Puppetry in museum interpretation and communication

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is all my own.

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Abstract

Although there is a growing practice of puppetry in education, there has been no academic research to date on the range of puppet theatre styles and techniques in the museum context. This interdisciplinary thesis seeks to investigate what I call 'museum puppetry', e.g. puppetry used for pedagogical purposes in museum studies' with a focus on the exchanges, compromises and tensions among museum staff and puppet theatre practitioners. Although the research is conducted mainly from the puppeteers' perspective, the voice of museum experts is also present throughout.

The thesis examines puppetry's theoretical and practical frames for creation and how these can be used to conceptualize the applied form of this marginalized medium in the contentious territory of museums today. It also investigates what benefits, challenges and limitations are faced by the two distinct communities of practice (puppeteers and museum staff) in the pre- and post-production of museum puppetry projects.

This multiple case-study, qualitative research examines the current work of practitioners who present and perform in museums, mainly in the United Kingdom, United States, Greece and Israel. The data analysis, based on interviews and field work, also aims to investigate the projects' preproduction processes. Furthermore, it explores the negotiations between puppeteers and museum staff around the visual and performance aspects of museum puppetry projects from a technical and aesthetic point of view (construction, narrative, manipulation techniques).

The research also suggests that although museum puppetry is currently a marginalized museum practice, its distinct sign system renders it rich in meaningful and soulfull associations, strongly visitor-oriented and remarkably flexible. Commissioning long term museum puppetry projects remains —with a few exceptions— a missed opportunity, due to prejudices and low expectations. Overall, the thesis reclaims the pedagogical, aesthetic value of puppets as ultimate metaphors. It advocates the holistic, eco-friendly aspect of the practice and favours the empathy and thought-provoking gaps it traces. Finally, it attempts to balance constructive, unpredictable learning with significance and fun.

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All photographs are by Fay Tsitou, unless otherwise stated in captions throughout the thesis.

Preface

Interviewer: … Do we have time?
Interviewee: All the time in the world…[1]

They say that a PhD is a journey. 'On the road' I was lucky enough to realise soon that the driving motive for this journey was not just the pursuit of knowledge that could potentially take the shape of a piece of academic work. Although the process was sometimes tiresome, the memories this journey left behind were overall unexpectedly pleasant: memories of an intense research experience in the midst of puppets and artefacts from the puppetry and museum worlds. However, I now understand that what actually kept me on track for over three years did not derive from the world of objects. Instead, I feel I owe this to the moments spent with all the new, inspiring people this journey introduced me to.

Although, at the start, interviewees were approached for their work and innovative ideas, soon parts of their personality —and mine— inevitably started to unfold; by the end of most interviews, I had the feeling that 'sharing' was gradually becoming more important than 'collecting'. Meeting with these people in cafés and at their offices, homes, or workshops was a rewarding experience in itself. Apart from a rich source of data, these meetings rendered over thirty hours of recorded interviews into food for thought, laughter and nostalgia that I value most of all.

Those who know me well often point out that I tend to idealise people. But I prefer to think that I tend to idealise the moments. And if this is true, I wonder: could this be 'just me'...?

I believe it is this *flow experience* during discussions with puppeteers and museum staff that often showed me the way to the next step of the research. Inspired by their work and enthusiasm, I hope that I manage to highlight here some of the key and current issues of museum puppetry practice.

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[1] R. Poulter, Personal Interview, 22 May 2009.

Introduction

> The last few decades have belonged to a certain kind of person with a certain kind of mind -computer programmers who could crank code, lawyers who could craft contracts. MBAs who could crunch numbers. But the keys to the kingdom are changing hands. The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind -creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers and meaning makers. These people -artists, inventors, designers, storytellers, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers- will now reap society's richest rewards and share its greatest joys (Pink 2005, cited in Singer et al [eds] '*Why Play = Learning*', 2006: 6).

Motivation

Working for the Athens University Museum, a small institution situated in the old city, I had the opportunity to either closely observe or contribute to the management of its collection. In the mid-1990s, the museum used to communicate information about its collection in written form, with single line display labels —a computer exhibit was still a fantasy then. During those years, I was often surprised by multiple possibilities of 'putting things together' for display; by the artefacts' adaptability and the shifts in their meanings, depending on their setting.[2]

My background in puppetry automatically transformed this task of 'putting things together,' into a pleasant series of object theatre études. It is obvious, though, that within a museum context this task goes well beyond personal aesthetics. Apart from staging *object theatre tableaux* in or, sometimes, outside the glass-cases, my collaborators and I had to take into consideration a plethora of museological criteria, such as the museum's target group and research related to the objects' histories and meanings, all in combination with the gallery's narrative and space dynamics, the visitor flow, the requirements of learning activities and practical issues such as the number, size and type of glass-cases and museum objects available, not to mention the museum's ideology, and so on and so forth. So, besides any conservation issues regarding the collection and the historical building, at each

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[2] Live museum interpretation for independent visitors mainly relied on informal conversations inside the galleries with the museum staff, while guided tours for groups of adults and learning programmes for school students were run on a regular basis throughout the year. Besides these programs, the museum has also developed a rich program of parallel activities (performances, theatre festivals, concerts, lectures, conferences, etc).

step, we had to think about two major, overlapping parameters: 'meaning,' for museum interpretation and 'sharing,' for museum communication.

Experiments with museum objects' associations drove me to consider that puppetry might have a special role to play in a museum context. At the same time, after my first museum learning programme based on the use of puppets, I had noticed the strong appeal of the medium to young museum visitors: in their smiles, their powerfully silent gaze, as well as in their undisguised indifference when things were not going in the right direction. In these moments, puppets acted as a kind of a pedagogical alert: as performer-facilitator, whenever my focus was —despite my best intentions— on 'transmitting' knowledge instead of 'sharing' or 'exploring' meaning, puppets were on the side of the children. Young visitors were either losing interest in me or the puppets were becoming redundant and refusing to accept their roles. Even worse, in some critical and difficult to control moments, especially common in larger groups, when the puppets were taking a higher status and started to lecture or 'preach' various sorts of 'truths,' they became caricatures.

Some years later and early on in this research, I had the chance to get acquainted with many wonderful puppets and puppet collections from all over the world. These visits reconfirmed my belief that puppets constitute a precious part of humanity's cultural heritage in an 'astonishing geographic and ethnographic variety' (Shershaw 1999: 1). It was obvious to me that thanks to various puppet and anthropological museums as well as special collections in mainstream museums, today's visitors have the opportunity to contextualize these cultural treasures from all over the world, in time, place and culture.

However, I was particularly curious about what happens to the life inscribed on puppets by the people who make, hold, manipulate, perceive or believe in them; the life they carry as constructed and performing objects, their interactions with their 'colleagues' on stage or their long travels carefully packed in all sorts of containers until their next appearance on stage. Where did the poetry of their real, everyday life go? This original context and ambience of everyday life, their aura, had now somehow disappeared, since once gathered 'the object is not surrounded by "context" but part of it' (Knell 2007: 9).

Having already decided that my primary intention was not to study puppet collections, I moved on. I started to look for any type of museum which hosted shows, workshops or puppet-like interactive exhibits based on puppetry (what I call museum puppetry) and for practitioners (puppeteers or puppet constructors whom I call museum puppeteers) who develop these projects.

It is a common belief and traditional understanding that puppeteers are limited to doing puppet shows for preschoolers, and 'since children had usually been a part of the target audience anyway, many puppet artists settled into this truncated role' (Blumenthal 2005: 21). Acknowledging this bias, I attempted to challenge this stereotype from early on by seeking out examples of non-infantilizing practice.

I was twice surprised: first, by the popularity of museum puppetry for preschoolers when compared to other museum target groups, and secondly by the troubled looks of some museum staff and puppet practitioners on first hearing about my research. They[3] perceived this interdisciplinary study as either too scientific or too artistic according to their particular perspective. However, in the long run, things proved to be more adventurous and promising than I initially expected as I was trying to bridge the current or more classical literature in both fields (museums and puppetry) with the style each case study introduced.

Research questions

The thesis investigates, from the practitioners' perspective, two main research questions.

First, it explores puppetry's theoretical and practical frameworks for creation. It investigates how these frameworks can be used in the conceptualization and analysis of applied puppetry in the contentious territory of today's post museums.

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[3] I would like to note here that throughout this thesis I will use *he, him and his* (and also *they, them, their* and *theirs*) to refer both to females and males. Among the other options to my knowledge, this convention seems to me the simplest, the least confusing.

I would like to clarify here that the term 'post-museum' mentioned above is one of the key terms of the thesis. According to Hooper-Greenhill it refers to museums which 'may be imagined as a process or an experience' and take the exhibition just as 'one among many other forms of communication' (Hooper-Greenhill, cited in Watson 2007: 81) According to Hooper-Greenhill the post-museum 'will hold care of its objects but will concentrate more on their use rather than on further accumulation'. Also, among other things, the post-museum which 'is not limited to its own walls' becomes a platform for many voices, while the knowledge it fosters 'becomes fragmented and multi vocal' (ibid).

This first question is divided into two areas of enquiry:

1a. the first area examines the distinctive sign system of puppetry and provides a new understanding of what a puppet is and what it does. It investigates puppetry's potential to enhance communication within a safe environment and to create powerful visual images. It also studies the practice from the perspective of craftsmanship and the sense of touch.

1b. the second area relates the practice to associated museum practices and maps out various examples while recognising the 'fuzziness' of boundaries among different art genres and learning activities (such as, for example, theatre/museum theatre, visual arts/art workshop). Drawing on these examples, it examines puppeteers' skills and the techniques engaged to render rather complex scientific or historical subjects into communicative narratives and constructions. More specifically, it explores the challenges involved in aligning puppetry imagery with the intended learning outcomes of a project and being transformed into a co-created narrative.

The second research question examines the benefits, challenges and limitations for the two distinct communities of practice (puppeteers and museum staff) within the production of museum puppetry projects.

This question aims to investigate the negotiations, tensions and compromises between the two communities of practice and, more specifically, to study the frictions between them vis-à-vis the intended learning outcomes of a project.

I would also like to note here that by 'intended learning outcomes' I mean the learning outcomes that puppeteers have in mind while working towards the production of a project, as opposed to the *actual* learning outcomes from the visitors' perspective after the end of an activity. I would like to clarify that traditionally, puppeteers (Sherzer & Sherzer 1987: 2-3) and, in recent decades, museums (Hooper-Greenhill, cited in Watson 2007: 81) have at their centre the audience they address. In this role, they both strive primarily to create the most appropriate and engaging learning conditions (intended learning conditions) for their public.

This fact inevitably determines the way both museum staff and puppeteers develop their work, the language they plan to use during an activity, the economy or the complexity of their means, the style they choose for each project, the ways they choose to interact with the visitors and/or the museum collection and ideas, and so on. Finally, as will be presented in the following chapters, the intended learning outcomes and the intended learning conditions affect, often considerably, the collaboration between the two communities of practice when they engage in common projects.

Why a qualitative, multiple case-study approach?

My initial perception of 'reality', 'knowledge' and 'truth' as non-absolute, non-controlled, and holistic notions placed the whole research under the larger umbrella of epistemological relativism. This approach could not but foster a postmodernist social reality (Seale 2006: 296).

This theoretical perspective enhances the exploratory nature of the thesis and is also compatible with the complex nature of this investigation (puppetry), which indeed is traditionally used to react against controlled, strictly structured situations or fixed patterns (Blumenthal 2005: 163-185). Empirical data serves here as a tool for an inductive process

during which the research is 'based on methods of data generation which are flexible and sensitive to the social context' (Mason 1996: 4).

The risks of adopting this methodological path (qualitative research), such as heavy reliance on subjective impressions either of the researcher or the interviewees, cannot outweigh the advantages mentioned above. Any strength endangered in external validity is, hopefully, gained in reliability (Yin 2009: 2).

More specifically, my investigation focuses on the multiple uses of puppets in a number of museums across the United States, United Kingdom, Greece and Israel. While in the beginning I was interested in looking for case studies in non-western countries, practical language issues and a lack of contacts prevented me from carrying out detailed research outside the aforementioned countries.

The plethora of uses, styles and purposes favour a multiple case-study model. A representative selection of cases (see below) and specific examples are studied jointly, in order to explore in detail certain distinctive aspects in each one of them. Although it is difficult to generalize, examining and analysing in depth each of the core case studies opens the way to 'better understanding and perhaps better theorizing about a still larger collection of cases' (Denzin-Lincoln 2005: 446). The multiple case studies and multiple sources of evidence are chosen in order 'to optimize understanding' rather than to 'enumerate frequencies' in order to formulate a 'statistical generalization' (Yin 2009: 15).

It is worth mentioning that written documents and reports on museum puppetry are still very limited. This lack of published research and the plethora of different styles, techniques and types of commissions also favoured a multiple case-study research model. A wide range of examples needs to be examined here in order to develop a number of theoretical and practical frames of creation, based on current practice. Moreover, in order to redress puppetry's stigmatisation and possibly inspire both communities of practice (museum

representatives, puppeteers) to re-evaluate the applied form of the medium, I consider the study of a large number of devoted practitioners a crucial choice. [4]

Moreover, the thesis attempts to open up a dialogue between the fields of the performing arts and the humanities. This dialogue may be quite challenging as it not only communicates opposing views held by puppeteers and museum representatives respectively, but it also highlights a number of methodological frictions that have arisen during this research.

Communication with museum staff also provides me with an invaluable source of data to aid the analysis of the findings, particularly with regard to the second research question. Information from museum staff enables me to better understand and define the field, locate practitioners and, of course and organize field visits.

The case studies

A number of the museum puppetry projects I observed appeared to be a museum's easy solution to the problem of occupying preschoolers. These projects justified puppetry's stigma not only as an art form suitable exclusively for preschoolers, but also at times as a low quality, simplistic show which could be run even by amateur volunteers. In those cases, the story seemed to be predictable rather than inventive, the constructions and the manipulation/performance seemed rather simplistic or aesthetically non-imaginative, and the interaction with the audience tended to be quite directive and didactic in nature. At other times, puppetry activities did not seem to be the outcome of thorough background research linked with the museum's messages and collections in a sophisticated way.

The projects falling under the above categories seemed to have a narrow scope with regard to the puppetry in education potential and were therefore not examined in this thesis. My challenge then was to meet with those practitioners whose work was intriguing enough to

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[4] It is worth noting that the practitioners' works studied in this thesis have rarely been the subject of academic research (for a rare evaluation see Sumption 1999: 83-94).

generate new understanding beyond the common prejudices in the field and who could reflect upon their own work.

I would like to note that there is no central organisation for museum puppeteers —as I found out in the course of my research, they rarely know about each other's work. This fact made the challenge even harder. Furthermore, it was not easy to locate practitioners: Many of "applied puppeteers" work in the fields of school education, community work or therapeutic agencies, but they do not often work for museums. [5]

Ideas and recommendations for this research came from multiple sources: talking to people from both fields -museums and puppetry- receiving responses to my research blog (http://museumpuppetry.wordpress.com), as well as conducting online and archival research.

Moreover, satisfying communication via internet, easy access to data and fieldwork and, last but not least, the open-mindedness of the practitioners involved, were also influential in producing the list in the following section.

I contacted and/or met with a number of puppet practitioners including Steve Abrams (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology), Alan Cook, John McCormick (Theatre Museum), Ali McCaw (Keswick Museum), Geoff Felix (Museum of London, Foundling Museum, and others), Matthew Cohen (British Library), Jennifer Levine (Jewish Museum in New York), Shari Aronson (Science Museum of Minnesota, Minnesota History Center), Theodora Skipitares, and others. [6] I also contacted and/or met with museum staff who had hired or developed museum puppetry projects at their institutions and did field visits to museums including the Cartoon Museum (London), Walsall New Art Gallery, New York Hall of Science, Natural History Museum of London,

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[5] For more on applied puppetry, see the special issue of *Puppet Notebook* on this theme (Tsitou and Smith, eds. 2011/12).

[6] In parentheses are the institutions that hosted the practitioners' work at the time of research. See also appendix I.

Tate Modern, Natural History Museum of Paris, Athens University History Museum, British Museum, Science Museum of Minnesota, Minnesota History Center, Kensington Palace, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, Whitney Museum, Brooklyn Children's Museum, and the Science Museum of London.

The core case studies are represented by ten practitioners/puppet theatre companies and one anthropological museum.[7] These were selected because of the originality of their style and quality of their work which breaks the stigma of puppetry and of museum puppetry as a second rate art. I consider that the selected core case studies constitute a representative list which best highlight the potential of the practice in western museums today, as well as its variety in styles and combination of techniques. At the same time, these core case studies—especially those involving collaborative practices between practitioners and museum staff—best bring to light an indicative range of frictions and complexities involved within this much contested setting (museums).

For the following practitioners, puppets' communicative power often went beyond what is commonly called, with much condescension, a 'puppet show'. It took the form of engaging participatory activities: puppetry was used for workshops in puppet construction and/or manipulation; for multi-sensory devised mini-narratives inspired by museum collections or an exhibition's storyline; for live demonstrations based on interactive puppet exhibits; or on a larger scale, for curating exhibitions.

- **Emily Capstick**'s (UK) multi-sensory participatory projects rely on a thorough knowledge of drama in education and museum theatre techniques. Her stories are mainly based on anonymous, fictional characters and are highly interactive. The

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[7] My aim was not to study museum interpretation and communication in puppet museums. Not only because there is already some literature in the field of world puppetry (puppetry as a popular culture), but also because this had the danger of making the conceptualization of museum puppetry self-referential. It would potentially limit the research's impact to just one type of sites (i.e. puppet museums) or in some cases to the puppet as an exhibit, i.e. not as a powerful performing object for communication. Overall it was clear from the beginning that my interest targeted around puppetry's potential to associate with less obvious museum collections and messages.

practitioner has also developed projects for audiences with special needs and for community work.

- **Robert Poulter**'s (UK) historical re-enactments involve radical montage and manipulation techniques, combined with sophisticated visuals. The practitioner has presented toy theatre techniques, shows and workshops extensively in museums worldwide since the 1980s. Many of his projects (historical re-enactments) raise the reliability issue (authenticity) in relation to the visual metaphors he uses, while his reconstruction of the Eidophusikon automaton is an example of the active involvement of museum staff in the pre- and post-production phase of the project.

- **Patricia O'Donovan** (Israel) communicates ideas from science, history and the philosophy of science. This case study explores the beneficial aspects of long-term collaborations with museums (as well as the negotiations and compromises these often involve). Presented to a highly polarized multiethnic audience, her projects occasionally raise censorship issues and tensions.

- **Horniman Museum** in London (UK) is an anthropological museum that has developed a wide range of workshops around its large handling collection, including a great number of puppets, masks and performing objects. The puppetry workshop is among the most popular activities in the museum.

- **Chris Green**'s (US) interactive constructions made from reused materials were built for the Noah's Ark in Skirball Center in Los Angeles, USA. This is a unique example of highly sophisticated puppet exhibits being displayed in the gallery or manipulated by museum staff.

- **Tim Hunkin**'s (UK) and **Forkbeard Fantasy**'s(UK) interactive automata and puppet exhibits reflect the practitioners' intention to conceive and construct non-didactic, thought-provoking, unpredictable, durable puppet exhibits and to infuse them with great doses of humour.

- **Karl and Kimberley Fosters**' (UK) Object Dialogue Boxes intend to provide an 'out of the box,' innovative museum experience. They intend to foster open interpretation and communication of museum collections, and they are based on surprising combinations of everyday or whimsical objects.

- **Sophia Yalouraki**'s (Greece) work is a unique example of a permanent collaboration with a museum institution (Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens). The practitioner develops her programmes based on her long experience in pedagogy and school education.

- **Brad Brewer**'s (US) project was commissioned by one of the most prestigious museums worldwide, the Smithsonian. He collaborated with a museum research team to resolve a number of authenticity/reliability issues involved in the historical project he presented.

- **In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre**'s (US) long experience in community puppetry happenings and parades highlights a unique philosophy in participatory as opposed to directive projects.

The case studies are listed randomly here and may appear in more than one chapter, from different perspectives, and in conjunction with reference to a number of other secondary examples.

Research Methods and Techniques

The methods used for data collection are primarily interviews, field notes and secondary material such as photos, videos, documents, archives (records, pertinent literature, articles), performance/workshop reports and personal practice in the field.

The interviews provided me with the basic tools to examine the range of practices, styles and techniques in the field, as well as to locate the practical difficulties and any tensions involved in the projects commissioned. In those cases where data were also collected via live observation, interviews enabled me to explore how the final project reflected the puppeteers' (and the museums in the case of closely collaborative projects) intentions in practice.

I used a list of prepared questions (see Appendix II) as the basis for discussion, although it was not, followed slavishly. The open ended questions '…allow[ed] any new topics … not initially incorporated to be added to the topics included' (Seale 2006: 136).

During the interviews I viewed data 'presenting one of many possible representations of the world' (Seale 2006: 181). Although inevitably subjective, the interviews were 'insightful', and they constituted a tool for 'pattern matching' across the multiple cases (Yin 2009: 102, 136). They were semi-structured, which means that they were conducted in a conversational form. This gave interviewees the chance to open up, to reflect upon their own practice and to put this into words, for the first time, in some cases.

In the beginning questions involved also quantitative data. However, as the research evolved, I realised I had to manage the unique complexity of each case study. This made me realise that it was more useful to focus on the qualitative aspect of the projects, with the hope that a future field study might include quantitative data as well.

Furthermore, the plan did not originally involve questions addressed solely to constructors. Although, I had not initially thought of this area as a legitimate area of research for this thesis, I ended up dedicating a whole chapter to it (interactive puppet exhibits, Chapter Four). So I adapted the interviews accordingly to focus the questions more on materials, durability, maintenance, the communicative power of visual aesthetics and the potential for visitors' direct involvement.

In most cases, the interviews were recorded (especially when I was meeting the interviewee for the first time) or alternatively I relied on notes taken during or after the interview. The types of interviews varied: for the core case studies, I conducted face to face interviews and added further data at a later stage drawn from email correspondence, telephone and Skype interviews, whereas for most secondary cases I primarily used telephone interviews, email correspondence and Skype.

I interviewed not only practitioners but, in most core cases studies, also representatives from the museum that hosted the activity. This 'methodological plurality…encourage[d] different voices to be heard and facilitate[d] the exploration of different truths' (Philip, cited in Seale 2006: 296).

Also, I used observation as a method of data generation aligning to the ontological perspective of the thesis, which 'sees interactions, actions and behaviours and the way people interpret these, act on them, and so on, as central' (Mason 1996: 61).

Even if it is said that observational methods are 'subjective, unrepresentative and ungeneralizable" (Mason 1996: 62), they nevertheless gave me a way to visualise the intended learning conditions and the intended learning outcomes in practice. As already clarified, my research did not include evaluation of learning outcomes from the visitors' perspective, but field visits did give me a clearer and more complete picture once the data had been collected from the interviews.

Observations were recorded in the form of field notes, photographs and written reports. Previous personal work in both fields (museums and puppetry), collaboration for a production of a historical New Model Theatre show directed by Robert Poulter, and a short internship at the Horniman Museum were useful experiences for gaining better access and insights into the research.

As already mentioned, being an individual researcher, I was not able to directly observe each and every project in a museum setting. As Mason points out, observational research can be very time and resource consuming (1996: 61). Furthermore, this type of international multiple case study research would ideally involve a team of researchers, and a high budget for travel in order to do a repeated series of field visits in a number of different places. Another reason that prevented me from direct observation of certain projects was that a number were commissioned for specific exhibitions, and the exhibition's duration therefore determined the lifespan of the productions.

However, I did meet all the practitioners in person,[8] as well as many of the museum staff who play a part in the eleven case studies. In addition, I had the opportunity to observe a representative sample of the practitioners' work live in museums or on video, to take

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[8] Except Tim Hunkin, see Chapter Four.

photographs of their shows and to collect material from their archives (notes, leaflets, reports, etc.).

In cases where observation in museums was not possible (as was the case, for example, with some of the projects by Robert Poulter, Patricia O'Donovan and Brad Brewer), I watched the shows in other settings such as libraries, on DVD or on videocassette. Alternatively, in those cases where I did not have the chance to watch the show in any setting, or in recorded form, I attempted to critically reflect on data from interviews and other sources, such as documents or visual materials (for example, scripts, articles, storyboards, sketches or photographs), and/or by exploring the actual constructions outside the context of the show (for example, in the practitioners' workshops).

It was clear, however, that when observations in the real museum setting were possible I certainly gained a clearer understanding of the dynamics of audience engagement and the function and contribution of puppetry techniques.

In addition, visual data (photographs, DVDs, leaflets, websites) were used for more precise, objective information, complementary to the interviews (especially when direct observation was not possible). This was used for gaining a more detailed and vivid image of the way puppet techniques were practically used. Photographs of settings and puppets were used for contextualizing the projects (the puppets' design, the material, the dimensions and the stage constructions) within the museum setting and performing space.

Furthermore, secondary data such as newspaper articles, written reports and other material obtained from visiting the libraries and archives of many museums and institutions such as the Institut International de la Marionnette Research Center, were also part of the data collected.

Finally, before conducting the fieldwork I submitted a fieldwork form to the Ethics Committee of Royal Holloway University of London. The form, which was approved by the Committee, described the research and its purpose and included several general

guidelines as well as a handout for potential participants (museum education officers, schoolteachers, parents).

Before conducting the interviews, I explicitly asked for permission to keep fieldnotes, use a tape recorder and take photographs. I asked this orally or via email of all those who were involved in the research and informed all about its content and purpose. I had no refusals and no institution, participant or practitioner asked me to keep their anonymity.

For schools or sensitive cases, such as the special educational needs programmes in the Museum of London, permission from the museum automatically presumed permission from the school and the parents. Photographs in these cases were not allowed (or they were not allowed to show the children's faces), but the museums' learning department kindly provided me with some visual material.

Theoretical framework

> Like puppets and masks, […automata] are not the thing they're purporting to be. There's a synaptic gap of some sort where things don't quite touch, and in the space between those two things comes thought (Gilliam 1998).[9]

Providing visitors with handling collections, interactive exhibits and a range of participatory activities is part of today's museum strategy to 'demystify the inherent strangeness of so many museum collections' (Roberts 1997: 6). More specifically, while 'touch' used to be traditionally 'a privilege usually reserved to conservators and curators' (Were 2008: 132), puppetry and applied puppetry participatory techniques have occasionally been used both for interpreting museum collections and ideas and for exploring this sometimes neglected sense in sophisticated ways.

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[9] Dreams: Devious Devices http://www.smart.co.uk/dreams/automata.htm (accessed 1 June 2010).

For the purposes of this research I will examine the intended learning outcomes and the intended learning conditions that puppet practitioners claim to produce, relying on the ultimate puppetry convention (a dead thing that becomes alive).

Andrew J. Pekarik, the Program Analyst in the Office of Policy and Analysis, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., introduces a model of visitor participation in exhibition designing as well as a 'participant oriented evaluation' arguing that:

> The valuation and establishment of specific outcomes implies a paternalistic relationship between the organisation and its public. It suggests that the task of the organisation is to change the visitor in ways that the museum has predetermined are useful and valuable… the word 'education' should be used to mean much more than 'schooling' or 'training' (Pekarik 2010: 107, 109).

Pekarik's argument on learning outcomes aligns with the idea of knowledge adopted in this thesis. Knowledge is taken here as holistic, constructive and relative, while learning is understood as a practice-based exploratory process where 'minds on' and 'hands on' engagements go together: an active participation of the mind via a 'physical interaction with the stuff of the world' (Hein 2005: 31).

In addition, Tony Jackson examines the power of applied performance within interventionist performances and maintains that this might lie beyond any measurable outcomes or the transference of any messages:

> Evidence of the actual responses of audiences suggests there is more, much more, to a successful interventionist performance than 'messages' or measurable outcomes—that there is a quality of experience that is to do with the 'liveness' of the event, the emotional resonances it can offer, the dialogues that can be generated, and the complexity of texture that defies easy closure. It is that quality of theatre experience that we have to describe, articulate, research, and communicate to those who provide the funding and set the agendas (Jackson 2005:116-117).

Drawing on Pekarik's and Jackson's ideas, in the case where learning takes place in a non-natural environment like that of schools or museums or away from real life situations, I will

consider the focus on the intended learning conditions (providing a strong visual interactive narrative, for example) to be of vital importance.

Moreover, I will examine the idea that the intended conditions for learning within museum puppetry rely on three main criteria: participation, openness and flow. Drawing on the object theories of Heidegger, Jurkowski, Tillis, Bogatyrev and others, I will examine the contribution of the ultimate puppetry convention (a dead thing that becomes alive) to frame these intended conditions for learning.

I will draw on Heidegger's suggestion that people should interact with the world of objects with humbleness and respect (2001). However, it very much depends on the museum visitor's agenda whether they look at certain museum exhibits[10] and perceive them as Heidegger suggests, as having a life on their own, or to put it differently, as potential puppets at rest. Is that visitor an animist, who believes that a certain kind of soul resides in all things, like many Maori people do?[11] Are they a puppet theatre fan, a puppeteer themselves, or do they simply have a strong enough imagination (as many artists do) to make the leap to similar assumptions or metaphors? Are they a preschooler (or an adult with a well preserved childlike self inside?), or are they perhaps mentally disturbed?

Most museum visitor studies support the suggestion that visitors observe museum exhibits from seconds to a few minutes. However, it is hard to believe that all the visitors who observe these objects also imagine them as having a life and a narrative of their own.[12] As

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[10] For the purposes of this research I would like to make clear that I use the term 'museum exhibit' in its broader sense: I refer to all the stuff that is contained in an exhibition, be it objects in the showcases, interactive exhibits, labels, computers, handling collection, carts, etc. Also, whenever I use the term 'performing objects' I refer to objects manipulated or constructed by puppeteers (puppets/objects), leaving the term 'museum exhibits' standing for anything else contained in an exhibition gallery.

[11] As Hooper-Greenhill explains, some Maori people think of objects as having a soul and use museum objects for family and tribal rituals. (2000: 113).

[12] As with the museum exhibits featured in the Quay Brothers' animation *The Phantom Museum* (2003), where objects become alive once the museum's doors are closed.

the case studies suggest, puppeteers (or those people who have the *puppetesque*[13] look at things) are more likely to recognize an object at rest as a puppet to be, or even a puppet at rest, and move onto visualizing various narrative paths towards it. The visual artist and model theatre performer Robert Poulter describes the process from the practitioner's perspective: 'You look at the shapes and how you translate the shapes of the readymade objects into moods and feelings'.[14] The case studies will examine how this skill of puppeteers intends to be communicative and to enhance audience engagement with collections and museum ideas.

I propose that in his analysis of objects at rest, Heidegger seems to adopt a *puppetesque* approach and recognizes their autonomy when they are in this state. He urges us to 'leave the thing at rest in its own self, for instance in its thing-being' (2001: 31). He also believes that an object or a thing, as he calls it, is much more than 'the bearer of its characteristics' or 'the unity of a manifold of what is given in the senses,' or 'a formed matter.' Rather it is 'the thingly element of the thing, its independent and self-contained character' (ibid: 24-26). It is this quality of the things (puppets included), their autonomy that combined with often a minimum effort to create a theatrical ambiance, empowers them to trigger our imagination and make us believe that these 'dead things' -the puppets- are alive.[15]

Moreover, in the field of arts, authenticity may have many meanings. We can talk about 'performance authenticity' and focus, for example, on how much theatre directors, actors or music composers are doing justice to the author of a theatre play or the composer of a

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[13] I would like to clarify that for certain cases (such as the Tim Hunkin case study, see Chapter 4) I refer to the term *puppetesque*, which has been popularized in British puppet circles by critic Penny Francis. I use the term to refer to constructions, worldviews, or object theories that take a *puppet-like* look at things meaning a look that perceives objects as having a character within a communicative, often comic, co-created narrative. This is achieved by taking an object as a living being with feelings and senses and by creating a fictional story and inspiring narrative gaps around it. http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm (accessed 2 February 2012).

[14] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 22 May 2009.

[15] I would like to note here that whenever there is a reference to puppet theatre, puppetry or puppets, and if not stated otherwise, object theatre (or the object) will also be implied. Object theatre is a theatre where the manipulated objects have a particular function in everyday life; these are objects not specially constructed to be manipulated in a puppet show. As Jurkowski explains, these are 'all sorts of objects as well as different materials adapted during the process of invention into stage characters […] they have much to do with our profane civilization […] they are produced on stage' (1988: 41).

musical work (Kermal & Gaskell 1999: 6). We can talk about authenticity in reverse and relate inauthenticity to insincerity. As Alex Neill claims: 'one way in which a work of art may be inauthentic is in virtue of being insincere, of expressing or articulating sentiment which are or were in fact those of the artists' (1999: 197). We may also relate authenticity to religious transcendence as 'people maintain that great works are informed by a religious dimension, are ultimately "touched by the fire and ice of God"' (ibid: 1). We may also follow the modern tendency in art and search for authenticity in the 'autonomy' of an artwork and the 'aesthetic values' it contains rather than something external to it (ibid: 4). Lastly, we may talk about accurate representations of authentic, true, original stories - those kind of stories that a number of museum exhibitions expect to communicate to their audience.

'Defining himself as an historical materialist, as opposed to a historicist' (Sayre 1999: 268), Walter Benjamin overtly locates the representations of these stories in the present and chooses the *here and now* as the logical standpoint for their interpretation, for a meaningful dialogue with the past and communication in the present:

> Historicism presents an eternal image of the past, historical materialism a specific and unique engagement with it… the task of historical materialism is to set to work an engagement with history original to every new present. It has resource to a consciousness of the present that shatters the continuum of history. (1979: 352)

In his analysis on Benjamin, Sayre states that:

> …it is no longer the 'unique experience' of the work of art that matters to us; it is our 'unique engagement' with it. It is no longer the 'original' upon which we focus our attention, but the 'history original' to our present. We no longer turn to events *per se*, or to the documents that survive them but to the stories they let us tell. This is the authority of the author – to originate stories, and let them multiply (1999: 268).

The task of transforming museum interpretation into storytelling will be explored in the main case studies of this thesis. In doing so, I intend to expand the idea of authenticity and

locate it within a larger, less limiting framework that focuses on the experience of a community of people—the participants—in the *here and now*.

It is not my intention to underestimate the force of past evidence or the logic of commonly accepted facts in history or in science. My intention is rather to view the force of past evidence as part of an experience in the present and to explore the importance and meaningfulness of the latter within the museum setting. An experience which has, in the words of Benjamin, 'fallen in value' (1999: 83) and which I consider worth investing in and revaluating.

For this purpose, I will draw more specifically on Heidegger's concept of authenticity and everydayness as explored in his book *Being and Time* and analyzed by Charles B. Guignon in his article 'Heidegger's "Authenticity" Revisited' (1984). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger asks '[W]hat is the meaning of human existence' or 'Being' (ibid: 321)? More specifically, Guignon claims that:

> …emerged of an age that perceived itself as a time of profound crisis, a period shaken by intellectual currents of relativism, scientific materialism, Darwinism, and the complete secularization of life, [Heidegger] attempts to combat the 'groundlessness' (Bod enlosigkeit) of the contemporary world by uncovering enduring values and meanings within the framework of 'worldliness' (Welt lichkeit) and human finitude. The 'question of Being' is no exercise in arcane speculation; its aim is to restore a sense of the gravity and responsibility of existence. (ibid: 322).

As Guignon explains, Heidegger found these 'enduring values and meanings' in the *'everydayness'* and *'authenticity'* of *'anyone'* (1984: 332).

Heidegger views *'authenticity'* embedded in the heart of social life of 'anyone' rather than in scientific facts and sees both concepts ('authenticity' and 'anyone') as being interconnected and grounded in everyday life. As Guignon clarifies:

> …authenticity cannot be a matter of 'transcending the herd' in any sense. Rather, authenticity must be understood as an 'existential modification' of our essential being as both the Anyone and an Authentic self. To be authentic is to be resolute about one's ability to live one's life as a coherent totality… The

'transparency' of authenticity reveals that resolute existence cannot be disengaged from the public world... (ibid: 333)

As Heidegger himself maintained:

Resolution does not withdraw itself from 'actuality', but discovers first what is factically possible; and it does so by seizing upon it in whatever way is possible for its own most ability-to-be in the Anyone (Heidegger 1962: 299).

In other words, what Guignon suggests here is that Heidegger could not separate Being from *being human* and this equated with being authentic to oneself and in actualizing oneself in an everydayness, as well as the historicity this carries from past generations of predecessors or 'anyones'. This kind of humanized idea of authenticity, which has been traditionally overshadowed by the notion of *scientific authenticity* and *objective truth* so favoured by the museum world, will be examined in Chapter Two and again, more explicitly, in Chapter Three. The value of everyday subjects and characters, the idea of coherency and involvement in this world and what this means within museum puppetry programmes will also be studied in Chapter Two.

Throughout the thesis I will refer to the reliability or authenticity issue and, specifically in Chapter Three, I will also investigate it in relation to Heidegger's notion of authenticity.

Whether a marginalized art such as puppetry or objects outside the museum collection (such as puppets) are appropriate to explore scientific, historical or high art subjects will be questioned by some museum staff as well as audiences. As will be studied, unsurprisingly, museums often raise the issue of documentation, background research and authenticity when the puppet narrative refers to real events, historical persons and the use of replicas.

Moreover, as the cases suggest the idea of a play and especially object play seem to be central for the learning conditions established by a museum puppetry activity. For this purpose, based mainly on Winnicott's play theory (as well as on Csikszentmihalyi's idea of flow) I will examine a range of puppetry techniques which foster this playful environment and the learning potential this intend to provide.

Aligned with many other play theories, the psychoanalyst D.W Winnicott's *Playing and Reality* (2006) maintains that play occupies a major space in the life of children and enhances their development, while preparing them to face the real world; it is a unique learning experience, creative and exciting (ibid: 70; 138). It is also considerably engaging: 'Playing is essentially satisfying' (ibid: 70). Moreover, Winnicott underlines that children's play significantly engages the body while it places objects, imagination, pretence and metaphor at its centre of interest (ibid: 69). For Winnicott, play does not exclude adults (in fact it significantly values their contribution, especially in their role as children's co-players). It is a free choice activity which can be controlled by the players for their benefit. Also, for children's therapists, according to Winnicott, play stands as a valuable gateway to the child's inner thoughts and feelings.

Simon Knell, Head of Department of Museum Studies at Leicester University asks:

> Is the object active or passive? Does it embody and communicate some aspect of ourselves or is it simply a slave to our words and thoughts? (Knell 2007: 7).

From a museological point of view, Knell talks about the poetry of the object that many museum staff strive to detect today: from their former role as 'container[s] of information' to be kept 'in order to understand' (ibid 11), experts today recognize objects' 'intellectual and poetic possibilities' and justify them via their 'relationship to the external world, to an original context' (ibid 9).

Winnicott and other play theorists suggest that this poetry can be brought back to life and that we could interact with it in a playful environment. Winnicott underlines that object-hood provides people with 'periods of rest from the struggle to draw lines between [them]selves and others' not only in infancy, but also throughout childhood and into adulthood (2006: xiv). As will be discussed in the following chapters, this implies that the manipulation of objects within a museum context (for example interactive puppet exhibits, puppetry workshops, museum handling collection) could have a strong appeal to visitors and enable them to make links between their inner and the outside world.

Moreover, I will draw from Richard Sennett's theory of the craftsman (2009) and his analysis of the hand as a unique research tool to analyse the puppet builders' techniques. Sennett's theory will be useful for framing these artists' practices, for theorizing about them, their worldview and ethos, as well as for exploring their contribution to the platform for a holistic learning.

The value of craftsmanship, according to Sennett, relies on ideas such as taking pride in the quality of one's own work, the community spirit in workshop production, the intrinsic simplicity of the necessities of everyday life and the human qualities infused to an anthropomorphised matter by a conscious human touch (hand and mind) and manipulation. Craftsmanship here presupposes and encourages constant research ('problem solving' leading to 'problem finding'), freedom in experimentation and a continuous deepening of understanding through repetition. As with children's play, Sennett contends that repetition is followed by anticipation, which leads to new learning each time it is performed.

In his analysis of craftsmanship, Sennett re-evaluates the handmade versus the machine made. The handmade suggests a way to slow down and to physically trace the working process of both the human spirit and hand. According to his theory, craftsmanship is a process that values the crafted object more than it worships the master maker, who often remains anonymous, together with their assistants and apprentices. Sennett discerns here a democratic spirit of impersonality, which distributes the burden of difficulties or mistakes made at work equally among all members of the workshop.

He views the separation of head from hand, perfectionism and correctness, with mistrust. Instead, he values ideas such as necessity, functionality, practicality, holistic approaches (Sennett 2009: 46), qualities that directly derive from the real world, and the everyday life of a community. As he points out: 'good craftsmanship implies socialization… a shared experiment… a collective trial and error… a continuum between the organic and the social' (ibid: 288; 290).

Overall, the role of touch in museum learning and museum puppetry will also be explored with reference to Pye's anthology, *The power of touch: handling objects in museum and heritage contexts* (2007) and Chatterjee's *Touch in museums: policy and practice in object handling* (2008).

Finally, I will focus on Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's positive psychology theory of the 'flow experience' (Csikszentmihalyi 1995). In contrast to the feeling of boredom and anxiety experienced by visitors when they are confronted with exhibits that pose either very low or too difficult challenges, the flow experience is 'a state of mind that is spontaneous, almost automatic, like the flow of a strong current' (ibid: 70). According to Csikszentmihalyi:

> When a person is in flow, or fully enjoying an intrinsically motivated activity… the individual fully expresses the self… discovers previously unknown and unrealized potentials and skills [and] tends to feel connected with other entities, such as nature, a team, the family, or in the broader community (71).

These qualities of the flow experience in museum communication will be further explored in relation to puppet exhibits' manipulation by visitors in Chapter Four.

The museum environment is perceived as a 'rich and rewarding environment in which learning can take place' (ibid: 39), and where knowledge is not seen as an end in itself but as an ongoing, non-directive journey. From this perspective, puppet practitioners' work is examined according to its contribution in stimulating visitors' imagination and critical thinking by filling a series of *gaps.* In the museum puppetry projects studied here, these *gaps* also take many forms: they could indicate a distance between reality and fiction, nature and abstraction, signifier and signified, or a museum artefact and its original context beyond the exhibition. Gaps might refer to the in-between space that separates science from everyday life, language from visual images, or one human sense from another. A gap could also occur in the space between museum authority or expertise and visitors' experience and expectations, or the different ways we tend to express ourselves, from the heart or the mind.

As a rule, puppets are intrinsic gap makers. The three key gaps (two semantic and one optical) they create are also very concrete. The first is the one between the puppeteer and the manipulated object; the second is between action on stage and the audience; and the third relates to the abstractness of visual arts and is present in possible missing parts of constructions.

Creating and filling optical or semantic *gaps* could also be intended as a playful, engaging activity in its own right. The case studies in this thesis explore how such gaps are intended to be communicated and perceived by visitors, enabled by the techniques of puppetry.

Figure1: The puppeteer and constructor Chris Green trains the Skirball Cultural Center staff how to manipulate the Snow Leopard Puppet (photo by Marni Gittleman, courtesy of Skirball Cultural Center).

As both spectator and manipulator, the pleasure I personally get when I am compelled to engage my imagination or thinking when exposed to puppetry's concrete and easily recognisable imagery and empathy has often been very clear to me. For example, when a puppet's head and its tail are not physically connected, I automatically engage my visual imagination to see a whole body in between (Fig.1). In this way I feel some kind of self-fulfilment as a co-creator: I can identify or feel familiar with an image I complete with my

own imagination. Similarly, when I am exposed to dramaturgically meaningful object theatre metonymies, I automatically imagine with great eagerness the whole object, the entire action, the entire environment.

Most of the practitioners studied in this thesis work around these puppetry gaps and aim to provide visitors with firm enough scaffolds of humour, poetry and subversive images to stimulate their imagination, critical thinking or laughter to make at the end any associations with the museum collections or ideas (for a complementary analysis of the gap, see also the discussion on 'Distance sensitive objects' in Chapter One).

Learning thus focuses here on individual skills and experiences where 'the conclusions reached by the learner are not validated by whether or not they conform to some external standard of truth, but whether they "make sense" within the constructed reality of the learner' (Hein 2005: 34). As knowledge, in this context, is facilitated by story-telling and narrative development, it intends to resonate more with meaningful real life situations and the way the human mind functions (ibid: 151).

Moreover, I tend to view puppeteers not only as storytellers of the objects but equally as craftsmen as the term is analyzed by Richard Sennett (*The Craftsman* 2009). Recognizing the storyteller and craftsman in every puppeteer, I attempt to embed knowledge sharing fluidly in the mind of the community and co-participation and not solely within an elite of individual learners.

The main resource for examining the issue of knowledge as narrative, is Lisa Roberts' *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum* (1997), which extensively examines the role of social interactions, private reverie, fantasy and play in museum learning (Fig. 2).[16] What Roberts supports is that it is legitimate and more visitor friendly for museum interpretation to be based on narratives thoroughly documented rather than on information about facts. Based on the same idea of knowledge as narrative I will attempt to examine how fiction becomes often a challenge and an issue for debate and

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[16] Lisa Roberts is the former director of conservatories for the Chicago Park District and a museum interpretation specialist.

tensions between museum staff and puppeteers and the alternative compromises and negotiations around it.

Figure 2: Wall sign at the entrance of the Enchanted Palace exhibition at Kensington Palace, 20 May 2010.

Moreover, from the beginning of this study, I noticed that the concept of interactivity (as well as the interactive) was constantly recurring in discussions and fieldwork observations. Also, I discerned that the idea of interactivity, either as a theory or a practice, is remarkably popular in today's museum settings. However, in the literature I was studying, the term remained rather vague and not easily definable. Andrea Wintcomb, a scholar in the field of Cultural Heritage, and a former curator in many Australian museums, developed a great interest in interactivity within multimedia practices and 'politics of representations in museum exhibitions' (Wintcomb 2006: xviii). She points out that the term is often used to refer to interactive exhibits: 'interactivity is too often understood as simply an outcome of interactives. Yet there can be a vast gulf between interactive (as an adjective) and the possession of interactives (as a noun)' (Ibid: 360). Here, Wintcomb uses the noun 'interactives' to refer specifically to interactive exhibits and the adjective 'interactive' to refer to the broader sense of the term which implies a museum experience during which visitors are not merely passive receivers of information.

Interactivity on the other hand, is deeply embedded in the world of puppetry. According to the theorist Steve Tillis, puppets are by definition dependent on the audience's consent

(Tillis 1992: 17).[17] Unless spectators imaginatively 'co-create' (Bogatyrev 1983: 62) what appears on stage as a character with life, the puppet will always remain merely a manipulated object, without succeeding in incarnating any dramatic character whatsoever.

I would like to clarify here the way I use the term 'interactivity,' through the lenses of the two disciplines—puppetry and museum studies. As far as museums are concerned, interactivity brings us back to the basics, implying the general, though not always obvious, principle of dialogue. Wintcomb describes the idea of dialogue in reference to multimedia interactives, but I believe that her account is valid for any museum activity characterized as interactive:

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

Regarding museum puppetry as a form of live interpretation, the concept of interactivity becomes further complicated. It implies not only the relation between the audience and the stage but also the multifaceted relation between the performer and the manipulated objects.

Interactivity here also refers to the triggering of the audience's imagination as George Bernard Shaw explicitly described in his famous preface for his puppet play *Shakes versus Shav*: '[The puppets'] unvarying intensity of facial expression, impossible for living actors, keeps the imagination of the spectators continuously stimulated' (Shaw, cited in Hamlin 1965: 916). Shaw's comment suggests what has already been said; the term is embedded in the very essence of puppetry: 'a puppet exist[s] before an audience' (Tillis 1992: 17). Audience interactivity in museum puppetry will therefore be understood as multifaceted, multilayered audience participation, within which a meaningful visual/verbal narrative unfolds either by the manipulation or the construction of concrete objects/puppets (or *puppetesque* constructions).

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[17] For other theorists' definitions of the puppet see also Margaret Williams' discussion (2007: 119-132).

Finally, I understand museum puppetry interactivity to precede the actual performance or the final construction of a puppet exhibit. The term here also encompasses co-participation of the two initiating communities involved, museum staff and puppeteers.

For the second research question which focuses on the negotiations, challenges, tensions and compromises between puppeteers and museum staff I intend to mainly focus on the Lave & Wenger's theory on community of practice (2008). This said, it should be clear that the term community is not understood here, by any means, as 'some primordial culture sharing entity… [nor] does the term community imply necessarily co-presence, a well-defined identifiable group, or socially visible boundaries' (ibid.: 98). As Wenger clarifies:

> Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger et al 2002:4; see also Hansen, Anders and Moussouri 2004).

As Wenger explains more explicitly in his website[18] there are three 'crucial characteristics' developed within a community of practice. These are the domain of knowledge, the social relationships among the members, and the practice. The first suggests that the community of practice 'has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest'; the second suggests that members 'engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information... They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other'; and the third characteristic suggests that members are 'practitioners'—in other words, they 'develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice'. This process 'takes time and sustained interaction'.[19]

I intend to use this theory to examine museum representatives and puppeteers as two distinct communities of practice coming from seemingly unrelated backgrounds (museum studies, puppetry) but still having some common grounds: the need to explore the world of

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[18] http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm (accessed 2 February 2012).

[19] http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm (accessed 2 February 2012).

objects (with museums focusing more on their history and physical characteristics and puppeteers focusing more on object stories, construction and manipulation techniques) and to communicate them to the audience. Especially in those cases where there is a closer collaboration between puppeteers and the museum staff (Chapter Three) I will focus on those cases where each group of professionals holds contradicting expectations from a learning activity (playful and subversive versus didactic and serious). Also, as already implied in both research questions, I will investigate one of the most crucial issues both communities need to reflect upon when they initiate common projects: the intended learning outcomes and the intended conditions for learning in these projects.

Breakdown of chapters

Chapter One provides an overview of the puppets' communicative power and explores how puppetry's theoretical and practical frames can be used to conceptualize this artistic genre in general, but also in its applied form. It explores the sign system of puppetry, based on relevant techniques and theories, and introduces readers to the world of puppets. This chapter also aims to bridge the gap between the field of art and humanities and the field of social sciences.

Chapter Two explores how puppeteers and puppets' imagery takes the form of a co-created narrative and intends to facilitate museum communication based on the idea of interactivity and live interpretation. This type of museum puppetry involves the practitioner's physical presence. It relies heavily on storytelling and performance skills; it can vary from a devised participatory piece, to folk puppetry or a puppet workshop. Also, this chapter examines the idea of puppetry's co-created narratives in relation to the debates around the sense of touch in museums.

Chapter Three studies various types of close collaborations between museums and puppeteers during the preproduction of live interpretation museum puppetry projects. It is more focused on the second research question by examining various issues raised among the two communities of practice (for example, the authenticity issue or the stigmatization and prejudices against puppetry).

Chapter Four explores how puppeteers and puppets' imagery takes the form of a co-created narrative from the perspective of interactive puppet-exhibits. It looks at interactive constructions (puppet exhibits) in terms of puppetry imagery, building techniques and narrative. This type of practice suggests a way of re-evaluating the idea of play by positioning the visitor as manipulator in a 'flow experience'. The chapter also investigates the sense of touch (already introduced in chapter two) and how this neglected sense intends to sharpen vision and vice versa.[20]

Chapter Five synopsises the main findings and general conclusions and recommendations drawn from the previous chapters.

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[20] The type of museum puppetry concerning puppet exhibits is often partly, if not entirely, a museum designer's or curator's job. In such cases, builders are usually professional puppeteers themselves (Chris Green). Alternatively, they are just puppet builders and, as such, they have close collaborations with puppeteers (Penny Saunders - Forkbeard Fantasy). Others are officially known simply as exhibit designers, but their puppet-like constructions directly reflect the impact of puppetry techniques or puppet narratives (Tim Hunkin).

Chapter One

Puppets as communicative tools

Puppetry is a celebration of the dynamism and diversity of popular culture (Sherzer & Sherzer 1987: 3).

Interviewee: Where do you prefer performing?
Punchman: Anywhere where the audience will gather.[21]

A puppet is made to speak… (Ackerman 2005: 7).

This chapter investigates the puppetry world and its communicative power in a range of environments (theatre, schools, politics, television, museums, etc.). It studies the qualities and codes of puppets that facilitate the expression and communication of ideas and emotions. It explores how puppets have often been used for different reasons: their intention was to inspire us, to make us think, to refine our aesthetic taste, to enhance our body awareness, to proselytize, to release us from our instinctive drives, or even to enhance our communication skills. Finally, it examines how puppets are intended to make us laugh and to entertain us; in their long history, puppets have been most extensively used to share joy and fun. It introduces readers to the sign system of puppetry and distinguishes it from the sign system of theatre. It also aims to establish a common language for discussing museum puppetry in the context of museum interpretation and communication in the following chapters. It aims to throw some light on the distinctive characteristics of the medium, which set up the learning conditions of a *puppet in education* activity.

Last but not least it introduces the debate between funders, state authorities and the marginalised group artists (puppeteers) in the effort of the latter to protect the communicative aspect and the learning conditions of their art from meaningless, directive and unattractive didacticism.

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[21] G. Felix. Personal interview, 13 February 2009.

Puppets: communicative tools with special characteristics

> As long as it conveys character and personality, it is a puppet. And as long as the audience is willing to accept it as representation of a living creature, a version of themselves, it has the power to communicate… It can cross barriers of social and political taboos. It can be a mirror teaching us about ourselves (McIntyre 1998: Foreword).

Contemporary puppets have occasionally left the streets, the small scenes and anonymity, to participate in modern and sophisticated productions. They have climbed the stairs of grand opera houses such as the Metropolitan Opera of New York,[22] prestigious theatres like the National Theatre in London[23] or La Comédie Française in Paris.[24] Puppets are not only exhibited in museums but are also extensively used as a pedagogical tool in schools and museums, as well as television programmes and films (usually as stop animation).

In the following section, I will briefly outline seven parameters which, in my opinion, give this communicative power to puppets. These are drawn from puppet and object theorists such as Bogatyrev, Tillis, Jurkowski, Kaplin, Eichler, Zich, Blumenthal, Cohen, and others, as well as on two volumes on puppets in education: *Puppets with a Purpose: Using Puppetry for Social Change* (Unicef/ ed. McIntyre 1998) and *Puppetry in Education and Therapy* (eds. Matthew Bernier & Judith O'Hare 2005).

Material soul

If a puppet belongs to the material world, can it have a soul? And if so, how will we, as humans, treat it? The National Theatre and Handspring Puppet Company co-production, *War Horse*, clearly highlights two distinct worlds: the world of humans (actors) and the world of objects and puppets (animals such as horses, a goose, and a small child; see Figs. 3 and 4).

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[22] http://www.blindsummit.com/MadamButterfly.htm accessed 30 January 2011.

[23] http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2007/oct/18/theatre.michaelmorpurgo accessed 30 January 2011.

[24] http://www.liberation.fr/culture/010179725-don-quichotte-bien-ficele accessed 30 January 2011.

Figure 3: The back side of the larger than life horse constructions from *War Horse* backstage at the National Theatre in London (2008).

Inside (and outside) the constructions, manipulators strive to translate the (larger than life) horse's soul into rhythm and movement. They are literally feeling the resistance of the material and the heavy weight on their shoulders. Toby Olié, one of the manipulators of the protagonist horse (Joey) recalls:

> With all of these different impairments, an indefinable symbiosis has appeared between the three of us, where we are in a constant state of alert, a hypersensitivity to the puppet and to each other; so if one of us decides to move, or to articulate the horse, we are ready to follow (Olié 2008).[25]

A wooden goose,[26] together with the extraordinary war horses, mostly made out of cane, wood and fabric, start to breathe on stage as soon as (from their entrance, if not before)

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[25] Olié, cited at http://www.puppetcentre.org.uk/animationsonline/aotwentytwo/ao22_frontline.html accessed 17 May 2008.

[26] The manipulator of this puppet was Finn Caldwell, an experienced puppeteer and puppet director.

their materiality acquired a plastic movement. Creating such shockingly convincing transformations in puppetry usually demands thorough research, and an alert and sharpened sensitivity:

> Using video footage and farm visits to analyze how various parts of the horse react under different emotions, allowed us to communicate as much as possible with only an ear flick, a shoulder judder or a swish of the tail. (ibid).

This description implies that puppetry's visual images are not only theatrical and appealing, taking advantage of artistic techniques and craftsmen's technology, but may also involve a learning potential discerned in the abstract forms, the economy of movement and the gaps involved in the visual images. Although I did not conduct audience research, it is indicative that *War Horse,* with constructions based on well planned abstraction and minimalism (gaps), enabled me as a spectator to recognize familiar situations, creatures, and feelings in forms, movements and images. This was a deeply satisfying process for me, as it empowered me with the means to understand more with less and also to complete an image with my own imagination. This interaction didn't rely on my background knowledge of puppetry but on everyday experience and observation. Puppetry techniques were used here to focus my attention on the essence of physical laws, animal anatomy/biology and natural phenomena and also provided the right environment to sharpen my visual understanding and to trigger my imagination— I could assume together with all the other members of audience. They also established a platform to explore ways of decoding visual perception and recomposing it into a new meaningful image according to my own worldview and desire in a particular moment. The idea that this took place within a dramatic narrative also provided an appropriate setting for me to open up, to feel touched and to approach the knowledge involved in the visuals within a meaningful experience.

Like any inanimate object, puppets share certain common attributes with other inanimate objects, props or pieces of set design on stage. Since puppets belong to the broader world of material objects, they can interact with and live among other objects on stage. As Steve Tillis states: 'When a live actor is surrounded by what obviously are nothing more than

stage-props and stage-flats, he can seem ludicrous, taking seriously what no audience would so take' (1990: 12).

Even if both human and puppet worlds seem to be present and quite vivid on stage, at many points in *War Horse* these remain rather separate or scarcely meet.

It seemed to me at these points that the actors (with some luminous exceptions) faced puppets (especially the spectacular and magnificently constructed horses made by Handspring Company) as if they were colleagues (human actors), without succeeding in fully entering their world, the *world of objects*.

Figure 4: Adrian Kohler, founder member of Handspring Company, demonstrates how to manipulate the Goose puppet from *War Horse* (2008).

If for humans puppet theatre is an illusion, for puppets, living in a material world such as a stage or museum gallery is equal to living among peers. In this sense, the material world is puppets' everyday life; it is their reality. Unsurprisingly, it always takes a special effort for an actor to interact with this world. It demands a special kind of acting, quite different from

what it is found in mainstream theatre. In this type of acting, the actor does not only react to his 'partner' on stage but also somehow justifies its existence through adjustments in movement, posture and tone of voice that acknowledge the puppet's existence. If possible everything that happens on stage should relate in some way to this puppet.

The situation becomes a bit more complicated when voice is added to puppet manipulation. This is when the manipulator not only 'stirs up' the puppet's soul by moving it in space, but also literally becomes its voice and makes it speak. For this purpose, puppeteers quite often distort their voice to make it more puppet-like and keep it within the puppets' material environment (Jurkowski 1990: 28). Today, there is an even stronger need to distort the puppeteer's voice as puppets, beyond their inanimate materiality, may be non-realistic, abstract constructions or readymade objects (with no easily distinguishable limbs or head, for example). As Bogatyrev admits: 'It is difficult to imagine how a puppet made of cutlery (knives, forks, spoons) or figures made from laboratory equipment (the Martian musical comedians) could talk and sing in ordinary human voices' (1983: 61). For this purpose, puppeteers use technical means to distort the voice of puppets. A device inserted in the mouth, referred to in Britain as a swizzle. It was once 'a secret of the profession,' though this is no longer the case, as puppet historian George Speaight attests (1990: 44-5).

However, it should be made clear that even if we take for granted that puppet theatre belongs to the world of the objects, this is not exactly the case when the puppeteer is visible on stage. Puppeteers' manipulation of objects/puppets, as Kavrakova-Lorenz supports, is a 'synergetic form of art… [where] a figure capable of existence considered as a subject, comes into being, identical neither with the puppet nor with the player; it is something else' (cited in Jurkowski 1990: 22).

I think this synergetic spirit was what was mostly missing from the actors' interaction with the puppets in *War Horse*: this third world where material and human souls interact with each other using a common code for communication.

Distance-sensitive object

Messages in puppetry are blended and filtered in the spaces created between each one of its three main components: manipulator, puppet and spectator. But these spaces —these gaps — are particularly fragile as well as dynamic. To borrow a phrase from Levinas' theory of the Other, these spaces should be treated 'without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance' (2007: 41).

I think *The Muppet Show* is a unique example for investigating how the show's popular guests manage — some more efficiently than others — to dismount their ego,[27] recognize and protect this space between them and their animated interlocutor and enter gently and meaningfully into the Muppets' world. Gently and with humour, the guests interact with the Muppets. Guests stay open and let their response be affected by Muppets' action and presence; they believe in them. They take the Muppets as real hosts and feel honoured to be invited into their world (the TV show). They seem to tune their energy, gaze, voice, length of words, rhythm, and form their body movements and posture according to this *gap* between them and the Muppets. Once the gap is securely established, it is precise and clear, then action can take place naturally. The guests' awareness of and attitude towards this gap intends to make the TV audience more eagerly and willingly suspend their disbelief and respond to this surreal situation.

In contrast to the actor's theatre where the actor appears 'as himself, as a character, or as both at the same time,' in the puppet theatre the options are multiplied: there the 'distance between the puppet and the donor of motion and donor of voice,' determines not only the clarity but also the variety of the show (Jurkowski 1990: 24). This is especially the case with Bunraku puppet theatre, where puppeteers are visible on stage as they manipulate the puppets; there 'the audience attention is oscillating between the object as actor (i.e. having life) and acted upon (i.e. inanimate thing)' (Green and Pepicello 1983: 156).

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[27] I believe that this literal distance between the manipulator and the puppet acts also as an 'ego controller.' Concentration in movement and use of voice doesn't leave much space for the manipulator's ego to outshine this sharing.

Similarly to the Muppet-style puppets, classic Punch and Judy glove puppets are also held close to the body of the puppeteer and have a different appeal to spectators than puppets manipulated from a distance, such as marionettes. According to Jurkowski, marionettes seem to be more independent than hand puppets. As Eichler explains, '[the marionette] forms a completely self-dependent and unreal art of expression that is a world of its own, in which acts the mechanical law of puppets' (Eichler, cited in Jurkowski 1990: 24).

Similarly to Jurkowski, the puppeteer, puppet designer and theorist Stephen Kaplin's Puppet Tree suggests that a distinctive characteristic of puppetry is the relationship between the puppeteer and the puppet. According to Kaplin's graphic, the type of manipulation (character role, masks, body puppets, hand puppets, marionettes, remote control figures, shadow figures, animated figures, computer generated figures, virtual puppetry) and the distance between the performer and what is being manipulated are interdependent (Kaplin 2001: 21). Kaplin gives an illustrated analysis of this theory, referring to the various genres of puppetry, depending on the number of people who manipulate the puppets and the physical proximity between the puppeteer and the performing object. The diagram starts with the actor and their role, he then proceeds to the mask, and continues to body puppets, hand puppets, rod puppets, marionettes, remote control figures, shadow figures, ending up with animated figures, computer generated figures, and finally virtual performer objects (ibid: 18-25).

Among a number of manipulation techniques, I consider physical distance (provided by the way the puppet is constructed) as the easiest way to arrive at the puppet's autonomy. The puppet's autonomy has been used for a range of purposes, from exculpating a committed artist from charges in non-democratic regimes ('don't blame me, blame the puppet,' Aronoff 2005: 118) to freeing a shy child or performer from fear of exposure. There are two funny real- life examples that best portray this *blame it on the puppet* quality. Once, a puppeteer was accused of using his puppets to support his political beliefs. Kašpárek (the Czech equivalent of Punch) accompanied him to court. There, while defending himself, the puppeteer brought the puppet to act as the adverse party in order to lay all blame on it (Bogatyrev 2001: 89). Similarly, in the 19th century, when authorities tried to impose

German as the official language for puppet theatre, the folk puppeteer Kopecky explained how it was not possible for his puppets to follow this rule since 'although he could speak German, his puppets did not know that language' (ibid: 90).

Non-threatening stranger

> When manipulated… [the puppets] are accepted as distinct personalities …[they] take responsibilities of their own actions. To criticize, to argue with a puppet figure makes you look foolish and ridiculous. Therefore children readily accept a puppet and it is a safe house for them when they use them (Chessé 2005:13).

The puppet's character depends on the puppet's appearance and materiality, on the expressions it can take through the quality of its movements and positions in space. Outer and inner worlds merge in the appearance of the puppet and turn it into a being with 'no movement un-intentioned' (Ackerman 2005: 6); a being which cannot lie.

The puppets' materiality occasionally favours the expression of destructive drives. Especially in adult puppetry, some African initiation rituals or political propaganda, puppets might become really disturbing and evoke anxieties. As Professor Matthew I. Cohen, explains: 'Puppets are by nature silent, and can be magically destroyed and magically reconstructed in performance. Only puppet fetishists might protest against this "fair use" practice. Much adult puppetry from Ubu to the present capitalizes on the puppet's destructive ontology' (Cohen, 2007: 122-3). On the other hand, experiences from everyday life and growing puppet in education practices worldwide suggest also that puppets never ceased to be 'intimate and familiar objects associated with the world of childhood play' (ibid: 119).

During the Athens University Museum's museum puppetry programme, Why on Earth Would You Study Science? (Fig. 5), there was a scene set in Galileo's workshop. This was set in the science gallery, and participants were standing around the museum exhibits and a small stage setting. Many times during the programme, nine to eleven year-old students were literally touching Galileo (a wooden table top puppet); they were spontaneously talking to or even teasing him. Although this slowed down the programme, it also

suggested that children are not at all hesitant in physical contact with the world of objects (as opposed to touching, for example, the museum educator). They were playful in their interaction as they followed the narrative. They felt as much at ease with the puppets as they felt with their peers.

Figure 5: An articulated replica of an Anatomic Atlas, Galileo(table top puppet) and Vesalius (articulated two dimensional figure) from the programme Why on Earth Would You Study Science*?* (constructions by Stathis Markopoulos - photo from the Athens University Museum archive).

Puppeteers repeatedly witness the puppet changing from an inanimate, dead object into a moving 'thinking' object with feelings and specific intentions. This object unfolds its own world as it reacts to the human world. Although this *stranger* might manifest superhuman or destructive powers within a fictional narrative, its death (inanimate state) is always present; its life is threatened at every minute, as it is always dependent on its manipulator.

Beyond their materiality, the usually small size and their imperfect copying of reality reinforce puppets' dependence on their manipulators: they are 'controllable'. In 1923, O. Zich, the composer and professor of aesthetics at Charles University in Prague, proposed a twofold way of perceiving puppets. He says that they can be viewed as 'frozen,' 'small,' 'lifeless dolls' and invite us to 'take them as people… [which] invariably amuses us' (Zich, cited in Bogatyrev 1983: 48). But they can also be perceived as 'living people':

> Our awareness that the puppets are not alive recedes, and we get the feeling
> of something inexplicable, enigmatic, and astounding […] I think that if our

puppets were as large as people, we too, would feel uneasy, and only their reduced size forestalls this feeling, imparting to them instead a quality of serious mysteriousness (ibid: 48-9).[28]

There is also a long-standing puppetry tradition in non-western and developing countries. Puppet in education practices are very popular and have been extensively used as communicative tools to cross social, cultural and political barriers. It is unsurprising that in many countries people acknowledge puppets' inherent simplicity, clarity and the friendliness that 'channels aggression and pain,' without 'fear and personal embarrassment' (McIntyre 1998: 44). They are often used to communicate difficult or delicate subjects.

For example, in South Africa, puppets have been used to help children 'get back their childhood' and in other places children's shows have been used as an indirect way to communicate messages to the parents (ibid: 26). According to the UNICEF volume *Puppets with a Purpose: Using Puppetry for Social Change* (1998), puppets have been used to communicate about hygiene, health issues, sex education (teenage pregnancy, AIDS prevention), child's rights, multiculturalism, girls' education, social tolerance and breastfeeding.

In prisons they have been used to touch on complex and sensitive issues such as AIDS or rape:

> Puppets are a way of mediating and distancing the pain and humiliation of certain sexual acts… The prisoners seem able to discuss their vulnerability and even their need for sexual power with much greater openness than before (McIntyre 1998: 44).

In schools, children learn about health, hygiene and nutrition. At home, however, their parents may take this knowledge as a criticism of their way of living; they take it as a personal offence and criticize teachers for being ignorant of other communities' traditions

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[28] Bogatyrev (1983) criticized Zich's analysis for taking two distinct artistic mediums, puppet theatre and actors' theatre, as if they belonged to one and the same system. However, it cannot be denied that Zich's analysis of puppetry is fresh and profound considering his times.

and needs. However, parents are often more open to the simple and funny stories of school puppet performances. They feel more comfortable and enjoy watching and listening to the non-didactic, non-authoritative mediators manipulated by their children (ibid: 26). Bad habits or behaviours are portrayed here without pointing the finger at a real member of society (ibid: 4).

In the case of delicate issues, puppets' simplicity seems to be valuable. As Cheryl Henson explains: 'Their simplicity allows the audience to hear difficult messages' (McIntyre 1998: Foreword). The Namibian priest, Isaac Begi Mutuwawira, who founded Puppets against AIDS in 1994 says: 'The paan performances tell stories about how the characters could become infected with or avoid HIV. They also answer questions from the audience… [the spectators] can laugh but they know deep down it is a true message' (ibid: 39).

In developing countries, as elsewhere, the friendliness of the puppets is further highlighted by the puppeteers' formative research. As a rule, puppeteers try to be well informed about their subject, to be accurate with their narratives and also, if possible, to visit communities before giving a performance there. In this way, puppeteers gather all the information needed to adapt their narratives, their characters, and their interaction with the audience according to local problems, heroes, customs, folk stories and culture (ibid: 20). They might also have to cope with the communities' prejudices, according to which a good show may traditionally be a long lasting event, without too much humour or dramatic special effects (ibid: 14). On the other hand, as will be examined later in this chapter, they have to cope with their sponsors, who often favour dull didactic stories deprived of economy, humour, music or fast pace.

Finally, even in the extreme conditions of war, puppets have a significant role to play. Puppet narratives based on real examples where people have helped to end suffering are often used to comfort and give hope to those experiencing or recovering from violence or conflict situations. People, including children, taking positive action amidst their pain and regaining some control over their lives are used as role models in some of the stories developed with puppets for participants traumatized by war (McIntyre 1998: 40). In such

delicate situations, the puppet environment is particularly reinforcing as there are 'few reserves of tolerance for fictional conflict' (ibid: 39). Traumatized children need to feel secure, as they need help to cope with experiences such as abuse, being orphaned, or having parents who have been forced to flee as refugees (ibid.: 35).

Fluent speaker of the international language of images, movements and humour

There are some types of puppetry which are heavily reliant on verbal narratives. This is the case with some traditional forms, such as Japanese Bunraku and Indonesian Wayang Kulit, or with the more recent example of the renowned and multitalented Canadian solo puppeteer-actor-writer, Ronnie Burckett. However, as is the case with other performative arts, puppet theatre may use, or combine, a very limited amount of words, a fictional language or just a live or pre-recorded soundscape.

No matter what their style is, all puppeteers (and puppet theorists) acknowledge and try to take full advantage of the puppets' powerful visual language, their appearance and movements. They recognize that it is thanks to their powerful visual language that puppets manage to reach 'across cultural and social barriers and into the minds and hearts of all the world's children' (Smith 2005: 83). As Lesley Smith, a puppet practitioner and educator, states: 'Puppetry… gives the speaker a way to state a thought in a strong way before a word is uttered. It reaches into the psyche of the speaker to find the words that reflect emotions and thoughts that are central to [them]' (2005: 83).

In many cases, dramaturgy and how the puppet looks and moves progress together. While they experiment with a newborn puppet, puppeteers tend to be particularly attentive to their distinctiveness and expressive skills. In the beginning, they might prefer to move it in space silently, without using any speech or voice at all (Sivori-Asp 1990: 3). The visual narratives might rely on simple recognisable gestures or postures indicating 'come here,' 'hello,' 'I am happy,' 'I like you,' 'the puppet is sleeping,' etc. In other forms of narrative, as in Wayang Kulit shadow puppetry, movements are more sophisticatedly codified; they are more complex and less realistic. In these cases, however, it seems that just the quality of the

movement is sometimes enough to communicate the main message even to non-initiated audiences.

Moreover, puppetry's strong visuals facilitate quick changes in time and place. Miniature worlds are built and dissipated instantly. Particularly during a learning activity within a museum context where time is limited, this proves to be very useful. For example, for the programme Why on Earth Would You Study Science*?* at the Athens University Museum, several two dimensional articulated puppets were 'planted' near selected exhibits. These were animated just to advance the plot, make a brief interaction between the young visitors and the museum artefacts, or pass on information in a playful manner.

Often humour in puppet theatre is based in the funny synergy between puppeteer and puppet. In more modern productions comic scenes are sometimes built around the paradoxical convention of having the puppet and its manipulator both visible on stage. This is the case with the Scottish company Puppet State's *The Man Who Planted Trees,* where a puppet dog, in its basket, is complaining about its manipulator who is always behind it, indiscreetly following it wherever it goes. However, comedy in puppetry is often based entirely on non-verbal scenes. Popular puppet theatre like Punch and Judy or Karagiozis shadow theatre build entire comic scenes based on slapstick action. Anthropologist Frank Proshcan maintains that 'body humor, in which folk puppetry often abounds, or slapstick and buffoonery, refer to what we might be tempted to call universal understandings' (1987: 39).

Puppet narrative is further enhanced by the puppet's inherent comic potential, evident in the way it is constructed and moves. This might be revealed in comic scenes where puppets attempt to imitate or exaggerate details of human and animal movements, or just by the caricature style of their appearance:

> […] all of the expressive elements of a comic puppet show, the language, the characteristics of the voice, and the movements of the puppets and their figurative grotesque features, are apt to provoke laughter in the audience,

even before the plot, situation, and actions are appreciated as comic. (Pasqualino 1987:10).

Free spirited explorer… a visitor looking for contact in the human world

> […] the puppet, once having developed a life of its own, seeks to continue the relationship and turns it in directions that often have not been consciously intended by its creator (Ackerman 2005: 9).

Puppets have appeared in open-air sites as part of secular and religious life since antiquity (see also Blumenthal 2005; Bell 2008: 97-122; La Marionette Dans la Rue 1999). Within a street ambiance which often makes communication a real challenge, puppeteers have an extra advantage as George Bernard Shaw notes of the puppets:

> though stiff and continually glaring at you with the same overcharged expression, yet move you as only the most experienced living actors can. What really affects us in the theatre is not the muscular activities of the performers, but the feelings they awaken in us by their aspect; for the imagination of the spectator plays a far greater part than the exertions of the actors. The puppet is the actor in his primitive form (cited in Boehn 1972: Introduction).

McIntyre also underlines that 'puppets can tour and travel even to the areas that are unreached by the mass media, in rugged rural places; they can even journey strapped to the back of a donkey' (1998: 7). This flexibility is what makes puppets ideal for working in the least developed countries or in difficult to reach venues.

As soon as the audience gives its consent, to recall Tillis' definition of the puppet noted in the previous chapter (p.26), and enters the puppet's world, it actually gives its approval to explore the world from the puppet's perspective:

> If a puppet is put on one's hand, it is impossible to keep it quiet. It has a mind of its own. If it wants to interrupt, it does. Its personality comes from some part of the puppeteer that is dominant enough for it to have been created as a concrete visualization. It is a statement of thoughts that may not have been consciously expressed. Here, those thoughts are not only stated,

but stated strongly. This aspect of puppetry makes it a dynamic tool for developing language communication skills with both children and adults. A puppet is an extension of the personality but it has a greater freedom to express this personality. It can go where the person is afraid to go. It can speak with mistakes without worry. It can fly. It can sing (Ackerman 2005: 8).

This exploratory quality of puppets is also significant for puppets in education pedagogy. First, it should be stressed that, unlike puppets used for political propaganda, the strength of puppets in education lies not only in the delivery of a message. It seems that puppets in education provide the classroom foremost with an adventurous playful journey; the journey being more important than the destination.

'Learning situations with animation figures [puppets] provide multiple opportunities for dialogue and polyphony' reports Hamre of this multi-sensory friendly pedagogical tool (2004: 82). Second-generation American puppeteer Bruce Chessé sees puppetry as a synthetic art form, which 'encompasses the entire spectrum of the arts and it involves individual choices that allow one to be selective' (2005: 13).

Despite the puppets' pedagogical potential, their use in the classroom often raises the 'final show versus everyday facilitator-tool' debate, as many teachers complain about the limited time they have to integrate puppets in their classes (O'Hare 2005: 64). As most of the papers in *Puppetry in Education and Therapy* (2005) suggest, puppets may not necessarily lead to a single performance at the end of the school year. The production of a full puppet show seems often to be an overambitious and complicated process in the context of school curricula. The leading figure of puppets in education, academic and puppeteer Judith O'Hare further explains:

> When the goal is either creating theatre… or making a statement in human condition the puppeteer works for perfection in: manipulation, staging… aesthetic and artistic presentation of the theatrical piece. When the goal is education, the puppet becomes a vehicle for expression of the child's understanding of life, literature, social studies, etc. (2005: 64).

'The arts are being squeezed off the curriculum either because they are considered too expensive, or because schools are too busy testing children in other subjects, such as maths and English,' comments Chris Hastings (2008), the *Telegraph*'s arts and media editor. In the same article, Nicholas Hytner (artistic director of the National Theatre since 2003) concurs: '[A] generation has been deprived of the tools they should have been given to open a door [to the arts] that can otherwise seem quite daunting' (cited in Hastings 2008). In his open criticism to the American system, the well known English playwright Mark Ravenhill complains that 'evangelicals and fundamentalists have now strangled school curricula and stunted, if not actually dictated, the agendas of arts organisations, leaving the nation culturally poorer' (2008). Within such education strategies, a puppet show is often considered a real waste of time and money.[29]

Acknowledging this fact, it seems to me that thinking of puppets as belonging only to the artist's workshop or the stage doesn't help the already difficult and ongoing debate about the general role of the arts in education and more specifically of applied puppetry.

Ultimate metaphor

> [...] puppets, though normally associated with gross buffoonery, are poetic.
> They are, because they are not human, immediately metaphors (Bass 1992:
> 1).

'Born out of wood, of ivory, of metal or what you will, he is content to obey his nature - their nature. He doesn't pretend to be flesh and blood,' maintained Gordon Craig (1921: 109), implying that originality is intrinsic to a puppet's inanimate materiality.

In fact, it is this materiality that saves puppets from the pitfall of a latent realism that, Craig noted, often troubles human actors. This English theatre reformer envisioned that actors might one day be replaced by Über-marionettes. He reacted strongly against the naturalistic theatre of his time: 'Do away with the real tree… do away with the real actor, and you do

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[29] Having said this, the Hands On Symposium on Applied Puppetry (28 January 2011) organised by Little Angel Theatre, and various uses of puppets in education demonstrated in the Theatre Applications conference (21-23 April 2010) organised by Central School of Speech and Drama evidence the pedagogical potential of the medium if not a growing interest in the field.

away with the means by which a debased stage realism is produced and flourishes' (Craig 2001: 142).

While Craig's ideas reflected the overwhelming naturalism that prevailed in the theatre of his time, during the same period, Bogatyrev was defending the uniqueness of the puppet theatre's sign system. As already noted, Bogatyrev held that the puppet sign system is based on the visual aspect of the performance and the unity of the puppeteer and the puppet; most importantly, it is definitely separate from the sign system of the human theatre (1983: 51-2).

The more stylized the puppets are, the further they depart from everyday reality, but simultaneously they gain more in adaptability, flexibility and thus universality. 'The stylized face… reflects the puppet's various experiences… the more schematized a puppet's face is, the more possibilities it has to participate in different situations' (ibid: 56-7).

Even in puppet shows that attempt to imitate actors on stage by mimicking their movement, speech and other human features (Bogatyrev 1983: 54), puppets still belong to their semantically autonomous sign system: the world of matter. In this sense, puppets are congenital ultimate metaphors and the more abstract and schematized they are, the more adaptive they become to various contexts and dramatic situations. In other words, the further they depart from naturalism, the more they are empowered as metaphors.

In fact, puppets are a useful medium both for surrealistic or more realistic representations. As they can masterfully copy the form and characteristics of a human face, puppet builders can render the medium ideal for realistic historical representations:

> From Rajasthani court drama to Beatlemania, plays have often included historical characters… Puppets can be made to order… Beyond the cheeky suspension of disbelief that any puppet creates, portrait puppets spark that peculiar pleasure of recognition that impersonators and impressionists evoke (Blumenthal 2005: 88).

The rigidity of a frozen facial expression, especially in puppets made from hard materials such wood or metal, might sometimes make puppets at rest to have an almost 'death-like' look. However, as soon as the puppet starts moving in space, a skilful manipulator manages to soften it up, and the puppet starts looking for contact. I believe that this balance between softness and rigidity, the real and ideal, the Dionysian and the Apollonian aspect of the puppet within a narrative spoken and/or 'sculpted' in space, makes it look at the same time fragile, happy and noble.

Puppets are specifically tailored to do a job, favouring the economy of the visual and eliminating or leaving out (in the best case) any other unnecessary function that could weaken the core of their personality. I think this is why, from the moment the puppet enters the stage, its intentions are clear and precise and this 'adds power to the portrayal of ideas' (Ackerman 2005: 10). Because of this fact puppets have the potential to 'crystallize […] ideas and bring... participation between a person's inner and outer self that is tuned in to a basic "primordial" understanding' (ibid: 10).

Finally, there are some puppeteers who claim that the more the puppet obeys the rules of verisimilitude, the greater its appeal to the audience. The more the puppet carries some 'humanness' or 'animalness' in its movements and actions, the more whimsical it becomes when it breaks natural laws and starts flying, stretching, dying or resurrecting. If this does not occur, as Koshiro notes: '[I]n most cases, because puppets themselves are extraordinary, if the content of the puppet does not fall within the bounds of ordinary, shared concepts, then the performance will not communicate with its audience' (1990: 20).

All the above communicative characteristics of puppets have been further developed by the applied form of puppetry (puppets in education), in the service either of political or educational purposes.

Puppets in politics

 'Puppets are inveterate political animals. And like many politicians, they can play on both sides of the fence' says Eilleen Blumenthal (163: 2005) and she implies that puppets have

quite often been used either for socio-political propaganda or critic. On the other hand, Peter Schumann supports that 'the radicality of puppet theatre derives from the definition of puppet theatre as applied and socially embedded sculpture' (1991: 81). He thus focuses on the applied form of puppetry and implies that puppetry -in contrasts to some other art forms- is an art very close to real social life.

Paschalis comments on the satirical demon, a fictional figure often affiliated to certain puppet characters:

> The satirical demon laughs like an actor presenting, mutatis mutandis, social situations in which evil is triumphantly present; yet, as he is considered ontologically identical with them, his presence tends to highlight, to reveal and also to mock them, inciting a dark laughter. This humiliating revelation of situations that appear to be socially acceptable and even respectable as morbidly silly —and, in fact, of a diabolical order — constitutes the core of their ridicule. The satire here is a peculiar, imitative dramatization of the social sores, with the demon posing as an actor in a variety of roles (2006: 106).[30]

Considering both the bold and sensitive nature of the puppets, I would like to refer briefly to a few examples used in politics. These examples show how this fundamentally subversive medium has been used for crude propaganda to shape the minds of citizens, and how it has also been used to insert thought-provoking gaps into social conventions, preconceptions and taboos, either via slapstick comedy or subtler techniques.

Since the mid-20th century, the American puppeteer Carol Fijan has been entertaining her audience with comical skits. Throughout her career, she remained faithful to her principles to always be respectful of other people's religion, nationality, race and disability. Her puppet narratives and characters were full of disguised messages on sensitive issues such as drugs, war, segregation, espionage and bullying (Fijan 2006). Reacting against segregation of any kind she performed the skit *Central Spy Six* where some 'Obratzov style' styrofoam finger puppets sang (ibid: 26):

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[30] Extract translated by Vassilis Paschalis from Greek language.

We are the co-eds of Central Spy
Espionage we glorify
Soon we'll start upon our labors
Spying on our country's labors
We're all American and true
Loyal to the red, white, blue.
Always ready to do or lie
We're the co-eds of Central Spy. (ibid:28)

Among the audience there were once some Russian puppeteers from the company of the great Soviet puppeteer Sergei Obratzov. They were amazed at Fijan's company being so open with their political satire and having 'no fear of government interference' (ibid: 28).

Eileen Blumenthal (*Puppets and Puppetry,* 2005) also describes how puppets played a central role in political messages for or against the oppressing authorities. Their inherent humour and seemingly innocent or classical narrative, as well as their apparent triviality, intended to facilitate the dissemination of ideologies in a non-provocative way. Authorities did not really see a threat in inanimate objects. Puppets were used to openly satirise or criticise regimes —a puppet allegory was once performed before Napoleon III, although the show was very critical of him (ibid: 167). Of course, many times puppeteers have been caught, jailed or even beaten up. This perhaps explains why the Russian artist Eduard Berdudsky decided to keep locked in his house a gigantic kinetic sculpture titled *The Tower of Medieval Sciences,* made 1978-1989. The piece showed 'people and rats toiling away, often under the watchful eyes of Lenin and Stalin,' a theme incompatible with 'Soviet official dictates' (ibid 169).

Blumenthal also refers to numerous examples where puppets were used for propaganda by political parties, dictatorial regimes in power (such as the Nazis or the Russian Communist Party), or oppositional parties. Primarily, puppets were required to conform to the political programmes of the party. The Russian Bolshevik regime converted the well known Petrushka to promote the authority's anti-bourgeois ideology. The Nazis, in their own turn, not only engaged Kasperle to spread their ideology, but also transformed him by shortening his nose and 'dying' his hair blonde; thus, the German folk hero was modified to better represent the ideal of the Aryan race (ibid.: 163).

During hard times, puppets from the people were also used to encourage the oppressed in their fights for democracy. For example, during World War II, Czech artists were performing in basements and private homes. Some, like Josef Skupa and many of his colleagues, 'landed in Nazi prisons and concentration camps' (ibid: 174) because of such illegal activities. Obratzov ridiculed Mussolini and portrayed him as 'a bulldog, Hitler as a German Shepherd and the Vichy France leader Petain as a poodle, all barking and yapping' (ibid: 163). These puppets were on the side of those who seemed to be 'manipulated' by others. They were on the side of the poor, the weak, the oppressed, or the rebellious (ibid: 171). Such figures include the Turkish Karagöz and Greek Karagozis, the French Guignol and the English Punch and Judy, the American Bread and Puppet, or to mention a more recent example, the South African-Australian Gary Friedman's 'Puppets for Democracy'. Furthermore, effigies were often part of the political or social groups' ideologies, such as Eugenio Barba's Mr Peanut body puppet. It is noteworthy that the performer inside Mr Peanut became the target of a police attack under the Pinochet regime in Chile (ibid: 170).

The following two examples demonstrate the use of puppets for propaganda and advertisement. They also highlight in more detail the complex role of puppeteers within these contexts as negotiators of meaning and learning conditions of their shows.

Superstar dalangs

> Optimally, a new story has to have enough familiar elements so that it is not instantly rejected yet be distinctive enough that it compels attention and engages the mind. The audience has to be prepared in one sense and surprised in another (Gardner 2006: 74).

The popular Indonesian rod puppet theatre *wayang golek* lasts all night. During the shows the (often religious) figure of dalang who is a highly skilful puppeteer, singer and narrator, builds strong ties with the community (Weintraub 2004: 15).

Under Suharto's New Order regime, Indonesia underwent immense changes in economic policies and culture. It welcomed foreign investment, new technologies and infrastructures of media communications. It opened quite rapidly to the global market and consumerism

(ibid: 5). The regime 'wanted to nationalize culture … and modernize tradition' (ibid: 7). For this, it recruited the popular master puppeteers as government officers to help Suharto spread his political ideology and 'educate' his people, or perhaps to 'mystify people and make them more ignorant' as one dalang argues (ibid: 116).

As Weintraub noted about twenty years ago, collaborations with the state had an impact on the strong bonds that dalang[31] had with their traditional art form and their audiences. Their struggle was twofold: with the state authorities and with the supporters of more traditional forms of wayang golek.

Weintraub wrote that in the 1990s dalang aimed to satisfy their faithful audience while, as cultural agents hired by the state, they had to deliver specific messages about family planning and the economy, for example. The same dalang were often accused by traditionalists of infusing humour into a medium (wayang golek) that was traditionally meant to have religious roots (ibid: 15-16).

Despite their raised status through taking on officially-sponsored performances, dalang were therefore in a difficult moral position: '[T]hey represent the often conflicting interests of the state on the one hand, and their popular audiences, on the other' (ibid: 7).

In reality, many dalang shared their audience's beliefs. In order to balance their own political beliefs with those of their sponsors, they often kept most of the state's promotional material for the beginning of the show, when the officials were still around (ibid: 5), and they responded to the situation with what they knew well— humour.

> Through entertainment dalang raised critical questions in performance about the leadership and future of Indonesia's New Order, enabling spectators to participate in narratives that challenged the hegemony of the state. In the restricted public space of Indonesia's New Order government, entertainment and humor were essential for opening up spaces in which interesting narratives and conflicting ideological tendencies could be exposed (ibid: 127).

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[31] The Indonesian term dalang is both singular and plural.

Besides, humour had been infusing the wayang golek performances long before the beginning of Suharto's New Order, as it was required to enliven night-long performances. (ibid: 74).

Bhats of Rajasthani

Bhats are low status bards and puppeteers from Rajasthan, India. Bhats, similarly to dalang, have also taken on this double role of representing both the community and the state. As anthropologist Jeffrey Snodgrass explains, the messages that bhats communicate in their performances often contradict the ideas which they are supposed to be promoting. They are hired to advertise family planning, bank savings programmes, health care, alcohol abuse, life insurance: the modernist spirit of managing, planning and controlling the future. In other words, they have been asked to share messages that are altogether incompatible with their traditional way of thinking and living (2004: 63-88).

Plots, characters, direction and venues are all developed in consultation with sponsors. However, bhats manage to sabotage performances by cunningly manipulating the codes of their traditional art (using parody or humour) and indeed by running their own lives in an altogether different manner to what they preach on stage.

The bhats' rebellious spirit prevents them from aligning with elitist values. They favour the idea that both traditional elite and the modernist elite are corrupt. Thus, bhats strive to raise the audience's consciousness and contest, through humour, the idea of any authority whatsoever, even their own: 'Don't take what we say seriously, it is not real, it is just art, and we are just puppeteers trying to entertain' (ibid: 83).

The issues raised by the Indonesian dalang and the Indian bhats are very similar. Are they focused on economic gains or the genuine desire to 'open their audience's eyes'? Or are they victims of a modern westernised model that favours fast progress and fast income? Snodgrass' analysis suggests, however, that despite enjoying some extra income, such performers are still able to be subversive and communicative with the masses.

Educators who use puppets in any part of the world may need to make similar compromises vis-à-vis their own sponsors and bosses. As will become clear in the following chapters, any puppeteer who wishes to use puppets for pedagogical purposes will have to negotiate a number of issues, including preconceptions that stigmatise puppetry as a marginal subcultural form.

Puppets in education

> Toys and dolls take an active role in children's plays…. A child makes her doll move— she is a puppeteer. She scolds her doll in the stern—...she is an actor. She makes her doll stamp its foot and then laughs at the effect— she is [an] audience. After this early experience a child recognizes puppets as legitimate and natural (McIntyre 1998: 5).

> The kind of learning that takes place in the school proves far less natural than that which occurs in the fields, on the savannah, or on the streets (Gardner 2006: 135).

Very few thorough investigations have focused on the use of puppets in the classroom (Peck 2005: 74) and those that have tend to focus on primary school students. However, puppetry for school education is not only practiced today but a number of puppet educators have attempted occasionally to reflect upon their own practice.

According to those puppeteers (some of whom have a theoretical/academic background) puppets in education constitute an intrinsically holistic experience: cognitive, physical, emotional and experiential. As O'Hare explains:

> Recreating characters and stories with puppets helps children to absorb and remember what they have learned and internalize information so that they can retell the stories from the mind and heart. Puppets make an emotional as well as cognitive connection to ideas, information, stories, characters, literature and historical and life situations (2005: 2).

Puppet educators claim that puppetry is a useful learning communicative medium for various disciplines within the school curriculum, especially in lower grades. Puppets are

occasionally used in teaching science, language, history, reading, music, visual arts, drama, religious stories and other delicate issues such as sex education and social studies (O' Hare & Bernier eds. 2005).

According to puppets in education experts (O' Hare & Bernier eds. 2005; McIntyre 1998; Hamre 2004) puppets are genuinely non-authoritarian and tend only to demand obedience in comic ways. They also claim that puppets in education offer a meaningful, practical, secure, multidimensional, non-imposing experience and generate enthusiasm within a multi-sensory practice. Experts also say that puppetry in education also enhances children's confidence, imagination, creative expression and improves their memory through re-enactment; it encourages children's freedom to select from a vast range of possibilities. Moreover, they consider that puppets enable students 'to identify other's feelings and perspectives and respond empathetically to others' (Smith 2005: 85). So they consider them remarkably effective for enhancing interpersonal skills: they say that puppets promote cooperation and social interaction among students, they sharpen listening skills, they offer friendship where students speak through an alter ego, facilitate the exploration of behavioural issues, enable anger management learning, and help control the manipulator's ego. They also believe that puppets release children's fears, aggressions and frustrations in acceptable ways.

Indicatively, according to puppet practitioners, puppets in education practices can be summarized as follows (cf. O'Hare & Bernier eds. 2005; McIntyre 1998; Hamre 2004):

- students inform a puppet character about how they connected with a text and act out a favourite part to extend their understanding
- students read to a puppet (for building reading skills, comprehension and fluency)
- students write a script and let the puppet serve as a peer resource for ideas on how to handle difficult situations
- puppets introduce the class to ideas and routines
- puppets lead students in sharing daily news, poems and book reviews, or puppets and children consult each other on what book to read etc.

- puppets warm the classroom with informal play and improvisational dialogue

- puppets are unbiased judges in the case of student squabbles

- puppets encourage struggling students by sitting next to them as they work

Overall, puppet educators maintain that puppets are not only effective in exploring children's strengths and weaknesses, they also 'minimize […] the resistance to learning' (Mazzacane 2005: 60). Releasing someone's resistance is more significant in learning than convincing them of something, as Gardner suggests (2006: xii).

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored how theoretical and practical frames are used in various occasions to conceptualize puppetry both aesthetically and in its applied form. The chapter explored the sign system of puppetry, based on relevant techniques and theories, and introduces readers to the world of puppets. It also aimed to bridge the gap between the field of art and humanities and the field of social sciences.

In this chapter I pointed out that puppets can be custom built to incarnate a certain character, communicate a certain message, and share an experience around a specific theme. From this perspective, I explored how they can act as amplifiers of the ideas and messages they are engaged to transmit.

What I foremost tried to introduce in this chapter is the potential of puppetry and its intention to create optimal conditions for learning. For this I briefly outlined the main characteristics that make puppets distinct and efficient communicative tools. Although I clearly suggested that puppetry relates to other artistic forms, like theatre (they both rely on the dramatic form: narrative, characters, climax), I pointed out its distinctive sign system. I explained how this system is embedded in audience communication but also in the ultimate contradiction of the medium which lies in its very ontology: a puppet is a dead thing that becomes alive, a fictional yet real and concrete object that asks for the audience's consent for its existence.

I underlined Bogatyrev's idea about the distinctive nature of puppetry which derives from its materiality and visual sign system. I stressed its intention to create learning conditions within a narrative and at the same time to prevent the audience from confusing reality with fiction. As this will be further examined in the following chapters, I suggested that, being ultimate metaphors and given that they are based on a well researched narrative, puppets provide a platform for experimentation and for linking art with knowledge meaningfully and stimulatingly.

I explored how puppets can make an immediate link with the world of the objects, as they both belong to the same sign system. Moreover, I suggested that the gap between the puppet and puppeteer affects the gap between the audience and the action on stage and thus determines audience reaction to the puppetry convention (a dead thing becoming alive, and having a character). I also maintained that for this first gap to be meaningful it needs to be based on the clear synergy between the puppeteer and the puppet, on a well-planned use of movement and voice to avoid mixed messages (as was the case in some scenes with the synergy between actors and puppets in *War Horse*) and on well documented research.

I investigated the idea that the puppet stands as a surrogate for both the manipulator and the audience. I explained how this complex interaction technically relates to proxemics (Kaplin's puppet tree) and depends on the type of puppet used and the type of manipulation this demands. I suggested that possibilities of interactions and new meanings or dramaturgical turns (turning points of a character) are multiplied thanks to proxemics, the gaps and visual images involved in puppetry. I also suggested that Winnicott's idea of a safe environment for learning can be achieved by puppetry proxemics (the more distanced the puppet from the manipulator, the safer the environment for them to open up and express their inner feelings).

I also maintained that a necessary condition for puppetry's convention (a dead thing that becomes alive) is to gently manipulate the gap between the manipulator and the puppet (the puppet as a distance sensitive object). In other words, and as Heidegger recommended, I

suggested that puppeteers in their best practice respect the 'thingly' element of the things (their puppets) and interact with them, acknowledging their independent entity (of course, this doesn't exclude certain cases where puppeteers react against the over-mystification of their medium—the puppet—and play with the idea that puppets are indeed nothing more than dead objects).

Moreover, I examined how puppets' simplicity, clarity, friendliness, but also their usually small size, and their 'failure' in exactly copying reality, intend to create a non-threatening environment. I referred to the power, economy and humour inherent in puppet imagery within the pedagogical process. Puppetry's visual power becomes the hook for attracting attention and for overcoming language barriers; its economy avoids tiring didactic monologues.

The chapter also explored puppets in politics, as they can be used for propaganda, to encourage the oppressed, or just to entertain audiences with satire or political live skits.

I examined cases where puppeteers negotiate their own understanding of puppetry's learning conditions (humour, co-created narrative, constructive learning, disguised non-didactic messages), as many times they have to deliver their shows in contexts which hold fixed, rigid ideas of what knowledge and learning is.

Also, I touched on some tensions between non-western puppeteers and their sponsors and suggested that their dexterity in performance enables them to balance their own worldviews with the socio-political messages they are hired to disseminate. I explained how, based on this dexterity, puppeteers favour the intended conditions for learning even within clear-cut institutionalized frames.

Background research is useful both for documenting the practice and for producing reliable, evidence-based material. In particular, examples drawn from non-western countries suggested that if the puppeteer is familiar with their audience - especially in cases of remote, isolated communities- then he better communicates his messages. Moreover, he is

more able to create the right environment for playful interaction in flow with his audience, to draw on Winnicott (2006) and Csikszentmihalyi's (1995).

However, it should be noted that the medium as a communicative tool also has problematic aspects. I referred, for example, to the difficulty in balancing the learning potential of puppetry, especially within the time limitations of a school setting. In certain cases, it might be tempting to favour the decorative aspect of the art, or to fetishise the object with endless construction sessions instead of taking advantage of its communicative power in economy or minimalism. Having said this, it is true to say that in many cases even skilled practitioners working in the field of puppetry in education rely on the inherent communicative power of the medium and may not fully develop puppetry's learning potential. In these cases, communication relies mainly on cuteness and the friendliness of the medium and not on sophisticated, meticulous work. I believe that similar approaches further the stigmatization of the medium as a second rate art form.

As I will discuss in the following chapters, it is possible but not always easy to balance entertainment with art, or any more complex message with learning. In this chapter I referred to some examples where puppeteers did conform with the demands of their sponsors and once again affirm the stigmatization of puppetry as an over-simplistic art.

Finally in this chapter, I investigated how puppetry's imagery intends to motivate mental mechanisms primarily through the senses. I suggested that this journey to knowledge, combined with the inherent playfulness and comedy of puppets, aligns with the learning theories of Winnicott (2006) and Csikszentmihalyi (1995) according to which an experience within play and flow is of vital importance and contains in itself the optimal conditions for learning. More specifically, I pointed out the exploratory quality of puppets which align with Hein's idea of the constructivist museum (2005), and the idea of exploratory non-linear learning as opposed to a monolithic concept of knowledge. I examined how puppetry's characteristics can transform the delivery of a message into a journey towards knowledge and an experience in flow based on participation as suggested

in Pekarik's model for exhibition designing (2010: 107) and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's (cited in Watson ed. 2007: 81) idea of post-museum.

The following chapters will focus on the communicative role of the puppets more specifically within a museum context and on various negotiations between museum puppeteers and museum staff.

Chapter Two

Museum interactivity and museum puppetry live interpretation

> If education is a process of assessing different possible worlds, narrative is the means by which this is accomplished (Roberts 1997: 137).

> These new museums [small history and art museums] have had to learn to do more with less. And many of them have done so with remarkably ingenuity. Of necessity, their energies are directed at public programming rather than collection care… Often for the new art museum, the strength of its imagination and not the strength of its collection may be its only hope for distinction (Weil 2007: 44).

This chapter explores interactivity and live interpretation within a museum communication context. It examines how interactivity, the sense of touch, and ordinary stories involved in live interpretation projects frame the intended conditions for learning. In this chapter, I will describe and analyse the dynamics around specific narratives, characters and types of puppetry, as well as the links puppets attempt to make with museum exhibits. Based on these dynamics, as well as on the role of the puppeteer (during the show but also in collaboration with museum staff during preproduction process, as discussed in the next chapter), I also will attempt to identify various techniques and styles of museum puppetry practice.

Specifically, the case studies in this chapter investigate the engaging role of ordinary stories, drama in education and museum theatre techniques within museum puppetry projects (Emily Capstick, Jennifer Levine), as well as how history subjects and re-enactments are developed based on puppetry's sign system and in relation to authenticity and reliability issues (Robert Poulter).

In addition, I will study the puppetry workshops for younger audiences developed by Robert Poulter, the Horniman Museum, and the British Museum and community artists for outdoors activities for the Day of the Dead event. I will also focus on shows for younger audiences such as the ones presented at the Science Museum of Minnesota, at the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens, and at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles. My final

case study in Chapter Three will focus on Theodora Skipitares' puppet projects for adults, which have been presented in museums and galleries around the world.

Interactivity as dialogue

A museum professional once said: '[B]iologically speaking if a person is not interacting, the person is dead. If any exhibit doesn't produce some kind of visitor's interaction it's a dead exhibit' (Adams, Luke & Moussouri 2004: 157). In another context, Tillis' definition of puppets states that 'a puppet exist[s] before an audience' (1992: 17); its existence implies an active twofold process, an interaction.

Museums use the term interactivity and interactives extensively to describe activities and exhibitions that aim to engage and attract their audience. Interactive exhibits, interactive galleries and interactive-participatory events are ubiquitous in most western museums today. On the other hand, community based interactivity is embedded in the heart of puppetry tradition which is 'an extremely vibrant, rich, and complex form of popular culture' (Scherzer & Scherzer 1987: 2), especially in eastern societies. Also, in many cases museum puppetry follows the post-museum model which recognises museum partnerships and activities beyond the institution's walls, and combines it with the long tradition of street puppetry.

Dr Matthew Isaac Cohen's *Ramayana*, performed in four parts, is one example of where museum puppetry takes a step towards the gallery exit, beyond the conventional exhibition area. *Ramayana* took place in between the British Library's exhibition area and the cloak room. This was a collaborative project in conjunction with the Southbank Gamelan Players, presented at the British Library (2008). It was part of an exhibition under the same title that explored how the Indian epic story is retold over the centuries. Cohen, as the shadow puppeteer (dalang) of the Indonesian wayang kulit show, based the arrangement of the space on its traditional form in Indonesia. The Indonesian audience enjoys a great deal of freedom and proximity to the artists. The latter often sit at the same level as the audience: spectators can move around, take a nap, leave the show and return when they please. Proschan describes below the structure of this traditional form, which has many similarities

with other folk theatre genres, but also brings to mind the free choice, self paced nature of a museum visit:

> […] the décor was minimal, the staging rudimentary, and the audience transitory. Crucially, the audience was in immediate proximity to the performers, separated not by the footlights, stage front and aisles, but rather by the limits of the booth [here by the screen and the orchestra] or by the efforts of the narrator, shill, or money-collector. Moreover the audience was not bound by the conventions of formal theatre, in which viewers are expected to be still and silent, attentive to the goings-on onstage, passive spectators rather than active participants in the stage action. Finally, the composition of the audience could not be assumed in advance, at least not to the same extent that the audience for an elite theatrical performance could be predictably characterised as to class, education, occupation, etc. (Proschan 1987: 33).

In the same spirit, the British Library's wayang kulit audience could watch the nearly three-hour performance (without intervals) seated on pillows or circulating around the screen and performers. During the show, the spectators could also move towards the exhibition area to enjoy the exhibits while still hearing the superb chanting and music, or they could go behind the screen and the performers, pass the gallery's door and have a drink in the cloakroom hall. They could still watch the puppet show from the back, viewed through the door opening. While standing in the middle, it seemed as if the wayang kulit Indonesian type of shadow puppetry and gamelan orchestra created an intimate in-between space bridging two worlds: art and life (Figs. 6, 7).

Figure 6: Matthew Cohen and Southbank Gamelan Orchestra present the wayang kulit performance *Ramayana* in the exhibition space of the British Library (from the back side of the screen - Ramayana exhibition in the background) (2008).

Figure 7: Matthew Cohen and Southbank Gamelan Orchestra present the wayang kulit performance *Ramayana* in the exhibition space of the British Library (from the front side of the screen) (2008).

During three years of research, it was occasionally suggested that a stimulating dialogue between the community of puppeteers and that of museums was not only out of the question but also not in the interests of either side. Puppeteers often think of museums as conservative institutions (even if the latter seem to have all the best intentions to the contrary), while it is only under certain special circumstances that museum staff find a slot for a puppet show or workshop. The range of these circumstances seemed to be very limited: preschoolers' activities, holiday periods and one-off workshops, demonstrations around specific puppet collections, fairy storylines. Occasionally, however, it seems that these activities don't really make an effort to link the narratives organically to the exhibits or to the learning strategies of the institution. However, in every rule there are exceptions and the cases below constitute, in my opinion, some of the best practice examples in the field of museum puppetry's live interpretation; a style which relies heavily on the practitioner's storytelling and performing skills.

Audience participation: 'touching' stories of ordinary people and everyday objects

> Performance can give voice to, and celebrate, the experiences of **marginalized individuals or communities** excluded from the grander

narratives of conventional history (Jackson & Kidd 2008: 135) [emphasis in original]. [32]

Spectators at the puppet theatre experience the puppets and their movements as extraordinary, but most of the time the material being depicted is ordinary, relying on stock ideas which everyone shares… The puppet is an artificial creation and this confers upon it an extraordinary quality (Koshiro 1990: 19).

Emily Capstick

Emily Capstick is a gentle, communicative, open minded and multi-talented performer and educator. I was first introduced to her work by the Heritage Consultancy Director of Interpretation Verity Walker, whom I met at the Performing Heritage International Conference at the University of Manchester in April 2008. I met Capstick three times: at her home in Stockport outside Manchester, at the People's History Museum where I observed her project for preschoolers in Manchester *Off to the Galapagos* and at the London Museum in Docklands where I observed her project *Over the Sea to London.* (I also saw on DVD *Coming Home*, a multi-sensory story telling for schools).

As a facilitator, storyteller, director, actor, writer, oral historian, costume/set designer, puppet maker and researcher, Capstick has presented her work in various schools and museums including the Manchester Museum, the People's History Museum-Manchester, the London Transport Museum, the London Museum-Docklands, the National Museums of Scotland, and Manchester City Art Gallery. In the mid-1990s, she founded her company *Peoplescape Theatre* with her collaborator Alison Hale, who is a secondary school drama teacher. The age of their target group is maximum eleven years old, but for Special Education Needs sessions this can be extended up to fifteen or sixteen years old. [33]

Having watched two of her museum projects live and discussed about the structure of the project *Dreams that Fly* (Manchester Museum*)*, as well as her project for schools *Coming*

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[32]From the *Performance Learning & Heritage Report* http://www.plh.manchester.ac.uk/documents/Performance,%20Learning%20&%20Heritage%20-%20Report.pdf (2008:135, accessed in May 2010).

[33] E. Capstick, Personal interview, 9 February 2009.

Home, it was obvious to me that Capstick's starting point is not the transfer of knowledge. Instead, all her projects place an emphasis on interaction; she keeps this focus from the time she begins the design of the narrative structure and she uses everyday objects or simple puppet constructions as an intermediate for audience engagement.

Capsitck is interested foremost in how the audience relates the narrative to their own lives. Here, she talks about her preference for choosing protagonists among everyday people:

> I am not trying to teach them [the audience] though: 'this is the facts, this is where you get the authenticity issues, you can learn about this because this is real'… I think this is why museums come back to me. Moving away from the facts, it is quite a new thing. I am interested more in ordinary people, not particularly named individuals… there is not an answer into how does […a character] feel about […something], so the audience, whatever age, they get to use their imagination… they are in a position of experiencing something or learning... What do we do with the knowledge, what is the point of the knowledge, what does it mean to the visitor? Having said that, I do historical research to make sure that the frame, the background is right — but the thing about having ordinary people… is that actually *they don't know all the answers*… (ibid)

The choice of puppets and of narrative also enables Capstick to handle the reliability/authenticity issue raised by many museums; the scientists' and historians' concern with remaining faithful to scientific or historical facts. As she explains, she uses puppets for 'exploring relationships and interpretation rather than a quasi-naturalistic portrayal of a person, either from the past or as a direct voice of the museum'. Regarding the style of the puppets she asserts that 'the more naturalistic [they are], the more the concerns' (ibid). Aligning with Brad Brewer's views on the same issue (see the case study in the next chapter) she selects her characters from among ordinary anonymous people (as opposed to historical figures) and everyday objects. In this way, following a constructivist learning scheme -focusing on visitors' experience and their background knowledge- she intends to overcome didacticism and to counterbalance museum expertise with the value of triggering visitors' imagination and empathy for her anonymous protagonists.

Firstly, she takes the role of a first person interpretation performer/puppeteer. Thus, she is discharged from some of the burden an authority figure would carry along:

If I, as a facilitator at the museum was using puppets, what was being said in that way would carry some of the authority of the museum with it; it would need to be more 'authentic' than if a fictional character was using the puppet. Most puppets and object-manipulation is done by a fictional character of a young person… so if they [manipulators in role] use a puppet to communicate something, they might get it wrong — they don't have the same authority as a puppeteer [first person interpretation] at the museum (ibid).

The way Capstick conducts her research depends on the subject matter. Usually, if it is something within recent history she uses reminiscence work. If there is sufficient funding she also conducts some research to meet with individuals related to the story she intends to develop and uses afterwards recorded interviews with them for first person interpretation. She also checks for information on the internet and for more technical aspects she asks the museum for consultation. In general, her material is collected outside the museum. The museum provides her with the topic, might make some changes to her script and may define the age group the show is destined for. The museum is always informed about the particular technique or style Capstick intends to use.

As a general rule, the museums Capstick has worked with share her general point of view: they know that she is not interested in making something 'authentic': 'for me that it is very limiting: how they speak…the languages, how accurate…' (ibid). On the other hand, as her projects are highly interactive, authentic histories might make the programmes more complex and perhaps less integral to the dramaturgy: 'If someone intends to make an authentic project interactive then if the public asks questions, then somebody from the part of the museum is needed who knows how to answer' (ibid).

To enhance audience participation, Capstick uses drama in education and museum theatre techniques extensively. While in role, she integrates the audience into her narrative, posing questions and offering tasks.

As is the case with most museum puppetry practitioners, Capstick is a kind of external museum educator. Her role keeps pace with new theories of museum learning which, according to Roberts are 'about not just interpreting objects but also deciphering

interpretations —in other words, anticipating and negotiating between the meanings constructed by visitors and the meaning constructed by museums' (1997: 3). As Roberts says about museum educators, their role today is to replace 'language about facts and certainties… by language about context, meaning and discourse […];' in other words, museum educators are concerned 'less with knowledge than with narrative' (ibid.).

Capstick's *Over the Sea to London* was a museum puppetry commission for the Museum of London Docklands. It was based on the interpretive potential of the human senses. The session took place in front of a mini re-creation of a warehouse. Exotic goods brought into London Victoria docks from all over the world during the 19th and early 20th centuries were displayed there: weight scales, and large window cases contain all sorts of goods. The warehouse looked like a shop; it was an ideal naturalistic backdrop for Capstick's show. Museum staff covered the other interactive exhibits in the gallery with black cloth to avoid distraction.

The project was devised within ten days and addressed at young people from seven to twelve years old with special educational needs (SEN). Given some flexibility both from the schools and the museum, the session lasted forty-five minutes or more, depending on how involved the participants became.

The story starts with all the goods coming from afar. Capstick designed some ship rod puppets: simple blocks of wood with a stick for manipulation. She covered the outside of the boats with the real cargo they would have carried (for example, the boat from Africa had coffee beans on its exterior) (Fig. 8). The sailing movement of the boat was playful and, although abstract, the constructions were concrete and recognizable. Capstick used them as a reference to facilitate participants' search for associations within their everyday lives. Touch here plays the role of a *multi-sensorial junction* and has the potential to enhance other senses, like vision:

Figure 8: The coffee boat rod puppet from *Over the Sea to London* - Docklands Museum (2009).

> Through the kinaesthetic accompaniment of voluntary motion the whole perception is raised to a higher order: the touch qualities become arranged in a spatial scheme, they fall into the pattern of surface, and become elements of form (Jonas 1982: 141).

Participants can 'sail' any of these ten boats and smell them; they can touch real coffee beans, cocoa beans, tea, ostrich feathers, cloves, shells, tobacco, cinnamon and silk. The concreteness and simplicity of the activity aligns with what the experts on museum visitors research, Peter Falk and Emily Dierking suggest: 'Children's learning tends to be concrete, devoted to recognizing the size, shape, and peculiar features of objects' (cited in Prytherch and Jefsioutine 2007: 225). [34]

Capstick's dramaturgy incorporates touch experiences and indicates her intention to enhance social interaction among participants:

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[34] It worth mentioning that Verity Walker, who evaluated the programme, refers to the team's concern about 'a risk assessment of this activity, notably for likely allergic reaction to any of the spices, nuts, etc. used as cargoes, for the risk of hurting oneself or others with the boat masts, using any of the artefacts as a weapon and licking or sucking any of the artefacts and props used' (Walker 2007).

Charlie (played by Capstick), who works in the warehouse, asks the pupils to help him arrange the displays, which arrived closed in parcels. He needs the participants to help him distinguish the goods. He gives them a hint when he tells them that workers in the warehouse can distinguish twenty types of tea just from looking and smelling them. So Charlie brings a big basket full of parcels wrapped up in brown paper. The participants play a game of the senses guessing what is inside the parcels by feeling their shape, by smelling them, by shaking them, by feeling their weight, the resistance of their material, etc. Charlie's boss writes him a letter and asks him to show his sister around the warehouse. Charlie again asks the children to help him decide what to show her from the warehouse, and how to arrange the goods. The boss's sister, Lady Isabella (played by Hale) arrives in the warehouse. She introduces herself to Charlie and to his workers (the participants) and asks to see the exotic Golden Paradise bird with the beautiful plumage she heard about when she was a small girl. Charlie explains to her that the bird has already been sold to another customer and that he is not willing to show it to her. Capstick takes her hat out and gets ready to manipulate the bird. Lady Isabella asks again for the children's help to persuade Charlie to show her the bird. Charlie has it in the cage covered with a cloth to keep it calm. While Charlie is away, Lady Isabella uncovers the bird and opens the door of the cage. Being a bit reckless, she lets the bird out by mistake. The young participants get involved, trying to coax it back down and into the cage. The tasks given to them depend on their abilities and interests. To make the bird feel safe, they could be asked to do a number of things: to tickle it, to sing to it, to stroke it, to poke it, to give it something to eat or drink, ring a bell, talk to it, whistle, pretend to be birds, clap, or shout (Fig. 9).

Figure 9: Interaction with the bird-puppet in Peoplescape Theatre's *Over the Sea to London* at the London Museum – Docklands. Emily Capstick (manipulator on the right) and actor Alison Hale (standing at the background). (Photo from the London Museum - Docklands archive.)

Capstick recalls from previous sessions:

> […] it was a really fantastic thing to do because the young people just surprise me every time: some just hold the hand out and indicate that they had food, they try to stroke it or make noises, all kinds of different ways of interacting… for that we wanted to have puppet, we wanted something which was tactile we did not want to describe the story, we wanted it to be present… pupils are able to build a relationship with the bird. The bird is affectionate and responds to them and they respond to the bird.[35]

Verity Walker, who evaluated the programme, refers in her report to a teacher's comment: 'The bird was a big hit —they all went to the bird!' (2007); or, to put it differently: '[O]bjects can touch as much as we can touch them' (Pye 2007: 134).

According to Roberts, there is evidence that museum visitors seek 'simple pleasure, social outings, and even leisure' (1997: 37) rather than seeking to be educated, or even to learn. In this sense, puppet imagery, simple stories around ordinary people and everyday objects may be more visitor-friendly. Roberts sees education as a 'meaning making activity that

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[35] E. Capstick, Personal interview, 9 February 2009.

involves a constant negotiation between the story given by the museums and those brought by visitors,' something that suggests 'the institution's gradual transformation into a new sort of genre that is based less on objects as it is on experience' (ibid.: 14), as the post-museum model suggests.

As is the case with *Over the Sea to London* programme, museum puppetry activities enhance all kinds of direct, clearly visual objects' associations and suggest a new way of interpreting collections by focusing on a co-created narrative. This aims to provide a new code to decipher the collections and the museum's messages, and to stimulate visitors to engage dynamically with them. This narrative also introduces participants to the poetics of the world of objects and the poetics of museums.

Capstick also enjoys the use of puppets, particularly where she is a lone human actor on the stage. This is the case in her latest piece *Dreams that Fly*. As already said, I did not have the chance to directly observe this performance, so the following information comes from the interviews with Emily Capstick.

The main puppet in this programme is Chloe. She has to stay to study with her grandparents and there she has a frightening dream: she is caught in a creepy forest by an angry queen who has also captured a dragon: she wants them to teach her how to fly. Chloe wonders if the queen's courtiers could speak to her: 'I would have felt much better, they know what the queen is like,' she says, and then she addresses the children directly: 'would you consent to be the courtiers for me?' This is the first call for audience participation in the story. After some character development comprised of much bowing and politesse, Chloe tells the courtiers: 'you were there, you saw the queen getting cross, you know what makes her really angry, what she does when she is really angry, you know how she treats the dragon'. So, she passes to the children the task of building the story, to imagine how the queen caught the dragon. In the middle of this, a trumpet sounds. The queen's messenger arrives, bringing a royal proclamation. He interrupts the children and speaks to them as courtiers, and intends to immerse them in the imaginary situation. The message says that the queen has taken 'grandpa' as her prisoner. A bird puppet brings a secret message

written from grandpa saying: 'Look at my things Chloe, the secret is to find the questions and not the answers'. Children are asked to think of questions about flying to tell Chloe. Questions arise during the museum object handling. The children are already in role while observing and holding objects. Chloe indicates to them that they have to be very careful with the objects. They open grandpa's boxes filled with stuffed towels, feathers, silk, flying creatures, a bat, butterflies and beetles, all from the handling collection of the museum. Capstick tries to keep everything within the framework of the story, and also uses enormous 'FRAGILE' signs as a hook to talk about the idea of fragility.

Although it is very common for devised sessions to be divided into separate parts (do the drama, then go to the galleries and finally complete the worksheet), Capstick takes another direction, as is the case with all of her projects. She tries to do everything within the same narrative, providing meaningful reasons for actions: for reading or helping the protagonists to handle the museum objects. The questions vary, as Capstick explains: 'Do I need feathers to fly, how heavy should these be, do I need bones, do I float, how do I take off, do I need wings?' At the end, they are all ready to meet the queen and to form the questions into groups by putting the objects in six separate drawers.

'To experience the real is to experience signs of the real… what matters is not the thing itself but the manner in which it is experienced'(Roberts 1997: 104) Roberts maintains and links Capstick's ideaology with the post-museum model. Museum puppetry projects such as Capstick's are designed to create a safe playful environment for visitors to open up physically, psychically and spiritually and to actively engage with objects. In other words, Capstick's projects are more aligned with Heidegger's notion of authenticity (togetherness and connectedness) than with the idea of 'faithfully' re-enacting real evidences.

Jennifer Levine

In December 2009, I visited and interviewed Jennifer Levine, an American puppeteer and visual artist, at her home in New Jersey. Levine, like Capstick, believes in the pedagogical value of everyday life and ordinary people who embrace history and culture in an authentic way. Set at the turn of the century, her *Miracle on Monroe Street* was presented widely in

schools, as well as at the Jewish Museum in New York, for an audience of no more than fifty people. Levine built a thirty-minute 'miniature puppet drama' with material collected from ordinary people (Figs.10; 11). As I did not have the chance to watch the show neither live, nor recorded, I relied on examining Levine's constructions which I saw at her workshop, as well as her own descriptions during the interview.

This oral history project at first seemed 'too personal,' as Levine admitted:

> Maybe this is such an individual story but the feedback that I got was that… with one specific detailed story you really get a picture of what life was like; I knew it was authentic: I reported my grandmother.[36]

Figure 10: Jennifer Levine at her house, demonstrating a scene from *The Miracle on Monroe Street* (2008).

The story unfolds around one of the many families of immigrants who came to live in New York in the 1930s. It narrates an extraordinary incident in the lives of an ordinary Jewish family living in the Lower East Side. When Levine's grandmother was twelve, her sister stole a cake from a bakery. The baker chased her around the neighbourhood and, to escape

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[36] J. Levine. Personal interview, 1 December 2009.

him, she went to the roof of the tenement. In moment of panic, her sister slipped and fell, landing in the baker's flour bin. On the way down she got caught in a clothes' wire and got wrapped in a talis.[37] Levine's grandmother recounts the story (Levine uses her grandmother's pre-recorded voice): how they went to the hospital, how her sister survived and what people said about her fall. Levine follows the audio recording by manipulating her puppets and objects in order to build up the imagery of the story; at points she narrates directly to the audience herself and interacts with the puppets (rod puppets out of papier maché, also manipulated with wires attached to her head). Levine notes:

> Hearing the voice of the grandmother can be very powerful for spectators… it is very evocative over their own [spectators'] relationship with their grandparents, it is really all about connecting to… a true experience and the show is just a means to do that. That is the best part of it… I am talking to them —to adults too— I am not doing a fourth wall, this is me. It is a stylized version but also there is a truth to it, they know it is theatre but at the same time it is personal.[38]

Similarly to Capstick's belief in the value of the everyday characters, Levine seems to challenge the idea that the 'extraordinary' has to be searched in big names, big historical moments and official memory days. On the contrary, they both seem to share Guignon's analysis of Heidegger's idea about everydayness:

> …insofar as this everyday pre-understanding is still infected by distortions conveyed to us by our social and historical context, it is necessary to engage in a deep interpretation of 'everydayness' to reveal its underlying structure and content. Heidegger's use of the term 'hermeneutics' for the method of the existential analytic indicates that he sees our ordinary self-understanding as a kind of text-analogue which can be interpreted to bring to light its hidden meaning. (Guignon 1984: 325)

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[37] A Jewish prayer shawl.

[38] J. Levine. Personal interview, 1 December 2009.

Figure 11: Jennifer Levine demonstrating a scene from *The Miracle on Monroe Street* (2008).

Levine, who considers herself to be 'pretty much self-taught,' has an art and teaching background. Her collaboration with an educator who specializes in middle school education and cultural identity provided the project with pre- and post-show interactive activities. Levine brings in pictures of the Lower East Side and divides the kids up into groups, asking them to write down what they notice about the pictures. Then they use their comments as a discussion point and talk about what was different back then as compared to their lives now, as well as about cultural objects and artefacts that are important to the students' own culture. During the pre-show activity Levine has the opportunity to train the audience, unfamiliar to this type of puppet theatre:

> I always do a little preview about puppetry, more specific to what I was doing, how I created the puppets, the materials I used, the idea that I am exposed, most of them have only seen more traditional puppetry like the Punch and Judy show or on TV, the style that I do is new to them… that was always something that museums should really use: giving the kids tools in how to view theatre (ibid).

As for the post museum visit activities, often the teacher asks the students to bring an artefact of their own and do a project around it. Sometimes they write a story about it or they talk about the meaning of this special object: '…often [...] something that a parent of a grandparent brought from another country like a wedding dress, a cup, or a ring.' Sometimes they draw something inspired from the show. Depending on the age group, Levine might also do puppet making workshops. Numerous positive comments in evaluation reports about the pre- and post-show activities indicate 'the effectiveness of the circulation of information among peers' (Lave & Wenger 1991: 93).

To show or to speak, to touch or to see?

> There are risks in allowing visual appreciation because of the damaging effects of light, but because vision has been the dominant mode of experiencing objects the risks of lighting have been accepted and worked with (Pye 2007: 134).

To show or to speak?

The *Over the Sea to London* programme was initially designed for young people with severe and multiple difficulties and complex educational needs. Having this as a starting point, Capstick and Hale then reworked it to be acceptable for a general audience. As Verity Walker notices, this is the reverse process of what is a common practice for similar museum programmes: '[museums] run [SEN programmes]… on the basis of a simplification of existing primary school programmes' (Walker 2007).

Capstick and Hale wanted to make the programme challenging to everyone, so interactivity was a prerequisite from the start. They worked on the assumption that both they and their audience were in role. From a pre-visit activity to the school, the group knew about what they were going to be doing, so they were prepared to engage with the action. Capstick and Hale adapt the script or shorten it according to the needs of the group. Although they do have a routine and always end the show in the same way, the language they use, the time spent on each part of the session and the type of interaction may vary from session to

session. So, for example, for the group who are more able to understand, there is more opportunity to learn details about the ships, as the actors choose to deliver a fuller version of the script. When Capstick and Hale started devising the piece, they talked about having a narrator's voice, but they quickly decided not to use verbal communication for description. They could directly show what they meant:'… this is all about "listening"…*we* are "showing"'.[39] Capstick clarifies some differences between theatre and puppetry:

> In theatre when you are limited to having one performer, there are quite a lot of different ways you can present -obviously different theatrical styles… but having *some thing* that can represent another person… [gives more] opportunities for interaction between the two…sometimes the puppet represents the character that I play, sometimes I play that myself; visually this is more theatrical, more of a spectacle, and again it is taking it away from always telling things, rather than just showing things.[40]

Similarly, Levine acknowledges that 'kids struggle when they go to a museum, it is so much talking which is strange; it would help make it less intellectual and more visceral' (J. Levine. Personal interview, 1 December 2009).[41]

What I am trying to suggest with the above examples is not necessarily that puppeteers always favour the power of the visuals over the power of speech, but rather that puppeteers' skills in visualizing stories with objects, manipulation and using other visual effects bring action into the present and thus make live interpretation more vivid. Compared to narrating stories from the past, communication with live objects on stage tends to better justify audience intervention/participation which, when it happens, takes place *in the present*; it also makes it more meaningful. Even if the story's characters are no longer alive (the baker in Levine's story, for example), or may be completely fictional (Capstick's characters Charlie, Isabella and the Bird), their representation on stage intends to facilitate co-creation of the story. The visuals here are not simply used as props but as

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[39] E. Capstick, Personal interview, 9 February 2009.

[40] E. Capstick, Personal interview, 9 February 2009.

[41] Having said this, I should note here that still, there are many puppet performances which do rely heavily on speech. However, I think their success still lies on a fine balance between an equally evocative spoken as well as visual narrative.

central characters which lead and advance the story and are intended as linkages with the museum ideas. Performers on stage are not merely handling objects or showing them to the audience; they manipulate them as integral parts of a story. Their role in the story is affected by the objects' presence, movement and action.

To touch or to see?

However, objects/puppets within a museum puppetry project are significant for one more reason: they provide a platform for experiencing the sense of touch in more sophisticated ways than simply by touching or handling something.

> Why should young people who don't have special education needs not get this?... Touch things!... Everybody else had to sit and listen, listen, listen!...
> Emily Capstick [42]

What Capstick alludes to here is a complex argument around the sense of touch that has been debated since the establishment of museums about two hundred years ago. Since then, the museum world has shifted its attitude on the idea of touch several times, aligning each time with the social values and the conservation policies of the period (Candlin 2008: 13-16).

Although today 'touch is a privilege usually reserved to conservators and curators' (Were 2008: 132), to confront the original museum collection as if it was part of the handling collection for learning purposes was a common practice in schools and small museums since the 19th century, as Greenhill suggests (cited in Prytherch and Jefsioutine 2007: 226). According to Butler, this practice was 'superseded by shift in focus from objects to subjects and themes' (ibid: 226).

Classen and Howes give their own explanation for the mid-nineteenth century shift from tactile to visual perception as they attribute it to 'modern notions of observation, objective

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[42] Personal interview, 9 February 2009.

science, surveillance techniques, the visual display of capitalism and the increasing equation of touch with "primitive cultures"' (cited in Candlin 2008: 9). Nevertheless, Candlin's own view is directed toward 'who touched rather than when they touched,' and underlines that 'upper classes always had access to touch and their touch was deemed rational and non-damaging' (ibid: 9-11). She notes that there is some evidence that, in the eighteenth century, people were allowed to touch the collection. She explains that this was, however, a privilege for the elite:

> As Classen and Howes note touch was understood as a legitimate and even essential means of engaging with art and artefacts during the eighteenth century. However, not everyone had the chance to do so; restricted opening hours, public and private days as well as the private nature of most collections meant that the working class and, to some extent, even the middle class did not gain access… (ibid: 13).

Furthermore, according to Candlin, the nineteenth century pressure to attribute a social role to museums resulted to their 'partial' democratization for the benefit of the working class, while on the other hand, it made museums 'visually oriented' as they became increasingly crowded and busy: 'touching objects was no longer regarded as an educative or pleasurable experience; it now ran against "common sense" and "common justice"' (ibid.: 16).

The current situation is quite different, as '[M]useums are under pressure to provide tactile access to visitors' (Candlin 2004).

> Whilst this pressure comes from directives to meet the needs of visually impaired or blind visitors, there is evidence that haptic experience is an important, if neglected, aspect of understanding objects for everyone (Prytherch & Jefsioutine 2007: 224-5).

Today, handling collections and numerous craft workshops bring touch as a learning medium for all visitors back to museums, not to mention their well-established policies for visually impaired visitors. All sorts of objects from the handling collection are touched during museum workshops (see also the Horniman Museum case study below in the same Chapter). Similarly, carts are frequently found during weekends in various spots in museum galleries. Items from the museum's handling collection are passed to visitors to offer them

a 'touching experience'. Also, several museum exhibits incorporate 'sensescape' surfaces, entire exhibits are accompanied by 'Please touch' (and 'Please sit') signs, while haptic technologies have emerged in the landscape of galleries. To further empower the underdeveloped role of touch in museums outreach programmes, often a member of the education department is made responsible not only for objects' transportation, but also takes on the role of facilitator and explains to the children how to handle museum objects appropriately. This is the case with Capstick's *Dreams that Fly* project where, during the outreach session, a member of the museum's education department brings objects from the handling collection to the school and trains children in handling.

However, despite the current trend favouring touch, modern museums throughout the world still prevent myriad visitors' hands from touching their material culture by raising all sorts of barriers between them: great quantities of glass and plexiglas, ropes and wires, as well as 'do not touch' signs and advanced electronic alarm systems.[43] Moreover, it seems that this continuing abstinence from touch prevalent in museum settings also perpetuates a certain attitude towards this sense: touch is often taken as a second rate sense, compared to the nobler —museologically more 'appropriate'— sense of vision:

> Museum objects are —unfortunately— only there to be *seen*. (Van de Wetering, 1996: 415; original emphasis).

Robert Poulter's New Model Theatre in museums

> It is like seeing history at great speed.[44]

I first met Robert Poulter at Ramsgate in 2007. On our way to his home, he took me around to some of the town's attractions. That walk, I later realised, partly revealed his interest in art and history, as well as his passion for research.

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[43] Some museum professionals suggest that objects are unfairly overprotected from being touched: '[…] a greater danger comes not from touching stationary objects but from the lifting and handling needed to move objects within a museum, or to transport them to another institution' (Were 2008: 133).

[44] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 22 May 2009.

Poulter has presented his more than eighty New Model Theatre (NMT) shows in museums, galleries, libraries, and festivals in the UK,[45] Germany, US, France, and the Netherlands for almost thirty years. His shows invite the audience to embark upon a journey around intriguing (real or fictional) people and stories. His protagonists include painters (Turner in *Mr Turner Gets Steamed Up*, Hals in *Franz Hals in Haarlem*, and Loutherbourg and Gainsborough in *Pandemonium*), actors (O Smith in *Oh! - Smith*), literary figures (Oliver Twist in *Oliver Twist*), an Egyptologist and hydraulics engineer (Belzoni in the *The Great Belzoni*), as well as pirates (Bartholomew Roberts in *Black Bart's Last Breakfast*). Poulter's stories are also inspired by theatre and opera. Occasionally, he performs the Kabuki drama *The Loyal 47* (Fig. 12), an edited version of Sheridan's play *Pizarro*, and *8 ½,* a condensation of 250 years of opera in eight and a half minutes.
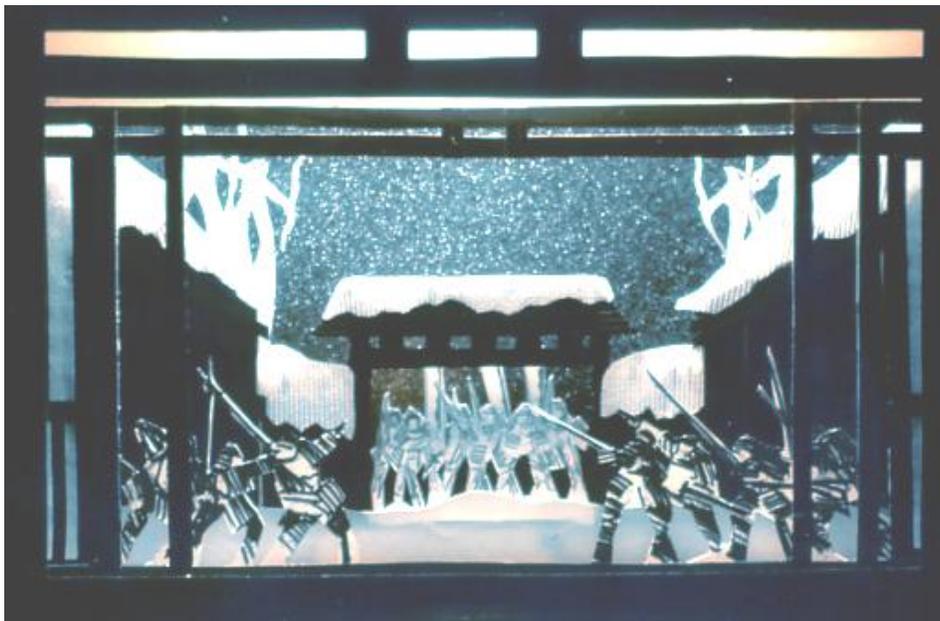
Figure 12: Scene from *The Loyal 47* (Photo by Norbert Neumann).

NMT shows, especially the historical ones, have often been commissioned by museum and gallery learning departments. In museums, Poulter usually presents three to four shows per day for a week, or performs a one off event. Occasionally, he is also asked to run the shortest version of his workshops within a museum context.

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[45] He has himself organized six major festivals of paper theatre in UK.

I had the chance to watch some of Poutler shows (*Mr Turner Gets Steamed Up, Oh! – Smith, The Loyal 47, 8 ½, Black Bart's Last Breakfast)* live in libraries and private houses, one of them (*The Great Belzoni, Sir John Sloane's Museum*) live within a museum setting and another one on DVD *(Pandemonium).* Also, I had the chance to work together with Robert Poulter on a Cultural Olympiad related commission, *The Rowers* (2010).

The New Model Theatre

Poulter's shows are, as a rule, designed, written, constructed and manipulated entirely by himself.[46] NMT has as its starting point the English traditional toy theatre, which consists of paper figures on a small stage. Yet, NMT differs in many ways from what we understand today as the toy theatre genre. Poulter's innovations consist primarily of a painted rolling background, a complex theatrical lighting system, and twelve grooves on the stage. The grooves prevent his figures from falling down, often a risk in toy theatre. The grooves also provide the show great flexibility: a figure can enter from one side and exit from the other; the performer can safely speed up action and hide the manipulation (a strip of cardboard) inside the grooves. On rare occasions, this permits the manipulator to have one figure pushing the other across. Poulter admits though that even if 'you cannot hide manipulation, you can sometimes surprise the audience by having the figures coming forward from the back of the theatre… everything happens horizontally, so anything happening like that is a shock to the audience'.

NMT figures and settings are dexterously painted with felt-tip pens, watercolours, coloured paper, card, fibre, pastel, or collage. In some cases they are articulated and on rare occasions, they might be built out of metal, wood or glass instead of cardboard. The rolling background depicts scenes which are usually painted in watercolour. Often, this backdrop is painted and lit from behind for effects such as sunrises, volcano eruptions, explosions or fires.

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[46] For de Loutherbourg's miniature theatre (*Eidophusikon*) see Chapter Three.

Poulter puts great emphasis on the theatricality and composition of each scene. The figures, the scenery and the rolling background are meticulously choreographed. Anything moving on stage is part of a chain of associations in space and time. This gives a cinematic quality to the framed area, which stands simultaneously as a stage, a canvas, and a screen. Various parameters contribute to the montage of a NMT show: the proportions and the distances among figures and props, the angles from which these are painted and lit, how far in or off the centre should they go, which scale and which groove works better perspective-wise, the timing, the pace and delicacy in manipulation, the order in which the figures and settings appear and go off the stage.

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

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

In addition, Poulter usually uses a pre-recorded mix of voices, music and other sounds which makes the shows' soundtracks sound 'like short radio programmes in their own right' (Poulter 1994: 14).

Last but not least, I have often witnessed Poulter literally dancing while manipulating, as he tries to coordinate all the elements of his multifaceted art. Perhaps this flexibility in movement and rhythm is an essential part of the show— having to match long lists of sound and light cues. He treats each and every figure as a dancing partner from the moment it appears on stage till it vanishes backstage.

Overall, Poutler's skills, background research and exploratory quality of his work resonates here Richard Sennett's idea of the craftsman who seeks for problem finding rather than for problem solving. As many others, Poulter could have relied on his skill as a painter and illustrator and continue the long tradition of traditional Toy Theatre. However, his innovations I analysed above, give another dynamic to his shows, they contribute to the

platform of optimal conditions for learning as action and visual of all the shows that I watched seemed to me really inspiring, sophisticated, playful, original and therefore potentially more engaging. More specifically, for the purposes of this research I would like to analyse below in detail some scenes from two of his well known historical / art shows widely performed in museums. This would hopefully give us some insights to the way Poulter uses NMT techniques to communicate historical themes to create intriguing visual *gaps* in non-linear ways.

Mr Turner Gets Steamed Up [47]

The show (Fig. 13) was performed in about fifty venues: in Old Town Museum in Margate and Maritime Museum in Ramsgate, in the National Gallery in London, in eleven museums in Germany, in US festivals, in universities, schools, and galleries.

Figure 13: Scene from the show *Mr Turner Gets Steamed Up.* (Photo from Robert Poulter's archive.)

All voices are pre-recorded, as the performer has too much to do during the show. The first part (30') of the show takes place in Turner's home in Margate, where the painter lived as a lodger with his landlady Mrs Booth, who later became his mistress. In the beginning of the show the backdrop shows a little peddle steamer in a storm through the windows of the

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[47] The title has a double entendre: it alludes to the new industrial age of the day, steam engines, ships, trains and locomotives and also Turner's excitement about his relationship with his landlady Mrs. Booth.

house. Later in the scene, we see Turner reading in the newspaper about the old warship, the *Temeraire* (the famous warship of the Battle of Trafalgar 1798). The ship is being taken by two steamboats to be demolished. As Turner is talking about the battle, the background becomes a vision of the battle, based on two of his own paintings. When the flashback ends, the painter decides to go to London. Next scene is set on a steamboat from Margate to London. On the deck we see Turner admiring the sky. In the following scenes, we see Turner going to the pub he owns in London. Across the river from the pub is the place where the ship will be broken up and Turner wants to see it for the last time.

Then we see Turner with his housekeeper Hannah in the artist's studio. The image of the studio is painted on one slide while on the stage there is also another slide with a big picture frame (Turner and Hannah are placed in front of it). Turner is painting the *Temeraire*, when suddenly the image of the studio slides and goes off the stage. The audience, together with Turner and Hannah, now look through the picture frame at a grayish sky on the rolling background. Then a number of slides come into perspective, in different grooves: the river-water on two slides, two steamboats, and an image of what the *Temeraire* would have looked like. This is a scene where the ship, with its masts down, is being taken to the breakers yard up the Thames. Then, as Poulter turns the rolling background, the sky changes to a Turneresque sunset and the ships swap around: the slides of this image go off the stage while new slides come in at the same time. This is the moment when the 'real' image of *Temeraire* turns into Turner's *Fighting Temeraire* painting. This poetic image of the ship with her masts up is a three-dimensional NMT version of the original painting.

In the final scene, Turner is trying to finish a painting at the Royal Academy of London, on the varnishing day before the exhibition's opening. Poulter shows the audience a flashback using a slide with an image of the great engineer Brunel, who built the bridge over the Thames at Maidenhead for the Great Western Railway to cross. The quick changes of sky images on the rolling background suggest the (fast!) passing of time. New slides suggest the opening of the railway: the trains are crossing the bridge and in one of the carriages, we see Turner amazed at the train's speed and at the wonderful stormy sky. After this

flashback, the narrative goes forward to the Royal Academy of Arts. There Turner is putting some last touches on his painting *Rain, Steam and Speed - The Great Western Railway*. It appears to be blank and a little boy comes in on a slide, asking where the train is. Turner explains that he has not painted it yet, while the train slowly appears on the canvas as if from nowhere (the magic relies on the backlighting of the rolling background).

During this last scene, Poulter includes the appearance of a hare (Turner painted a hare in the original as a symbol of speed): 'Good bit of theatre!' he says, '[T]hey are doing art history I am trying to do a bit of entertainment that is why the script is quite funny, I think it works well on all levels'.[48]

Nonetheless, Poulter makes it clear that he is 'quite keen to be fairly accurate.'[49] The script, although fictional, is based on factual information that Poulter has tried to incorporate humorously into the dialogues. However, he has taken some liberties. For example, it is not known what the historical Mrs Booth looked like, so Poulter based her on a Turner painting of a woman lying in bed. But he is selective with the liberties he takes and the sources he uses. As for copying the great artists' artworks, he admits: 'I know my abilities and what I can and what I cannot do… I would not do that with all artists… I could not do it with Vermeer or with Titian… difficult to imitate… to match their style…'[50]

The Great Belzoni

The Great Belzoni was originally performed at the Bristol Museum and afterwards at other UK Museums (Fig. 14). The NMT version was commissioned by the Bristol Museum,

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[48] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 22 May 2009.

[49] In the show's programme Poulter writes: 'Although I have tried to keep to the known facts concerning Turner - as this is a piece of theatrical entertainment certain liberties have been taken. The principal ones are as follows: The size of the "Fighting Temeraire" and "Rain, Steam and Speed" paintings have been increased in scale in relation to the figures on stage in order that you the audience can see them! Turner's pub … I have moved closer to the Thames than it actually was & its interior is totally my own invention. The Maidenhead scene, although suggesting a Turner painting under the influence of the 17th c. French painter Claude, is in fact pure fantasy, but it does hint at the "Rain Steam and Speed" viewpoint to come….The sounds of paddle steamers and railway trains are in no way authentic -merely atmospheric… The dialogue contains a number of Turnerisms—some put in new contexts for dramatic effect'.

[50] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 9 December 2009.

which owns all Belzoni's drawings. At that time the museum had an exhibition including a recently x-rayed Egyptian mummy along with Belzoni's drawings.

Poulter performed on the top of the museum's main staircase.
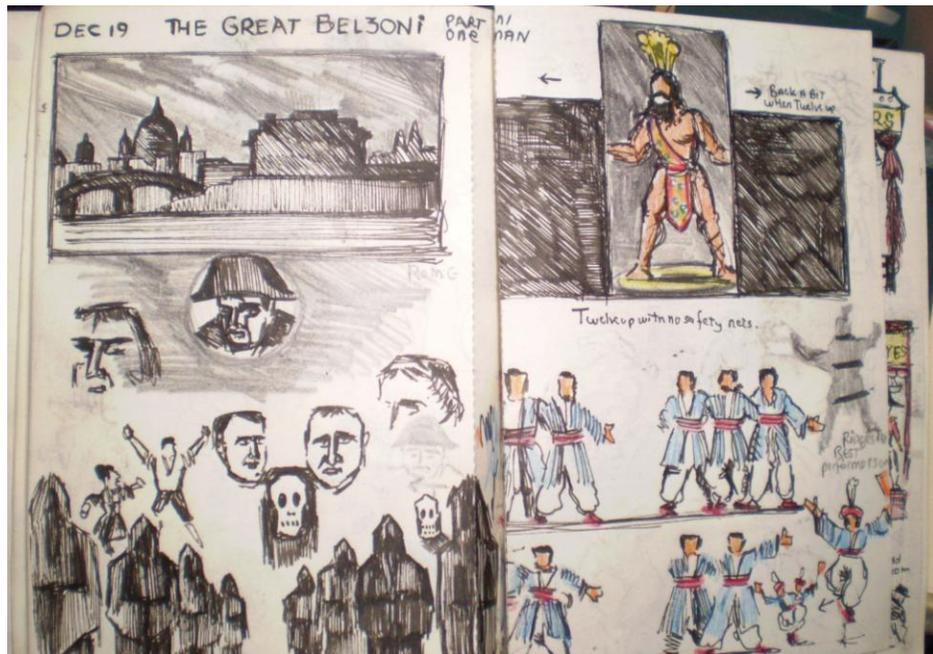
Figure 14: Robert Poulter's sketches for the show *The Great Belzoni* (2008)

The Great Belzoni was also presented at one of the small rooms of Sir John Sloane's Museum. The museum exhibits the entire tomb of Pharaoh Seti I, including the sarcophagus and the passage walls of the tomb, which Belzoni brought back from Egypt. They also own Belzoni's sketchbooks. Also before the performance starts, Poulter gives a short introduction making the associations between the show and the museum's collection. Having attended a number of pre-show presentations by Poulter, I always recognized the characteristic playfulness with which he links the real facts with his story.

The main setting is inspired by an Egyptian temple (Fig. 14). The curtains are both vertical and horizontal, and the proscenium continuously changes shape to fit the scenes. The figures are made out of coloured paper with no other details (nose, mouth and ears) (Fig. 15). This, Poulter says, makes them 'stand out very well.' The opening scene is a non-realistic amalgam of Belzoni's early life, before coming to London in 1803 to make his

living as a performing strongman. A number of slides are pushed on stage, in various grooves and in perspective, suggesting crucial moments of Belzoni's life. The montage is non-linear and all action is compressed within a single frame. The challenge here is to follow Belzoni's travel and do the scene changes (from Rome to London, Scotland, Portugal, etc.) without ever closing the curtain.

Figure 15: *The Great Belzoni*'s proscenium (photo from Robert Poulter's archive).

To play with the fact that Belzoni is a strongman, his legs first appear on stage in big scale. Then Poulter lifts the upper part of the stage and we see Belzoni carrying twelve people in his hands. Then we see him at Sadler's Wells Theatre, where he worked as an actor and as a set designer fabricating water spectacles, chemical flames, effects, rolling backgrounds, before creating his own theatre company (it is little wonder that Poulter was fascinated by this 'extraordinary gigantic Italian strongman, actor, impresario, hydraulic engineer and Egyptologist,'[51] his talents and his adventurous life).

The second part takes place in Egypt (Fig. 16). It starts in Cairo and the scenery is based on Henry Salt's drawing of Cairo.[52] Poulter 'squeezed Belzoni's two to three year journey to

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[51] http://www.newmodeltheatre.co.uk/shows.html Accessed 2 May 2009.

[52] Henry Salt was the British Council General who commissioned the archeological excavations initially.

Egypt to two to three seconds.'[53] There are various archaeological scenes, including excavation of the head of Rameses II on rollers and the lifting of an obelisk. Within multiple transformations in a single setting, the audience follows Belzoni and his wife through their explorations of different tombs. One of the final scenes takes place in London at a big exhibition at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly. Among the audience there, we recognize Turner and Wordsworth enjoying the delirious spectacle of all the objects Belzoni discovered and brought to England. The archaeological treasures dance playfully while we hear Poulter's recorded voice singing a song to commemorate the great hydraulic engineer and Egyptologist Belzoni.

Figure 16: Scene from *The Great Belzoni* (2009).

For all of his shows, Poulter's delicate 'double touch' —construction and manipulation— is inspired mainly by the beauty, power, or humour of all sorts of images, drawn from art, theatre, music and maritime history, or literature. Watching NMT shows or participating in NMT workshops, visitors have the opportunity to explore the highly neglected sense of touch in really sophisticated ways and in conjunction with meaningful narratives.

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[53] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 9 December 2009.

Walter Benjamin recognizes scientific qualities in cinema art and understands it as a radical means of rediscovering the world, by perceiving hidden aspects and perspectives:

> The film has enriched our field of perception with methods which can be illustrated by those of Freudian theory…As compared with painting, filmed behavior lends itself more readily to analysis because of its incomparably more precise statements of the situation. In comparison with the stage scene, the filmed behavior item lends itself more readily to analysis because it can be isolated more easily. This circumstance derives its chief importance from its tendency to promote the mutual penetration of art and science. (1999: 228-229).

Furthermore, Benjamin emphasizes the uniqueness of the language of cinema and sees the camera lens as a gateway to what he calls 'unconscious optics'— similar to the 'unconscious impulses' of the language of psychology (ibid: 230). This is achieved by cinema technologies that allow the camera to take close ups of space (enlargements, details, isolations) and interruptions in time (slow motion, extensions and accelerations).

With the help of technological advancement, cinema seems thus to gain in clarity, concreteness, precision and flexibility. Moreover, Benjamin acknowledges a dissociation effect between film actors and audience which permits the latter to take a more critical view of what is witnessed on screen:

> The film actor…does not present his performance to the audience in person. This permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experiencing any personal contact with the actor. The audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera (ibid: 222).

It seems to me that the impression someone gets while watching Poulter's shows is similar to watching a film. Cinematic images follow each other inside, and sometimes outside, the miniature, changing frame. The 'tools' of painting and cinema (angles, perspective, depth, scales, design, colours, composition, editing, zooming in and out, light and soundtrack) are carefully combined to produce a staged version of an intimate low-tech 3D movie; small in scale and short in length, since as Poulter points out: 'Sitting watching bits of cardboard

move, there is a limit… most of my shows last twenty to forty minutes; sometimes even one or five minutes.'[54]

Moreover, Poulter's cinematic images, dramaturgically edited, based on visual art and film techniques, seem to be particularly precise, clear, coherent, and flexible.[55] They are also facilitated by mechanical devices such as articulated figures, backlit rolling background, lights placed in different spots and sound recording. These devices add an extra perspective to the artist's exploration of historical themes, in addition to his experiments in visual or toy theatre performing arts around materials, colours and innovative manipulation techniques.

Benjamin also wrote:

> The characteristics of the film lie not only in the manner in which man presents himself to mechanical equipment but also in the manner in which, by means of his apparatus, man can represent his environment… (1999: 228).

Similarly, Poulter takes advantage of the flexibility and techniques of his medium to always achieve some balance between the historical personalities and their environment. Although based on dialogues and perceived as metaphors (as in all puppetry), his highly edited stories remain subjective statements about a world of the past. The aim is not to make the spectators identify with the characters. Instead, Poulter wants spectators to get enough visual and textual information in an entertaining and often funny way to enjoy watching the life of his protagonists *within the world they inhabited.*

Overall, it seems to me that Poulter's museum puppetry work is equally embedded in visual arts, documentary, puppetry, science, history and museum interpretation. The unique mixture of precision, clarity, science, economy, and logic with metaphor, art and

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[54] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 22 May 2009.

[55] In fact, the flexibility of travelling instantly —and imaginatively— in time and space, by bringing in and out flat pieces of painted card or by turning the rolling background, makes the live editing of the show seem as easy as the turning of the page of a book.

imagination legitimately locate his work somewhere in the borderline between documentary and toy theatre fiction, without necessarily making it less reliable/authentic from a museum point of view. Poulter communicates history in a visual-textual form, and constructs a space (a gap) for an interplay between objectivity and surreal. He doesn't subordinate reality to favour fantasy; rather he poetically transforms its essence as he interprets it, taking advantage of the economy of visual images and the complexity of montage.

Museum puppetry often enacts counter-narratives that are not normally celebrated by mainstream museums. The British Museum gives credits, to Henry Salt, the British consul-general, who initially commissioned the archeological excavations in Egypt. However, Poulter was inspired by Belzoni's personality and life and thought that this story could complement the museum's narrative. However, when he proposed his counter/complementary narrative to the British Museum as another way of 'touching' this delicate issue, Poulter never got a reply.

On the other hand, Poulter's interests and research area are addressed more towards adults and primary school children than preschoolers. This fact raises once again the issue of puppetry's stigmatization (toy theatre included). Holding such prejudices against puppetry, museum staff's reservations might lead to the following hypothetical questions: 'Why hire a museum puppetry programme that does not have a clear target group (preschoolers, families) but looks like it explores adult themes in a preschooler fashion? How serious could this be? Who, of our visitors who come to the museum to gain 'authentic' knowledge or to be impressed by spectacular shows, would have an interest watching paper figures moving back and forth in space and occasionally up and down?'

The museums' politics and learning strategies formulate obviously the criteria in hiring a museum activity or show. However, as previously clarified, all these are only individual assumptions and further research should be conducted here. Nevertheless, there is an issue around the role and image of similar museum activities. Poulter's and other related cases reinforce the need to create contact zones for the two communities of practice (puppeteers,

museum staff) where prejudices can be discussed and a common language and common approach to knowledge can be prioritised and investigated. As Wenger and Lave maintained (2008) this might eventually resolve some tensions within collaborative learning and alternative solutions might take the place of negative or monolithic attitudes and uncompromised rejections (see Chapter Three for further discussion).

Live interpretation and museum puppetry workshops

Tony Jackson maintains in his article 'The Dialogic and the Aesthetic' that:

> …the dialogic process must be at the core of interventionist theatre practice, whether that be the giving of finely honed theatre performances or the running of interactive workshops that include within them moments of performance. It is in those multifaceted, spoken, and unspoken dialogues— within the play and between play and audience—that the aesthetic and pedagogic impact of the performance event will lie. (Jackson 2005:116)

Museum puppetry workshops might involve interaction and dialogue not only in rehearsals and participants' performance but also within craftsmanship. This is a field of puppetry that demands the use of tools, other materials and hands as well as the use of a special type of language (discussed in the next chapter).

Robert Poulter NMT construction and performance workshops

For example such types of interactive platforms and learning conditions are among the intentions of the NMT workshops. These can be undertaken by participants ranging from the age of 'eight to eighty' as Poulter proudly states,[56] and vary depending on their length and budget. Poulter always gives a short show first as many 'do not have an idea about

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[56] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 22 May 2009.

what the toy theatre is.'[57] The shortest workshop runs for one and a half hours; the longest could last up to three months.

In his workshops, Poulter either uses his own stage or has the participants build their own. He either suggests a theme or leaves it more open for the group to decide upon. In such cases, they do a storyboard, write the script, design the characters in more detail, divide up different tasks (the lights, music, voices, manipulation) and finally rehearse it. Poulter points out that even though rehearsals are important they usually get neglected because of time constraints. As a consequence of this, alternatively, his workshops may involve just performing.

The Horniman Museum handling collection workshops

> Playing and cultural experience are things that we do value in a special way; these link the past, the present, and the future; they take up time and space. They demand and get our concentrated deliberate attention, deliberate but without too much of the deliberateness of trying (Winnicott 2006: 147).
>
> […] play is a mind set [and] the way you do an activity determines whether it is done playfully or otherwise (Else 2009: 125).

Workshops based on the museum's handling collection are undertaken throughout the year by the staff of the Horniman museum. Louise Palmer (the museum's schools learning manager), is one of the workshop leaders. Palmer seems to balance, with self-confidence, playfulness and openness, the demanding and varied tasks and skills required of her role: energetic, smiley, open and very busy (but always ready to stop and listen), she combines a very good sense of humour with a clear idea of limits.

Given that educators are familiar with the rich learning potential of the museum's handling collection (Fig. 17), Palmer underlines the importance of the loosely structured nature of the workshops (both for participants and the staff):

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[57] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 22 May 2009.

[…] because you… 'use' the object as evidence… you can create a narrative between objects in any way you want. It depends entirely on school, on what it focuses each time. There is a basic structure of the program [but] …if you have the object knowledge you can go anywhere with it…it is a good way to work with the collection to keep it varied for us as well.[58]

Figure 17: From the Horniman Museum's Toys Handling Collection (2010).

The handling collection contains an impressive range of objects. Having revised its access system, the collection was reduced from 6000 to 3000 items, with the rest donated to other museums (Fig. 18) (ibid.).

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[58]L. Palmer. Personal interview, 7 May 2009.

Figure 18: Part of the handling collection in the Hands on Base at the Horniman Museum (2010).

As Palmer explains, during field and acquisition trips for the museum's permanent collection, museum curators always 'have an eye to buy for the …. "separate mini museum" the museum handling collection' (ibid). Items that lack background or provenance information are not such an issue for the handling collection programmes as: 'we don't need the background history of an object; we are interested in the educational value of an object and what it tells about the people that made it, or about the adaptation of an animal, or the environment it lives in… we have different criteria' (Fig. 19) (ibid).

Figure 19: Louise Palmer leading the Puppet workshop in the Horniman Museum (2010).

Besides the puppet workshops for schools, there are also puppet workshops for children with special needs, learning packs for puppets based on temporary exhibitions, trails to make links with the permanent collection, puppet/masks workshops for families once every five weeks, and pre- and post-visit activities for teachers in the website. More specifically, during the workshop, Palmer and the other workshop leaders communicate with the public about the similarities and differences among the various puppet styles, the geographic and cultural origin of the puppets (and the interdependence of all three, focusing, for example,

on explaining why specific countries favour certain construction materials). As Palmer makes clear:

> […] our aim is to introduce people to the breadth of styles of puppetry around the world…what performance is, what the puppet show is, what the narrative is. Is it for entertainment… for social satire? For moral lessons? It is about empowering people, not [about] becoming puppeteers as such, but enabling [them] to animate [the puppets] and learn that a puppet is only a puppet when it is animated (ibid.).

The trainer does a short demonstration on manipulation and then the schoolchildren are divided into groups to have a go at puppet manipulation in front or behind the shadow screen, depending on the type of puppet (shadow, rod, string or glove puppet, see Fig. 20).

Figure 20: Louise Palmer leading a puppet workshop in the Horniman Museum (2010).

As the museum cannot provide professional puppeteers for the sessions, Palmer (who regularly delivers programmes for nursery all the way up to eighteen year-old students) explains:

> We are not puppeteers. We are not dexterous in puppet skills. We can only show basic techniques; that is a bit of a challenge… We do have breakages;

things break; with the best will in the world you are trying to be as careful as you can and encouraging careful handling, but if you are having thirty children there will be breakages (ibid).

However, for puppet shows, the museum collaborates with external professional puppeteers who present their work during the weekends, as well as with a puppet-maker for the maintenance of the handling collection on a weekly basis (minor repairs are undertaken by interns from the conservation department).

Also, the museum provides trails ('Puppet Pathways') with an answer sheet to be completed during the visitors' tour inside the galleries. Finally, when the Hands on Base is open to the public, and with the help of museum staff, visitors can handle objects and puppets found on the discovery tables, and explore the discovery boxes, which are separated according to specific themes (Fig. 21). These boxes contain objects from the handling collection, relevant reading material, instructions for puppet manipulation and activities. Visitors can try out puppet manipulation and also improvise their own activities.

Figure 21: Discovery boxes in the Hands on Base at the Horniman Museum. The boxes also contain reading material, instructions for manipulation and suggested activities (2010).

Data from direct observations suggest that during the ninety minute puppet workshops for schools, children do get excited and are thrilled to touch, manipulate, and move the puppets

in space. Time is limited, though, for direct manipulation and participants don't have the chance to develop either their own narrative or a meaningful interaction with other participants' puppets (although the passing of the puppets among the participants seated in a circle could potentially integrate simple puppet manipulation within a meaningful short narrative).

The time of a school visit is limited so it is not possible to fully explore the learning potential of such richly varied objects. Choices are necessary and within the limits of a one-off school visit participants do get a taste of the puppets' world, of their history, origins, styles, manipulation techniques and their role in various societies and cultures. The fact that the puppet workshop is among the most popular workshop of the museum is proof of that.

Also, I consider the post-visit activities provided via the museum's website as the best way to extend the museum experience: these activities provide participants with a chance to explore puppetry's potential, as well as a chance 'to understand the world via symbol and narrative' (Slade &Wolf 1994: 94). Another alternative would probably be to have a follow-up workshop with the class after the first introductory one, or a family visit to the Hands on Base. Thus, the chances would be greater to have plenty of time to make all sorts of associations and develop meaningful narratives with the museum's collection.

Working on the rules set by the puppet manipulation could possibly bring another focus and motivation to a follow-up activity. The Russian psychologist Leo Vygotsky says: 'a child's greatest self-control occurs in play' (1978: 99). If participants are provided with enough time to enter more deeply into the playful world of puppets, they may have a greater chance of being more relaxed and ready to focus on the more scientific or kinaesthetic aspect of puppet constructions and manipulation after the excitement of the hands-on experience in the first session. Although we can take it for granted that children are puppeteers by nature, there is still a considerable learning potential in puppet manipulation, which requires certain rules. These rules could be, for example, natural laws (for example the law of gravity) or simple mechanics, as explored with O'Donovan's Troll House (see next chapter). Rules could be as simple as the self evident fact that if you pull

up a string, the marionette's leg is raised and if you let that down and do the same with the other leg, the marionette will start walking. Once the rules are understood, the more the child practices manipulation, the more the possibilities to get the satisfaction of watching its puppet becoming 'really' alive and communicative. In other words, the more the possibilities for the child to get amazed and engaged.

> The strict subordination in rules is quite impossible in life, but in play it does become possible: thus play creates a zone of proximal development of the child… where [it] behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour … as though he were a head taller than himself (ibid: 102).

British Museum community workshops

Community workshops were conducted by the British Museum when it celebrated the Mexican Day of the Dead on Sunday 1st November 2009, while the museum's temporary exhibition was *Moctezuma: Aztec Ruler*.

In the museum's Great Court and outdoors, the museum offered processions, family workshops for creating traditional paper cut-outs, skeleton masks, storytelling performances, an altar (where dead loved ones traditionally are celebrated), all made by Mexican artists and the children who visited the museum (Fig. 22).

Figure 22: Mexican artist wearing a mask demonstrates how to make cut-out figures. Next to her is the Day of the Dead Altar in the Great Court at British Museum (2009).

Among the most astonishing events of the day were the Mexican folklore dance group, the romantic dance from the underworld (Danza Antigua) where a macabre duet danced on stilts, and a carnival parade of gigantic puppets as dancing skeletons. This spectacular procession, along with the dances and music, created an ambience for all visitors. When the band played the traditional tunes, aligning to this fiesta spirit, the audience started to sing along with the performers. Although it was a rainy day, a carnivalesque atmosphere prevailed all over the museum's yard (and beyond), with long queues surrounding the building.

The parade with the giant puppets was organized by community artists commissioned by the museum. The artists worked with a group of elderly Latin Americans and another group of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. They created three giant puppets, a skeleton figure in a coffin, La Catrina and a dog, manipulated by rods. These were technically simple structures and were made during two three hour workshops. As Harvinder Bahra, the community programme coordinator of the British Museum, explains:

> […] it was an opportunity to learn about the Day of the Dead and puppet making traditions. The Latin American group comes from all over the South America and not all of them celebrate the Day of the Dead, even though they may be aware of it. For the young group it was a completely new experience.[59]

The architect and artist Thomas Sayre argues that in the past 'public space [was]… the display of "civic virtue" [but]… nowadays… we don't agree so readily on what is civic virtue... This admittedly utopian vision sees public space as a place where our multi-cultural society orchestrates its many voices into a dynamic whole' (Sayre, cited in Weil 2007: 41-2). I think that the excitement of the British Museum's audience best advocates Sayre's view and post-museum's ideology on multiple voices and activities beyond collections enclosed in a building: this fiesta in a public space made an appeal equally to Mexican and non Mexican participants (and passersby) who became part of what Sayre calls 'a confluence of voices… a forum for exchange'. Similarly to the *Ramayana*

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[59] H. Bahra. Email correspondence. 19, 23, 24 November 2009.

presented in the British Library, the British Museums' Day of the Dead, rather than exoticising the 'Other', disclosed some 'fluid dynamics' in the air and became what Sayre calls 'a place where the melting pot melts' (ibid).

In these times when school education legitimately invests in computer technology which is ubiquitous in the school environment compared to more traditional, 'old fashioned' craftsmanship, the above cases raise the following question about the role of museums compared to that of schools: If computer technology is a legitimate 'must' for professional and vocational training today, who then is responsible for holistic learning? This would be a type of learning that, as Sennett argues (2009), links the head and the hand with a work ethos and devotion to the pleasure of creation as opposed to the pursuit of mere profit or market demands.

Age discrimination and the stigma of puppetry:

is it a kids' show or is it for adults?

> Whatever I say about children playing really applies to adults as well (Donald Winnicott 2006: 54).

> In Indian cosmology, to be in play is to reproduce time (Handelman, cited in Sutton-Smith 2004: 134).

In this section I will mainly focus on museum communities classified by age, and will study museum puppetry live interpretation for younger audiences compared to, or combined with, adult shows. As such, I will analyse the notion of play as not only having a value in its own right, but also as a means to bridge differences between various age groups.

Sofia Yalouraki children's museum puppetry programs

Sofia Yalouraki, an archaeologist, former teacher and nursery school director, has collaborated with the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens, one of the most popular museums of the city. She has done so on a weekly basis since 1986. In the beginning, she used to

present her museum puppetry programmes every Saturday, but in recent years she only does it once a month, plus the school holidays. Yalouraki's case is a rare example of a long-term, regular collaboration between a museum and a puppeteer. Yalouraki's long experience in education made her very clear from the beginning: she asked the museum to provide her with a puppet booth, and suggested the parameters for her target group: a mixed, general audience, about sixty participants (the programmes are open to primary school children aged 6-12 years old, but not to school classes, even if these are accompanied by their teachers). Yalouraki explains:

> My audience is mixed as age doesn't always go with mind… Society itself contains all ages and all social classes… I would like children to socialize even when they do not know each other, even if there is an age difference... the minister's child should sit together with the taxi driver's child.[60]

The glove puppets she constructs personify Cycladic statuettes and everyday people—including a fictional character, the *star* of the programme: the Bubble, the frivolous nouveau riche (Fig. 23), with her husband the Cup-holder, a puppet personification of one of the Cycladic statuettes who is holding a glass (of wine?) in his raised hand. Sometimes sessions start with a twenty minute question and answer tour through the galleries. Although her sessions are rather crowded, they are still participatory. In the activity space, the group discusses the tour and is engaged in warm-up theatre games around mythology, art and history; the multidisciplinary programme ends with the puppet show. There, Yalouraki mainly touches on social issues in a playful atmosphere. Humour is 'important to the puppeteer for its functions as an entertaining device to draw an audience… and an indicator of audience involvement' (Gross 1987: 124), and Yalouraki uses it not only to test her audience but also to communicate human values, often in the form of spontaneous improvisations (see also Geoff Felix's case study above):

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[60]S. Yalouraki. Personal interview, 9 August 2009.

Figure 23: The Bubble puppet, the star of the Cycladic Museum (Athens) and Sofia Yalouraki behind her (2009).

> Social messages are basic; human values as well. There are not so many after all. It is not so difficult!… When I am not hearing the children laughing I get worried. When I hear the first laugh, this is the first bridge… I choose the puppets and the subject of the programme when I wake up every morning, depending on my mood. If it rains, or snows and I take the Cup-holder, he might say: 'Oh, my bald head got frozen today!' Puppets have character - they are alive if you have humour, if you don't hesitate… I do not have 'papers,' I improvise. Children feel that I have devoted my life to *this*, they feel the warmth, the human touch. You do not need 'papers' or philosophy for that (ibid).

Above all knowledge, it seems to me that Yalouraki primarily values human relations. During the years she has been collaborating with the museum staff she has perceived puppetry as a spontaneous, improvisational and humorous practice— as a genuinely popular art. However, she never stops researching, enriching her sessions with new subjects, and experimenting with new techniques. What she and the museum staff have carefully built over these years is the idea that the museum is a 'place of safety' and its function is that of building 'healthy human communities':

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> In an increasingly atomized and even hostile environment…the museum ought to emphasize the fact that it has traditionally been and still remains one of the few public spaces in which people of every background can gather together for peaceful exchange in a secure surrounding. […] as a contemporary descendent of such earlier public gatherings places as the Roman bath, the medieval cathedral and the New England village green (Heumann Gurian, cited in Weil 2007: 41).

When I arrived at the Museum of Cycladic Art I met sixty people, children and their families, waiting to meet Yalouraki at the entrance of 'their museum' (as they call it). Each one was holding a flower to give to 'their teacher'.[61] As soon as they saw her, children ran to talk to her, to hug her and to hide under her long overcoat. I think the museum's confidence in Yalouraki as a person, in her talent, and her long experience in school and museum learning, made any detailed planning or lengthy negotiations with the museum staff rather redundant. I also think that the above image in a way reflects the effect of time over a chain of relationships, negotiations and exchanges within the museum context. It also suggests the role of the institution as a unique public space, which can turn museum interactions into an exceptional type of barter.

Science Museum of Minnesota live interpretation for families and younger audiences

The Science Museum of Minnesota has a long tradition of museum theatre and runs a rich programme of related activities (Bridal 2004: 59). As its ex-director of public programmes, Tessa Bridal says the Science Museum of Minnesota, along with nine other US organizations and one from Uruguay, has 'made recognized contributions to the field of museum theatre', and it 'employs a professional director and actors on a salaried, full-time basis' (ibid: introduction viii; xii).

As a permanent member of the museum's staff, Stephanie Long is responsible not only for performing the shows (Fig. 24; 25) but also for commissioning the museum and puppet theatre shows. In those cases where Long is not directing, she first has discussions with the directors and then hires professional playwrights to write a treatment and then the final

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[61] S. Yalouraki. Personal interview, 9 August 2009.

script (this happens after she gives them between one and three teaching goals for the programme).

Figure 24: Stephanie Long performs in a puppet show for preschoolers at the Science Museum of Minnesota (2008).

At the second stage, she hires builders and costume designers. She tries to alternate the external collaborators to meet with the demands in 'feel, vision, voice' [62]of each show's style. The preproduction period lasts from six months to a year for shows that last from 5 to 30 minutes at the most. As Long argues , there is a lot to see in the museum and it is always nice after seeing a puppet show on polar bears to leave some time for visitors to go and see the real exhibit afterwards.[63] The shows are presented either at special spots inside the galleries or in the black box theatre stage (there, museum staff can easier select their audience for -mainly museum theatre- shows especially addressed to older spectators).

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[62] S. Long. Personal interview, December 2008.

[63] S. Long. Personal interview, December 2008.

Figure 25: Stephanie Long manipulates an arm Bear puppet at the Science Museum of Minnesota (2008).

I had the chance to observe the show for preschoolers *Murder and the Mysterious Miss Squito* in this space and three other shows (*Riddles of Disease, Don't Call me Monkey, Polar Bear Journey*), in special spots inside the galleries of the museum.

As Long says, the shows usually complement a travelling exhibit, 'to develop something that the exhibit doesn't touch on' and are all evaluated by a scientist beforehand.[64] Shows for permanent collections have a lifespan of more than two years. Also, as Long explains, the shows cannot be very intimate in the museum setting, where there are a lot of people and noise all around and actors wear microphones. As for the puppet show's cost, although there is often a very low budget for the puppeteers' costumes as they usually wear black, a lot of money may be spent on elaborate puppets.[65]

Long sees museum puppetry as a bridge for the age gap between children and adults (it works for a family audience):

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[64] S. Long. Personal interview, December 2008.

[65] S. Long. Personal interview, December 2008.

> […] just found that puppetry is a huge draw. It draws in more people to a show than a non puppet show… We hear daily 'oh this was our first puppet show, our first play,' and this is very important to us to maintain the level of excellence because we are the first experience to create lifelong art lovers and science lovers at the same time.[66]

Long maintains that puppetry works best with the natural world where the goal, especially for the little children, is to help them emotionally engage with animals; for example, she argues that programmes might make them 'fall in love with the polar bear' rather than inspire them to save the planet with specific actions.[67]

Long thinks of museum theatre as the most appropriate medium for communicating controversial or sensitive issues to adults, whereas she thinks that puppetry is more appropriate for preschoolers:

> There are certain things we would not use puppetry for…We had a ten minute show about racism, it was very raw and real, it had no conclusion it was open- ended; the conflicts were not resolved between the characters. It would look untrue… Obviously puppets have been used for that kind of conflict resolution and situations but for the type of show we developed we would not use puppets… The controversial issues are geared for adults, I cannot think of any puppet show with controversial issues, it is not that I don't believe that puppets cannot be used for that, but the types of shows we developed with puppets are not applicable to it […] [68]

Long is clear that the museum's policy is to keep the puppet medium within a safer, non-threatening environment for the children, something that shouldn't cause any confusion to the parents or the rest of the audience.

However, we should also acknowledge the learning potential of puppetry for sensitive or controversial issues (see Chapter One), as well as the re-emergence of adult puppetry. I

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[66] S. Long. Personal interview, December 2008.

[67] S. Long. Personal interview, December 2008.

[68] S. Long. Personal interview, December 2008.

believe that there has been a lost opportunity. By isolating museum puppetry from the ambiguities and tough aspects of the real world, we deprive museum learning of an ideal medium to explore delicate issues in a safe, playful environment, both for younger audiences and adults (see below the section on adult puppetry).

However, it should be noted that Long is really open to future use of adult puppetry under certain conditions:

> I would love to see that [i.e. adult puppetry] and we hope to do that some time, but [need to] find the right amount of funding. It would have to be well made.[69]

Besides museum puppetry for preschoolers, Long recalls, the museum has used puppetry with visitors with special needs and learning difficulties in order to make science shows accessible to them. Experts in the field collaborated with a number of museums and worked on tabletop activities; they found out that 'puppetry was the most accessible just on its own merit'.[70]

Coming back to the narrative issue, Long stresses the fact that:

> Our shows are meant to inspire further learning, because the art should always come first; that is why we use puppets, it is such an artistic form…science is second… As long as it is not contradictory to the facts or to what we know of the being of the person, we take a lot of artistic license… the whole point of the programme is to reach people through the humanity of it, to give them a reason to care about it; you have to take a little bit of artistic license or else it might just as well be a science.[71]

Overall, I got the impression that this museum differs from others that tend to think of reality as 'superior' to 'inferior play' (cf. Sutton-Smith 2004: 134). The Science Museum of

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[69] S. Long. Personal interview, December 2008.

[70] S. Long. Personal interview, December 2008.

[71] S. Long. Personal interview, December 2008.

Minnesota, like many other science museums or science centres, considers that play has a place in science, as well as in the scientist's life. In this, it seems to align with Einstein's view of the playfully scientific routes his mind used to favour:

> […] the words or the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought… It is also clear that the desire to arrive finally at logically connected concepts is the emotional basis of this rather vague play with the above mentioned elements. But taken from a psychological viewpoint, this combinatory play seems to be essential feature in productive thought before there is any connection with logical construction in words or other kinds of signs which can be communicated to others (cited in Else 2009: 133).

Adult museum puppetry

> Why do puppets matter now… Throughout culture and politics these days, the imagery of puppets is dense, critical, humorous, and potentially profound (Schaffner 2008:15).

It is no surprise that when advertising their shows for grown-ups, puppeteers in the west feel the need to add an indication such as: 'Puppet Shows for Adults' to their promotional material. Similarly, there are very few puppet festivals that dedicate their programmes to adult puppetry. The exceptions include the Scottish *Manipulate Visual Theatre* (advertised as 'Innovative theatre and animation for consenting adults') or London's *Suspense* (advertised as '…bringing puppetry to new adult audiences'), just to mention two recently inaugurated UK festivals.[72]

The indication 'Shows for an adult audience' might bring forth spontaneous assumptions such as: a) the show contains sex and/or violent scenes that parents would not like their children to be exposed to; b) children will not be able to identify with the characters or the story and thus they will remain indifferent to the show; c) the show is not didactic, or does not have a clear moral message; or d) it does not have a happy ending.

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[72] http://www.manipulatefestival.org/ and http://www.suspensefestival.com/content/about/ (accessed 8 February 2010).

On the other hand, puppet shows not specifically made for an adult audience, are usually addressed to preschoolers or the 'general public' (they also referred to as 'family shows'). This usually means that the shows are suitable both for children and their parents/carers who often find a good excuse for some uninhibited 'light' entertainment. Some 'braver' adults, not being accompanied by their children, are overtly looking for a comic, entertaining show that contains witty dialogues and/or simple but effective visuals and action. As Gross points out: 'People like to laugh, so a show that is known to be funny will be well attended' (1987:124).

It should be noted here though that the segregation of adult and children in puppetry happened in the course of the last hundred years. As Blumenthal explains:

> In the nineteenth century, puppetry got a special bailiwick. With the romantic movement's exaltation of pre-civilized innocence, children were increasingly seen not as half-baked grown-ups but as a special group with unique imagination and needs. Puppets took a prominent place in the new field of theater geared specifically to kids (2005:20).

Blumenthal also says that the obsession of the society of the time with 'objective data' and science drove many puppeteers to realism, 'to make their work as lifelike as possible'. This, according to Blumenthal, enhanced the belief that 'a non-realistic form such as puppetry was fit only for children' (ibid.).

The examples in this section (especially Theodora Skipitares's case study, more thoroughly examined in the last part) suggest that there is no clear age limit for puppetry -and consequently for museum puppetry - and that consequently, sophistication, simplicity, real life situations and playfulness are not mutually exclusive terms (Fig. 26).

Figure 26: Visitor resting at the entrance of the exhibition *Enchanted Palace* at the Kensington Palace (2010).

For example, Levine, while in the pre-production process, doesn't have a particular age group in mind, and she admits that this can work both ways:

> I just create the work and see where does it fit… I originally thought that this is only gonna be for adults. Once I was hired and they told me -this happens a lot- that this was going to be for junior high kids, but when I got there, these were six years old and I thought they are gonna be scared, they are not going to understand it. And they loved it. And I said this has a greater stretch than I thought.[73]

Also, Yalouraki, normally hired for museum puppetry programmes for schoolchildren, was asked once by the Museum of Cycladic Art's director to give a late night puppet show for American tour operators. Yalouraki relied on her improvisational skills and involved the audience in the action: she asked the men of the group to vote which type of woman they

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[73] J. Levine. Personal interview, 1 December 2009.

thought were the best: the timid one, the intellectual, or the sexually emancipated one incarnated by Yalouraki's frivolous mascot: the Bubble (see above in the same Chapter). The winner would dance with the President of the tour operators. The Bubble got the majority of votes and the President took her in his arms (with Yalouraki manipulating her). They started to dance together and chat:

> The Bubble: Will you take me to your bed?
> The President: Yes!
> The Bubble: Will you take me with you to the US?
> The President: Yes!
> The Bubble: Will you divorce your wife for me?
> The President: I don't know! [74]

In 2001, the renowned French director Philippe Genty presented *Le Concert Incroyable* in the Grande Salle de l' Evolution in the Natural History Museum of Paris. High technology projections of inventive graphic designs were used and interacted with the central exhibit of the gallery: a march that consisted of large mummified animals. This puppet and physical theatre show was a composition of sophisticated images based on environmental issues, dramatic conceptual action and chorus singing; a museum experience for an adult audience.[75]

Theodora Skipitares

I was introduced to Theodora Skipitares by the puppet theatre researcher and practitioner Alissa Mello. I met the renowned American-Greek visual artist, performer and puppet director at her home in New York. Although Skipitares had once wanted to become a doctor, she instead decided to approach the science world from an artistic and rather critical point of view. She has made a number of puppet shows for adults around the history of science and medicine (including *The Age of Inventions*, 1984; *Defenders of the Code*: *A Musical History of Genetics*, 1987; *Empire Appetite*, 1989; and *Under the Knife: A History of Medicine*, 1994), while in the last few years she has become more interested in

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[74] The operators watching the show were accompanied by their partners, husbands and wives (!) – S. Yalouraki. Personal interview, 9 August 2009.

[75] See *Le Concert Incroyable.* Dir. Philippe Genty. Le Musée National de l' Histoire Naturelle. 2001. DVD.

storytelling and myths (Skipitares 2001: 125-143).[76] I did not have the chance to watch any of her shows live but I saw extracts on DVD from the shows: *The Age of Inventions*, *Defenders of the Code*: *A Musical History of Genetics* and *Empire Appetite.*

Skipitares has presented her 'documentary shows,' as she used to call them, in numerous galleries and museums.[77] Unlike other practitioners, Skipitares prefers not to mix up or change the exact words known to be said in the past from scientists, artists. Instead, she attempts to use montage to comment on these words and also to make symbolic associations by the way she places puppets/objects in space. As she underlines: 'Except the songs, (someone else wrote the verses) I don't feel I ever fictionalized. I would not use that word, I took other kinds of liberties, but I still see it as a documentary piece.'[78]

Skipitares, unlike other artists, is not reluctant to characterise her early puppetry work as didactic ('I love didactic things,' she admits); she was even criticized for giving her characters long speeches: 'critics did not like teaching through a theatrical device,' she says.[79] Skipitares thinks of innocence, emptiness and purity as some of the main qualities she discovered in puppets. For her, unlike actors who have 'to deal with their ego,' puppets are ideal containers to preserve the purity of their content:

> […] not everyone agrees with me on that and a lot of people criticized that period of my work; I believe that puppets are empty and innocent and you can fill them up with the truth and they won't alter it… so that's how I first found puppets to be this wonderful link to documentary material (ibid.).

Skipitares undertakes thorough research about her subjects before 'documenting' science history or mythology in her oblique, dark, non-linear way. Her subjects range from genetics and female criminality to hunger and ancient Greek tragedy. Humour is also very present in

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[76] Th. Skipitares. Personal interview, November 2008.

[77] As her work gradually became more and more complex, Skipitares needed a space that could be darkened in order to bring scenery and puppets in and out of the stage. Thus, she started presenting her shows in proper theatre stages.

[78] Th. Skipitares. Personal interview, November 2008.

[79] Th. Skipitares. Personal interview, November 2008.

her work. A well known scene is the comical visual image of the noses' dance in the *Defenders of the Code*. There she attacks racist theories developed in the name of science:

> […it was] straight out of what was once a highly esteemed science book you know, that the 'negro's' nose is always lazy, the Jewish nose is always gonna go looking for money… (ibid).

Adults might be reticent about facing high art, science or history in a playful, funny way as it is the norm to face life in general in a serious manner. Adults are not always eager to legitimise play, apart from sports or gambling:

> Just like children we may be unwilling to chance new ways of playing; as adults we have our comfort zones and don't like to move too far out of these. …there is a reassurance in doing things repetitively… However, if we are truly to be aware of ourselves, we need to take risks to move beyond our current levels of operation, to transform our perceptions through new experiences… There is nothing to prevent us exploring further except our preconceptions. This is especially valuable if we are to support children in their playing; to be playful, you need to play (Else 2009: 128).

Inspired by the philosophy of science, Skipitares' work best illuminates the theory of play according to which play can be both 'unserious, illusory and ephemeral' and 'subversive and resisting the order of things' (Handelman, cited in Sutton-Smith 2004: 134).

Skipitares' work, as with Poulter's, O'Donovan's and many others' also echoes Richard Schechner's view that 'it is wrong to think of play as an interruption of ordinary life… [but, as] an ironic glimpse of things, a bend or crack in behavior' (Schechner, cited in Sutton-Smith 2004: 135).

Conclusion

In this chapter I investigated how the practical and theoretical frameworks of the practice are applied within the museum field, a place for all sorts of interactions: among exhibits, puppets, manipulators, workshop participants and, last but not least, the public. The contact zones where these interactions took place were viewed as a platform of continuous

dialogues and negotiations for co-creating a narrative and for meaning making. Winnicott's object play, Csikszenmihalyi's flow experience, Heidegger's idea of the Thing and everydayness, Roberts' analysis of the narrative, and Sennett's theory of craftsmanship all set the theoretical framework for the analysis of these museum contact zones.

Heidegger takes an ethical approach to the world of the objects: 'Thinging is the nearing of world,' he says, as he urges us to '…spare and protect the thing's presence in the region from which it presences' (2001: 179). Where Heidegger focuses on Object-ness, Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory of play seems to map out a contact zone between his idea of transitional objects and Heidegger's philosophy on the Thing's territory. Acknowledging the learning potential of this territory, Winnicott emphasises our physical relations with the world, our tactile experiences around objects and 'love and hate' relations with what is 'not me' and at the same time 'not not me'. Winnicott sees the world of objects as a safely fragile, transitional environment (2006: 1-34); he maintains that creative play 'arises naturally out of the relaxed state' (ibid: 146) and enables us to experience our own existence, to engage with the complexities of the world outside.

Aligning with Winnicott's and Heidegger's ideas, all the cases studied here bear witness that practitioners focus on challenging gap-making, intriguing post-show follow up discussions or sessions, workshops, links with the museum collection and ideas. They also intend to create optimum conditions for participation and learning. Moreover, they align with Winnicott's and Csikszenmihalyi' idea of play as a safe learning environment 'in flow'. In addition, all cases echo Bogatyrev's (1983) view about the distinct visual aspect of puppet theatre (and museum puppetry): a special focus is given to the concrete materiality of the medium which stimulates vision and contextualizes the sense of touch.

As 'the prevailing policy in museum is "hands off"' (Prytherch & Jefsioutine 2007: 224), I suggested that the constructions puppeteers bring along to the museums (either to be touched by puppeteers while visitors watch, or by visitors themselves) are intended to familiarize the audience with the sense of touch in a meaningful way. The process here is

less mechanical and less detached, as the objects aim at being part of an evocative, and sometimes even personal, narrative.

In this perspective, it seems to me that the combination of aesthetics and style with a well-planned narrative that anticipates the audience's willing suspension of disbelief are key factors for the intended learning conditions of holistic museum experiences (see also Chapter Four on interactive puppet exhibits).

I also explored how interaction with familiar concrete everyday objects aims at triggering an audience's imagination to explore non–linear narratives more by showing things that happen in the present than by telling of things that happened in the past. According to the post-museum philosophy, learning was analysed more as a meaning making, often playful, activity and narrative beyond exhibitions, than as transmission of knowledge based on museum interpretation labels. Also, I suggested that there is a need to train the audience or to familiarise it with ways to participate and interact within museum puppetry activities (to organise, for example, short talks, show demonstrations before workshops, workshops or school visits).

I suggested that in museum puppetry, empathy is primarily based on the puppetry convention. This convention seeks to make the audience identify itself and empathize with an inanimate character brought to life via form and movement as well as verbal text. Apart from an intriguing narrative and dialogues, echoing Sennett's ideas presented in his book *The Craftsman* (2009), empathizing with puppetry presupposes intelligent, sensitized hands for the use of tools in construction (craftsmanship) and for skilled manipulation during the show.

I examined how projects (Capstick, Levine) that dramatize the idea of 'everydayness' aim to raise the 'anyone' and the world that surrounds him beyond conventions and stereotypes. In fact, interpreting the 'everyday' is a more demanding, interesting and dynamic process than it at first seems to be, as Guignon's analysis of Heidegger's philosophy implies:

Our 'direct' understanding of ourselves is always the product of a template of traditional schematizations which circulate as 'common sense' in our culture, and tend to distort and disguise as much as they reveal. Since our way of interpreting ourselves and our world is mediated by social and historical categories and conceptualizations, our normal, 'self-evident' self interpretation is generally a *mis*interpretation.

In order to start from a neutral standpoint, then, the existential analytic begins by laying out our plain sense of what it is to be as this is found 'proximally and for the most part' in everyday active situations prior to reflection (Guignon 1984: 324).

Moreover, I referred to Robert Poulter's museum projects which don't aim to make a sentimental appeal to the audience with innocent-friendly looking figures, or challenge their knowledge and spirit from an expert's point of view. Instead, his narrative attempts to suspend spectators' disbelief by inviting them to fill visual gaps on his miniature stage, often within a comic narrative. Rigorous movement, use of scales, close ups, surprising associations and inventive montage, time travels, all aspire to carry the audience with Poulter into the playful side of life. With these simple techniques Poulter creates breaks in time and space, and a fragmented narration, and attempts to reveals some strange hidden structural forms of a world which otherwise remains more or less familiar to us. Also, I considered NMT revolutionary because it suggests that poetry and *joie de vivre* are closer to real life than we tend to think in our everyday routine.

Moreover, I tried to make clear that Poulter intends to entertain rather than teach. He aims, as Bogatyrev would say, towards 'co-creating' (1983: 62) a world based on poetic interpretations of real facts with his audience, a world of ultimate metaphors which presents a mini-view of the social, historical and cultural context where action takes place. I examined the idea that NMT's audience witnesses a person from the present attempting to enter into a multi-sensory dialogue with the past. Poulter's miniature stage of history is accompanied by his live presence. This reconfirms a humble truth, as Stephen Weil, clarifies: in certain museum exhibition practices, museum interaction 'is no way inevitable but has been shaped and mediated by real human beings, with all the possibilities for error and/or bias that any such human undertaking might entail' (Weil 2007: 42).

Overall, I argued that Poulter's NMT seems to fit perfectly into the idea of the post-museum (Hooper-Greenhill 2007:81), where the aim is to enhance entertainment, inspiration for learning, sociability among visitors and sharing instead of teaching. This is not only because of its flexible size, but because it does not pretend to mirror life or history. Instead it comments on and responds to facts in a highly poetical, open and funny way and clearly suggests just one of all possible interpretations of this world.

I also explored the idea and value of museum puppetry workshops as a dynamic form of visitors' participation and as a platform for implementing a wide range of touch experiences in meaningful ways. In museums 'thousands of people earn their living preventing untold thousands of others from touching' the museum displays (Van de Wetering 1996: 415). In contrast, puppeteers hired by the same institutions enthusiastically welcome audience participation, not only to touch, hold or handle visitor friendly objects but also to manipulate, animate or even construct them.

During workshops, I also viewed museum visitors as equal members of the community of museum puppeteers (including puppeteers and museum staff). As Hansen and Moussouri state, Lave and Wenger's idea of *legitimate peripheral participation*, make workshop participants 'take up a role that gradually develops from being one who oversees and imitates, to a fuller, individual, contribution' (Hansen & Moussouri 2004: 171). During a museum puppetry workshop this might lead to puppet construction and manipulation of a scene or even to a whole show in front of an audience. Museum workshops here aim to create the optimum conditions for learning as they are usually, wholly or partly, exploratory in nature; they are 'learning processes that are bound up with, or produced, in interaction with people, which again is circumscribed by a particular context for learning' (ibid). Of course, the learner 'never becomes fully experienced or fully educated' (ibid) but, in a form of apprenticeship is offered the chance of 'legitimate access which opens up opportunities for engagement and construction of identity' (ibid).

Finally, I examined the issue of stigmatization attached to live museum puppetry interpretation. Drawing on the museum theatre debate where 'adults expect it will be entertaining but not necessarily educational, children assume if it is educational it will unlikely be entertaining' (Jackson and Kidd 2008: 137), I examined the unfairness of museum puppetry's reputation as a simplistic art which is limited solely to the target group of preschoolers/families (perhaps the only target group where entertainment and education is de facto accepted). Limiting museum puppetry as an activity for a specific target group seems to make negotiations among staff and puppeteers clearer and promotion more efficient. Hiring or promoting an activity as puppet theatre for museums, parents (and even many puppeteers) automatically understand that 'this is a show for kids'. In addition, for some museums' agenda, 'kids shows' could even imply that the work is to be done by volunteers as opposed to professionals.

I examined puppets' stigmatization within various live interpretation shows for younger audiences and argued that (museum) puppetry's strong and concrete visual or/and comic aspect sometimes makes it popular and entertaining among an audience that is larger than museum staff or even practitioners themselves tend to imagine.

In *The Performance, Learning and Heritage* report on museum theatre, Jackson and Kidd also suggest that 'each site and each type of audience is so different, it is clear that there cannot be a "one size fits all" performative technique' (2008: 135). Aligning with this idea, it seems to me that all audiences do not necessarily perceive live museum puppetry interpretation in the same ways, and nor do they willingly suspend their disbelief in all cases. However, what could be said here and what this chapter aims towards is to highlight certain crucial aesthetic and technical parameters that frame the intended conditions for learning within live museum puppetry interpretation. The case studies suggested that the more organically learning goals are interwoven with puppetry techniques, the more the artistic integrity is enhanced and the more the process falls into the shape of the post-museum model which perceives museum interaction foremost as an experience in flow. As Jackson pointed out, the more we continue to perceive the 'aesthetic' and the 'instrumental theatre'—or for the purposes of this thesis, museum puppetry—as a 'dichotomy', the more

we should highlight and invest in the aesthetic qualities of applied art (2005: 117) in order to counterbalance this artificial split. This split undermines not only theatre or puppetry as an inadequate means to explore knowledge but it seems to imprison the very idea of museum learning within 'glass-cases', labels, or lectures, and places it outside the ideology of the post-museum.

Finally, I think it is a shame to rely heavily on the attractiveness of objects moving in space and not to pay extra attention whether the messages communicated through them are indeed strong, and clear. Concrete, clear, beautiful objects don't mean unmixed messages. I suggested here that background research and clear notes on the liberties taken by the artists, are indispensable not only to protect the reliability of prestigious institutions (museums), but also to avoid any tensions involved in negotiations with these institutions (see also next chapter).

In the next chapter I will examine how this platform for live interpretation with puppets and co-participation becomes at times a dynamic or 'hot' contact zone for the two communities of practice (puppeteers, museum staff).

Chapter Three

The two communities of practice: museum staff and puppeteers

> Applied theatre in all its various manifestations has recently entered a
> phase where the emphasis is upon participation, with the target community
> influencing the agenda, telling the story. (Etherton and Prentki 2007: 146).

This chapter examines the collaborative aspect of museum puppetry projects and to lesser extent museum puppetry's theoretical and practical frames for creation. The case studies include Emily Capstick's *Over the Sea to London* developed in close collaboration with the Museum of London; Poulter's *Eidophusikon* automaton construction, which was produced in collaboration with museum staff, technicians and volunteered manipulators from the Altonae Museum in Hamburg and Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut.

This chapter also examines the collaboration between the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles's learning department with Erth, an Australian puppet company which was commissioned by the museum to build giant puppets and train museum staff members to manipulate them. Interviews with Z Puppets Rosenschnoz company (Shari Aronson) aim to highlight the challenges of building a family show around a pre-existing, logo-centred script. The chapter also examines how the Minnesota History Center copes with issues arising from the copyright of one of the Z Puppets Rosenschnoz company's commissions.

With Patricia O'Donovan's case study, I focus on collaborative projects or practices built around delicate issues. Part of her museum puppetry work was developed with the staff and technicians of the Bloomfield Science Museum in Jerusalem and the Israel Museum. In the same section, I study a collaborative project by the Minnesota History Centre and the Ojibwe Native American Committee. Also, an interview with Wendy Jones, the head of museum and education programmes, focuses on the tensions raised during the pre-production process of this project.

Moreover, Brad Brewer's puppet show on Louis Latimer, commissioned by the Smithsonian Institution, is examined mainly from the authenticity/reliability perspective. Along with it, several other issues emerge during the pre-production processes of this collaborative project.

In this chapter, I also explore projects which take place beyond the museum walls, like the community projects by the theatre company *In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre*.

Finally, I make a short reference to Geoff Felix's audience interaction techniques in conjunction with the museum's agenda. I also refer to some issues regarding indoor and outdoor performances, as his Punch and Judy shows are often presented both inside and outside museums in London and elsewhere.

I would like to make clear that data for some of the following projects (Robert Poulter, Geoff Felix, Brad Brewer and Patricia O'Donovan, except for those of her projects hired by the Bible Land Museum in Jerusalem and Bloomsfield Science Museum) are collected from the puppeteers and not from the institutions that hosted their projects. Data for puppet demonstrations in the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles and the *Manoominikewin: Stories of Wild Ricing* show presented in the Minnesota History Center were collected by the institutions and not by the puppet practitioners. Even if the practices involved in these case studies sound more descriptive than analytical, or strongly triangulated, I believe that they do provide valuable data on museum puppetry collaborative practices and projects.

Post-museum and museum communities - Interactivity as pre-production

> And who are these comic characters [from the Liege Puppet Theatre] but members of the peasant or working class, the people who suffer most from the way the conventions presently work. Comedy is their particular way of speaking which is base, clever, and most of all, irreverent. For in these comic exchanges, class divisions are negated (Gross 1987: 124).

The concept of post-museum as introduced in the beginning of the thesis is closely linked to the idea of events and exhibitions as 'conjoint dynamic processes [which] enable […] the incorporation into the museum of many voices and many perspectives' (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 81). Creative partnerships and artists in residence are also other aspects of the same concept (ibid). In other words, the post-museum model is perceived here as a platform for dialogue among various communities, an idea that already preoccupied museums more than half a century ago.

Thorough discussions about the social role of museums date back to the sixties when the term 'new museology' first emerged (Watson 2007: 13). This shift in the field put less emphasis on collections, their documentation and interpretation. Instead it focused on museum communities and enhanced social inclusion policies (Fig. 27). Since then, the 'lives of the people' became a core museum issue and the democratization of the institution a high priority (ibid: 3; 13):

> […] a museum is no longer only measured by its internal possessions such as collections, endowments, staff and facilities, but by 'an external consideration of the benefits it provides to the individuals and communities it seeks to serve' (Weil 2003:43, cited in Watson 2007: 1).

Figure 27: Museum visitors relaxing at MOMA, New York (2008).

Jennifer Mason divided museum communities into six categories and defined them by shared historical or cultural experiences, specialist knowledge, demographic/socio-economic factors, identities (national, regional, local or relating to sexuality, disability, age and gender), visiting practices, and exclusion from other communities (2007: 4). Most advertising material (leaflets, websites, press releases, etc.) indicate that this division is especially helpful for developing appropriate strategies for display, interpretation and learning activities, as they tend to address specific target groups. Indeed, effective fundraising depends on museum services addressed to particular communities. As Watson explains: '[M]any museums in the United Kingdom are the beneficiaries of a range of extra funding sources… None of these funds can be accessed without specific, demonstrable and measurable benefits to the public' (ibid: 1). Lack of resources is another parameter that has led some new museums to direct their energy 'at public programming rather than collection care. That in turn has required that their focus be more outward than inward' (Weil 2007: 44).

There are museums situated in the heart of underdeveloped neighbourhoods (examples include Tate Modern in Southwark in London, New Museum near Houston and Bowery in New York, or the Children's Museum in Brooklyn). Occasionally, museums design

community galleries for communities to represent themselves (Witcomb 2007: 136) and make them partners in designing exhibitions (Weil 2007: 45). Usually big museums plan a plethora of outreach programmes for schools or hard to reach communities. They might even 'help […] to bring personal and practical benefits to individuals' and thus 'impact positively on the lives of disadvantaged or marginalized individuals' (Sandell 2007: 98). For example, the Tate Modern puppeteer and museum educator Eden Solomon once commissioned a homeless artist to create a doll for the resources of the museum's activity department: 'Every morning she sells the *Big Issue* magazine but during Christmas time she gets a lot of commissions, zebras, tigers…' (Fig. 28) [80]

Figure 28: Eden Solomon from Tate Modern with the cat doll by a homeless artist (2009).

I would like to clarify that in this chapter I particularly intend to view museums themselves as distinct communities. Witcomb suggests that 'one way of avoiding romantic notions of community, whilst also recognizing that museums are engaged in dialogue, would be to think of museums themselves as communities' (2007: 135). In accordance with this view,

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[80] E. Solomon. Personal interview, 30 October 2009.

and further to Mason's categorization, I view the communities of museum staff and that of museum puppeteers as co-learners in collaborative practices.

Collaborative museum puppetry practices

Emily Capstick's projects behind the stage

The Museum of London activities for special education needs (SEN) visitors are organised by a separate team that collaborates with freelancers, teachers and other professionals. Besides all the necessary facilities required for the SEN visitors, the museum also trains visitor assistants to help these groups during their visit. There are also outreach services for hospital and special schools, an outreach session with shadow puppetry, as well as video conferencing and resource materials, which can be tailored to suit the learning needs of the pupils and help teachers with follow up activities.

When the museum first commissioned Peoplescape Theatre, they worked together for the preproduction of *Over the Sea to London*. Catherine Evans, the museum's SEN officer, explained me that the project passed through a series of stages including audience research, a pilot project, interviews with teachers and pupils, and class observations. The session was also piloted with six different school groups, was evaluated and adapted, and finally launched in 2007. Evans adds that the budget for the development of the programme was £4000. They used a focus group with SEN teachers and other professionals such as a speech and language therapist, storytellers, and Peoplescape Theatre to discuss the various needs and ideas for the sessions and to find the most interesting location for the performance. They also developed an outreach session to be conducted one week prior to the museum visit, facilitated by Catherine Evans and Alison Hale (Capstick's collaborator, see also Chapter Two).[81]

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[81] C. Evans. Personal interview, April 2010.

During the museum visit, any compromises made by either the museum or Casptick were minor and there was always a mutual understanding. Before the session, a big table has to be moved for the wheelchairs to pass. This was an extra job for the museum staff, who also had to cover the interactive exhibits around the performing area with black cloth to minimize distraction. However, there were some sound effects when visitors walk through the gallery which could be very noisy. The most distracting noise (particularly for visitors with autistic problems who found it confusing) came from the area next to the warehouse, where it is shown a video about World War II is shown. Capstick explains that since this is a major feature of the institution, the museum could not turn it off during the session.[82]

In her evaluation report,[83] Verity Walker mentions that the 'overall museum experience was seen as positive by 100% of staff and pupils interviewed, even by those who had slight misgivings about the complexity of the arrangements prior to a first visit' (2007). It is also mentioned that the first version of the script had a more complex and difficult to follow plot. Walker also underlines that the success of the programme relied on enjoyment, inspiration and creativity: 'the children were obviously having fun, were surprised by where they were and what they were allowed to do'.[84] (Fig. 19).

From personal observation, it was easy to understand how shifting the use of the puppets from re-telling the same story (a scene from the first version of the show) to one-off enactment (the current version of the show), made the original story tighter and more focused, and also saved time. Also, it seemed to me that good acting, the use of objects, and the well conceived plan of the session were the key to the SEN visitors' engagement and voluntary interaction with the action on stage. Possible limitations, in terms of communication techniques for the most complex learning difficulties, were taking into consideration from the design phase of the project. This made the session effective and

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[82] E. Capstick. Personal interview, 9 February 2009.

[83] Notably, this is one of just three complete evaluation reports that I am aware of which are related to this research. The others are for the Object Dialogue Boxes and the puppet exhibit in Walsall Art Gallery (see Chapter Four for both cases). However, I am also aware that, at the time of writing, there are a few other reports in progress.

[84] See also Chapter Two.

inventive all the way through and enabled performers to overcome the pitfalls of simplistic, dull solutions. Instead, exactly the good structure of the project intended to give participants enough confidence and sense of control to open up and engage within a playful action:

> Play is immensely exciting. It is exciting not primarily because the instincts are involved, be it understood! The thing about playing is always the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself, magic that arises in intimacy, in a relationship that it is being found to be reliable (Winnicott 2006: 64).

For the project *Dreams That Fly*, commissioned by the Manchester Museum, Capstick was asked to develop a course for Key Stage one and two students on any topic (it did not have to be allocated to a specific subject of the curriculum). The course had to be delivered in the schools with one class teacher. Capstick should develop the outreach programme, design it and perform it. With a museum collection of about three million objects to think about, Capstick was facing a challenge before she even started: 'It was a very long painful process for me, and to be given such an open brief… too much freedom about the content and the style,' she confesses.[85]

For its part, the museum organised a teachers' consultation and invited eight class teachers from its contacts. They came for an afternoon workshop at the museum where they discussed what they felt was difficult to deliver in the classroom. They found that a lot of children have very limited life experience, and they wanted to raise their confidence, aspirations and self esteem (Capstick and the museum both value experiential learning, group working and skill based activities over rote learning of factual knowledge). Eventually the show was developed within fourteen days as a one woman show with puppets and objects. It has been presented in public since the end of 2008.[86] A minor compromise that Capstick had to make was on the pre-recorded sound, which she admits

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[85] E. Capstick. Personal interview, 9 February 2009.

[86] E. Capstick. Personal interview, 9 February 2009.

was not of the best quality: 'it would be good to have more sophisticated sound equipment.'[87]

Robert Poulter's Eidophusikon

Robert Poulter has occasionally undertaken closer collaborations with various museums or institutions. For example, the *Great Belzoni* started as a twenty-minute open-air event for Ramsgate spring festival in 1993. It included clowns, giant puppets, military re-enactments, fireworks and live bands. It was co-written with the museum's curator Michel Hunt who had an interest in Belzoni and Egyptology. As I analysed in the previous chapter, Poulter then transformed it into a forty-five minute NMT show and rewrote the whole script. The NMT version was then commissioned by the Bristol Museum, which owns all Belzoni's drawings. At that time the museum had an exhibition including a recently x-rayed Egyptian mummy along with Belzoni's drawings. The head of Egyptology volunteered to play the part of Sarah, Belzoni's wife, with a Bristol accent. [88]

However, the project that was really based on a series of collaborative practices with a number of institutions was the automaton *Eidophusikon* and its reproductions for a number of institutions.

Loutherbourg's *Eidophusikon* was a large-scale 18th century automaton featuring weather and atmospheric phenomena (Fig. 29).[89] The Altonaer Museum thought it would be

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[87] Ibid.

[88] As Poutler explains, it is said that Belzoni's wife may have lived in Bristol.

[89] We read in Baugh's article on Philippe de Loutherbourg: 'The Eidophusikon was a miniature theater that was presented in performances at Loutherbourg's home in Lisle Street, off Leicester Square, opening in March 1781… Loutherbourg's Eidophusikon effectively marked the beginning of a technology driven entertainment industry that attempted (and still attempts) to use new technologies, especially of light and projection, to devise ways as into the worlds of landscape and topography. Of all Loutherbourg's works the Eidophusikon appears to be the one that caught the public imagination and was retained in the public memory longest' (2007: 259; 262).

suitable to exhibit a replica of this automaton to go with the *Wolkenbilder Exhibition* at the Jenisch Haus,[90] which included paintings of clouds by Constable, Goethe, Strindberg and Turner (Fig. 30, 31).[91] In 2004, the museum commissioned Poulter to reconstruct an Eidophusikon automaton. In his version, Poulter based all the re-enactments on original pictures and made them to scale.[92]

Figure 29: Poulter painting the back of the Eidophusikon's rolling background (Photo by Norbert Neumann).

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[90] When the exhibition finished, the automaton was moved to Altonaer Museum to a specially built gallery connected with optical magical lanterns and toy theatre.

[91] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 22 May 2009.

[92] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 22 May 2009.
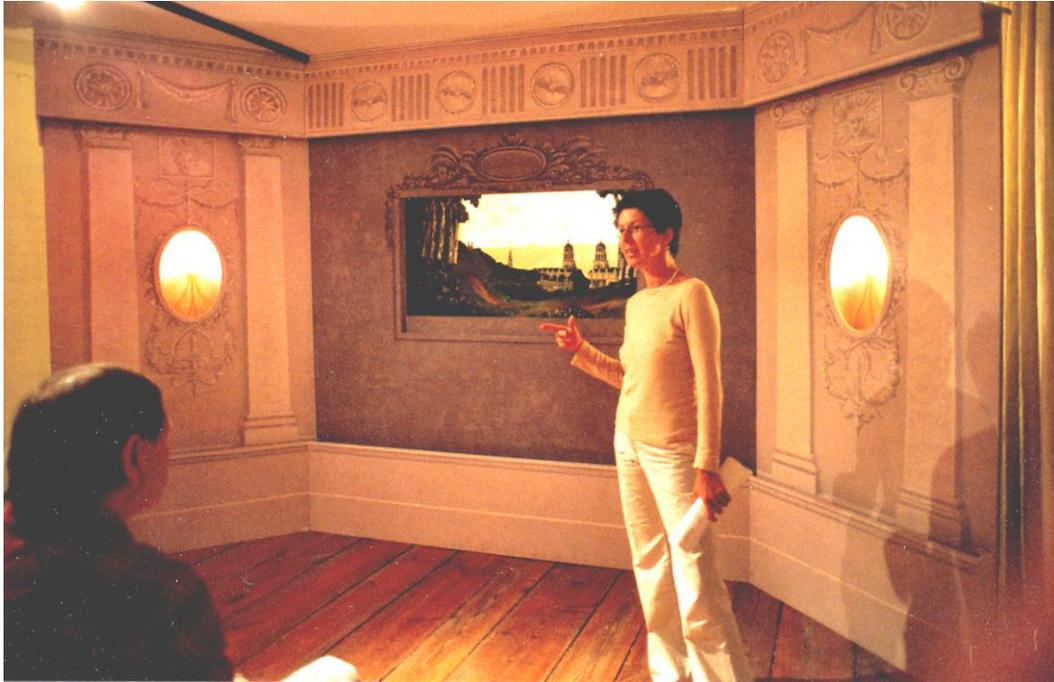
Figure 30: Robert Poulter's Eidophusikon in the background at the Altonaer Museum (Photo by Norbert Neumann).

Although, Poulter explains, commissions are generally underpaid, this time his project got a reasonable amount of money (£4000, including the materials) and the museum also provided a builder. The builder based his work on Poulter's drawings and a small scale model, and was supervised by the artist.

In 2005, a second full size version of *Eidophusikon* was commissioned by the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut. In 2006, it moved to the Huntington Library in California for a Gainsborough exhibition entitled *Sensation and Sensibility*.[93] This automaton was based on one of de Loutherbourg's scenes inspired by the 'Satan and the Creation of the Palace of Pandemonium in Hell' from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). Poulter took his small-scale model out to America and the Yale Center paid for his trip as well as a demonstration of the automaton. Poulter made the drawings and sent them to the

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[93] Gainsborough was a great admirer of the *Eidophusikon* and visited the attraction many times.

technical department of the museum. After he arrived there, he completed the artwork within two weeks, returning once more for the opening.[94]

These *Eidophusikon* pieces were constructed on Poulter's designs and on his supervision in collaboration with technicians from the institutions. The constructions included among others natural phenomena rolling waves (Fig, 22), clouds, a backlit volcano eruption, images of storm enhanced (Fig. 32) with the flashing lightning, plastic glass with pullies and chains for lifting up an underground palace. Poulter was also responsible for the artwork (painting) and the sound effects (he created some weather sounds effects and selected the period music).

Figure 31: The rolling waves at the back of the Eidophusikon - Altonaer Museum (Photo by Norbert Neumann).

Eidophusikon is performed —depending on its size— by four or five people. In both the US and Germany, a circle of enthusiasts, a community of performers, formed around it. The automaton was activated by groups of museum staff, curators, volunteers, or even museum guards. At Yale, they even built up a social club of fifty people around it —'a little brotherhood,' as Poulter describes it.

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[94] After the exhibition in Los Angeles finished, the automaton was given to a collector of automata, with Poulter's permission. The collector subsequently phoned Poulter to say he did not want to keep it anymore. Poulter currently doesn't know what happened to it.

Figure 32: Eidophusikon's storm scene, Altonaer Museum (Photo by Norbert Neumann).

Poulter recalls that the community of *Eidophusikon* manipulators enjoyed learning how to operate the automaton.[95] They did ten performances a day, five people each time. They even had a party and a pen made for everyone involved in the performance (Poulter included). Similarly, in Germany, the manipulators went out to the theatre or for picnics together. The German group was smaller, and is still operating the automaton every weekend at the time of writing.[96]

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[95] R. Poulter. Personal interview, 22 May 2009.

[96] In 2006, Poulter was commissioned to make a much smaller version of his *Eidophusikon* replica by the Nouveau Musée Nationale de Monaco, which was built entirely in UK. It was performed by three people and was part of an exhibition on light and visual illusionary exhibits under the title *Lumière, Traspareé, Opacité*. Poulter added a Mediterranean scene with a volcano, moonlight, a storm and a shipwreck. The automaton was going to form part of the museum's permanent collection. Also, it is worth mentioning that Poulter's New Model Theatre show *Pandemonium* stars de Loutherbourg and Gainsborough in a double act. Poulter has located the two artists within their works (the *Eidophusikon* and other paintings). Also a miniature model of *Eidophusikon*, originally built for the demonstration to the Yale Center staff, appeared in a BBC programme in 2010.

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles and the giant dinosaur puppets

I was introduced to Dan Keefe from the education department of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles by Michael Fritzen from Skirball Cultural Center (see Chapter Four). Keefe explained the background history of two giant dinosaur puppets the museum owns and uses for interpretation to me. The museum commissioned Erth (an Australian-based collective of artists, puppeteers, designers and engineers) to construct the puppets (Figs. 33; 34). The puppets can move their mouths and blink their eyes, and are also equipped with an internal sound system that projects and distorts the puppeteers' voices.

Figures 33 & 34: Giant dinosaur puppets made by Erth for the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles (2008).

The show takes place in the museum's main gallery during the weekends and attracts an audience of fifty to three hundred people. Each puppet is accompanied by an interpreter who answers the audience's questions, interacts with the puppets, and clears the path for the dinosaur to pass. They make it clear to the audience that the puppets are not real dinosaurs, thus drawing a line between fiction and reality. Keefe further explains:

> For 3-4 year-olds it is a little bit scary… We advertise that it can be frightening for younger children, and try to let people know about that at the beginning of the show… and also that [they] are welcome to leave, as [they] are watching during the show.[97]

Those who stay, however, 'suspend their disbelief very quickly' (ibid.). The interpreters and the puppeteers decide beforehand the themes they want to talk about, certain gags, and the structure of the show. As Keefe points out, the show 'is very outlined but then within it, it is still much improvised' (ibid.). Also, it is based on the museum's research department resources:

> We worked really closely with our dinosaur institute, with paleontologists… we developed very in depth information… there is a lot of interaction between the education department, research department and Erth (ibid.).

To be able to manipulate them, the puppeteers (members of the permanent museum staff) 'are spending a lot of their day just keep in shape': during the show the manipulators carry seventy pounds for 20-25 minutes. Originally, Keefe explains, the manipulators were trained by the Erth for three or four months while, at the time of the interview, the museum had also hired a programme coordinator who was responsible for supervising the multiple interactions (interpreter, puppet, manipulator, audience) and manipulation (ibid.).

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[97] D. Keefe. Personal interview, December 2008.

Geoff Felix's Punch & Judy popular show

Although I did not have the chance to watch Geoff Felix's Punch and Judy show in a museum, I did manage to watch it in Russell Square and at the Mayfair Punch and Judy festival in Covent Garden. In both places, the performance took place outdoors. The street show conditions reminded me of the indoors museum experience where audience circulation is based on free choice decisions and in the best cases is running 'in flow'.

In Russell Square was also the meeting point for an interview with Felix, sometime during a break between his 25 minute Punch and Judy shows (Fig 35). As we were standing with the 'professor' next to his booth, talking about the differences between indoors and outdoors performances, a little girl approached us and joined the conversation [98]:

> Felix: …Indoors is a more …
> Little Girl: Hallo!
> Felix: Hallo there…is a more controlled environment there is less noise from outside, less ambience noise…
> Interviewer: Less distraction also…
> Little Girl: …Are you going to do another show?
> Felix: I don't know…
> Little Girl: ….on a different thing?
> Felix: No it will be the same show again at 3 o'clock…
> Little Girl: No I mean next year maybe?
> Felix: I might be here next year if lucky, if spared!
> Little Girl: Or maybe next month!
> Felix: Not next month, no, but we might be here next year. But I am going to be in the Foundling Museum in about a week's time or two weeks time…
> Little Girl: Heyyyy! We are going to the Foundling Museum soon… that is what we really came for!!! That's what we really came for!!!
> Felix: Did you see my picture there?
> Little Girl: Where?
> Felix: At the Foundling Museum.
> Little Girl: I did not see any picture!
> Felix: Have you been there already or are you going to go there?
> Little Girl: I go there, I have not seen a picture of…
> Another man: You don't know Thomas Cook, eh?
> Little Girl (laughing): He died a long time ago!
> Felix: Well I died many times but…
> Little Girl (surprised): You've died many times?!...

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[98] '[…] most Punch performers call themselves "Professor"' (Reeve 2010: 12).

Little Boy & Little Girl (laughing, shouting, running): I am dead…I am dead! I am dead! I AM DEAD!!!
Felix (trying to keep a serious tone): …I will just continue because this lady is interviewing me…So outdoors, it is lot of ambient noise, there is interruption and things…[99]

Figure 35: Geoff Felix's *Punch & Judy* show at Russell Square (2008).

Similar children's interventions are numerous before, during and after Felix's shows, as I witnessed and as Felix confirms. He recalls that once, at a puppet festival in Belgium, where he could hear from the other side of his booth, children 'screaming for blood,' exceptionally loudly: 'Kill him where he is! Kill him! Kill him! KILL HIM!' The translator of the show, standing outside the booth could not hide his astonishment, unlike Felix who —feeling more 'protected' inside his booth, behind his puppets— is more familiar to this

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[99] G. Felix. Personal interview, 2009.

'fierce' young audience's engagement during his shows. Felix notes that 'children react the same, no matter where they are' while watching the Punch and Judy show, which could be a bit awkward within the museum space (ibid). Aligning with Levine (see Chapter Two), he also thinks that most of the time, this interaction needs some training:

> Children don't know what their role is to be. They often assume it is the same as television, unless you explain them it is otherwise. That they are meant to be listening instead of joining in. They do get involved anyway but it is nice to let them know how to respond... With museums sometimes I add a little bit of historical background because I feel I should do, but the children are not interested in the history, they just want to be entertained (ibid.).

To emphasize the current practice of the show and to distinguish it from the exhibition and interpretation museum practices, at the end of his shows, punchman Clive Chandler explains 'the nice thing about the old Punch and Judy show is that "it's very old *and* sometimes we can still see it today". The objects and the show have become de-historicised' (cited in Reeve 2010: 252).

Also, the museum might ask Felix to talk before the show about its history, how it came to England and the society of the time. Felix then describes how:

> Punch and Judy was formed through trial and error, if it did not get a good response from the public he did not get paid. We usually use the show to change the society we are in. In those days you could not get divorced, infant mortality was high, children were expected to die, the police were ineffectual and probably corrupt, you had to pay for a doctor to take care of you -very unfair!- it reflected the times in which the show evolved but also why the formula of the show was so strong: if it did not entertain, it did not get paid for!

Proschan says of Punch and Judy performer Percy Press, for his performances at the National Mall of the Smithsonian Institution as part of a festival of traditional puppetry:

> […] he cleverly channels the children into directing him to do what he intends to do in any case… children can freely indulge their conformist or authoritarian inclinations and can serve as the voice of society, condemning Punch's wife beating, Joey's sausage-theft, Jack's Catch's gullibility… The

children, witnesses together to the events, can speak with one voice, and can speak truth. By doing so, they create a consensus and shape meaning (Proschan 1987: 43).

Proschan also emphasizes the need to train the audience in puppetry:

> If one must be properly trained or experienced in order to apprehend and appreciate a performance properly, it is clearly all the more important that one must be initiated into the conventions of audience participation in those traditions such as puppetry that depend so heavily upon the active intervention of audience members. (ibid: 38-39).[100]

And 'Professor' Felix, like any experienced 'Professor', is surely a master of this. He starts with a warm up to get to know his audience before the show. For this, he takes out a trick puppet, a courtier who:

> […] stretches his neck. The children laugh when they see him, then I come out of the theatre … I can test the audience how they are going to react… I say… that this is a piece of theatre and in the theatre anything can happen, that you can stretch your neck up to the sky without getting a sore throat. I point to the scenery, to the curtains, to the proscenium arch and explain that it is a theatre, not real life and I ask them whether Mr. Punch is well behaved or naughty, and they all tell me how naughty he is, and look at the parents and tell them 'there you are! They know the difference!' I am pre-empting any doubts that I am instructing them how to be bad, by an example. [101]

As soon as the show starts, Felix involves the audience in a number of ways, similar to the roles described by Proschan: from the very beginning Felix makes his spectators, 'investors' and implies that 'the audience members have some stake in the performance itself… and in the successful conclusion or progression of the enacted events.' Then he treats them as 'instigators,' when 'one or the other character repeatedly asks the audience for advice as to a course of action.' Also the audience might be asked to 'direct interpretations… This may simply be a matter of naming an object or character' and so it

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[100] On the importance of long term collaborations between Punch professors and museums as well as for how to engage the Punch and Judy audience within the museum see also Reeve 2010: 248-253.

[101] G. Felix. Personal interview, 2009.

takes the role of 'definer'. Lastly, spectators become 'rectifiers' when they 'endorse, corroborate or contradict meanings or interpretations suggested by one of the puppet characters' (1987: 40-41).

Felix presents his show up to three times a day in various places. When once he performed outdoors for the opening of the London Museum at Docklands, there were about 150-200 people in his audience. Although this is not the normal situation, it was 'fantastic' as he likes to have a large audience as 'it gets a better atmosphere.'[102] Among many other places (Fig. 36), Felix has also performed at the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood, Horniman Museum, Foundling Museum. At the Museum of London, his show became part of a Victoria street exhibit. It is no surprise to learn that Felix's beautifully crafted booth was mistaken for an exhibit as it was standing next to older original booth displays of the museum's exhibition (see also Chapter One). In the Geoffrey Museum, Felix performed in the museum's garden where there were all sorts of activities to encourage people to visit the museum.

Figure 36: Geoff Felix (on the far left) chatting with his audience before the show at Covent Garden Puppet Festival (2008).

Felix discusses why his puppets would probably feel more at home outdoors:

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[102] G. Felix. Personal interview, 2009.

[…] outside, what is interesting to me, are people who have not seen Punch and Judy and stop and watch it. If I perform in the museum… I might be inside… and be a whole a lot of children outside, and I think they would be perfect members of my audience. Because they have not actually gone through the door, they don't get to see the show. Outdoor if it is daylight you see very well…you get people, all sort of people that would stand watch the show that would have not normally have seen it… A part of performing outside which also always appeals to me is that you have gone to a place you have created a performance and nothing is left of it apart from the memory of it. You have to create something from nothing. And this can happen anywhere.[103]

Like other practitioners, Felix has also to make some compromises with the museums. These are often to do more with health and safety issues, certificates and time-consuming paperwork as well as costs.

Also, as it is the case with other practitioners, Felix might be asked to please specific target groups, depending on fundraising issues:

I welcome any age, my target audience is six but the museum's audience might be under five. I try to entertain them all… Sometimes the museum has a brief in order to get money from the government, sometimes you have to fit it [the show] to that brief.[104]

However, besides all these compromises, unsurprisingly enough, many Punch professors manage to adjust their Punch and Judy style audience communication to the museum expectations:

[…] Chandler uses a number of strategies to renegotiate the power relations in the room. He is aware all the time that he is doing this within the bigger frame of the museum and its expected code of behaviour. It becomes clear to the children that this new space is somewhere where the rules are different and managed by the performer. The children have permission to see the world from their and the performer's point of view, sometimes in playful opposition to the view of the teachers and the guides (Reeve 2010:250).

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[103] G. Felix. Personal interview, 2009.

[104] G. Felix. Personal interview, 2009.

Z Puppets Rosenschnoz's visual narratives

The puppeteer Shari Aronson together with her partner, Chris Griffith (also of the Z Puppets company), she was responsible for designing and building the visuals of the show *Riddles of Disease* for the Science Museum of Minnesota. Aronson confessed that this was not an easy task as the teaching goal of the show was to give an overview of the history of infections. The script, written by a professional playwright, ended up with 'tons of information,' as Stephanie Long from the Science Museum of Minnesota also noted.[105]

On the other hand, Z Puppets usually prefer to enact their own scenarios as these are developed in association with other aspects of their work. In their narratives, they try to combine appropriate drama with education techniques, physical movement as well as visuals, to make the show accessible to the audience. But with *Riddles of Disease* 'the script was much more didactic than what we would do… it was really heavy and fast…' [106]

Aronson's concern about the dramaturgy and the actual amount of text and information involved in the script echoes some contemporary views from the field of psychology:

> Instead of encouraging creativity, thinking outside the box, or coloring outside the lines, we are requiring children to memorize information, even in the face of the fact that information constantly changes. This is not to say that we do not need to know facts; we do. But the power of knowledge comes from weaving those facts together in new and imaginative ways. And facts change... (Singer et al. 2006: 6).

In addition, Z Puppets had a very limited amount of time (three weeks) to deliver their work. They had to design and build four backdrops, six puppets and a rolling background. Under these circumstances, toy theatre two dimensional figures and settings seemed to be the quickest and most effective solution (Fig. 37).

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[105] S. Aronson. Personal interview, December 2008.

[106] S. Aronson. Personal interview, December 2008.

Figure 37: Stephanie Long, puppeteer & narrator in the show *The Riddles of Disease* designed by Z Puppets for the Science Museum of Minnesota (2008).

Beyond Boreus is a twenty minute comic show created by Z Puppets to complement a cartoonish and playful exhibit about weather by the Minnesota History Center. As Wendy Jones, the Head of Museum and Education Programmes from Minnesota History Center in St Paul, recognizes, the exhibit initially lacked a multicultural element and this was why the centre commissioned Z Puppets. Aronson and Griffith developed a puppet and physical theatre comedy show by introducing two characters from the Minnesotan folklore about winter carnival, the King of cold, Boreus and the Queen of heat, Veranaus Rex, as well as some glove and hand puppets and toy theatre figures. As Aronson says, the show contained adult humour and was visually rich enough to make it suitable both for adults and a younger audience. Also, the show was designed with its own integral stage; as Aronson points out: where there is no stage area in the museum, puppetry can be a useful medium.[107]

Finally, Aronson pointed out that puppets are expensive and that people are surprised when they learn the amount of time and money devoted to them. She also noted that Wendy Jones really acknowledges this fact, and that Jones' sense of humour and openness to using

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[107] S. Aronson. Personal interview, December 2008.

puppets for communicating historical facts in a comical way, facilitated negotiations on content, budget and management between Z Puppets and the Center. For example, Jones' philosophy on the often problematic museum issue of authenticity is clear and is embedded in common sense and discharged of any rigid opinions viewpoints often adopted by so many museum experts:

> The most important thing is not to be true to the story and to the history but to have an effective way to engage people in that story. There are many ways to get there and it doesn't always have to be 'these are the exact words'.[108]

Jones has commissioned Z Puppets several times for museum puppetry shows and has shown great flexibility in managing and negotiating their productions: while the Center keeps all copyrights, the Center gives Z Puppets permission to perform in independent venues.[109] Thus she contributes to the maintenance of the shows which are independent from the school curriculum. Also, for the benefit of the Center, Jones asks Z Puppets to give back 10% of each performance's income. In that way Z Puppets are managing the Center's productions as a kind of semi-independent outreach programme. [110]

In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre and community projects

In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre has a long history in community based projects with strong social activism. Sandy Spieler, the artistic director of the company,

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[108] W. Jones. Personal interview, December 2008.

[109] During my stay in Minnesota I was invited by Z Puppets to a private party given for some international companies. I watched there the show *Minnesota Aha!,* originally made to accompany the Center's exhibit *Minnesota 150.* The show was inspired by various Minnesotan inventions to celebrate the 150 years of the state and involved a big pop up book, a humanette, shadow puppets and hand puppets. Despite the initial reservations of the hostess of the party in using puppets to entertain the companies' representatives, at the end she and the international adult guests seemed to have really enjoyed the event.

[110] As for the main outreach museum theatre programmes of the Society, these are run by actors from the permanent staff. The History Players Dilemma is the History Center Society's on site highly interactive programme where a lot of artefacts are used as primary sources to link the school class with the museum exhibits.

notes that their ideology is 'born from the political activism of the early 1970s,' and its projects have been 'articulating the mythic mysteries of human existence and the deepest rituals of community life' (Spieler 1999: 40) for over thirty-five years. However, she explains:

> […] we are not a trend or an experimental fluke. We are a puppet theatre that has woven itself into the cultural fabric of its very urban south Minneapolis neighborhood…We look at the world with an exclamation point in one eye and a big question mark in the other. Most of our work boils down to this dialectic of WONDER (Spieler 1999: 41).

Although the company's collaborations with museums is not its main activity, its participatory projects are particularly inspiring and worth exploring. Museologically speaking, they are celebratory as well as compensatory, and they directly reflect the voice of a large number of citizens as they are actively engaged in partnership with the artists.

The company is well known for its long history of organizing the May Parades: 'an intense act of love, an invitation to return yearly to a feast of community, joy, and renewal' (ibid: 54). The parades have been organized since 1975 and themes developed around community life include water, the corn, the indigenous cultures, multiculturalism and bridges. These themes are embedded in the heart of the city of Minneapolis community, which is involved from the very beginning of the process. Kids, parents and artists were used to gather together in February for a brainstorming session about the parade's theme and the images. As Spieler explains: 'we ask people what is important, what is happening in their life, what is inspiring them, what is drugging them down… and their life will be there… themselves, their family, the neighbourhood, it is always incredible conversation.'[111] Referring both to the parades and to their residency work in schools, colleges and churches, Spieler views reflect Witcomb's analysis of Hooper Greenhill's notion of 'interpretive communities' — 'interpretation is socially based and the result of a two-way process—one that both produces and represents that which is being interpreted... interpretation always takes place within a community' (Witcomb 2007: 145).

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[111] S. Spieler. Personal interview, 17 December 2008.

May Day parades, as well as the company's other projects, involve reminiscence research, live interviews, images from dreams, group discussions, as well as museum, library and archive visits, and journeys to other regions. It is indicative, though, that the company's community spirit is not only alert during local community meetings, but is also nurtured from within:

> When I have gathered my early ideas, I call my co-workers together with sticks, cardboard boxes, cloth tape and odd assortments of instruments to 'brainstorm in action' according to the working threads of core images… All company members share various leaderships in the creation of our work (ibid: 43; 45).

The company develops its own shows, which very often bring them to other areas, nationally and internationally. For the purposes of this research, I will focus on a project that developed around the history of the street where the company is located. The Lake Street area is highly significant, historically, geographically, demographically and commercially:

> Lake Street is a six-mile corridor linking St. Paul and Minneapolis, encompasses 14 neighbourhoods and is one of Minneapolis' most important commercial districts. Lake Street began as the path to the lakes, but for the last century and a half it has been so much more…Whether an avenue for success, a crossroads or the end of the line, Lake Street has always brought into relief the rich dynamics of a city on the move. [112]

Although the project was mainly produced and performed by the company's artists, it still involved the community in negotiations about its theme, its venues and scenery and in researching. During the pre-production process, members of the community provided resources for written and visual material, as well as offering their own properties for rehearsals and performance. More importantly, they had the opportunity to interact with the public and the artists, as well as with the neighbouring shops. Audience stopped at shops and offices in the area and also travelled in time among local family and businesses

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[112] Minnesota Historical Society. (http://events.mnhs.org/media/Kits/release.cfm?newsID=911&SiteID=1), accessed 27 March 2010.

histories. *Lake Street Excavations* was a promenade community theatre-puppet theatre event and was inspired by the Lake Street Excavations, as the title suggests. Spieler recalls:

> We thought what better time to do a local history project than now… everything is being unearthed in a way and we can use that as a much larger metaphor for what are the layers or story that are mounted one on top of each other in a community…we have made a big toy theatre, like the whole history of lake street -not with facts and figures but just impressions… People were divided into eight different groups and we travelled and each group had a tour guide, a funky tour guide who would tell the history but also obscured it a little bit, and left it really open so that people who were travelling added their own stories, because some were neighbours who lived for 60 years… there was a ninety years old woman who came, some were officials, some were owners, and some were people who had never lived here […].[113]

In this project the tour guide, accompanied by a musician, told the story of eight different places, shops, social services and cultural institution offices. Toy theatre was mostly used for the presentations. This type of puppetry was suitable because it used real photographs that were blown up and then cut, which helped make the event more authentic and real. During the twelve shows, neighbours, business owners, city officials (even the mayor) and other people who heard about the project, participated in this walk around the neighbourhood. One example is the poster collective shop, where the puppeteers presented the stories behind the posters, the labour history and also the story of the shop and how the posters were printed; at the end they silkscreen printed a poster and gave it to the audience. One person from this shop also manipulated the puppets.

For this history project, the company collaborated with the Minnesota History Center. They used images of historical figures, anonymous Lake Street people and even animals. Even if learning is not the ultimate goal of the company's projects, it is an inevitable by-product of all these interactions, in the form of 'legitimate peripheral participation in communities of

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[113] S. Spieler. Personal interview, 17 December 2008.

practice' (Lave and Wenger 2008: 31).[114] Besides the official historical facts, the company also invited the audience's stories and input:

> [t]hen there is also oral history, so it is someone's impression… and left it open for a continual evolution of history by the people who were the audience at that time.[115]

Learning here as Wegner and Lave's suggest 'is an improvised practice' (1991: 93). Finally, the metaphorical visual language turned out to be a powerful tool for communicating tacit knowledge:

> A lot of times there are the little figures in museums that are very realistic, like dioramas, [but] unless you are going for realism, the incredibleness of puppet theatre and its sensibility being able to express something that you cannot say as just a human talking… then you use a puppet because it can be a layer of art that brings a poetic connection; that can combine maybe something that is more spiritual or more scientific, something that is more compassionate than a discussion of hard facts.[116]

The Minnesota History Center expressed an interest in the Lake Street project and invited Spieler to speak about it during conferences. It also hired the company to work for the *Right on Lake Street* exhibit (which opened 18 September 2008), a collaborative practice with Macalester College. The Minnesota History Center and Macalester College 'began exploring ways to partner with local communities to enrich public life and to tell the story, past and present, of one of Minneapolis' most diverse and ever-changing streets.'[117]

One of the company's artists collaborated with the museum staff to design the exhibit and created a 'colorful and interactive gallery experience... [out of] papier maché, felt, fabric,

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[114] As Lave and Wenger observed about the tailors' apprenticeship in Liberia, they 'might engage in a common, structured pattern of learning experiences without being taught, examined, or reduced to mechanical copiers of everyday tailoring tasks, and… become, with remarkable few exceptions, skilled and respected master tailors' (ibid.: 30).

[115] S. Spieler. Personal interview, 17 December 2008.

[116] S. Spieler. Personal interview, 17 December 2008.

[117] http://events.mnhs.org/media/Kits/release.cfm?newsID=911&SiteID=1, accessed 24 March 2010.

wire and other set-building materials' (ibid). The artist made a reconstruction of a city with little streets and miniature buildings. The streets were presented the way they look today. Within the city, the information was provided by the college. Most of the students' work was in written form, so the artist placed various written material from their research inside the buildings. They also made a big book with turning pages, and a bus where people could sit next to the driver and listen to recorded stories about what someone might have seen while riding the bus on Lake Street. Minnesota History Center underlines that this exhibit did not claim to be a 'comprehensive history of Lake Street told by professional historians,' although, in this urban geography project, 'Macalester students were encouraged to explore Lake Street and create projects that highlight the connections between people and place' (ibid.). In this collaborative practice, the curatorial process was an outcome of a series of exchanges between a local community, a museum community, a puppet community and a school community.

The main idea that interweaves all the cases in this section is the idea that participation in practice encourages learning among the two communities of practice (museum staff, puppeteers). Newcomers and older participants change sites, according to which is considered to be the currently central or peripheral field (whether museums or puppetry). For example, in the case of manipulation and dramaturgy techniques (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, Robert Poutler's *Eidophusikon*, *Riddles of Disease* by Z Puppets, as well as Patricia O'Donovan's museum sessions that follow below), puppetry is considered to be the core field and thus training of newcomers, such as museum staff or museum volunteers, is essential. As Lave and Wenger maintain, participation involving technology (in this case craftsmanship, manipulation and dramaturgy techniques) should not be superficial. It needs to encompass the history of the practice as integral to the present content in terms of the communicated messages and the co-created narrative.

> Participation involving technology is especially significant because the artifacts used within a cultural practice carry a substantial portion of that practice's heritage… understanding the technology of practice is more than learning to use tools; it is a way to connect with the history of the practice and to participate more directly in its cultural life. (Lave & Wenger 2008: 101).

What is implied here is that discussions about the history and philosophy of puppetry art, its impact on theatre audiences from personal experiences, as well as show demonstrations to familiarize novices with a lesser known genre (as is the case with toy theatre) contributes to a better understanding of the practice in its applied form.

The Emily Capstick cases suggest that collaborative practices tend to lead to non-didactic learning activities that do not necessarily correspond with science or history school departments. Instead, her projects aim at enhancing students' self confidence. They obviously have scope beyond the factual knowledge (although they might use some) common to many museums.

Moreover, instead of theoretical exchanges in the form of lectures or bibliographies Capstick's collaboration with the museum was a 'centripetal practice', where peripheral communities (teachers, museum staff, puppeteers) attempted to create a contact zone within common activities (discussions, focus groups, performance). Learning how to proceed with the project came out of reflection upon these activities. It is worth mentioning, however, that at that time Alison Hale (Capstick's collaborator) was working for the Museum of London and this obviously may have facilitated the whole process.

Finally, I would like to point out the difficulty in managing audience reactions in certain museum puppetry cases based on popular art, as is the case with Felix's Punch and Judy. I would like to stress the importance of the puppeteer's skills to contextualise his show within the museum confines and for this purpose to train his audience appropriately and balance the confines and policies with the (often loud and unrestricted) audience reactions.

Museum puppetry projects and delicate subjects

> You want to do something on Darwin? I always wanted to do something on Darwin…Ok now, what? Two months? Are you are crazy? You need to tell me a year in advance! But if I cannot talk about evolution… if there is too much censorship... [118]

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[118] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

Patricia O'Donovan

Patricia O'Donovan is one of those multi-talented puppeteers with highly developed skills in all aspects of her art, teaching included. In addition, she seems to be gifted with this distinctive attribute, at the same time relaxing and sparkling, that characterizes all those people who have a natural tendency to fulfil their potential. Despite her long experience and expertise in puppetry and the recognition her work enjoys worldwide, she remains remarkably open and simple, with a childlike curiosity for everything.

Dr O'Donovan is cosmopolitan in origin, profession and temperament. Her parents originally came from Ireland and Austria and she grew up and studied biological science and puppetry in Argentina. She left the country during the dictatorship and ended up in Jerusalem, Israel. She still lives and works there, having completed her PhD thesis in zoology and studying in the School of Visual Theatre. In October 2009, I had the opportunity to see her perform her shadow theatre show *Amanili Sings*, an ancient Mesopotamian lullaby, live at the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem.

O'Donovan was also a member of the Train Theatre's artistic committee until 2010. The Jerusalem-based theatre has produced many of her shows. O'Donovan's work has been presented in numerous Israeli and foreign festivals, radio and television, and is acclaimed by the public and critics. Today, she also works as a director for other performers' shows.

O'Donovan has collaborated extensively with museums, particularly the Israel Museum and Bloomfield Science Museum in Jerusalem, for over ten years. Her collaborations with museums are multifaceted. Also, apart from designing, writing and performing her own shows, O'Donovan also designs and writes plays for museum staff to perform. Also, occasionally she trains them in object/puppet manipulation, storytelling and acting. She has also demonstrated drama and communication skills for use in teaching and guiding visitors, and conducted workshops in sculpture, drama, masks, toy building, puppetry and puppetry in education for teachers and children. Some of her projects were commissions where just

the subject and some common practical issues were negotiated with the institutions. Other commissions were based on the collaborative aspect of the process (the practitioner and part of the museum staff went through the process together). For the purposes of this research and in relation to both research questions, in this section I will refer to both types of collaborations.

For example, O'Donovan was hired by the Nature Parks and Galleries of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to train guides how to create their own stories around objects. She is regularly invited to run a two-session course twice a year on communication skills. The course is based on dramatic skills (body language, eye contact, suspense, use of pauses and silence) and puppetry skills (how to pass the attention to the object and let it speak by itself, how to integrate demonstration/visibility of objects with verbal interpretation, how to create a space/stage for objects, how to use handling and passing objects techniques).[119]

In addition, she curated the exhibition *Science and Detective* (Bloomfield Science Museum in Jerusalem) which explored the detective work done by scientists and vice versa. O'Donovan interviewed and invited members of the Police Department and the Rockefeller Museum of Jerusalem to give a series of lectures during the exhibition about what scientific techniques they use to catch criminals and conduct investigations. However, as she points out, her involvement was not limited to the usual museum commissions. Besides doing research, she underlines, she did give the exhibition 'a unified aesthetics'. She undertook the design of the exhibition, including the exhibit space, the exhibit's activity tables, the indication panels and games for the public. She 'was never called a curator'[120] and her compensation was much less than curators' fees.

O'Donovan thinks the museum also considered and relied on her background in science as a zoologist (she 'loves researching') (ibid). This is also the reason why she has recently been invited to help the same museum to develop a proposal for funding an exhibition

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[119] At the time when the interview was conducted O'Donovan was also asked to teach the uses of puppets as facilitators for museum demonstration in the course.

[120] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

about the brain called *A Journey through the Brain*. She was in charge of the co-ordination, organization, selection of exhibits for 'The Language Narrative,' one of the sections of the main exhibition. Also she was in charge of the entrance hall area where an ongoing movie related to the exhibit will be screened, for which O'Donovan wrote the script. The Head of Educational Programmes, Esthy Bresner, explains the initial difficulties of this exhibition:

> We knew that we wanted to find an interesting way to show this subject - the brain- which is so complicated… We need to go very deep to scientific material and thought Patricia could help us design it in a welcoming way, to invite the curiosity of the public, still deal the subject very seriously - she has a PhD in science, she is not only a puppeteer… We invited her to the group of the *Brain*, just to see if she has any ideas… We believe in science theatre shows and our demonstrations all have something from acting.[121]

It should be noted here that there are certain parameters that favour similar collaborative practices such as: O'Donovan's long experience as a constructor, her scientific background, a series of previous successful collaborations with the museum, the high esteem the museum holds for her work, as well as its broad appeal to the public. Last but not least, the open mindedness of the museum in using alternative means of interpretation is noteworthy. This is something that apparently matured with time (O'Donovan still remembers in the early 1990s the museum's initial hesitation regarding a story based on the myth of the Sphinx to explore the idea of gravity and balance. The museum maintained then that although the story was beautiful, O'Donovan had to change it because she could not have 'talking elephants and other animals communicate science').[122]

This collaborative practice is indicative of the new paths post-museum are following today where 'the demand of new forms of collaboration around temporary exhibitions, implying particular forms of learning, is […] one of the major challenges facing museums today' (Hansen & Moussouri 2004: 161)

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[121] E. Bresner. Personal interview, 9 October 2009.

[122] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009. Instead, O'Donovan made *The Toy Doctor*, a project for a narrator and a box full of broken toys in need of repair.

As far as direct interaction with the audience is concerned, O'Donovan admits that she is still investigating the best way to introduce them to her shows, as she prefers to begin the show immediately. After her shows, she always talks with audience members who approach the stage and ask questions. However, she prefers not to spoil the illusion of the show by taking the puppets' heads off for example, or by showing how they work, or how they are manipulated, unless someone from the audience is really interested.[123]

Variety in commissions and puppet techniques

O'Donovan uses various types of puppetry techniques, depending on the subject the museum asks her to develop each time. She stresses the fact that technique, constructions and narrative go 'hand in hand' and 'script develops as it goes because the gestural language comes together with the writing. They come together: puppets and script'.[124]

Apart from puppets or shadow theatre, O'Donovan occasionally uses objects, especially when she deals with crowd scenes. In the *Louis Braille* show (Fig. 38) was presented among other museums the Israel Museum and Bloomfield Science Museum in Jerusalem. There, pupils in a classroom are represented with yellow pencils, because O'Donovan wanted to give the impression of many children playing during recess [125] ; the solution was clear, as well as symbolically and artistically powerful. Louis —the blind protagonist — is a white pencil. O'Donovan explains:

> They [the pencils] fly in the air, and they write when there are lessons. And I ask children 'why Louis is represented by a white [pencil]?' The answer is: 'Cause blind people see white'. There is a moment when the Louis figure itself comes close to the pencil and holds it and the image is like he is holding the white stick of blind people…[126]

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[123] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

[124] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

[125] *Louis Braille* is a puppet show for one narrator. It is based on the biography of the Frenchman who invented the alphabet for the blind people. The show has been performed two thousand times since 1994. It was also accepted for the educational system in France. The show also received many prizes worldwide.

[126] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

Figure 38: Scene from the *Touch of Light* show (From Patricia O'Donovan's archive).

While watching puppet shows, a common dramaturgical scheme occasionally comes to my mind: sometimes I compare what is happening on stage to a universe in miniature being controlled by a *god-like* manipulator (the puppeteer). This very idea is straightforwardly explored within the narrative of O'Donovan's hilarious half hour open-air show *The Watermelon-Eater*. It was presented at the entrance of the Bloomfield Science Museum (2000) as part of a London-based Mechanical Cabaret Theatre exhibition with automata inspired by the idea of 'cause and effect'.[127] The show was about the laws of physics in the service of a 'genius'.

O'Donovan collaborated with the museum's technicians to construct a massive mechanical installation. As O'Donovan describes, there lives a lazy but clever tramp who invests 'enormous energy… to build himself mechanical contraptions that help him meet his needs with no effort'.[128] The action starts when he comes home with his shopping: eggs,

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[127] See also http://www.cabaret.co.uk/ (accessed 29 May 2010)

[128] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

watermelon and a newspaper, and places them inside this installation. All of a sudden, he decides he wants these goods one after another, and with simple automated mechanisms these move closer to him. Lastly, he wants the watermelon. At this moment, the fruit starts rolling within the installation, jumps, and finally falls on a spot where there are four knives. The watermelon is cut by automated mechanisms just next to him and he eats it. As O'Donovan recalls, this was 'a lot of fun to do!'[129]

Also, in 1988, O'Donovan constructed a travelling exhibit for the Science Bloomfield Museum.[130] This was the *Troll's House* (Fig. 39), out of found materials and junk, provided with powered mechanical machines. The actual house was an old fashioned wagon where Jerusalem sellers used to put their storage and move goods from side to side in the narrow streets of the old city where cars are not allowed to go -the wagon was broken and O'Donovan had fixed it. O'Donovan describes the inhabitants of this fairytale house who were some recycled toys, the trolls. These were little creatures with long hair. This house was initially made for O'Donovan's children and had electricity, running water and lots of lifts and pullies, as she recalls: 'The material was from the streets; we went with the children to collect scraps'.[131]

The museum showed an interest in it and commissioned O'Donovan to copy it. They also asked her to include a turning wheel that would transform mechanical energy into electricity. Overall, the house was very 'green,' as Esthy Bresner remembers enthusiastically.[132] O'Donovan recalls with a similar nostalgic tone: 'they would pull a rope and all the beds would go up, the water went from the bath tab to the little garden, you could press a button and the lights turned on in each room… the exhibition wanted to talk about simple machines.'[133] Bresner also adds that the museum took it a step further and

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[129] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

[130] The exhibit was put in a gallery accompanied by a demonstration and stayed there for nearly twenty years.

[131] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

[132] E. Bresner.Personal interview, 9 October 2009.

[133] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

elaborated the already intense museum experience by organizing activities where twelve to fifteen year-old children built their own rooms for the trolls using shoeboxes.[134]

Figure 39: Patricia O'Donovan demonstrates the *Troll's House* (Photo from the Bloomsfield Science Museum archive).

O'Donovan has also several times noticed a kind of prejudice against puppeteers, despite the fact that her work, and that of many others, is generally considered to be high quality art: it is imaginative, demanding and sophisticated and, scientifically speaking, it is also remarkably accurate. She thinks that puppetry is still considered either as an art for 'little children, for libraries' or as something marginal, and 'disregarded.'[135] For example, she finds indicative that although for the other activities, artists' names are mentioned in museums' leaflets, for puppet shows many times, the puppeteers' names are absent.

Compared to a proper theatre, museum events spaces and venues have some limitations. As O'Donovan agrees, this is due to the fact that most museum auditoriums were originally built and equipped for lectures: they are not always adequately equipped, there is often no

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[134] E. Bresner. Personal interview, 9 October 2009.

[135] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009. She does however note that this may be less the case in other countries.

direct backstage exit to a parking area to bring large props and scenery in, there are difficulties in darkening and emptying the stage (a piano and a poster with the museum's logo had to remain on stage during one of her shows), and the green room facilities are often poor. As for performing in the galleries, the main difficulty the puppeteer faces is distraction: as shown, sometimes museum staff has to compromise and turn off the exhibits as it would be very distracting otherwise. This, as O'Donovan remembers, was once 'bit of a conflict... I said I could not do it with the noise.'[136]

O'Donovan also underlines the pressure on practitioners' to 'please' if not everybody, at least the majority of the museum's general audience. As she explains: 'the problem with the museum is the problem of age: the general public comes in all ages. So if you do it too complex the little ones cannot understand it, if you do it too simple, it won't be interesting for the adults'.

The 'general audience' usually refers to all ages and all communities. But what is the situation like with multicultural communities such as those of Jerusalem? Do you play to Arabs, Jews or Christians? Especially with the Jewish community, who are the majority of the city's population, this is further divided in various sub-communities, thus making any effort to identify a general audience even harder. The country's political and religious tensions add yet more obstacles. The question 'what should be considered a general audience for O'Donovan shows in Israeli museums?' is open. The idea that the audience did not find her latest show 'Jewish enough,' as the practitioner admits, really makes no sense to her: 'they [a number of spectators] expect you to be like a model of life… you have to be like this… like you should be… But how you should be is your decision!'[137]

Yehuda Kaplan, the Education Director of the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem explains more about O'Donovan's show *Amanili Sings*, which is based on a lullaby written 4000 years ago in Mesopotamia: '[O]ften the museums see themselves like diplomats: we have a

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[136] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

[137] P. O'Donovan.. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

mission, we are trying to create an atmosphere which is really totally different and isolated from what is happening in the outside, so we try to give the idea that they [Arab and Jews] are equal'.[138] What Kaplan is describing here is 'one of the greatest challenges facing museums in the twenty-first century [which] is how to exhibit the nation in an inclusive way and to recognize other forms of privileging identities such as religion' (Watson 2007: 7).

Kaplan is referring to the precarious balance between the world in - and outside the museums as the latter '…mirror the beliefs of the society in which they have developed as well as influencing that society's view of itself' (Watson 2007: 12). Given the fact that modern museums are no longer unquestioningly thought of as sacred temples of the world's knowledge,[139] and considering the history of the city's highly multicultural population, the role of a socially engaged museum entails special challenges and potential risks:

> As nations become more multicultural and governments struggle to balance the need for national unity with the idea of the toleration of difference, museums become arenas where concepts of what it is to belong within a nation are explored and made explicit (ibid.: 6).

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[138] An example of this is the museum's *Arabs and Jews Coexistence* programme which runs in both languages, Hebrew and Arabic. Kaplan explains: 'If we speak about Abraham we tell the story of the Koran and the Bible… we look for the universal values'. When asked about how open minded teachers are Kaplan is positive 'Yes, they are. First we do the work with the headmaster; we speak about it. We want to hear their opinion'. (Y. Kaplan. Personal interview, 8 October 2009).

[139] Given the fact that the Israeli museum examples seem to be even more complex due to the extreme divergence among the multicultural population and all sub-minorities within them, the same issue is given a westernized perspective in reverse, as Weil talks about today's museum prestige:

> With the loss of the museum's transcendent voice, the public's confidence in the museum as a disinterested, neutral and objective agency has also been lost, or at least tarnished. In a dozen different contexts, identity and interest groups of every kind insist that the mainstream museum is neither empowered nor qualified to speak on their behalf. Increasingly, such groups are creating their own museums from which to speak in their own voices and address what they consider to be their own issues. In recent years, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans have been particularly active in the establishment of specialized museums…Consistent with this distrust of the museum's objectivity has come a growing recognition that the museum, in and of itself, is a morally neutral entity… we have come to understand that museums could be used just as easily for malevolent purposes as for benevolent ones…that the museum is simply an instrument'. (Weil 2007: 37).

From this perspective, a skilled curator —or any other member of staff who is responsible for key decisions such as commissioning collaborators — is crucial in such challenging situations. As Watson maintains:

> There is a great deal to be said for the curator as the individual who negotiates meanings and attempts to act as an independent arbiter, otherwise the strongest view will prevail and some groups, individuals and communities will be disenfranchised…Empowerment of one group to allow them to control not only knowledge (the stories told and the manner of their telling) but also access to that knowledge can result in other group being disempowered (ibid.: 11).

Kaplan also comments on the concept of 'general audience' and visitors' feedback:

> From my experience you can never satisfy 100%; with 85% or 90% you are okay… About O'Donovan's show, people wrote [in the show's memory book placed outside the auditorium] either it was wonderful or they complained: 'not fit for younger kids.' Very few wrote about the religious theme... Most of the people liked it, 65%-75%, and some of them liked it very much. They appreciated the quality. Even if you don't like it you cannot ignore the work that is behind it, the research, the technique etc.[140]

However he adds that: 'The problem is that we don't have enough resources to bring really sophisticated shows here, we are limited in the space, in our ability to pay for many actors' (ibid).

Even if 'pleasing a general audience' is not amongst the main priorities for O'Donovan, I found her show *Amanili Sings* (the only show I had the opportunity to watch live) particularly emotive and effectively communicative. Based on my personal experience, I would like to note here that her visuals, manipulation, narration, music and the delicate balance between all these, held my attention. They enabled me to follow the basic storyline, even though I did not understand the Hebrew language at all. I found a young spectator's[141] overt reaction while watching the birth scene presented just with shadows and sound

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[140] Y. Kaplan. Personal interview, based on audience's written comments after the show, 8 October 2009.

[141] She might have been primary school student - definitely not a preschooler.

indicative: I literally heard a 'wow' sound coming from her while she was sitting next to me and I felt that the rest of the full house auditorium was holding its breath—and I mine. It seemed to me that, despite the delicate situation (an Arabian myth communicated to a Jewish-Arab museum community), O'Donovan's art made an appeal to her audiences, even though they might hold reservations regarding the show's implications. In other words, the value of the aesthetic pleasure from the visuals and narrative counterbalanced the audience's possible prejudices or strong political and religious beliefs. Obviously, such commissions might seem provocative, depending on the institution's social context.

Based on museum reports about other museum activities, as well as on everyday observation and informal interactions with the audience, Kaplan maintains:

> Usually in the festival we invite shows with workshops so they [audience] can spend a whole day here. Sometimes we bring a magician, this time [with O'Donovan's show] we did something like a gambling: we knew that we were taking something which was not for the whole family … we wanted this time to do something of higher quality for people to appreciate… The problem is that it is not suitable for small children and usually children coming here are 4 to 8 or 9… but a mother might say: 'I don't know where to leave my younger child, I have to bring it along with my older child'… Second problem: we are in Jerusalem, it is a religious holiday (Sukot), a lot of people are coming to Jerusalem for religious purposes, our audience, more than 50%, are religious -not the ultra orthodox, they don't come to museums usually— and sometimes, this show can be a big contradiction to their beliefs, because we talk about pagan environment, related to mythology, to God; some of them, a few not many, got out; it was too much for them…but also in Spielberg's *Prince of Egypt* also got out, because 'this was not the story that we know, this is not how we see the Exodus'... The people who are ultra orthodox and who are not open… even not later when we explain them, to the kids… they cannot cope with it… they want the kids to hear the things exactly they hear them at home, at school and at synagogue. With those, I cannot do anything. When we speak about Egypt, I have to be very delicate, to give the information but without judging. But I don't like to say to people that monotheism is better, I can say how it developed.[142]

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[142] Y. Kaplan. Personal interview, 8 October 2009.

O'Donovan has struggled with the ways she can communicate the idea that all Israeli people are one, despite their different religions. She believes that: '…a theatre piece would be much more provocative; a person uttering words could be very shocking.' And she continues:

> With a puppet I can use a language that is not realistic, transmit a meaning without showing the thing per se. Puppetry allows me to touch what it would be very emotional or violent or cruel to present it in a manner in which you can access it in different ways. With puppets I can show an image which is a bit removed from that, with shadows, create a tension; you hear a scream but you don't really see the action… the blindness, to become blind is something very difficult, you could show it realistically but I did it metaphorically, there is a kind of paper that covers Louis Braille's eyes; images completely symbolical… the birth is very critical but you do not see the birth, you see the baby crying.[143]

However, visual symbols can be equally problematic, as she recalls her show *Five Steps to the Moon* (1991-2008, Bloomfield Science Museum), a commission by the Bloomfield Science Museum for the opening exhibition The Laws of Motion. This was an imaginary encounter between a girl living today and great scientists (Aristotle, Galileo, Newton and Einstein), who she literally meets while reading her science book. O'Donovan remembers:

> It was funny case … the director of the museum asked me when to come to see the show. And he came that day! With Copernicus comes this revolution, I did it all symbolically. I had a plastic hammer, when you bang the column it made the noise of breaking glass… The glass 'breaks' down and the earth 'gives the place' to the sun...
>
> The girl meets Galileo who was looking at the telescope and making his drawings:
>
> Girl: What are you doing?
> Galileo: I am drawing the moon.
> Girl: But no, this cannot be the moon, the moon is smooth…
>
> And she describes it as she taught it from Aristotle. So, Galileo starts telling all these heretical things for the Church. The 'Church' comes in, represented by a red cross -I had red gloves in my hands- when I moved my

[143] P. O'Donovan. Personal Interview. 6 October 2009.

hands, from this cross, I had a hook from which I could literally hang Galileo; so when I moved my hands, it looked like fire; at this point the Church is telling him that if he is not going to repent, he was going to be burnt at the stake, like Giordano Bruno. So at this point, strictly religious Jews spectators told their children to get up and leave the room, not to look at the stage. I did not know what was happening, I did not know what to do, I was terribly confused, I looked at Peter [the museum's director], asking him what to do; he made a sign 'I don't know, do what you want'. At the end of the show they [spectators] said they are sorry they left but they cannot look at the image of the cross. This was my first encounter with a kind of dilemma: conformism or freedom of expression? …What happens is that when I am in the context of the museum I am not totally independent; when I am in the theatre I would say that if the audience wants to get up and leave, it can go. But here, I wanted to ask the museum what to do, they said I had to find a solution, not to offend them; so I separated the two wooden bars and the object is not anymore a cross; but that optically it is still a cross. And that solves the problems there (Fig. 40).

What is implied here is that the ultra orthodox Jewish members of O' Donovan's audience found the Christian symbol of the cross offensive. Although this was not what O' Donovan was aiming for, the dramaturgy of the show seemed to be misinterpreted due to the significance of a symbol for a number of spectators. The meaning of the symbol was even highlighted by the fact that it was presented within a visually-centred piece.

Figure 40: Patricia O'Donovan is holding the Galileo puppet from a red cross, made from two separated (formerly-connected) wooden bars (2009).

For the exhibition Heroes (at the Youth Wing, Israel Museum of Jerusalem, 1998) O'Donovan created a Puppet Theatre Activity Corner, where she had puppets planted in the sand at a corner of the museum. The public could act out their own heroes and invent their own stories. They could also test their puppetry and storytelling skills using these puppets, which represented figures from the myth of the Minotaur. The corner always had adult supervision and O'Donovan herself gave instructions on manipulation, body/face incorporation and expression. The constructions were made from wooden furniture pieces (Fig. 41). O'Donovan used them to perform the show *Theseus and the Minotaur*, 'a show about the grey boundaries of heroism' (ibid). O'Donovan recalls that there were some practical problems with the theatrical atmosphere of the performing area in the museum, which was both too bright and too noisy.

Figure 41: Patricia O'Donovan with the Minotaur puppet from *Theseus and the Minotaur* (2009).

O'Donovan was both puppeteer and narrator and, at the end of the show, she had an open discussion with the public. There, she attempted to explore another side of Minotaur: that of the victim who could not escape his fate of being a killer. She says that the museum had objections to the narrative: they were expecting it to have very clear cut symbols of good and evil; the Minotaur has to be an evil symbol opposed to Theseus who symbolizes the good. According to O'Donovan, she was not offered a 'grey zone' in her interpretation as everything had to be either black or white. She found this unrealistic, however, too simplistic and against the very spirit of classical tragedy. On the contrary, for O'Donovan, the myth touched 'the subject of the braveness and the boundaries; the fact that many heroes have also a dark side.' Also, she continues, the museum was reluctant to use wood as a construction material as they saw a risk of children hurting themselves. On the other hand, the solution of using foam rubber, as O'Donovan notes, was not ideal from a maintenance point of view (ibid.).

Similar tensions were once raised in a school context, where O'Donovan presented the *Touch of Light* show. The school director, referring to a scene where children were playing and making a mess during the recess, suggested to O'Donovan that instead of throwing the paper, the children should fold it, as a sign of the order and neatness of that class!

The artist is still struggling with this conservative pedagogy:

> I am not telling what you have to do, I am showing you a piece of life, of what is happening… this is for me the basis of education, respecting anything, respect the other people, respect an animal… This [the teacher's attitude] drives me crazy… but this is the minority, it is not all, it doesn't happen all the time.[144]

O'Donovan's show *Jan's Daughter* produced by Train Theatre, was planned to be performed in another museum in Jerusalem in 2002. It is based on the childhood memoirs of Hannah Yakin, a Jerusalem-based artist and author. The show narrates the conflicts and

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[144] P. O'Donovan. Personal Interview. 6 October 2009.

desires of a young girl in Holland during WWII, based on Yakin's autobiography (O'Donovan knew Yakin personally). As O'Donovan maintains, the museum objected that she 'reinforced the myth that the Dutch have been very good towards the Jews during WWII.' In response, she argued that 'evidently not everybody was nice and good, and this is a true story!' Finally, O'Donovan talked to the writer, who showed her evidence of some of the four thousand non-Jewish people that helped the Jews, Yakin's father included. In the end, the show was presented at the Train Theatre instead of the museum, which had decided that the artist 'did not show the Dutch as evil enough!' (ibid)

Although O'Donovan acknowledges that there is some limitation in museum puppetry compared to the freedom allowed on a typical theatre stage, she herself enjoys both venues: 'It is like a challenge, to try to fit the ideas and the concepts'.[145] She also enjoys a 'green' facility when collaborating with the Israel Museum in Jerusalem: the museum provides a space with scrap materials from factory waste, to be used for various museum activities.

As Russell J. Ohta, who studied visitors' responses to the exhibition *Old Glory: The American Flag in Contemporary Art* supports, visitors 'experienced what they were capable of experiencing. They experienced who they were' (cited in Weil 2007: 41). Also, as Weil notes, this research suggested the museum's attempts 'to provide the individual visitor with an important degree of personal self-affirmation' (2007: 41). Nevertheless, it is obvious that museums in today's multiethnic societies often have to struggle with their social responsibility when communicating '[M]essages… to evoke feelings of respect, empathy, understanding and insight.' These might 'evoke equally strong negative responses' (Sandell 2007: 105):

> [such initiatives] require an acknowledgment not only of the potential to impact on social inequality but also of the organization to deploy their social agency and cultural authority in a way that is aligned and consistent with the values of contemporary society (ibid.: 107).

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[145] As O'Donovan clarifies, it is common for the museum to choose the subject, possibly also suggest the points that should be explored and stressed, as well as the messages. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

Examples like the Bible Lands Museum —based in a multicultural city where religion has been politicized and many communities strive to coexist— are part of broader complex issue in museums worldwide.[146] This case indicates that commissioning and performing might become a political act. Moreover, it follows that, besides finding ways to interact with their audience, museums have to negotiate with the value systems as well as the pedagogical and artistic beliefs of the artists they commission. This emphasises the need for further research on the debate on visitors study and learning strategies, and to reconsider the criteria in theory and practice for a museum to legitimately claim the title of post-museum. In other words, future research needs to assess whether the spirit of a post-museum is reflected in reality in its partnerships and collaborative practices and is also infused in its audiences' interactions.

For example, according to O'Donovan, it is noteworthy that museum staff are primarily interested in the scientific content of the show rather than the dramaturgy, despite the fact that the latter happens to be the most attractive, interactive and thus highly communicative part of a museum puppetry project.[147]

While Kaplan and Bresner are clear that education is the museum's primary aim and that the learning potential should not be missed from any museum event, O'Donovan points out the pitfall of becoming over-didactic ('illustrating' or 'giving a lesson'), instead of giving 'something of the atmosphere and the poetry'.[148] 'Even if they want to have fun it will be related to something they will learn,' says Kaplan, while Bresner underlines 'our programmes are all educational… we really believe that anybody entering the museum he

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[146] In his attempt to define the museum community, Davis acknowledges that '"the community" is hugely complex, a constantly changing pattern of the tangible and intangible'. He stresses the fact that '[A]ny individual within the geographical region that we loosely (and probably inaccurately) refer as the museum community may also belong to several different sub-communities' to conclude that the museum community is therefore 'a meaningless expression' (Davis 2007: 60).

[147] P. O' Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

[148] P. O'Donovan. Personal Interview. 6 October 2009.

is going to have an educational experience, enthusiastic, enjoyable; this is education' (Personal interviews, 8 October 2009).

Rather, O'Donovan believes that one of the key points in museum puppetry and museum theatre is its ability to bring a subject into the present:

> The teaching thing for theatre is that it brings the thing to the present. Mnouchkin[149] calls theatre the art of the present. The things that are happening now in front of you…Galileo is a human being there, with fears and emotions and you can see also the human side of science, when I have Edison with all his conflicts and jealousies with other people. This doesn't appear in the book, this allows you to see it as a human endeavour in this world, and not as a collection of facts and information. You present the person and character, it is an interpretation.[150]

For O'Donovan, this is also justified by the children's reactions after the show: 'Children are especially interested in the real biographies; for example, in the *Touch of Light* show, even though I say it is two hundred years ago, at the end always they ask, 'where is he [Louis Braille] now, where is his father?' It brings them into the present' (ibid.)

There are strategies that a museum could follow in order to measure the learning conditions it intends to create for its public; in the case of museum puppetry, this relies primarily on measuring the effectiveness of the puppetry convention (a dead thing that becomes alive). Similar practices can be inspired by the puppet theatre stage for young audiences (and not only). For example, Train Theatre uses formative research with its young audience. It values audience research highly and offers ten free pre-shows to small groups which, at the end of shows, have to stay and talk for twenty minutes.

Pre-shows illustrate the range of audience: adults' reactions differ in many ways from children's. As O'Donovan notes:

> Children are not used to getting true biographies in puppetry. They are curious about the *true story:* how it happened, what happened afterwards… it triggers them a lot. On the other hand, the adults usually ask how I came

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[149] Mnouchkin is the French theatre director, founder of the *Théâtre du Soleil.*

[150] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

with this idea, about art; whereas children talk more at the end of the show about the show itself.[151]

O'Donovan also comments on the various channels of communication she tries to open to meet with her audience. Echoing Vygotsky's theory of proximal development (1978: 84-91), O'Donovan maintains that:

> Children react well, this is what always happens, but it is the adults who decide what children think! I never expect children to understand everything…the meaning that you can express in words. Perhaps something touched them aesthetically or emotionally and that is enough, this is the way you are approaching art, or other cultures. For example, with Chinese opera, I don't understand half of what I am seeing, then I go second time and then… I go to China… In museums there is a kind of expectation that theatre has to be educational in the sense that it has to have a very clear message and meaning and people are very concerned with what children understand (ibid).

O'Donovan points out that the theatre and the museum audience differ in many ways: 'Museum public is not the public that goes to theatre. This public comes to be informed and wants to do other things afterwards, they are more impatient, children come inside with the grandmother and the father is in the coffee house'. In the end, she says: 'I do not think that I can do something to satisfy everybody.'[152]

Several times, O'Donovan finds herself in a dilemma: 'Today I censured myself and I did not say "she prayed to the house of God," and I do not want to do it again. Tomorrow I will say it, it is against my belief [not to say it]; it is respect for other cultures. How can you close your eyes?'[153] I think the complexity of the situation seems to overcome her own worldview here, as the next day of the interview O'Donovan commented on the same issue: '[…] but for me if you want to teach how to respect another culture, this is where it starts; teaching pluralism, respect for other people… if this creates a big problem I will not say it.'[154]

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[151] P. O'Donovan. Personal Interview. 6 October 2009.

[152] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 8 October 2009.

[153] P. O'Donovan. Personal Interview. 6 October 2009.

[154] P. O'Donovan. Personal Interview. 6 October 2009.

According to the theory of community of practice, and similarly to the cases explored in the previous section, O'Donovan's collaborative practices (including her shows) suggest the value of situated participatory learning for both parties. Museums explore new ways for communicating delicate, complex messages and O'Donovan is given a platform and the necessary facilities to experiment with a range of innovative applied puppetry techniques. As is the case with examples from the previous section, O'Donovan's training sessions provide museum staff not only with practical tools for object manipulation but also for familiarization with Heidegger's philosophy on the Thing (2001). It takes time and special manipulation techniques in order to explore the inner world of the Thing and to communicate its essence to the audience. In order to discern the poetry that surrounds the performing objects or museum artefacts, O'Donovan's participatory sessions examine things beyond their characteristics; she explores things as autonomous entities and not as mere possessions of humans or museums.

Moreover, in the case of collaborative projects (for example in exhibition curating, or exhibit designing for funding proposals), meetings with museum staff from the very beginning of the projects provided O'Donovan with the necessary language to talk about their common practice. Participatory meetings, as Lave and Wenger maintain, develop in time and are essential to investigating the codes of the practice from within—to embed the discourses on solid ground:

> The conflict stems from the fact that there is a difference between talking *about* a practice from outside and talking *within* it. Thus the didactic use of language not itself the discourse of practice, creates a new linguistic practice, which has an existence of its own. Legitimate peripheral participation in such linguistic practice is a form of learning, but does not imply that newcomers learn the actual practice the language is supposed to be about. (2008: 107, 108).

Minnesota History Center, an Ojibwe Advisor Committee and a puppet story

When I first met with Wendy Jones, the Head of Museum and Education Programmes, I was impressed by her good sense of humour, positive spirit and open-mindedness. I also found these characteristics very useful for negotiating museum puppetry collaborative projects. However, as the case study below suggests these were not enough to automatically overcome issues which were raised during a collaborative practice around a delicate subject.

About fifteen years ago, the Minnesota History Center (Fig. 42; 43) collaborated with an Indian Advisory Committee of Ojibwe people (Native people from North America) for a puppet theatre show around an exhibit called *Manoominikewin: Stories of Wild Ricing* (cf. Bridal 2004: 140-141). Wild rice has been an intrinsic part of Ojibwe's life and as Jones says this is both a spiritual activity and an economic force. With the twenty-five minute puppet show, the Center wanted to portray both the spiritual aspects as well as the processing: 'how it is a community event and then… how rice becomes food.'[155] The storytelling nature of the narrative, as well as the uncertainty of being able to find an Ojibwe cast, made Jones think that puppets could be a good medium:

> Jones: There was one scene in the middle of the lake and a puppet looks up and sees an eagle, and you hear the eagle go 'aaaaa' (she pretends the eagle's noise) and *all* the kids look up!... If I had done it myself they would not look up but if the puppet does look up….

The Center used an Ojibwe playwright and one Ojibwe actor. For the whole show, actors were wearing a black hood in the Japanese bunraku style, though they were removed during the introductions given at the beginning of some scenes about the origin of this sacred story. At some points, the actors asked the young audience (aged from three all the way up to thirteen years old) about their own traditions, and they also involved them in the story by having puppets ask them to do certain jobs for the miniature harvesting on stage. As Jones recalls, the logistics of the task came from the actors and the guidance, how to do things, came from the puppets (ibid.).

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[155] W. Jones. Personal interview, December 2008.

Figure 42: Detail of an exhibit at the Minnesota History Center (2008).

Figure 43: Interactive bed exhibit. A 'Please Sit Here' sign is projected on the blanket. When the visitor sits he listens to an audio recording. A woman narrates that when she was lying down on the bed with her husband, often part of its wooden support was being misplaced. The couple had to stand up and fix it each time. When the narration arrives at the right moment the bed suddenly lowers down with a jerk, making the visitor empathize with this funny bed story- Minnesota History Center (2008).

Jones says that '[U]sing puppet theatre was a way to be very true to the story and deliver it many times with only compromising a little bit, so just one of the actors [a member of the museum staff] was white (ibid.).' There was also a Native American puppet-maker. The exhibit was on for six years, and the performance area was in the middle of the exhibit, with an audience capacity of about thirty people. It was performed every year for a season, and three times per day every weekend. This story was traditionally only performed when there was snow on the ground. As Jones notes:

> That is the first thing that actors would say to the audience: that this is a sacred story which can only be told in the winter when there is snow on the ground and they would ask the kids if there is snow on the ground. That was another learning moment for the audience to think about a different religious tradition and the American Indian culture in Northern Minnesota that is so intertwined with nature, the seasons and tradition… It is Minnesota, so most of the time there is going to be snow on the ground, but we did have quite a few times when there was not…there was a dry winter for whatever reason. So the story had to be removed if necessary (ibid.).

And if the story was removed, they played the two other 'back up…non-origin stories about a day of ricing' instead, Jones says (cited in Bridal 2004: 140).

The Center originally commissioned Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre to direct the show and provide the second Ojibwe manipulator. The company also used an Ojibwe playwright, but when the Center brought the script to the Indian Advisory Committee, Jones realized that:

> […] we immediately hit a snag! The Committee was not happy because they did not know who the 'kid' who wrote this play was… and it took a long time to come to a mutual agreement. The script underwent a number of revisions; we worked with our Indian Advisory committee to get a playwright of their choosing… so the mistake we made was outsourcing to the Heart of the Beast… We should have started with the conversation with the Indian Advisory committee and worked through them.[156]

Time was another issue for both communities of practice. As Jones said, 'the Heart of the Beast, is a theatre company… they don't have the same understanding of some things that we did as a museum… it was a learning thing for both of us. They tend to also work really last minute on a lot of things… In museums nothing happens fast; so we managed to work it out in the end, but it took a lot reworking on our part to make it work' (ibid). What Jones suggests here is Wenger and Lave's idea that practice is synonymous with learning (2008). In her effort to coordinate all parties she had to take into account the particularities of each side. As a producer would do, she decided to intervene from the periphery to the core of the practice in order to resolve tensions which emerged due to misunderstandings between the Indian committee, the puppeteers and the writers. Being in the periphery didn't necessarily mean that she had an 'inferior position' (Hansen & Moussouri 2004: 171). It rather 'indicate[d] a form of learning at a distance, in a listening position, or as a newcomer or stranger entering a community of practice from a bordering discipline', which in this case is the museum field (ibid).

Authenticity/reliability and other issues involved in big institutions' commissions

> The notion of privileged access to a reality that exists 'out there', beyond us, is an ideological effect. The sooner we realize this, the better… Narrative maintains a metaphorical relation to the real… Documentaries do

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[156] W. Jones. Personal interview, December 2008.

not present the truth but a truth (or better, a way of seeing) even if evidence they recruit bears the authenticating trace of the historical world itself. (Nichols 1991: 107; 118).

Many of the cases already studied suggest that museums share an ethical concern as to how well their collaborative practices reliably manage to represent the 'reality' and 'history'. Interpretation and communication seems to be rather problematic in the field of museum studies, not least because, 'reality', 'history' and 'knowledge' are highly debatable concepts in our post-modern world, and within a constructivist museum and post-museum ideology.

Brad Brewer's project in this section examines the issue of reliability/authenticity, which provokes much debate among museum experts whenever current museum practice involves re-enactments or reconstructions.

Brad Brewer

This is another way to make a project for a museum and avoid censorship. Be more simple. No historical representation…[157]

The puppeteer Brad Brewer is the leader of the African American puppet company, the Brewery Troupe, founded over thirty years ago. I interviewed him in New York in 2008. Brewer started as a ventriloquist and art teacher before becoming a complete puppeteer (designer, writer, builder and performer). He also worked for Jim Henson's company, and gave weekend street shows (with Brewery troupe, the Crowtations) in New York's Central Park for fifteen years. Today, Brewer's company has several large scale projects for museums. The show *Lewis Latimer: Renaissance Man* (1998)[158] was commissioned by the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, and took two years of pre-production work to complete.

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[157] B. Brewer. Personal interview, December 2009.

[158] Lewis Latimer (1848-1928) was an African-American inventor who worked alongside Graham Bell and Thomas Edison. His name is associated with two of the most revolutionary inventions: the incandescent electric light bulb and the telephone.

The show was a ninety minute long, three-act production, which involved sixty-five muppet-style puppets. It was performed in the Smithsonian theatre space, with the relevant exhibits being placed outside the venue. The show was devised for school and family audiences and was presented twice daily for one week. Two of the show's puppets later became part of the museum's permanent collection.

I did not see the show live but I had the opportunity to watch its recorded version on videocassette. It is worth noting here that this is one of the very few museum puppetry productions that is commercially available on video. The show opens with the Crowtations puppets, which feature as a group of scientists travelling around the country introducing science to children). In the first act, the audience is introduced to this group of scientists (puppets), who use a mini-narrative to make their role as storytellers clear: they are not 'the stars of the show… Louis Latimer is… we just tell the story… we are the glue… we just stick it all together.' The Crowtations are, however, the stars in the show's intermezzos (they do the singing part) and they also advance the story. They discuss inventions and inventors, and communicate the idea that failure is: 'the first step to success. Failure makes them [inventors] think' (video excerpt: *Lewis Latimer: Renaissance Man,* Lemelson Center 1999). The audience is then introduced to the historical part of the narrative. Crowtations present scenes from Latimer's parents' life when they were slaves and how they escaped, as well as from Latimer's childhood. In act two, we see aspects of Louis Latimer's adult life, his talents, his inventions and his work next to Graham Bell and Thomas Edison. The act also includes a scene where all three scientists are represented by gigantic puppets. Act three takes a documentary form as we listen to a voice pretending to be Louis Latimer, reading his letter to the National Conference of Labored Men, and reciting a poem he wrote for his wife. We also see real pictures taken during Latimer's life.

Brewer, similarly to many other puppeteers commissioned by museums, initially had to convince the staff about puppetry's potential to move beyond simplistic Disney-like narratives:

> Upon studying him [Latimer] I realized that he had a very interesting life: his parents were slaves, he worked for Thomas Edison…Then I saw the connection between Latimer the inventor and the African history. At first the Lemelson Center[159] wanted me to give a kind of sterile Disney kind of biography of Latimer but I wanted to include all this additional information and to their credit they allowed me to do it. [160]

Once the museum was convinced, 'authenticity' became the central issue. As Brewer recalls:

> […] it was the Smithsonian that had to document it; everything that I wanted to include, I had to do research; I did about three months of research… We had to deliver research on just the costuming…we had three persons who did costumes… I sent sketches back and forth … they had three historians from the Smithsonian who read the script and a couple of times the dialogue that I had, had to be changed: once or twice I presented something that is fact in the dialogue and I did not have any back up; my experience is 'writing for theatre,' so I was trying to advance the dramatic element of it, but they did not want that… I had to work within the confines… I had to submit at different stages illustrations of the main characters… They wanted to check it four times. Check and check and check…they are *The Smithsonian Institution,* they wanted absolutely everything factual. [161]

As Brewer explained, he is more familiar with experimenting with mixing real persons with fictional elements. In this way, museologically speaking, the interpretation is far more personal and, dramaturgically, the action advances more dynamically. Thus the show is not mirroring life, but rather comments on it: it is inspired by real events and people, and responds to them:

> I've done shows that involved Duke Ellington. What I would do is that I would turn it into a fantasy. I had a story where two little boys run away from home because they wanted to join the Duke Ellington band and they

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[159] The Jerome and Dorothy Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation was founded in 1995 at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. .(http://invention.smithsonian.org/about/)

[160] B. Brewer. Personal interview, December 2009.

[161] B. Brewer. Personal interview, December 2009.

meet him. It is an imaginary story; the only factual persons are Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Miles Davies. [162]

However, real evidence is not equal to truth, or re-enactment. Bill Nichols, the theorist on documentary films maintains that 'what is one person's historical evidence is another person's fiction' (1991: 161). What could be said is that Brewer's thorough research of real evidence is a good starting point to better convince the audience of the veracity of his story.

In other words, and as Guignon's analysis of Heidegger's notion of authenticity suggests, Brewer is more interested in the authenticity of the subject (Dasein), and of being true to its own self as a starting point to examine history from a safer background, than in the rigidity of, sometimes questionable, authentic, hard facts. He intends to use puppetry as a means to provide the appropriate conditions for learning. These conditions aim to make participants stay connected together and with the world around them in order to get engaged with a quest for knowledge, for exploring human history:

> Heidegger observes that since Dasein is always contextualized in a community -since the happening of its life always dovetails into the 'world-historical happening' of a people- its 'authentic happening' is possible only as a 'co-happening' with its community... On this view, then, our deepest possibilities of understanding are drawn from the shared historical possibilities made accessible in our culture. My own personal quest for meaning is only possible against the backdrop of the communal projection of meaning of a historical people. This indebtedness to history may not be explicit: Heidegger says that 'it is not necessary that in resoluteness one should explicitly know the origin of the possibilities upon which that resoluteness projects itself' [Heidegger 1962: 385]. In other words, a grasp of the heritage as historical is not necessary to resoluteness… (Guignon 1984: 336)

Besides, if even authenticity is a question of faith, as Nichols suggests below, then what more should be expected from fiction?

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[162] B. Brewer. Personal interview, December 2009.

> Indexicality plays a key role in authenticating the documentary image's claims to the historically real, but the authentication itself must come from elsewhere and it is often subject to doubt. Our willingness to suspend disbelief in the face of the 'living likeness' such images convey supports the fascination, pleasure, and power to persuade that documentary affords; it is also a willingness we tender more often on faith than reason (1991: 153).

However, the learning conditions based on puppetry's communicative power might weaken within a museum's context. Due to the show's length and the pre-recorded dialogues, Brewer's company had to compromise and limit improvisation and audience participation, leaving most of this to the end. Brewer explains that there is always a time limit in performing for school visits in museums, so puppeteers have to adjust interaction with the audience and improvisation to a predetermined time:

> There was a little bird, the narrator of the story, and I used him to connect with the children. So with his dialogue I had more flexibility… we have him from another show, he talks directly to kids there, but here we did not want to do that because some of the soundtrack was recorded on tape and if the kids start to respond…. In other shows we have more free will: we might have an improvised dialogue with the audience for half an hour. Here we had a time frame: the school comes before lunch and leaves after lunch… [163]

Finance is another issue sometimes related to the project's research and authenticity that needs also to be negotiated between puppeteers and institutions. Apart from the general limitations on financial resources, a common problem for commissions is that the budget has to be fixed beforehand.

However, puppeteers' work is an open, dynamic and ever-changing process; creative ideas and unexpected needs in constructions or the narrative might lead to new paths and new research which cannot always be avoided. New materials need to be bought, things may break and need to be reconstructed, or costs may rise through providing new solutions:

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[163] B. Brewer. Personal interview, December 2009.

more scenes or characters might need to be included than initially planned that add to the reliability of the project. Brewer recalls:

> Although my original budget only included about forty puppets, I got so much into the process and did research and I wanted to include certain characters - in total sixty-five puppets… to enhance scenes such as the slave auction, I had extra slaves, and more soldiers… I was paid in instalments. Sometimes I had to put my own money 'cause I had to get things done, I did not want to wait for them because that would throw me off of my schedule.[164]

Especially for big productions, grants can also be problematic, as 'money always comes in late and by that time we might have already started another project'.[165]

Another problem with commissions is that museum shows are often more specialized than puppet shows for theatre, as the former are made primarily to accompany an exhibit; so, no matter how large-scale they are, they may only be suitable for supplementing a specific temporary exhibition which, in turn, might influence the life span of the show.   For example, the *Louis Latimer* show was only presented about fifteen times in total, for one week in the Smithsonian and the rest in three other venues.

Moreover, tensions between the two communities of practice (puppeteers and museum staff) might occur due to lack of awareness about each other's field. Lack of understanding leads to lack of communication. For example, the Smithsonian Institution's staff arranged the filming the show during an exhausting technical rehearsal, which also happened to be the first day of the company's arrival after a long trip. The performers were not given time to rest, and the museum's team did not take into account the demands of performing for a different medium (film), which was to be used for promotional and learning purposes as well as an archival item. Brewer recalls:

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[164] B. Brewer. Personal interview, December 2009.

[165] B. Brewer. Personal interview, December 2009.

They took me by surprise because we were going to film it when we finished it [the series of performances]. It was never my intention for us to be seen on stage; in a live production that is ok… [but] on film, it is too much information on a small screen… I thought that we were going to do another dress rehearsal… they just filmed the whole thing! And if it was up to me I would film it scene by scene, different angles, but by that time we were so exhausted, we had just driven in, four hours drive right from NY, unload the equipment, set it up, test the sound, light, get it together. It took us five hours. Then we had a dinner break for an hour, and then they filmed us! [166]

Overall, the Brewer case study suggests that tensions, compromises and conflicts could legitimately form a significant part of peripheral situated learning (in this case, puppeteers are in the periphery and museum staff represent the older members). Learning that comes out of such difficult negotiations is valuable for all members and it can only emerge when problems that occur are faced up to, not based on hierarchy, status or educational attitudes that tend to exclude resistant members from practice. Learning rather comes to the fore when members strive to stay connected and find a solution in common. Learning thus acquires an extra meaning, based on tacit as well as explicit knowledge:

> Schoolchildren are legitimately peripheral, but kept from participation in the social world more generally… [When] sequestering …is institutionalized […] it encourages a folk epistemology of dichotomies, for instance, between 'abstract' and 'concrete' knowledge. These categories do not reside in the world as distinct forms of knowledge, not do they reflect some putative hierarchy of forms of *knowledge* among practitioners. Rather they derive from the nature of the new practice generated by sequestration. *Abstraction* in this sense stems from the disconnectedness of a particular cultural practice. (Lave & Wenger 2008: 104).

Conclusion

Roberts' view that museum educators 'come from every background imaginable' (1997: 2) seems to challenge the barriers in the profession. It is obvious that learning activities could be further enriched as the network of communities of practice involved moves beyond

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[166] B. Brewer. Personal interview, December 2009.

museum staff. Further to their own expertise, members of staff might be affiliated to other communities such as actors, theatre directors, puppeteers, visual artists, drama in education experts, education therapists or school teachers.

As Wegner and Lave maintained in this case 'learning itself is an improvised practice' (2008: 93) among these communities which, in the case of museum puppetry, might lead to collaborative projects. Although close collaborations are quite rare, sometimes they may start even from the pre-production stage. The learning activity would then consist of '…a set of relations among people, activity, and the world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (ibid: 98). In this scheme, the museum would supply the platform of dialogue (their own expertise, the setting, the facilities and contacts) within which all sorts of 'social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place' (ibid: 14). Consequently, further social engagements are added and a whole bunch of communities (from focus groups, to audiences, or other partners) gets involved. By the time the production phase begins, the network of communities that share various aspects of the final museum experience should be challengingly complex.

In this chapter I examined a number of ways puppeteers and museum staff exchange experience and benefit from each other's knowledge. As a rule, museum staff provide puppeteers with learning goals, social technology, contacts, promotion strategies, and facilities, while puppeteers' techniques and visual economy (as is the case with Capstick, Z Puppets, Patricia O'Donovan among others) inspire museum staff by communicating complex or delicate issues within imaginative, engaging co-created narratives. I also examined other cases where staff training like those conducted by a collective of artists (Erth at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles) or by Patricia O'Donovan aim towards eventually making a museum puppetry project independent and run by the museum's permanent staff.

The learning of museum staff and puppeteers was perceived as:

> …a process that takes place in a participation framework, not in an individual mind. This means among other things, that it is mediated by the

differences of perspective among the co-participants. It is the community, or at least those participating in the learning context, who 'learn' under this definition (Lave & Wegner 2008: 15).

Regarding the practical difficulties in museum puppetry explored in this chapter, besides the marginalization of and prejudice against puppetry, these are more or less the usual ones of any live museum interpretation: distraction because of 'noisy' exhibits, difficulties in satisfying the desires of often conflicting audiences, difficulties in darkening the space and in securing financial resources. However, misunderstandings within partnerships like the ones conducted by the Minnesota History Center, the Ojibwe community and In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre company suggest that delicate issues need careful treatment, especially when there is a question over 'authenticity' and timeframe. The case study suggested that neither the popular nature of puppetry, nor the puppeteers' origins (Ojibwe), could guarantee 'authenticity', unless the narrative is co-created with the core-community being represented. In other words, as Jones implied, minorities might feel like outsiders to the collaborative practice and thus feel misinterpreted if they are not involved from the very beginning of the process.

Personal observations in museums in Europe and US suggested that problematic uses of puppets in museums usually involve any combination of: uninteresting or inappropriate designs or poorly made puppets,[167] non-engaging or non-intriguing narratives, amateurish manipulation and audience interaction based on dull questions and predetermined answers. Many times, the great enthusiasm of a young interpreter counterbalances some badly pre-recorded voices or poor constructions and unintelligent narratives. This is the case with a NYC museum which engages poorly trained volunteers for running the museum puppetry programmes. Also, in a certain UK museum, although the puppeteers seem to be skilful and experienced, it feels like they do not put all their efforts into the performance or narrative. It is not easy to tell if this is because the performer is overwhelmed by the overcrowded

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[167] This was the case with disorienting persona dolls made to research very young children's responses to museums. As Linda Kelly, the Head of Audience Research from the Australian Museum, admits: 'we found the persona dolls themselves rather scary!' (Email correspondence March 2008).

schedule of museum activities, or that the easily excited younger audience has been misinterpreted as an audience with de facto low expectations.

A number of partnerships, collaborative projects and practices suggest that many contemporary museums are heading towards the idea of the post-museum, a democratic museum, which is less confined within its own walls, both literally and metaphorically. These museums claim to provide a platform for their communities' voices and needs, where their identity is continuously defined, reshaped, refined and strengthened through meaningful narratives co-created for or sometimes with them.

Puppetry and its long tradition as a street popular art, can be a useful tool towards this direction; besides, many puppeteers worldwide rely on the idea of play and humour inherent in the art to amuse a general audience: 'puppetry is most relevant to anthropology… as a reflection of and commentary on social and political structure, and as a major form of leisure entertainment' (Sherzer & Sherzer 1987: 3). On the other hand, with traditional puppets, 'people look at themselves, their social and cultural life, their history and traditions, and their rituals' (ibid.: 3). The Greek Karagiozis and the Turkish Karagoz 'a man of the people, poverty-stricken and always hungry' (Arnott 1992: 287), and the English Punch, whose anarchic spirit momentarily sets the audience free from 'the flouting of taboos and the affronting of contemporary mores' (ibid.: 283) are just two popular puppet theatre examples.

It is a common belief that puppeteers' independence and freedom have shaped both street performers and their audiences over the centuries, and have contributed to the directness, flexibility, efficiency and vividness of the art. Case studies such as Geoff Felix's Punch and Judy or in the Heart of Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre community work suggest that the puppeteers' familiarity with the ambience of the street — travelling and interacting with unknown passersby — as well as their traditionally strong bonds with people of any age and communities (something that resonates eastern puppetry' status explored in Chapter One) makes museum puppetry a flexible medium for indoors activities as well as outdoors, outreach programs. Working with puppeteers, during either collaborative practices or

projects, museum staff can begin to learn puppetry's communicative techniques for inspiring audiences. As already mentioned, the hook here is a co-created narrative as well as the willing suspension of disbelief among participants.

For example, In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre's tradition in actively engaging local communities is remarkably long. Its projects could stand as a good example for inspiring museum staff in other contexts. The company's projects suggest how puppeteers fundamentally become technicians/facilitators for the local community. The artists provide the community members with their expertise on visual images, working with objects, storyboards, constructions, performance and direction and contribute thus to an engaging, holistic, intelligible, imaginative and playful interaction with the audience.

However, puppetry's convention—infusing a dead object with life—is not only a hook for museum audiences but also for creating stronger bonds among the professional communities involved (museum staff, puppeteers) in the pre-production of the projects or of practices (see the diagram in Chapter Five). Besides the learning goals around which the team is working, giving life to puppets/objects engages manipulators in playful, entertaining interaction during constructions and rehearsals. This convention enhances sociability and communication, as is the case with Robert Poulter's *Eidophusikon* teams, who tend to socialize even beyond the museum context.

Also, in this chapter, I focused particularly on O'Donovan's multifaceted museum puppetry projects developed in negotiations or in collaborative practices with the museums. Although O'Donovan is a highly respected artist, she also had to struggle with the stigmatization of puppetry, especially in her first museum projects. However, the practitioner's scientific background, the accuracy of her research, and the high aesthetic quality of her work were essential to ultimately convincing the museum staff of the richly varied potential of puppetry. Most of her collaborations suggest that mutual trust matures in time.

O'Donovan's skills and long term museum projects favour a wide range of commissions or practices: from collaborative practices for exhibits' designing, constructions, exhibition curatorhsip, development of museum proposal for funding, to shows, demonstrations, and staff training. In all these projects, O'Donovan explores critical issues in which she prefers to go deeper, beyond propaganda and convention. However, as her projects are either commissions or collaborative practices to be presented within the museum confines and policies, she does not always feel free to deal with particular audience reactions or to resolve delicate or controversial issues emerging from her shows in the way she would on independent theatre stages.

As is the case with well respected puppeteers by the museum and puppetry community, she is not easily satisfied just by demonstrating an issue with limited and limiting, directed research and she is often struggling with the museum's short deadlines or demand to appeal to a general audience. Situated learning based on participatory practice that gives 'access to a wide range of ongoing activity' (Lave & Wenger 2008: 101) for both communities (O'Donovan and museum staff) becomes here an appropriate way to express, and hopefully resolve, any tensions that emerge.

Brewer's case, in particular, demonstrated the problem of representation and the tensions that can arise between puppeteers and museums. Many museums require the words, the period costume, and the events represented in a show to all be based on historical facts. I suggest that, especially in the case of a highly prestigious museum like the Smithsonian Institution, the commissioned puppeteers have to take a step back and seriously consider accuracy as much as they pursue artistic quality in aesthetics, narrative, climax, and performance. If these two qualities (accuracy and artistic choices) clash, then it is obvious that the museum, being the venue which hosts the show, cannot but have the final word. It is up to practitioners then to accept this and make the necessary changes or to change venue. As Brewer points out, another alternative is to introduce fictional characters and avoid historical representations altogether, at least in their classical linear, realistic, narrative form.

This said, there are significantly positive aspects when these two communities of practice collaborate in peripheral situate learning. Museums have the opportunity to learn more about the potential of puppetry to explore history within an imaginative narrative. Also, the puppeteers' familiarity with recycling techniques in imaginative ways could inspire museums to retrain their audience and their expectations. It is indicative that both Brewer's bird and Latimer puppets have been reused in a jazz show, and other contexts.

On the other hand, with their high expectations of research and accuracy, museums provide practitioners with research tools and technical knowledge to achieve a scientifically acceptable accurate representation. The puppeteers are challenged to acknowledge the museum's criteria and turn, if possible, any artistic compromises into imaginative, creative solutions. I believe that as long as there is an agreement about the approach to the project's subject from an ethical point of view from the pre-production stage, practitioners should aim primarily at keeping their inspiration fresh and, so far as possible, close to the museum's standards (thorough multidisciplinary research, use of background information and references to ensure authenticity/reliability and clarity in museum interpretation around historical facts, accessible relevant documentation).

Also, Brewer's case seems to initiate an interesting dialogue between scientific authenticity and authenticity associated with aesthetic perception and expression. His collaborative projects suggest the importance of contextualizing factual authenticity and reliability not within the confines of rigid expertise but through more human, grounded approaches: not only via the scientific truth represented by the museum staff, but also via artistic truth represented by puppeteers, as well as via the perspectives and personal agendas of museum audiences.

Overall, Brewer's example reflects Lave and Wenger's idea about situated learning: '…rather than learning by replicating the performances of others or by acquiring knowledge transmitted in instruction, we suggest that learning occurs through centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient atmosphere' (2008: 100).

There seems to be a fine line in museum puppetry which tends to 'celebrate the diversity of popular culture, linguistically, socially, and individually, in contrast to official, elite, and standardizing high culture, to which puppets are a comic counterpoint and which they often debase' (Sherzer & Sherzer 1987:4; see Fig. 44). Or, to put it in Professor Felix's words, 'the show is […] not particularly politically correct, I'm afraid, but it's historical and that's how we get away with it' (cited in Reeve 2010: 253). On the other side of the coin, there seems to be a second fine line which distinguishes the popular, celebratory aspect of puppetry from a tourist industry exclusively driven by profit.

Karp and Kratz underline that:

> Over the past fifteen years, virtually all museums and heritage institutions, new and old alike, have grappled with financial issues and with continuing debates about how to combine and balance education and entertainment in exhibitions and programmes… [and] seek to tap burgeoning tourism industries (Karp & Kratz 2007:14).

Further, Davis maintains that:

> Not always altruism but sometimes political expediency, economics and survival have caused museums to be aware of the needs of their communities; more revenue, and hence larger (and different) audiences are required, as is the need to be seen, to be publicly accountable and politically correct (2007: 65).

However, I believe the necessary marketing for the survival of museums could coexist with a play ethos that doesn't underestimate anybody's aesthetics, intelligence and sensibility. It is important to clarify once again that simplicity and playfulness don't necessarily equal simplistic or tedious solutions. Most of the cases studied in this research suggest that this pitfall can be prevented and worked out in the pre-production process, especially within collaborative practices. It also depends on the puppeteers' worldview, imagination, narrative and performance skills, as well as their craftsmanship. Last but not least, success depends on good collaboration with an open-minded museum staff.

In the following chapter, I intend to further explore the idea of collaborative practices and commissions, this time focusing on puppet exhibits that engage audiences not only as spectators (co-creators) but also as independent manipulators.

Figure 44: Mr Punch with some of his victims… (2010)

Chapter Four
Museum interactivity and puppet exhibits

In this chapter I will focus on the first research question by examining how the theoretical and practical frames of puppetry relate to a selection of interactive museum puppet exhibits. Interactive here means that they invite touch or manipulation in any way as opposed to being enclosed in show-cases, as is the case with many puppets in traditional puppet museums.

In particular, I will focus on exhibits that incorporate puppetry in a dynamic, open way, which I call 'puppet exhibits' as well as those that simply bear a *puppetesque* element, as I call it, drawn from puppet (or object) theatre imagery and techniques (see also introductory chapter for more explanation on the term). They will be examined from at least one of the following five perspectives: manipulation, aesthetics, narrative, visitor engagement, and collaboration among the museums' and puppeteers' communities of practice.

These puppet (or puppetesque) exhibits, as a general rule, rely heavily on the constructor's building techniques and visual art background. Many times they imply a kind of autonomous interactivity (they are interactive constructions, which don't necessarily demand the presence of a puppeteer or facilitator). Instead, they rely on direct audience engagement and direct manipulation where the visitor takes the role of manipulator.

My case studies include the Science Museum of London's exhibition *Wallace & Gromit present: A World of Cracking Ideas*, where I explore how puppet imagery inspires and interweaves with an exhibition's narrative. The case of Walsall New Art Gallery gives an example where preschoolers are exposed to an original work of art with the use of a puppet booth and a set of puppets. Jo Digger, the gallery's collections curator, touches here on the debate around the role and use of interactive exhibits in modern art museums and galleries. The Horniman Museum's high technology interactive exhibition *The Robot Zoo* aims at introducing visitors to a fantastic world of animal-robots. This case study explores puppetesque exhibits with integral puppetesque narratives.

The *Secret Life of Home* exhibition at the Science Museum in London explores Tim Hunkin's double role as curator/constructor in conjunction with his puppetesque way of thinking and seeing the world. Similarly, Forkbeard Fantasy's (multimedia theatre company) retrospective exhibition at the Theatre Museum in London and one of their interactive exhibits commissioned by the Jurassic Coast Museums explores the challenges of employing puppet techniques in exhibition design. Karl Foster, one of the constructors of the Object Dialogue Boxes, and Alex Woodland, from the education department of the Manchester Art Gallery, reflect on how object combinations with an open and non-directive interaction push the boundaries of the typical museum experience. They introduce the idea of object-theatre techniques as a challenging starting point for museum interactions. Finally, the puppeteer and constructor Chris Green, and Marnie Gittleman from Skirball Cultural Center reflect on their close collaboration in designing, building and testing the Noah's Ark series of interactive exhibits. These exhibits are either stationary or mobile and circulated by the museum staff. This case study reflects Green's 'human ecology' philosophy and the criteria for building exhibits out of recycled materials.

Most of the cases are also examined under the scope of the second research question which focuses on issues around negotiations between the two communities of practice (puppeteers and museum staff, with particular reference to Green's and Foster's cases).

Exploring museum collections and ideas with objects

> Objects are used in museums and galleries for a range of purposes: enjoyment, to stimulate subject specific interest, knowledge acquisition and inspiration (Chatterjee 2008: 1).

In the last chapter of her book, Roberts in her analysis of the museum objects she explains:

> Objects have also become vehicles of experience. By opening the field of possible meanings that objects can hold, traditionally valued qualities such as rarity, provenance, or reality have taken their place next to experiential qualities that objects evoke, such as provocation, spectacle, or realism. Clearly, museums are no longer object-based institutions in the traditional

sense of the term —except insofar as objects serve as the conveyers of ulterior ideas and experiences. (ibid: 147).

Real or virtual objects that do not necessarily belong to the museums' original main collection are extensively used today for museum interpretation and communication. These objects could take the form of a computer exhibit with digitalized artefacts: using a computer keyboard or a touch screen visitors can for example rotate, zoom in, or drag a digitalized exhibit seen on the screen, or navigate around a narrative related to it, or to the museum's collection. Visitors could also 'touch' 3D virtual objects with the use of haptic technology (Giachritsis 2008: 75-106; Loscos 2008: 135-149). In other cases, bearing the history imprinted on them, real 'stuff' from the museum handling collection can be directly handled and examined by visitors. Furthermore, artists' special commissions (Fig. 45) occasionally aim at creating visitor-friendly interactive works of art, especially in art museums and galleries; robustly made, these constructions welcome touch and sometimes even direct manipulation.

Figure 45: Interactive large scale abstract installation on the laws of motion - Bloomsfield Science Museum in Jerusalem (2009).

On the other hand, electro-mechanical kinetic sculptures combine technical knowledge and often highly artistic skills. They can be equipped with operational devices such as buttons, ropes, levers, handles, pulleys, switches and other moving parts to hold, touch, bite, leak, blow through, rub against, turn, transform, pull, or push (the more exhibit designers experiment with neuroscientific findings and the complexity and richness of our body functions and senses, the greater the variety of interaction and learning experiences). Some of these objects automatically produce a series of movements, get specially lit, respond with some sort of sound/music/speech triggered by sensors or sometimes just stimulated by visitors' circulation inside the galleries, or by pressing a button.

In addition, reversing the roles and with the help of the appropriate mechanical or high technology, digitalized tools, during indoors museum workshops or on line, real matter or digital *stuff* is transformed into concrete or virtual creations in the hands of visitors, according to their personal choices, aesthetics and skills.

What all these seemingly irrelevant objects —concrete, electromechanical, original, everyday, virtual, or newborn objects signed by the visitors' hands— have in common is that they usually stand (wholly or partly) outside the glass cases; they welcome the visitor's touch and are often imaginative and playful. They invite the visitors' bodily reactions and can take the form of 2D or 3D moving images on a computer screen or projected onto a wall, or the form of a real object, or a hologram in space. What this rich range of objects aims at is to enhance museum communication and interpretation's entry points. Using these interactive objects, museums attempt to provide their visitors with a dynamic, inspiring, and sometimes collective, experience. Their ultimate goal is to enhance some kind of learning, entertainment and/or socializing.

With the exception of the handling collection, something else that all these objects share in common is that most of them are constructions commissioned especially to accompany a museum collection. Either as a simulation of reality or as an abstract/symbolic construction, these objects often raise the authenticity issue (cf. Chapter Three). These objects bring along a certain kind of narrative, related somehow to the grand narrative of the museum collection

they accompany. This 'narrative within the narrative' varies in abstractness, the fiction involved, open-endedness, and audience engagement. Also, it varies in the way the sub-narrative is integrated into the grand narrative. The look of these objects also suggests a series of aesthetic choices, varied in style and quality. Last but not least, another characteristic that, unfortunately, all these objects may share is that they are sometimes out of order, or damaged. A fact that, museologically speaking, may have a twofold explanation: it could imply poor sustainability and an inefficient service system and/or extreme usage and raucous audience fun.

Within a museum context, we can also discern specially manufactured surfaces made from a plethora of materials and textures; these might be dispersed throughout the galleries and are meant to be touched, handled or changed in shape. These surfaces or parts of objects may play a rather secondary role to the museum exhibits' narrative and, perceived in isolation, they don't really bear any predetermined narrative whatsoever. These types of interactive materials also set a tone of interactivity in a museum exhibition, whereas hardcore, condensed — and often noisy — forms of interactivity often find their place in science centres, science museums, children museums and even art museums (Bradburne 2002). In most cases, special, interactive galleries or, in exceptional cases, interactive spots dispersed throughout the entire museum (see also the Walsall Gallery case study, below), are usually addressed to younger audiences.

Automata on display

Closer to puppets' anthropomorphism, kinetic sculptures, or automata, can be displayed either inside or outside the museum glass case.[168] Automata can be stimulated by natural elements as is the case with Calder's series of mobiles (Simon 2009). These are playful exhibits in colourful shapes, meant to produce unpredictable movements as the air passes within and around them.

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[168] See also the first chapter of Max Von Boehn's *Puppets and Automata*, where he gives an overview of the history of automata which date back to the times of Ancient Egypt and Greece. Among them, Hero of Alexandria, is characterized as 'the most famous mechanician among the ancients' (1972: 5).

Automata can also produce predictable, regular and predetermined movements. They can be stimulated by a simple mechanism such as turning a handle or in other cases they are stimulated by motors used at the exhibitors' will. This is the case of some of the automata of the popular worldwide touring exhibitions by the Cabaret Mechanical Theatre,[169] or the exhibition in the Cartoon Museum in 2009, *Rowland Emett's Engines of Enchantment* (Figs. 46; 47) which I had the chance to visit in 2009.[170] In the Cartoon Museum, during the opening hours of the exhibition, the automata work independently of the world around them: regardless of whether there is a visitor in the room, or has moved, or walked to another room. I think this adds something to their charm and to the very idea of eternal repetition inherent in automata which are made to repeat their actions in loops, with the same rigour, as if this is to be perpetuated in eternity.

Figure 46: Automaton, made by Rowland Emett, from the exhibition *Rowland Emett's Engines of Enchantments* at the Cartoon Museum in London (2009).

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[169] http://www.cabaret.co.uk/ accessed 3 March 2010.

[170] After his series of railway drawings Emett did for the UK puppeteers' journal *Punch* (1944) he was asked by James Gardner from the Festival of Britain to 'transform his spidery Punch drawings into a passenger carrying railway to be built in Battersea Pleasure Gardens' in 1950 (this is about a whimsical train that makes its appearance every Christmas in the Ontario Science Center) (The Cartoon Museum 2009: 30). After that project, Emett was commissioned numerous times 'by large companies to give a friendly face to new technology systems.' (ibid: 20).

Emett explains his machines:

> They are the direct opposite, I suppose, of the average idea of the implacable soulless machine, driving relentlessly on, or these frightening electronic proliferations, ready at the drop of a Silicon chip to take us all over… My Machines are friendly, they are happy, they crave love, and I really think they get it (Cartoon Museum 2009: 20).

Arguably, although this continuous repetition had a kind of hypnotic appeal to me I think it is exactly due to this repetition that a refreshed perception and a re-evaluation of time can be possible. Visiting the exhibition in the Cartoon Museum and the Cabaret Mechanical Theatre website I encountered highly imaginative, comic, surrealistic, often ironic and satirical mini-narratives. Repetition did not seem dull to me. I actually found it rather adventurous. For example, I found in each of Emett's elaborate automata an element of surprise which, after some time, gave way to a soothing quality of security and predictability; the repetition just extended this feeling for a bit more, offering enough time to enjoy, to feel and to think— to build my mini-narrative without worrying that I would miss something from the action (it remains unchanged, as it goes on in loops until museum closing time—when it stops... I guess!). Of course, there is no doubt that there is a limit to the time someone can watch, for example, the Mechanical Cabaret Theatre's cat drinking poisoned milk, dying and being resurrected only to drink it again and so on and so forth. However, automata at work always made me want to go back and revisit my favourites. As soon as the rules of the game are known, I believe there is something deeply rewarding in fulfilling my expectations as a spectator myself; something that made me empathize with the fate of these creatures, even if by the time the first loop is watched, then the initial surprise is lost forever and can only come again as an echo.

Figure 47: *The Fairway – Birdie Mk. 1 automaton*, made by Rowland Emett, from the exhibition *Rowland Emett's Engines of Enchantments* at the Cartoon Museum in London (2009).

Automata can also take an impressive theatrical form and expand into really large-scale, complex mechanisms like those of the Sharmanka Kinetic Theatre by the Glasgow-based Russian artistic collective.[171] *Devious Devices* (1998) are contemporary automata in action, which toured and were presented among other places in Croydon Clocktower, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. The eighteen automata of the exhibition are responses to objects considered symbolic of the twentieth century, chosen by the film director and ex-Monty Python member, Terry Gilliam. Gilliam gives us an insight into the friendly world of automata (often equally applicable to puppets and even everyday objects):

> ... taking mundane things and making them interesting. It's back to surrealism -taking the ordinary and looking at it in different ways you wouldn't normally look at it… Automata are mechanical fantasies in which common mechanisms are adapted to make incongruous machines that

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[171] http://www.trongate103.com/129,162/partners/sharmanka_kinetic_theatre/ accessed 6 March 2010.

appear to have a life of their own… It's surrealism at its best. Funny and disturbing. It sparks off so many different emotions. I've always found the ability to laugh at the most serious things is a test of how important they are…It's almost like doing my animations on Python, which clearly weren't perfect. It wasn't like Disney where everything is seamless and smooth and articulated. With automata a cog turns there, a lever goes click there. Everything moves on Newtonian principles and it always feels like, well, I could maybe do something like that. You can always have the chance of being a mini-god, to create something that apparently has life… That's what's so wonderful about them [automata]- the enormous effort that goes into this thing that you would normally do effortlessly. And that's the other way of doing automata, creating incredibly complex paths to get to something incredibly simple.[172]

Finally, kinetic sculptures can also be placed in museums to raise money: users have to put a coin in a slot to make the automaton respond. Gilliam comments on these types of sculptures: 'The action of a coin continues to exert its fascination today and modern automata-makers are increasingly used by museums and other penurious institutions to design witty ways of relieving visitors of cash' (ibid.).

According to Tillis, 'a distinction should be maintained between the automaton and all categories of puppet… being considered [the automaton] a kind of kinetic sculpture' (Tillis 2001: 183). However, it seems to me that if someone attempts to define interactive automata by the maker's intention -the kind of appeal they aim at on their audience- they might spot many similarities with the impact puppets in action would like to have on their audiences. Interestingly, the puppeteer Stephen Mottram combines automata and puppets in his performances in such a way that having watched his show *The Seed Carrier*, I found it hard to distinguish which is which.

Also, some might argue that the Fosters' or Chris Green's case studies described below fall within the field of sculpture, or kinetic sculpture, rather than puppetry. However, similarly to puppetesque automata, these projects are also analyzed here, due to the potential impact of the artists' constructions on visitors. In addition, I would like to make it clear that all the practitioners (like the Fosters or Tim Hunkin, see below) mentioned in the thesis, even if they

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[172] Dreams devious devices: http://www.smart.co.uk/dreams/automata.htm (Accessed 1 June 2010.)

may not all be puppeteers in the strictest sense of the word, nonetheless have developed strong affiliations with the larger community of professional puppeteers.

Museum interpretation and communication with puppet exhibits

With a few small exceptions, the examples that follow are ordered from less to more open-ended cases. The last examples involve more sophisticated and engaging narratives, aesthetics, manipulation techniques and learning potential. Also, the last case studies in this section are particularly significant for the close, long-term collaborations built between the community of puppeteers and museum staff. These examples are exceptional for one more reason: puppet exhibits/objects are not stationary; they are also circulated within the galleries.

Wallace & Gromit Present: A World of Cracking Ideas

This was an exhibition sponsored by the Intellectual Property Office, presented by Aardman Animations, which first featured in the Science Museum in London (2009) and attracted 186,000 visitors (Figs. 48; 49).[173] The exhibition was based on the fictional clay television characters, Wallace and Gromit, created by Aardman Productions. When I visited the exhibition I understood that its grand narrative was based on the idea of invention and creativity. Many of the exhibits (as well as the promotional material) were built around these inseparable stop-motion celebrities, featuring models of them in their puppet-like environment, as well as footage from their films. The characters were used to explore issues such as: 'What is copyright? What legal rights does a design have? How can a patent protect an idea? How do you tell a registered trade mark from a copycat version?'[174]

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[173] http://www.crackingideas.com/news/archives/89/science-museum-exhibition-closes-new-venue-coming-soon (accessed 9 May 2010).

[174] http://www.crackingideas.com/exhibition/ (accessed 21 May 2010).

Figure 48: Detail from the exhibition *Wallace & Gromit Present: A World of Cracking Ideas* - Science Museum in London (2009).

The museum chose to use this narrative because of the national and worldwide recognition of these 'iconic inventors,' as Lawrence Smith Higgins from Intellectual Property Office admits: 'The Intellectual Property isn't the most entertaining subject but if you put that with an iconic inventor — Wallace and Gromit — then you've got the basis of getting that message out to a huge audience potentially' (ibid.). This exhibition used the actual puppet figures as static models and relied on puppet imagery to interweave them with the exhibition's grand narrative. Paradoxically, 'hands-on' interaction was not much enhanced via these 'iconic inventors' in the form of puppet exhibits as they remained inside the glass cases.[175]

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[175] It is perhaps worth noting here the 'strong emotional responses' the *Flight Time Barbie* exhibition (http://www.nasm.si.edu/museum/history/nasm25th/chronology/1994.htm National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 1995), elicited thanks to the doll's imagery. The display was open for ten weeks. The exhibition included one label panel and two cases. The cases contained 32 Barbie and Ken dolls dating from 1961-1994, which were 'displayed in aerospace-related outfits, along with other associated dolls and toys'. (Pekarik 1997: 59) It should be noted here, as Pekarik explains, that the objects exhibited in the showcases, being actually highly signified popular commercial dolls (and not for example traditional puppets), turned out to be rather provocative and inappropriate for some visitors' sensibilities. As Pekarik comments:

Figure 49: Detail from the *Wallace & Gromit Present: A World of Cracking Ideas* exhibition - Science Museum of London (2009).

Walsall New Art Gallery

Karl Foster (see case study below) introduced me to a puppet exhibit in the Midlands UK. The Discovery Gallery is the first space that visitors face on entering the Walsall New Art Gallery, which is a genuinely visitor-friendly space.[176] The Discovery Gallery is a totally 'hands-on' space which aims to introduce children (and their carers) to art. It includes a

> The subject of Barbie clearly excited the visitors… Even for those who do not feel a special attraction to Barbie, the doll is not a neutral object… statements of disappointment with the exhibition showed that not all visitors are content to accept passive displays of authentic objects as adequate presentations of historical material. A number of comments pointed out that Barbie was not 'realistic'. Dolls as objects seem to fall outside the preview of science when they serve to inspire imaginative play rather than to represent the natural world (Pekarik 1997:65).

[176] Karl Foster was commissioned to conduct an evaluation report (2005-6) for the same gallery.

puppet theatre booth with a series of simple glove puppets and replicas of the figures portrayed on photographs (exhibits from the museum's main collection) opposite the booth.

During my short visit to the gallery, I had the chance to observe the exhibit being used. I noticed that the area around and inside the booth was one of the most active areas in the room. Even if the preschoolers inside the booth were not paying so much attention to the picture opposite them, they were having a lot of fun playing with the puppets (Fig. 50). They were excited to move them in space and give them a voice. They were chasing, frightening or hitting one another's puppets.

The aesthetics of the puppets and the booth's design did not seem to be the main priority of the exhibit, which was obviously designed mainly to engage children in manipulation, provide a playful environment and encourage the making of free associations with the original exhibit located opposite.

Figure 50: The back of the puppet booth - Walsall New Art Gallery (2008).

However, opportunities for this kind of link to occur were rather limited. The puppets were not really given a script to stimulate action within a relevant museum narrative. Foster notes

one visitor assistant's comment in his report: 'they [visitors] had only seen the script… used once in all the time the gallery has been in use' (Foster 2005-2006: 31).

The puppets' clothes vaguely resembled the shapes and colours of the ones worn by the people in the photograph, while their faces were stamped onto the fabric. This made their overall look rather vague and imprecise (Fig. 51). As for the booth, this was equipped with four lights in different colours, and it was too high for the small children to reach the switches and the proscenium. Foster writes again in his report: 'Apart from Health and Safety issue of children standing on chairs, the design of this space seems quite frustrating and the links to the artworks are confused. Here it is important to decide if play gets precedent over the interpretative aims…' (ibid: 30).

Figure 51: Glove puppets from the puppet exhibit - Walsall New Art Gallery (2008).

When I visited the gallery, I first met with the education curator of the gallery. She briefly explained the role of the Discovery Gallery to me, and referred to the function of the puppet theatre booth. She maintained the view that the use of puppets for museum communication depends mainly on whether this medium is directly linked to the theme of a specific

exhibition.[177] Similar views are held by members of the education staff of another art museum overseas, the Whitney Museum of American Art.[178] As Stina Puotinen (senior coordinator of family programmes) and Al Wee Seow (coordinator of school programmes) pointed out to me, an artist exhibiting in the museum might find it inappropriate or offensive to have their art works interpreted by other artworks, i.e. puppets.[179] This statement clearly suggests that, within art museums and galleries, museum puppetry should be developed, if at all, with extra caution to try to remain complementary rather than antagonistic towards the works of art included in the exhibition. Another alternative could also be to use museum puppetry mainly for communicating about classical works by visual artists of the past (see also Robert Poulter's New Model Theatre shows, Chapter Two).

The curator at Walsall Gallery also suggested that adding more puppet activities in the gallery would probably demand specialized museum staff to train volunteers and visitors, to familiarize them with the medium (something which would, of course, affect the museum budget— though not necessarily dramatically).

During my visit, I also had the pleasure of meeting collections curator and sculptor, Jo Digger. Digger not only kindly offered me her time for the interview during an obviously busy day, but also generously provided me with the report she had conducted on Interactive Art Spaces in the US, and various other reports.[180]

Digger wanted to reinforce the points she made in a paper she gave during the V&A conference on interactives: 'if children could become used to visiting the art gallery as a regular part of their activities, then many of the barriers to gallery visiting, especially class

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[177] Personal Interview, June 2008.

[178] I had the chance to observe such an activity with an artist circulating in the Calder exhibition in the same museum in 2008. He had a stage hanging from his shoulders and was manipulating his own tiny circus show, echoing Calder's circus figures.

[179] S. Puotinen and A. Wee Seow Personal interview, November 2008.
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[180] In fact, I left the Midlands carrying a thick file which was soon followed by further reports in electronic form.

barriers, would be overcome' (Digger 2002: 1,2). This, she argued, would demand a long term strategy of audience development. Defending children's right to access first class art, Digger argued that children deserve to enjoy art, either in their own space (Discovery Gallery), or in the main gallery. It should be noted here that the main rooms in the Walsall Gallery include a number of interactive exhibits, which are displayed next to original works of arts and provide a great variety of related activities. This museum strategy suggests that it is appropriate to place family interactives within an art space which, traditionally and perhaps in the minds of the visitors remains a highly protected environment: 'don't touch, don't talk, don't move too much.'[181] Under this spirit thus the gallery found the puppet booth as a way to strengthen the interactive element of an artwork and make audience react to its visual perception.

Robot Zoo

During my internship at the Horniman museum, I had the opportunity to visit the *Robot Zoo* (2009), a touring blockbuster exhibition (launched 1998) on loan from the Tech Museum, San Jose, CA. The mission of this exhibition where 'nature's engineering and human technology converge' was to 'reveal the biomechanics of giant robot animals to illustrate how real animals work.'[182]

In *Robot Zoo*, high tech interactive animatronics were used to communicate knowledge from physics and the biology of animals including chameleons (Fig. 52), squid, flies, giraffes (Fig. 53), and grasshoppers. According to the Time Out review, these models were 'as attractive as they [were] sturdy, and every exhibit was in working order (not always a given).'[183]

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[181] J. Digger. Personal interview, June 2008.

[182] The Robot Zoo. http://www.thetech.org/exhibits/online/robotzoo/ (accessed 2 February 2011).

[183] Time Out, The Robot Zoo, review by O'Reilly http://www.timeout.com/london/museums-attractions/event/13480/robot-zoo (accessed 2 February 2011).

Figure 52: Chameleon interactive exhibit from the Robot Zoo exhibition - Horniman Museum (2009).

More specifically, the exhibition designers had programmed the movement of various parts of the animals' survival mechanisms, such as finding food or camouflaging. The innovative concept of the exhibition lay in the metaphor of real life biomechanics imagery and manmade machine parts such as springs, pumps, shock absorbers, etc.[184] The exhibition provided the audience with pulleys, buttons, and other devices, to trigger or physically produce some kind of movement in the gigantic models, and to partially manipulate them in predetermined modes. Most of the time, it was possible to have visual access to the interior functioning of this mechanic energy, as the animals were partly skinless.

One of the exhibits (a rhinoceros robot) had remained 'half finished' (Fig. 54). Part of the exhibition story, as explained on a label, was that the rhinoceros exhibit had been left loose by a fictional character: the laboratory technician. This element implied that there were some human characters (a technician) behind this high tech laboratory, who gave life to these creatures (robots), which brought to mind Dr Frankenstein and his creature. With the risk of

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[184] See also the highly entertaining and imaginative *Hemo the Magnificent* (1957) by Frank Capra. A superb short film made for television education featuring, among other body functions, bodybuilders pumping up the volume of Hemo's muscles. Footages of the film are part of an exhibit about medicine in the Science Museum of Minnesota.

imposing a personal interpretation onto the entire exhibition, it seems to me that the exhibition's narrative was a lost opportunity. I think the idea of creating a life in a laboratory environment is too strong (it visually intersected the whole exhibition) to remain untouched or ignored. As a visitor, I felt ready to get involved in a fictional story, but there was no obvious story there; no stimulation to make any associations apart from the pervasive, impressive metaphor. Who was that omnipotent technician who created such beautiful, gigantic constructions in his laboratory? Why did he build them? Where is he now; what will happen next?

Figure 53: Giraffe automaton from the Robot Zoo exhibition - Horniman Museum (2009).
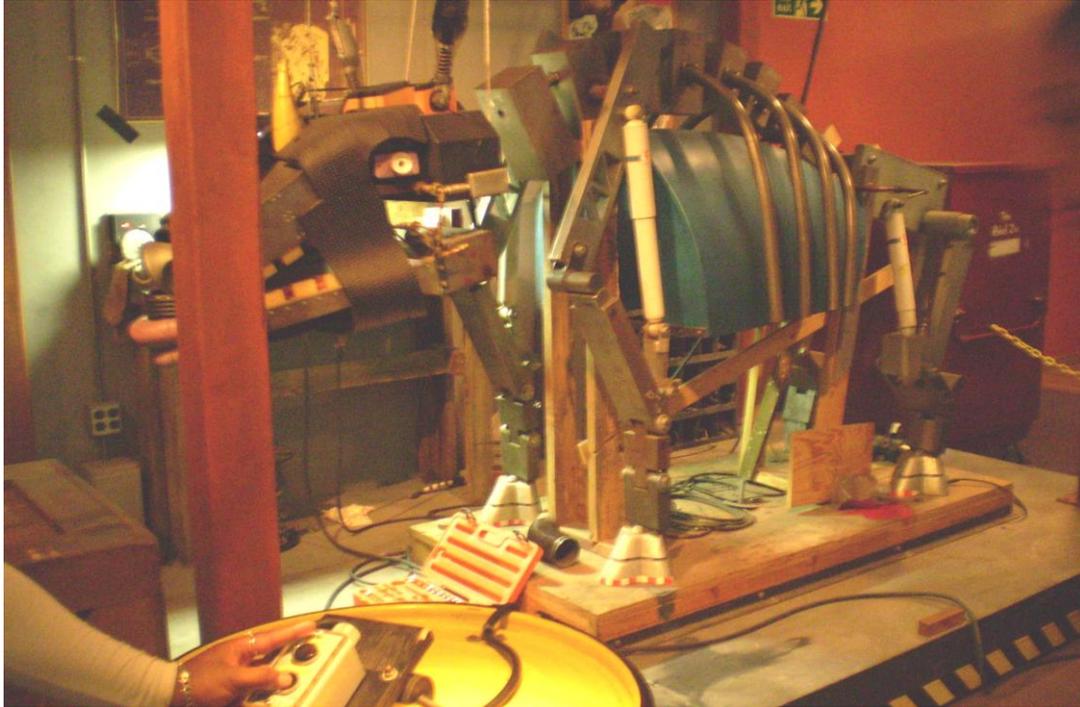
Figure 54: The Rhino interactive exhibit 'under construction', from the Robot Zoo exhibition- Horniman Museum (2009).

The labels didn't give any further insight into a meaningful narrative to support the metaphor. The text remained on a purely scientific level, which seemed to be again problematic for a general audience. It also seemed to be too complicated for smaller children and, in parts, oversimplified for adults, without really making any direct links with the museum's permanent collection. As the museum's schools learning manager Louise Palmer admits:

> The displays and interactives are good for young families I believe, but the text is quite weighty. It is very difficult to read both visually and also in terms of content… I think there are opportunities missed for drawing out some more natural world elements. Having some of our natural history collection on display alongside the interactives would have been really nice, but part of the reason we are buying an exhibition is because it is less time in house to organize all this sort of stuff.[185]

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[185] L. Palmer Personal interview, May 2009.

Aligning with Palmer's view, I believe that greater associations with real life (like the small video with the chameleon) could aim at enabling visitors to really enjoy the constructions and the metaphor they implied and better understand the wonders of the animal kingdom.

Tim Hunkin: The Secret Life of Home and other museum exhibits

> […] one curator referred to my activity as case stuffing, as opposed to case dressing. I regarded this as a compliment, believing that museums always should be overstuffed (Hunkin 1996).[186]

After following a workshop in Devon by the mixed media theatre company Forkbeard Fantasy (see case study below), I contacted Penny Saunders to ask her about her work as a designer and constructor of the company. In one of her emails, she wrote about Tim Hunkin: 'he is a clever puppeteer, mechanic, electrical expert… [he] installed a wonderful permanent exhibition on Southwold Pier… [which] give[s] wry observations about human behaviour.'[187] Thus, I was introduced to Hunkin's machine world where objects are animated as having a life of their own, inhabiting their own world, which humans sometimes visit, rather than vice versa.[188]

Michael de Podesta, a scientist at the UK's National Physical Laboratory and an admirer of Tim Hunkin's book *Rudiments of Wisdom*, writes in his blog, that Hunkin manages to:

> …take a complex topic and present it straightforwardly to anyone who could read a few paragraphs and enjoy a silly cartoon. Tim Hunkin doesn't offer wisdom, but he does suggest that the rudiments of any subject, however apparently abstract, can be made accessible. In a way he was the forerunner

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[186] http://www.timhunkin.com/92_museum_design_initiation.htm (accessed 7 May 2010)

[187] P. Saunders. Email correspondence, November 2009.

[188] See also Hunkin's television series *The Secret Life of Machines* where, for example, parts of a fax or sewing machine are blown up in scale as they expand in an open air natural space while electric power is replaced by power provided directly by the human force (Hunkin's assistants). From http://www.timhunkin.com/control/n_tv_index.htm, (accessed 3 May 2010).

of many '"Complex Topic" made simple' guides with his simple text and delightful pictures.[189]

In addition, a part of Hunkin's Heideggerian world appears in the permanent exhibition *The Secret Life of Home,* located in the basement of the Science Museum in London.
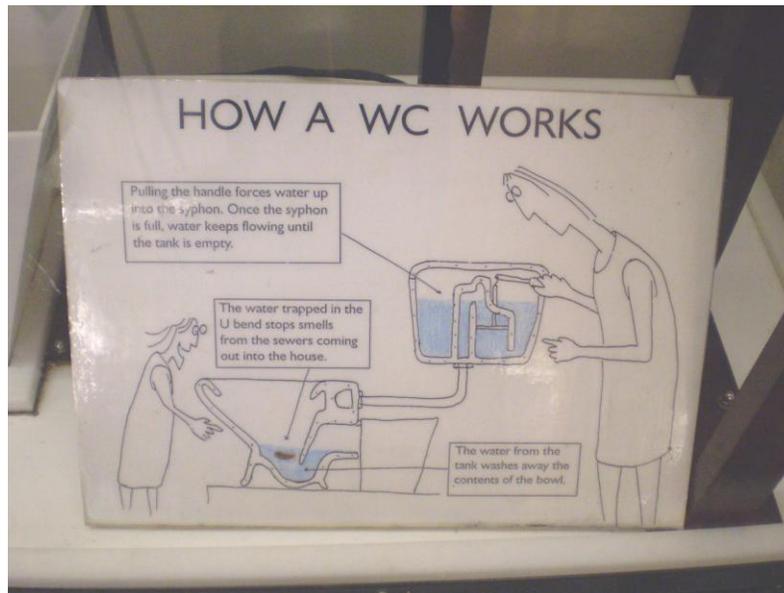
Figure 55: Illustrated label for the Toilet exhibit of *Secret Life of Home* exhibition - Science Museum in London (2010).

During my visit to the Science Museum I had a firsthand experience of Hunkin's puppetesque exhibits. I found them playful, surprising, provocative, imaginative, communicative, integrative, and full of humour. They manage to combine exaggeration, economy and humour in the narrative (Fig. 55). Objects also hang from the ceiling, out of reach, occasionally brought to life. Hunkin adds: 'I spent a happy autumn making 12 strange objects including a microwave with a poodle trapped inside, a set of flying hot water bottles, a toilet with a plumber who popped out of the bowl and the cistern, and a tele with a model of the museum director inside (so he could keep an eye on the gallery).' [190]

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[189] http://protonsforbreakfast.wordpress.com/category/simple-science/page/2/ (assessed 13 October 2011).

[190] http://www.timhunkin.com/92_museum_design_initiation.htm (accessed 8 May 2010).

The Secret Life of Home gallery (one of Hunkin's major projects– and the one that makes him proudest) started in 1993 and was completed two years later (Fig. 56). While the museum was developing the education centre, Hunkin was approached to cheaply refurbish the domestic appliances gallery. As he confesses: '[U]nlike the education centre, the prospect of displaying the nation's collection of hairdryers and the like was instantly appealing' (ibid.).
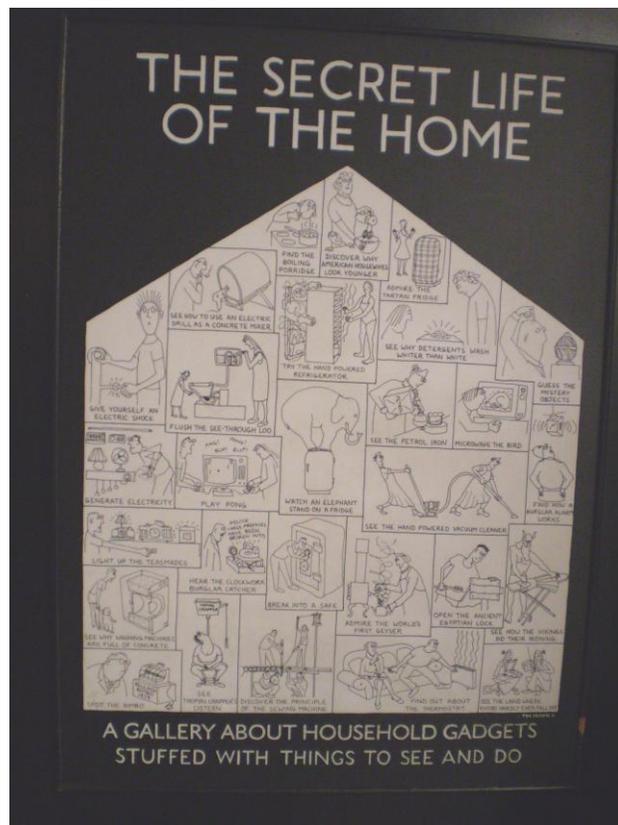
Figure 56: A comprehensive illustration by Tim Hunkin for the exhibition *The Secret Life of Home* - Science Museum in London (2010).

Observing and manipulating Hunkin's exhibits during my first visit was a pleasant surprise for me. It made me wonder, smile and even laugh. Most importantly, the interaction made me think about these mundane everyday machines from another perspective. Museologically speaking, it made me realise that Hunkin's amusing visual narratives and the intriguing gaps these invoke contributed considerably to the flow experience of my visit. Watching videos on

Hunkin's website, I got the impression that visitors interacting with slot machine automata at Hunkin's Peer Arcade in Suffolk (*The Under the Peer Show*) had had similar reactions.[191]

On his website, Hunkin discusses *The Secret Life of Home:*

> I started by making an exhibit explaining how electric motors worked. This was followed by a hand-powered fridge, a hand- powered automatic washing machine (with the front of the drum replaced by perspex to show what happens inside), and finally a hand-cranked generator - which could make a fuse glow hot and then blow. All these exhibits seemed dreadfully conventional and old fashioned, particularly because they were all behind glass, with only the relevant handles etc poking through. (I had decided to put them behind glass partly to be in keeping with the rest of the gallery, and partly because I felt that many 'open' exhibits I'd seen had become so dominated by their protective perspex casings that the exhibit itself got rather lost.) I tried to cheer my exhibits up by adding decorative signs - motorized spinning sign for the motors, a washing line for the washing machine and a frozen sign, with letters formed from copper pipe connected to a fridge unit so ice formed on them, for the fridge... The final exhibit put on trial was the toilet, built by Willy. This was cut in half to show how the flushing and the cistern worked. It incorporated a plastic turd which was flushed round the bend, caught by a mechanical arm, and lifted back into the bowl once the cistern had refilled. This was definitely popular (I had assumed it would be) (Fig. 76). It was our solution to the entrance problem, positioned to draw visitors into the gallery from the posh education centre next door.

Although some stages involved other collaborators, Hunkin was the main brain (and hand) behind all the processes: conceiving, designing, constructing, testing and interpreting. As he says characteristically about *The Secret Life of Home*: 'It was often refreshing to have a break from some writing or design problem and go to the workshop and bash some bits of metal about' (ibid.). He controlled most of the work on the spot, but also collaborated closely with a small team (three technical assistants, one former-museum curator, the exhibition's project manager and the assistant curator). Hunkin maintains that the process was eased because there was no need to organize extra meetings as the small team regularly communicated informally, and problems were resolved on the spot, as soon as they appeared. Also, the team was spared all the paperwork that a big team has to maintain.

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[191] http://www.underthepier.com/index.htm (accessed 30 October 2011)

Things became a bit more complicated when Hunkin and his team had to turn the 'trial cases designs' into permanent exhibits, since these had to conform with the guidelines of two other museum departments:

> The conservation department had to consider the long term effects of all materials, paints and glues inside the case that might affect the objects, and ease of access for periodic cleaning. The design department had to consider things like the standard of finish of the boxes, and the quality of the lettering on the labels (ibid.).

The general guideline however was clear from the beginning: 'Museum exhibits had to work repeatedly, be totally safe, and rely on written interpretations' (ibid.).

Hunkin stage-managed the whole exhibition. Writing and positioning the labels was also part of his job. He minimized text and instructions, and added some cartoons to communicate ideas in a quicker and more entertaining way. Also, he preferred to use rods and make direct links between labels and various parts of the objects for some exhibits, instead of using confusing diagrams that often frustrate the reader (Fig. 57) (ibid.).

Figure 57: Iron exhibits, labels and illustrations for the *Secret Life of Home* exhibition - Science Museum in London (2010).

> I knew museums were tough environments, but I was still shocked… I realized it was impossible to make everything last forever, the important thing was to make the exhibits easily accessible, and the parts easily replaceable… Energetic handle turning in all the exhibits seemed to be particularly popular (ibid.).

Hunkin managed to refurbish the gallery at low cost (even if that meant extra work for himself that could have been done by a carpenter or other technician of the museum). By reusing the glass showcase he made the traditional concept of 'the museum' (displaying objects) the main narrative of the exhibition. Without having to add any extra sub-stories, this solution seemed to work perfectly for everyday items. Aligning with Gilliam's idea on automata, Hunkin was deeply inspired by the very nature of objects (everyday mundane items):

> A bit of humour and bad taste were obviously good ingredients. It might not work so well elsewhere in the museum, with objects that have less relevance to visitors' personal experiences (though I wouldn't mind having a go at the shipping and farming galleries). However, refurbishment could in principle improve many of the old galleries, without destroying their period charm… The Secret Life of the Home also showed that low cost refurbishment was good value (ibid.).

On mentioning Hunkin's name to a former Science Museum staff member, she said she 'certainly' recalls him as a very clever and well respected exhibit designer,[192] but '…by no means I would call him a puppeteer!' Hunkin doesn't call himself a puppeteer on his website either (although his work clearly suggests that he is a master puppeteer of the machines). He just refers to a puppet show he once performed together with the well-known puppeteer Meg Amsden. However, the way Tim Hunkin introduces himself is indicative of his puppetesque spirit:

> When asked what I do for a living, I can say I'm an inventor, and engineer and cartoonist, a science communicator or lots of other things but I now just

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[192]   See Tim Hunkin's website for more example of puppetesque exhibits. http://www.timhunkin.com/92_museum_design_initiation.htm (accessed 8 May 2010).

say 'I run an amusement arcade'.[193] Partly I enjoy the disapproving reaction
it can provoke —people change the subject or end the conversation. [194]

Personally, I would call Hunkin a puppetesque craftsman, whose craftsmanship challenged and sharpened my imagination. His work suggests much 'thinking', 'repairing', 'fixing', 're-exploring' (Sennett 2009: 199). It is also full of puppetesque references and vigorous anthropomorphism of matter and objects.

Sennett maintains that '[P]eople invest thought in things they can change and such thinking revolves around three key issues: metamorphosis, presence and anthropomorphosis ... Metamorphosis can be as direct as a change in procedure', 'presence' could be reflected on a 'maker's mark' and 'anthropomorphosis occurs when we impute human qualities to a raw material' (2009: 120). I think all these issues are encountered in Tim Hunkin's work: in the way he transforms and infuses a life into the machines and also in the way he uses his unique puppetesque humour to put his personal mark on them. It seems to me that his work doesn't intend to confuse but to surprise the audience. It is simple and attached to everyday life seen from its comic (and often critical) side. It intends to transform the mundane electro mechanical machine world into an interactive playful environment. As a 'sculptor of readymade machines,' Hunkin treats reused matter with humbleness and humour.

The American puppeteer Roman Pasca says of puppets: 'What is the Nothing that hides behind the mask of the puppet? What is the puppet stripped bare? The fascination of the puppet, its secret power, lies in what it hides, not what it expresses' (Paska 1990: 37). Likewise, Hunkin's narrative is not intended to be imposed on the objects (nor on the visitors). *The Secret Life of Home*'s design suggests the constructor's preference for 'old fashioned,' 'overstuffed' museums as opposed to museum exhibitions built around '"stories" devised by curators, interpreted by designers, who provide elaborate "themed spaces"'. [195]

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[193] See also Under the Pier Show http://www.underthepier.com/13_in_praise.htm

[194] See also his exhibition *The Art Gallery Spectators*, where with a series of interactive exhibits, he comments on the elitistic approach to art. Seehttp://www.timhunkin.com/29_art_gallery.htm (accessed 3 May 2010).

[195] Hunkin, T. http://www.timhunkin.com/92_museum_design_initiation.htm , accessed 8 May 2010.

This was an approach which, according to Hunkin, seemed 'very refreshing when new in the 70s, but …had become a rather tedious new orthodoxy' and often favours a 'superficial' design 'geared to making a spectacular initial impression.' [196] Instead of using the 'one line joke' of a 'superstore look' he preferred a firsthand experience with the poetry of the original objects using his screwdrivers, hammers and, of course, his technical knowledge. With his sophisticated electromechanical intervention, Hunkin presents not only a simplified communicative version of machine operation, but also he suggests the hidden metaphors that lay within the well designed man made machines (Fig. 58). Turning the machine into a craft object, he attempts to simplify science, without oversimplifying everyday life or underestimating our critical thinking.

Figure 58: Everyday objects turned into automata exhibits hanging from the ceiling in the *Secret Life of Home* exhibition - Science Museum in London (2010).

Nicki Brookes, developer of Craftplay (Bilston Craft Gallery, Wolverhampton), refers to the idea of 'osmosis' in a space for young children and refers to 'the importance of equality of school environment with the outside world, as opposed to a synthetic and oversimplified construct saturated with bright primary colours and over-sanitized sensations' (Brookes:

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[196] http://www.timhunkin.com/92_museum_design_initiation.htm (accessed 8 May 2010).

2002: 4). Reflecting this idea, Hunkin does not overload his objects with long text labels, forced messages, colourful showcases or elaborated contours. Nor has he relied on theatrical dim lighting or charming music and sound. While interacting with the exhibits, I found that his machines don't pretend; they made an appeal to me because of their bareness, their everydayness, their straightforwardness, their original noise, and movement, even because of their bad taste:

> Generally I felt there was some virtue in a bit of bad taste, things to make you go yuk. Part of my brief had been to make the gallery more appealing to children, and a bit of bad taste seemed a much better way of doing this than painting everything bright primary colours. There's actually no evidence that children prefer bright colours, except possibly under two year olds.[197]

Given the fact that the *Secret Life of Home* was a long-term project with a fixed deadline, Hunkin had to make negotiations and deal with certain tensions with the museum staff. For example, not being allowed to use the museum workshops, he had to bring his 'own tools and set up in a storeroom'; the labels had to be in 'an acceptable "museum quality"'— something that 'haunted' him for some time. Finally, Hunkin refers also to the issue of maintenance and says that there was 'no one person responsible for any particular gallery, no one to do detailed daily checks.'[198]

Forkbeard Fantasy

> I suppose that is another way in which our exhibitions are theatrical -the amount to which they respond to the room they are in, we try to create a real environment peopled by our characters, and inventiveness, to wrap them up in our atmosphere […] you have to be clear so their [the visitors'] senses are not confused (Saunders 2009). [199]

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[197] Hunkin, T. http://www.timhunkin.com/92_museum_design_initiation.htm , accessed 8 May 2010.

[198] Under the Pier Show http://www.underthepier.com/13_in_praise.htm (accessed 10 May 2010).

[199] P. Saunders. Email correspondence, November 2009.

I met the Forkbeard Fantasy (FF) team during a workshop in Devon in July 2009, and also in Bristol where I watched their show about an invisible painting that was stolen from an art gallery, called *The Colour of Nonsense* (12 November 2009).

Figure 59: From the Forkbeard Fantasy workshop: a tour at the company's studio in Devon (Chris Britton in the background) (2009).

During the lunch break of the workshop in Devon (Figs. 59; 60) I had the chance to interview Tim Britton, one of the co-founders of the company, a performer and cartoonist. After the workshop ended, I also had email correspondence with the designer and constructor of the company, Penny Saunders. The experience from the workshop, data collected from the interviews, as well as what I got from watching their show, films and retrospectives converged to the following impression: As is often the case with theatre/puppet theatre companies that manage to stay and work together for a long period of time, FF is (like) a family. Two of the first members of the company (known as the Britonioni Brothers on stage) are real brothers (Tim and Chris Britton in life), Penny Saunders and Tim Britton are partners in life, while the rest of the members have all known each other for many years. Humour, simplicity, generosity, trust, a playful attitude towards everyday life, as well as an acute perspective on things seemed to me to be more of the FF way of life that is inevitably reflected on their artistic work.

Figure 60: From the Forkbeard Fantasy workshop at the company's studio in Devon (Chris Britton manipulates an automaton) (2009).

FF was established in 1974. The shows combine many mediums: actors' performance, puppetry, installations, peep shows (Fig. 61), automata, animation and film. Their inventive way of using verbal and visual narratives together creates a surreal, absurd world, recognizable in all their shows. FF's world is full of fun, laughter, joy of life, but preserves a deeply critical look on things. It is not easy to categorize FF work: '[…] the company has never quite fitted in anywhere, being too funny for the po-faced performance art world they first grew out of, yet too subversive and experimental for most theatre programmers'.[200]

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[200] Animations on Line Forkbeard Fantasy' Profile by Lock and Max Prior
http://www.puppetcentre.org.uk/animationsonline/aotwentytwo/ao22_forkbeard.html (accessed 6 April 2010).

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Figure 61: An image from a peep show by Forkbeard Fantasy (2009).

Small scale exhibitions used to accompany FF's international shows. Also, in 1999, they presented a retrospective of their theatre work in the London's Theatre Museum in Covent Garden. *Architects of Fantasy* ran until 2001 and included items from the company's live shows: peep shows, automata, props, puppets, mechanized sculptures. Having not seen the exhibition, I relied on Saunder's description; she explained me that timer switches, burglar detector sensors, headphones and video monitors invited audience engagement and added an element of surprise to the overall museum experience.

Saunders confesses she prefers to work with old props and deals with them as 'friends' who '… really enjoy showing off again for a bit':

> […The exhibition] was very popular because it was very lively -much of the movement generated by the public pulling ropes- the ropes usually made something work quite a long way away which made someone else laugh - or walking on 'pressure pads' under mats stuck to the floor. It was lit with Varilights (intelligent lights which run on computer programmes) so it was constantly dappling through different colours, patterns and highlights… which added to the feeling of movement, life, and theatricality... I think it was also quite exciting to exhibition designers

because it was such a theatrical environment with this dynamic lighting and lively props.[201]

The aesthetics of objects on stage are enhanced by different techniques than those used in museums. Distance and lighting in the theatre empower an object with liveliness and a character. Saunders says that in a live show 'the effect is more "gestural."' However, in exhibitions, '…time and space can be frozen: distances between audience and objects are diminished even to a zero degree when visitors manipulate objects, and time of observing the objects is in the control of the observer' (ibid.).

Saunders ideas resonate the academic and puppeteer Jan Mrázek's theory. Even if it is meant to be perceived in motion, from a distance, within a certain narrative and often while interacting with other puppets, a puppet in a showcase doesn't cease to have a value of its own as part of our material/popular culture. For example, as Mrázek explains, iconography and art can be studied by focusing on each separate part of the traditional Javanese wayang kulit (shadow puppet) and the way the bodily characteristics and details (including stature, posture, shape of eyes, nose, torso, colour, size, and costumes), 'express the nature of a character and provide other information around it (status, genealogy and so forth)' (Mrázek 2005: 18).

However, Mrázek, being a Javanese puppeteer himself, doesn't limit his perspective to art history. Adopting a more holistic approach, he underlines that studying traditional Javanese puppets is a much more complex process than it first seems to be. He maintains that it is better to study wayang kulit characteristics and qualities comparatively, 'even though there are constraints, as to what types of traits go together' (ibid: 20). Mrázek also comments on Javanese puppets displayed in museums or in contexts outside the stage:

> In the museum […] this essential union between the performer and a thing is broken: the puppet is no longer a living extension of the puppeteers' hand, and the puppeteer himself, the human center and source of energy of wayang, is absent. Similarly the collective audience, which is integral to wayang celebration and without which it lacks life, energy, and purpose, is

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[201] P. Saunders. Email correspondence, November 2009.

not part of the museum or art book picture, where the viewer is outside and at a distance from the picture. (Mrázek: 273, 279, 284).

Being a theatre designer, Saunders pays attention to the overall space and in a way sees the gallery as a theatre stage. She believes that 'the nature of the rooms, the shapes, where the light comes from, how people enter/leave the room and any particular architectural identity' affect considerably the exhibition. Saunders also points out: 'Sometimes the worn-outness of a prop has a lovely "old dog" feel, sometimes it has lost its "soul" and you have to mend it' (ibid.). Speaking of maintenance, in the theatre, props and sets have to survive the tough manipulation on stage without causing performers any problems during the show. As Saunders puts it: 'I always work with a revolting little boy in my mind! (ibid). Durability is always an issue as far as technology is concerned. When using complicated mechanisms and projectors during exhibitions, FF always has an allocated member of the company to oversee and repair the equipment on a daily basis.[202]

Saunders admits that negotiations and collaborations with museum people affect their exhibitions considerably. Support and trust on the part of museum staff help facilitate negotiations. Conversely, over-expertise 'can be very destructive to one's approach to putting up the exhibition… how much time and care one takes. We have been very lucky very often which is why I know how destructive the other kind can be!' (ibid). Tim Britton adds:

> […] we had some difficult times with [a museum in UK]… but luckily the director was so keen to make it work… some time you get obstruction about health and safety but everything can always be overcome when there is a positive spirit and a will of the organization… sometimes they get very 'posh' designers, gallery designers...(ibid).

On the other hand, it is difficult to compare the efficiency in decision-making of a five-member theatre company to the procedures of a large, bureaucratic complex organisation with many departments. Although, for a museum project, strong expertise, a number of facilities and social technology services are problem-solving factors, on the other hand, hierarchy and committees often block initiatives and slow down the processes.

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[202] T. Britton. Personal interview, June 2009.

However, as Briton and Saunders admit, mutual compromise and understanding manage to bridge the gap between artists and museums. We should take for granted here that museum staffing styles have changed 180 degrees from what used to be in the past, when the staff lacked 'social consciousness' and was 'hypnotized by the charms of collecting and scholarship' (Low 1942: 9).

In addition, lack of humour might be another reason for miscommunication. 'Some curators take themselves too seriously' says Tim Britton[203] while Roberts comments on less conventional, but more visitor-friendly, museum practices:

> Practices like displaying things that visitors could handle… or that provided familiar links… were intended to demystify the inherent strangeness of so many museum collections. To many curators, however, practices like these threatened to mislead visitors and to undermine their own specialized skills and responsibilities. (Roberts 1997: 6).

Moreover, the internal process of aiming (often unconsciously) towards a timely and accurate 'social resonance' is often neglected or suppressed when practitioners are commissioned to meet with the demands of particular museums' celebratory themes. This is when the artistic impulse must contend with the museum's demand to commemorate, for example, the birth or death of Darwin, Chopin, Einstein (a point stressed by practitioners such as Tim Britton and Robert Poulter). On the other hand, this is counterbalanced by the museum's role in refreshing the interpretation of past ideas, events and facts in order to keep them up to date.

Britton also comments on FF's attitude towards the elitist views of some artists or art managers.

> **Tim Britton:** We all five of us are very engaged in this [interactive exhibits] together, we love it, we all understand what it is that we are trying to achieve, we love doing it so much and in many ways we prefer it to live theatre….it is also like live theatre, because the things are living and because they are so interactive and I don't think there are many people

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[203] T. Britton. Personal interview, June 2009.

exhibiting quite with that same approach. I think artists are terrified that their stuff will get broken; some people would say that our stuff is not art but I think it is …

Interviewer: Because you show some respect to your audience, this makes it not art? Trying to engage the audience is not art?

Tim Britton: Exactly!… And because you are not making it very, very obscure, and saying 'if you don't understand this … pff sorry'… that's how [the theatre and art world] has survived and managed to separate itself, and make itself so exclusive… the people just want to have a good time, people want to enjoy, want to go to an exhibition and want someone help them to understand… I am not saying that things have to be easy, it should be difficult some of it, but we should not enjoy this exclusivity, excluding people, or patronizing…we all feel sometimes that art can separate itself, put itself on a pedestal too much… (ibid).

Discovery Box (Fig. 62) is an interactive exhibit commissioned by the Jurassic Coast museums, for the world heritage site of Jurassic Coast. Since this was an entirely new commission, no readymade items from previous FF shows were used and the process was more time consuming and costly.   *Discovery Box* interprets history of geology and fossils of the Jurassic Coast from multiple entry points. The museum helped with the research and introduced geologists and paleontologists to the company. They had several meetings and the scientists recommended relevant literature and shared books with the company.
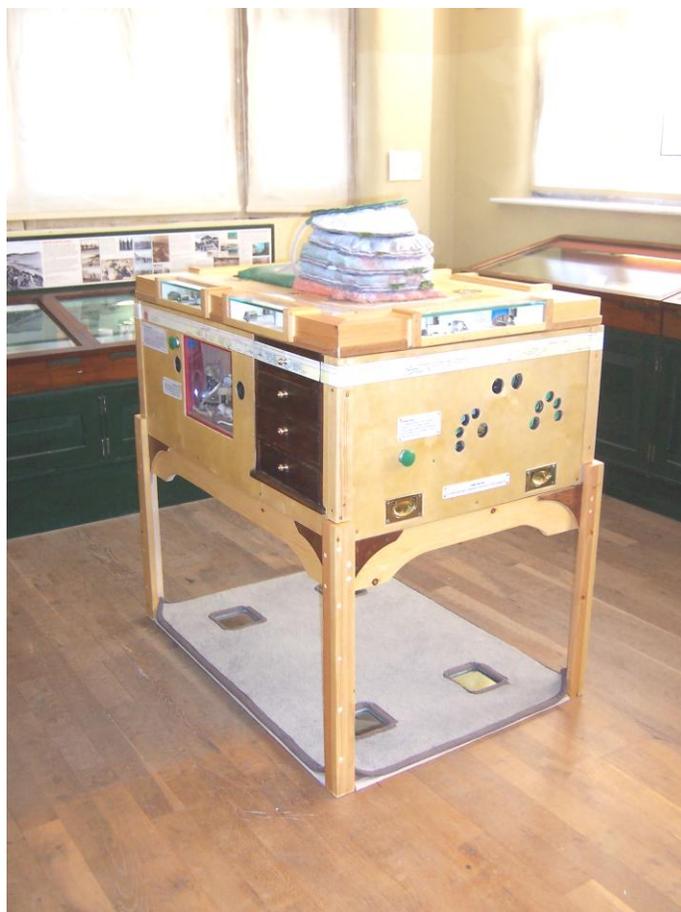
Figure 62: The Discovery Box (photo from the Lyme Regis Museum archive).

Having visited the Dorset County Museum which hosted the exhibit in 2010, I had the chance to have a first hand experience and interact with it: I laid on the floor to watch an underwater panorama of swamps and prehistoric creatures on a video screen placed at the bottom of the exhibit. Tim Britton did the animation and mixed it with real pond-life. The film is also reflected on four small mirrors placed on a floor mat underneath the exhibit. The mirrors are for standing visitors to view the panorama through the reflection on them.

Moreover, on one of its sides, the exhibit incorporates a comic short film animation about farfetched scientific theories and practices in paleontology. On another side there is the earth's magma boiling: the audience can see and hear the magma boiling on a screen, while the earths' tectonic plates (made out of elasticized pieces) are pulled apart. On another of its sides, the exhibit offers a more poetic perspective on environmental issues: a short film describes a time travel through the history of geology— a spatial journey from the bottom of

the sea towards its surface. All around the top of the exhibit there are magnifying glasses and drawers to open and observe tiny fossils and read labels. On the top of the exhibit there is a demonstration of a fossilized relief in a pile of carved layers (a cliff) in the shape of a book: as the visitor turns the pages they can touch the different textures of earth formation with fossils from different eras. This entry point is particularly addressed to visitors with visual impairments or blind people. Also, handwritten labels intend to give the box a visitor-friendly look, although it seemed to me that the small font was unsuitable for visitors with visual impairments, or really not attractive to the smaller children.

On another side of the exhibit, I put my fingers into finger holes. These become the extension of a monster's hands. I saw the whole picture of a jungle like environment and other dinosaur cut-outs, when looking through two holes which are on the side of the exhibit, above the finger holes. In this way, I partially animated a monster figure which was reflected on a mirror placed at the background of this miniature stage.

As Saunders explains, health and safety rules made the exhibit very heavy. However its legs come off and it can easily fit in the back of a hatchback car, which turns it into a travelling exhibit as was originally required by the museum. She also adds that: '[T]he museum was very helpful in the preparations.'[204]

Mary Godwin, the curator and head of the Lyme Regis Museum is also very satisfied to have collaborated with the 'creative and strangely wonderful people who made the box'. Visitors' comments, Godwin says, suggest that the *Cabinet of Curiosities* (as she calls the Discovery Box) has been 'hugely popular.' Comments included: 'Eccentric; Informative; can be used by many people at once; great for all ages from 3 to 103; hasn't broken down once despite having non-stop use all season; looks weird but friendly; Heath-Robinson-esque; children love it; grown ups love it'.[205] Also, one of the museum volunteers who organized a visit for a group of professional geologists to the museum commented:

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[204] P. Saunders. Email correspondence, November 2009.

[205] M. Godwin.Email correspondence, 28 November 2009.

> Mary… your talk was much appreciated by the group and many asked me
> to thank you… but I am afraid that it's the geological box that they will
> really remember. It was a big hit - seen as an automated degree course in
> geology with films, AV, minerals, hand lenses, rock samples, fossils,
> structural geology… (Ibid).

As Britton remembers, FF was asked for a second time to present an exhibition by Chelton Museum. The area is famous for racing, so FF decided to use racehorses for their central narrative. For this, they used some of their old items, but recycled them and turned them into horses. This was not only eco-friendly but also saved time and money for the museum and the company. According to Briton, this was well received by the audience, as visitors were glad to recognize some of the company's previous exhibits. Britton recalls:

> […] we thought about new ways of exhibiting our old things two years
> later, and people would say 'Mrs Moody is back!'... I know that this sounds
> like someone is blowing one's own trumpet… but they become so popular!
> They come in and see the fun part with all that mad stuff (ibid.)

Overall, FF exhibits, even in their absurd and nonlinear style, are still very precise and do not intend to be confusing for visitors. This seems to me to be the challenge of FF's little worlds: how to effectively build an appealing comic metaphor that enhances an entertaining (often) physical interaction. Echoing Roberts' idea, FF exhibits 'constitute an artifact in their own right':

> Exhibits… evidence the manifold decisions regarding artifact choice,
> setting, and interpretation. These decisions stand on fundamental notions
> about what it means to educate, what it means to know, and what it means
> to hold authority to represent knowledge at all. (1997: 8-9).

I would like to clarify here that the FF puppetesque exhibits are not intended to present the argument in terms rigorously mutual exclusive: 'popularization versus scholarship' (Roberts 1997: 21), or entertainment versus painstaking learning. I believe if puppet exhibits have a place in museums this is not because they purposefully communicate straightforward factual knowledge. Rather they intend to provide another entry point to museum interpretation and

communication that prioritises humour, visual intelligence, physical involvement, emotional engagement and critical thought. To do this FF's company relies on the stage instinct and experience of what appeals to the audience. This experience naturally developed over time as the company members stay open-minded and openhearted towards the audience's reactions.

Csikszentmihalyi says: 'When one's mind becomes focused on meeting an external goal or requirement, attention or "psychic energy" is split and no longer and not fully focused on the task at hand' (1995: 68). I think that this is exactly what FF's projects try to avoid as they intend to provide the audience with a safe playful environment and release them from the concern on 'understanding', or 'remembering' for the sake of learning per se. Aligning with Csikszentmihalyi's argument on museum experience, FF exhibits seem to prioritize the journey to critical and imaginative thinking above any predetermined lesson; they value the pleasure contained in a moment of surprise for its own sake and take this as a starting point for thinking creatively and critically, rather than seeing any forced learning outcomes as the ultimate goal and a pretext for engaging visitors in this journey. In this sense, FF's puppet exhibits don't rely on 'cheating' the audience and especially children. From the original idea to the design and the actual construction, the main concern for puppeteers seems to be communication for its own sake. In any other case, and as all interviewees suggest, puppeteers deeply feel their project has failed. I think here is where the communities of museum staff have a delicate role to play: to balance their own learning agendas without blocking the 'flow experience' and spontaneity at any stage of the process.

Finally, I think it is noteworthy that FF's exhibits potentially offer the visitor a feeling of control in a world which is rapidly accumulating masses of knowledge. In this world, unsurprisingly we tend to feel we are sometimes being manipulated by a language foreign to us, be it the language of science, old times, politics, economics, or modern art. FF's device is not new as Roberts suggests:

> In his biography of P. T. Barnum, the undisputed king of curiosity displays and showmanship, Neil Harris suggests that more was at work than simple amusement. While history has remembered Barnum principally as a master entrepreneur, Harris argues that his success was tied directly to his satisfaction of a variety of social needs… Initially, Barnum' success was

probably tied to the social climate of Jacksonian America and its rejection of Jefferson's intellectual ideals… Under Jackson… learning and knowledge were considered valued endeavors -even amusements- but they were not to be monopolized by 'experts'. New forms of exhibitions that featured prodigies, freaks of nature, and automata didn't just pander to public appetite for entertainment; rather, they reinforced onlookers' emerging sense of authority and control by challenging them to judge for themselves the truth of the 'wonders' before them. The detection of fraud became an exercise and pastime, and Barnum's shows played splendidly into this sensibility [...] At the same time, advancement in technology had led to widespread credulity, as science continued to reveal the boundlessness of nature […] In short what critics called frivolous, uninstructive entertainment may have satisfied an unconscious but powerful need to experience a sense of personal control and power (Roberts 1997: 26-7).

Tensions emerging from negotiations among, on the one hand, the museum staff and, on the other, the FF's company or Tim Hunkin suggest that *false uniformity* is an issue for collaborative museum puppetry practices. Both cases suggest the need to understand the distinctiveness of each project—even of each puppet construction and potentially its complex mechanisms—but also the need to frame the practice outside the box of expected learning outcomes and schooling. Having said this, I don't intend to focus exclusively on the technical aspect of the collaboration (time and space limits, health and safety issues, and so on) but rather I aim to highlight the need to frame the practice within a larger social context. In other words, I aim to investigate the needs and the particularities of each project and to contextualize them within a human centred friction of fruitful negotiations where hierarchy and prestige take a secondary role and to consider 'learning as part of social practice' as Wenger and Lave suggest (2008: 113).

> Most analyses of schooling assume, whether intentionally or not, the uniform motivation of teacher and pupils, because they assume, sometimes quite explicitly, that teacher and pupils share the goal of the main activity (e.g. Davydov and Markova 1983)…[this] ignores the conflicting viewpoints associated with teaching and learning, respectively, and obscures the distortions that ensue…Furthermore, it reflects too narrowly rationalistic a perspective on the person and motivation. The multiple viewpoints that are characteristic of participation in a community of practice, and thus of legitimate peripheral participation, are to be found in more complex theories of the person-in-society…(2008: 113).

The following two cases are examples of collaborative practices where situated peripheral learning for both communities is happening with a spirit of exploration, open-mindedness and willingness to find solutions during the project, especially on the part of the museum staff.

Object Dialogue Boxes

> For the most part... attention to visitors' values, goals, and current knowledge has largely been driven by interest in improving the transmission of the museum narrative; the visitors' narrative while acknowledged, continues to be regarded as something private, accidental and therefore beyond the scope of museum attention and practice (Roberts 1997: 140).

When I attended the Performing Heritage: Research and Practice International Conference (Manchester University, 2008), I met a fellow conference participant who told me about a kind of a wooden case filled with everyday objects that had once been used in the British Library. It was described as a 'mysterious' box full of reused objects combined together, and linked somehow with exhibition objects.

Karl Foster and his partner Kimberley are the 'parents' of several Object Dialogue Boxes, as these cases are officially called. Forster says that he is the 'analytic' mind while his partner is the 'intuitive' mind, as well as 'a very good teacher.'[206] Based in Norwich, the Kimberleys devote a lot of time to collecting objects, whether found items or antiquaries.

Foster explained to me how their practice aims at demystifying museum interpretation by adopting a visitor-centered, constructivist approach: 'It is about setting aside for a moment of all the potential information and rely on yourself: what you feel, what you see, what you like, what you remember, whatever is there. [It is a process that] relates to the visual language'. Their goal, as Foster maintains is to 'take […] away all the artificial boundaries and generate […] more fluid thinking…' (ibid).

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[206] K. Foster. Personal interview, May 2008.

The Fosters have collaborated with various educational institutions including the British Library Gallery, Sheffield Museum and Manchester Art Gallery.[207] The first Dialogue Box was commissioned by the British Library and, since then, the initial concept has been developed in various aspects. The main idea though remains the same: to create a little world of (more or less common) everyday, reused objects, and to transform them by combining them together in unexpected ways. This object world is divided between small compartments within a wooden box, which often signifies a larger concept. For example, the dialogue box in the shape of a beehive, commissioned by the Manchester Art Gallery, was inspired by the bees that decorate the freeze on the ceiling of the gallery (and which are also the symbol of the city).

From field observation in the Sheffield Museum, I felt that the unfamiliarity provoked by unexpected object combinations (Fig. 83) is intended to prevent participants from any linear modes of thinking. I had the impression that the conceptual gaps raised by the objects invited the audience's imagination and visual thinking. As visitors are not asked to recall, memorize or respond to any predetermined answers, the aim here is to open up even before starting to share any stories, which often involve the museum collection in indirect ways. Foster maintains that users might arrive at the same piece of information (which is written on the labels) without relying on reading or recalling any prior factual knowledge.[208] Instead, learning conditions aim at triggering participants' imagination:

> […] you don't need knowledge to find a way into paintings. Imagination is a catalyst…You don't necessarily have to have factual information to make a valuable interpretation, if you start from being confident…There was an artist 'talking' [in one of his paintings] about the discomfort of a woman... we asked the curator who was in the group who was this person [in the painting]? We thought it was his wife, and he left her... We thought, without having any prior knowledge, just from the body language, and the gaze. He [the curator] was amazed […][209]

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[207] Boxes have also been used once with staff to redevelop a museum gallery.

[208] K. Foster. Personal interview, May 2008.

[209] K. Foster. Personal interview, May 2008.

Figure 63: The Object Dialogue Box for the *Palace and Mosque* exhibition - Sheffield Museum (2009).

Fosters supports that: 'people are too much concerned with somethingness… Feeling at ease with not knowing and managing anxiety is a big thing with objects… [Working on a commission by one institution in UK] we did not realize how much anxiety knowledge or not having knowledge can bring … [F]ull of experts … very stiff in their expertise.'[210] Foster's statements resonate with Dwack's concept of 'learned helplessness' (1975) which, according to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 'highlights the serious effects of low self-esteem and anxiety on learning achievement' (Csikszentmihalyi 1995: 70). Object Dialogue Boxes are not designed to be directive, or with predefined expectations from participants, and they aim at giving participants a sense of control and ownership. These conditions of learning aim to provide visitors with a tool for making new discoveries (Csikszentmihalyi 1995: 74; Winnicott 2006).

Museum experience may contain factual information but supposing we have enough time, the right impetus for a fresher look, and an 'out of the box' interaction, it might be a richer museum experience. Foster explains that 'novelty is the stimulus… the object transmitting a

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[210] K. Foster. Personal interview, May 2008. For a 'participant based evaluation' see also Pekarik 2010: 105-115.

signal, a meaning… For example take [an] umbrella, people will talk about the weather. How that weather gets coloured depends upon who is there… the dialogue becomes fluid'. [211]

But how do the artists collect their things?

> We try to marry absolutely everyday things, things we use all time… the process of selection is to develop a theme or title —it might be rivers — we go out and buy objects related to it... it might be a fishing float, or something more obscure… put them on a table over a period of time. Then they begin to talk to each other… It is a non verbal selection…usually objects have to yield. If they don't [they are not suitable for the dialogue boxes]… coca-cola cans do not yield. They have virtually no metaphor, they are signs, their marketing is so good… you cannot put metaphor into coca-cola.[212]

Free association, stimulated by objects, intends to open up discussion of personal narratives in an improvisational, spontaneous way. Foster believes that: 'you don't learn anything unless you experience it; it has to become you, otherwise it just flies straight through, it has no embodiment. Once people get it, you cannot stop them; that's it, they unblock.'[213] In other words, and as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi would perhaps put it, visitors enter into a 'flow experience' which leads participants 'to personal growth because in order to sustain the flow state, skills must increase along with the increased challenges… Since flow is inherently enjoyable, one is constantly seeking to return to that state, and this need inevitably involve greater challenges' (1995: 70).

The Manchester City Art Gallery's interpretation development officer, Alex Woodland appreciates the value of such boxes. According to Foster: 'she talks about our boxes more than we do!'[214] I met her at Art Gallery in November 2009 and before meeting her, I had attended a session at the Sheffield Museum the same day.

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[211] K. Foster. Personal interview, May 2008.

[212] K. Foster. Personal interview, May 2008.

[213] K. Foster. Personal interview, May 2008.

[214] K. Foster. Personal interview, May 2008.

Woodland, while she was still working for the Sheffield Museum, was given £5000 to create a handling box to go alongside the *Palace and Mosque* exhibition (which was part of the V&A's Islamic Collection). Woodland was really keen that the box did not contain only Islamic artefacts, but would be something more 'thought provoking.'[215] She commissioned the Fosters to create an Object Dialogue Box, which had to work with the rest of Sheffield's collections (Fig. 63). The Box had to be very open-ended and 'quite generic.'[216] Woodland herself had already used the Box for many galleries (the Ruskin gallery, the metal work gallery, the art gallery), and had also taken it to several other museums. Woodland recalls:

> I've used it all over the place with lots of different age groups. From four ... all the way to eight-four years old… Teachers … would find different angles for their students and you can tailor it to art, history, literacy… it still had some links with Islamic objects, there was an origami bird on a mirror and the text on the origami piece of paper it is Islamic poetry. That was a very subtle link to Islam… But it was pretty open... Objects were chosen by Karl and Kimberley… all they had was the catalogue. I just told them to get on with it and spend around four months and deliver it to us the first day of the exhibition. We were all exploring together (ibid.).

In the Manchester City Art Gallery, the box (Figs. 64; 65; 66; 67) has been used since September 2009, mostly by art and English teachers. During teachers' day, teachers try out the box on their own, and then they bring their first class for free. What follows is pretty encouraging, as Woodland admits '…then we get fully booked.'[217] By the time of the interview, the box was being used every day (sometime twice) and the gallery was developing an evaluation report based on comments from educators collected after each session. An artist was leading the session for the exhibition on surrealism and used the box inside the gallery with 14-16 year-old school students, divided into small groups.

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[215] A. Woodland. Personal Interview. 16 November 2009.

[216] A. Woodland. Personal Interview. 16 November 2009.

[217] The Dialogue Boxes programmes were even honoured by a royal visit. Woodland recalls that Prince Charles "used the leather gloves and made a story about them". Ibid.

Figure 64: Part of the Bee Hive Object Dialogue Box - Manchester City Art Gallery (2009).

Woodland discussed the different uses of objects: for example, she says, in the exhibition about Islam, visitors were inspired by the importance of positioning oneself in order to pray properly, and they used objects as compasses to lead them to various exhibits; technology teachers and students focused more on the technical construction of the box; objects were used to retell the visitors' journey as they held and manipulated them when circulating in the gallery: they were used to retell imaginary stories inspired by the objects' associations with museum displays. 'The main thing is about dialogue,' Woodland underlines (ibid.).

Figure 65: Alex Woodland holding an object from the Bee Hive Object Dialogue Box - Manchester City Art Gallery (2009).

Woodland also explained the way the Manchester City Art Gallery Box developed in collaboration with the Fosters and over time: staff from various departments made a tour in the gallery and came up with words that summarized different ideas, moods and feelings and jotted them down on post-it notes. The Fosters then had put the numerous post-it notes on a big table and tried to group them together into big themes such as, for example, beauty or death. The museum did about four sessions with Karl within six months. Then, when funding was found, Karl proceeded with the constructions, using the word maps as a guide to make 'sociolinguistic links between things' (ibid). Woodland admits: 'It was a bit of both ways: we wanted something out of them and they were testing their new theories on us— which worked' (ibid.).

As I did not have the chance to see Manchester Art Gallery dialogue box in action, Woodland recalled for the purposes of this research the reactions of the audience when they first face the unfamiliar objects merging inside the Box. She says that visitors could sometimes take a step backwards, more so with adults:

> By the end of examining the objects and just talking about them, most people have walked forward… are beginning to look excited, because they are not scared anymore… People walk […] around the gallery with this; it is brilliant. It totally transforms their character (ibid.).

Figure 66: An object from the Bee Hive Object Dialogue Box - Manchester Art Gallery (2009).

What Woodland describes here is like a loosely structured role-playing, or storytelling with minimal guidelines, initiated by a narrative based on objects. She describes an activity which is also exciting for the staff, as the audience's reactions and stories are endless and never the same, so 'every time you do a session you don't get bored. During other sessions, so many times, it could be boring saying the same things over and over again' (ibid).

Figure 67: Bee Hive Object Dialogue Box - Manchester Art Gallery (2009).

Woodland also explains the reasons why these objects may not be taken simplistically as 'children's dolls', and how they don't intend to invoke childhood memories: '[the Object Dialogue Boxes] have got nothing you can hold on to… in fact, some of the things in here are quite disturbing for older children and younger ones' (ibid.). She goes on to mention the problems in maintaining the boxes and their contents (ping-pong balls break; other objects need better positioning in the box, or repainting; there is some difficulty in storing the box), but overall, these sound like minor problems.

The post-it notes used in the pre-production process are also copied onto cards (Fig. 68) which aim to enable the adults accompanying (especially primary) children to make links with collections and 'break the ice' in the first encounter with the objects. The museum educator makes it clear to visitors that not all words work with all exhibits. Woodland herself has a few questions ready: What could it be used for? Do you like holding it? Is it nice to look at? Would you like to own one? Are there any objects that you have a strong reaction

to? She asks the questions quickly so that she elicits more spontaneous and genuine answers and responses to the objects. Cards could also contain a series of idioms addressed to gifted and talented students, with English expressions like, for example: 'born with a silver spoon in one's mouth.'
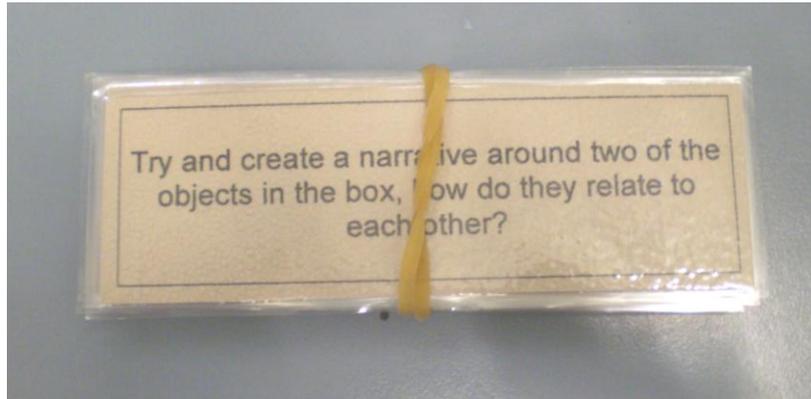
Figure 68: Cards with questions to facilitate teachers using the Bee Hive Object Dialogue Box - Manchester City Art Gallery (2009).

The 'pinball effect' refers to the cases where museum visitors enjoy the effect of participatory exhibits 'but [are] making no effort to understand them' (Roberts 1997: 18). Although Roberts is referring here to communication about science, I believe that this effect may also be valid in communicating art or within any kind of museum learning. She says that the 'pinball effect' occurs when the metaphor around which an exhibit is being developed is so powerful, and becomes so engaging, that visitors 'would have neither the desire nor the motivation to make the leap to science' (ibid: 18), or art, history, etc. In other words, and as visitor researcher Chandler Screven suggests:

> The three dimensionality of exhibits and their novelty, gadgetry, and manipulatory aspects can have intrinsic interest and generate attention but distract viewers from the main ideas, distinctions, or story line (Screven cited in Roberts 1997: 19).

However, having had firsthand experience with the Boxes, Woodland seems to be sure that there is no danger of this 'pinball effect' in the case of the Boxes:

... using it [the Box] in a gallery context, you are totally surrounded and immersed by the collection. It is easy to keep telling people to make connections with the stuff around them… I think during outreach programs you have a tendency to just totally focus on this [object dialogue boxes] because you don't have a collection to link it to. Some of the most striking evaluations I did in Sheffield were when I worked with an entire primary school… so every single class in the school came to see the exhibition and had a session, and two months later I went back to the school and interviewed every single child… the details which they could remember about the objects and the exhibitions were astounding. We did some activities where they draw what they could remember seeing… the drawings were amazing and the teachers could not believe how much the kids had remembered … Some of them were drawing the objects from here [the Box]… but on the whole they were the things that they told their stories about from the collections. That said it all. It was really exciting, there was a girl who was five or six years old and she had special educational needs and she was having lots of extra support and the teacher did not think she was capable of that much… she could draw that plate which had an angel on it and the angel had a funny face on his tummy…[218]

The evaluation report for the Object Dialogue Box at the Sheffield Millennium Galleries reiterates their popularity:

[…] the *Object Dialogue Box…* is not a traditional museum/gallery resource box and it can therefore only be evaluated against the unique objectives that were set for it... The box encourages users to think differently. This is challenging and can be uncomfortable for some. The satisfaction /learning to be gained by using it is considerable -it validates pupils' imaginative responses and lateral thinking in a way most resource boxes can't do. It is best used by staff members who are at ease with it, and happy to stay with the ambiguities and confusions that can arise until these result in new discoveries. It provides a different learning experience which is easier for some pupils than others – and perhaps not always for the ones who tend to shine in class.

…. ….

In terms of evaluating the *Object Dialogue Box* most of the groups appeared to have a very positive experience, although some pupils were confused and others did not really make connections to the objects in the gallery as intended. However, the ODB certainly stimulated creative thinking - one of its key aims. The use of the ODB facilitated by a trained Enabler is a very flexible resource, allowing Enablers to tailor sessions to pupils needs on the spot. It can inspire teachers and pupils to explore the

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[218] A. Woodland. Personal interview, 16 November 2009.

gallery in ways they might not have thought of. In this case there is evidence that preconceptions about Islam, Islamic Art and galleries were challenged. (Hub Evaluation Report, James et al 2006)

Despite their popularity though, as Foster says, there were some initial reservations about the novelty of the idea. They may have been too open for the more conservative museum staff members; for example, one of the boxes was considered 'not pedagogical enough' so it was not used the first time it arrived at the museum.[219] On the other hand, the objects might be too powerful (over-imaginative, in a way), which might ruin the whole point, as Foster[220] and Roberts (1997: 18) both maintain.

It seems to me that all the objects have qualities that attract attention by the time they are handled and moved in space. In his essay on object theatre, Jurkowski talks about the 'opalisation' effect of the object. The Polish puppet theorist explains what he means by the term:

> When movement fully dominates an object we feel that the character is born and present on the stage. When it is the nature of the object which dominates we still see the object. The object is still the object and the character at the same time. Sometimes however this unity splits for a short while, to be regenerated after a moment… (1988: 41).

According to Jurkowski, in contrast to puppets the objects' 'opalisation' effect is independent of the story: '[it] seems to be quite natural, existing *per se'* (ibid.: 42). This is something that attracts the audience's attention, even before creating any narrative around them. Jurkowski also explains, the 'object holds no programme of acting: the performer must invent one from his own imagination. So he does not serve the object; it is the object which serves the imagination of the performer' (ibid.). Likewise, participants do not have to adjust a narrative to a clear-cut character imposed on them, for example, by a puppet's expression. Instead they are free to invent their own stories, drawn from their own imagination and to adjust the objects to it any way they want, as they also associate them with the museum's permanent

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[219] K. Foster. Personal interview, May 2008.

[220] K. Foster. Personal interview, May 2008.

collection. In the same way, the 'flow experiences' generated by object dialogue boxes seem to closely relate to object theatre experiences as described above.

Chris Green

I was introduced to Green's work with the Skirball Cultural Center by my colleague Alissa Mello, who kindly offered to ask the right question to the right museum person: What is the current cutting edge museum puppetry case in the USA?[221] Her information led me to one of the most distinguished examples of museum puppetry.

From 2005 to 2007, Green made two series of animal puppets for the newly launched gallery the Noah's Ark in the Skirball Cultural Center. The first series consists of stationary permanent puppet exhibits displayed in the entrance area of the gallery. The audience are given a platform to interact with some parts of the sculptures, which have a performative character and function (for example, the feet of a huge elephant can be used and played as percussion instruments) or they can manipulate movable pieces incorporated organically in the exhibits (for example, a metallic moving part at the chest of a deer) (Figs. 69; 70; 71; 72). Looking through a pinhole found on the body of a polar bear exhibit which is placed in a bathtub they can encounter an icy landscape. There they can spot a miniature polar bear floating on an iceberg in the middle of a frozen sea. (Figs. 73; 74). All the sculptures are made from found objects or objects bought in antique shops combined together mainly with wooden or metal parts.

Figure 69: Crocodile puppet exhibit made by Chris Green for the Noah's Ark - Skirball Cultural Center (2008).
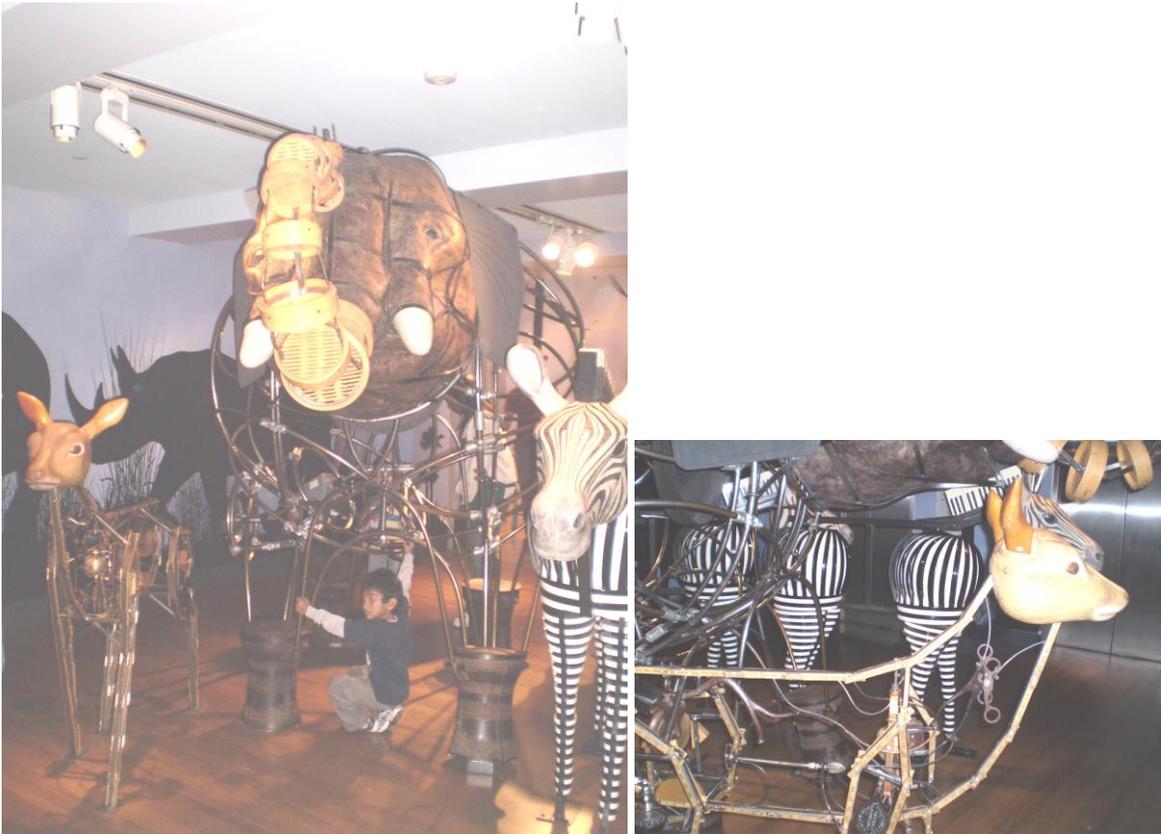
Figures 70; 71: Interactive puppet exhibits made by Chris Green for the Noah's Ark - Skirball Cultural Center (2008).

Figure 72: Zebra exhibits made by Chris Green for the Noah's Ark - Skirball Cultural Center (2008).

Figures 73; 74: The Bear puppet exhibit (up: outside, down: the inside) made by Chris Green for the Noah's Ark - Skirball Cultural Center (2008).

Before entering the Ark, the audience sits in the entry area and participates in a playful, introductory discussion about the story of Noah. Then they explore the gallery on their own. First, they encounter Green's stationary exhibits. Leaving these behind, visitors can then go down to the second room of the gallery on a lower level. There, among other museum interactive exhibits and still within the larger narrative and construction of the Noah's Ark, unexpected happenings occur: a gathering, a story telling, an activity, an interaction with animated puppets (Figs. 75; 76). Occasionally, staff members bring some puppets out into the galleries and let the puppets interact with the visitors. For this purpose, Green made his second series of puppet constructions to be circulated inside the gallery and manipulated by trained staff. He taught the staff not only how to operate a puppet technically, but also how to make it interact with the audience while keeping it in role. The manipulators remain silent and let the animal puppets do the 'talking' and interaction with the public.

Figure 75: Member of staff demonstrates the manipulation of the head of an Ostrich puppet exhibit made by Chris Green for the Noah's Ark - Skirball Cultural Center (2008).

Green says he chose the type of animals that encouraged diversity in manipulation and design techniques. These are mostly rod or Czech style marionettes. One exceptional puppet is the leopard, which is half marionette and half costume; it must be *worn* by the puppeteers (see

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Figure 1). Green's unique ideas about constructions also inspired the designers commissioned to make the rest of the exhibits in other parts of the gallery.[222]

The gallery's target group is families with three to four year-old children, all the way up to adults. As opposed to many children's museums, which use lots of plastic, foam and colourful materials due to their 'durability and safety', Greens says the feeling someone has when entering the Noah's Ark is the same as entering a theatre space or an art gallery. It is visceral and evocative, an effect enhanced by the theatrical light and the natural materials used. The patina of the latter brings with it a pre-existing life, a history (ibid.).

Working with reused materials, Green maintains, was a way 'to avoid cuteness.' However it also turned out to be a challenging process:

> […] the design… came really quickly… But choosing materials that would last and engineering them was the biggest challenge; but it was not crazy, it was just a totally new way of thinking; it is puppetry, but puppets are built for the puppeteers and for the stage […] I don't think I would propose that per se, because of how complicated it is. It takes a long time to find it… I walked in the city, just walking into stores and looking at stuff… thousands of pictures… that was where to go more deeply… no one would imagine that taking that [a reused object] which is very fragile, put it out for the public to handle it, would work: but it does! Just depends on what you've done to it… metal, wood, some leather (really limited), there is a little of plastic… I try to avoid that, there is some rubber in there but mostly it is wood or metal… There are some fragile pieces which are all supported by steel; they are more decorative (ibid).

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[222] C. Green. Personal interview, December 2008.
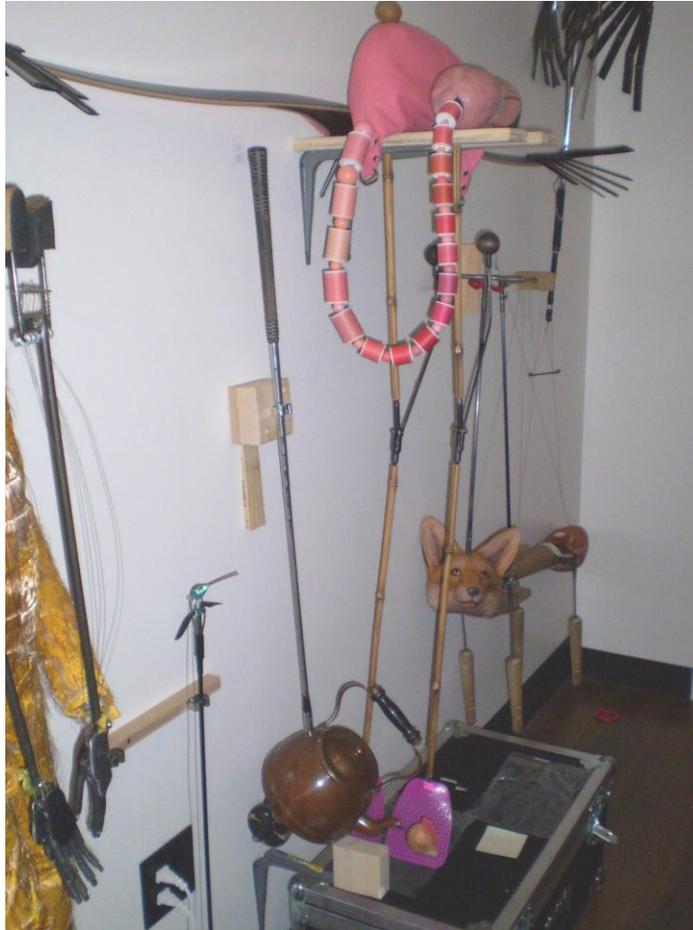
Figure 76: The storage room with Chris Green's animal exhibits. These puppet exhibits are manipulated by Noah's Ark staff members - Skirball Cultural Center (2008).

Green further explains his personal philosophy on found objects and their function within a museum environment, their multi-layered learning potential and their visitor-friendliness:

> [Found objects have a] difference in the impact… when people go to museums and see all kind of materials, art works, sculptures. Most of the time, they can recognize the material from what it is, if it is marble, or a bronze, but a lot of times you are looking at something and you don't know how it is made and you don't know what the material is. You are not focusing on it, you are focusing on something else. [In] contemporary art, … really, more and more [artists] are using materials that are not familiar to people, different types of composites or processes, generally very toxic but durable, …moulding or whatever it is, and when you walk in you have no idea what this stuff is, and this has an effect on you… So when you put found objects, people recognize the objects and go more deeply into what you are presenting, and start having a relationship with it. That's all it is. There are some objects that I have used, that are not familiar to everybody

because these are antiques, they don't use them anymore, but some older generations that I have come through, I have heard them say to their children or grandchildren they knew what that was, something that they had or their mother had, they just recognize them and the kids don't have a clue what it was (ibid.).

Philip Yenawine's ideas also relate to Green's view above:

Today several phenomena complicate the development of aesthetic understanding. We no longer live within ethnic or tribal boundaries. Design, media and imagery have a global reach; the things we see, use, own and worship are usually designed by faceless others, using means we do not see or comprehend (2002: 1).

During my tour of the gallery, I was surprised not to see any video or slides. Green and Skirball Cultural Center's exhibit developer Marnie Gittleman agree that the language of technology in such an environment would endanger the ambience and the focus on touch and manipulation.[223] Also, I noticed a high ratio between facilitators and visitors, and found remarkable the unified high quality aesthetics and narrative, as well as the economy in the use of the mediums.

In the Noah's Ark, touch and interaction intend to have a powerful appeal to visitors and absorb their attention, as Green explains:

We did not know. We all thought that the children would be more exploratory, touching everything more. But when the puppets show up… the children see them as living things, they approach them very differently. They interact with the face, they get eye contact and they sit down. It is all improvised, they have a track that they can go through… but they don't stray from those, so they don't get aggressive, they don't knock things over; they explore (ibid.).

I found the constructions visitor-friendly, playful, and recognizable (with the head being the most interactive part of the animals) and, thus, highly communicative.

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[223] M. Gittleman. Personal interview, December 2008.

However, the level of abstraction and how communicative this was to preschoolers (Fig. 77) was an issue for the museum, as Gittleman admits, from the very beginning. The team used formative research and its results were really surprising to the staff:

Figure 77: Interaction with the fox puppet made by Chris Green for the Noah's Ark gallery - Skirball Cultural Center (2008).

Gittleman: […] we test everything in advance...we had children visiting his [Green's] studio in Brooklyn. [We were studying] their response, would they see the puppet as real or alive, or take it as a toy, will they be afraid of it? A lot of testing… We took photos, and we continue to get feedback on our school programmes. We did not just talk in a small group.

Interviewer: Do they understand that this is an elephant, for example?

Gittleman: Yes. That is one of our team's questions. Is it going to be too abstract? Will children be able to put that together? There was no child unable to identify that it was an animal. Depending on the age of this child, it may be a bird, or a vulture, but what was incredible is that when we tested it, it had only [like] a head, temporarily carved out of foam with no eyes and no colours, attached to some strings and [a three year old child interacted with it like it was] a finished product! (ibid).

The finished puppets/sculptures preserved their constructivist, abstract form. Thus, they intend to welcome a more sophisticated kind of interaction, more exploratory, less predictable, more open to interpretation. They are not simplistic; but they had to be simple enough to be manipulated by non-professional puppeteers who, when they feel it is the right moment, go to the storage area, grab them easily, and go to the gallery and animate them fairly quickly. As Green explained: 'This is something that a 25-string marionette would never do.'[224]

Furthermore, it was not surprising to hear that based on his personal observation, Green believes that 'the children totally understand it more than adults. Adults get it too, but the children are in many ways more generous, very rarely are they confused, because their [the puppets'] faces are so clear, and they see the movement and they just come together' (ibid). Some puppets, like the elephant, are manipulated by four performers, while others are more abstract with gaps in between their body parts; but this doesn't prevent interpretation. This is probably when the adult is given with the chance to re-learn from children what is lost in imagination while they are growing up (ibid).

Both Green and the Skirball Cultural Center intended to create an alternative to Disney-esque cute animals that hug visitors. As Green underlines: 'we wanted something more feverish,' less 'commercial.' That said, aggression or violence was not the intention either, even among animals like crocodiles, polar bears, or vultures.

Green was also very cautious in the choice and use of his materials. Besides, he follows a holistic view in all his projects. His work develops in parallel with sustainable ideas, a generic respect towards natural resources, and a great sensitivity to nature. It is about 'symbiosis of the natural and the manmade environment,' as he points out (ibid).

Overall, Green's work for the Skirball Art Center echoes Sennett's idea about the manufactured/artificial versus the handmade/natural. According to Sennett, some craftsmen

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[224] C. Green. Personal interview, December 2008.

and philosophers relate manufactured/artificial objects and materials to monotonous, lifeless, 'imperturbably, uniformly perfect' constructions, an 'industrialized simulacrum' (2009: 144) whereas they perceive the handmade/natural objects as anthropomorphized. They relate them to ethical human qualities such as honesty, modesty and virtue (ibid: 135-144).

Following Mello's advice, and Green's persistence, a few days before returning to Europe for Christmas, I visited the Skirball Cultural Center and met Marni Gittleman in LA. She arranged with the staff to give me a gallery tour and also a backstage visit to see where the rest of the puppets are. The staff kindly offered me some puppet demonstrations and had the puppets interacting with the visitors. They also combined manipulation with a storytelling activity.

Gittleman sounded very proud of the Ark's clear achievements. She explained to me that, from the start of the long recruitment process, this collective project took seven years to be accomplished. She recalled:

> We looked [for a designer] at over thirty-five firms nationally and internationally. [It was] not an open call… we researched… we narrowed it down to three firms— some had experience with children some not. We were looking for people who were philosophically aligned and aesthetically could help us envision this new model. Whether they had designed for children or not, we were willing to take the risk…[225]

She also said that the puppets provide the impetus for starting partnerships with other institutions in the form of outreach programmes, as was the case with the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens. Michael Fritzen, who has worked for the LA zoo for ten years and now leads outreach programmes with the Skirball Cultural Center's puppets, talks about teaching and learning moments he experienced with puppets, and about the transformation from educator to animal animator:

> […] the children interacting with the puppet acted no differently than when acting with an animal… they do compare and construct by having real animals and having the puppet right next to it... We can use them [the

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[225] M. Gittleman. Personal interview, December 2008.

puppets] for trainings for staff, for visitors… when you take their focus away from you and it goes onto the puppet… it works, it is pure magic. You can see it in their eyes. They go to me and when I don't react, they start interacting with the puppet. It is incredible, even if they are missing fur, etc. Their mind switches…[226]

The sense of touch and interactive puppet exhibits

The case studies above already give a range of interactive experiences within museum puppetry projects. They also suggest the significance of aesthetics, of surprise and of familiarization and friendliness when creating interactive exhibits. They also open up a dialogue on what is an interactive and issues involved around the blurred boundaries between art, interaction, original artefacts and exhibit designing commissions, as Jo Digger explains:

> Walsall New Art Gallery has commissioned artists to make sculptures that can be touched and interacted with. We have commissioned both computer-based artworks and computer-based interpretation, with very little clear distinction to our audiences as to which is which. Does the audience care? Not really. But we do, because we want people to learn from looking at artworks, and to do that surely we need to know that they are looking at an artwork. If they are learning merely from looking at an interactive then surely we have failed?... If our aim is to create visual literacy, then it should not matter, but if our aim is to create visual literacy through looking at original artworks then it obviously does matter. But if the interactive is an artwork as well, then is that OK? When is an interactive an artwork? We go round in circles. (Digger, 2002: 3,4).

Added to this, I would like to underline the lack of a consensus among museum experts as to what an interactive exhibit (or interactives) actually is. The terminology itself suggests ambiguity:

> Interactivity is normally used to mean physical interaction with an object or exhibit— a 'hands-on' experience… Limiting the notion of interaction to merely physical manipulation has been challenged for years, although most

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[226] M. Fritzen. Personal interview, December 2008.

proponents still consider hands-on manipulation indispensable. Richard Gregory, founder of Britain's first hands-on science centre, the Bristol Exploratory, speaks of 'minds-on' exhibits and uses illusions to show the workings of the human mind. Jorge Wagensberg, Director of the Museu de la Ciencia in Barcelona, speaks of 'hearts-on' exhibits… the notion of interaction itself -whether hands-on, minds-on or hearts-on- does not give any real indication of the quality of the experience. Interaction is too vague a term. It cannot be used precisely enough to be helpful… The trouble with the word 'interaction' is that it can refer to an extremely wide variety of visitor activities, some trivial, some satisfying (Bradburne 2002: 1).

Acknowledging this confusion around the definition of the term, the case studies I investigated introduce the more concrete term of *touch*, though even this creates more puzzlement. Candlin, for example, writes about the '…lack of a commonly agreed "lexicon of touch,"' which could potentially equip researchers with '…a recognized set of terms with which to describe the tactile sensations elicited by various material properties' (2008: 30). Candlin ascribes this difficulty to the 'occulacentric world' we live in (ibid: 2), which tends to undermine the study of other senses in favour of vision.

As she explains, 'in the years to come, researchers will need to focus far more of their efforts on questions relating to defining which characteristics are important in determining whether people actually "like" to touch a surface or to hold and manipulate an object' (ibid.: 33) (Fig. 78). Moreover, referring to museum replicas, she notes: 'at present it is unclear exactly what aspects of an artifact or sculpture should be captured by a tactile replica. Is it the size that is important? Or is it the weight, the temperature... the texture, or the compliance of the material? We simply don't know' (ibid: 31). On the other hand, what the experience of touching the relics suggests is that this is 'strongly linked to emotion' (ibid: 34); as a museum visitor admits: 'you are sort of more aware of the beauty when you are able to touch it' (ibid: 33).

Figure 78: Chinese Dragon costume hanging from the ceiling. Young visitors are welcomed to wear the heavy costume - Brooklyn's Children Museum, New York (2009).

Overall, and as the book *Touch in Museums* (Chatterjee ed. 2008) suggests, haptic technology advancements, and museum policies for visually impaired or blind visitors as well as elderly people, all strongly encourage further explorations in the field of haptic experiences in museums for various communities. However, it should be noted that all the studies contained in the book suggest that considerable progress has already been achieved in the field. The editor of this recently published volume, Helen Chatterjee, maintains that '[a]ctive manipulation of objects is preferable to passive tactile stimulation' (ibid: 3).

On the other hand touch has quite recently gained more attention in sciences: various neurological and psychoanalytical studies stress the necessity of developing a lexicon of touch and touch aesthetics (Spence and Gallace 2008: 22; 34). This would initiate further studies on the type of learning outcomes expected (Romanek, Lynch 2008: 282); on the relation of touch with movement ('active touch'); on the motivation for movement; and on the 'emotional aspect' of touch which, according to McGlone, is more powerful than 'pure

discrimination – for example telling us how hard, cold or smooth something is-' (2008: 41-42).

Moreover, Doonan and Boyd characterized touch as 'the most reliable of sensory modalities' (2008: 114) and this suggests that research is needed on the ways this sense affects people with disabilities (SEN museum visitors).[227]

The sense of touch is studied in all case studies in this chapter as this is taken as intrinsically multi-sensory (McGlone 2008: 43), a window to the outside world: 'skin is a main interface between an individual and the outside world. The sense of touch informs and guides close interactions with the immediate environment' (Critchley 2008: 61). Overall, puppet/puppetesque exhibits such as Fosters' object dialogue boxes, Chris Green's constructions, Tim Hunkin's automata, FF's interactive exhibits—unlike the Robot Zoo's animatronics, the Walsall Gallery's puppet booth or the Wallace & Gromit exhibition—intend to provide a platform of narrative hooks. These hooks invite the audience to a nondirective narrative and co-creation based on their imagination, needs, desires and background knowledge. Embedded within the idea of an integral, not necessarily linear narrative, high quality constructions are intended to contribute to visitors' flow, playful experience and thus to the optimum conditions of learning. These constructions, concrete in their materiality, still remain abstract enough and leave some space for the audience's imagination and visual thinking. They invite the audience to engage in their own meaning making activity and to fill any gaps invoked in the exhibits or in the story which is being unfolded (which is still open for them). What are these birdlike breathing creatures doing up on the ceiling of Science Museum basement? (Fig 58). Where is this dinosaur coming from, and what is he doing in this miniature jungle incorporated in a FF's Discovery Box? What is a little bear doing inside a larger 'bath tub' bear (Fig. 73;74), and how does an elephant's walk sound (Fig. 70) in Chris Green's animal world? What are the ping-pong balls doing attached to an umbrella skeleton's edges (Fig. 65), and how could they be linked with an art

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[227] McGlone and her colleagues made a research with people who suffer from a 'rare neurological condition in which all their A-fibres (touch) have been destroyed'. Not only these people were insensitive to touch but also they could not move. However, the research suggested that these patients were still sensitive to 'pleasant touch' and scientists assume that this 'stimulates opioid receptors on… peripheral nerves and that this is decoded in emotional processing brain areas' (2008: 52-53).

exhibition in Manchester Art Gallery? All these questions are intended as hooks for exploration. These questions are meant to drag the audience into a flow experience and potentially construct, through manipulation, a new personal meaning.

In other words, I am trying to examine with the above case studies how a co-created narrative involved within interactive puppet exhibits aims to make the sense of touch more explicit and I hope to possibly initiate further research in the field (a lexicon of touch). I primarily maintained here that this first requires a thorough investment in the actual construction to be touched; in other words, an investment in skilled craftsmanship.

Moreover, after making a quick historical overview of touch, referring to terms such as 'active touch', 'touch with conscious intent' or 'located touch', Sennett advocates the term 'prehension'. The term refers to 'movements in which the body anticipates and acts in advance of sense data' (2009: 154). Referring to Raymond Tallis' analysis of this phenomenon (prehension), he recognizes four stages: 'anticipation', 'contact', 'language cognition', and 'reflection'. Sennett himself adds to the list a fifth stage which he names: 'values developed by highly skilled hands' (ibid: 155).

Unsurprisingly, 'material awareness' (ibid: 145) and touch with 'prehension' are highly developed skills among craftsmen, experienced puppet constructors included. In all case studies puppeteers were considered (constructors but also manipulators) gifted with such 'values developed by highly skilled hands'. In addition and aligning with Sennett's analysis, I argued that puppeteers have not only developed 'sensitized fingertips' but also techniques to skilfully balance between 'minimum force' and 'release'— '[I]ntegration of hand, wrist, and forearm…teaches lessons of minimum forces,' (ibid: 238). The more a puppeteer trains his hands and use of his tools through practise, the more this 'prehension' is refined via a rhythmic skill of repetition, concentration and coordination (ibid: 155-178). In other words, I will assume that puppeteers use their 'thinking hands' as a channel for communication between various senses (touch, vision and hearing) and reason.

The idea of a trained hand with the use of tools articulates and demystifies, as Sennett suggests (ibid: 213), the idea of intuition which, among other parameters, shapes the craftsman's imagination. Constructions bearing the trace of a thinking hand also intend to provide users with a platform to become familiar with a time-consuming process and invite them to an already invested narrative. Although this narrative has already started in the puppeteer's workshop, it is up to the user to continue and expand it. Museum visitors encountering handmade puppet constructions through vision, touch and movement are confronted with the human struggle with matter, and plenty of non-uniform 'gaps'. This already anthropomorphized matter intends to become the visitor's tool to invest via touch and manipulation the museum experience with their own intuition and imagination.

Having said that, I am not implying that there are no equally challenging 'gaps', powerful metaphors and unique museum experiences created through the use of haptic technology, or in general with the use of (high tech) machine-made exhibits. What I am saying is that interaction with puppet exhibits tends to focus on whimsical experiences embedded in the natural world and everyday life, whereas interaction with these haptic technologies tends to explore the mysteries of our world, focusing primarily on the cutting edge uses of the sciences. In this last approach, the anthropomorphism of matter/nature is no longer manifested in the natural world and everyday experience, but in high fidelity simulacrums. Although these approaches are fundamentally different, I think that further exploring channels of communication between the two could lead to new paths for both fields and a challenging and exciting fusion of practices.

Moreover, the absence of the constructor or the puppet performer is intended to enhance the feeling of independence and the sense of control of the user over the museum interaction. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1995), this kind of flow experience contributes to more relaxed exploration, discovery and learning: '[F]or personal growth and development one must become less dependent on, or constrained by, outside guidance so that spontaneous motivation will have a chance to awaken' (ibid: 74). The above case studies, among others, highlight this role of interactive puppet exhibits as they enhance the 'flow experience' within the museum setting.

Conclusion

According to writer Josie Appleton, we live in an age where the visitor's contribution in the museum setting has become an obsession, while at the same time there is 'less discernment about what people are interacting with' in museums. She maintains that computer interactives are limiting visitors' freedom and are often controlling:

> Exhibits in the Welcome Wing are always demanding a response: press this button, vote here, play this game here, say what you think there, set up your own personal website…Your thought can only take predetermined paths; every association that you make would have to have been decided in advance by the programmer. (Appleton 2002: 6).

She underlines that while engaging with interactive exhibits visitors leave a tangible, 'measurable' proof that they have been there, that they must have taken something from their museum experience as they willingly give something back (ibid.). For example, visitors might be invited to play a computer game and leave their score on the computer screen, they might be asked to share their views by choosing one among several options regarding current socio-political issues, they might be asked to select a number of images or other material to be sent to their personal email address, and so on and so forth. According to Appleton, these practices show that museums are 'intent on solving political issues' and pursuing 'socially inclusive' practices, due to the institutions' need to justify its existence (ibid.). Moreover, all these practices might disturb the visitors' flow, as well as their privacy; they might 'undermine… [the] idea that the arts have an independent value, a quality of their own by which they can be judged' (ibid.). She clarifies, however, that:

> The problems with interactivity in museums are related to its political role, not to interactive exhibits themselves… In an age where people don't vote and don't take part in public activities to the same degree as in the past, then if they can be seen doing things, making things, exploring things in the museum, this is considered to compensate for the democratic deficit (ibid.).

I believe what Appleton also describes here is citizens' need for some kind of control over their lives and for finding a public space, a platform to express their views (cf. Sennett 1992),

even if only to an open-access museum interactive exhibit. However, if the museum has a role to play in finding ways to develop its visitors' sense of control and social responsibility, then it seems to me that this would be an ongoing process, which cannot be done with one-off visits or occasional use of interactive exhibits. It seems to me that this is more of a generic attitude, the worldview of the museum staff and the museum as an institution, which might affect its whole communication and interpretation strategy. This is something that goes beyond the number of seconds or minutes someone might spend in front of an exhibit or stay to watch a museum theatre or puppet show.
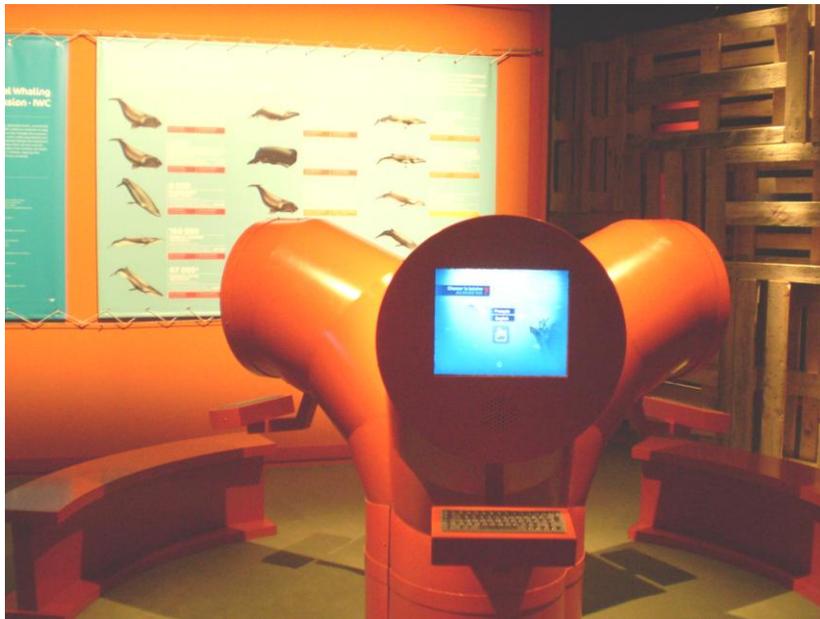
Figure 79: A narrative within a narrative: a computer interactive placed in a three dimensional construction - Natural History Museum of Paris (2009).

I think that the use of a variety of communication techniques is something that visitors do already take advantage of in many museums, as not all visitors have the same learning skills, styles, or preferences (Figs. 79; 80). This, I believe has an ethical dimension in terms of social responsibility, and museum professionals need to build partnerships and collaborative practices to create meaningful narratives and thought-provoking, imaginative and non-directive interactive experiences, within either a computer exhibit, museum theatre or museum puppetry activity.
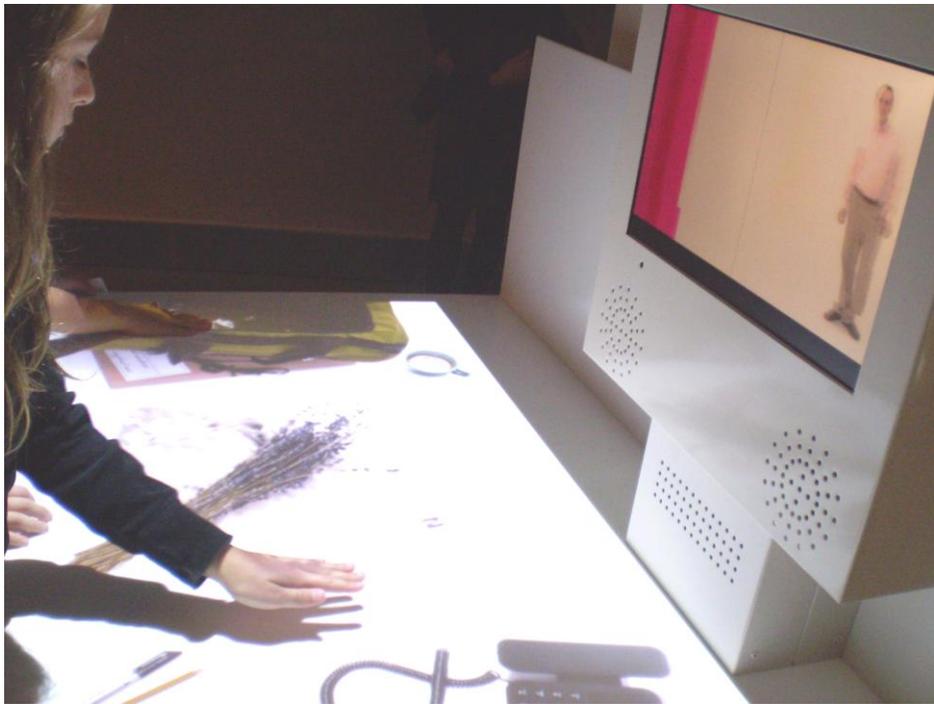
Figure 80: A computer interactive exhibit engages visitors to co-create a narrative using a touch screen - Darwin Centre - Natural History Museum in London (2010).

On the other hand, as this chapter suggests, a great variety of objects, constructed or found within a museum puppetry context can be used as interactive exhibits.[228] Often these objects may come from recycled or used materials. Puppeteers seem well-qualified for making them sustainable, not least by testing their durability in extreme usage. Being experienced craftsmen, most of them, they are also particularly qualified in their awareness of materials, tools and various construction techniques. This knowledge is inherent in the final exhibits and transforms them into platforms for exploratory learning.

Moreover, as puppet exhibits are interactive *par excellence* (see Tillis' definition of the puppet in my introductory chapter), all the principles of interactivity are applied here. Subjective narratives and play involved in museum puppetry intend to increase the time spent

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[228] As the Fosters' case suggested, exempted from this rule are the objects that have a poor metaphorical power, or at the opposite are over powerful. Also, as Hunkin confesses, the 'interactivability' of an exhibit/ object is determined by the theme: 'trying to make an exhibit to fit a particular theme… doesn't always work. I now suspect that for many interesting subjects there are no good interactive exhibits.' http://www.timhunkin.com/92_museum_design_initiation.htm (accessed 8 May 2010).

in the gallery and to provide valuable information for visitor studies, giving some access to the minds and souls of participants (Durbin, cited in Adams, Luke, Moussouri 2002).

In this chapter, I analyzed some examples where puppet exhibits intend to actively engage visitors through the sense of touch. As a response to the need for a vocabulary of touch, I think it would be useful to further clarify a term used largely in puppetry. I suggested that touch in museum puppetry applies to:

a. Professional manipulators (puppeteers) who aim to suspend the audience's disbelief by animating a dead object within a narrative (a show – or objects circulation in the gallery like Green's puppet exhibits for the Skirball Cultural Center)

b. Museum visitors who explore the world of the objects by moving or manipulating objects — or parts of them — in space (like the Object Dialogue Boxes session in the museum galleries)

c. Puppet craft workshops: museum visitors themselves construct an object (puppet) to be manipulated

In this chapter I examined various parameters that vary according to the type of the puppet exhibits. These include the function, form and construction materials (readymade objects included), abstraction, narrative, technology involved, and type of audience engagement. Overall, I particularly focused on two -often neglected in the museum field- parameters essential for any interaction with puppet exhibits: a. the type of manipulation, and b. aesthetics.

I referred once again to the importance of clarity, simplicity, spontaneity, concreteness, freedom, surprise, comedy and friendliness embedded in the art of puppetry. I suggested that curiosity and motivation are intrinsic in puppet exhibits and along with the idea of 'flow experience' (Csikszentmihalyi 1995) contribute to the conditions of non-linear, non-directive learning.

I suggested that, in museum puppetry, manipulation, co-created narrative and aesthetics overlap and together they colour the entry points of the practitioners' construction. I also suggested that museum puppetry aims to provide a visitor oriented museum experience where meaning making is potentially transferred to the audience, aligning with Roberts' idea of the 'shift of authority... from the curator to the educator, and later to the visitor' (1997: 45). I also suggested that experienced craftsmen such as Green, Hunkin, Saunders, the Fosters, have ways to save museum puppetry from the risk of falling into the common pitfall of predictable, didactic, dull visitor engagement and cute, over-simplistic constructions.

Chris Green's elephant or FF's automata and Discovery box, and the Fosters' Dialogue Boxes all suggest that puppet exhibits aim to enhance social interaction in museums. Puppet exhibits tend to be clear and straightforward in their function (it should be noted, though, that at first encounter, the Object Dialogue Boxes might be also confusing, a feeling that is very soon replaced by eagerness for exploration and play). Also, puppet exhibits and personal/collective narratives instead tend to enhance curiosity, imagination, reflection, socializing rather than invest in the participants' competitive spirit.[229]

Once entering the flow experience, the chances for socialization increase as visitors in flow tend to 'fully express the self.' But, beyond this, they also tend to connect with others, to feel more integrated' (Csikszentmihalyi 1995: 71). The examples studied here suggest that puppet exhibits and narratives do not aim towards learning per se, but at communication. The goal here is how to enter into a sustained dialogue with the objects (and, in certain cases, with other co-participants). Museum puppetry exhibits aim at offering participants a sense of

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[229] Christian Heath and Dirk vom Lehn from King's College write:

> Interactives' -in particular those relying on computing and information technologies- inadvertently impoverish the social interaction that can arise with and around exhibits in museums and galleries. There is a danger that we are confusing interactivity with social interaction and collaboration…. One of the difficulties with interactivity is that it tends to reflect a particular model of human [that]… is implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, drawn from computer science or at least from the ways in which people are thought to interact with computer systems... The 'interaction' is primarily designed for a single user who undertakes a series of actions in response to pre-specified questions or puzzles posed by the system… Even for those visitors accompanying the user there is limited opportunity to co-participate in the activity...we find numerous examples of the principal user becoming irritated and in some cases trying to push their eager co-participant away, even of parents removing their children (2002).

control over visitor-friendly, anthropomorphized matter and objects. Based on my personal interaction with the exhibits, it seems to me that the more low-tech, abstract (but still concrete in their materiality), simple and everyday the objects are, the more possibilities there were to engage my senses and imagination, and the more I had the chance to find a personal story in exhibits.

This echoes Terry Gilliam who acknowledges that although he should use technology more, he doesn't '[…] get the same sensory thrill. There's no smell, there's no sound, there's no texture. With computers I feel sensorially deprived…You can't control things. You can't feel part of the process… With automata, the mechanics are the point.' [230] Haptic technology advancements and learning potential however remain open and currently under research.

Chris Green explained his own contribution to the 'gap-making':

> I enjoy showing people that what they are looking at, they are actually contributing to… in the interpretation; so we are not giving them everything. They love that. It is a way for me to acknowledge that there is some real intelligence… that comes through.[231]

Overall, all the case studies in this chapter suggest that museum puppetry aim at providing the ground for an inclusive, non-linear, non-elitist museum experience.

As Gilliam maintains:

> [Our society] is losing a strange sophistication because everything that is fed to you is literal: there's no need for you to be engaged… It's like the difference between theatre and television. Theatre is abstract. Television is not abstract at all. Our culture has somehow become something just for the elite to remind themselves of ancient ways of storytelling… [Automata are] immediately achievable and understandable. We get lost in a world now where things are too big and too vast and not specific enough. And people are kind of lost about what to do and where they fit in and how much

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[230] Dreams: Devious Devices http://www.smart.co.uk/dreams/automata.htm.

[231] C. Green. Personal interview, December 2008.

influence they can have on things. And as things get more complex, you have to simplify.[232]

Finally, this chapter also focused on the collaboration between the community of puppet exhibit constructors and museum staff and investigated some of the miscommunications and tensions that can arise in shared projects. Overall, the data suggested that most of the time these two communities rarely collaborate closely for long term projects, but when they do the outcome is beneficial for both parties, even though the process might not be always smooth. Sometimes the 'assumption of uniformity make it difficult to explore the mechanisms by which processes of change and transformation in communities practice and processes of learning are intricately implicated in each other' (Lave & Wenger 2008: 113). Especially museum staff needs to recognize that each project and each practitioner has different demands and that open-mindedness, mutual respect and flexibility seem to be the best guide to unprejudiced experimentation around museum puppetry's intended conditions for learning and unexpected, non-directed outcomes.

Overall, success seems to depend on mutual interest and trust in a well planned long term project (as was the case with Chris Green and Skirball Cultural Center, as well as the Fosters and Manchester Art Gallery), or due to mutual compromise, exchange, understanding and individual good will, (as was the case with Tim Hunkin's collaboration with Science Museum of London staff, and Forkbeard Fantasy and their *Architect of Fantasy* exhibition in the Theatre Museum in London).

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[232] Dreams: Devious Devices http://www.smart.co.uk/dreams/automata.htm.

Chapter 5
Conclusion and recommendations

The scope of the enquiry

The thesis drew ideas both from established and emergent theories evidenced in fields such as education (constructivist learning theories; the value of object play), communication (cultural approaches), ethnography (the re-emergence of folklore studies), museology (diversity policies; shift of museum authority; visitor-centred museums; visitor research, the re-evaluation of the sense of touch), sociology (communities of practice), and puppetry (its distinct sign system and the definition of the puppet).

Throughout the thesis I implied that -over the last decade- museums have been guided more by 'educators driven by visitors' agendas' than 'curators driven by institutional agendas' (Roberts 1997: 21). I argued that interaction and participation (either for museum staff, puppeteers or visitors) in each and every museum puppetry project is varied: in some cases this is more dynamic, open, creative, resonant, multi-sensory, or simple and distant than others. Overall, I took the idea of interaction within puppetesque narratives/constructions and collaborations as the melting pot of creative 'gaps'.

Although in the beginning the research focused on live interpretation activities, as the study evolved it came to include interactive puppet exhibits as well (Chapter Four). It identified museum puppetry as collaborative projects and practices during the pre/post production phases among the two distinct communities of puppeteers and museum staff (Chapter Three, also parts of Chapter Four) and the practice was divided into two categories:

a. live interpretation, communication and co-creation that draws its inspiration from the museum theatre field, which has grown considerably over the past two decades (Jackson and Kidd 2008; see Fig. 3; Chapter Two),
b. construction directly related to exhibit design and to the visual arts (Chapter Four).

Also, I argued that what glues everything together is the participants' willing suspension of disbelief, which is embedded in the very definition of puppet that I adopted for the purposes of this thesis (see Chapter One).

What museums are we talking about?

> Museums in a new age can become places that actively support and facilitate a range of human experiences with artifacts and collections— social, spiritual, imaginal, therapeutic, aesthetic, and more (Weil 2007: 45).

Museum puppetry negotiations can be favoured or undermined depending on the policies and learning strategies of the hosting institutions. The research suggested that those institutions that fall into the category of post-museums tend to be puppet friendly museums and willing to facilitate negotiations between the two communities. Of course, and unsurprisingly, there were cases where although museums claim to adopt a post-museum ideology, in practice they seem to be too rigid for these kinds of exploratory, non-conventional practices (the difficulty some puppet practitioners face in finding a venue for their show might possibly be a result of the above reservations held by some museums today).

In the introductory chapter, I set out my approach to the idea of a 21st century post-museum and its treatment of knowledge and learning. I asserted that a cultural approach to communication within a democratic model of museums where all communities involved have their own voice, results in an institution with social responsibility. This type of museum does not pretend its superiority by using labels and texts that imply 'I know more than you do,' or that 'the visitor is to be a listener, the museum a storyteller' (Bradburne 2002: 7).

Museum learning occurring within museum puppetry projects was viewed as a distinctive example of active, co-constructed museum experience. Aligning with Wenger's theory of situated learning (Lave & Wenger 2008) and Gardner's ideas on 'education for understanding' (2004: 200-248), the thesis understood learning as practice occurring in

participation and apprenticeship. Following Roberts' theory (1997), I argued that a non-absolute, non-unique, non-exclusive idea of knowledge cannot consist of a predetermined set of facts intended to be transmitted by museum experts to novices. Instead, this idea takes its best form as a meaningful co-created narrative.

I viewed museums as visitor-centred democratic, complex but flexible platforms of fluid ideas: a 'portable social technology' as Kratz and Karp call it (2007: 2). I considered museum interpretation as often overlapping with museum communication. I understood museum interpretation and communication as negotiating meanings between various communities (museum departments, individual museum staff, educators, visitors, external collaborators).

Also, I attempted to discern the potential of theatricality in museum collections. This element, I argued, favours all sorts of interactions: a devised series of dialogues, negotiations, exchanges and tensions orchestrated by world cultures and various (often heteroclite) communities of people within and beyond the museum's walls. As far as museum communities are concerned, I recognised that the museum's staff itself constitutes and incorporates a number of diverse communities. Secondly, I acknowledged that the museum plays a vital role in determining what sorts of communities it attracts, supports, neglects or exclude.

The following findings show that today there are a number of museum staff members who align with the idea of post-museum—though still more theoretically adopted than practically applied—as well as with those education reformers who approach learning as a holistic, constructivist process: an all-inclusive, participatory experience. Equally importantly, some of them approach it with an original kind of playful mind set so familiar to the world of puppetry, as is the case with museum puppetry:

> Entertainment [is]…not simply a stepping stone to education but the
> progenitor of the receptive state required for authentic learning to occur…
> In other words, its very nature –playful, enjoyable, and fun- evoke[s] in

people the optimum conditions for learning — openness, loss of self, and what Mihaly Csikszenmihalyi called 'flow' (Roberts 1997: 40).[233]

Overall, the findings below indicate how some members of the community of puppet practitioners (museum puppeteers), gifted with 'sensitized hands' and 'material consciousness' (Sennett, 2009: 119-178), attempt to turn a museum experience into a series of multi-sensory, playful activities.

The findings

The findings show puppetry's intention to humanize a learning process that triggers the participants' imagination and challenges the conventional polarity between knowledge (to know/to own) and entertainment (to open up/to stay connected). They rely on the ultimate puppetry convention (a dead thing that becomes alive) and they are addressing two main research questions from a practitioner's perspective:

> 1. What are puppetry's theoretical and practical frameworks for creation and how can these be used in the conceptualization and analysis of applied puppetry in the contentious territory of today's post-museums?

More specifically, this question examined two areas of enquiry:

1a. it demonstrated the distinctive sign system of puppetry and provided a new understanding of what a puppet is and what it does. More specifically, it indicated puppetry's intention to enhance communication within a safe environment and create powerful visual images, and it studied the practice from the perspective of craftsmanship and the sense of touch.

1b. it investigated the practice in parallel with associated museum practices and mapped out various examples. Drawing on these examples, it demonstrated how puppeteers' skills and techniques are engaged to render rather complex scientific or historical subjects into

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[233] See also Mihaly Csikszenmihalyi (1991). *Flow: the Psychology of Optimal Experience.* New York: Harper and Raw.

communicative narratives and constructions. More specifically, it showed the challenges involved in puppetry imagery to align itself with the intended learning outcomes of a project and be transformed into a co-created narrative.

The second research question investigated:

> 2. What are the benefits, challenges and limitations for the two distinct communities of practice (puppeteers and museum staff) within pre- and post-production of museum puppetry projects?

More specifically, this question demonstrated the negotiations, tensions and compromises between the two communities of practice and, more specifically, it indicated the frictions among them vis-à-vis the intended learning outcomes of a project.

Theoretical and practical framework of museum puppetry practice

The Australian academic and puppet practitioner Margaret Williams maintains that 'absorbed with its own nature, puppetry can be reduced to endlessly recycling its own metaphors, which tends to confirm it as a minor theatrical form' (ibid). However, complementary to Tillis' definition of puppet (a puppet depends on audience perception) a list of paradoxes emerged from the theoretical and practical framework of the medium examined in Chapter One. Based on data from interviews and field visits, the thesis suggests that these paradoxes could be the intended 'hooks' for attracting the museum puppetry audience's attention.

These paradoxes argue that puppets are:

- manipulated **but** they look autonomous and independent
- 'us' **but** also 'not us' (cf. Winnicott 2005: 115-127)

- effective both as trivial ready-made objects, or small-size constructions of cheap materials **but** also could be complicated, time-consuming constructions
- 'gods' (omnipotent) **but** also 'toys' (cf. Tillis 1990: 11-15)
- often the outcome of variously demanding work **yet** they are often made by a single multitalented artist
- related to the sublime **but** also to everydayness
- very good at developing realistic scenes **but** also surrealistic, supernatural ones

The thesis also shows that the ultimate paradox of the medium is embedded in its ontology rather than in its cultural, religious or psychological connotations: a puppet is a dead thing that becomes alive and, although it is something fictional, it is concrete, physical and visible.

This paradox challenges museum interpretation and communication and invites both educators and visitors to view our world afresh. In this world, the ambiance of places and people, historical moments, mixed messages and/or conflicts are communicated via moving images and their—often non-linear—montage.

All the cases emphasized that museum practice constitutes a distinct genre and made clear that this distinction relies on various parameters: the visual images combined with the sense of touch (by puppeteers, constructors, visitors), co-participation, play, fun, safe environment for experimentation, empathy, re-evaluation of everydayness (in stories and characters), and the concreteness of the medium encapsulated in its materiality. They implied that museum puppetry intends to provide an alternative solution to overcome oversimplification thanks to its visual economy and visual codes: clear intentions on manipulation, disciplined and specific movements, concrete constructions, and non-confusing but inspiring images. The cases also underlined the fact that museum puppetry places at its centre that objects or puppets have a character, as if they are alive. In the best cases, it is around this inherent puppetry convention—the appearance of life—that partnerships or audience interactions are built.

The research indicated that the two associated fields -museum theatre, museum puppetry-have several issues in common (Fig. 81). These include the definition of learning, negotiating the intended learning outcomes to align with the museums' learning strategies, the type of interpretation used (first person or third person interpretation, historical re-enactment, storytelling), audience engagement and interaction, narrative and reliability/authenticity issues, museum preconceptions against the approach to learning/knowledge by artistic means, collaboration with the museum staff, and the museum setting as a performance area.[234]

Figure 81: First person live interpretation of the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, Natural History Museum of London (2008).

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[234] Throughout the thesis I used 'museum setting' to refer to museums, art galleries, open air sites, historical houses and science centres. For a more detailed analysis of museum theatre styles, methods, and impact see also *Performance Learning & Heritage Report* (2008): http://www.plh.manchester.ac.uk/documents/Performance,%20Learning%20&%20Heritage%20-%20Report.pdf accessed May 2010); Hughes (1998) ; and Bridal (2004).

The findings demonstrated that live interpretation museum puppetry projects could engage their audiences more dynamically to contribute more actively to narrative building and that they could benefit from experimentation and research findings from drama in education and museum theatre practices. This is shown in Emily Capstick's projects, which skilfully balance drama in education, museum theatre and puppet theatre techniques in order to enhance audience participation. Her approach aligns with recent research assessing the impact of applied theatre, which suggests that 'the emphasis is upon participation, with the target community influencing the agenda, telling the story. This has come about in part as a reaction against the cruder use of the medium to deliver the messages of external agencies' (Etherton & Prentki 2007: 146).

In the same spirit, most projects suggested that puppeteers do not intend to deliver any message whatsoever, but rather aim to create the optimum conditions for growth, development and self confidence with the use of visual images, play, humour, entertainment, co-created narrative, empathy and experimentation around the sense of touch. Similarly, Emily Capstick's, Brad Brewer's, Patricia O'Donovan's and others' case studies indicated that the dialogical aspect and the style of interaction are intended to affect the conditions for learning and to engage the audience.

Audience research conducted in the associated field of interventional theatre further alludes to the above statement:

> Evidence of the actual responses of audiences suggests there is more, much more, to a successful interventionist performance than 'messages' or measurable outcomes—that there is a quality of experience that is to do with the 'liveness' of the event, the emotional resonances it can offer, the dialogues that can be generated, and the complexity of texture that defies easy closure. It is that quality of theatre experience that we have to describe, articulate, research, and communicate to those who provide the funding and set the agendas. (Jackson 2005:116-117).

Nevertheless, as with applied theatre, assessing museum puppetry projects which aim to provide favourable conditions for practitioners of all ages to open up in a safe environment and learn by participation, ownership, empathy and control is a much more difficult, time

consuming task than to assess factual information or whether a message has been delivered or not:

> With applied theatre as a message delivery service, it is far easier to evaluate the outcome: the message is either understood or not. But impact occurs only at the point where the message changes attitudes and behaviour and is acted upon. These results are a measurable impact for which appropriate indicators can be devised. Where there is no message or issue at the heart of the process but rather the encouragement to the community to develop self-confidence and assume control over their own lives, to transform themselves, in other words, from the objects into the subjects of their development, it is much more difficult to assess whether such a personal transformation has led, in the long term, to the wider social impact envisaged (Etherton & Prentki 2006: 146).

Unsurprisingly, I have found that there are not many evaluation reports in the field.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that many social theorists (Vygotsky 1978; Gardner 2004; Wenger and Lave 2008; Csikszenmihalyi 1991) suggest that learning by meaningful and/or playful participation, or learning by apprenticeship creates optimum conditions for learning. Such pedagogy, the theorists suggest, demands long term, more holistic and less rigid assessment methods.

We should acknowledge, however, that some common criticisms against the medium focus on the relativism of knowledge and the difficulty in assessing such projects. This criticism may be especially legitimate in cases where puppeteers confuse the intended learning outcomes or the intended learning conditions of their projects with the actual ones. They might assume that this refers to the same thing, even if no relevant research has been conducted beforehand. The reservations and prejudices voiced by some museum staff that often undermines museum puppetry—that it is unreliable, disorienting and confusing, based on fiction, simulations, re-enactments, reconstructions, metaphors and abstractions—weaken and further confuse the practice. It might even be argued that mediums such as puppetry take the attention away from the original collection and the messages it communicates and direct the audience towards purely entertaining attractions (see Chapter

Four on the pinball effect). However, evaluation reports regarding projects such as the Dialogue Boxes (see Chapter Four) suggest the contrary is accurate.

None of the cases examined in this thesis claims to straightforwardly bring about social change. However, even if the aim of learning has been put aside (see diagram below) for the sake of the puppetry convention, all the cases aim ultimately towards something that seems to be of vital importance in today's school environment and curriculum –often overloaded with lengthy units- and which enables students to regain self-confidence and a genuine curiosity for knowledge. They aim to enhance inspiration for a playful, meaningful learning, closer in style to our everyday life and social interactions.

Moreover, as examined in Chapter Three, the authenticity/reliability issue remained many times unresolved due to the approach to knowledge adopted in the thesis: it shows that it is meaningless to pursue rigid objectivity or an absolute truth. Instead, the findings indicated another approach to authenticity and framed it anew.

Within a museum context, the agency that traditionally judges when something is, or isn't, 'authentic' is the museum authorities, who have specialized knowledge of a subject (museum research departments, curators, and so on). On the other hand, no matter whether we talk about the *original* or a 'faithful' *copy* of it, what intervenes between 'authenticity' and the authority that testifies to it is the act of *interpretation*. A number of interpretations or approaches claim to be based on facts or to faithfully resemble the original and therefore to be accurate and valid in each and every detail. Not all of them necessarily are though, and those that come close might be plural. This fact signifies the passage from the old museum model (one knowledge, one truth, one approach) to the post-museum model and new museology—towards multiplicity, diversity and interesting debates among researchers.

As Patricia O'Donovan, Emily Capstick, Sophia Yalouraki, Brad Brewer, Chris Green, Karl and Kimberley Foster, Sandy Spieler (In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre) and others explained, museum exhibitions seem to expand this *dialogue of the here and now*, when 'interpretation' has to become 'communication'. Based on, often multi

sensory, narratives similar to those examined in this thesis, the dialogue now involves the museum visitors and at the same time seems to further soften and humanize the abstract idea of authority and authentic knowledge. At this stage, and moving closer to the idea of a visitor-friendly post-museum, 'authenticity' was not approached in comparative terms (original vs replica/copy). From the perspective of existential philosophy, it was approached by 'relating to or denoting an emotionally appropriate, significant, purposive, and responsible mode of human life'.[235]

Given that generally accepted facts from the scientific community are not seriously contradicted, O'Donovan and other practitioners, as well as some museum representatives, propose that puppets' power relies foremost on the concreteness of the *here and now*. In other words, they claim that within an (often historical) museum context, puppets provide, above all, the means to bring history to the present and/or to bring complicated abstract scientific concepts from an intangible theoretical sphere into live movement, action and interaction. Moreover, all the case studies demonstrated that puppeteers use fiction without inhibitions and look for authenticity in puppets' origins, in metaphors and communicability. The puppet's ultimate metaphor (a dead thing that becomes alive) becomes the puppeteers' authenticity. This directly involves the community (the participants) as they engage in a playful dialogue with the past or with complicated abstract ideas.

Heidegger prioritizes being true to one-self, based on belonging, connectedness, everyday life and history. His notion of authenticity is viewed as interdependent with everydayness and historicity, as Guignon explains:

> When one has become authentic, one will achieve a 'clearing away of concealments and obscurities' (Heidegger 1962: 129) in order to become fully 'transparent' about '*the truth of existence*' (ibid 221)

> (Guignon 1984: 327)

And he continues:

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[235] Oxford dictionaries http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/authentic, accessed Nov. 18 2011.

> …becoming authentic will also enable us to know when we have reached
> the 'ultimate' horizon for understanding Being. We have arrived at the
> deepest horizon of understanding, according to Heidegger, when we have
> uncovered the primordial 'sources', 'wellsprings', 'origins', and native 'soil'
> of our everyday way of grasping what it is to be (ibid: 327)

Overall, as all museum puppetry projects showed, the projects were constantly tested by the links they attempted to build among participants and the world that surrounded them. As Guignon explained:

> The ways we handle the tools we find around us and the ways we conduct
> our lives are regulated by norms and conventions made accessible in the
> social world into which we are thrown. Only because we have been initiated
> into a shared "we-world" can we handle ourselves in coherent, normalized
> ways. But this means that all of the possible roles and self-interpretations we
> can take over have been laid out in advance by the Anyone (Guignon 1984:
> 333)

From this perspective, the thesis indicates that museum puppetry at its best enhances authenticity and everydayness within 'historicity', by building it around the everyday life of the community. Puppetry itself is a popular art and it intends to provide a surrogate for the unconscious, the spontaneous or more vulnerable part of ourselves, free from the fear of exposure or 'not knowing'.

Moreover, museum puppetry doesn't constitute a unified method or technique. Certain techniques are more suitable for certain museum activities depending on space, duration, public, budget, availability of staff and equipment, type of museum and collaboration, the type of learning they aim at (factual knowledge, body skills, development of critical judgment, imagination, or communication skills), or according to the puppeteers' personal style.

Although my intention was not to develop a 'how to' manual, the findings did develop around the practical framework of various narrative techniques in museum interpretation and communication. During the design process, I viewed narrative building as a creative and demanding process. Robert Poulter, Emily Capstick, Sandy Spieler, Tim Hunkin,

Forkbeard Fantasy and others suggested that the more organically, meaningfully, holistically, emotively, playfully and imaginatively the narrative techniques are combined, the more they resonate within interactions.

The thesis demonstrated that the puppets' sign system and power lies foremost in their visual qualities. Sandy Spieler, the artistic director of the In the Heart of the Beast Puppets and Mask Theatre Company, explains further the power of visual intriguing associations:

> When you are using puppet theatre, so much of the image itself speaks. I always say that one of the things about puppet theatre [is that] we can tell stories that are not just human stories… [There] you can have a craw and a sun and an ant and a baby and an old woman, all in one scene. And they all have a relationship to each other. They have a dialogue in some kind, but not necessarily a verbal dialogue.[236]

The findings particularly stressed the importance of the gaps spotted in any well built and well thought out (often abstract) puppet construction or narrative. These gaps can also be located in the physical distance between the puppeteer and the puppet, as well as between the audience and the action on stage. All these gaps aimed to actually become a platform for the audience to interact with the story and to engage with the puppetry convention. As Jackson explains:

> While the artist creates the art and invests it with significance, it is in the appeal to our aesthetic imaginations and sensibilities that the reader/observer becomes an active maker of meaning. It is the percipient who completes the circle, contributes the imaginative filling-in of the gaps left in the text, and becomes a co-author in the work of art. Thus the aesthetic refers both to that quality of the work that makes its appeal directly to the sense perceptions of those who read or watch it and to the response itself. In theatrical contexts, therefore, the aesthetic may have more to do with the role played by the audience in making meaning, with the dynamic relationship that develops between audience and artwork, than with the artwork itself. (2005: 110)

Drawing from the findings and especially from Karl & Kimberley Foster and Forkbeard Fantasy, museum puppetry always takes the form of a co-created narrative which is more

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[236] S. Spieler. Personal interview, December 2009.

about experiences, associations and all sorts of interactions in space than it is solely about either objects or visitors. Often by using constructed or found inanimate objects, the practice aims to transfer all action into the realm of concretised imagination and play. Built out of recycled or brand new materials like Chris Green's and the Fosters' interactives, or by reusing puppets from past shows (Forkbeard Fantasy, Brad Brewer), the thesis indicated that puppet exhibits have an additional learning potential: they are usually multi-sensory and meaningful as they usually intend to involve an easy-to-understand narrative that is challenging enough to explore within and beyond the medium's abstractness or subversive nature. Also, I argued that puppet exhibits tend to have a unified aesthetic. And, last but not least, as is the case with the Forkbeard Fantasy or Tim Hunkin's automata, I stressed the fact that they involve a great amount of humour and playfulness.

The case studies indicated also that, although it is not as easy for a puppeteer to move around the galleries with the puppets and still keep them alive as it is for an actor, if needed, the puppeteer can fit a number of characters on a small stage anywhere in the museum (depending on the size of the puppets and the stage). The small size of certain puppets and stages, like Robert Poutler's NMT shows, potentially facilitate the visual lines between spectators and the museum exhibits and make links accordingly.

The museum puppeteers' perspective

Certain common characteristics of museum puppeteers might affect the negotiations, tensions and compromises involved when collaborating with museum staff. Given the risk of generalizations, I still think it is worth exploring these characteristics among the community of museum puppeteers (constructors and/or manipulators) drawn from either background: puppetry or museums.

Based on the thesis' findings I would not consider the museum puppeteers I met to be practitioners who aim to represent history, culture or natural phenomena. I would portray

them rather as researchers who use all these sources as a starting point for building poetic metaphors around them.

In most of the museum puppeteers I interviewed, I recognized a passion for knowledge. Generally speaking, I would suggest that they are well educated (with a background in higher education, sometimes in other fields than the arts). As is the case with most puppeteers, museum puppeteers usually have a nomadic way of life as they are used to travelling extensively to perform nationally and internationally. This seems to broaden their perspective, and make them flexible and adaptable to new cultures, places, theatre spaces and technical facilities. It also makes them remarkably supportive towards each other. Usually, they are gifted craftsmen and storytellers and, as with Benjamin's 'Storyteller' (1999) and Sennett's *The Craftsman* (2009), they seem to be community friendly people, enjoy the process of construction for its own sake, as much as they enjoy sharing (as opposed to teaching or explaining) stories. They have a desire to interpret history by transforming it from a series of fixed facts and dates through their own stories and images. Also, it seems to me that the popular aspect of their art, combined with a deep and almost inherent sense of freedom, open-mindedness and playfulness, takes them beyond any social prejudice. They do not see themselves as experts in interpretation. Their audience, whoever this is, always remains their co-creator, their partner.

As Sandy Spieler suggested, puppeteers can become the 'midwives, teaching puppet techniques but also teaching the participants how to form their stories from the body of their own community.'[237] In this context, learning springs forth as a by-product of triggered imagination, empathy, emotive narrative, and ethical dilemmas within meaningful situations about everyday experience and ordinary people, all of which the general audience can easily identify with. These narratives can be based on simple natural laws as well as on fundamental human feelings and values.

Puppeteers who have worked as exhibition curators/designers, like O'Donovan, Saunders and Hunkin, tend to view galleries as theatre stages. The exhibition is treated as a

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[237] S. Spieler. Personal interview, 17 December 2008.

performance, the gallery as a stage and the curatorial input as direction. Everything included in the exhibition needs to be theatrical, lively and integrated into the whole; it needs to have a reason to be there. Communicability is the guide for decision-making.

If 'curators in charge of displays need to be able to recapture childlike wonder in order to attract the attention of new visitors' (Spalding 2002: 99) then museum puppeteers seem to have a significant role to play in museum display. The findings suggest that constructors such as O'Donovan, Hunkin and Saunders all seem to be fully qualified to function as 'curators in charge of display.'

Lastly, the thesis showed that many puppeteers tend to recycle their puppets or use recycled materials for their constructions. Even if the reason for doing this is primarily to economize time and money, it seems that there is a challenge involved in the process and some fun as well. It demonstrates the artists' creative skill in transforming their previous constructions/found objects into new meaningful narratives and characters, as well as their ecological spirit.

Finally, in my attempt to highlight the importance of touch within a museum puppetry experience and what makes puppeteers so absorbed and passionate about their work, I drew on Sennett's ideas on craftsmanship (2009). The puppeteer is compared here to the craftsman who, according to Sennett, embodies the difference between the handmade and the machine-made. Sennett acknowledges in the craftsman a material awareness and a value in 'skilled hands' which stimulate thinking and imagination. Also, for Sennett, craftsmen find an intrinsic pleasure in problem solving— they find the pleasure for crafting for its own sake. For Sennett, craftsmanship is also embedded in community life (cf. Sennett 1992). All case studies, each in its distinct way provided a platform which aimed to link the museum exhibits with visitors' experiences, puppet constructions and narratives (see for example Tim Hunkin's case study). They aimed to bridge the gap among the machine-made with the hand-made. They also created the conditions for visitors' touch experiences and familiarization with the various approaches to matter (materials and tools), as observers, manipulators, or constructors.

O'Donovan admits that it takes her 'half a year or even two years (average a year) to prepare a show.' On the other hand, Poulter notes:

> […] Wanting to put across an idea…story telling… Why bother to do it? I've done work over the last thirty, forty years that people never see; not toy theatre, but books and everything, lots of other work. So I do that anyway. People say: 'Oh you wouldn't do it unless it was going to be seen,' but I can refute that argument because I've got it: my picture books, my stories, tons of books. I like it and it amuses me… People use it as an excuse not to do things but on the other hand that means that they don't have any great ambition to do anything; because if they use it as an excuse that means their ideas cannot be that interesting […].[238]

It is obvious that practitioners like O'Donovan, Poulter or the many others discussed in this thesis, do not rely on the popular appeal of their art. They continue to work hard because they find the craftsmanship involved in it pleasurable in itself (cf. Sennett 2009) and also because they feel a responsibility to maintain the high quality of their multi-faceted work. Even though the criteria among puppeteers about what high quality puppetry entails may differ or clash, previews of shows are always useful formative research. However, puppeteers, educators, or museum staff should not forget that, even if it is marginalized, puppetry is very popular especially among family audiences. This advantage might ultimately turn against the medium if those involved in its creation are too-easily satisfied and give up further efforts to move their work beyond a cute show with smiley puppets.

Negotiations between the two communities of practice: museum puppeteers - museum staff

> […] Some objects are more robust than others, but the museum [the Theatre Museum in London] itself had a rather odd idea as to what was 'fragile' and what was not (ironically, when we helped catalogue some [puppets] in the Museum we had to wear rubber gloves)! (McCormick 2007).[239]

What puppeteers seem to gain from collaborating with museums is the discovery of new techniques of threading their way to 'social responsibility' amongst prejudices, conformism, authenticity issues and censorship. To see a museum as just a venue to present

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[238] Poulter, R. Personal interview. 22 May 2009.

[239] Email correspondence, 2007.

their work in is rather limiting, compared to seeing the potential of a collaboration based on the mutual need for interaction with museum audiences within devoted practice and experiment.

As a general rule, when mutual understanding is guiding the collaboration between museum staff and puppeteers, then tensions are smoothly overcome, if not avoided altogether. Cases such as Chris Green, Erth, Emily Capstick, Robert Poutler, Patricia O'Donovan and Karl and Kimberley Foster imply that meetings between these two communities do not necessarily lead to conflicts around prestige and expertise. Instead, they often take the form of fruitful exchanges of knowledge or even a kind of training in open-mindedness for both sides. In these cases, museums seem to be open to learning about how to endow simplicity and meaningfulness to an overly scientific interpretation; how to adopt more holistic or surprising approaches to communicating with their audiences; how to benefit from the visual language to overcome language barriers and communicate delicate issues; and how to take advantage of economy in time and space. Moreover, they are introduced to the recycling technology involved in imaginative and attractive constructions.

Particularly with cases such as O'Donovan or Yalouraki, what seems to be significant is the regular and long-term commissions which permit both communities to built collaborations in trust and mutual understanding. On the other hand, what seems to block sometimes communication from the puppeteer's perspective is the stiffness followed by museum over-expertise, snobbish attitudes of individual museum staff, preconceived or conventional ideas about puppetry and learning, and conflicting ideas of what 'fragile' means.

The data collected indicates that prioritising humour and play over stolid expertise; emotional engagement based on personal narrative as the basis for learning experience over obsession with defining and assessing learning outcomes (cf. Pekarik 2010); common sense over rigid health and safety rules; decision making according to mutual understanding over unwillingness to take the initiative and lengthy approval procedures; inventive combinations

of reused materials over elaborate and expensive, brand new constructions, constitute some of the basic issues that might be raised between these communities.

Puppeteers maintain that when puppetry focuses on the intended learning conditions (comic, intriguing, entertaining story) the medium strengthens its learning potential, as opposed to when it focuses merely on the transmission of messages: 'The aim is to produce a show in which it is impossible to tell where the entertainment stops and the message begins' (McIntyre 1998: 20).

The selected case studies suggested that these intended conditions aim at inspiration and growth, as well as at keeping the high status and the sense of control of the learner. Also, in most cases, they implied that this growth aligns with Pekarik's idea of growth in participatory activities for museum exhibiting which is 'personal – intellectually, emotionally, spiritually – in whatever way each individual needs and desires' (Pekarik 2010: 109).

Moreover, although the assessment of projects is not the focus of this study it is worth mentioning that research in relevant fields such as applied theatre indicates the different views held by social sciences and the arts: 'arts workers are notoriously suspicious (often with good reason) of the mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation imported from the social sciences while being reluctant to develop their own' (Etherton & Prentki 2007: 143). This fact might possibly affect collaborations between the two community of practice examined in this research.

Although, as already explained, this thesis is not centred around learning outcomes and visitor research, the theoretical and practical framework of the practice already suggests that the appropriate type of project evaluation should rather be based on long term studies of participation, as Pekarik has suggested (2010). Some alternatives would include commissioning practitioners to train museum staff so that permanent staff runs the projects on a more regular long term basis, or museums developing long term artist residencies, or even hiring permanent staff coming from the puppeteer's community and discussing with

them how to develop assessment mechanisms. Which of these solutions will prove the most effective needs further research. In the field of applied theatre, however, there is research suggesting the success of similar initiatives, as is the case with Haddon, who is supportive of 'empowering teachers to overcome the de-skilling experience of being outshone by the "artists"' own' (Etherton & Prentki 2007: 151):

> For Haddon impact is again implicitly connected to sustainability. That, in turn, is partly about the skills, knowledge and attitudes left behind after the applied theatre 'expert' has finished her/his 'visit'. (ibid: 151).

Moreover, as Lave and Wenger suggest, we should not underestimate the significance of longer term collaborative practices within peripheral situated participatory learning among communities (in this case, museum staff and puppeteers). According to the findings, due to the interdisciplinary nature of the projects the role of the core community is expected to change each time, depending on the phase or the section of the project (pre-production, maintenance, construction, partnerships with other institutions, promotion, and so on). Throughout the thesis, I noted the significance of any strategy that embraces the practice in its broader sense, including its 'cultural life' (Lave and Wenger 2008: 101), its practical and theoretical framework. This might include, for example, health and safety issues or more trivial issues (who should be holding the keys of the museum workshop space), but certainly it implies a much broader spectrum including mutual respect, understanding, and willingness to become apprentices and learn from each other's expertise. Drawing on Lave and Wenger's theory, this process would release the practice from the need to include all aspects or all projects in an identical uniform model that leaves no space for experimentation and keeps out the uniqueness of each participant and each puppetry project (ibid).

Lave and Wenger maintain that 'productive activity and understanding are not separate, or even separable, but delicately related' (ibid: 102) and add that 'a deeper sense of the value of participation to the community and the learner lies in *becoming* part of the community (ibid: 111). It is in this way that 'use value of increasing participation' gains more importance compared to the 'exchange value of the outcomes of learning' (ibid: 112). The

cases suggested that a common language can also emerge, not so much to 'talk about' this collaborative practice but to speak the same language ('talk within') in order to better communicate while at work (ibid: 106, 107). For example, a vocabulary of the sense of touch, which pre-occupies modern museology, might emerge from such closer types of collaborations. The same principles accordingly apply to apprenticeship within all museum puppetry workshops.

The cases that involve collaborative practices imply that it is important to allow 'access to a wide range of ongoing activity… to information, resources, and opportunities for participation' (ibid: 101) as well as to initiate peripheral members to the core of the old members' practice, in order to understand the philosophy that lies behind it (ibid). As actually happened with some cases, these strategies could include, for example, puppeteers attending the learning department meetings, access to museum resources, meetings with experts and scientists, the training of museum staff about objects/puppets manipulation by professional puppeteers, and so on. In this way, all members have the chance to share issues and questions at any step during the process (for example, how to deal with delicate subjects, which are the recommended partnerships, bibliographies), and also to enrich the practice as a whole by giving it another, fresher perspective: the eye of the newcomer (ibid: 117).

However, the practice inevitably involves contradictions and tensions as evidenced in some cases (see Chapter Three). Lave and Wenger argue that the 'continuity/replacement' contradictions are among the major issues between communities of practice (ibid: 115). This suggests that problematic issues around expertise and hierarchy (see for example Forkbeard Fantasy, Patricia O'Donovan, Tim Hunkin, and the Minnesota History Center case studies) might be included here. It seems that flexibility is key to what Lave and Wenger describe as 'conflicts between masters and apprentices [which]… take place in the course of everyday participation' (ibid: 116). The same theorists also suggest an ideal type of practice to overcome conflicts where 'legitimate peripheral learning is far more than just a process of learning on the part of newcomers. It is a reciprocal relation between persons

and practice' (ibid); this is something which was also evidenced by data collected from most cases studies.

Moreover, throughout the thesis, I had the chance to examine the two communities as they alternate their roles, as core or peripheral members of the projects, depending on the stage of the project. Access to resources, respect for newcomers and their fresh ideas, learning of a special *code (language)* for the members to communicate with during the process (as opposed to the language that merely describes the process), familiarization with the general cultural and social context of the process all seemed to be of vital importance for most cases. Most importantly, they often aligned to Lave and Wenger's theory which attempts to bridge two seemingly different worlds within meaningful practice: 'If the person is both member of a community and agent of activity, the concept of the person closely links meaning and action in the world' (Lave & Wenger 2008: 122).

Nevertheless, it is notable once again that the community of museum puppeteers hardly know about each other's work, although the benefits of enhancing stronger bonds among members are remarkable, as Lave and Wenger suggest (2008).

According to Wenger, the community of practice requires primarily the combination of three elements—domain, community and practice—and only by regularly investing in all these elements may practitioners develop a community of their practice, and also be entitled as its members themselves:

> In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. A website in itself is not a community of practice. Having the same job or the same title does not make for a community of practice unless members interact and learn together. The claims processors in a large insurance company or students in American high schools may have much in common, yet unless they interact and learn together, they do not form a community of practice. But members of a community of practice do not necessarily work together on a daily basis. The Impressionists, for instance, used to meet in cafes and studios to discuss the style of painting they were inventing together. These interactions were essential to making them a community of practice even though they often painted alone... Members of a

community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction…nurses who meet regularly for lunch in a hospital cafeteria may not realize that their lunch discussions are one of their main sources of knowledge about how to care for patients. Still, in the course of all these conversations, they have developed a set of stories and cases that have become a shared repertoire for their practice. [240]

In this sense, museum puppeteers could take as an example the benefits of the active community of practice they are coming from (puppeteers) and/or negotiate their role in the already established museum theatre community of practice (for example, IMTAL). The findings suggest that there is a possibility for practitioners to engage more dynamically in their new membership. To start with, they could take into account the fact that 'the peer-to-peer learning activities typical of communities of practice offer a complementary alternative to more traditional course offerings and publications'.[241] Once the community of museum puppeteers is better established, then collaboration with the already established community of museum staff could possibly become more fluid and less antagonistic. In the long run, they could aim to consider themselves as equal co-members around the same practice:

> People usually think of apprenticeship as a relationship between a student and a master, but studies of apprenticeship reveal a more complex set of social relationships through which learning takes place mostly with journeymen and more advanced apprentices. The term community of practice was coined to refer to the community that acts as a living curriculum for the apprentice. Once the concept was articulated, we started to see these communities everywhere, even when no formal apprenticeship system existed. And of course, learning in a community of practice is not limited to novices. The practice of a community is dynamic and involves learning on the part of everyone. [242]

The data collected also indicate that museum puppetry is usually, though not exclusively, designed for a family audience (general audience). Also, according to the findings one common pitfall in the field is when practitioners and museum staff underestimate their

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[240] http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm (accessed 2 February 2012)

[241] http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm (accessed 2 February 2012)

[242] http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm (accessed 2 February 2012)

younger audiences (especially preschoolers) and provide only simplistic shows and uninspiring constructions and narratives.[243] Although this practice might work thanks only to the power of the world of objects (see Chapter One), I think it is a missed opportunity for everybody: the museum, the audience, the puppeteers and, overall, for museum puppetry and puppetry itself. Often the lack of finance to hire professional puppeteers either for building a show or activity or to train the museum staff has been the excuse for low quality, simplistic museum puppetry activities, especially the shows. Nevertheless, it seems that even with very basic training in some of the key skills in manipulation would make a big difference to the final outcome of the practice.

The findings maintained that it is the puppeteers' responsibility to thoroughly experiment with the rich sign system of their art and provide alternative solutions for authenticity/reliability issues. I argued that neither puppeteers nor museums should underestimate the importance of Heidegger's notion of authenticity, which is embedded in the self, connectedness, community and history and which lies beyond the rather vain idea of rigidly representing/copying reality. The theoretical framework of the practice implied here that pedagogy ethics are more related to this Heideggerian type of human centred 'authenticity' which in turn is related more closely to the intended conditions of learning than to the factual centred pursuit of 'scientific truth' and to the idea transmitting a 'pack of knowledge' from educators to learners.

Also, the thesis implied that it is up to the puppeteers to negotiate their personal worldview or make suggestions to the museum staff and decide together what strategies would work best. The cases suggested that they should also be ready, not so much to compromise their art or beliefs, but to improvise - even during the show when having to deal with the museum's reservations or audience reactions. If any alternative solutions they provide cannot be adjusted to meet the museum's policies or needs, then it seems more appropriate to change venue and act more independently on a theatre stage.

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[243] I am not referring, of course, to the case studies cited in this thesis.

Finally, the cases suggested that the more museums acknowledge that there are some basic aesthetic criteria (in visual and performing arts) to consider alongside the intended learning outcomes of an activity—or the fact that these are often interdependent—the greater the chances are to commission projects that they will be proud to host in their institution, shows that echo the museum's mission in its intention to enhance critical thinking and sensitize the senses, as well as to entertain.

The limitations of the research

In the very beginning, my intention was to conduct a research based both on the production of learning activities as well as on their reception with the audience.[244] However, although I recognize that examining the visitors' perspectives would certainly contribute to the new understandings in the field, it was clear to me that an international research would be too time-consuming and expensive a task for an individual researcher. This is the reason why ultimately I decided to focus solely on practitioners' perspectives hoping that a future study might approach the same topic from visitors' perspectives as well.

Acknowledging this limitation, I should note here that it also opened new areas of the research. By going deeper in the production of the practice, I explored the practitioners' perspective, focusing more on their inventiveness in intended learning outcomes. The focus on intended learning outcomes from an artist's perspective as opposed to the evaluation of visitors' learning outcomes from the museum's perspective (either formative or summative) broadened, in certain cases, the common expectations of the museum practice. In addition, it further enriched the contact zone of the two communities of practice, as it brought up new issues such as the different ways in which museums' learning goals, outcomes and their evaluation methodology might benefit from and be inspired by art practitioners such as puppeteers and their practice.

Data from the interviews often suggested that conventional ideas about the nature of learning can limit the museum-based learning process. For example, the application of such

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[244] For this purpose, at the start, I had also constructed a hand puppet to engage preschoolers in free playful conversations within a short narrative. This puppet was never used.

ideas might result in scripts being overloaded with wordiness, making the performance less interactive, less 'flowing'. This in turn can lead to a less engaging experience for the audience.

Also, focusing on practitioners' perspective broadened the common idea of exhibit designing. I arrived thus to unexpected areas of research (Chapter Four), such as interviewing puppeteers about their collaboration in museum exhibit designing (puppet exhibits) or even museum curating.

In addition, one of the main difficulties and limitations of this research was to locate practitioners, and make direct field observations of projects presented within the museum context as opposed to observations in other contexts (for example, libraries) or media (for example, recorded on DVD). In the cases where neither direct observation in the museum nor any other context was possible, I had to rely mainly on interviews, on practitioners' (and often on museum representatives') reflections and memories, which could only be mediated and subjective data. I explicitly clarified for each case study throughout the thesis as well as in Appendix I, where I had to use this kind of data.

New understanding

The multiple case studies presented in this thesis indicated that the genre I define as *museum puppetry* has often broken the stigma of puppetry as a second rate or simplistic art. They suggested that, for more than thirty years, a number of puppeteers have been offering high quality work to augment museum communication and interpretation practices. They also demonstrated that close collaboration between puppeteers and museum staff could further enhance related museum experiences.

As a general outcome, the thesis implied that there are a number of puppet friendly museums. However, the research clearly showed that museum puppetry continues to be a marginalized but strongly visitor-oriented and flexible practice. It also demonstrated that although it is very common for museums to host puppet shows (often not of the best quality) the commission of long-term museum puppetry projects remains, with few

exceptions, a missed opportunity. It also indicated that this is mainly due to staff and audience prejudices and not so much to limited financial resources.

More specifically, drawing on the data collected, the new understanding of the practical and theoretical framework of the practice encompasses the following key points:

- it examined practical techniques (such as the synergy between the performer and the puppet, audience engagement, the montage of the scenes and how to mix visuals into a coherent narrative based on the economy of the medium) that take advantage of the communicative power of puppets within museum contexts
- it examined the importance of museum puppetry beyond what is commonly called a puppet show, in the form of participatory activities
- it stressed the importance of the flexibility and economy of puppetry's imagery within the museum space and time limits
- it prioritized the significance of interaction, co-participation, and co-created narratives based on puppets' visuals and movement techniques in parallel to the idea of *gaps* and everydayness
- it thoroughly examined the role and importance of the sense of touch and craftsmanship and studied practical ways to incorporate them in museum projects
- it studied practical ways to use puppetry as a platform for enhancing the idea of visitors as manipulators
- it prioritized the significance of the idea of puppets as ultimate metaphors, and of the willing suspension of disbelief (puppetry convention) in the pre- or post-production phases of a project as these are intended to enhance the learning conditions for participatory activities
- it provided evidence of the inefficiency of the conventional ways to evaluate visitors' museum puppetry activities based on the generic learning outcomes model; it evidenced the need to explore new long term mechanisms for assessing the new idea of learning beyond factual knowledge and intended skills' development. This type of learning is associated with development, growth and self-confidence

- it indicated that museum theatre and museum puppetry are associated practices which could complement and benefit from each other
- it investigated alternative ways of exhibition curating and exhibit designing by puppeteers

Secondly, the thesis' new understanding focused on the benefits and issues among the two communities involved in the practice (puppeteers, museum staff):

- the thesis underlined the importance of long term participatory collaborations with open access to participants. It examined the benefit of collaborations as peripheral situated learning (a type of apprenticeship addressed both to museum staff and puppeteers); also it made clear the need to face and deal with any frictions and tensions emerging from the practice
- it focused on the post-museum philosophy and studied how this favors museum puppetry projects, providing evidence where over-expertise or hierarchy blocks communication in practice
- it made clear the need to seriously consider the maintenance of museum puppetry projects (shows, exhibits) by the museum staff beyond the duration of the exhibition that complements it
- it reflected on how the conventional type of knowledge as an isolated, rigid and serious concept disconnected from everyday life undermines the idea that learning can be entertaining, playful, meaningful and 'in flow'. It also provided some examples where this affects collaborations between museum staff and puppeteers. It suggested the need to evaluate this with long term projects instead of either being satisfied with personal impressions from the puppeteers or of neglecting or underestimating audience research for these projects
- it explored issues involved in historical re-enactments and reconstructions, especially related to the idea of authenticity/reliability and it introduced Heidegger's idea of 'historic authenticity', which is embedded in connectedness and belonging
- it demonstrated how the practice can benefit from individual open-mindedness among museum staff and from their willingness to take museum activities seriously

even if these have an arts—as opposed to scientific—background, as is the case with museum puppetry

- it stressed the importance of establishing a common approach and ethics for experimenting with knowledge and learning beyond the conventional methods

- it provided evidence that museums—and sometimes puppeteers themselves—perpetuate puppetry's stigmatization (that this is a simplistic art for preschoolers). It examined how this prevents museum staff from developing learning strategies and optimum conditions for learning within museum puppetry projects (especially when the same museums do hire/commission puppeteers and host puppet shows and activities)

- it explored the option of hiring puppeteers to work as permanent members of the museum learning staff

- it gave evidence of miscommunication, misunderstanding and mistrust among the two communities of practice, as well as ignorance of each other's social, cultural life and of particular crucial parameters/issues involved in their respective fields

- it provided evidence which suggested that puppeteers tend to listen well to the objects, and build compelling stories around them

Overall, the research reflected critically on the idea of knowledge and took it as an open process framed by the ethics of the institutions and involving partners. The learning and knowledge I am referring to here, refers to both the museum visitors and the communities involved in the collaborative projects or practices (museum staff, puppeteers). On the same issue in the case of museum theatre, Jackson and Kidd maintain that knowledge emerges from a '"well-told story" [which] has an unparalleled ability to engender interest in, and often empathy with, the life experiences of those considered "other" from ourselves' (2008:135).

Thus understood, learning in the case of museum puppetry and as the diagram below suggests, is not any more in the center of the projects but rather their by-product. According to the diagram, the willing suspension of disbelief of all museum puppetry parties involved generates a unique platform of the intended learning conditions.

MUSEUM PUPPETEERS

Engage their artistic and communicative skills
Negotiate meaning with museum and visitors
Protect and nurture spontaneity, imagination, fun – protect the *gap* and negotiate its depth
Adapt to the facilities of the museum space
Study, acknowledge and negotiate the institutions' policies on issues such as authenticity,
exhibiting practices, performing area, health and safety etc. (or else, think of changing venue)

RESEARCH & CONSTRUCTION OF METAPHOR

Narrative (verbal and visual language: text, visual images, movement, constructions), characters, unified aesthetics (humour, style, material, montage, mechanisms)

WILLING SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF
(objects' world - puppets' imagery) or **PARTICIPATION**

AUDIENCE

Interaction – Participation

Inclusion

LEARNING

MUSEUM

Social technology (contacts, partnerships with other institutions, audience research)
Facilities (arrange access to workshops, provide technicians, green room facilities, gallery facilitators, visitor staff, security guards)
Provide access to research material (literature, exhibits, meetings with experts)
Maintenance of the show (check exhibits regularly and cover repair costs / post production)
Keep up-to-date with puppeteers' work outside the museum
Negotiate subject, meaning and any liberties involved in the narrative (focus on the ones that obviously contradict real facts)
Take into serious account and preserve spontaneity, imagination, fun and the *gap* involved in the project
Balance the artistic freedom with the activity's potential for learning

This diagram recapitulates certain key points of the theoretical and practical frameworks of a museum puppetry project and reflects on the idea of learning and knowledge this thesis adopts. Most importantly and relating to the second research question, although it doesn't encompass them in their entirety, it highlights some of the parameters and particularities involved in collaborations between museum puppeteers and museum staff, given the

mutual understanding, open-mindedness and compatible worldviews between these two communities.

According to the diagram, the key idea is to build a metaphor powerful enough to engage participants in puppetry's convention. As the case studies suggested, once this is achieved, interaction can be further explored and built on in any direction. Case studies also suggest that audience inclusion is a never-ending process that starts in the pre-production process, but can take many forms afterwards. Although the conception and design of the metaphor are the puppeteers' main concern, this might be considerably facilitated and enriched within good collaborations and where there is mutual trust with the museum staff. Furthermore, according to the diagram, if the audience is motivated enough to engage with puppetry' convention (willing suspension of disbelief), it can have also a direct access to the metaphor of the project. As is the case with museum puppetry workshops or with Foster's Object Dialogue Boxes, the audience involvement in constructing the metaphor is much more dynamic. When people simply attend a show though, the audience rather undertakes a peripheral role to the metaphor's construction (although it still keeps a definitely vital role in giving their consent to the puppetry convention, or not).

The diagram also implies that among other activities, museum puppetry has the power to demystify knowledge by approaching it artistically with visitor friendly constructions. This aesthetic often draws on the idea of the unfinished, not perfect, non-absolute, low-tech, and everyday. Also it overcomes the taboo of using visitor-friendly objects along the museums' precious collections.

Here, the strength of the medium lies in its concreteness, in the 'physical link between the signifier and the signified' (Green & Pepicello 1983: 156). What the museum puppetry examples suggest is that what is treasured is not so much the construction material, its uniqueness or preciousness, but the way the manipulator (and constructor) approaches it and the time devoted to learning how to touch and work with matter and tools, to using the hands together with the heart and mind. It implies that it is the manipulator-constructor (professional or museum visitor) who transmits extra value to the objects, and once this

occurs, the objects 'yield' and respond. This is a very subtle encounter enhanced by the exterior look of the objects.

Suggestions for further practice

The research indicates the need to examine alternative assessment methods not based on learning outcomes which are examined immediately after the activity ends, but with the use of other methods that evolve with time, such as Pekarik's visitors' participation experiment. Applied theatre could be a good example for this as researches in the field suggest that 'assessing this longer term impact of applied theatre differs from concepts of monitoring and evaluation, which are an immediate assessment of achievement' (Etherton & Prentki 2007: 140).

Another point that requires further thought, as researches on applied theatre suggest, is that 'any assessment of the impact of activities involving theatre and drama must take account of a poetics that has such a powerful potential to alter the emotional states of those who participate and those who spectate' (ibid: 145). These researches also make an interesting distinction between the terms 'monitoring', 'evaluation', and 'impact assessment'. They emphasize that:

> …monitoring and evaluation tends to be constructed to measure what is intended by the initiative or project activity. Impact assessment, on the other hand, must take account of any result which provokes change, regardless of the stated aims of the project or programme (ibid: 147).

Overall, the case studies showed that hiring puppeteers to work among museum educators or collaborating with puppet constructors such as Chris Green, Penny Saunders or Patricia O'Donovan are some viable options within the museum learning, exhibit designing or curating field. [245] As puppet shows today tend to combine more and more performance with

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[245] While I was writing this thesis, I learned that Robert Poulter had been asked to collaborate with an exhibit design team to make a three dimensional display (a kind of static New Model Theatre) around Sigmund Freud's visit to the National Portrait Gallery in 1908. This was a commission by the Freud Museum in

manipulation, and puppeteers need to increasingly develop their acting skills, one puppeteer in a group of actors could have multiple roles: director or assistant director, coach for manipulation, constructor, consultant in writing to enhance the incorporation of inventive visual images (using objects and/or artefacts) in the show, workshop leader, and so on. Another alternative would be a flexible arrangement with puppeteers, like the one Wendy Jones from Minnesota History Center proposes: the Center commissions Z Puppets but gives them permission to perform outside the museum, while the institution keeps the copyright of the show and just 10% of its income.

Weil states for the museum's role:

> Museum workers are fundamentally technicians. They have developed and passed along to their successors systematic ways in which to deal with the objects (and with information about those objects) that their museums collect and make accessible to the public. Through training and experience they have developed a high level of expertise as to how those objects ought properly be collected, preserved restored, classified, catalogued, studied, displayed, interpreted stored, transported, and safeguarded' (2007: 35).

Weil maintains that these tasks are what museums are good at and this, in turn, is what external collaborators could take advantage of. On the other hand, as reiterated throughout the thesis, the primary criterion for any museum puppetry project is the audience engagement, which inherently assumes the idea of social inclusion, without making it an end in itself. In many museum puppetry programmes 'having fun' implies a democratic process. Watching a museum puppetry show involves the audience instantly and straightforwardly. This is difficult to achieve, sometimes even with a well-planned, politically correct museum learning strategy. Josie Appleton, writer on culture and politics, says:

> Museums should stick to what they know best – to preserve, display, study and where possible collect the treasures of civilization and of nature… The

London for an exhibition called *Objects in Mind*, which was in collaboration with the National Portrait Gallery.

curator who is concerned with the People, who loudly professes his respect
for every ethnic, class, age and gender group and who builds his exhibition
around what he perceives to be their needs, almost inevitably ends up
expressing disdain for the public ... The People's curator is motivated (or is
proclaimed so) by a concern not to look down on people, but ends up doing
just that (2007: 125).

O'Donovan claims that, as a general rule, 'Museums do not pay attention to having a good show.'[246] This said, it doesn't necessarily mean that low museum budgets preclude museums from hiring good shows or that current museum puppetry in its entirety is a mediocre but 'effective enough' medium for preschoolers. Instead, this might mean that, in some cases, museums might lack the time or the criteria to judge whether a museum puppetry event is worth hiring or whether a puppet exhibit is worth commissioning. They might also be unaware of the potential of museum puppetry (or museum theatre) and therefore lack the tools to incorporate such an activity into the initial designing process of an exhibition.

It seems to me that in such a case, museums first need to evaluate the appeal a well planned museum puppetry project has to its audience. Also if they may not feel confident enough to negotiate all the necessary issues with the practitioners they could perhaps think of hiring a specialist cultural broker (cf. Kurin 1997). Especially for big museums, this would save them time and energy, and enrich the dialogue while smoothing any tensions among the two communities of practice.

It has been suggested that '[W]e still know relatively little about how people respond to exhibits in museums and galleries and interact with and around the objects and artefacts they contain' (Heath & Vom Lehn 2002: 13). In addition, Watson supports that 'evaluation of educational and learning outcomes… are mainly focused on school-age children' (2007: 2). Drawing on the references above, I believe that museums could undertake evaluation research — addressed to all ages— for the museum puppetry programmes they hire with the same professionalism that they use for their exhibitions (front end research, summative research, mock up exhibits, etc.). It is often said that museums need to adjust their audience

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[246] P. O'Donovan. Personal interview, 6 October 2009.

research according to what is easiest for the funders to understand and to value. If this is the case, then I think museums should really put their efforts into familiarising the funders with recent findings in learning and museum communication.

I would also suggest that from the initial design of an exhibition the museum starts thinking of various alternatives for parallel, complementary activities (museum theatre, museum puppetry, workshops). They could commission practitioners accordingly and well in advance for specially tailored programmes. If museums are well informed about the work and repertoire of certain theatre or puppet theatre companies, they could risk hiring shows even where they do not correspond exactly with major annual celebrations or events (births, deaths, etc. of renowned scientists or artists). This could perhaps open up a vivid dialogue in unexpected ways, create interesting associations between the past and the present and relieve practitioners from the burden of having always to adjust their work and inspiration to the museums' strict demands or celebratory programming (cf. Tim Britton's comments in Chapter Four). For their part, puppeteers, especially those who are not both constructors and manipulators, should seek help or collaboration on their weaker skills (for example some are better in working with certain materials than others, some are better in construction than in manipulation and vice versa). Perhaps if museums undertake more systematic, long-term collaborations with practitioners, and really open up the dialogue with them, they might pave the way for mundane discussions about budget or health and safety to be transformed into a fruitful, backstage museum experience in time, in trust, and in flow. I believe that the time devoted to a project is time gained back, evidenced in the audience's engagement with an exhibit, a show, a workshop, an activity.

Also, the thesis argues that museum puppetry programmes are ideal and very flexible for small-scale productions. Therefore, perhaps museums could include them more frequently in their outreach programmes, when they need to communicate their collections outside their walls, in remote places, or hard-to-reach communities. Perhaps they could even commission puppet exhibit designers for projects embedded in the heart of society. Playful, interactive, outreach exhibits could be an attractive and ideal medium for 'busy people.' These 'great small' museums could take the form of portable-dismountable durable

interactive puppet exhibits or slot machines (peep shows, automata, mechanical sculptures, accompanied by appropriate museum interpretation etc.) installed temporarily in public places outside the museum walls. Perhaps there might be potential in such installations, not only to advertise a museum, but also to make an impact on our everyday lives, the way we understand knowledge, as well as the role of museum.

Finally, a maintenance policy needs to be considered especially regarding big, expensive productions like the Brewery troupe's shows. An institution like a prestigious museum with expertise in public relations and long lists of contacts, could perhaps undertake the management and distribution of its own commissions, for its own profit. As soon as the production cost is covered then the museum could negotiate the post-production costs (performance fees, transport, etc.) with other partners, invest in outreach events or even touring co-productions with other museums or learning institutions that have common interests. Further research might show whether bigger efforts and time devoted to building, locating and promoting a good quality show actually pay off in terms of efficiency and audience appreciation, more than a greater variety of -less stimulating- new commissions.

Further, what can be drawn from large-scale productions hosted in big museums is that easy access (ramps as opposed to stairs) to and from the stage could perhaps taken into consideration in advance when still designing the building. Basic green room and technological equipment facilities, together with other practical issues, show caring and goodwill and contribute to the practitioners' comfort and to an uncompromised show.

Finally, even when designing a new exhibition, museums could take into serious consideration recycling their constructions, or using recycled constructions, as Marni Gittleman from Skirball Center suggests:

> You have a choice: you could work with something that looks like wood but is made out of plastic, it is real, not alive, but real. Chris [Green]… did not mould or cast the real thing. Many spaces for families use fiberglass, synthetics, etc. because the durability factor has some impact there. What we found though is that when we stay simple and low tech then things have endurance. We like the way that our camels are starting to look; they have a

patina now, they have a story. We picked a material that would age beautifully over time as compared to what looks like it was rutted and needed to be replaced over time. They are more alive.[247]

Chris Green, a particularly sensitive artist and museum puppeteer, experiments but also struggles with the precarious balance between the museums and the arts. He suggests some good starting points for uplifting the dialogue between the two communities of practice:

> Human ecology…We all respond to it … we are not conscious of that, all it means is that humanity is in relationship to the environment… the built environment is in relation with the natural environment… how can there be a symbiosis there, so that there is a harmony... Preservation is a strong word which I think is problematic, because what it means is to stop, to preserve something is that you stop change. I don't believe in that at all, you do need to change and renovate certain things, but there is a core set of values that art has the responsibility to respond to. Asking certain questions of what we are doing… It is not like a religious belief, but it seems to me that if I am making things out of materials, I want those materials … to come from responsible sources when possible, it is very, very difficult to do… In ten years there will be a flow, it will be much easier... But now to really do that, it takes twice as long, twice the expense… I don't just build things arbitrarily; materials have a content, they are speaking of something, not just a beautiful object, they are reflecting something larger than itself… I don't have answers, I am not saying 'everybody recycle,' because that is not necessarily the answer, but to say 'We live in a material world that is really problematic,' that is enough to have people think… Self critical but also not passive, that is a lot to ask for an artwork.[248]

Because, after all, as Davis points out: 'Museums must… relate to, serve and interact with several communities, and through their actions define for themselves what their 'museum community' is' (2007: 60).

It is a common belief that 'visitors come to museums to see "cool stuff"' – they don't come to do things they could (and maybe should) do elsewhere' (Adams & Moussouri, 2002: 16). Some visitor studies researches suggest that audiences prefer to use the museum's website

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[247] M. Gittleman. Personal interview, December 2008.

[248] C. Green. Personal interview, December 2008.

information in electronic format pre- or post- museum visit, while it is the onsite visit that makes their 'experience special or unique':

> Visitors expect to see (and do) the extraordinary or to see the ordinary from an extraordinary perspective. A note of caution: this extraordinary/ordinary issue is more like a continuum or a tightrope. Visitors do not respond well if they perceive they have 'been-there, done-that'. However, if an experience or a technology to access the experience is 'too strange', visitors also perceive this to be a problem (ibid.)

Often museums use their original items as a springboard to talk about extraordinary narratives such as those involved in cutting-edge art, scientific discoveries, living legends, sacred wars, human suffering or wonder, valuable jewels, extinct species. And visitors do get amazed by these mesmerizing exhibits and larger-than-life stories: they are reminded that the world used to be, and still is, awe-inspiring. Offered a condensed taste of the world's cultures, visitors can feel inspired and touched. However, they can also occasionally be overwhelmed, while feeling obliged to follow the proposed one-way path of interpretation where there is no space (gap) for a personal narrative. I believe this is where museum puppetry (similarly to museum theatre and other parallel museum activities) has a role to play in museums.

If we take for granted that it is not easy for humans to endure great doses of unfamiliarity within a limited period of time (they might feel inferior, fooled, suspicious or indifferent) then novelty derived from a recognizable everydayness seems a friendlier option. Museum puppetry narratives have the potential to bring on a human scale an overwhelming museum experience full of humanity's big moments and to give visitors a break to draw breath. They provide the audience with the time to reflect and respond: to enter into a dialogue with the wonder of the world; to maintain that wonder but still to have the choice to remain calm and critical, to feel touched but in control. This, in my opinion, is the greatest contribution of puppets in museums: the human scale they convey despite all their superhuman power (in flying, dying, resurrecting, etc).

APPENDIX I

The following is a list of shows/puppet exhibits/exhibitions/workshops I directly observed (unless stated otherwise) during my field visits.

Chapter One:

Visual Poems (Yalino Mousiko Theatro, Athens)

War Horse performance and behind the stage tour with Adrian Kohler form Handspring puppet company (National Theatre, London, UK)

Punch and Judy May Fair Festival (Covent Garden, London, UK)

Chapter Two:

Matthew Cohen: *Ramayana* (British Library)

Emily Capstick:

Over the Sea to London - London Museum (Docklands)

Coming Home (DVD)

Busy Bee - People's History Museum-Manchester

Ali McCaw:

The Musical Stonemason (extract on DVD)

Robert Poulter:

Mr. Turner Gets Steamed Up (private house)

Franz Hals in Haarlem (Art Workers Guild)

Pandemonium (DVD)

Oh! – Smith (Art Worker Guild)

The Great Belzoni - Sir John Sloane's Museum

The Loyal 47 (Art Workers Guild)

8 ½ (private house)

Robert Poulter's workshop (as participant)

Horniman Museum workshops

Day of the Dead event - British Museum

Sofia Yalouraki's puppetry activity / show - Museum of Cycladic Art

Science Museum of Minnesota:

Murder and the Mysterious Miss Squito

Riddles of Disease

Don't Call me Monkey

Polar Bear Journey

Minnesota History Center:

Minnesota AHA (commissioned by the Minnesota History Center, attended a performance given for private public)

Kensington Palace:

Enchanted Palace

Theodora Skipitares' shows *(*extracts on DVD *The Age of Inventions*; *Defenders of the Code*: *A Musical History of Genetics*; *Empire Appetite*)

Chapter Three:

Eidophysikon automaton in action (DVD)

Geoff Felix: *Punch and Judy* show - Russell Square

Patricia O'Donovan: *Amanili Songs* - Bible Lands Museum of Jerusalem

Brad Brewer: *Louis Latimer* show (DVD)

Observation of the Erth's giant dinosaur puppet exhibits - Natural History Museum in Los Angeles (I did not observe them being manipulated during the show)

Chapter Four:

Puppet exhibits - Horniman Musuem, V&A and Benthal Green Museum of Chidlhood

In Praise of Shadows exhibition – Benaki Museum

Alexander Calder: The Paris Years 1926-1933 - Whitney Museum

Le Cirque Calder DVD

Rowland Emett's Engines of Enchantment - Cartoon Museum

Wallace & Gromit Present: A World of Cracking Ideas - Science Museum of London

The Secret Life of Home exhibition – Science Museum of London

Discovery Gallery - Walsall New Art Gallery

Robot Zoo exhibition (Horniman Museum)

Forkbeard Fantasy's Discovery Box – Dorset County Museum

Forkbeard Fantasy's workshop (puppets, constructions)

Forkbeard Fantasy's DVD extracts of performances and short films including the *Architects of Fantasy* exhibition

Karl and Kimberley Foster: Object Dialogue Box - Manchester Art Gallery / Sheffield Museum (direct observation of a school visit)

Skirball Cutlural Center / Chris Green: *Noah's Arch*'s puppet exhibits (static and manipulated exhibits)

Puppet show for preschoolers - New York Hall of Science

Natural History Museum of London: puppet show for preschoolers

Tate Modern Museum / Eden Solmon: Puppets at the Learning Department Storage Area

Philip Genty: *Concert Incroyable* (DVD)

The initial plan of interview questions

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY QUESTIONS	DATA SOURCE AND METHODS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS
0. Bio info, organisational issues		Puppeteers / Performers – Museum educators Date Name of institution – practitioner – museum's position/ department Age / gender Title of the programme Email addresses Phone numbers – Skype address
1a. What is museum puppetry? - Differentiate it from similar practices, such as museum theatre. - Mapping out various examples. - Challenges and difficulties in practicing museum puppetry	Interview Puppeteers - Performers – Museum Staff *(see questions on the right)* Investigate the visual material *(photos, flyers, videos) provided by the archives of the puppeteers and the museums (references to the setting, how and where this is staged in the museum space, the visitors' space, interaction with the audience, and so on, contribute to the mapping of the examples and the possible difficulties)* *(to define museum puppetry, examples)* Observation of live programmes *(as above, plus a first hand*	Puppeteers - Performers – Museum Staff - What is the title of the programme:? Could you describe in a few words: the main subject the plot the characters of the programme(s)? *(mapping various examples, potential uses)* - Where exactly in the museum was the programme presented and where was the visitor's space? *(locate the activity in space and investigate how organically or not this fits within the museum environment-difficulties)*

	feeling of the ambiance of the activity and better understanding of the audience's response) a. close up photos of settings - puppets b. describe the design of the puppets, material type, dimensions, constructions. c. summary of the story d. description of the characters e. description of the interaction with the participants f. reference to specific exhibits-collections g. pre & post show activities *(to define museum puppetry-examples)* ARCHIVES Investigation of evaluation reports from previous programmes or any relevant documents (contracts with the companies, and so on) *(to define museum puppetry-examples)*	- What was the duration of the show? - What was the time schedule for the pre-production (script, constructions), rehearsal time? - Were space-time-equipment (light-sound) limitations prearranged? By whom? *(practical issues that may determine how easy-organized or, alternatively, how difficult could the whole process be)* - Why did you choose this type of interpretation/activity for this specific subject/exhibit/event, and did not choose instead an interactive exhibit, film, video, museum theatre? *(defining "la raison d' être" of museum puppetry and differentiate it from other types of interpretation, studying the criteria for commissioning a puppetry programme)* - What type of issues/subjects do you think that museum puppetry as a medium is good at exploring/presenting? Why? (controversial/ sensitive issues) *(to find out whether there is a connection between specific media of interpretation and delicate and sensitive issues - possibly differentiate museum puppetry from other media)* - In what way this project was a challenge for you as a puppeteer/performer? Are there any issues involved in working in a museum setting as opposed to other settings?

		(difficulties, define museum puppetry as an activity specially designed for the museum)
		- Do you collaborate with a specific puppet company outside the museum or you prefer to collaborate with a number of companies? Why? *(mapping museum puppetry)*
		- How would you describe the future of museum puppetry projects? *(how museum puppetry could be developed in the future)*
1b. Is the triple interaction visitors-exhibits-puppets possible and effective? - In what ways do the images and action created by puppets' constructions, narrative, characters, etc. intend to make a link with the museum's collection and to facilitate the dialogue among museum exhibits? - In what ways do puppets or everyday objects intend to facilitate the dialogue between museum visitors and the collection?	Interview Puppeteers - Performers – Museum Staff *(see questions on the right)* Evaluation reports *(secondary material to investigate the efficiency of the programme as far as the interaction is concerned)*	Puppeteers - Performers – Museum Staff - What is the role of puppets in the museum? (secondary role as accessories, protagonists in programmes and shows, mascots of the museum, funny characters just for gags, exhibits-automata, all or any of the above) - In what ways does the pre-production or the post production process (subject, construction, concept, narrative, etc.) take the museum setting into consideration? *(link between the museum and puppetry)* How do you understand visitors' contribution during the programme? How do you feel the audience responds to the programme? - How you develop interaction with the museum collection or exhibits?

		(mapping various ways of interaction between the museum, visitors, puppetry)
		Who was responsible for the concept and for the script? What were the principals that were taken into consideration for writing the script? *(find connections among museum, visitors, puppetry)*
		- How do you decide about the type of puppets and settings constructions you choose to build (material, size, style, type, manipulation, the performer was seen or hidden, and so on)?
		(mapping various examples and see how puppet techniques and style could possibly affect the interaction between exhibits and visitors form practitioners' perspective)
		- What are the common practices applied during pre or post visit activities?
		- Who is responsible (museum/puppeteers) for the pre/post visit activity? *(study whether and how often the activities incorporate/introduce the medium ie the puppet, or they work on the subject independently of museum puppetry)*
		- Have you ever used ready made objects (object theatre) to build your narrative? Did you notice any difference between object theatre medium and puppet theatre in terms of how

		this fits in the museum setting?
		- In terms of how visitors react to it? *(investigating the impact on the interaction visitors-museum-animated objects from practitioners' or museum staff's perspective)*
		- To what degree is the puppeteer involved in the dramatic action (was he a separate character? A narrator? The alter ego of the puppet? A commentator bridging the audience with the puppet?)
		- If you need your audience to be familiar with certain key concepts, or to have some information about the story before or while watching the show, how do you communicate it?
		- Would you say that, most of the time, the puppets you use are of: a. high status (they know all the answers), b. low status (they need the audience's help) or, c. together with the audience they "explore" around the performance's or the museum's narrative? *(investigate the interaction with the visitors-exhibits-puppets from practitioners' perspective)*
		- Could you give us any examples where puppetry was a solution? (to a problematic exhibition, an exhibition that

		needed to be refreshed and was presented to the same audience, and such)
		- Do you consider museum puppetry as another way of exhibiting? In what ways? Could you compare museum puppetry to other communication or interpretation media? *(impact of puppetry on museum exhibitions from practitioners' or museum staff's perspective)* *(define museum puppetry-difficulties)*
1c. Could we consider museum puppetry as a potentially suitable interpretative means for any museum collection/target group, activity, museum space? Or is it better used only for special occasions, such as: - thematic exhibitions i.e. puppet collections - attracting specific ethnic minorities i.e. cultures with a long tradition of puppetry - age group i.e. preschool children – Does it make sense to talk about adult museum puppetry? - shows, i.e. a	Interview Puppeteers - Performers – Museum Staff *(see questions on the right)*	Performers – museum educators - What was the target group of the programme? *(various examples according to age, culture, etc.)* - Have you ever developed a puppetry programme for specific audiences such as: - adolescents? - adults? - a certain ethnic minority? - visitors with disabilities? - How does this affect the preproduction process? -type of puppets? -subject? -interaction? - Are there any advantages/disadvantages of the museum puppetry programmes compared to other media of interpretation for specific target groups? - Do you feel any difference in the way participants react to

performance designed for a specific exhibition presented in the theatre or in an isolated space of the museum		puppets, according to their gender, age, status? Could you talk more about it? - Are there any major difference between the children's and the teacher's / adult's response? What are these? *(investigates if museum puppetry for adults or visitors with disabilities is being practiced, investigate if museum puppetry is among the media of museums to attract audiences from various ethnicities, adults' reactions)* - Could you describe in a few words why and how do you use puppets for the preschoolers / primary school students? How do they react compared to other interpretative media? (evaluation reports?) *(justify the effectiveness of museum puppetry for children under 12 from practitioners' perspective)* - Have you ever used museum puppetry for a subject other than science? If yes, could you describe it in a few words? - If no, do you think that museum puppetry for subjects other than science is a possible challenge and why? *(museum puppetry and thematic exhibitions)*
2 a. Research background of a museum puppetry activity (sources, co-productions between museums and artists) - Content research	Interview Puppeteers - Performers – Museum Staff *(see questions on the right)* OBSERVATION Observe museum theatre	Puppeteers - Museum educators - What research methods and sources do you use to develop your scripts and constructions? - In what ways does the

issues for independent visitors - challenges - difficulties	programmes – take notes - pictures - videos	museum examine the research background of the programme? *(investigate the role of the museum in the preproduction process, map the research methods of practitioners)* - What are the main difficulties when incorporating research into the art of puppetry? (the details around historical persons, events, scientific facts, costumes, facial characteristics, dates, exact words, order of events, scale, proportions…what to keep and what to leave out) - Would you consider museum theatre or museum puppetry an artistic compromise? Why yes/no? *(investigate the difficulties, and the idea of 'extreme metaphor' inherent in puppetry and whether this 'distorts reality' overall, or is another way of looking at it, locate the difficulties in combining learning and artistic processes)* - How effective do you think puppets are in dealing with controversial or sensitive issues? *(controversial, sensitive issues in science and puppetry from puppeteers' and museum staff's perspective)* - When does an artistic metaphor – costumes, script, fictional events and characters, etc.- become problematic *vis a vis* the museum's credibility and

		authority? *(study the non-scientific use and risky use of museum puppetry)* - Do you remember any visitor's reaction against the use of artistic means (i.e. puppetry) to explore science? What was the main argument? *(negative impact of the media to the visitors form museum staff and practitioners' perspective)*
2b. How puppetry intends to facilitate affective and social learning and to what degree it also helps people link what they learn at the museum to real life situations.	Interview Puppeteers - Performers – Museum Staff *(see questions on the right)* Observation, museum – puppeteers archives	- How do you use the art of puppetry in the pre- and/or post-production process to engage the audiences' imagination? (real life characters, situations, real life movement, design) - How do you use the art of puppetry in the pre- and/or post-production process to achieve identification with the characters? (real life characters, situations, real life movement, design) - How do you use the art of puppetry to promote interaction among museum visitors? (tasks, puppet manipulation, etc.)
		Would you like to add anything else that might relate to the subject which you feel we haven't covered?

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