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Puppet Theater:

Changes in the perception

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Abstract

This research paper investigates possible changes in the perception within puppet theater which have a twofold aspect. On the one hand, and in order to offer a cross-disciplinary approach to the subject, puppet figure is explored within the sociological study on objects as theorized by Bruno Latour and the anthropological study on things by Tim Inglod. The puppet figure will arise as a *thing* in life which influences the artistic process equally as the artist. On the other hand, the notion of intermediality is employed in order to not only place the puppet theater within contemporary theater-theoretical discourse but to suggest that the intermedial lies in the core of this art form, enhanced by the emergence of the artist's perception of the puppet as a *thing*.

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CONTENTS

Introduction

You are in a space in utter darkness; you cannot see but you feel the space vast, beyond your cognitive grasp. You are not sure whether you have been here before but the place, although dark, feels neither scary nor unfamiliar. At a later time – not sure whether two minutes, two hours or two years has passed- something catches your attention, something like a source of light. You look down and you realize suddenly that you hold some tools, illuminating in the darkness, with the word 'ideas' written on them. As a signal after this realization a whole world starts to emerge in front of your eyes, out of the ground! Colorful tents and lighting chains, people with funny clothes and masks, music sounds from another time, real and fake animals – something between a circus and a fairground. People stand next to tents and they call you to join the happenings inside (how do they know your name?). You approach one tent and they assure you that inside you will find everything that you are looking for (how do they know if you do not know yet?). Nonetheless, you enter the tent and there stand mechanisms and instruments, some of which you identify and some that you see for the first time, all very mesmerizing. And the weirdest thing - your ideas glow stronger next to one they recognize as familiar and it glows back. Although you are having a nice time, watching all these apparatuses and discovering a new companion for your ideas, you keep thinking that you did not find after all everything that you were looking for, even if you did not know exactly what this was. So, you decide to walk out the tent and carry on the wandering. And you visit other tents because the people outside them keep calling at your name, promising you the best show, to offer you what you need; but still, you find nothing in these tents, sometimes not even one instrument that matches your ideas. At last, you enter one and your ideas find their absolute match – not only they glow towards the ones they identify as familiar but they can be placed next to them, as their missing parts although they did not seem as incomplete before the whole shape revealed.

The small text opening my thesis portrays in a rather poetic and abstract way my personal journey towards the realization of any assignment but particularly of this one. Regardless of any limitations, deadlines and formal conventions which you have to align with so as to fulfill a project within university walls, the journey concerns (for me at least) the course through an unknown land, the struggle to find the complementary pieces of your ideas, the prevalence of your instincts within a certain logic – in a nutshell, a magic journey, which ultimately carries the stress of a student to deliver a valuable piece. When I started this journey I tried to plan my course as much explicitly as possible; I am happy to announce that at a certain point when I estimated that the next route was not

relevant to the goal of my journey anymore, I readjusted my plan towards another direction – a stressful yet necessary step to make provided that my goal has not been *the delivery* of a thesis. In what follows I present the topic of my thesis, an introduction of the theories and terms that I employ and a description of my methodology.

The topic of my research will be the consideration of the contemporary puppet figure as a *thing*[1] in life and the consequential interpretation of its material nature outside the dualistic model (subject/object). The current presentation of the puppet on stage calls for an extended perceptual reflection that moves away from the traditional view of the puppet as a passive object. In addition to the practical manifestations of contemporary puppet theater which position the puppet as active character on stage and which I aim to justify, I also aim at making theoretical justice to the puppeteers who report that their puppet has a power and intention that renders it on some level independent from them. The consideration of the puppet figure as a *thing* will reveal at the end another dimension of puppet theater, one in which the intermedial lies in its core. My goal is to offer a new consideration of the puppet figure and puppet theater within the growing academic interest for this art form, oriented towards theater theoretical discourse.

The key concepts of my research are of great significance in the current theoretical discourse for two reasons. First, there is a considerable emergence of puppet theater as part of the contemporary theatrical expression which seems to overcome previous characterizations, limitations and traditions; that calls for the development of another way to think the puppet in order to obtain a new perspective and to offer a new consideration of it. Second, if a new perspective to understand the puppet is adopted, it seems that the puppet does not conform anymore to a dualistic model that perceives it as a passive object – a conceptual change which mirrors a general turn in the academic world in regards to the state of objects. As such, puppet theater appears to function as the ultimate example to investigate the role of objects through theatrical expression and to offer a new dimension of it that will place it within the latest theater discussions.

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[1] Italics will be used throughout the whole thesis for this particular word in the cases it denotes the things in movement, the things that can affect other things and humans around them. Ingold uses italics as well but only to introduce the term for the first time.

This particular art form, the puppet theater, has been theoretically analyzed and informed by what it seems to be its very profound element: the puppet-object and its manipulation by the puppeteer-subject. However, observing the contemporary puppet theater, there is an undeniable change to the way the puppet figure is presented on stage: it is not anymore the helpless doll in the hands of the human who decides about its story and fate and presents it as such. This change, although initiated by the change of the puppeteer's spatial position, grants to the stage presence of the puppet a significance that has never occupied before: the puppet is a partner of the puppeteer as much as the puppeteer is a partner of the puppet. This simple observation led to more complicated questions that I sought to answer: the main question concerns the possibility to consider the puppet figure as somehow alive, able to interact with the puppeteer; from this point, is it necessary to deal with (and potentially to dismiss) the dualism which accompanies the puppet theater? How can we consider theoretically the puppet not as a lifeless and passive object but as an equal partner of the puppeteer? Can we trace this conceptual change within a broader theoretical discourse? If finally the puppet figure is perceived differently than just a passive object, how puppet theater with this new dimension can be positioned within the current theater-theoretical discourse?

I will now proceed to the presentation of the structure of the thesis, introducing the theoretical framework.

It is necessary at the beginning to map the puppet theater, to offer a brief overview of the concepts and traditions that follow it at least until the 20th century. Puppet theater is defined by the manipulation of a puppet by a puppeteer, of a lifeless object by an alive human being, while lately is also defined by their co-presence on stage. The whole discourse around puppet theater focuses with one way or another, more or less, on presenting objects/puppets as if they were alive through the intentions of a powerful subject/human. Translating this in academic language, we are left with the Aristotelian dualism haunting any consideration of objects as somehow independent from idea/mind/subject; we are left with a *hierarchy which measures beings according to their limits and according to their proximity or distance from a principle* (Somers-Hall 2013, 41); we are left with the description of things (in general) according to not only *what they are* but most importantly *what they are not*. In this chapter we actually witness the lack of not only a deeper understanding of puppet theater but also its

continuous rotation around Theater. Gradually, we observe puppet theater's experimentation with new means of expression, following the broader collapse of artistic boundaries. This ends up with the abolishment of one of its formerly essential characteristics: the invisible puppeteer, who in turn occupies a place next to the puppet on stage, and which dramaturgically leads slowly to their direct interaction.

If what we observe in contemporary puppet theater is an interaction between puppet and puppeteer, or as I have described it above the one is an equal partner to the other, then we are in need of an approach towards objects which is not informed by a hierarchy or imposition. At the second chapter I turn firstly to Bruno Latour and Actor Network Theory, a constructionist approach to the social life of non-humans. Latour, one of the primary developers of Actor Network Theory, urges on studying relations between humans and non-humans focusing on their actual behavior instead of applying to these relations attributes of the social domain. In his book *Reassembling the Social* (2005) he attacks the short-sighted aspect of sociology which is fond of explaining everything according to a cause-effect recipe while it ignores that it is the complexity and uniqueness of every group/relation that makes it what it is. He claims that there is no standard construction –and thus explanation- of reality and as such we cannot apply the same rationale to ostensibly similar groups. In the formed groups and relations around us is not only humans that participate in and influence them but non-humans as well that, although they do not possess any intentionality, they participate in the distribution of agency within a particular network. The actor in the Actor Network could be anything that ″acts or to which activity is granted by others″ (Latour 1996, 7), anything that shapes in any way, to some extent, the associations of an assembly. However, the reasoning of Latour concerns exclusively the social aspect of networks. Although he offers a fresh view on the ways the world and its internal relations are built and sustained, he strives to assemble the social and to redefine what it consists of and how its "participants explicitly engage in the reassembling of the collective" (Latour 2005, 247).

Coming from anthropology, Tim Ingold offers a similar point of view but which is applied to a broader context; and which, when applied to arts, might dissolve current theoretical, dualistic debates. Ingold claims that the world should be seen not as one where human beings are its center but as one consisted of materials where

human beings are just one of its components. This world of materials is always in movement: forms are being made during processes, during various combinations of the materials involved. Thus there is no pre-existing form we can turn to, or the act of imposing an idea on lifeless matter. The materials involved in the various processes are manifested as *things* and not as objects; more specifically *things* are always in a state of approaching and encountering (other things), always in the process of becoming, in contrast to the objects which are only the temporary, close-ended instances/images of *things* in our perception. This continuous movement of *things*, and of all the components of the world of materials, is what actually renders them alive. Ingold conceives the life of a *thing* as a line; this line does not exist on its own but rather in continuous intertwining with other lines, weaving an endless, three-dimensional *meshwork* where everything is connected because of this inevitable intertwining and not because of hierarchical causes.

Ingold also attacks to the problem of agency that follows the latest academic interest in materials and materiality and which strengthens the dualistic model implying that, when studying the relation between subjects and objects in order the latter to act/act back, one part of the pair must have human properties to set up the whole process, based on the intention that human species profoundly and undoubtedly has. Instead of ascribing an agency to biologically alive humans or imagining a borrowing agency which is inherited for limited time to things, Ingold denies it as such. So as *things* to become what they are, to act as such, should they immerse in the currents of other things; and it is during these immersions that they attain specific attributes, a way of being active in the world and a way to influence and shape the things they get in touch with.

At this point it is necessary to highlight that the position from which Ingold observes and conceives the world is one of close proximity to the emerging formations and relations. The same position is occupied also by Latour in his persistence to follow the trajectory of the actors in a network in order to determine the nature of it. Thus, to pay close attention to the *things*, their movement, their relations and encounters with other things one should observe closely a meshwork. In other words, the puppet is able to influence the puppeteer because it is a *thing* in life but this fact is visible only through a close collaboration and entanglement with it, while the

perception of a puppet by an audience still concerns a disturbing feeling due to the inability of a distanced spectator to see a *thing* in life.

The third and last chapter aims at deepening our understanding of the puppet figure, enhancing the overview of puppet theater of the first chapter; at presenting the perception of the puppet by an audience next to the perception of the artist, as outlined during the second chapter; and at amalgamating the two perceptions that the puppet can provoke under the notion of intermediality. The puppet figure is directly associated with the notion of uncanny as it inhabits simultaneously two territories: the object-ness and the subject-ness and as such it creates in our perception an unsolvable complexity since we are used to deal with either the one or the other state but never with both of them. In addition, within this contradictory spectrum we are able to locate a sense of pleasure when watching a puppet performance. The notion of sublime refers to the delight deriving from a temporal or potential overwhelming feeling by an object beyond our grasp; at the moment between our incomprehension and before logic and consciousness re-establish control, we give in to the implied imagination and we experience a pleasure-in-pain created by the object. Both the experience of uncanny and the sublime are linked afterwards with the main trends in arts and in particular theater. Avant-garde art but mainly postdramatic performances aspire to create audience's experiences that range from uncomfortable and confusing to incomprehensible and unsettling, employing and, most importantly, juxtaposing any means. More specifically we can connect intermediality with puppet performance. To define intermediality I refer to articles by Chiel Kattenbelt, Freda Chapple, Peter Boenisch and Meike Wagner as presented in the *Intermediality in Theater and Performance* (2006). According to these authors the intermedial concerns an effect created somewhere in- between the juxtaposition of media on stage, the relations of the performers and the interaction of stage and auditorium. Since we accept that the puppet figure is a medial representation of the human body, as suggested by Wagner, and that it is essential to locate the intermedial in the perception of the audience, as suggested by Wagner and Boenisch, I would like to point towards the importance to locate the intermedial in the perception of the artist as well, as I suggested at the end of the second chapter, and ultimately to locate intermediality in the core of puppet theater.

At this point, the initial question of mine, whether we can think of the puppet figure as somehow alive and away from the dualistic model of a subject and an object, seems to have been answered (but surely not exhausted). Drawing on sociology and anthropology I have investigated in what way we can perceive the puppet figure as an equal partner of the puppeteer. Through this approach the intermedial perception of the artist emerges, as another essential dimension of puppet theater. In conclusion, puppet theater, incorporating a medial representation of the human body and an intermedial perception by the audience *and* the artist, encloses the intermedial in its core. My research concerns the exploration of theories, their critical understanding and their juxtaposition next to each other in order a rounded and balanced contribution in the theater field to be achieved. I work towards the revealing of relations and associations between the multidisciplinary theories that I employ through the description, analysis and interpretation of their main points. Consequently, the position which my research is entrenched upon is interpretative in the sense that it is based on methods of production of conclusions which are flexible and sensitive towards the subjective frame in which the conclusions are produced. However, through a critical examination of the theories and reflective attitude from my point of view I believe I deliver a thesis able to produce, to some extent, explanations to some artistic riddles which have a broad resonance.

I would like here to stress that the particular subject is not exhausted within the scope of this thesis. First of all because the chosen bibliography derives strictly from western thought production. It was a conscious choice to not deal with Eastern academic discourse since from many references to it, it became clear that a change of view regarding the status of objects –as I strive to achieve- has never occurred; for the objects were never addressed with such contempt as in West. Second, because the chosen bibliography does not reflect the whole discourse around puppetry, the status of objects and intermediality. In the process of writing this thesis a selection had to be made for reasons regarding the time frame and words' limitations.

1. Mapping the puppet field

This first chapter aims at presenting the main characteristics of puppet theater form 18th century onwards. The underlying reason for such chronological choice is the emergence of academic works that deal with other aspects of puppet theater than just the historiographical ones. These aspects, although not explored in detail and having direct connection to the live theater at the beginning, recapture the interest towards this art form and shape current discussions about it. The reader will become familiar with the essential features of puppet theater until the late 20th century. The features of this century though will be in chapter 3 further elaborated as they point towards the intermedial traits that inhere within puppet theater.

Although present for many centuries puppet theater have been until recently exposed to a conflict regarding its ambiguous status as an artistic genre. The most profound evidence of its indifferent treatment is the limited amount of written records of its trajectory and of academic works that deal with its specificity. This lack of interest towards what is clearly an artistic form that has survived throughout centuries is quite disturbing especially in relation to the existing literature of other forms of art which also date back to ancient times. And although this chapter does not aim at providing a historical overview of puppet theater, it is without any doubt clear that in mapping conceptually the puppet field we have to begin from late 18th century as the given bibliography dictates. Despite the revival of scholarly interest in puppetry two centuries ago, it is not until 20th century that this interest becomes fruitful practically and provocative theoretically.

The first works to pay attention to puppet theater focus on its most profound characteristic, that of manipulation. The act of manipulation was an invisible one that ultimately offered the puppeteer the freedom of self-expression and the control over his medium[2]. Whether having a dramatic structure or a more improvised one, the puppet performance allowed the puppeteer to act through his puppet without considering social restrictions

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[2] I use the male pronoun out of convention to refer to the puppeteer throughout the thesis.

and reality's limitations. The result of the act of manipulation renders puppet theater the perfect performance, according to some practitioners and theoreticians; Henryk Jurkowski in *Aspects of Puppet Theater* (2013) refers to a great amount of scholars interested in puppet theater during 19th century such as Heinrich von Kleist, Ludwig Tieck, Eleonora Rapp, August Mahlmann and Justinius Kerner (among others) describing the general disappointment with the acting of human actors and the affection towards the truth of the puppet (6-8). The puppet performance is considered one where the stage character serves absolutely and efficiently the aims set up by the author/text or its manipulator, and simultaneously transfuses none of the inappropriate human weaknesses such as emotions, ambitions and over confidence. This attitude is supported by the Romantic Movement and its striving for overcoming human nature and flaws in favor of an illusion and lyricism that cannot be attained by the biological limitations of actors. It is actually because of the Romanticism that a new appreciation of puppet theater was possible, according to Lothar Bushmeyer (in Jurkowski 2013, 5). In times where human physical abilities are considered as a disadvantage to the theatrical expressive aims and the dreamlike stage world is ruined by the tangibility and humanness of actors, it is not surprising to notice a fascination with figures which can represent just what they are asked of.

In displaying and discussing the most important works that initiated an interest in puppet theater and which set up the foundations of its further analysis, Jurkowski's book displays a continuous reference to the counterpart of puppet theater. That is, in the effort of rendering puppet theater as a creative and important art, the scholars and practitioners connect it and compare it repeatedly to live theater. Thus it is evaluated according to what human actors can possibly gain by working with or observing puppets; how the theatricality of the puppet gives to puppet theater its legitimate place as part of the theater; which attribute offers the puppet, in opposition to the actor, an advantage in representing a character and a world. However, we observe nothing essential being said about the nature of puppet theater. Undoubtedly, there are publications regarding the history of puppets[3] and the

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[3]For example Magnin, Charles. 1852. *Histoire des Marionnettes en Europe: depuis l'antiquité jusqu'a nos jours* (Leipzig: Michel Lévy Frères) and Leibrecht, Philippe. 1919. *Zeugnisse und Nachweise zur Geschichte des Puppenspiels in Deutschland* (Borna-Leipzig : R. Noske)

fundamental and evolutionary analogical relationship between theater and puppet theater[4], but there is no work for example regarding the aesthetic laws or the sign system of the puppet; it is rather described within the context of theater and its understanding comes through the relationship with that context. There is also no work analyzing or even approaching the complicated relation between puppet and puppeteer. Throughout the centuries it exists, puppet theater strives to present objects as having life (Tillis 1990, 20-21, Posner, Orenstein and Bell 2014, 6, Jurkowski 2013, 86) of their own and thus the act of manipulation is concealed. Even in the cases when the manipulator is present on stage, he has a secondary, non-essential and inactive role. Practically there is nothing to provoke theory in the sense that the hierarchy established leaves no space for considering another relation between puppet and puppeteer or the mixture of puppet-like and human means of expression.

With the dawn of 20th century the works appeared analyze in more depth the nature of puppet and gradually the performances question the traditional presentation of it; the practice of puppet theater will introduce major changes which in turn will shape theory.

It seems that mentioning Edward Gordon Craig is some kind of necessity when authors deal with puppet theater and its evolvement, whatever perspective each one might occupy. Although Craig's ideas were radical and provocative, their objective concerned a renewal in theater. Craig's über-marionette, whether just a "de-personalized figure" (Jurkowski 2013, 13), that would indicate another "form of presence of the player" (Lehmann 2006, 73-74) or an actual "replacement of the live actor" (Piris 2011, 37-38), aimed at improving the art of acting which was destroyed by the nature of humans (Craig 1911) and not to enhance conceptually the puppet theater. However, this interest towards puppet theater, first initiated mostly in Romanticism and flourishing later during 20th century, facilitates contemporary discussions about it.

At the beginning of the 20th century and with the advent of modernism there is a turn towards the materiality and artificiality of the puppet. The puppet, which has its own special construction, should dictate the production style according to the modernists and not the story; in this way it will achieve "its particular and

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[4] For example Sand, George. 1877. *Dernières pages* (Paris : Calmann Lévy)

authentic style but first it must be emancipated from the 'drama' theater" (in Jurkowski 2013, 21). Puppet theater practically follows the evolutionary methods of theater introduced roughly in modern times and becomes a self-consciously art, one which investigates the dramaturgical functions of its most fundamental attribute. The puppet is perceived as unique due to the ways it is manipulated and moved, and these are the factors initiating and shaping the performance which, in turn, embrace every theatrical means that would convey better its aims and meaning. The inability of a puppet to imitate realistically a human being, for example in the case of a hand puppet, is considered an advantage that would introduce other of its potential and not yet discovered functions. The anthropomorphic figure, the material limits, the conventional techniques of manipulation, the traditional performing space, the illusion of an alive object along with the illusion of the stage world – all are contested and under fragmentation in favor of a general conceptualism and dispute regarding the meaning of art, the means of expression and the effect of a performance. Puppet theater gradually becomes "a complicated mix of practices encompassing old traditions, new aesthetics and technological innovations that have intertwined it deeply with other strands of contemporary culture" (Posnar, Orenstein and Bell 2014, 14).

What can be identified as at least one of the changes that conditioned such development is the appearance of the puppeteer next to the puppet. The new aesthetics of puppet theater depends on the realization that a puppet among humans appears more 'puppet –like' and a human among puppets more 'human' (Jurkowski 2013, 28). This change in the puppeteer's spatial position opens up countless dramaturgical possibilities and re-evaluates the relationship between an object (puppet) and a subject (puppeteer). Practitioners break the illusion of an animate object by itself, introducing an effect similar to that of Brecht's alienation[5]; they create acts where the puppet is aware of being manipulated; they assume another role besides that of the manipulator – they become characters in the performance, thus they have a dramaturgical function. In his PhD dissertation *The Rise of Manipulacting: The Puppet as a Figure of Other* in 2011, Paul Piris insists that it is the change in cultural policy in Europe that also conditions the development in puppet theater; not only funding sources are more accessible and available for

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[5] Jurkowski differentiates Brecht's alienation effect and the 'break with the illusion' on the grounds that, although the result is more or less the same-the opposition of reality and fiction- the former underlines an ideological attitude and social awareness while the latter does not.

15

puppetry but theaters too open their doors to this form of art (43). Since the whole scenic space becomes available, the booth is no longer necessary and it is banished, a fact that enables the puppeteer to interact with the puppet "without" spatial limits. Ultimately, participating in the artistic impulses of the time, puppet theater extends its means of expression to that degree that a homogenous explanation of a puppet performance is impossible and rather it requires references to multiple disciplines. Jurkowski (2013) proposes the term "third genre" to describe the mixture of means of expression of live and puppet theater and refers to the 'break with illusion', following the revelation of the manipulation, and to the "atomization of puppet theater" to describe how the elements of puppetry as atoms are ready to be combined in varied ways. Instead of inventing terms to define the changes on the inner forms and structures of puppet theater I suggest to adopt the term postdramatic, coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann in 1999, in order to place the trajectory of this artistic form in the late 20th century within the general tendencies of theater at that time. Whether a subcategory of theater or a genre of its own, puppet theater shares an essential relation with theater; and although not a dramatic art per se, it can still be placed within postdramatic paradigm due to major breakdowns with previously established traditions.

After such a brief overview of the developments of puppet theater, let us pause and observe the contemporary manifestations of this art form. Let us consider this: out of a pile of artificial, plastic masks a human body emerges, yet not fully occupying the shape of a human body. It has the faces of these indefinable, yet anthropomorphic, things attached to various places with an emphasis on the place where the head should be; the human body seems to have a plethora of faces instead of one. The faces/masks do not form a smooth unity – rather they are partially mixed with each other and their mold has been redefined so as to mingle with the human body. As the performer starts to move, it becomes extremely demanding to step away from the visual illusion created and observe that what seems to move him is the pile of faces/masks attached to him which in turn he re-shapes and interacts with. There is an actual interaction which alters equally both parts of the duet.

And let us consider this: in a relatively empty stage there is a woman and a man, sharing a body which nevertheless functions as a body for each one. The man is a puppet attached to the woman's body. They share a

similarity in facial features and body quality movements but otherwise appear very autonomous and flexible about their shape which changes in order to illustrate the stages of their relation. At the beginning they appear independent (as much as possible) of each other as they dance around the stage but gradually the man dominates more parts of the woman's body until she disappears inside the puppet. Apart from the possible meanings of such end, the co-presence they establish during the scene is built through the physicality they share which is simultaneous but distinct in expressing each one as a particular being.

These examples by Duda Paiva (*Screaming Object*, 2012) and Nicole Mossoux and Patrick Bonte (*Twin Houses*, 1994) respectively, are but a glimpse of what puppet theater nowadays has been busy with. They are not by any means representative of the entire contemporary manifestation of puppet theater but certainly they are part of it and they function as the starting, observational point which this thesis is built upon. More specifically in the next chapters I will strive to offer a possible account of the ontological occupation of the contemporary puppet figure. What seems striking in these performances (among other things) is the uncontrolled and uncontrollable nature of the puppet in the sense that it ceases to function as a manipulated object and becomes the partner of the puppeteer. To study this new relation we need to step away from the dualism which accompanies the theoretical works discussing aspects of puppet theater.

In what has been presented so far as a brief overview of puppet theater, there is an explicit or implicit separation of a subject (puppeteer) and an object (puppet). The very fact of an object presented as alive – by legitimate alive beings – displays a contradiction, *an oxymoron* (Jurkowski 2013, 55), in our perception due to the association of objects with lifeless matter. If we were left with just a separation of entities or properties there would not be much to worry about. However, separation is a form of differentiation which allies with categorization and with hierarchization, according to Delleuze; we think of something in terms of "it is this, not that" (Colebrook 2002, 7-8). Being a subject in western thought affords an advantageous position in relation to objects for humans possess intention, agency and ideas, whereas matter does not. Thus what until recently was shaping the puppet theater discourse was the examination of an asymmetrical, manipulative relation – that of a subject towards an object – and the oxymoron appearance of a living object on stage. From the *Research into the*

Structure and Symbolism of the Puppet by Roger Daniel Bensky (1971) in which the puppet-object "offers itself to the individual as an extension of his being [...], an augmented affirmation of his total existence" (Jurkowski 2013, 32), to the *Towards an Aesthetics of the Puppet* by Steve Tillis (1990) in which puppet is perceived through double vision, that is as a mere material and as having life, and to *The Co-Presence and Ontological Ambiguity of the Puppet* by Paul Piris (2014) in which the ontological ambiguity of the puppet as an object that is presented on stage as a subject is stressed by the confrontation with a human - all these works, in their inestimable value for the enrichment of puppet theater, they are built upon a dualism which is in favor of a subject that acts upon matter.

In considering though the above mentioned performances (and of course others of the same style) in which the co-presence of the human and the puppet is not one that depends on a powerful subject but rather on a powerful duet of which both parts are equal, another approach should be employed. The last twenty years a movement has emerged within material culture studies, sociology, anthropology, and other disciplines, that deals with the materials, their materiality and their meaning. Objects and things appear socially alive, active participants in the creation and interpretation of artworks, actants and actors that, although not humans, have the ability to do things, make a difference and alter the course of events[6]. Dassia Posner in the introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (2014) states that "one of the most recurrent refrains uttered by nearly anyone who has ever held a puppet is that the puppet is unruly, that it wants to do things that differ from what we would impose upon it, and that we can best bring out its life if we listen to it" (Posner, Orenstein, Bell 2014, 6). It is exactly this kind of statements that I would like to explain through theory which ultimately find their application in performances where the puppet is presented as equal to the human presence not because of the dramaturgical choices but because of the status of the things that are not anymore at the mercy of the subject's

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[6] Appadurai, Arjun (ed). 1986. *The Social Life of Things*. (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press), Constall, Alan. 1997. "The Meaning of Things" (*Social Analysis* 4: 76-85), Gell, Alfred. 1998. *Art and Agency: Towards a new Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), Lehmann, Ann-Sophie, Frits Scholten and H.Perry Chapman (eds). 2012. *Meaning in Materials: 1400- 1800* (Leiden: The Foundation for Dutch Art History), Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (United States of America: Duke University Press), Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

intentions. Tim Ingold (2010, 2011) in particular suggests that things exist in a world of materials and have equal potentials to affect and be affected as humans because they are *in life*. The employment of his theory towards a re-consideration of the contemporary puppet figure seems appropriate in the sense that not only he renders things *alive* as such and thus able to act on their part but he also defines anew the world we live in and destabilizes the preference and priority towards the subject.

2. Re-envision of the world

In this chapter I will present the evolutionary turn that emerged in the late twentieth century regarding the status of objects and things so as ultimately to present the puppet figure through the theory elaborated by Tim Ingold (2010, 2011). Ingold re-envisions the world we live in as a world of materials where humans are just a part of it and not its primary species; in this way there is space for other materials, things or relations to be designated and investigated. The puppet figure will be studied on new conditions where it functions no more as a minor, lifeless and under manipulation object but as a *thing* which is alive and participates in an endless circulation of becomings, able to equally affect and be affected. I will thus argue that, in order to occupy a conceptual place from which we can contemplate contemporary manifestations of the puppet theater that present the puppet as a partner of the manipulator, we have to shift our understanding of the world and its inner relations. However, as I point out at the end, it is crucial to highlight that this understanding of the world in general and of the puppet as a *thing* in particular is enabled only through a close immersion in the world and a close collaboration with the puppet.

In what feels as a defensive point in Bill Brown's article *Thing Theory* (2001) the focus on things as re-manifested the last decades of the 20th century is not only acknowledged but also rendered as an obvious and inevitable consequence of thought evolution, in the sense that older works always circulate within the contemporary discourse (13). The matter of matter might have appeared at the beginning of the century, revealing new ways to perceive, use and deal with it, but it occupied a certain conceptual territory while nowadays it questions the function of the world – a world that until recently was exclusively moved, evolved and shaped by human beings. What is the most fundamental perceptual shift related to the emergence of the materials is the one that abstracts from human beings all their previous significance and calls for a redefinition of the whole world. It is actually interesting that the western thought of so many centuries, in which the subject is considered as the only 'lovable child', collapses within decades. The Aristotelian model of creation which demands an agent imposing

form through ideas upon passive matter, although not obsolete yet, is shaken to its very foundations. The dualism and the cognitive prisons we have built for the concepts and that which they denote are overcome through the recognition of the mere fact that we do not inhabit this world alone – but as with many cognitive problems this also required time to be digested (perhaps too much time). Tzachi Zamir (2010) insists that such denial, to admit that the other participants of this world are not only worth of study but we may share some properties with them as well, derives from the fear of infecting our subject-ness with some of the negative attributes already related to the passivity of objects: "refusal of freedom or self-determination, moral responsibility or authentic self-shaping" (393). Yet, with the impact of technology in our lives the boundaries of the natural and the artificial become unclear enabling once and for all a two way interaction between subjects and objects. Donna Haraway outlines our post-gender world and pronounces our state of existence: "by the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism" (1991, 150). Thus we cannot continue denying a flexibility in the concepts and that which denote. For now let us be occupied with how the flexibility of the concepts enables the emergence of other cognitive points of view.

The most prominent point of view concerns the supposed passive, inert and variable nature of the object. In acknowledging some sort of action or agency on behalf of the objects on a social or semiotic level, it seems that there cannot be anymore an internal, primary universe of humans whose individuality is contrasted to and at the same time shapes an external and secondary universe of objects whose materiality follows designs and ideas. Additionally, if no clear distinction can be made between a natural and an artificial body and their properties are exchangeable, then agency cannot be attributed to humans only. Rather agency is widely distributed between the participants of an action which are actually caught up in the temporal continuum of an activity which in turn associates the participants with each other through its trajectory. When Bruno Latour (2005) reassembled the social he actually redefined what social is and what might denote. When he referred to the distributed agency, it was not one distributed within a society of homogeneous things that at the end, because of its social status, would reveal or explain some hidden social forces. The 'social' is not a glue to fix or explain what otherwise remains unfixed, unexplained or not fully interpreted; "it is what is glued together by many other types of connectors" (5).

To understand agency we need to cease connecting it with nature, especially if we are not in the position to define nature, and to ascribe social extensions to it, in the sense that it shapes the social fabric through semiotic attributes.

So what Latour does (1996, 2000, 2005) is to create another concept of social that broadens to encompass more things than just humans and their relations, has no particular limits and is defined by its internal movement. The actor-network (AN) conceived is not social-ly structured but rather it describes the very essence of nature and societies. Every activity in it, in the broad sense of the word (science, technology, art etc.), is not related to and explained by similar social aggregates behind it but rather is examined through the movement that its participants manifest throughout it; the social is not inherent but can be traced through the signs that the movement of various elements leaves. The notion of the group in general is repealed; the participants of x (where x can be every activity or a determined domain of activity) are not defined by the nature of the x-group but rather they define the group through their action. As Latour steps away from our need to categorize and define relations according to the system they belong, he stresses other limitations that should be also dismissed. The emerging AN highlights the movement and associations of the participants that need not to be proximate; the very use of the word network and thinking in terms of it get rid of spatial boundaries. Additionally, if we conceive the world as relational (as ultimately AN theory aims at), shaped by the relations of its elements and consisting of many fields, then there is nothing between the networks – they are somewhere connected and interacting no matter how intense or loose these connections are. Thus an AN does not have a specific territory but it expands; it does not include *this* and excludes *that*; it is not hierarchically ordered but intensely –or not- interconnected. If I were asked to illustrate an AN I would create a three dimensional shape consisting of crossing filaments that would glow in various points and paths according to meeting trajectories and their intensity. But what are these filaments exactly? What an AN consists of? Latour not only offers another way to explain relations, by actually paying attention to the relations as such, but he also broadens the notion of relations by extending our understanding of what can initiate them.

The word actor in AN does not imply a human being that acts within a cause-effect situation, manipulated by social forces; and does not imply either that action is related to agency as fundamental characteristic of an

intentional human being. Rather we should free ourselves from the notion of manipulation as one way causal relation and question the certainty of given principles when it comes to trace an action. In doing this, Latour proves that we discover other than humans initiating, affecting, transforming and shaping a course of events (2005, 58-74). So the word actor refers not to humans only but generally to anything that "acts or to which activity is granted by others […] anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action" (Latour 1996, 7), to humans and non-humans as well that apart from expressing, symbolizing or reifying social relations can actually be placed at the origin of social activity. To trace an actor in an AN means that one should not look for an 'image' of him/it but should study his/its movement , the trajectory followed which intersects and intertwines with other ones, the process within which he/it affects and is affected. The 'image' is what we grasp as his/its presence within the world but it is through the movement and the associations with other human or non-human entities (actors) that the image is shaped and held in place.

However, AN theory along with other works that provide non-humans with discursive visibility, such as *The Social Life of Things* (1986), *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (1998), *The Sex of Things* (1996), are social in essence in that they study objects as socially charged entities: as commodities, as taking part in the consumption and exchanging circle, as having economic value, as products etc. It is true that in these works objects display some kind of movement as parts of ongoing relationships and it is actually this recently discovered 'quality' I am interested in. This thesis is concerned with a possible way to consider the puppet figure differently than a mere object. But how we can bring the puppet in the forefront as something else than a passive, manipulated object doing theoretical justice to the practitioners' manifestations as having its own life? How do we engage with objects beyond their functional value or their ability to express and carry ideas and meaning? How to understand statements that ascribe some kind of life in things that sound false, poetic or metaphorical and yet keep occurring especially in creative entanglements with them? Craig stated about the puppet: "You don't move it, you let it move" (in Jurkowski 2013, 14); Dassia Posner, quoting Margaret Williams, notes that the puppet "remains independent even as it is manipulated; it expresses the will and persona of its animator while imparting meaning of its own" (Posner, Orenstein, Bell 2014, 5). The above mentioned statements confirm surely one thing: we

cannot maintain our previous understanding for objects; for objects participate actively in the shaping of the world, they do not form a world apart from our own subjective world and that has been realized more and more lately. Peter Schumann in 1999 perceived subject hood as a state which we are deceived into while discussing objects from this point makes no sense for we know nothing about them (Schumann 1999, 58). Perhaps the social dimension of objects is not suitable in re-thinking the puppet figure but it is the change of the ways we think about the world that matter and point to another conception of its structure. Latour acknowledges a world consisting of quasi-objects and quasi-subjects and that "considering humans necessarily involves the consideration of things and vice versa" (in Brown 2001, 12); Arjun Appadurai suggests to follow things themselves for only through studying their trajectories we see the traces of human intentions as well as objects' role in shaping them (1986, 5); Carl Knappett builds his arguments based on the perspective that an idea in mind is nothing without a material projection of it and an object cannot be thought independently of how it relates to an idea (2002, 98-99); Bill Brown supports the methodological fetishism proposed by Appadurai for studying how objects affect the subjects (2001, 7). Inclined to a methodological fetishism myself as a condition of thought I do re-consider the position of objects within our world. And perhaps, as the emerging discourse suggests, the effort to re-think objects is ultimately an effort to re-think the function of the world. If we are in a position to conceive a world that is inhabited not only by intelligent and intentional subjects but by a heterogeneous number of entities that do have a role in it, we might discover other relations than unidirectional ones to occur between them. This is exactly what Latour and Ingold, among other contemporary scholars, have succeeded – to challenge the way we think about our influence on other entities, to question the certainty of an action and what initiates it, how it unfolds, its causal status and the supposed predetermined end. As I noted above however, a social theory might lead our new perception to a specific direction when this perception should concern the function of the world as such. For this reason, I turn to Ingold's train of thought, in order to designate anew the position of things and subjects in a world of materials.

2.1 Within the world of materials

What Ingold claims to be the main goal of his work (2011) is to restore anthropology to life. That is, anthropology is a discipline that although concerned with the conditions and potentials of human life it has treated this life as pieces of codes, structures and values that can be explained through natural, cultural, biological or social sign systems. Human beings live a life that is somehow pre-directed, designed through more or less predicted paths, fulfilling qualifications already set up by systems. Yet life is not lived according to a manual; life explicitly implies movement, evolvement, development, a course, and a trajectory- thus anthropology should be busy with these qualities as well. In studying life, though, Ingold moves away from the human domain to study the movement manifested within the world which includes a variety of entities, as these entities turn to have qualities that are not rooted anymore only in human conditions: they display a movement that binds them directly to life and to the trajectory of the world. In this sense Ingold's work share many similarities to Latour's in that both are concerned with a kind of non-causal movement by entities not exclusively human, in a network that is not systematically defined by particular codes. However, Latour conceives his method towards a sociological explanation while Ingold, although he may turn to social theory at times, specifically refers to the way the whole world functions. The AN theory can be applied to instances and occasions but Ingold's work deals with the world as such. In doing so, he focus on how the world is 'accomplished' rather than explaining the world as we perceive it around us, as a finished project. If, as he suggests, the world is accomplished by and through the endless engagement, encountering and association of its participants then no importance or priority can be granted to particular individuals rather what is of importance is the occurrence of relations. Ultimately through his theory, the puppet figure will cease to count as an object whose essence has been adjusted to the intentions of its partner (puppeteer) and it will emerge as an *actual participant* in the relation. Thus what Ingold's work calls for is to place a metaphysical eye on what we have inherited as a certain knowledge about the world and which is constantly questioned if we *look* around us.

2.2 First source of uncertainty[7]: No priority of mind upon matter

Ingold acknowledges a difference between entities that owe their form and function to properties resulted from exterior forces shaping their row material, and entities whose properties are shaped by forces internal to them – that is, objects that are constructed by an external intention or agency upon them and living organisms that grow following the internal 'software' inscribed in genes (Ingold 2000, 50-51). In order an entity to be constructed, form and substance is needed – the design and the material. In the case of living organisms the design is inscribed in the genes which shape the physical material. In the case of objects however there is nothing from within to shape the form but rather form is imposed from without and this process requires the form to have been conceived by someone. If we look in the world, though, Ingold insists that we will observe products of design by entities which cannot be associated with the forces imposing a form upon a substance – that is humans legitimately being the only ones to manipulate matter. The problem of admitting such a fact has direct connection to our inclination towards a metaphysical separation of mind and nature (ibid. 52). It is complex to try to differentiate between objects, things or artefacts, and especially when more complex factors enter this reasoning: purposely manufactured objects, things we produce out of necessity or pleasure, nature's accidental artworks, animals' instinctive tendency to produce etc. When we decide to pay attention to the world around us and remove the blinkers, we might escape the anthropocentric point of view and realize that there exist many more complications in understanding the world than just the human element. So let us consider the entities constituting the world.

In considering the house of a bee and of a human, Ingold reveals the metaphysical separation: whereas both the hive and the human house are the products of exterior forces imposing a design upon raw materials, we cannot equate their producers as only the human is granted with intention and imaginary powers about the form prior to the construction (ibid. 52). Yet, the intention towards, or the imagination of, a form is not transformed into a final objet just like that; the process requires attention and involves transformation of the material *and* of

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[7] This title, along with the following two, is inspired by Bruno Latour's titles in *Reassembling the Social* (2005). Latour conceived five sources of uncertainty to describe and explain how the cognitive position of the AN theory redefines our given knowledge about objects, agency and action.

the one who produces as well. Turning to Marx and Engels, Ingold positions the process of the production in the center of interest in the sense that it is not confined within the finalities of any particular project but it combines a number of forces in order to happen which at the same time they influence the transformation, the transformation influences them back; and if the final object is not the goal but rather is the ongoing process that has priority, then there is no reason to limit the production, the emergence of a form, to humans only (Ingold 2011, 5-6).

Positioning the process of production in the center of interest Ingold moves away from the hylomorphic model where the idea is inscribed upon the material and the meaning of the final object is pre-conceived and manifested through social or cultural attributes. The materials, apart from participating in hierarchical games that humans have invented (silk is more noble material than nylon, painting with fresco technique reveals high-skilled artists in comparison with those working with oil), are capable of displaying a short of resistance when working with them and thus inscribing the act of production with more complex relations that just of an idea materialized upon and through an object. The same can be applied to the occasions of working with an object- as I am not particularly interested in how an object is produced but rather how it participates in and shapes the production of relations with other things or humans and especially in the case of an artwork. In creating art, artists do not only engage with raw materials which have to work *on* in order to produce an artefact but they work *with* objects as well. In doing so, they do not manipulate them in an absolute way; the creative process of art encloses more than an intentional subject that uses objects to display some ideas – the objects too shape these ideas.

2.3 Second source of uncertainty: Things *are* their movement

As just mentioned, this thesis is not concerned with raw materials and how they come into being objects which hold a particular meaning; rather it is concerned with objects that when participating in a project, they play a role during the creation of this project and they might affect its course as well. This is not to suggest that in our case the object, the puppet figure, has not been created according to specific dramaturgical ideas or that in the process of making it the emerging puppet did not display some resistance on a material level or that it did not affect the initial idea of design. It did, and it would be interesting too to study what the raw materials of the puppet

tell us about its nature, following the wider material turn in humanities. However, I would like to suggest, following Ingold, that objects in the process of creating artworks initiate new ways of working *with* them and they do not merely express a work *on* them.

According to the first source of uncertainty, working with materials is not a mere inscription of a form upon a substance. The material world is not a place that we visit in order to produce objects – we live within it. As such, we need to consider our immersion in it and not anymore from the point where we possess absolute dominance against lifeless matter. Ingold proposes to take a step back from the materiality of objects and to turn to the properties of materials; to cease perceiving the objects as final forms of the fluxes of materials; to realize that in the world of materials everything undergoes continual generation and transformation; to see the form arising and evolving within processes and not from without (ibid. 22-28). Thus the world does not consist of points which are connected by whatever relations we recognize each time but it consists of lines of becoming which are unavoidably interweaved. Every human or non-human is not a static point within the world from which we can draw a line towards other points of connection but rather a line of becoming that displays the flow of the being throughout its life and which is intertwined with other lines.

As in the case of Appadurai and his methodological fetishism which he sets as a condition of thought regarding the trajectories of objects, Ingold inclines toward what western thought calls animism. Imagining a becoming for non-humans requires a cognitive point of view in which previous limitations about the nature, status and scope of action of them do no longer apply. However his study is not on beliefs *about* the world but on the conditions of *being in* this world (ibid. 67). The animism that Ingold is inclined to concerns a perception of the world and its entities before any ontological differentiation of a subject and an object, of a human and a material. It is one where the entities are perceived not as points belonging to an environment but as lines 'swimming' in it. As such, there is no boundary between an entity and its environment; the entity is as much part of the environment as the environment part of the entity, creating a *meshwork* of lines. Moreover, the meshwork does not display relations between its lines and as such between its entities. The entities *are* their relations, they are what they are because they have been caught up in entanglements with the whole world around them. To study a *thing* involves

the study of the relations which it has been entwined in, otherwise it will be cut off the 'gatherings' that make it what it is – it will be an object to be processed and analyzed at the sterile environment of a laboratory but not within the moving world it participates and the fluid trajectory it creates. Every *thing* is immersed in the currents of another thing and that 'quality' makes it more than just a materialization of an idea – it changes along the realization of that idea and the idea changes as well.

2.4 Third source of uncertainty: The persistence of unpredictability

To produce something is not a simple procedure as we have seen. By producing I mean everything – from the actual production of commodities to the production of a play or the realization of a project. By simple procedure I mean that we need to count more than what has been produced and especially how it has been produced. Additionally, if we are to envision the world as Ingold, a world that is never stable nor locked in final forms, then paying closer attention to processes rather than the project or the outcome of something is necessary. That means that we have to relinquish our convenient position as observers who decide about a mission, select a 'product' or an outcome and attempt to trace it backwards to a pre-conceived idea, applying in the meantime a pile of scientific terms that would place it within a cultural, social, economic or political domain. If the process reveals more than the final outcome, if the world is continuously in movement, if all the participants of the world *are* their relations with other participants and the world, Ingold suggests to "follow the unfolding of the world and not read it backwards" (Ingold 2010, 10-11 and 2011, 212-215).

However, I am not aiming at inventing a new term or specifying the tasks and the route that this new observer, or perhaps a follower, has to accomplish in order to follow the world. Rather, the goal is to highlight the creative character of the emergence of *things* and of the way the world is. *Things* are always in formation; this does not mean that they have no final form but there is more to see than that form, that is, how they have caught up in relations with other things, how "things are in life rather than life to things" (Ingold 2011, 29). It is not about interaction or intention or agency – it is about thinking the becoming of the world and its entities as the becoming of a work of art: the element of creativity and improvisation supersedes any preconceived idea; working with

materials is not translated automatically into manipulation but it rather concerns an entanglement of two (or more) entities through a relation characterized by improvisational and unexpected elements.

If I were asked to illustrate a meshwork with its lines of becoming then, especially after the acknowledgement of its creative character, I would have to choose a work of art. That would probably be a work by Jackson Pollock, an American painter, representative of Abstract Expressionism or, as it is often referred, action painting[8]. I would call the technique 'action painted' as well, pointing not only to the actual action implied so as the painting to be created but the action that the painting depicts as well: in the effort to recognize a line or a particular movement you lose it as it mingles with the other lines and it makes sense only if you immerse in it.

2.5 Conclusion

I cannot help but notice that through a circular thought development I am right back where I started – though more aware of the route followed. At the end of the last section there is the proposition to follow the becoming of entities in the same way artists create their works of art. The better understanding of the sentences "you don't move it, you let it move" and "it remains independent even as it is manipulated" lies precisely at the ability of the puppet to express its nature as a continuous becoming, one that cannot pinned down and which entails the unpredictability of an artistic process (in which it literally participates as a puppet). When I posed the question of what we can understand out of these statements and how to justify them theoretically, although I had introduced an established theory regarding the role of objects in the world and intended to proceed to Ingold's work of how things influence and circulate in the world, I had not foreseen how to reach a point where the actual artistic process in which the puppet participates would concur with the puppet's nature, with its becoming. So, in one sense, although I set up my main points on how to build my reasoning, the way to reach and pass through (them) was not clear from the beginning. However, I would like to highlight a certain limitation on what has been

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[8] Online at http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1963/Abstract-Expressionism

presented so far. My original intention was to make theoretical justice to instances where a certain, supposedly unexplained, mystery occurs, that is, when people witness an interactive element in their relation with a material and more specifically the puppet, and how it is able to contribute to and affect the process of its manipulation. The limitation concerns the implicit position that I occupy and from which I build my case, a position implied throughout the work of Ingold and Latour as well: a position of close proximity to the meshwork (or network) in question – in my case, that is the position of an artist who works with and creates relations with his puppet. I turn to scholars and theories to discover a possible way to contemplate and render puppets as active counterpoints in making art but not as a spectator of that art, rather as a participant of the process. In this position, close and immersed in process, *things* are in motion, *things* do make a difference in the course of events they participate, *things* exist in a world that is in constant reformation – and we are able to perceive them as such zooming in that world. Yet, if we zoom out of this position, in a distanced point, there do appear to be entities externally bounded, explained by codes, specifications and significations. There appears to exist both objects and things (Knappett 2011, 46) and to engage in a competition to favor, select or adopt only one side makes as much sense as favoring the subject over the object or generally building a reasoning out of any dichotomy/dualism. Latour already reached this conclusion: although he was referring specifically to subject-object distinction he argued that "it has not made to be overcome […] it's made to be un-overcomable" (in Barron 2003, 79), so a productive point might be to start articulating what a non-competitive, mutual consideration would reveal.

This is what I was aiming so far. The puppet, considered as an object manufactured or hand-made for theatrical purposes, emerges as a thing during the artistic process of making a play. It asks for a consideration of its abilities, it reveals a limit in some cases and a freedom in others on what is capable of, and proposes new ways of displaying its relation to the puppeteer. The creativity of that process does not occupy a mental topology nor does it depend on a causal relation. Any innovation that a contemporary puppet performance might present is a corollary of a work *with* the puppet, an actual period of time in which the puppeteer rehearses with his puppet to find a way to communicate and listen to each other.

Let us assume that I am indeed an artist, a puppeteer. I did the first step to investigate how or why my puppet has this mysterious power, to actually partner me in the process of making a performance. It has been already investigated whether another perception of the world is possible: it is! In this world, which is always in formation, things are also in the same state: *things* are in movement; *things are* their relations and entanglements with other things; *things* are becoming, as life itself; things unfold and in order to observe them we have to "follow them" (Ingold 2010, 2011). So, this is what I have been doing so far: I entangled with a thing, the puppet, and my becoming improvising with its created synapses within space and time, changing myself (my ideas about the play) and the puppet as well (how it was expected to perform). However, the perception of a puppet by a spectator concerns a completely different point of view. What is broadly observed and manifested several times is that a puppet arises an uncanny feeling since it occupies a strange territory between life and death – what Jurkowski calls 'opalization' (2013) and Tillis 'double vision' (1990). The puppet emerges as an *oxymoron* (Jurkowski 2013, 55), as an object and, at the same time, as having life. Yet, this observation contrasts the becoming of a puppet, a *thing* in life, as presented so far. My suggestion is that there are two different perceptional positions when thinking of a puppet: one that derives from a close collaboration with it, that is, from the position of an artist who entangles with a puppet in order to create a piece; and another one that concerns the perception of the puppet on stage by a spectator who has no access to the process and witnesses only the outcome. Thus, a different perception of the puppet by the artist and the spectator.

I will now move to the last chapter of my thesis in which I will present the puppet figure from an audience's point of view, thus elaborating on the oppositional powers of the puppet in the perception of the audience. In the process, the notion of intermediality will arise as a central point around which I position the puppet theater that ultimately incorporates the perception of the puppet as an object and as a *thing*.

3. The puppet theater as intermedial art form

The aim of this chapter is to connect the ideas presented so far in the thesis with the broader academic discourse. More specifically I span: the first chapter which is left slightly suspended regarding the deeper understanding of the puppet figure within the contemporary discourse; the emergence of the puppet as a *thing*, which is able to not only be affected by the puppeteer but to affect him back as well; and, the current academic discourse, which will place the puppet theater within dominant trends in arts and performance, and in particular the notion of intermediality. This requires a revisit of what puppet arouses on the perception of the spectator, with references to the uncanny and the sublime. Then, I trace the similarities between the perceived puppet, a medial representation of the human, and the notion of intermediality as theorized mainly in *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* (2006) and with references to Chiel Kattenbelt, Freda Chapple, Peter Boenisch and Meike Wagner. At the end, I propose to think of the puppet performance as intermedial per se, since the process of making and the staged product incorporates, and always delivers, changes in the perception.

3.1 The uncanny and the sublime

The perception of the puppet is directly connected with the notion of uncanny as coined by Ernst Jentsch in 1906 and elaborated later by Sigmund Freud in 1919. Although such an analogy seems nowadays quite outdated, since new concepts have created to define not only puppetry but our general existence within the world, it still holds some appropriation for an understanding of the first psychological edifications of the puppet. The German word *unheimlich*, loosely translated as un-homely, refers to the situation where one, confronted with something uncanny, experiences a "*lack of orientation*" (Jentsch 1996, 2, italics in the original). What matters to Jentsch is not *what* exactly produces this feeling, since not the same conditions or the same persons could qualify every time for the emergence of that feeling, but *how* manifests itself. Jentsch locates the uncanny in the things presented to us not anymore familiar nor self-evident; when the order of the things is disturbed in such a way that make us feel uncertain about the things themselves - a fact that partially he connects to ignorance; to man's naivety

to assume that everything is animated as he is; to illness and some kind of distortion of the psychical functions. There is one uncertainty though that he relates always to the rise of the uncanniness: "doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate" (ibid. 8), and more precisely when we perceive imitations of human beings which "on top of everything they appear to be united with certain bodily or mental functions" (ibid. 10). It is at this point, where the puzzlement created in the perception of the audience of a puppet performance manifests itself in the clearest and simplest way, that we will always locate the notion of uncanny in puppetry.

Interestingly, Jentsch does refer to wax-figures, dolls, life-sized mannequins but not in puppetry. He also refers to art and its ability to trigger this kind of feeling in the observers but crucially "true art avoids the absolute and complete imitation of nature and living beings, well knowing that such an imitation can easily produce uneasiness" (ibid. 10). Puppetry in 1906 was probably not so popular as the other forms of art which Jentsch refers to but surely was not unknown. What we can assume is that Jentsch did not count puppetry as *true art* since it is without any doubt that one of its main aspects was, and is, to present animated figures with bodily and mental functions.

Building on Jentsch's theory Freud furthers the notion of the uncanny even more. His most famous approach concerns the placement of the familiar within the notion of uncanny (and from that point, the placement of the uncanny potentially within the familiar), something that derives even from the chosen term to describe such an effect or uncertainty. Whereas Jentsch assigns to the uncanniness of the things a new quality or a new aspect when they are presented as non-familiar, Freud (1919) claims that the encounter with the uncanny is nothing more than a return to the familiar which crucially have been repressed and concealed:

> […] among its different shades of meaning the word *heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*. What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich* […] On the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight (4, italics in the original).

It is interesting to notice that such notion of uncanny, one that incorporates so deeply the familiar, resonates phenomenological perspectives which recognize the medial transmission as the place for the visible and the

invisible to emerge and that "whenever the visible is traced it is still inhabited by a newly defined invisibility" (Wagner 2006, 130) which in turn point towards the binary nature of the puppet between an object-hood and a subject-hood. Or to notice that the different realities that the mind is obliged to deal with in the experience of the uncanny – the reality and the reality of the imagination (Freud 1919, 15) - resembles the different and distorting realities that intermedial art forms are able to produce in the perception of the audience. The oscillation of the puppet between an inanimate object and an animate being is a perfect example of what can trigger an uncanny experience, leaving the audience in the uncomfortable position of having an internal cognitive war between their logic and long forgotten beliefs as children who accept and embrace the liveness of their dolls. The uncanny feeling is created in the emergence of the possibility that these forgotten and seemingly childish, false and imaginary beliefs might be true; our rationality is being shaken in its foundations and Freud (1919) believes that we are willing to give in to our old set of beliefs as soon as we experience a doubt:

> Nowadays we no longer believe in them, we have surmounted such ways of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new set of beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation (17).

However, the nature of the puppet does not raise merely the uncanny feeling in the perception of the spectator, of something oscillating between life and death. The uncanny concerns (one of its possible manifestations) the feeling of de-orientation when one confronts a seemingly dead object occupying various human territories, such as form, movement, emotions etc. Yet, the puppet does not leave only the sense of the lack of orientation or even fear; the puppet could be seen as provoking the sublime, which too emerges in the perception of the audience. Christine Battersby (2007) explains that:

> In the experience of the sublime the audience or observer was said to derive pleasure from being (temporarily or potentially) overwhelmed by an object or entity that seemed infinite or vast, powerful or terrible, exceeding the capacities of the human to imaginatively grasp or understand it. Breaking with conscious control and individual personality or preferences, the pleasure-in-pain that was integral to the sublime seemed to take man temporarily beyond the human; but the pleasure was generated by an object – not by a god or by the divine – and opened a kind of split within the subject before consciousness and reason re-establish control (1).

The sublime concerns the failure of finding a reason, a sense or a logic to explain the absurd entity in front of one and the surrender to the delight coming from an imagination which cannot be fitted and tailored in the size of a rational world and is free to perceive the entity in question as from an imaginary world. The sublime integrates two states: the pleasure and the incomprehensible, and as such seems to grasp more accurate the double state of the puppet than the uncanniness associated so far mostly with.

In relation to the broader turn in arts, the sublime could be seen as innate within the contemporary aesthetics of presentation. The abandonment of traditional modes of communication and expression or of the dramatic paradigm in general, points towards the notion of experience instead of the incontestable absorption of the messages of the staged world. The spectator experiences facts that resonates the pleasure and the incomprehensible of the sublime, that raise a double state of something fearsome and magnificent that cannot be articulated. Whether an visceral, intermedial, embodied, synaesthetic, sublime or any other term that might characterize the experience of the audience, the presentation and reception of the contemporary performances concerns a multi-targeted, fragmented and visceral stimulation that creates disruptive and yet strongly individualistic feelings: the incomprehensible is at least yours to perceive it as such. Jean-François Lyotard (1991) acknowledges the sublime in the intentions of avant-garde art(ists):

> The arts, whatever their materials, pressed forward by the aesthetics of the sublime in search of intense effects, can and must give up the imitation of models that are merely beautiful, and try out surprising, strange, shocking combinations (1991, 100)

If we follow the events, avant-garde art is the first of a series of experimentation and radical changes in the way art is presented and perceived; it is the herald of a movement theorized as postdramatic by Hans-Thies Lehmann (1999) and which from the very beginning seeks to unsettle the audience:

> The public no longer judges according to the criteria of a taste ruled by the tradition of shared pleasure […] The question is not that of pleasing them by leading them to identify with a name and to participate in the glorification of its virtue, but that of surprising them (Lyotard 1991, 96-97)

It is evident that particular traits and signs of postdramatic theater inhere within the tradition of puppet theater because of the ambiguity of its most profound characteristic; an ambiguity emanating from the liminal realm which the puppet resides in, between reality and illusion, between life and death, ultimately presenting our

inability not only to grasp humanity but to draw distinct lines between human and material as well. Yet, these projections are not initiated by the object/puppet itself. In a puppet performance is not the working material nor the presented object which we feel delighted by and alienated with, but what it denotes. The spectator, and also the artist as proved with the second chapter, is struck by the potential that the presence of the puppet implies (an implication actually absent) and as such I suggest that the perception of a puppet performance concerns an intermedial experience.

3.2 Intermediality

After long debates, which are by no means over, over media's specificity, and in many cases superiority, the theater theoretical discourse has followed a fruitful direction where different media are investigated not under the light of their differences only but of their similarities, designation, juxtaposition and transparency as well. At the same time what characterizes the contemporary art practices is the collapse of boundaries between disciplines. There is an increasing number of artistic projects that concern unconventional collaborations, which resolve and designate, to a large extend, on the theatrical space. Chiel Kattenbelt explains that "the theater is the only art capable of incorporating all other arts without being depended on one of these in order to be theater" (2006, 32) and he considers it as a hypermedium which, when staging the other media and arts, does not jeopardize neither its specificity nor theirs[9]. Kattenbelt, as the rest of the members of the International Federation for Theater Research who have collectively contributed to the enhancement of the notion of intermediality, acknowledges the theatrical stage as the place which incorporates digital technology and a number of media in the effort to create new modes of representation and of disconcerting the perceptional routine of the audience. However, although digital technology is an essential part of our culture and of performance practice, it is not constantly present within artistic practice, thus not a defining feature of intermediality. Rather, intermediality is located at a point "in-between the performers, the observers and the confluence of media" (Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006, 12), precisely where the relations of these three aspects of theatrical practice become fluid so as new modes of communication

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[9] I follow Kattenbelt's perception when I refer to the media and the arts in that they do not occupy different topological spaces.

to emerge. Indeed, a performance utilizing several media and technological methods might create limited intermedial effects, in comparison to the abundance of the used methods. The presence of media and technology does not secure an intermedial experience which "might sneak into a most traditional text-only talking heads drama production" (Peter Boenisch 2006, 114).

Intermediality concerns co-relations, the blurring of boundaries, juxtaposition; it concerns a "tripartite phenomenon which operates in-between the different media, in-between the performers and the media and in-between the stage and the audience" (Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006, 12). Above all, it concerns a certain effect on the audience's perception; an effect created "in the perception of the observers that is triggered by performance and not simply by the media, machines, projections or computers used" (Boenisch 2006, 113); an effect caused (regardless of whether it is also technologically driven) by such juxtaposition of the media on stage that influences audience's perception towards imaginary, absurdist and personalized cognitive territories rather than the concrete, realistic and universal messages of a more traditional staged world. It is important to highlight that such an effect is created within theatrical space; to stress that theater is not only a hypermedium that utilizes other media and leaves them and itself intact, as Kattenbelt proves, but it produces them "theatrically into something beyond their mere presence and this process-beyond-mere-presence is realized in the observers' perception alone" (ibid. 114). When Peter Boenisch, discussing theater and media under the light of intermediality (2006), states that "any theatrical performance, thus, negotiates a multiple range of potential perspectives to be observed" (ibid. 114), he emphasizes on the role of the audience, on its role to spectate something which is not only a sign (representing something else) but something presented on stage *to* someone as well. Whether intermedial or not, a performance cannot incorporate "a multiple range of potential perspectives" if it is not observed by someone. And although this seems as an obvious and inevitable extension of every art work, it should not be regarded as a given fact but rather as something that actually enables the artwork to be perceived in a multilayered way. From this point, a performance which has an intermedial effect concerns the incorporation of media but most importantly it concerns

the inconsistencies and contradictions created in the perception of the audience; the conflicting realities produced *and* perceived; the effects of "alienation and dys-referential un-realities" (ibid. 115).

In her article *Of Other Bodies: The Intermedial Gaze in Theater* (2006) Meike Wagner focuses even more on this aspect of the performance event, through the analysis of a puppet performance: she locates the intermedial not merely in the staging of humans, puppets and mediatized bodies but also within the corporeally involved spectator. Building on phenomenology and media theory she investigates how the puppet body, with the ability to display the familiar and the other, "crosscuts through the act of perception" (128), forming more complex relations of the self and the other. Yet the other, the invisible, lies precisely within the self/familiar (echoing the Freudian uncanny), rendering the encounter with the object/puppet body as alienating, since the self is confronted with its otherness; rendering the other/invisible part of our world, of our way to perceive things (as the negatives of photos make the actual ones visible); and, rendering the gaze on the other as a process possible through a corporeal perception, of a body seeing and being seen. Wagner acknowledges the use of the puppet body as a *medial operation* which destabilizes the boundaries of the perceivable and guide the audience into areas not frequently perceptually inhabited.

However, although I do follow her reasoning and to a large extend I totally agree, I would like to suggest that the intermedial resides in puppetry, thus reshaping slightly her notion of the puppet theater as an intermedial form and at the same time including the notion of the puppet as a *thing* in the perception of the artist.

Although Wagner rightfully involves the spectator in the production of intermediality, her point of departure is an advanced, radical postdramatic puppet performance while I locate intermediality in the core of puppetry, in its purest form which involves the puppet, the puppeteer and the audience, without any additional dramaturgical strategies or the recruitment of other media on stage. Her article not only focuses on the intermedial staging of *Maquina Hamlet* (1995) by the Argentine theater company El Periférico de Objetos but, to avoid any misunderstanding, she also explicitly defines the puppet performances which she has in mind:

> Contemporary puppet performances mingle puppet bodies with human actors and mediatized bodies. […] We can see this in the human performers' interaction with the puppet bodies, which are constructed from a combination of material objects and human flesh. The performers enter into the puppet bodies and

humanize the animated objects – they inter-change their human bodies with their objects representations, until the sharp line of division contradicts itself (2005, 127)

Indeed, the amount of puppet performances which use similar techniques of interweaving the human and the puppet body are numerous. However, not all of the contemporary puppetry adopts the same means to draw attention to the fragility of the body and of the human being, or to evoke a distorted perception of our nature and of the material. There are plenty of contemporary puppet performances that do not mingle the human flesh with puppet bodies, which remains nevertheless an inventive and accurate means to enhance and magnify the ontological oscillation of the puppet – of a *thing* and an object – and the binary of our bodies between life and death.

And although Wagner rightfully involves the spectator in the production of intermediality, what I feel is missing is a proper acknowledgement of intermediality even before the perception of a puppet performance (which needs not to employ mingling techniques and other media such as photography in *Maquina Hamlet*) by the spectator, in the perception of the artist. While the audience perceives (with all of the consequences) within the apparent subject-ness of the puppet body its object-ness, in the same way the artist perceives within the apparent object-ness of the puppet its subject-ness – a quality that subsequently renders the puppet as an equal partner of the puppeteer, a quality that renders the puppet as a *thing* in life. In other words, I open up another dimension of intermediality within puppet theater. The intermedial is located in the in-between space of the performers, media and their co-relations and crucially in the perception of the spectator who corporeally becomes aware of the oppositional, intermedial status of the puppet and its implications (from the familiar/subject towards the other/object) but is *also* located in the perception of the artist who in a close proximity becomes aware of the oppositional, intermedial status of the puppet and its potentials during the process of creation (from the other/object towards the familiar/subject). The puppet indeed, as a medial representation of the human body, incorporates an opposition in the perception of the audience: it is the familiar threatened to be dissolved into the other and as such "the gaze seizes the puppet body as an other/alien body" (ibid. 132). It incorporates though an opposition in the perception of the artist: it is the *other* delightfully becoming the familiar, a *thing* in life.

If the puppet is a medial representation of the human body; if there are effects on the audience's and artist's perception; if in a puppet performance the puppet is perceived as a subject flirting with its object-ness and as an object flirting with its subject-ness; if the puppet's ontological oscillation evokes a fragmented perception, never stable and fixed but elusive and alienating, and yet inspiring and directional to other relations; then a puppet performance is an intermedial art form per se, one that triggers and destabilizes the traditional perceptual territories not only, as already identified by Boenisch and Wagner, in the process of presentation but in the process of creation as well.

Epilogue

When I started writing the first chapter, arranging the main characteristics of puppet theater in a loosen overview and time order, I was concerned about attributing a "wrong" characteristic in a time period, something that had not been invented yet so to say. At the same time though, I was busy with the notion of difference as elaborated by Gilles Deleuze: in the process of differentiating between things which are essentially connected but belong to variant time zones (either truly or because they were grasped later than their time), the "last one" possesses not only its own unique characteristics but carries along some of the characteristics of previous genres, produced by previous differentiations. So, except of conceiving a spatial and temporal dimension in the notion of difference, I ceased to get stressed by the possibility of assigning an attribute to a wrong time period: for at the end, puppet theater will possess *these* and *those* characteristics, the ones developed in the romantic period and the 70's, the ones I attributed in this thesis and the ones that have not been invented or comprehended yet. This of course does not mean that my research is less scientific or valuable, or that I pay no attention to the chronological evolvement of puppet theater; this just stresses that particular dimensions of a subject are already present in its core but somehow have not been revealed yet.

In the same tone and elaborating on the particular bibliographical choice that ignores eastern discourse on things and puppets, it seems that western thought only recently became familiar with another conception of the world and, most importantly, ready to embrace it. In the process of writing this thesis I came across many references on East's different perception of non-humans as having a spirit; although this is not precisely what is suggested in this research and with the fear of sounding extremely ignorant as I lack in details on this point of view, I cannot help but wonder: was western thought trapped in a mental prison regarding the constant separation of the Human and the world? Is there any chance that we, the westerns, just realized that the Earth is round, or, in our case, that we just conceived that objects and *things* play a crucial role on how the world evolves? Not drawing on eastern academic discourse means that we have to occupy a different perceptional point of view with

the tools we already possess and not adopting it easily through the reference on a discourse that accepts such conditions.

This thesis aims at offering changes in the perception. On the one hand, a change in our perception regarding objects and more specifically things. *Things* are in life; this does not mean that things are actually alive rather that they circulate within life and as such they participate in a constant movement. Ingold, and Latour as well, suggests to investigate *things* in close proximity, in their entanglements with other things, for only this position will provide us with information about their path, their inter-relations and the status of the group they participate in. Both these scholars deny the sterile characterizations which derive from our impulse towards taxonomy. The need to classify everything provides a convenience in terms of identifying groups and exchanging information about them but it involves the danger to fail recognizing new structures and data that might emerge within formations. Ingold's theory offers an alternative way to perceive the world, its entities and the meshworks created. Within the meshwork of a puppeteer and a puppet then, it is not only the subject, endowed with intention and agency, that is able to influence the *thing*; rather the *thing* influences the subject as well because of the mere fact that they have been both caught up in the process of their relation. This process will lead somewhere – to the production of a performance. And the act of producing is a complex and interactive one, especially in the case of an artwork. The puppet emerges as a *thing* which is able to affect the production of a performance and we can trace its influence if we immerse in the process. However, this is one side of the coin, of the double nature of the puppet.

On the other hand, a change in the perception concerns the opening of another dimension in the notion of intermediality; a dimension that highlights the perception of the artist next to the importance of the interplay between the media, the performers, the audience and of the perception of the spectator. At the end of the second chapter is suggested that the puppet affects the process of making and this is manifested when working closely with it. Yet, the puppet has been constantly investigated as an object which carries the unmistakable traces of an effort towards the resemblance of human nature; thus, an ambivalent object but which crucially is perceived always as an object. If we accept the re-envision of the world and its entities though, we observe that at a particular

43

stage, that of the production, the puppet is perceived as a *thing* by the puppeteer. Thus we are in need of a concept that can facilitate a double perception of the puppet and the respective consequences: as a *thing* by the puppeteer which participates in the process of making a piece and as an object by the spectator which triggers internal conflicts. Within the notion of intermediality puppet theater (with the puppet as a medial representation of the human body) conforms to an intermedial art form which questions and unsettles the traditional ways of perceiving of the audience. Taking into account the change in the perception of the puppeteer opens up another dimension of the intermedial through puppet theater. Ultimately I suggest that puppet theater is an intermedial art form per se because it incorporates not only a change in the perception of the audience but a change in the perception of the puppeteer as well.

Since this new aspect of intermediality is highlighted it would be interesting to investigate whether it is present (and in what way) in performances which employ human beings as puppets on stage or even robots and cyborgs. In the first case, the human being would function as an opposite to the puppet figure. Would it function as a medial representation? Of what? Would it make sense to perceive it as the medial representation of the medial representation of the human body? Would the perception of the puppeteer/fellow performer change regarding the metaphysical ontology of the human-puppet? In the second case, things become more complex, for robots and cyborgs occupy a similar but essentially different domain than puppets. The technological achievements of the 21st century concern mechanisms that resemble human activity in a rather absolute way, much more than a string puppet or a puppet mingled with a human body; the robots and cyborgs of our era demonstrate a mental resemblance to the human on a level higher than that of a puppet, a quality that complicates their contemplation since ethical issues start emerging and the boundaries between human and matter are not merely contested but essentially broken down. If we think of the robots and cyborgs as an advanced form of a puppet perhaps the double perception that intermediality can facilitate would be enhanced through the exploration of performances which employ them. The intermedial then would be explored through the perception of an artist and a spectator who deal with a thing which never ceases to manifest a double nature, like the puppet, but which occupies a marginal topology.

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