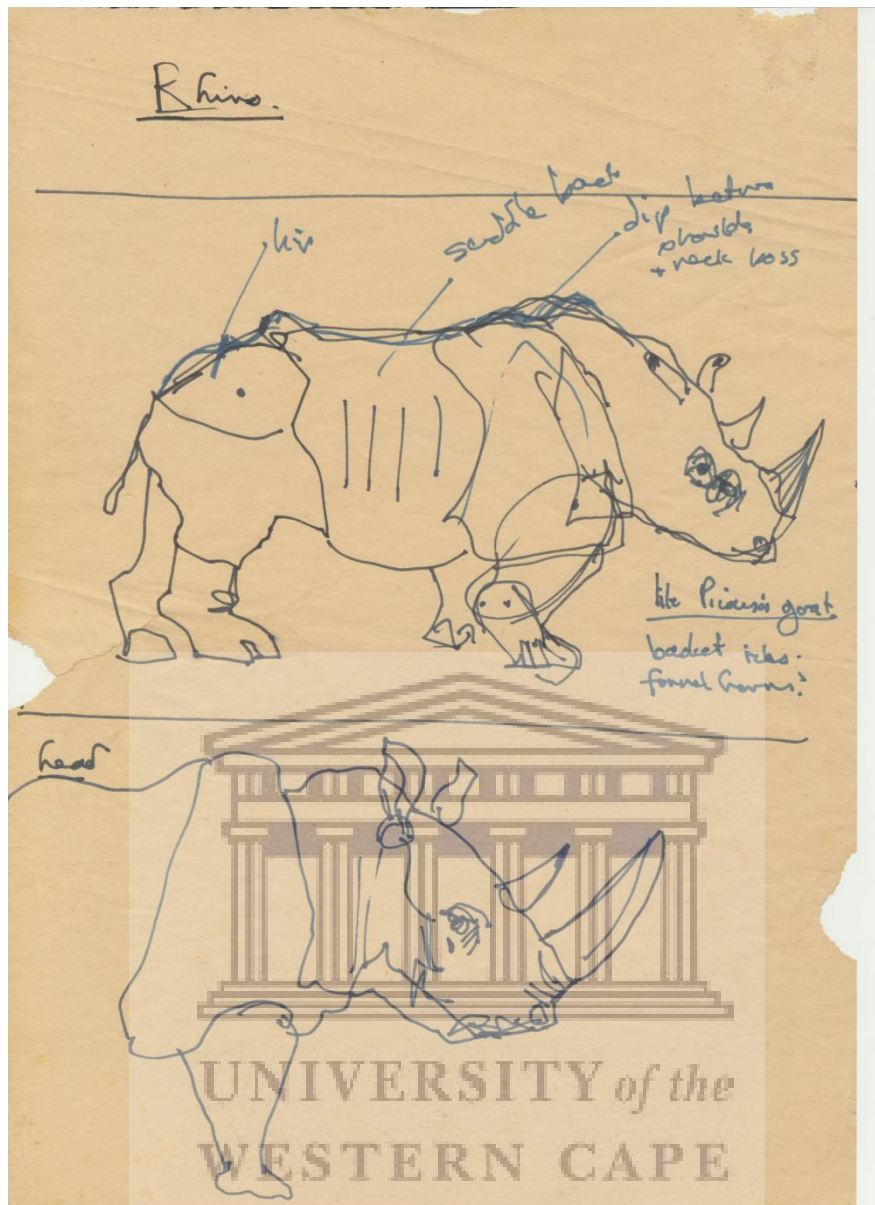


Figure 1: Detail sketch of the Rhinoceros puppet by William Kentridge

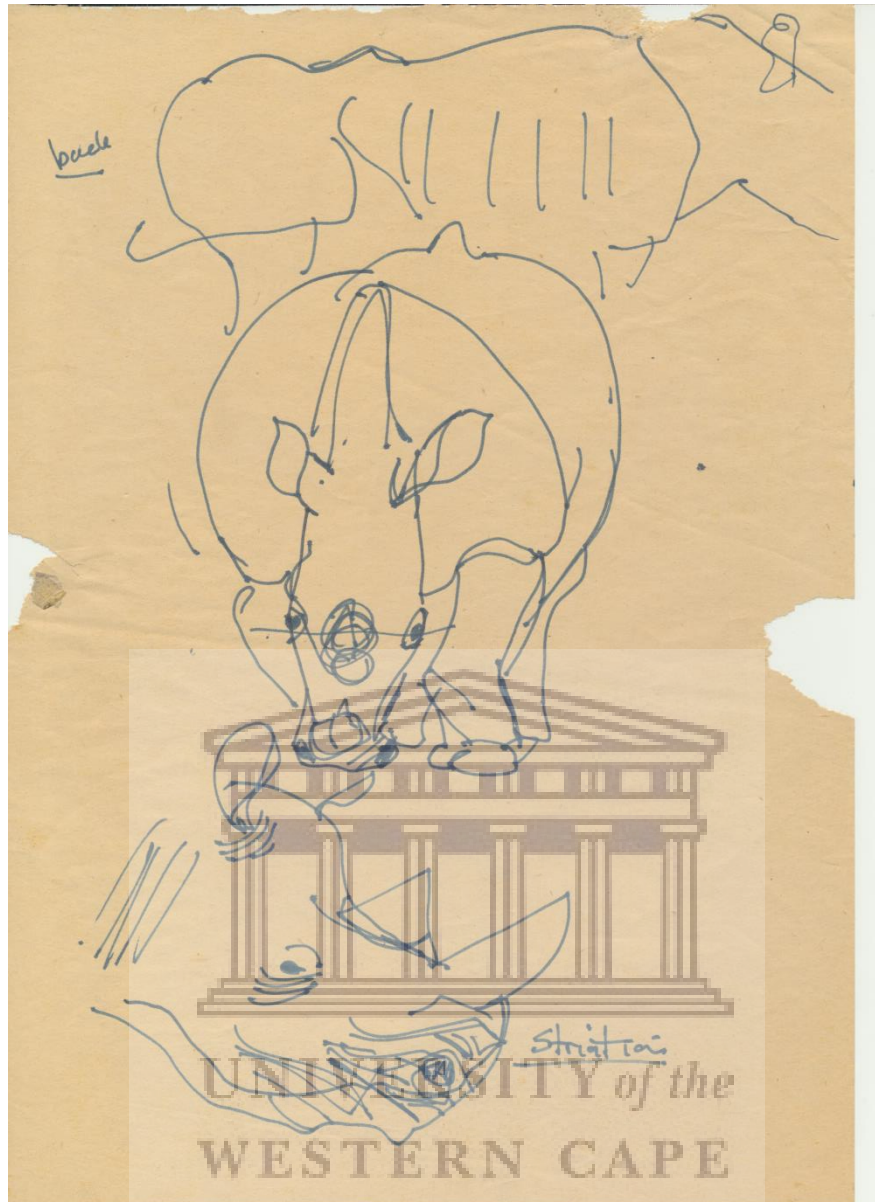


Figure 2: Detail sketch of the Rhinoceros puppet by William Kentridge



Figure 3: Rhinoceros character sketch by William Kentridge

The set of two drawings on off-white newsprint present the Rhinoceros from multiple angles and focuses in even further simplified forms. Simple fluid pen sketches with textual labels divide the body of the animal into segmented plates with focus on joints in the body and legs, and detailed features of the face including horns and ears. The drawings are divided into comic style panels, further emphasised by the handwritten labels, which focus on the structure and texture of the body. The lines show the outlined contours of the figure, map-like, plotting the plated armour of the body. Here the Rhinoceros is still animal, but starts to move closer to puppet in its form and conception, now a slightly abstracted machine-like creature constructed from multiple parts. This is further evident in the note alongside the Rhino in the first panel which reads “like Picasso’s goat: basket ribs; funnel horns”, indicating that the Rhino is to become object through an assemblage of other found objects, other commodifiable objects. Picasso’s *She-Goat* sculpture (1950) was made up of found objects including a wicker basket, two ceramic jugs, palm fronds and metal scraps, before being filled with plaster and cast in bronze, and depicts a pregnant nanny

goat with full udders standing squarely on a flat rectangular platform.⁵²⁹ Modelling the Rhino on the *She-Goat* introduces a further European modernist tradition into the production, the aesthetic of Cubism, but further the use of the medium of the found object. Although the Rhino puppet does not end up as an assemblage of found objects, its conception as this kind of object can be traced through the eventual treatment of the materials and tactile surface of the final puppet form, which could be said to mimic found objects, with constructed signs of wear and use. The wooden skeletal construction of the animal puppet with a thin nylon pantyhose skin, ripped and laddered in some sections, and the stippled carving in the head and feet of the Rhino, all point to this.

The Rhinoceros puppet (see Figure 4) was constructed in such a way to be operated from one side only at waist-level, the handles and grips made for manipulation adjusted and removed mid-performance hidden from the audience, and could thus only move backwards and forwards, the audience viewing it in profile only.⁵³⁰ When the puppet is manipulated overhead the puppeteers are hidden behind a screen, but with the puppet at waist height they are visible. This mode of movement is evident in the early drawings of the Rhino, and can also be seen to stem from Picasso's *She-Goat* which stands sturdy and unmoving, attached to its base in a square-on pose. The grips and handles appear to function as the puppets "organs", but are positioned on the outside of the body, which in combination with the skeletal structure of the puppet body, create the impression that the animal's body is decomposing. Because of the one-sided design of the Rhino the puppet remains a kind of two-dimensional drawing, an arborescent form that can only go up and down a track, a mining cart or a kind of monetary system. While the audience is permitted access to the puppeteer's body, they cannot see their hands, the central point of the puppet's energy or life force; they are active somewhere but the audience cannot see the process of production or labour they are representative of – they are made invisible. The transparency of the armature in the Rhino puppet (and in many of Handspring's animal puppets to come) however shows a kind of transparency in communication between puppet-maker/artist, puppeteer and audience. By disclosing the skeletal form of the body, a body without true organs, the "trick" of puppetry is disclosed, and

⁵²⁹ MOMA, *Pablo Picasso: She-Goat*.

⁵³⁰ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 73.

it is in these moments that the blur between object/subject and dead/alive is stilled, or comes into clarity.



Figure 4: The Rhinoceros puppet with handles and grips visible.

In the case of the Woyzeck character, who is, according to Kohler based on “Harry, a homeless person living in the neighbourhood”,⁵³¹ one of a pair of charcoal sketches on brown Kraft paper by Kentridge show the character’s full body in profile, mid-stride, the figure marching away from the viewer towards the left border of the page. (See Figure 5) His identity as “Harry” gives Woyzeck’s character some grounding as an individual human subject, but also motions to the anonymity and othered status of “homeless people” as an identity that can so easily be transferred to puppet form. In the drawing there is emphasis on costume including some detail of the folds in Woyzeck’s cap, which also looks like an intricately wrapped bandage, and the herringbone patterning of his over-sized calf-length coat, as well as the inclusion of a crutch which he uses to support his left leg. In fact, his left leg and foot seem to blur into or merge with the crutch, emphasising his body’s need for support. He is a “broken” puppet, a broken subject, bandaged and crippled, but in spite of this, the

⁵³¹ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 70.

drawing seems to capture him on a forward focussed mission, undeterred by any distractions he may pass by. There is not much detail shown in the face of the figure, and the emphasis seems to be on the general form and gesture of his body, not necessarily as it would appear in puppet form, but rather Kentridge's interpretation of Woyzeck as a character. Here the significance of the drawing for the final puppet form lies in Kentridge's particular focus on the continual movement of the body, as seen in the deep creases of Woyzeck's coat which billows around the form of his body, the swooping stride of the legs, and the pressure exerted from the shoulders down into the straightened left arm which supports the crutch. Kentridge attempts to "still" the movement of a body at work, and viewed as a capitalist subject, Woyzeck's body is expressive of the endlessly forward-focussed motion of work, trudging towards an end goal that is forever replaced by another. The legs and feet are simplified in comparison to the rest of the body, and are blurred in movement in relation to the crutch and a scribbled line drawn underneath the figure's feet which ground it in space, the right heel raised off the ground mid-step. This is the only indication of the grounding of the figure in an otherwise empty, infinite background space. The unevenly cut edge of the brown Kraft paper, which as a result is slightly longer in length on the vertical left hand side, creates further perspective and, following the gaze of the figure, gives the impression that it is walking up a slight incline "into" the paper. Kentridge simplifies the form with the use of thick, chunky charcoal marks, with the blank brown paper forming much of the negative space, which further gives the impression that the figure is walking past the viewer, only allowing a limited glimpse of detail, a blur in between scenes.

A second drawing by Kentridge shows close-up details of Woyzeck's head from frontal and left profile views with more detailed focus on facial features and headgear. (See Figure 6) The wrinkles and furrows in the scowling face are emphasised with dark scratched patches of charcoal, but the contours of the head and neck seem to have been drawn with the final puppet form in mind – clearly defined outlines designate the edges of both angles of the head, flattening the forms of the face, particularly as it is seen in profile. Further, there are a series of horizontal lines which run across the page from frontal to profiled head which seem to plot the proportion and scale of the heads in relation to one another. The "mugshot" style of the drawings parallels photographic conventions, allowing for it to be viewed as a

kind of photograph, perhaps a kind of ethnographic photograph of a human specimen. The puppet is from conception an object of scrutiny, further confirming Woyzeck's status as commodity. Despite the large size of the drawing (58 x 55.8 x 76.8 x 81.6cm), the fold at its centre in combination with the "photographic" renderings of Woyzeck's face, places it as a kind of identity document or pass book to be carried on his person, marking him as an accountable subject or citizen. In these two drawings the character Woyzeck is both a human and a puppet, that is, a human subject imbued with individualised gesture or body language, and a material form in the early stages of becoming puppet or commodity.



Figure 5: Woyzeck Character Sketch by William Kentridge

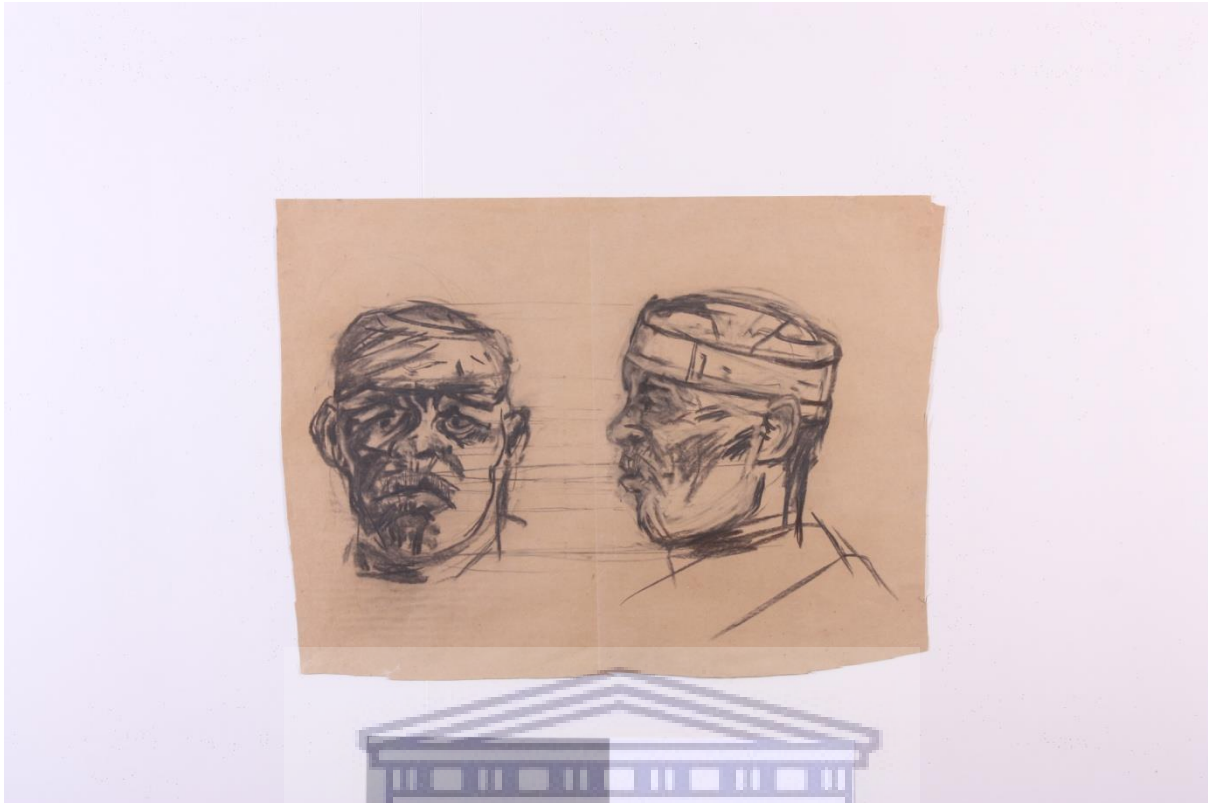


Figure 6: Woyzeck Head Character Sketch by William Kentridge

Kentridge's drawing of Woyzeck's head is carried into Kohler's puppet design, as is evident in his character plan for the Woyzeck puppet, which includes the contoured template parts for the puppet's head, neck, abdomen, arms, and hands. (See Figure 7) The two sets of heads are similar in shape and the facial features seen in the latter drawing seem to be derived from Kentridge's version of Woyzeck, with the puppet again shown from frontal and left profile views. The body is divided into segmented parts which show joints and structural contouring of the form, with the most detail placed in the head, the upper body and the hands, and the remainder of the body sketched in outline down to the knees. The "blurs" and "breaks" evident in this drawing add to Woyzeck's status as a working subject, layered with textual annotations and pencil smudges, his body erased, pierced, cut, and repaired again; and in this way the residues of artistic production come to stand in for the marks of a capitalist mode of work, layering and blurring the gestures of creative and capitalist production. This composition and similar versions appear frequently in Handspring's drawn plans, and although this kind of drawing does distinguish the puppet through a series of meticulously engineered plans in terms of its body shape and alignment,

both practically and aesthetically, it does not usually tell a lot about how that puppet is going to *act* in terms of its personality, but rather how it is going to *move*. The majority of the Handspring drawings thus work towards the puppet as a kinetic object as opposed to thinking subject, but in this regard the “mind” of the puppet is perhaps conveyed through gesture, through the *hand*.

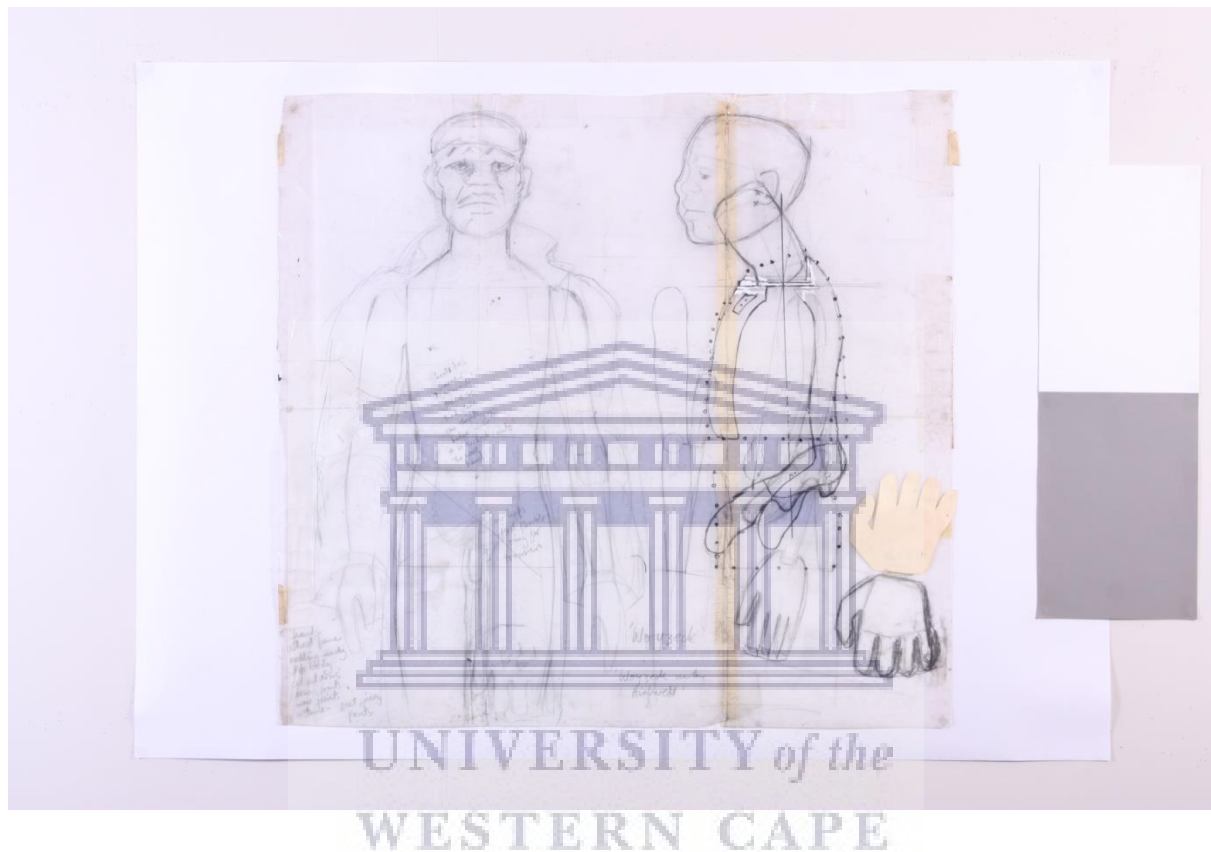


Figure 7: Woyzeck Character Plan by Adrian Kohler

In *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, and in many of Handspring's productions which feature human puppets, particularly in rod puppet form, the hand appears in two significant forms; in the carved wooden hands of the puppets, and the flesh and bone hands of the puppeteers which control the bodies of the puppets. In this play the puppeteers' hands are bare, apart from one instance in which two puppeteers wear black gloves to blend in with a dark backdrop representative of the night sky. If the emotional rapport of the puppeteers is read by the audience as part of the individual puppet's emotion, the gestures of the hand are perhaps also read in a similar sense, whether consciously or not. The puppet hand appears as a set of two but, perhaps surprisingly, the puppeteers' hands often feature as a set of four or six, depending on

the number of puppeteers manipulating a certain figure. These “hand clusters” transform the puppet into a hybrid being endowed with at least six hands which emerge from and merge with the puppet body at unusual points, a being in this sense far more capable than its human manipulators; a highly efficient working subject.⁵³² The first scene in which the “Miner” character is introduced shows the puppet controlled by three puppeteers, one at each arm, and a third positioned behind the puppet, moving the abdomen and head of the figure. The Miner performs a dance wielding two spades which are raised up and crossed, the hands of the puppeteers at either arm held stiff at the elbows of the puppet, and at the handles of the spades he holds. This display is witnessed by Maria, who stands watching from above, and marks out the virility and allure of the Miner for her, particularly significant in comparison to the mode in which Woyzeck’s body is performed. Woyzeck’s “final dance” towards the end of the play “echoes the miner’s opening dance: for the miner the dance was a display of masculine ostentation, for Woyzeck it is a display of frenzied desperation over his lost *raison d’être*.”⁵³³

Within the proceedings of the play the two white characters, the Captain and the Doctor, impose a certain fascination with Woyzeck’s body as an object of study, both as a biological subject and as a body at work. According to Ambros and Switzky, the “Doctor and the Captain present themselves as self-undermining examples of white superiority: both try to impress each other with scientific gibberish.” The Doctor pays Woyzeck to live on a specialised diet, and requires him to adhere to a strict schedule of bowel movements, while the Captain continually monitors his effectiveness and behaviour whilst at work. Even the biological processes of his internal body are put to work. The Woyzeck puppet’s hands cup and curl in on themselves, and are often raised to his chest in protection or defence of himself. It is significant that each human puppet in the play seems to be designed to hold specific tools or props, and the puppets’ capacity to use tools indicates a kind of basic human intelligence which in the past has been paralleled to certain animals’, such as apes, birds, and more recently, fish, use of tools – a means of drawing parallels between human and animal intelligence. Andries carries and plays an accordion, the Miner is always

⁵³² This “hybrid being” could be compared distinct modernist experiments in painting which represent complex and multiple beings that show motion as well as time in the still image, for example Marcel Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912).

⁵³³ Ambros & Switzky, *Hungry for Interpretation*, 52.

endowed with a pick axe or spade (except when he has Maria in his hands in the acting out of their elicited relationship, the male puppet using the female as a tool), the Doctor a stethoscope, and the Captain a pipe, but when Woyzeck must hold implements, it is in fact the puppeteers' hands which grasp these objects. His hands are continually replaced with the human hands of the puppeteers, creating a further form of human-puppet hybrid. Woyzeck carries a crutch, which he tries to fight the Miner with, and which, in comparison to the spade, seems an insufficient weapon – his tool failing him. The object he later forms a fixation with, the blade used to kill Maria, never becomes “his” in the same sense that the other puppets command ownership over “their” objects. He thus never truly becomes a human subject in the same way that the other characters do (or perhaps in this sense, he becomes *more* human than they do in that he is also able to dream and imagine, which they are not permitted to do), and seems to wander aimlessly through the play, all the while haunted by his own imaginings. He is not grounded; his presence is ghostly, floating through the scenes of the show, never finding his place or role.

The relationship between puppeteer and puppet in this instance is complicated in that a further means of subject-object dominance is present. Woyzeck's hands are “tied”, bound to their manipulator. Even in the menial tasks he is made to perform, setting the table, sorting through his belongings, it is the hands of two other puppeteers who control these motions, under constant scrutiny and surveillance, his physical actions controlled by a strict doctrine. This feeling is further exacerbated by the puppeteers' habit of continually watching the puppet as they are speaking for it, as opposed to fixing their gaze on the audience. Here Woyzeck's inability to “grasp” objects draws attention to his being treated “like an animal”, in Heidegger's terms a being *without* hands⁵³⁴ Heidegger links the hand intrinsically to the (human) head in his assertion that “[o]nly a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands and can be handy in achieving works of handicraft,”⁵³⁵ which opens up a more complicated notion linked to the treatment of Woyzeck's head, the treatment of his mind as “animal”, but further his inability to achieve the work (the “handicraft”) which situates him as “human”. The performing of the Woyzeck puppet, however, draws

⁵³⁴ Heidegger links He states that the “hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs – paws, claws, or fangs – different by an abyss of essence. [...] Apes, too, have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands.” (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, 16)

⁵³⁵ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, 16.

attention to his humanity, rather than his “animality” in that he and Maria “appear as complex subjects to the audience while being regarded as commodities by Woyzeck’s white superiors.”⁵³⁶ Woyzeck is more than his life as a labour unit, and Ambros and Switzky have here noted the significance of Woyzeck and Maria’s child “which fulfils several functions: he receives their emotions and reveals the link between them. Both relate to him as a fully-fledged human being. In so doing, they also demonstrate their capacity to express their feelings for each other and the child.”⁵³⁷ Here the maternal qualities of materiality are shown.

A set of two copied photographs from Handspring’s archive (see Figures 8 and 9) show Woyzeck’s right hand with a knife attached to it. In these images his hand seems to be carved specifically to balance the knife across it, which is attached to the thumb of the hand with a coil of wire. The plan drawing of Woyzeck in Figure 7 also shows a specific concentration on the puppet’s right hand, with an extra template part created for the contoured form of the carved wooden piece. What is significant about these images is that the knife is never actually present except at its initial purchase towards the end of the play, where a salesman offers it to Woyzeck claiming that “You’ll get your death for a fair price, but not for nothing. [...] Your death will be a bargain.” Woyzeck then slaps the money down in front of the salesman, proclaims “There”, snatches the blade up and exits. The salesman then remarks: “‘There.’ As though it were nothing. But it’s *money*”, the emphasis on human life as commodity to be bought and sold at quite arbitrary value made quite clear in this scene. When Woyzeck stabs Maria he in fact mimes stabbing her, and when he disposes of the knife by hurling it into a lake, he is not really throwing anything at all. The object of the blade is only present at its point of purchase, as a commodity, but in moments of violence it is transferred into “dark matter”, Andrew Sofer’s term for those objects which feature on the theatrical stage, but which are not actually visually present for the audience, or more specifically, “the invisible dimension of theatre that escapes visual detection, even though its effects are felt everywhere in performance.”⁵³⁸ The weapon is invisible, and the moment of violence is an imagined act. After ridding himself of the blade, Woyzeck finds multiple blood stains on his

⁵³⁶ Ambros & Switzky, *Hungry for Interpretation*, 54.

⁵³⁷ Ambros & Switzky, *Hungry for Interpretation*, 54.

⁵³⁸ Sofer, *Dark Matter*, 3.

clothing, which are also remarked on by the narrator. The audience, however, cannot find visual evidence of this blood either. Perhaps this is again used to mark the signs of a bloodless, lifeless puppet body, but could further be used to evoke a kind of sublime violence, present but not visible, the violence of work, the “bloodstains” of invisible labour carried unnoticed on the worker’s body.



Figure 8: Woyzeck’s hand

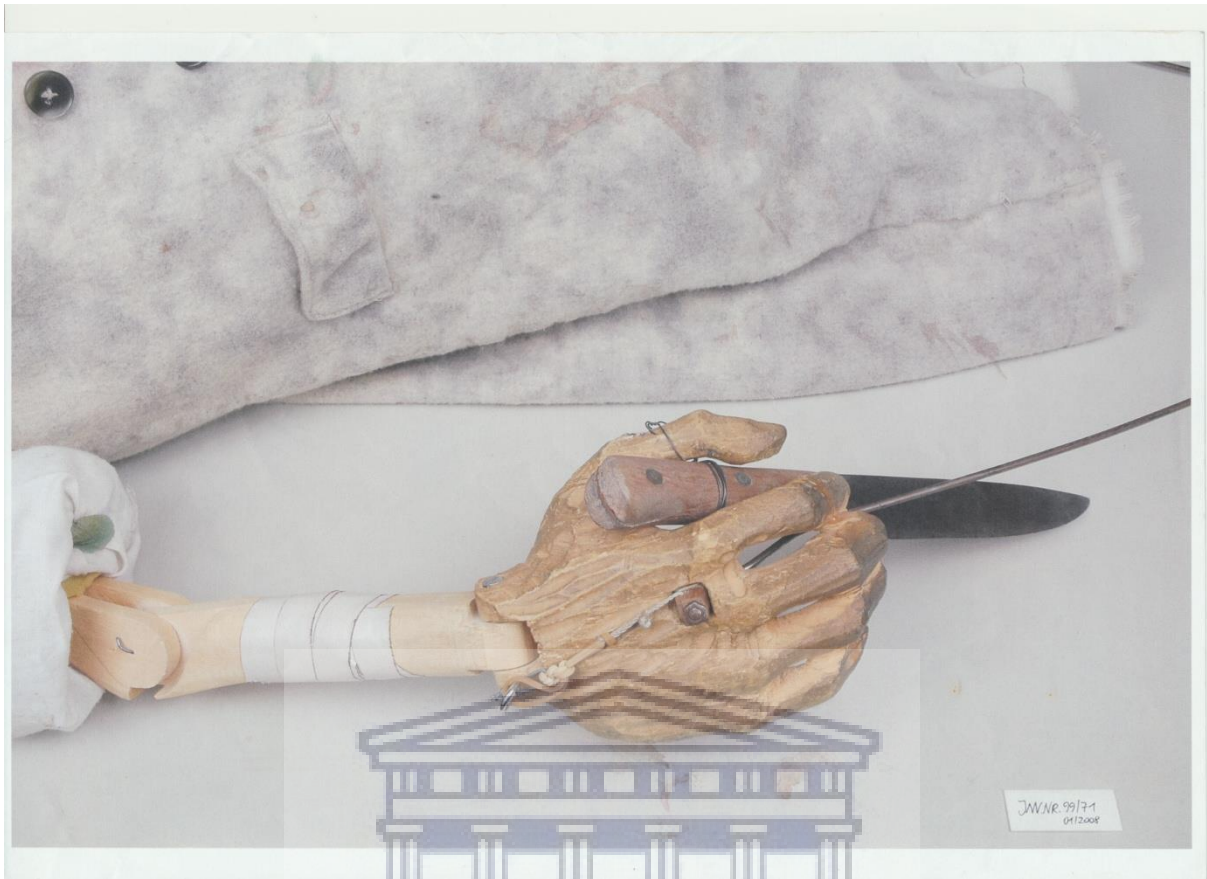


Figure 9: Woyzeck's hand

The comparison of different modes of touch evident among the human puppets in the production pose an interchange between “work” and “play”, evident in each puppet’s accompanying “prop”, but further in the ways the puppets are made to *handle* these props. The scenes featuring the Captain and the Doctor present an air of frivolity, perhaps best exemplified in the scene in which they engage in a smoke-blowing competition, each trying to “outblow” the other in the creation of more and more complicated forms crafted from the smoke from their pipes. The fantastical forms carry in them the touch of the mouth and breath, shown as animated projections on the backdrop screen behind them, and contrast jarringly with Woyzeck’s disturbing hallucinations throughout the rest of the play. If these are images of play, of folly, Woyzeck’s visions could perhaps be positioned in the realm of work. In one instance where Woyzeck is setting the table for the Captain’s meal, the crockery begins to move of its own accord, continually slipping away from his hands. Even these familiar objects turn against him, alienating him further, and disallowing him to complete what seems to be his life’s purpose; the work he does.

Woyzeck's intense focus on work, even in his hallucinations, and in his musings to Maria and Andries, goes completely unnoticed or disregarded by the Captain and the Doctor. He becomes a "ghost" worker, his labour obscured or dismissed, this further emphasised by the whimsy of the pair's game. Their touch is soft, ethereal, without consequence, while Woyzeck's hand seems to continually betray him; a hard, unforgiving touch. What does it mean for puppets, objects which are themselves somewhere between a *work* of art and the performers in a *play*, to be performing these modes of touch? What does this do to the activities of play and work, and conversely, to the genres of art(work) and theatre (play), particularly if the aesthetic functions, as Andrew Hewitt posits, "as a space in which social possibilities are both rehearsed and performed"?⁵³⁹

In *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, the combination of puppeteer/s, puppet and at times, animation screen, as a split triad that makes up the "whole" subject, allows a rethinking of the severed capitalist subject, who is perhaps made "whole" again through the recognition of multiple visible fragments, each part of which can be adjusted to alter the whole. In other words, puppetry opens up a means to use the split productively so that the whole is formed in an alternate way, out of new combinations and new recognitions. To think the puppet as *thing* may assist in this regard in that, as Brown puts it, "*things* is a word that tends, especially at its most banal, to index a certain limit or liminality, to hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable,"⁵⁴⁰ and it is perhaps through the liminality and language of the thing (the plaything?) that the gap between consumption and production can be figured differently. To play more readily with the tool of the hand, or to pause the activity of the hand and rethink it as a tool for play – that is, to make the hand more visible, placing focus on its relationship with tools, processes of production and surplus value - requires more open and visible processes of labour, which can be paralleled with Handspring's productions, in which processes of performance are open and made visible to the audience or consumer. This is to be made more aware of the touch and gesture within work, and re-imagine or refigure modes of touch in this

⁵³⁹ Hewitt, *Social Choreography*, 4. For Hewitt, "in a fully rationalised world, labour would be performed as a form of spontaneous bodily dance that generates rather than expends energy." (Hewitt, *Social Choreography*, 26)

⁵⁴⁰ Brown, *Thing Theory*, 4-5.

sphere. In this way theatrical or artistic production provides an example for capitalism to follow on from, supposing a hand without use value and in this sense a hand of pure means, the means being a subject reunited with its split parts, without an end goal. This also means to accept the “infection” of subject/object, and dwell in the status of commodity as a subject, a point which I explored in Chapter Two. The machine touch that is so evident in the world of work today can make it difficult to see the soft flesh and skin of the human hand, and the fast pace of work makes it difficult to recognise the subject in stillness. In these ways it is important to slow work, pausing in the fault line between consumption and production, and recognising individual working subjects in this pause.



CHAPTER 4

THE HEAD: LIVING/DEAD OBJECTS

4.1 A Body with Handles: The Puppet as Receptacle

4.2 The (After)life of Objects

4.3 The Body without Organs and the “Readymade” Subject



THE HEAD: LIVING/DEAD OBJECTS

This chapter opens up the question of the subject/object dialectic in relation to the problematic of the “living-dead”, both as a theoretical proposition around puppetry and a thematic question about archives, apartheid violence and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Contrasted with the object as an aesthetic project, the investigation addresses the ways in which it (the object) is also inserted into various political and epistemological narratives and claims; in this case bound up in retributory and reconciliatory practices, and produced through and within the discursivities of the ethnographic museum or archive and other conventional formats of memorialisation.⁵⁴¹ This looks to new ways of reactivating or reassessing objects, alongside these practices and spaces as instruments of interrogating or reconciling “problematic” objects. I touched on the term living-dead briefly in the previous chapter in reference to work and the working body, but here I want to take the question further in relation to the materiality of the body and the ways in which the living body is construed through compilations or assemblages of ‘dead’ objects or fragments, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, a “Body without Organs” (the “BwO”). This is to acknowledge the “things” the hand *holds* or *grasps*; what it collects and keeps, and what it constructs or makes,⁵⁴² that is, how to think manoeuvrability and manipulation through the hand. The inquiry also brings into question the ways in which objects come to be defined and valued as living/dead, inclusive of those activities involved in art-making and the constituting of an archive – both object and oral - in relation to the TRC and Handspring’s related production *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997). In some sense then, the chapter situates the hand more passively as a kind of receptacle or vessel to be “filled” with a subject, but must also

⁵⁴¹ This follows on from Nicky Rousseau, Riedwaan Moosage and Ciraj Rassool’s research which is outlined in a special issue of *Kronos* titled “Missing and Missed: Subject, Politics, Memorialisation” (see Rousseau, Moosage & Rassool, *Missing and Missed*, 10-32), and looks to the “bringing together of two lines of research that have previously been treated separately – namely the missing/missed body of apartheid-era atrocities and the racialised body of the colonial museum [...] both areas are marked by similar lines of enquiry, linked to issues of identification, redress and restoration, often framed through notions of humanisation or rehumanisation.” (Rousseau, Moosage & Rassool, *Missing and Missed*, 10)

⁵⁴² Things *made* and things *found* are usually assigned differing levels of value, but for Donald Winnicott, in reference to the “transitional object”, this discrepancy is irrelevant. Rather, the “transitional object and the transitional phenomena start each human being off with what will always be important for them, i.e. a neutral area of experience which will not be challenged.” (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 17) This equalises these two activities of the hand, drawing attention to the quite arbitrary hierarchical assignment of value to different practices, and places the ultimate meaning assigned to the object as more significant and consequential for the subject, regardless of how the object came into the subject’s possession.

account for the agency required in the activities of holding, grasping or constructing – whereby the hand “fills its own cup” through claiming ownership or authorship over its objects. If however, individuals are, as Althusser frames it, “*always already* subjects and, as such, constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, unmistakable and, naturally, irreplaceable subjects”,⁵⁴³ then it is perhaps that this vessel or cup, as representative of the “always already” subject, is filled rather with “ideology”, which “never stop[s] interpellating subjects as subjects, never stop[s] 'recruiting' individuals”.⁵⁴⁴

The chapter then asks, if ideology, which names and forms the subject, “has a material existence”,⁵⁴⁵ what are the ways in which the subject is interpellated through the material language of the object? In other words, how do objects name us, or bring us into being as subjects? This follows on from Foucault’s insistence that “we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc. We should try to grasp subjectation in its material instances as a constitution of subjects.”⁵⁴⁶ In this regard, Donald Winnicott’s “transitional objects”, also referred to as “‘not-me’ objects” or “other-than-me objects”,⁵⁴⁷ show how from early on our worlds become constituted through “things”, the object often serving as a substitute for the subject for the young child as a means of transitioning into a “full” individuated being.⁵⁴⁸ Here the “individual [is] engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.”⁵⁴⁹ This is descriptive of, in Georg Simmel’s thinking, “the diversity of the ways in which men and things belong to each other, of the fact that they are simultaneously inside and outside one another”.⁵⁵⁰ For Foucault, the “process of subjectivation takes place centrally through

⁵⁴³ Althusser, *On the Reproduction*, 189.

⁵⁴⁴ Althusser, *On the Reproduction*, 193-194.

⁵⁴⁵ Althusser, *On the Reproduction*, 184.

⁵⁴⁶ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 97. For more on both Althusser and Foucault in their relation to materiality see Coole & Frost, *New Materialisms*, 33-36.

⁵⁴⁷ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 4.

⁵⁴⁸ The transitional “object represents the infant’s transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate.” (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 19-20)

⁵⁴⁹ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 3.

⁵⁵⁰ Simmel, *The Handle*, 274.

the body”,⁵⁵¹ subjection being “literally, the *making* of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced.”⁵⁵² The subject is as such materially figured, but for Foucault “appears at the expense of the body, an appearance conditioned in inverse relation to the disappearance of the body. The subject not only effectively takes the place of the body but acts as the soul which frames and forms the body in captivity.”⁵⁵³ In this instance Foucault refers specifically to the formulation of the subject within the context of the prison, and in this case “the soul is figured as itself a kind of spatial captivity, indeed, as a kind of prison, which provides the exterior form or regulatory principle of the prisoner’s body”,⁵⁵⁴ but, as Judith Butler has pointed out, “[i]f discourse produces identity by supplying and enforcing a regulatory principle which thoroughly invades, totalises, and renders coherent the individual, then it seems that every ‘identity’, insofar as it is totalising, acts as precisely such a ‘soul that imprisons the body’.”⁵⁵⁵ Figured as “an instrument of power through which the body is cultivated and formed”,⁵⁵⁶ the soul “forms and frames the body, stamps it, and in stamping it, brings it into being. In this formulation, there is nobody outside of power, for the materiality of the body – indeed, materiality itself – is produced by and in direct relation to the investment of power.”⁵⁵⁷ This reverses the relation of vessel to ideology in that the subject, or “soul”, which comes into being via relations of power, acts rather as an ideological receptacle, a holding cell, for the physical body, opening up the notion of the BwO in its relations to and between the subject, the body, materiality and power. There is thus a focus on the materials and objects of performance, as opposed to gesture and movement as explored in Chapter Three, investigated via three interrelated fragments which together form a reflection on the assembled and disassembled body. I have further engaged with this question both theoretically and through a series of artistic interventions of my own creation which follow ideas surrounding archives, museums and collecting practices. The first fragment works through the idea of the puppet as receptacle in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, introducing the notion of a “body with handles”, followed by a more directed discussion, via my two interconnected art

⁵⁵¹ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 83.

⁵⁵² Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 84.

⁵⁵³ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 91-92.

⁵⁵⁴ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 85.

⁵⁵⁵ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 85-86.

⁵⁵⁶ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 90.

⁵⁵⁷ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 91.

events, of the lives and afterlives of objects and their relations to subjects. The last fragment explores the subject as “readymade”, an idea lifted from the modernist art object and put into play in relation to the BwO.

My engagement with *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, a production directed by William Kentridge and written by Jane Taylor, adapted from the absurdist play *Ubu Roi* (1896) by Alfred Jarry⁵⁵⁸ with source testimony from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Archives,⁵⁵⁹ presented a means of approaching the TRC through the body-as-object in the form of the puppet. The play moves the TRC into an aesthetic space, but also highlights the performative, theatrical nature of the TRC processes themselves, bringing them continually into the present with every enactment and re-enactment of the production. It follows the exploits of Pa Ubu, played by Dawid Minnaar, whose job involves “taking care of the affairs of the state”,⁵⁶⁰ and his wife Ma Ubu, played by Busi Zokufa, as they navigate a post-apartheid era landscape at the time of the TRC, a “commission to determine truths, distortions, and proportions”, as Pa Ubu puts it.⁵⁶¹ He is a villain of the apartheid era who must decide whether he testifies and tells the truth of the evil deeds he has committed as an agent of the state, which in the play appear on an animated backdrop screen in the form of body parts, bones, and weapons, or whether he denies any involvement and escapes his dubious past unscathed.⁵⁶² The production brings attention to participants of the TRC by using script from the original South African hearings which is spoken by puppet witnesses.⁵⁶³ Two puppeteers support the puppet occupants, “echoing the presence of two people alongside each witness at the hearings – one to translate, one to comfort”.⁵⁶⁴ In the play, however, the translator stands in a confessional “shower booth”, which also doubles up as a site for Pa Ubu to “wipe clean” his

⁵⁵⁸ There is more to be done with Jarry’s work and the French theatrical tradition in the ways in which it invites breaks from ideological notions of subjectivities, breaks also specifically available in a South African context.

⁵⁵⁹ With puppets produced by Handspring Puppet Company and backdrop animations by William Kentridge.

⁵⁶⁰ Handspring Puppet Company, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.

⁵⁶¹ Handspring Puppet Company, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.

⁵⁶² Ultimately “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.” (Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 89)

⁵⁶³ In the play, 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.” (Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 82)

⁵⁶⁴ Meskin & van der Walt, *Public Hearing*, 73.

conscience and wash away the residue of violence after he returns from his “evening strolls” smelling of “blood and dynamite”.⁵⁶⁵ The confessions included in the play appear to come predominantly from parents who speak of the death of their children by the hand of the apartheid state and the task of having to identify their bodies in so many parts; nose, mouth, eyes, hands, legs, brains, blood. As one witness represented in the play puts it, “They gave us the remains, but it wasn’t much”.⁵⁶⁶ Here the once living body comes to exist only as a set of organs – organs without bodies - and can be defined as a complete entity, a complete subject, only in its parts. Repeated performances of these narratives are important in archiving or preserving the evidence of past lives, conveying the “everlasting pain”⁵⁶⁷ of these witnesses, and as such, theatre has the potential to serve as a means of “processing” emotions or thought, in that “within the narratives of trauma, there is always scope for dramatic re-enactment(s) that can then serve as way stations on the path to healing, through the (re)processing of such narratives in structured forms.”⁵⁶⁸ This (re)processing is further made a collective process in the communal setting of the theatre. In this way archival material, channelled through creative theatrical production, provides a means of individual and collective psychological catharsis.

Ubu and the Truth Commission drew me to a deeper concentration on the disassembled human body as it features in examples derived from the TRC itself, which further led to the creation of a set of two interconnected art events titled *Museum of Truth and Reconciliation* (2016) and *Double Portrait/Haunting Objects* (2018). These events respond to the puppetry production and the historical moment it plays out, and are brought into the discussion in this chapter as an attempt to situate my own hand within the context of the research project and think more consciously about how it operates (or how I operate it) in the world. They further offer a meditation on how the hand has a “head” or “mind” through making, and provide practical consideration of the activities tied to archive-making in the context of the TRC. In this realm, the role of the hand in a politics of care involved in the locating, collecting or situating that or who which is missing, that is, finding tangible or

⁵⁶⁵ Handspring Puppet Company, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.

⁵⁶⁶ Handspring Puppet Company, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.

⁵⁶⁷ Handspring Puppet Company, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.

⁵⁶⁸ Meskin & van der Walt, *Public Hearing*, 70.

physical evidence, is contrasted with the hand who/which *creates* missing subjects through their disappearance or murder, the hand of the perpetrator or agent of violence, explored through the example of apartheid agent Dirk Coetzee in the section on “readymade subjects”. The professional “comforters” of the TRC, who could be seen to provide support to witnesses via human contact, “stroking them, holding them, providing them with tissues to dry their tears and glasses of water to help them recover”,⁵⁶⁹ show how integral the role of the hand itself is as an affective tool, in this case for comfort – the simple act of offering one’s hand a source of reassurance.⁵⁷⁰ The hand thus stands in as a metonym of care, but conversely of manipulation and violence, a vessel that holds water but also poison.⁵⁷¹

The figure of the puppet can help to draw out the dialectic of living/dead in reference to the seemingly easy ways it has life bestowed and removed; in its mimetic proximity to the human body, it acts as a stand-in for human life which can be sacrificed. The form of the puppet is brought, from bare life, *zoē*, or “the simple fact of living common to all living beings” to live a meaningful, “proper” or “qualified” form or way of life, *bios*,⁵⁷² by the puppeteer, via a relationship that can be figured as one of both violence and care. Bare life is bestowed on the puppet in terms of both the bare or “raw” materials used to make it, and in its status as an object which holds bare or “basic” life; but seeing as the puppet is both object and subject in the first instance, being an object which is also figured mimetically as a living being, the nature of *zoē* is somewhat contested to begin with. Here the story of *Pinocchio* (1883) offers an interesting analogy which illustrates the puppet’s “fight” for life, further denoting the idea that the subject, who in this instance is also object, is present, always already, before human intervention. In Carlo Collodi’s tale, Pinocchio starts out as a simple branch, which calls to be brought to life by a Maestro Cherry, who is about to turn the wood into a piece of furniture. The wood frightens Maestro Cherry when it continually calls out to him and he surrenders the piece to Gepetto to be made into a marionette. Before this can happen however, the two men fight over

⁵⁶⁹ Edelstein, *Truth and Lies*, 92.

⁵⁷⁰ This is expressed in Jillian Edelstein’s set of photographs of participants of the South African TRC, a portion of which use the comforters as subjects. See Edelstein, *Truth and Lies*, 92-97.

⁵⁷¹ Rilke’s short meditation on the hand (quoted in Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life*, 92-93) is fitting here: “Ah, so confusing a hand is/even when out to save./In the most helpful of hands/there is death enough still/and there has been money.”

⁵⁷² Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

the wood; in order for it to be brought to life there must be a conflict, a conflict between what is dead and alive, a fight for life. Pinocchio can be seen to “tease” life out – he plays with the men in order to gain life. Later on in the story he exclaims “I don’t want to die!” – he has realised he has life, a meaningful life, *bios*. To reverse this comparison and parallel the human body with the puppet body then shows how fraught and changeable the measure and valuing of the former is.

On the most part, objects occupy the world of the subject; the object is forced to face off in a conflict with the subject, who claims power over the object by *seeing* it, naming it (or leaving it unnamed or nameless), by using or handling it, by owning it.⁵⁷³ Fred Moten aligns objectification and humanization with subjection, thus asserting how the status of “object” can prove to act quite contrastingly, but at the same time does quite different things in terms of how it makes subjects “living” or “dead”.⁵⁷⁴ Becoming subject however is both enabling and debilitating – both enlivening and destructive - as Butler indicates, “[s]ubjection’ signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject.”⁵⁷⁵ As a “power *exerted on* a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power *assumed by* the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject’s becoming.”⁵⁷⁶ It is thus that the BwO, as a kind of living-dead body, helps in thinking about the changing economies of ideological value in subjects and objects, and how these two dialectics are often blurred. The “BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organisation of the organs called the organism”⁵⁷⁷ – to “a signification, a subject”, a designation which dictates that

You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body—otherwise you're just deprived. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted—otherwise you're just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed

⁵⁷³ We think that we give things *life* when we hold onto them; that they die if we discard them or loosen our grasp on them. They rely on us for life, but at the same time, they are made as extensions of ourselves; we are caregivers or parents of the objects we make and keep, and as such share a reciprocal relationship with them; we feel they love us back because we have given them life.

⁵⁷⁴ Moten, *In the Break*, 2.

⁵⁷⁵ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 2. According to Butler, the “notion of the subject has incited controversy within [contemporaneous] theoretical debate, being promoted by some as a necessary precondition of agency and reviled by others as a sign of ‘mastery’ to be refused.” (Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 10)

⁵⁷⁶ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 11.

⁵⁷⁷ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 158.

down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement—otherwise you're just a tramp.⁵⁷⁸

The BwO then, “and its ‘true organs’, which must be composed and positioned, are opposed to the organism, the organic organisation of the organism.”⁵⁷⁹ To dismantle “the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather [means] opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor.”⁵⁸⁰ The subject, “who is at once formed and subordinated”,⁵⁸¹ is thus positioned as simultaneously self-evident, “always already”, and as a BwO, an ever-fluctuating organism whose status is ambiguous and not predetermined. There appears to be further possibility for overlap here in the “play of ideologies” which “is superposed, criss-crossed, contradicts itself on the same subject: the same individual always-already (several times) subject.”⁵⁸² The subject is thus multi-layered, fragmented, a palimpsest.

In some sense this inquiry attempts to work through Butler’s questions around the notion of the subject which ask the following: “How can it be that the subject, taken to be the condition for and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the deprivation of agency? If subordination is the condition of possibility for agency, how might agency be thought in opposition to the forces of subordination?”⁵⁸³ In this context this is to ask how the subject is also object, living and also dead; a Body without Organs. The three fragments that follow will look to some examples of the various assemblages and constructions of organs that make up the BwO, a kind of continuous archiving of the body, in its infinite guises.

4.1 A Body with Handles: The Puppet as Receptacle

⁵⁷⁸ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 159.

⁵⁷⁹ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 158.

⁵⁸⁰ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 160.

⁵⁸¹ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 6.

⁵⁸² Althusser, *On the Reproduction*, 194.

⁵⁸³ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 10.

The vessel, the cup, bowl, pot or vase, the container, chest, crate, canister or box, the bag, case, pouch or purse, the repository, the casket; receptacles are created in multiple forms and serve varying purposes, but what seems to mark all these varieties of receptacle is that they *hold* or *contain* something, and are often also *mobile* – designed to be carried by the hand, and as such simultaneously *hold* and *are held*. The cup is a key marker of the production of agency, a replacement for the mother's breast which proclaims that "I forge my own destiny!", while other transportable objects like boxes and bags mark the subject's mobility in the world, but can also fix aspects of identity or bodies themselves to permanent locations as in the case of coffins and storage repositories in archives and museums. As an aesthetic object, the receptacle or "vessel stands in two worlds at one and the same time" in that a "vessel [...], unlike a painting or statue, is not intended to be insulated and untouchable but is meant to fulfil a purpose – if only symbolically. For it is held in the hand and drawn into the movement of practical life."⁵⁸⁴ Further, Georg Simmel, in his essay on "The Handle", describes individuals as vessels existent within ideological "spheres", and in this sense the subject is also a kind of receptacle, in that

a being belongs wholly to the unity of a sphere which encloses it and which at the same time is claimed by an entirely different order of things. The latter sphere imposes a purpose upon the former, thereby determining its form. [...] A remarkable number of spheres in which we find ourselves - political, professional, social, and familial – are enclosed by further spheres, just as the practical environment surrounds the vessel.⁵⁸⁵

The subject is seen to be held by and in the body, the physical body a vessel for the "soul", but if the subject (or soul) itself simultaneously acts as a vessel, then, in turn, and in alignment with Foucault's thinking, it also holds the body. This analogy is in alignment with the notion of the BwO as a kind of receptacle, and can be further explored through the puppet body, which is not expected to appear anatomically correct, and indeed does not require the same organs, bone structure, muscles and blood vessels as what the living human or animal body does; but it is the lifelike forms of Handspring's puppets in particular that highlight this uncanny form of BwO, a body made to be held, or perhaps, a body with *handles*. The puppet can be seen

⁵⁸⁴ Simmel, *The Handle*, 267.

⁵⁸⁵ Simmel, *The Handle*, 273.

to function as a kind of receptacle for the human body in and of itself, particularly in the case of Handspring's puppets, into which the puppeteer must actually *insert* either some part of their body, or their entire body in order for the puppet to function and move as it should. In this case, the hybrid form of puppet-puppeteer becomes a new kind of BwO, an armature powered by a flesh-and-bone body, a kind of cyborg. In other instances I have discussed how the puppet acts as an "emotional prosthesis" for the puppeteer in this way, but here I want to look more closely at the ways in which it serves as a vessel in the form of the animal puppets which appear in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.

The addition of handles or grips to many of the puppets, which are customised to serve specific functions for the puppeteer's left and right hands, make the puppets quite literally "handleable", the object adapted specifically to fit the hand, to be held, carried, transported by the hand, and speak to the mobility and flexibility of the puppet subject. Simultaneously, however, this "body with handles" is steered, controlled, manipulated, without having agency over these movements. So the Handspring puppet, when positioned as a body with handles, provides an exemplar of the subject as simultaneously formed and subordinated; but agency as a subject can perhaps be found in relation to what is stored or held in this entity. The handle as a thing in itself also offers a byway into other spheres of being in that "[j]ust as the handle must not destroy the unity of the vase's form for the sake of its readiness to perform its practical task, so the art of living demands that the individual maintain his role in his immediate, organically closed sphere while at the same time serving the purposes of the larger unity."⁵⁸⁶ When an object is grasped by the handle, a "mediating bridge is formed, a pliable joining of hand with" object which joins two spheres, in the case of the Handspring puppet the aesthetic and, as will be seen, the political, and further "transmits the impulse of the soul into the" object, "into its manipulation",⁵⁸⁷ thus joining human and puppet subjects as one. A handle also tells the user how a thing should be used, how it should *move*, what gestures are imbued within it, and in this sense the "dual nature" of the object is "most decisively expressed in its handle. [...] in the handle the [object] projects visibly into that real world which relates it to everything external, to an environment that does not exist for

⁵⁸⁶ Simmel, *The Handle*, 274.

⁵⁸⁷ Simmel, *The Handle*, 269-270.

the work of art as such.”⁵⁸⁸ For Simmel, “the handle as a phenomenon becomes one of the most absorbing aesthetic problems.”⁵⁸⁹

The puppet as a receptacle “holds” the human body within performance, and as an audience, we understand that a human manipulator is controlling this lifeless form, but we do not always see their forms - at times they are literally “dark matter”⁵⁹⁰ concealed behind a screen or play board, or within the body of a puppet. This is expressive of what Jean-Luc Nancy might call a “being singular plural” in that “[b]eing cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence” which is inclusive of “all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, gods, and ‘humans’”.⁵⁹¹ On the other hand, the “mark of invisibility”, according to Moten, “is a visible, racial mark: invisibility has visibility at its heart. To be invisible is to be seen, instantly and fascinatingly recognised as the unrecognisable, as the abject, as the absence of individual self-consciousness, as a transparent vessel of meanings wholly independent of any influence of the vessel itself.”⁵⁹² As such, the form or method of this mode of performance renders the living human body absent but present, whole but segmented. In this relation voice is further disembodied, ventriloquised; it is not easily located, linked to the ways in which objects which hold voice or sound can also be seen as “puppets” in perhaps surprising ways.⁵⁹³ This is evident in the early example of the phonograph, which at its inception was figured as a thoroughly uncanny object, “speech made ‘immortal’”,⁵⁹⁴ the disembodied voice attached to a supposedly lifeless object.⁵⁹⁵ This voice could be traced subsequently through the gramophone, record player, cassette tape player, compact disc player, and more recently into the digital realm, where the tangible object that “holds” voice is less obvious, but rather exists virtually, with cell phone applications such as the

⁵⁸⁸ Simmel, *The Handle*, 267-268.

⁵⁸⁹ Simmel, *The Handle*, 268.

⁵⁹⁰ See Sofer, *Dark Matter*.

⁵⁹¹ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 3.

⁵⁹² Moten, *In the Break*, 68.

⁵⁹³ See Erasmus, *A Sinister Resonance*, on the absence/presence of sound or the sonic in relation to the physical object or body in the context of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.

⁵⁹⁴ Kittler, *Gramophone*, 234.

⁵⁹⁵ There is further work to be done here on the impact of Edison and the phonograph in a South African context, as well on the larger history of technology, particularly in relation to séances and spiritualist events, as a means of thinking through the notion of absence/presence and the puppet.

“voice note” allowing the user to record and transmit their own voice instantaneously.⁵⁹⁶ This kind of puppet points to the role sounds plays in giving and sustaining life,⁵⁹⁷ but further how “[f]unctions of the central nervous system [have] been technologically implemented.”⁵⁹⁸ Thus the fragmentation of the body as a vessel for sound is inherently connected to technology and technological advancements which figure the body in parts, whether metaphorically or otherwise. This is also apparent in increasingly prevalent instruments of surveillance in the public and private realms. The framing of the body in this way is evident in more obvious recording devices such as security cameras and bureaucratic instruments of measure such as the identity document or passport, but the internet presents a perhaps more sinister mode of surveillance which “borrows” the data we upload to social media platforms and other digital applications.⁵⁹⁹ For Rustom Bharucha, “we are living in an environment where the technologies of surveillance have intensified particularly in liberal democracies where the myth of free speech has been placed under severe duress. There are now legal mechanisms which place enormous curbs on critical thinking or dissent”.⁶⁰⁰

The first animation shown at the beginning of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* places significance on the eye as both an object of scrutiny, and as an ever-watchful tool of surveillance. The animation features close-up filmic shots of an eye in seeming distress, the eyeball lolling and rolling about the socket, followed by an eye drawn in Kentridge's typical animation style with an iris that expands and retracts like a camera aperture, following movement around the stage. An animated version of Pa Ubu appears and transforms into this eye, staking it and pulling it down to attach it to

⁵⁹⁶ This is similar to the function of the telephone, a kind of “artificial ear” (Kittler, *Gramophone*, 238) but here there is no means of back and forth conversation; one must listen to the disembodied, recorded voice note until its end, and then respond with one’s own soliloquy.

⁵⁹⁷ See Kittler, *Gramophone*, 237.

⁵⁹⁸ In this regard, Kittler also refers to the telegraph as an “artificial mouth”. (Kittler, *Gramophone*, 238)

⁵⁹⁹ As Ed Krčma puts it, “[d]igital media have enabled the details of our interests, preferences, communications, movements, and transactions to be monitored, shaped, stored and trafficked.” (Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 137) The “emergence of global mega-corporations such as Apple, Google and Facebook has meant that those domains of human activity that escape such surveillance have radically diminished, while the content to which subjects are exposed on line, for example, becomes ever more precisely tailored and pre-packaged”, while “digital technology enables the exercise of new powers of manipulation at various registers and scales [...] Photoshop offers ever-greater means to saturate images with intentions, to shape them to the conscious will of their maker.” (Krčma, *Fortuna: Drawing, Technology, Contingency*, 138-139) See also Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism*.

⁶⁰⁰ Bharucha, *Terror and Performance*, 8.

his own head. His body, in fact a baggy costume, falls off him, and a set of camera tripod legs are revealed, a reference to the cinematic, particularly to Dziga Vertov's film technique which he calls "Kino-Eye" or "Cine-Eye", defined similarly to Benjamin's optical unconscious as a means of capturing "that which the eye doesn't see".⁶⁰¹ For Vertov, Kino-Eye offers "the possibility of making the invisible visible, the unclear clear, the hidden manifest, the disguised overt, the acted nonacted; making falsehood into truth."⁶⁰² This reference is deliberate on Kentridge's part and in relation to the TRC is suggestive of the ways in which the confessional processes served to open up subjective versions of truth, putting voice to the previously invisible, unclear, hidden and disguised; making absence present. In the animation, the assemblage of eye and tripod, the new version of Ubu, struts around the backdrop screen taking photographs with a flash, while the Minnaar version of Ubu, who is at this point positioned on the stage in front of the animation, performs various macho poses for the camera. This interchange of subject and object sets the milieu for the play as one of surveillance and tyranny which frames the body in a certain way, dissecting and reassembling it, and the significance of voice and the documentation of the subject within the TRC proceedings is made evident in this first instance, further seen throughout the play in the ways in which the puppet acts as a carrier of sound.

In Handspring's work, the body, both human and animal, is fragmented via the figure of the puppet in the relation between representational form and the selection and handling of materials used to make that form. That is, the human or animal puppet, although naturalistically rendered, is also often rendered "incomplete", fragmented or spectral in terms of anatomy, due in part to a certain "abject" aesthetic that has become distinct to Handspring's work which exposes the inner "organs" of the puppets, but also in accordance with the adjustments made to the puppet body which cater for practical use on the part of the puppeteer. This aesthetic is derived from a commonality in the materials and methods used to make the puppets, usually adaptations of rod puppets with a focus on the upper body and abdomen, sometimes missing limbs, this disguised by costume adaptations which means that only the hands of the puppet are visible. The structural aspects of the puppet are most often

⁶⁰¹ Vertov, *Kino Eye*, 41.

⁶⁰² Vertov, *Kino Eye*, 41.

crafted from carved or contoured wooden pieces, and cane warped to create ribbed structures. More recently the Company has started to work with carbon fibre as a super lightweight material to replace certain wooden parts which can become quite heavy for the puppeteers. The use of sheer nylon pantyhose fabric (or similar transparent fabric) patched and stitched up to form a covering “skin” links the puppet form to the (female) human body in its relation to a typically feminine clothing item which “holds” the leg, revealing its form but rendering the surface texture and marks on the skin opaque, transforming the female body into a kind of mannequin. The fabric holds a bone structure, the skeletal frame of the body, and in this way the inner structure, void of flesh or organs, is revealed so as to show signs of making and handling; the joints and structural aspects of the puppet are revealed. Some sections of the puppet are padded and bandaged, particularly in the feet of animal puppets, and there are also parts of the fabric that are “laddered”, either from use or to show that from conception the puppet is an object to be handled. This surface treatment is rarely dealt with in the preparatory drawings however, which tend to show mainly structure and potential movement of parts. Sometimes texture is hinted at pictorially, but generally the surface seems to be dealt with as the puppet is made, in the moment of making. When these characteristics are changed, for example, when the puppet is crafted out of another object entirely, it becomes a different type of body, an “unnatural” or mutant body in the context of a Handspring play, such as can be seen in the examples of two of the animal puppets from *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, both crafted out of bags so as to be carried by their human “handlers”.

“Niles” the Crocodile and the three-headed Cerberus dog, “Brutus” or the “Dogs of War”, were both crafted using bags of sentimental value, found objects amalgamated with Handspring’s more typical puppet parts. The curious assemblage of living and dead elements, a kind of “exquisite corpse” made up of a combination of puppet, (anthropomorphised) animal, and bag, acts as a gateway or passage between worlds, a means of transition or translation between human, animal and object. A third animal in the play, the Vulture, is also a kind of uncanny receptacle and a cross between a puppet character and a stage prop, receiving and reflecting or translating messages through sound in its screeching at significant intervals in the play. 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.”⁶⁰³ As a scavenger that feeds on the dead, the Vulture puppet could be seen as a receptacle of death, a coffin, and in the play a harbinger of bad omens. The three animal puppets are not fully inhabited by the puppeteers in that they are manipulated from a somewhat removed distance – at arm’s length, and the Vulture remotely - but rather act as repositories for memory, guilt and remorse, or conduits for a kind of mental processing - in other words, they *carry* the mind, or perhaps more accurately, the *psyche* of the subject – a kind of “Pandora’s Box”. Richard Sennett, via Hannah Arendt, has pointed out that “people who make things usually don’t understand what they are doing” and in that produce in Arendt a “fear of self-destructive material invention”.⁶⁰⁴ Here Sennett references the story of Pandora’s Box (or casket or jar) as an illustration to show that “culture founded on man-made things risks continual self harm”,⁶⁰⁵ and the contents of the Ubu bag puppets, as will be discussed, stand as representative of this.

Ubu and the Truth Commission was originally envisaged as a story of “waiting”, with the provisional title *The Waiting Room*, but, according to Kohler, “[w]hen the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was launched in South Africa, suddenly our own stories of waiting began pouring out.”⁶⁰⁶ There is still evidence in the play of an interest in waiting in the form of the suitcases used in the two animal puppets, emblematic of a kind of waiting for democracy, for change, but also a *weight* that must be carried through transition – from one state to the next, and which cannot be left behind. The suitcase, according to Irit Rogoff,

has become the signifier of mobility, displacement, duality and the overwrought emotional climates in which these circulate...luggage suspended between an unrecoupable past and an unimaginable future and bearing the entire weight of those longings, to a point that it will not allow for any form of reflection on the textures of life in the present, on the new cultural artifacts that are being constituted out of life among other peoples and other languages and objects.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰³ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 83.

⁶⁰⁴ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 1.

⁶⁰⁵ Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 2.

⁶⁰⁶ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 79.

⁶⁰⁷ Rogoff in Schmidt, *Migrant Drawing*, 60.

Bags are relational objects by definition, but these puppet bags are more so in that they both also hold a familial relationship within them. According to Kohler,

William [Kentridge] saw an old canvas-and-leather army duffel-bag hanging in the studio and thought it would be ideal as the bag [for the Niles character], with its military look. It was not available, since it had belonged to Basil [Jones'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.⁶⁰⁸

The puppets as objects, in this sense Kentridge and Jones's "kin", carry multiple striations of personal and social history to begin with, and become even more layered in their connection to the TRC and their role in concealing or revealing secrets, and props which carry Pa Ubu's misdeeds in multiple forms, and to some extent, his conscience.⁶⁰⁹

Niles, who simultaneously serves as a repository and confidant for the protagonist Pa Ubu's secrets, as well as Ma Ubu's handbag, is created through a conglomerate of a canvas and leather duffel bag and hand-carved wooden body parts which make up the head and segmented tail. The bag in its puppet form would thus play two ambiguous or doubled roles;⁶¹⁰ consuming "Ubu's history but retain[ing] it in its secret belly so that it can emerge to damn him when necessary."⁶¹¹ In the preparatory drawings for the Niles puppet, (see Figures 1-2) he is originally conceptualised as a rigid body with four legs, a handle mounted on his back, always a body to be carried, but still endowed with limbs for greater independent mobility and agency. In the finished puppet form, (see Figure 3) the legs have been discarded for Kentridge's soft canvas bag which forms the abdomen of the body

⁶⁰⁸ Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 85.

⁶⁰⁹ The TRC hearings opened up a further link to the bag as a relational artefact charged with affect, in the form of the *balsak*, the duffel bag assigned to South African soldiers conscripted to "a protracted armed conflict on Namibian and Angolan soil in the so-called 'Border War', 'Forgotten War' or 'South Africa's Vietnam'." (Gibson, *The Balsak*, 211) For many combat veterans this bag is a loaded vestige of the war, filled with memories often too painful to dig out, but for some it came to serve as a prop which offered a means of "talking about" it. (Gibson, *The Balsak*, 212)

⁶¹⁰ There is a second entity in the play which also has a doubled role – the shower booth – which offers cleansing and catharsis in different forms for both Pa Ubu and TRC witnesses.

⁶¹¹ Meskin & van der Walt, *Public Hearing*, 72.

which makes the animal feel more vulnerable – more “open” to the world, further emphasised by the way in which the puppet is performed with the flap of the bag open, the inner section exposed. Niles moves in a slippery fashion, sliding and skidding on his smooth belly, the worn leather underside of the canvas bag. Grips or handles on either side of the jaw control the head and mouth sections, the main point of play in this puppet. The tail is articulated and moves with a reptilian fluidity from side to side, while the rest of the body is quite docile in its movements, further emphasised by the violent jerking gestures of the jaws when Niles talks, bites, snaps or swallows. The mouth is also a receptacle for food, nourishment, sustenance, and in this case the guilt and remorse of Pa Ubu’s actions, but further offers him a means of processing it, “digesting” it. Over the course of the play Niles preserves the evidence that Pa Ubu feeds him, but already seems to be privy to the covert activities it exposes *before* it comes to be stored inside his belly. He seems to be implicit in them, and as such appears to act as an extension of Pa Ubu, perhaps the receptacle that holds his subjecthood, or more specifically, the *guilt* of his subjecthood, a part of the assemblage that constitutes Pa Ubu as a BwO. In these instances Niles is also made aware of this damning information through a process in which the digestive organs act as “head”, that is, he comes to know the information through his gut. The role that the crocodile puppet plays is further emblematic of what Kentridge calls a “battle between the paper shredders and the photostat machines”,⁶¹² that is, a conflict on “How to deal with a guilt for the past, a memory of it.”⁶¹³ In other words, it describes the “tension between history and memory and the creation of a new, and blank future”.⁶¹⁴ Niles offers a means of processing transitions or translations between apartheid and the post-apartheid. He holds the guilt of history – the burden of the subject, the burden of the TRC.

⁶¹² Kentridge, *Director’s Note*, VIII.

⁶¹³ Kentridge, *Director’s Note*, IX.

⁶¹⁴ Meskin & van der Walt, *Public Hearing*, 72.

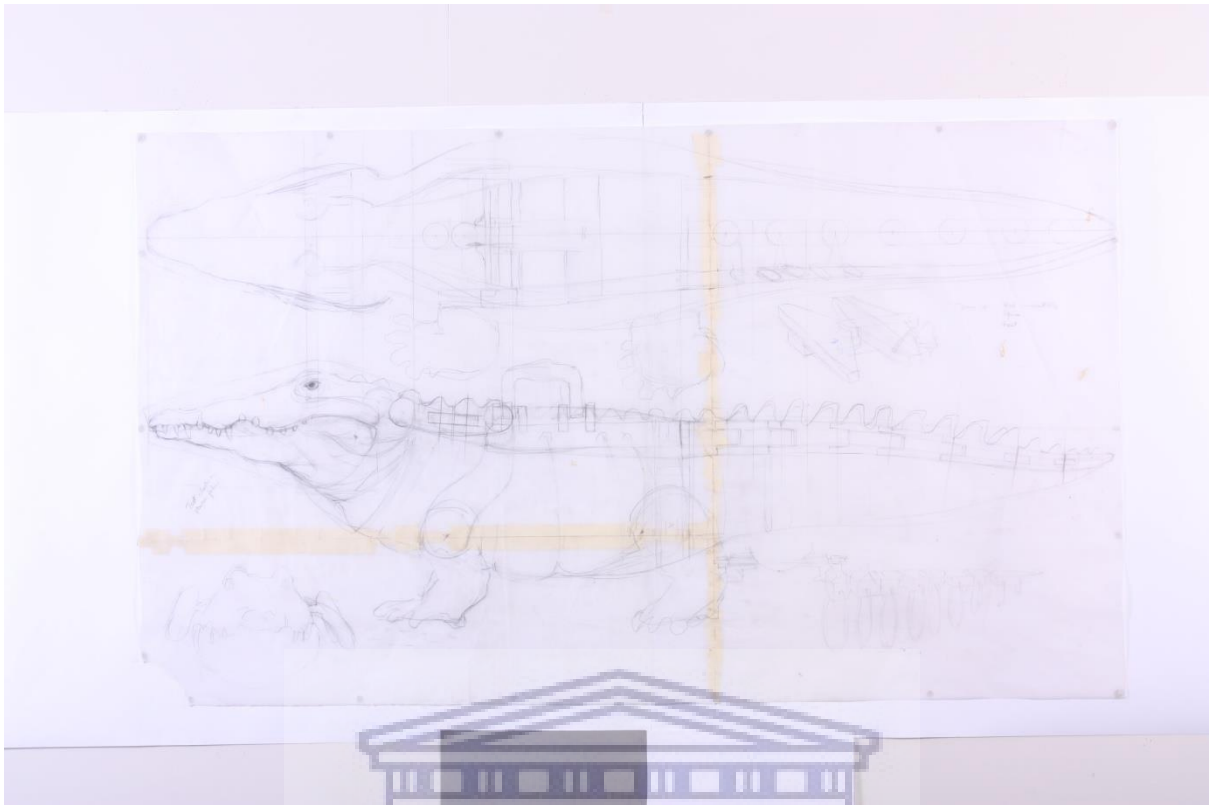


Figure 23: Niles the Crocodile Character Plan



Figure 24: Niles the Crocodile Character Sketch



Figure 25: Niles the Crocodile puppet

Brutus on the other hand, is constructed from a hard-shell “Globite”-type travel or brief case with carved wooden attachments for the four paws which sit atop carved wheels, the tail, a handle attached to the top of the suitcase, and the dog’s three heads, the “Head of Political Affairs”, the “Head of the Military” and the “Agent of these barbarous deeds”,⁶¹⁵ which are attached to long concertina-style necks. The Brutus puppet is not conceptualised as a whole bodily unit in drawn two-dimensional form, but his mobility as a being is evident in the puppet form, and is emphasized by wheeled feet and flexible elasticised necks which flex, stretch and rotate, rather like intestines or ducting pipe, with knobs placed at strategic joint points for the puppeteers to hold the neck. The briefcase body is closed off and inaccessible unless the dogs are asleep or otherwise unconscious, and is not opened or used as frequently as a utilitarian object in the same way as Niles is, until later in the play when Pa Ubu wants to frame Brutus, whereby it is snapped open to plant evidence and “place guilt” inside of him. Pa Ubu inserts incriminating evidence inside Brutus in order for it to be discovered, whereas he uses Niles’s body to conceal evidence, which later backfires. The point here is that the subject is constructed though a guilt

⁶¹⁵ Handspring Puppet Company, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.

that is placed or “inserted” into it. It is not disclosed or revealed through speech; rather it remains in material form to be “discovered”. It passes through the bodies of Niles and Brutus to be revealed through a kind of circuit, a processing or digestion. There is also an emphasis on jaw movement and manoeuvrability in both puppets, even in the drawn plans of the individual dog heads, the jaw seems to be the main focus, along with the long opposable necks. (See Figure 4) Early plans for Brutus show a mechanically constructed dog, like a Meccano construction, with a toilet brush tail and a hand saw for a head and jaws. (See Figure 5) This shows that the mouth cuts, is violent, destructive, and from inception the jaws of the Brutus puppet are of significance. It is also the mouth that, via speech or language, brings the subject into being in Althusser’s terms, and is of great significance in the context of the TRC as the vessel which brings testimony and confession into material form; memory and forgetting, guilt, pain, loss.



Figure 4: Brutus Dog 2 Head Plan

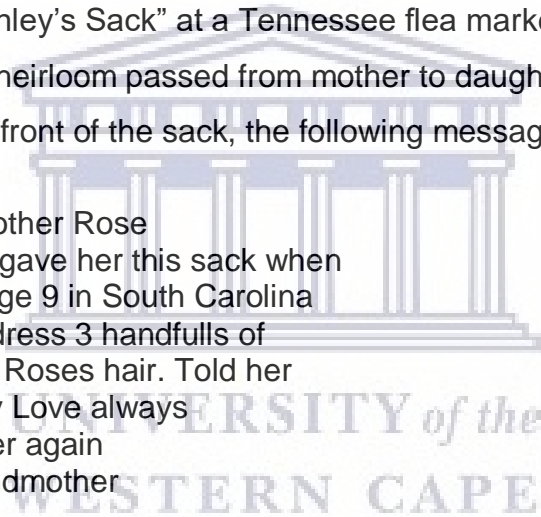


Figure 5: Mechanical Dog Character Plan

In the following section I discuss my use of the idea of the receptacle or vessel in the creation of two interrelated art events which respond to *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. I look more closely at the tangible objects held within the receptacle or the hand, things made and things found, and move from the object in the aesthetic realm into the museum and the ethnographic object, via a more directed look at the TRC processes themselves. This inquiry is linked to the fragmented body and seeks to uncover what the BwO enables in the spheres of ethnography, memorialisation and missingness.

4.2 The (After)life of Objects

Mark Auslander's short article "Objects of Kinship" describes the discovery of an object referred to as "Ashley's Sack" at a Tennessee flea market. This cotton seed bag was found to be an heirloom passed from mother to daughter on the sale of the latter as a slave. On the front of the sack, the following message is embroidered:



My great grandmother Rose
mother of Ashley gave her this sack when
she was sold at age 9 in South Carolina
it held a tattered dress 3 handfulls of
pecans a braid of Roses hair. Told her
It be filled with my Love always
She never saw her again
Ashley is my grandmother
Ruth Middleton
1921⁶¹⁶

This object, imbued with changing economies of value; emotional, spiritual and more recently, financial, reaches out to us from the past, "across histories of love and violence",⁶¹⁷ resurrecting itself in the present to convey a poignant story of kinship and loss.

Reactivating abandoned objects in a present conversation on missing and memory, my art event *Museum of Truth and Reconciliation* sought to do something similar in bringing new value to objects discarded as worthless. The *Museum of Truth and Reconciliation* was instituted first as an activity and later as a collection, compiled

⁶¹⁶ Auslander, *Objects of Kinship*, 209.

⁶¹⁷ Auslander, *Objects of Kinship*, 216.

and curated in response to a suite of cue or prompt cards by the group of participants who took part in the singular art event on the 19 October 2016 at the Centre for Indigenous Studies, University of Toronto, Ontario. The set of cards contained a series of pictures and textual phrases which were envisaged as prompts for action which revolved around themes seen to relate to truth and reconciliation, loss and memory.⁶¹⁸ Using these cards I asked participants to conduct explorations in which they would collect in small plastic “collector’s boxes”, of the type typically used for fishing tackle or for the storage of small delicate objects, items which they felt spoke to a specific chosen card. (See Figure 6) In my hybrid role as artist-researcher, I conducted the event as an attempt at situating or materialising notions surrounding truth and reconciliation, particularly as drawn from the TRC, in aesthetic forms, those accessible in the everyday, normalised spaces of the present which still hold trace of the past, whether tangibly or transiently. This posed the question of how a set of ideas or keywords could and would be imagined or envisaged aesthetically. The textual prompts included, each on a separate card, the phrases “Appearing/Vanishing”, “Monument to Lost People”, “Mapping Bodies”, “Moments/Monuments”, “Flotsam and Jetsam”, “Lost and Found”, “Placed/Displaced”, “Empty Shells”, “Replaced and Re-placed”, “Petrification and Mortification”, “Body Fragments”, “Burying/Covering”, “Remembering and Re-remembering”, “Trauma Imprints”, and the single words “Detritus”, “Debris” and “Souvenir”. The pictures on the cards were a selection of ink drawings, rendered predominantly in black and white and muted colour, which evoked the human body or parts thereof. This suite of cards sought to inspire “serious” or “studious” play,⁶¹⁹ in this case a moment of play which served as a thinking exercise around individualised notions of truth and reconciliation, a practice which to some degree

⁶¹⁸ The prompts, textual and pictorial, are derived from various readings and images which include Catherine Barrette, Bridget Haylock and Danielle Mortimer (eds), *Trauma Imprints: Performance Art, Literature and Theoretical Practice* (Oxford: Inter-disciplinary Press, 2011); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966) and Miriam B. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); as well as the *Fluxkits* of the late Twentieth Century Fluxus art movement; William Kentridge, Jane Taylor and Handspring Puppet Company’s theatrical production *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997); Jillian Edelstein’s photographic series which appears in Jillian Edelstein, *Truth and Lies* (London: Granta Publications, 2001) and Patricio Guzmán’s 2015 film *The Pearl Button*.

⁶¹⁹ I take the phrase “studious play” from Agamben, *State of Exception*, 64.

attempted to mimic Kentridge's description of the TRC as a kind of "civic theatre"⁶²⁰ in which "individual narratives come to stand for the larger national narrative" in a process where "[h]istory and autobiography merge."⁶²¹ The "show and tell" nature of the *Museum of Truth and Reconciliation* exercise meant that found objects often become symbolic or metaphorical makers of a participant's exploration, but it is perhaps the finding or searching itself that became the more significant aspect of the event, a "reconciliation" of the self with both human and object *other* through play.



Figure 6: A selection of prompt cards and collector's boxes displayed on the floor at the Centre for Indigenous Studies, University of Toronto.

⁶²⁰ Kentridge, *Director's Note*, IX. Kentridge further explains the notion of "civic theatre" as "a public hearing of private griefs which are absorbed into the body politic as a part of a deeper understanding of how the society arrived at its present position." (Ibid)

⁶²¹ Taylor, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, II.

The site of the *Museum of Truth and Reconciliation* event, structured around the Centre for Indigenous Studies, linked it to the study of the presence and absence of indigenous people and cultures, which was noted by the group of participants who received the card “Detritus”. (See Figure 7) This group set off together to find items which initially came from the “Old World”, but were in constant, popularised or normalised usage in the “New World”. The image on this card, two contrasting heads shown in profile, was read by participants as the meeting of these two worlds, the “European” and the “Conquest”, which in this context largely revolved around cuisine, this association triggered by the textual prompt and the way in which it could refer to the decomposition of food. Items collected included the sausage (pork) and the ketchup (tomatoes) from a hot dog, a popular fast food (for these items the group asked a hot dog vendor on the street if he would give them scraps of the food he was selling), as well as chocolate (representative of cacao and sugar) and corn, foods from the old world which the group felt the new world had claimed ownership over. Another item emblematic of this meeting of worlds was a small Bible printed in Spanish, handed to them on the street by a Jehovah’s Witness representative. In this example, situated within the realm of reconciliatory practices, indigeneity is aligned with the “old” and “new” worlds which indicate specific denotations in terms of racialisation, cultural identity and geographies. Within a South African milieu, while “[h]istories of empire and conquest produced specific systems of legal and historical classification, as part of systems of governmentality and knowability”,⁶²² in the context of the TRC, victim and perpetrator are multi-lingual and not racially distinguished as categories, and processes of reconciliation related to identity are further complicated in this way.

⁶²² Rousseau, Moosage & Rassool, *Missing and Missed*, 18.



Figure 7: Image for prompt card “Detritus”

Enacted as a communal activity, the Museum was actualised via the group’s collecting and collating processes, which asked participants to act as “forensic archaeologists” who “re-member” and remember history, figuring the “body as archive and exhumation as a recovery project”,⁶²³ the subsequent itinerary of objects that made up the portable *Museum of Truth and Reconciliation* serving as a kind of parallel or alternative to an anthropological or ethnographic museum. This brings to attention the fact that “artefacts are separated when they enter a museum, where they are placed in different collections and made subject to different disciplines and governmentalities.”⁶²⁴ In this regard, Nicky Rousseau, Riedwaan Moosage and Ciraj Rassool ask if we can “think of these objects as ancestors, as living people,

⁶²³ Rousseau, *Eastern Cape Bloodlines*, 204. The disciplines of exhumation “are archaeology, anthropology and anatomy. Its practice of investigation is often sensorial [...] It is work, which is slow, careful, scrupulous, becoming increasingly delicate as the diggers get closer to physical remains.” (Rousseau, *Eastern Cape Bloodlines*, 209)

⁶²⁴ Rousseau, Moosage & Rassool, *Missing and Missed*, 28.

embodiments or extensions of those who are missed”.⁶²⁵ The exercise emphasised the significance of *holding on* to objects which remind one of the past, a process which echoes the attempted reconciliatory practices of the South African TRC in its reliance on the memory of participants in recalling stories from the past, in this way enabling them to subjectively convey their side of the story.⁶²⁶ The objects collected speak to the “imprint” of trauma that remains in certain spaces and the burying or covering (and uncovering) of this trauma, while the collection of the *Museum of Truth and Reconciliation* further resonates with the subject of “missingness”, related to forensics or archaeology, as well as to the exhumation of bodies, in the sense that these practices look to objects and bodies that are ‘lost’ and found.⁶²⁷ These practices address repatriation processes,⁶²⁸ as well as how space is altered or modified over time, and how it embodies history in the present. How do we think it, use it, *remember* it in the present? The picture prompt for the “Monument to Lost People” cue card (see Figure 8) was figured by the participant who received it as a brain but also a settlement or forest, the trees living monuments or “mutant witnesses”. The forest, a site of stories or myths, was represented in this collector’s box by rough tree bark, soil, and a single leaf, and was experienced by this

⁶²⁵ Rousseau, Moosage & Rassool, *Missing and Missed*, 28.

⁶²⁶ There is an interesting contrast here to the recent *Fees Must Fall* and *Rhodes Must Fall* movements (whose members are referred to as *Fallists*) in South Africa, which emphasise the need to start anew, *destroying* rather than saving the evidence. A clear example here is the defacing and subsequent removal of the bronze memorial statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the University of Cape Town’s campus in 2015, where it formerly occupied a prime position looking out over the city of Cape Town. Fallists see the presence of this kind of memorial as a constant reminder or symbol of the epistemic violence that is continually perpetuated on those oppressed by the apartheid regime, and as such, seek to remove it from their everyday lives. In contrast to this, there are others who feel that to “make evident the less obvious evidence of the structure of things that belong to our pre-democratic history is to allow us some understanding of the challenges that have to be faced in the present and future historical moments. For the structure of things then is an irreducible part of the structure of things in a post-apartheid era.” (Dubow, *Constructs*, 23) Here artist Pitika Ntuli believes that “[r]ather the pieces [in question should be] taken into a theme park, or somewhere where the history is going to still remain and people can come and say, ‘This is so and so who did this, and this is so and so who did this.’ So we need to preserve every work of art or otherwise we will go down in history as iconoclasts.” (Ntuli, *South Africa’s Apartheid-era Statues*) See also the photographic work of David Goldblatt and the fictional stories of Ivan Vladislavić, particularly his recent *Save the Pedestals* (2019), which Handspring has adapted into a puppetry production.

⁶²⁷ Many of these topics are addressed in the special issue of *Kronos* mentioned in Footnote 541, and my intellectual engagement with them was largely instigated via this platform. My contribution to the issue is an aesthetic engagement in the form of a visual essay and a drawing which appears on the cover of the printed version.

⁶²⁸ See, for example, the work of Ciraj Rassool and Martin Legassick

participant as a place of loss, erasure or displacement – described as “illegible” where one “loses one’s compass” – of people and of entire settlements.⁶²⁹

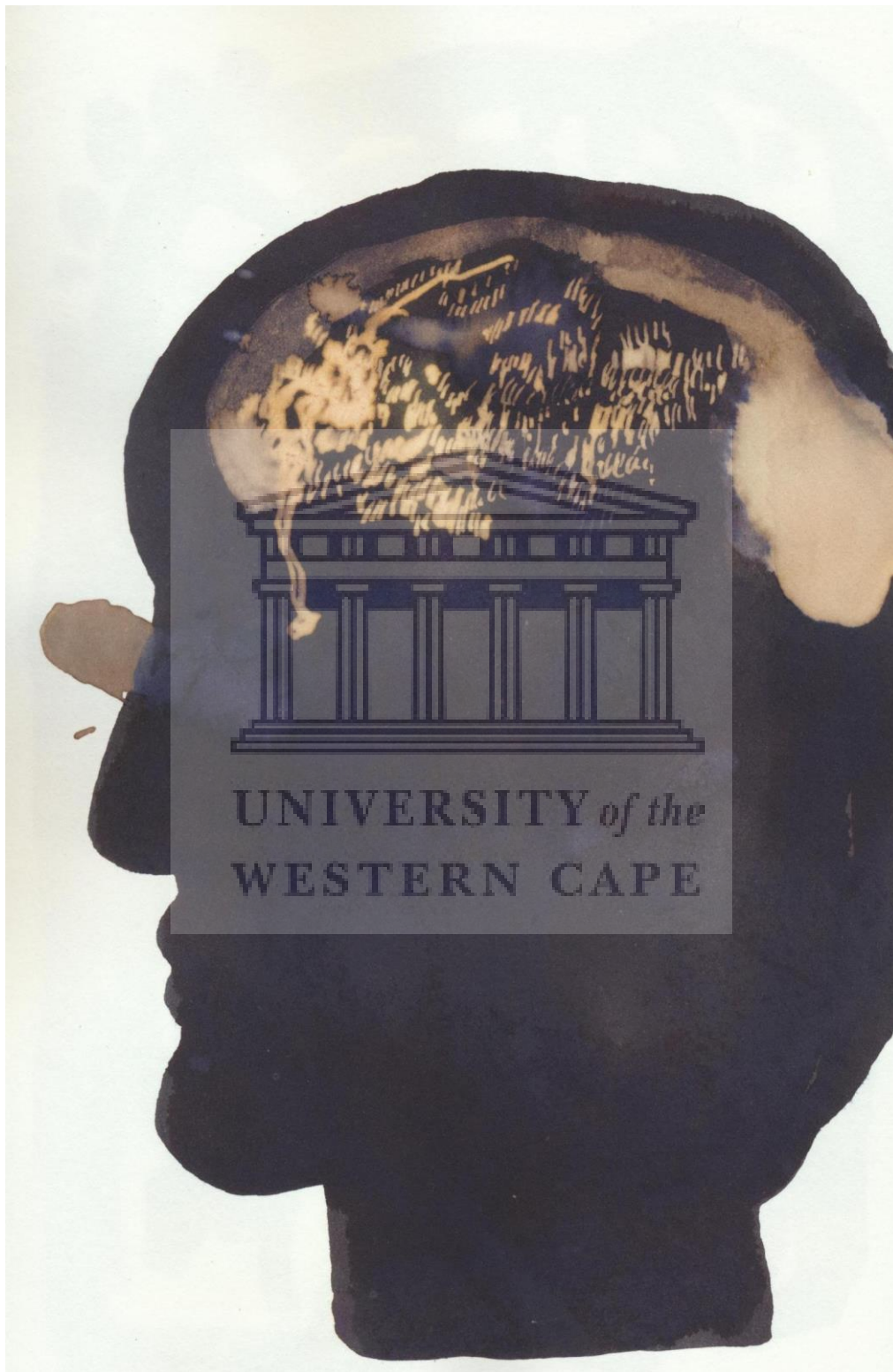


Figure 8: Image for prompt card “Monument to Lost People”

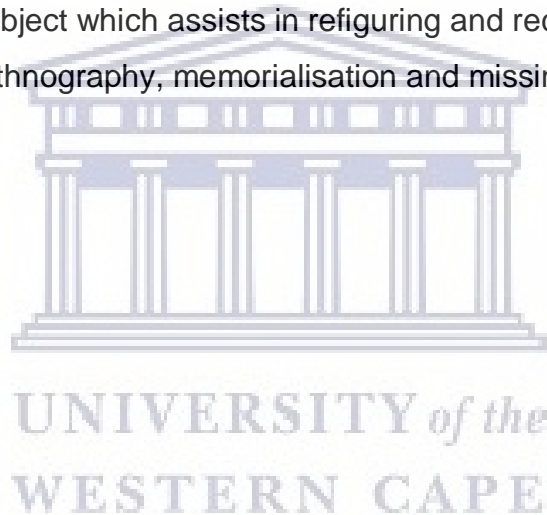
⁶²⁹ Here one could look to the erasure of settlements in the Apartheid Group Areas Act of 1950.

The array of found objects, which range from bits of organic matter to written pamphlets to foodstuffs, are now stored in small compartmentalised plastic boxes, “collector’s boxes”, each imbued with individualised notions of the given prompts. The cue cards exist as a set of indexical maps, simultaneously images and objects, which hold information on the routes and outlines of things and ideas lost and found. Using this seemingly disparate collection, a “beta-museum” of material and aesthetic forms, the more recent *Double Portrait/Haunting Objects* was intended to act as the second chapter of the event, and sought to re-activate these found objects in a new context within an altered economy of value. At the latter event, installed at the “Missing and Missed: The Subject, Politics and Memorialisation” workshop at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa in March 2018,⁶³⁰ the objects and their accompanying cue cards, as well as the small storage boxes they are housed in, were displayed in a darkened room alongside a set of overhead projectors. (See Figures 9-11) Participants were invited to interact with the objects and the picture and text from each cue card, in combination with the projectors, to create silhouetted images on multiple projected screens. In this way the objects took on a doubled meaning through their ex-relation to the *Museum of Truth and Reconciliation*, and were furthermore doubled in material and shadowed forms, both tangible and transient, absent and present; objects and images which become shadows. The objects were brought into this second sphere of missingness in a space where they were made to occupy a “shadow world”, spectral and haunting versions of their material and former selves. Their doubling through projected forms was further complicated with the inclusion of the bodies, particularly the hands, of participants themselves in the silhouetted forms. Here the subject, whether in the form of participant or found object, itself was doubled, othered and fragmented.

The emphasis on collection and collation stirs up an awareness of ‘missing’ objects, ‘missing’ in that they were not necessarily lost in the first place, but more accurately discarded, thrown away or left behind. Missingness in this context thus first appears through a connection to the missing *object*, rather than the missing *subject*, who is figured only later via a series of the former, a kind of BwO. The phrase “Double

⁶³⁰ For further details on this workshop see Rousseau, Moosage & Rassool, *Missing and Missed*, 9.

Portrait" which appears in the title of the latter event, offers a link to the way in which objects can become doubles or portraits of the self, as can be clearly seen in puppets and in photographs. The human body is rendered absent but present, whole but segmented. Both art events worked to activate the sense of touch, particularly that of the hand, unearthing a link to forensic investigation and the documentation of objects which make up the human body in terms of the location, collection or situating of that or whom which is missing (finding physical evidence). The practice or methodology of missingness is outlined here through a very basic form of mimicking the processes of exhumation, forensic investigation, archaeology and museological practices of the archiving and display of the human body, outlining the process of finding and placing meaning (and bias) in objects which serve as extensions, prostheses or apparatuses of the hand.⁶³¹ Here the BwO enables a blurring of subject and object which assists in refiguring and reconciling ideas around the human in terms of ethnography, memorialisation and missingness.



⁶³¹ Further visual links can be made to the ink drawings of bodies and fragments of bodies by Marlene Dumas, for examples *Models* (1994) or the *Magdalena* series (1996), and the interactive and tactile aspects of Sue Williamson's *Truth Games* (1998).



Figure 9: *Double Portrait/Haunting Objects* installation view



Figure 10: *Double Portrait/Haunting Objects* installation view

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Figure 11: *Double Portrait/Haunting Objects* installation view

To situate the event/collection as a “museum” offers a means of making memory and voice material. The collection of objects is now housed within a small brown velour-covered suitcase; storing within it the proceedings of the event, as well as the narratives that were built around ideas of truth and reconciliation and the past in this context.⁶³² This travelling museum or “object library”, a library of the street, can be seen as a literal storage facility of a finding and showing, a show and tell of “truth”. The collection of discarded objects, akin with the investigative practice of exhumation which Rousseau describes as “often sensorial, relying on an intimate interaction with

⁶³² I found that there was an uncanny similarity in the suitcase of oddments collected during the *Museum of Truth and Reconciliation* event to a box of objects found by staff at the former Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School, now the Woodlands Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario. This school, open from 1928-1970, was run by an Anglican religious order and operated as a boarding school for native Canadian children taken from surrounding areas, predominantly from the Six Nations Reserve at Brantford, Ontario. (Anglican Church of Canada, *The Mohawk Institute*) The box contains such items as candy wrappers, combs, socks and toys, all items left behind by children who were forced residents of the school. This reminder of the past lives of these children further conveys the idea that objects hold within them an (after)life and power.

the ground and the body”,⁶³³ is evocative of the objects which make up a ‘found’ body, and conversely, parallels the treatment of bodies as objects. Here Rousseau’s detailed account of the exhumation of “five anti-apartheid activists⁶³⁴ recovered at Post Chalmers outside the rural Eastern Cape town of Cradock [South Africa] in July 2007 by the Missing Persons’ Task Team”⁶³⁵ offers an anecdote which suggests that it is in fact objects or “things” which present more convincing evidence of the “human” (or the subject) than the physical human body itself:

If recognising bone was central to identifying the human, artefacts assembled the idea of a more fleshed, corporeal body. A shoe or zipper fragment, shoelace, button, buckle, a door key, some coins: these were more agentive in assembling the human persons, just as tyre, diesel, bullets, beer bottles, summoned their killers, suggesting the human is held together less by physical body, but assembled through fragments, things or objects, sensorial and affective.⁶³⁶

This illustration shows how the subject is in certain instances defined as a complete entity only through its parts, that is, as a set of “organs without a body”, a kind of “reversal” of the BWO. Patricio Guzmán’s 2015 documentary film *The Pearl Button* (*El Botón de Nácar*) offers a further example of organs without a body which weaves the stories of two “exterminations”⁶³⁷ in South Chile through the motif of water, specifically the ocean, and its significance as a place of refuge, reassurance, connection, life, and ultimately death in its description as a mass graveyard for indigenous people, a kind of bottomless receptacle.⁶³⁸ The film is seen as a follow-on

⁶³³ Rousseau, *Eastern Cape Bloodlines*, 209.

⁶³⁴ ‘Topsy’ Madaka and Siphiwo Mthimkulu, and Champion Galela, Qaqawuli Godolozzi and Sipho Hashe (known as the “Pebco Three”). These two groups of men were “killed in April 1982 and May 1985 respectively by Port Elizabeth security police, who thereafter burnt the bodies.” (Rousseau, *Eastern Cape Bloodlines*, 203)

⁶³⁵ Rousseau, *Eastern Cape Bloodlines*, 203. The Missing Persons’ Task Team (MPTT) is “a unit mandated by [South African] government to investigate the fate and whereabouts of missing persons cases from the TRC.” (Rousseau, *Eastern Cape Bloodlines*, 215)

⁶³⁶ Rousseau, *Eastern Cape Bloodlines*, 210.

⁶³⁷ Guzmán, *The Pearl Button*.

⁶³⁸ This film, along with its predecessor *Nostalgia for the Light*, is a departure from Guzmán’s previous work which addresses “the complex relationships between time, memory, and absence in postdictatorial Chile”. (Blaine, *Representing Absences*, 114) “The representation of ruins” can be seen in three of these documentaries, “*Chile, la memoria obstinate* (1997), *La isla de Robinson Crusoe* (1999), and *El caso Pinochet* (2001) – [which] can be seen as allegories of different aspects of Chilean history: the defeat of Allende’s democratic alliance, the end of the Pinochet regime, and the challenges of social reconciliation in contemporary Chile.” (Rodríguez, *Framing Ruins*, 131)

to Guzmán's *Nostalgia for the Light* (*Nostalgia de la Luz*), which investigates the evidence of human remains in the Atacama Desert after Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, in relation to the stars and astronomy. The earlier film follows a group of women who still search for any vestige of their relatives who were murdered and 'disappeared' during Pinochet's reign.⁶³⁹ *The Pearl Button* outlines the story of Jemmy Button, a Yaghan man who in 1830 was 'bought' by English Captain Robert FitzRoy⁶⁴⁰ with a single pearl button, historically an artefact of real value, and transported to an "unknown planet"⁶⁴¹ as one of four native people to be taken to England to undergo the process of becoming 'civilized'. The second layer of narrative that runs through Guzmán's film also focuses on Chile at the time of Pinochet's rule, specifically on how inmates from his concentration camps were disappeared in the Pacific ocean; weighted by steel rails, their bodies placed in plastic bags and potato sacks and dropped from the air.⁶⁴² In the film Chilean judge Juan Guzmán finds that the rails hold "messages" or "secrets" engraved by "water and its creatures"⁶⁴³ when he discovers a button encrusted in one of the recovered rails, "the only trace of someone who had been there",⁶⁴⁴ thus linking the story of Jemmy Button to Pinochet's victims.

The analogies between human and button makes clear the way in which the body is made into an object to be purchased, commodified as a product or project; but also how a world can be represented or enclosed in a single seemingly insignificant object. It explains how an object takes on life, but also how, when applied to the subject of the human body, it takes away life. In simple terms, objects encapsulate

⁶³⁹ According to Rousseau, Moosage and Rassool, the "'disappeared' entered the political lexicon of terror largely through Argentina and Chile; two decades later Rwanda and Bosnia turned international attention to mass violence and genocide as exemplified by the mass grave. South Africa slips through these grids: apartheid security forces tried but failed to emulate their Latin American counterparts in 'disappearing' activists on a large scale, while inter-civilian violence, which mostly took the form of political rather than ethnic, racial or religious cleansing, did not produce mass graves. Nonetheless, both 'disappearances; and inter-civilian conflict produced missing persons in the South African conflict – most presumed dead". (Rousseau, Moosage & Rassool, *Missing and Missed*, 10)

⁶⁴⁰ FitzRoy's mission was to draw the land and coastlines of Patagonia, creating maps of this area which "opened the doors to thousands of settlers". (Guzmán, *The Pearl Button*)

⁶⁴¹ Guzmán, *The Pearl Button*.

⁶⁴² According to the film, judicial reports say that between 1200 and 1400 people were disposed of in this way by Chilean Armed Forces. (Guzmán, *The Pearl Button*)

⁶⁴³ Guzmán, *The Pearl Button*.

⁶⁴⁴ Guzmán, *The Pearl Button*.

worlds. The motif of the button and its close relationship with the fingers and hand is furthermore emblematic of the intimacy of certain kinds of objects with the human body, apparent in the objects found by Rousseau at Post Chalmers which come to stand in for the body itself. Many of the TRC testimonies, such as those used in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, demonstrate the fragmentation of bodies; how victims of apartheid crimes were systematically broken down into sometimes unrecognisable parts or objects. In one of Jillian Edelstein's series of photographs focussed on participants of the TRC, ⁶⁴⁵ *Joyce Mtimkulu*,⁶⁴⁶ *Port Elizabeth, February 1997*, a mother is shown holding a chunk of her deceased son Siphiwo's hair, which, according to Rousseau, she had kept "as evidence of thallium poisoning during an earlier detention".⁶⁴⁷ This photograph calls "attention to the importance of physical remains",⁶⁴⁸ but further highlights touch, particularly a mother's touch, which is also evident in Ashley's Sack,⁶⁴⁹ revealing how objects are imbued with this sense of tactility, and in turn how it is charged with affect. Siphiwo Mthimkulu's hair was later buried by his mother as a substitute for his corpse, "the only remainder of her son's physical body".⁶⁵⁰ Another mother, Joyce Manaki Seipei, describes with devastating intimacy how she identified her son's body in so many parts:

'I looked at Stompie because I am his mother. I had a deep look at him. I saw the first sign. I said, 'I know my son. He doesn't have hair at the back.' His eyes were gouged, and I said, 'This is Stompie.'...He had a scar on his eye. I looked at him at the nose, and he had a birthmark. I looked at his chest and I could see a scar, because he fought with another boy in Tumahole. And I looked at his left hand. It was identical to mine. I looked at his thighs. Stompie was very fit, just like his mother. I looked at his private parts, and my sister just winked her eye. His left leg is similar to mine. Underneath the left leg there was a birthmark as well.'⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁵ See Edelstein, *Truth and Lies*. Also significant here, particularly in relation to the hand, are Edelstein's portraits of the professional TRC "comforters", Joyce Mthimkulu and Father Michael Lapsley.

⁶⁴⁶ Edelstein spells Joyce Mthimkulu's name as "Mtimkulu" (without the "h") in the photograph title and in other discussion of her, but the correct spelling seems to include the "h". As such, I have kept the title of the photograph as Edelstein has spelt it, but used the spelling "Mthimkulu" in all other instances in which I use the name in this text.

⁶⁴⁷ Rousseau, *Eastern Cape Bloodlines*, 209.

⁶⁴⁸ Rousseau, *Eastern Cape Bloodlines*, 214.

⁶⁴⁹ See Auslander, *Objects of Kinship*, 213.

⁶⁵⁰ Rousseau, *Eastern Cape Bloodlines*, 209.

⁶⁵¹ Seipei in Edelstein, *Truth and Lies*, 44.

One participant of *The Museum of Truth and Reconciliation* who received the prompt card titled “Petrification and Mortification” described the collector’s boxes as “coffins”, his collection consisting of objects of ‘death’: cigarette butts, paper fragments, stray feathers, and broken shards of glass. In this way, the fragments in the “coffins” came to be of the human body, echoing the memories of broken-up bodies such as those described by Seipei above.

This collecting of discarded objects may seem an arbitrary exercise, but is evidently connected to bodies and fragments of lives that were, as the pearl button exchanged for Jemmy Button’s life shows us. It addresses individual narratives which exist around truth and reconciliation and the refiguring of these narratives in the present, asking how we envisage these in daily life. We may contemplate the act of collecting in the manner European naturalists or ethnographers might have done while collecting specimens to add to their curiosity cabinets or *wunderkammern*; living entities, both animal and human reduced to objects of study, their sentience removed. Here we may again think to the pearl button exchange, as well as to the “dead body of the warrior, especially his or her missing or stolen parts, [which] are key historical tropes of colonial conquest, with stories of heroic suicides, corpses defiled and dismembered, heads separated from bodies and transported across land and sea to Europe.”⁶⁵² *Wunderkammern* serve taxonomical purposes, exploring the “limits” of various categories or classes of thing or being, conceptually similarly to the puppet which explores categories of “humanness” – and how “like” or unlike” a thing is to the self. For Walter Benjamin, “[w]hat is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind.”⁶⁵³ But the collector can also be figured as bricoleur, ragpicker or *strandloper*,⁶⁵⁴ one who “gathers the refuse and debris, the

⁶⁵² Rousseau, Moosage & Rassool, *Missing and Missed*, 11. Here the “quest to recover and return the heads of such warriors stands as a significant effort to reverse legacies of conquest.” (Ibid)

⁶⁵³ Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, 204. According to Benjamin, “[p]ossession and having are allied with the tactical, and stand in a certain opposition to the optical.” (Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, 206) Furthermore, “[w]e need only recall what importance a particular collector attaches not only to his object but also its entire past, whether this concerns the origin and objective characteristics of the thing or the details of its ostensibly external history: previous owners, price of purchase, current value, and so on. All of these - the ‘objective’ data together with the other - come together; for the true collector, in every single one of his possessions, to form a whole magic encyclopaedia, a world order, whose outline is the *fate* of his object.” (Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, 207)

⁶⁵⁴ Afrikaans word for “beachcomber”, translated literally as “beachwalker”.

ephemeral, rejected, and marginal, the no longer functional.”⁶⁵⁵ In other words, one who seeks to explore “a collection of oddments left over from human endeavours”.⁶⁵⁶ In this regard Miriam Hansen asserts that “a new shape cannot be lived unless the disintegrated particles are gathered and carried along.”⁶⁵⁷ It was in this vein that the group of event participants took up the task of collecting and interpreting, bringing objects “back from the dead” through individual and collective discovery.

4.3 The Body without Organs and the “Readymade” Subject

To situate the subject, who is “always already”, as a kind of “readymade” shows how the former comes into being through its objects, but also looks to the arbitrary and changing valuing of the subject as a BwO, a constant shifting of assemblages. In this regard, Huey Copeland has noted how “[l]ong before the genre’s originator, Marcel Duchamp, turned a urinal into a work of art through a series of enunciative acts in 1917,⁶⁵⁸ black bodies were subject to even more arbitrary and binding shifts in their categorical status, ready-mades *avant la lettre*.”⁶⁵⁹ Although Copeland refers specifically to “black bodies” here, his statement shows how subjects come to share their status with objects, and how language, in combination with the material forms it manifests, comes to form and re-form the subject in its continually changing guises. “Readymades” are significant as a new art medium in the early twentieth century as a “mode[...] of artistic production that foreground[s] object culture more than image culture”,⁶⁶⁰ the term used in modernist art to describe utilitarian found objects which are brought into the art world and *become* art objects simply through their renaming

⁶⁵⁵ Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 33.

⁶⁵⁶ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 19.

⁶⁵⁷ Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 23.

⁶⁵⁸ Here Copeland is referring to Duchamp’s work titled *Fountain*, a porcelain urinal which he signed “R. Mutt 1917” and placed in a gallery setting. According to Dalia Judovitz, “[w]hile Cubist artists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braques had incorporated, collagelike, newsprint or other nonart materials in their paintings as early as 1912 (a practice reprised by such Dadaists as Kurt Schwitters in his Merz collages after 1919), Duchamp’s daring act of appropriating objects - mass produced and commercially available - wholesale in order to eventually put them on display invited a radical reevaluation of art.” (Judovitz, *Drawing on Art*, xv)

⁶⁵⁹ Copeland, *Bound to Appear*, 18. Here Copeland notes how “The slave emerges as a thing-that-is-not-one, a form of readymade that not only challenges the status of the artwork, but that also intersects with and so reframes theorizations of the “thingly”—the commodity, the sculptural, or the material itself—within Western cultural discourse.” (Copeland, *Bound to Appear*, 19)

⁶⁶⁰ Brown, *Thing Theory*, 13. This mode of artistic production also includes the mixed-media collage and the found object.

and re-placement in a new context.⁶⁶¹ These may be objects rejected or discarded as rubbish, or new objects of mass production, their main distinguishing factor being “visual indifference”,⁶⁶² in this way rekindling desires and values in new contexts, and in this sense the readymade is expressive of the movement or translation of objects from one space to another, or from one economy to another. Here the figure of the hand in the transmission or circulation of objects (from “hand to hand” or “hand-me-downs”) is significant. According to Dalia Judovitz, the

readymades’ aspirations to conditions of display as art despite their lack of visual interest would put to the test the idea of art: they would serve to raise the seminal question, what may or may not be art when “looks” no longer count? And in so doing, they would open up the possibility that art may hold out a conceptual future beyond its manifestations as a purely visual medium.⁶⁶³

This practice presented a means of bringing the “everyday” into the art world, blurring the distinctions between art and daily life. Disabling the utilitarian or purposeful use of objects was utilised by artists as comment on the exclusivity or unapproachability of the art object – particularly the art object in the art gallery or salon context - but also a comment on the potential problematics inherent in objects in relation to violence, humour, eroticism, or conventions around identity politics, that manage to slip through the everyday largely unnoticed or disregarded. The readymade then, when placed in relation to the subject, would seem to imply that the latter is *not* self-evident, that its value and ontology is arbitrary and easily changeable.

In *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, Pa Ubu, once, in his words, “an agent of the state, [who] had agency and stature”, battles to come to terms with finding himself “cast aside without thanks.”⁶⁶⁴ He performs alongside a cast largely made up of puppets, and as a readymade subject, is described more thoroughly through his objects or props, including his “Top Secret Mission Reports” and toilet brush sceptre,

⁶⁶¹ Here a distinction must be made between “readymades” and “found objects” as art mediums in that “[u]nlike the readymades, which were selected because of their ‘visual indifference’, ‘found’ objects were deemed worthy of appropriation because of their visual appeal, thereby reinforcing reliance on the idea of art as visual manifestation and experience.” (Judovitz, *Drawing on Art*, xvi)

⁶⁶² Judovitz, *Drawing on Art*, xvi.

⁶⁶³ Judovitz, *Drawing on Art*, xvi.

⁶⁶⁴ Handspring Puppet Company, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.

which are drawn and described in detail, further giving the sense that Pa Ubu is somehow “missing” as a subject.⁶⁶⁵ Interestingly, in the preparatory drawings for the play there are virtually no character designs for Pa Ubu himself, particularly in relation to the other characters including the animals and witnesses. This is understandable seeing as he is played by an actor and thus does not require extensive design to realise his character, but it is still significant seeing that he is such a central character in the play. His character is perhaps additionally realised through the objects which appear in Kentridge’s backdrop animations; he is “filled” with the parts of the other - limbs, hands, fingers, skulls, bones, teeth, along with a pair of scissors and a hacksaw, which clog the drain when Pa Ubu showers, “a bath [...] a bloodbath” in which he washes off the debris of the people he has murdered.⁶⁶⁶ Niles and Brutus, who both act independently as objects and characters, also feature as Pa Ubu’s “pets” or familiars, an extension of his character in a kind of “becoming animal”,⁶⁶⁷ receptacles in a metaphorical sense, and themselves adaptations of readymade objects or “assisted readymades”. They are his familiars, confidants, but also storage for the “baggage” he refuses to face up to. In some sense he refuses his status as subject, refusing to answer the call of being hailed as witness in that the “call itself is also figured as a demand to align oneself with the law, a turning around (to face the law, to find a face for the law?), and an entrance into the language of self ascription — ‘Here I am’ — through the appropriation of guilt.”⁶⁶⁸ The “turn toward the law is thus a turn against oneself, a turning back on oneself that constitutes the movement of conscience”, but “is compelling, in a less than logical sense, because it

⁶⁶⁵ This is a considered decision on Handspring’s part in that, in Kohler’s view, “[p]erhaps 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.” (Kohler, *Thinking Through Puppets*, 80) In this sense the puppet is “more human” and imbued with more humanity than the human itself.

⁶⁶⁶ These scenes shift disturbingly to a witness talking about identifying the body of his son, seeing a thick stream of blood clogging the outside drain of the police mortuary: “No matter what they had done to my child, I will identify him by the mark on his chin. [...] I went to the mortuary. There I saw my child. I saw the mark on his chin. But I said to them, ‘This is not my child.’” (Handspring Puppet Company, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*)

⁶⁶⁷ In this sense, the animal puppets “become a starting point for seeing the animal anew, not for what it can do for or make of humanity and not in opposition to or as something to master, but for just what it is: an interrelated component of the world we share.” (Parker-Starbuck, *Becoming-Animate*, 650)

⁶⁶⁸ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 107. According to Butler, this “turning toward the voice of the law is a sign of a certain desire to be beheld by and perhaps also to behold the face of authority, a visual rendering of an auditory scene – a mirror stage or, perhaps more appropriately, an ‘acoustic mirror’ – that permits the misrecognition without which the sociality of the subject cannot be achieved.” (Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 112)

promises identity.”⁶⁶⁹ Pa Ubu suspends the call to subjecthood, and although he is permitted to sail away (in a boat made of a sieve) at the end of the play with Ma Ubu and Niles, he disallows his subjecthood to come into being, instead “storing” it in Niles. He also, however, claims his actions were only his job – they were not “personal”, and in this sense he is subjected by the state and attempts to reclaim his individual selfhood, his readymade selfhood. As Butler reminds us, “to become a ‘subject’ is to be continuously in the process of acquitting oneself of the accusation of guilt. It is to have become an emblem of lawfulness, a citizen in good standing, but one for whom that status is tenuous”.⁶⁷⁰

Pa Ubu’s human character is paralleled with a puppet-like mascot who is part-human, part-animal, part-intestine, a human actor dressed in a padded suit, shaped to represent Jerry’s original sketch of the Ubu Roi character, who appears at moments throughout the performance as a kind of jester or clown guiding Pa Ubu’s actions. Jerry’s drawings of Ubu Roi show him as essentially a “gut”, “comparable to a container that needs to be crammed in order to function and even to survive”,⁶⁷¹ and the spiralled form on his belly is representative of this; “he is bereft of a head and reduced to his intestines”,⁶⁷² and in this way “provides increments for brainless flesh”.⁶⁷³ His rotund pear-shaped body echoes the shape of the stomach, but also presents him as a kind of food, a piece of fruit to be eaten. The continual links to the gut also point further to a *digesting*, a process where something is transformed into a different state within the receptacle of the human body, which can be linked back to the processing of psychological trauma the TRC attempted to offer, and the passage from an apartheid to post-apartheid state it aimed to provide. Pa Ubu’s stained white underwear, particularly when viewed alongside his counterpart, the Ubu Roi mascot, are a marker of his obscene or gross character, a reminder of ‘taboo’ or ‘animalistic’ bodily processes and the marks they leave; but further position him as both a bold and vulnerable character.

⁶⁶⁹ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 107-108.

⁶⁷⁰ Butler, *The Psychic Life*, 118.

⁶⁷¹ Hubert, *Raw and Cooked*, 76.

⁶⁷² Hubert, *Raw and Cooked*, 79.

⁶⁷³ Hubert, *Raw and Cooked*, 79.

Pa Ubu could perhaps be identified, via the lines derived from the TRC proceedings he is made to speak, as Dirk Coetzee, the first commander of the covert apartheid-era South African Security Police Unit at the Pretoria farm Vlakplaas, “whose actions” in overseeing the death and torture of multiple anti-apartheid activists “epitomised the atrocities of the apartheid regime”.⁶⁷⁴ Here there is a kind of ventriloquism at play, where Coetzee’s voice in the form of his TRC testimony is evident but his physical presence is not explicitly identified, thus casting the human Pa Ubu, Minnaar, as a kind of mannequin or dummy – a vessel for voice – realising the “ventriloquistic potential of performance to re-member an absent body.”⁶⁷⁵ If Coetzee, via Minnaar, is positioned then, as a kind of gut or intestine, what might this mean for the white (post-)apartheid subject? Perhaps this is how the white subject is figured, as Du Bois put it, through “the workings of their entrails”.⁶⁷⁶ Ubu Roi “considers all materials and all surfaces potentially comestible; and any instrument can serve either to make anything whatever edible or to sharpen his teeth for the next meal, which looms in the immediate future.”⁶⁷⁷ He thus approaches the world with an instrumentalist point of view – *everything* is a tool or a resource used to get him what he desires.⁶⁷⁸ Here the hierarchical control of the brain is reversed; the white subject is controlled by his gut, by consumption, a voracious desire to consume and, like Ubu Roi, take “[u]ltimate possession” which “does not consist for him in burying treasure in a cathedral crypt or, for that matter, in a more modern bank vault, but in securing it inside himself.”⁶⁷⁹ The white subject, with an appetite for the other, is continually “empty” and insatiable, and in *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, Pa Ubu’s appetite is for murder and violence.

There is another curious link to the intestine and the white subject in apartheid history in the form of the alleged tapeworm which inhabited the gut of Verwoerd’s

⁶⁷⁴ Edelstein, *Truth and Lies*, 13.

⁶⁷⁵ Franko & Richards, *Acting on the Past*, 4.

⁶⁷⁶ Du Bois, *The Souls of White*, 923. Du Bois described possessing a kind of “‘second sight’” which enabled him to see the “souls of white folk” – “I see in and through them [...] I see these souls undressed and from the back and side. I see the working of their entrails” (Ibid) According to Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski, this “dynamic splitting and doubling of self and gaze” is further descriptive of “the capacity to see the material structures of segregation and colonialism as well as the visual and psychic technologies of racial domination.” (Smith & Sliwinski, *Photography and the Optical*, 15)

⁶⁷⁷ Hubert, *Raw and Cooked*, 78.

⁶⁷⁸ It is this greedy instrumentalist personality that has recently inspired comparisons of 45th American president Donald Trump to Ubu Roi.

⁶⁷⁹ Hubert, *Raw and Cooked*, 81.

assassin Dimitri Tsafendas, and which, according to Tsafendas, had supposed control over his life and actions.⁶⁸⁰ He was ultimately declared unfit to stand trial, which allowed the state to position the murder within a certain frame, that is, as committed by a mentally unstable subject, and not as an act of political treason.⁶⁸¹ Tsafendas' "actions demonstrate how an individual came to understand the connection between his personal circumstances and the larger political situation and chose to act accordingly"; significant in the broader historiography of apartheid which "has generally dealt with its structural aspects: we know a lot about how it affected the lives of large groups of people; we know very little about how it shaped the psychic interior of individuals living with its day-to-day effects."⁶⁸² This instance is thus a further example of the discrepancy between individual and collective (state) subjectivity. Legally Tsafendas was "not in his right mind" and his body was thus out of his control, "acting out" with directive from the creature living inside of him.⁶⁸³ Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (1972) is significant in this regard as a representation of the segmented body, the parts of which do not "match up". The theatrical piece is performed by a single actor with their entire body, apart from the mouth, blacked out, (also a further link to consumption and the gut). The actor performs a dialogue with increasing anxiety which describes seeing someone who has had a stroke, a malfunctioning of the body. Thus it is "Not I" who had the stroke, but further perhaps a realisation on the part of the actor and, separately, the viewer, that the performing body is a disjointed body that is "not me". Tsafenda's body, the body which committed the murder, was "not his", and the unstable mind, one that is controlled by an unpredictable and impulsive body, is here pitted against the political. In this case the body is seen as apolitical, imbued with a kind of "fumbling" violence, again

⁶⁸⁰ Adams, *The Prison Letters*, 9. He referred to the tapeworm as "his 'infirmity'".

⁶⁸¹ Adams, *The Prison Letters*, 2. According to Zuleiga Adams, "[g]iven Verwoerd's prominent role in the implementation of apartheid and the existence of underground military wings of the banned liberation movements, it was generally assumed that his murder must have been part of an organised political conspiracy. It therefore came as a shock that a 'madman', with a modicum of effort and organisation, simply stabbed the arch-patriarch of apartheid to death during the ordinary, day-to-day business of parliament. [...] For the apartheid government, his insanity meant that no political mileage could be scored by its opponents. For the leaders of the broader anti-apartheid movement, a madman with no rational political motive was of little consequence, and he was relegated to a footnote - an 'obscure white messenger' - by Mandela in his *Long Walk to Freedom*." (Ibid)

⁶⁸² Adams, *The Prison Letters*, 2-3.

⁶⁸³ Penny Siopis's film *Obscure White Messenger* (2010) brings illustration to Tsafendas's testimony through a video montage of found footage which juxtaposes images of recreation and leisure with scenes of uniformed youths taking part in organised sports and school activities and, quite disturbingly, an octopus in an aquarium which is representative of the tape worm.

impressing how the subject can be “filled” and moulded with political ideals. This can be paralleled with Coetzee’s distancing between his TRC testimony and his sense of self, an expression of a kind of self-hatred, but further a separation of body and mind, hand and head.⁶⁸⁴

The hand can be figured in a history of violence in narratives surrounding reconciliation commissions; the hand of the state which controls and oppresses, and the hand which murders or perpetrates, the amalgamation of hand and weapon becoming a different sort of emotional prosthesis or assemblage. This can be seen in Edelstein’s closely cropped black and white 1997 portrait of Dirk Coetzee titled *Dirk Coetzee, Pretoria, 26 February 1997* (see Figure 12).⁶⁸⁵ In the image Coetzee’s right hand grasps his handgun, a prop which apparently did not ever leave his wrist like a “little handbag”, even when he went to the toilet.⁶⁸⁶ Coetzee holds the gun as if preparing to fire, the weapon aimed upwards, parallel to his face, with his index finger poised on the trigger, while his left hand tightly grips the wrist of the gun-wielding right hand. The gesture seems posed and performative, particularly in comparison to the other portraits in Edelstein’s series. The pose could be a kind of storytelling on the part of the photographer, or perhaps it is unconsciously performed by Coetzee in the spur of the moment. He ‘plays’ with his gun as a kind of prop or companion, “showing” or revealing it in an audacious demonstration; his gesture a coming together of two hands, a kind of prayer. It is as if the hand is alive and has its own agency that needs to be controlled, contained. He needs to hold it, secure it, so that this hybrid hand-gun apparatus cannot be (re)activated to repeat the past actions he has confessed to. His face is smirking, stern, proud, there seems to be something behind his eyes. This is, in a sense, a “becoming-weapon” on Coetzee’s part, an assemblage of man and gun, which becomes part of his subjecthood (for

⁶⁸⁴ When speaking of the burning of Sizwe Kondile’s body, for example, Coetzee does not seem to notice the flippant manner in which he describes this heinous act: “...the burning of a body to ashes takes about seven hours, and whilst that happened we were drinking and even having a braai next to the fire. Now, I don’t say that to show our braveness, I just tell it to the Commission to show our callousness and to what extremes we have gone in those days...” (in Edelstein, *Truth and Lies*, 114)

⁶⁸⁵ This photograph forms part of a documentary photographic series centred on the TRC in which Edelstein has photographed witnesses who have testified as agents or perpetrators, victims and survivors of Apartheid. Coetzee’s portrait appears in the “Vlakplaas” section of the series.

⁶⁸⁶ Edelstein, *Truth and Lies*, 110.

Deleuze and Guattari, "it is always the assemblage that constitutes the weapons system")⁶⁸⁷ in which the latter *moves* the former.

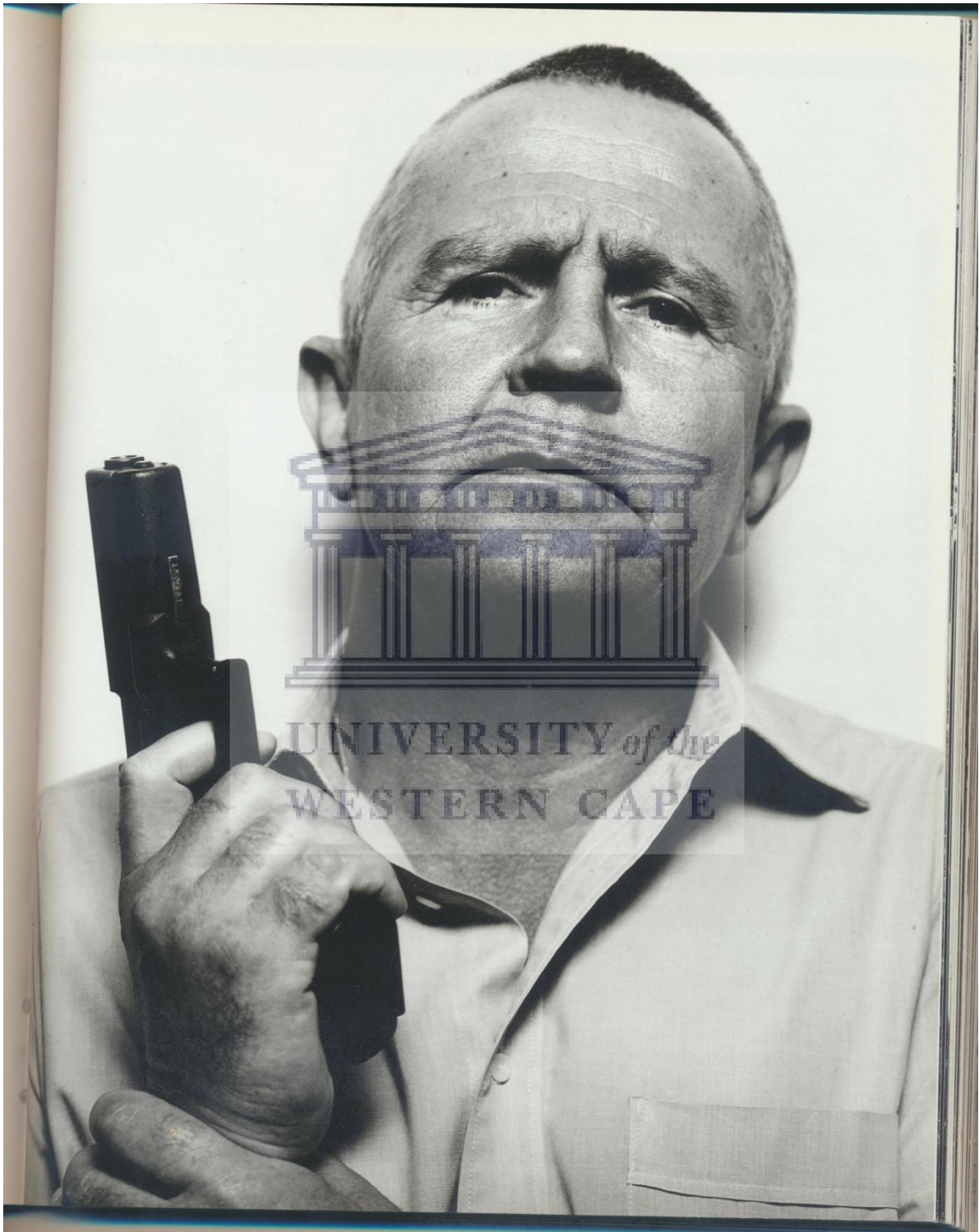


Figure 12: Dirk Coetzee, Pretoria, 26 February 1997 by Jillian Edelstein

⁶⁸⁷ Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 399.

This photograph was taken during the TRC proceedings, and in this context seems an attempt by Coetzee to stop himself from re-enacting, or perhaps even remembering, the evils of the past; his hand a creature which Coetzee must himself restrain. It seems an admission of sub-conscious guilt, a continual and still-present guilt. Here Karen Barad's notion of "touching the self" is significant in her invocation of touching as "by its very nature always already an involution, invitation, invisitation, wanted or unwanted, of the stranger within".⁶⁸⁸ Barad describes the significance of touch as such:

When two hands touch, there is a sensuality of the flesh, an exchange of warmth, a feeling of pressure, of presence, a proximity of otherness that brings the other nearly as close as oneself. Perhaps closer. And if the two hands belong to one person, might this not enliven an uncanny sense of the otherness of the self, a literal holding oneself at a distance in the sensation of contact, the greeting of the stranger within? So much happens in a touch: an infinity of others – other beings, other spaces, other times - are aroused.⁶⁸⁹

What "other" is contained within Coetzee's touch? This analysis reveals a conflict between hand and head, past and present self, which tell different stories whereby the head *thinks* that it has rid itself of guilt, but is betrayed by the hand, linked to impulse and action, which must be always in possession of a protective apparatus. The right hand is further betrayed by the left hand in Coetzee's strange gesture in a pose which Coetzee seems to want to convey as supportive, that is the left supporting and emphasising the dominance or virility of the right, but which rather comes across as a containment or restraining at the wrist by the subordinate or submissive left hand. Coetzee's hand may represent the hand that gives orders as a tool of the apartheid state, but there is also a sense that he seeks to emphasise the power he holds through his gun, perhaps a stand-in for the state, and how to some extent he is *powerless*, his gun holding agency over him as a readymade. In this image Coetzee could perhaps be likened to Doctor Strangelove, the mad German scientist played by Peter Sellers in Stanley Kubrick's *Doctor Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. Doctor Strangelove's deviant right hand must be shielded by a glove, but he is powerless to its impulsive "tics", which

⁶⁸⁸ Barad, *On Touching*, 207.

⁶⁸⁹ Barad, *On Touching*, 206.

send it shooting up into a flat-palmed Nazi salute, which he must repeatedly restrain, upon which it attempts to strangle him.

Du Bois expresses a “double consciousness”, that is, a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others”,⁶⁹⁰ which also means to look at one’s self as an other, or in other words, “the idea of a gaze that belongs to the other.”⁶⁹¹



⁶⁹⁰ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black*, 8.

⁶⁹¹ Smith & Sliwinski, *Photography and the Optical*, 14.

ASSEMBLED, DISASSEMBLED, REASSEMBLED: CONCLUSION

Over the course of this dissertation the body, as it appears in multiple guises and formations in archive, art and text, has been assembled, disassembled, and reassembled, a kind of surrealist “exquisite corpse” composed of hand, prosthetic, parchment, skin, wood, bone. The theoretical binary separation of head and hand that begins the writing has been reconstructed and reunited through the puppet body, but further through the body of work that constitutes Handspring’s archive. By framing thought through the context of the hand, this reading of the Handspring archive sets up new potentialities and futurities in relation to the three spheres of *theoria*, *praxis* and *poiesis*, and looks to how we can use the puppet to think through dilemmas around subjectivity and objecthood. The “blurring” of multiple binaries, subject/object, work/play, living/dead, absent/present, smooth/striated, is here figured as a productive and invigorating practice, as the puppet shows. The body of writing has thus opened up the gradual development of a certain kind of intellectual practice involving collecting, making and registering.

The work with the puppet as a kinetic object has also enabled me to become a kind of “kinetic scholar”⁶⁹², expressive of a migrancy or movement through disciplines and different modes of thinking and being, learning in and through movement and stillness. This is significant in relation to the research platforms my work is associated with at the CHR, that is “Aesthetic Education, and the Becoming Technical of the Human”, and the “Laboratory of Kinetic Objects” (LoKO). The kinetic scholar, a kind of *bricoleur* or ragpicker, can be figured in relation to the movement of corporeal knowledge, in the movement or distribution of bodies of work, and in the movement of one’s own physical body in practices of archival work and other modes of sharing and gathering new knowledge. This speaks to the importance of the enactment or creation and distribution of knowledge outside of the university grounds. Here the subject “picks up” the objects or ideas which have been left behind, addressing the relics and debris in their potential for ever-new openings, “setting forth” as one who “does not confine [her]self to accomplishment and execution: [s]he ‘speaks’ not only *with* things, [...] but also through the medium of

⁶⁹² A term which I borrow from Bradley Rink.

things”.⁶⁹³ “Setting forth” here marks a journey which is determined by (sometimes unpredictable) means, rather than by a predetermined end. Here the ongoing fabrication of the Handspring archive comes into play in its intrinsic relation to the hand which collects, collates and curates; my exploration adding a further layer of tactile and material engagement. I would encourage Handspring to make at least parts of their archive physically accessible, as a means of tactile engagement with the forms which are so intrinsically tied to the haptic senses.

The dissertation would be amiss without some reference to the strange and unprecedented state the world has found itself in during 2020, the occurrence of a global pandemic, COVID19 or Corona Virus which, on top of its danger as a potentially life-threatening disease, has led to a downfall of the global economy. There have been two major instructions which have governed individual control of the virus; wearing a mask to cover the mouth and nose, and washing and sanitizing the hands as a means of preventing the spread of the virus through surface contact. These guidelines have been widely circulated and enforced in public discourse and spaces, and have pointed to the significance of touch or contact in our interactions with other people. Along with this is an anxiety about breath, what it carries or holds, and the various ways it exits the windpipe – through the exhalation of breath, the cough, through speech - and the ways in which it “touches” or makes contact with others, and can be carried on objects through transmittance of saliva. This moment has also presented an opportunity to think more carefully about how we use our hands in the world in relation to the self and the other, nurturing an ethics of care, and the potential for biopoetics over a biopolitics; a re-enchantment through touch.

There are two major links here to this research project and the puppet in the form of the hand and of breath, grouped under the theme of the *body*, and its significance in the world and in capitalism. In this regard the pandemic has shown how significant the physical body is, not only for individuals (and potentially how vulnerable we all are as material beings), but also to broader capitalist phenomena – the economy which runs the world. Touch (or the lack thereof) has brought the global economy to its knees. Of course, it is an airborne virus that is really responsible for this, but it

⁶⁹³ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 21.

could be said that it has morphed into a *crisis of the hand*. As the symbolic carrier of money and its exchange, the absence of the hand, of physical interaction, has proved detrimental to even first world countries. Just a few months of slowing and in some cases completely halting the economy, has shown how unsustainable this capitalist system truly is – that it relies on a complete devotion to neoliberal ways of being to even continue. It is significant that this comes at a time when the world is predominantly virtually centred (the internet, finance), but even this has proved lacking in terms of how reliant the entire world is on money and the ways it is physically and tangibly implemented.

Mythologist Martin Shaw has referred to this moment as “the time of the wolf”, and recounts a story in which a horse and its rider reach a crossroads and the rider must make a decision between two paths. On one path, the horse will live and the rider will die. On the other, the horse will die and the rider will live. The rider chooses the latter path, and some days later on the journey a wolf appears and devours the horse. The wolf then demands that the rider mount it instead, and declares that it is now “the time of the wolf”, an unpredictable, untamed and unknown future. Shaw suggests that the best way to deal with this uncertainty is to dwell in it, to dwell “in the break”, and accept it for what it is. Here, as the dissertation hopes to show, there are multiple modes of being betwixt and between which may help us to re-imagine and re-enchant our wild world.

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