

**Contemporary Punch and Judy in performance: an  
ethnography of traditional British glove puppet theatre.**

**Martin John Reeve**

Royal Holloway College  
University of London

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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



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Martin John Reeve

## **Abstract**

No sustained research has been done into the traditional British glove puppet form Punch and Judy since the 1980s; no ethnographic research has ever been done on it. The research addresses the gaps in this knowledge and seeks to discover how production and reception of the form has changed in the last 25 years and how it is currently constituted. The research is particularly concerned to discover who is now performing the show, how it is performed and where it is performed. It is also concerned with how its reception is mediated by current preoccupations with nostalgia and the commodification of the historical.

The research relies on close comparison with previous studies; it also investigates the approaches of earlier commentators. More centrally, it is an ethnographic study of current practice undertaken in close association with many of the performers themselves, especially members of the Punch and Judy College of Professors who are collaborative partners in the project. Through participant-observation, the research seeks to get closer to understanding the dramaturgy, the material culture and the motivations of the performers themselves than previous studies have attempted to.

The research has discovered that significant changes have occurred in Punch and Judy in the past 25 years, in two principal areas. Firstly, in the control of the tradition by performers themselves. They have set up organizations, instituted dedicated festivals and produced discourses about their traditions, practices and aspirations. Secondly, there have been changes in the contexts, geographical and cultural, within which the form sits. It is no longer to be found mainly at the seaside, but more typically at festivals which deliberately invoke a sense of the past. Whilst these two changes mark a significant break with the continuities of context and styles of performance, the form itself remains remarkably resilient.

### **Acknowledgements**

My thanks go to my academic supervisor, Dr Matthew Isaac Cohen, the academic advisor, Dr Chris Megson, and my non-academic supervisors, Clive Chandler and Glyn Edwards, for their help and support. I would also like to thank all of the Punch performers who have given their time, enthusiasm and encouragement. Especial thanks go to my family, Charlotte, Molly, Florence and Martha for their patience and support.



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## Preface

### **A Punch and Judy show**

The puppeteer arrives alone. He parks his van in a roadside bay 50 yards or so from where he will pitch his booth, on a wide green just out of sight of a beach which is over a little rise. He unloads a long hold-all and a large suitcase and straps them onto a golf trolley. He puts coins into a parking meter, something he will have to remember to do several times during the day. Today he is lucky, he has found a nearby parking spot and will not have to carry the heavy equipment too far, though he has reduced the weight as much as possible, losing unnecessary puppets, the ones he thought when he made them would be sensational, but which in practice have limited mileage. He has got rid of one or two routines for the same reason, though he might do these in other circumstances, or, for a change, swap with some he is using today. He is lucky also because the weather is good; it's a near-cloudless day and, at 11 in the morning in early July, the sun is high. He left home an hour ago and the roads were clear. During the school holidays when people are heading for the coast he will have to leave earlier. He is booked to play this pitch twice a week during the summer months. The money is not as good as some bookings, but it is regular and as the local council are paying, it is guaranteed to be in his bank account within the month: a bird in hand. If a really lucrative booking comes in, he can get a deputy to do this one. As it is a familiar pitch, it is relatively stress-free: he knows the likelihood of getting a parking space, he knows where he can buy a coffee and sandwiches; he can keep the booth in sight when he does and he knows he can ask people here to watch it for him when he goes to the toilets which are also nearby, and clean. There are a few kids playing football a little way off, two or three young mothers stroll by with their pushchairs and up to the promenade to buy ice-cream and a tea from a café.

He pulls the trolley to his usual spot. He unpacks the wooden frame and the canvas covering. It is a 'lazy tongs' frame and opens out like a concertina in two halves. The top half is secured into the bottom half with aluminium sleeves. Extra wooden struts slot in place horizontally to add stability. The one across the front has hooks to hang his puppets on. He places the booth facing the grassy rise which will act as a seating rake; the audience will face away from the sun. He wraps the red and white striped

canvas around the frame, zipping it up at the back. He puts the canvas roof on top and attaches the 'playboard' on which the puppets will move about and bang their heads. He velcros a short tasselled cloth around the front of the playboard to disguise the join; various characters will poke their heads under this during the show. He hangs the three pieces of the proscenium arch, the two sides and the top, around the opening at the front of the booth - he has put a lot of thought into making these and is pleased that he can attach them without using wing-nuts or bolts. The proscenium carries the Professor's name - most Punch performers call themselves 'Professor' - and declares itself a 'Punch and Judy' show. It is brightly and cleanly painted and shows a picture of Punch and Judy and the baby. One or two passers-by ask him what time the show will start. He secures the tent with guy-ropes which have red, white and blue bunting which flutters in the breeze. He hangs bright red velvet curtains inside the proscenium and places a wooden clock on the playboard announcing the time of the show. He hooks a loud-speaker on to the top of the proscenium and goes inside to connect it to the battery operated amplifier. He tests it by playing a short burst of fairground music from his ipod which he has plugged into it. He takes the puppets out from the case: a Monkey, Joey the Clown, a Policeman - though sometimes, if he is doing a 'Victorian' show, he uses a Beadle instead - a Doctor, a Crocodile, the Devil, Punch, Judy and the Baby. He always hangs the puppets in the same places so he can put them on without looking. He hangs a 'hammock' inside the tent under the playboard so he can drop them in when he has finished with them. Finally, he tests his swazzle - Punch's voice - to make sure it is moist and working. He sets another one to hand in the booth in case he loses this one, or swallows it. He tidies everything away into the booth leaving enough room to stand. He plays 'hands in front of face' so his head is directly behind the proscenium and hidden by a back-cloth; he can see the audience through this, but they cannot see him. He has set up the booth hundreds of times before and can do it in 20 minutes if he is not interrupted. He has a few minutes to spare and he unfolds a camping chair, sits and reads his newspaper.

A young man from the council recreations department cycles up to ask if everything is OK. They have a chat and a laugh and the man cycles away again. It's nearly time to do the show. The puppeteer puts on some fairground music to draw a crowd, although seven or eight have arrived already, a couple of young mothers, a grandparent and a few four or five year-old children, eating ice-cream and enjoying



the rare sunshine. During the holidays there will be a bigger, more mixed crowd, but the puppeteer is quite happy with a small crowd today. As the music plays more people gather, one mother has brought a picnic rug to sit on. The puppeteer interrupts the music to announce, 'Roll up, roll up and see the Punch and Judy show, starting in three minutes.' By now there are perhaps twenty people assembled.

Some performers come 'out front' at the start of the show, but this Punchman prefers to stay inside the booth. He announces over the PA that the show is about to start, but that the stage needs a clean, so, 'for the little ones, here is Mickey the Monkey.' Mickey draws back the curtains and fetches a mop and bucket. He tries to mop the stage as the music continues, but, to the delight of the children, the bucket keeps moving away from him and the mop starts to hit him on the head. Mickey disappears and we hear the Punchman's voice again, 'the clock is gone, it's time for the show'.

Joey appears and encourages the audience to 'wake' Mr Punch, getting them to shout out 'wake up Mr Punch'. At first this is not successful, so he blackmails the parents into joining in, telling the children that if they don't, 'it's because they don't love you'. This is taken in good humour and gets a big laugh from the adults. They shout, but Punch calls up that he is having a 'wee wee'; water shoots up from below the playboard, splashing the audience. One or two children scream with laughter; Joey rocks with laughter and says, 'Oh dear, what a naughty boy!' Punch emerges and dodges about the stage, noisily banging his head on the proscenium and the playboard. Joey tells him 'we want a nice show with lots of laughs'.

Punch calls for Judy from 'downstairs'. She is reluctant as she is doing the washing and says in a deep, gruff voice, 'I don't want to get my knickers in a twist'. Punch insists and she comes up. She sees the audience and, more demurely, says, 'I didn't know we had company'. Punch asks for a kiss; Judy replies, 'I like a kiss, a nice big, wet, soppy kiss'; the children laugh. She counts to three and they go into a stylised kiss, their heads circling each other and then 'kissing' very noisily. Judy declares, 'you're worse than the milkman! I'll go and get the baby'. She tells the audience, 'We called him Bill because he came at the end of the month.' They throw the baby to

each other; Judy remarks, 'this is very difficult for puppets to do you know, sometimes we even get a round of applause'. The audience applaud. Punch then sits on the baby, Judy asks what he is doing; 'baby sitting', he says.

She leaves Punch to look after the baby, giving the audience strict instructions to call her if Punch hurts the baby at all. Punch tries to teach the baby to walk, placing him at one side of the stage, standing at the other and crying, 'walky, walky, walky'. When Punch shouts 'sweeties', the baby shoots across the stage into his arms. This happens several times. The baby starts to cry and Punch pats him on the head to try to calm him down; the baby cries even louder and Punch picks him up and repeatedly knocks his head against the proscenium. This makes matters worse, so he throws the baby downstairs, shouting gleefully, 'that's the way to do it!' The audience have started to call for Judy who comes to see what has happened. She asks the audience if Punch threw the baby downstairs; Punch says, 'Oh no I didn't', and without prompting, the audience cry, 'Oh yes you did'.

Judy fetches her stick and tells Punch to bend over. She asks the audience if she should give Punch, 'a little smack or a great big smack'. 'A big smack', they cry. She smacks his bottom. Punch grabs the stick and they fight over the weapon, moving up and down at either end as if they are on a see-saw. He wins and hits her. Judy says, 'My mother was right, I should never have married him.' Punch floors her with the slapstick, rolls her backwards and forwards on the playboard and tosses her downstairs, again crying, 'that's the way to do it'.

Immediately, a Policeman's whistle is heard and the slow-witted 'PC Jellybottom' pops up looking for 'a very naughty man called Punch'. The audience tell him Punch is downstairs; as he looks down, Punch comes up behind him and hits him on the head. A chase ensues during which the Policeman is hit several times from behind. Eventually he confronts Punch who knocks him down, rolls him about and tosses him downstairs. One mother says to her child, 'he's naughty'.

Joey reappears and plays hide-and-seek with Punch, hiding behind the curtains, then under the playboard, continually outwitting Punch. He lets Punch find him and tells him he has a surprise for him; he goes off to fetch it. Punch sits, excitedly musing on

what the surprise could be. Joey comes up with sausages, which he calls 'squasages, because I can't say sausages'. The children try to point out this inconsistency to him. He goes off to fetch a frying-pan, leaving the sausages on the playboard. Punch sings a ditty, 'sausages for breakfast, sausages for tea, I like sausages and they like me!' He repeats this several times, swaying from side to side. As he does, unseen by him, a Crocodile appears, also swaying in time. The children start to point and shout, the Crocodile disappears. Punch sings again, the Crocodile appears again, this time nearer to Punch; he bobs down and moves the sausages. Punch tries to work out what is going on. He sits on the sausages to prevent them being stolen. The Crocodile comes up and opens his jaws. Some of the children start to scream. There is by now a great deal of tension amongst the younger children, some of whom cling to their mothers; the parents are clearly enjoying the level of engagement their children are showing. Punch hits the Crocodile with his stick; the Crocodile swallows it and grabs the sausages which he also swallows. He bites Punch on the nose and, after Punch has struggled to free himself, the Crocodile disappears.

Punch lies flat out on the playboard and calls for the Doctor, who appears, telling the audience, 'my name is Doctor Duck, because I'm a bit of a quack'. This joke is lost on some of them. He examines Punch, and gets a kick on the head for his troubles. He tries to get Punch to stand up, but Punch keeps collapsing. He brings his 'medicine' for the Crocodile bite. The medicine is in the form of a stick. Punch offers to give it to the Doctor who replies, 'Doctors never take their own medicine - you must have a dose of this three times a day'. Punch retorts, 'No, I mustn't', grabs the stick and knocks the Doctor out, rolling him on the playboard and tossing him downstairs. He exclaims, 'what a pity, what a pity, what a pity!'

There is a growl from below and a red, horned, cloaked and leathery-winged Devil appears, telling Punch, 'I am Beelzebub, I am Old Nick, I am The Devil and I've come to make you suffer'. Punch replies, 'I don't want any supper'; 'I've come to take you somewhere hot'; Punch asks, 'Costa Del Sol?'; 'Not Costa Del Sol, but it will cost you your soul, I've come to take you to Hell, where you will spend the rest of eternity shaving monkeys, and there will never be another Punch and Judy show ever again'. Punch offers to fight him and they go off to get their sticks.

Joey comes up and encourages the audience to cheer for Punch if he is winning and boo the Devil if he is winning, since, if the Devil wins, there will be no more Punch and Judy, 'And we wouldn't want that would we?' The fight begins and after several reversals of fortune, accompanied by loud cheers and boos, Punch hits the Devil's stick out of his hand, knocks him out and rolls him on the playboard. Joey appears and declares, 'Mr Punch has beat [sic] the devil and the old Punch and Judy show is safe'. They pick up the Devil by his feet and drop him downstairs.

Joey tells the audience it's the end of the show, to give themselves a big round of applause and to give three cheers for the Punch and Judy show and for the local council who have put the show on 'absolutely free of charge'. They wave goodbye and disappear below. The Punchman's naked hand comes up, waves to them and draws the curtains.

The audience get up and head off to look at the sea or to have lunch. The puppeteer unzips the tent for some fresh air and starts to hang the puppets up again for the next show. He will do three today. In between times, he reads his paper and eats his sandwiches and talks to the occasional inquisitive passer by. At the end of the day he packs up and drives home.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Note**

1 This partially composite description of a show is largely based on performances given by Professor Carl Durbin at Teignmouth in Devon during the summer of 2007.

## **Introduction**

### **Overview of Contemporary Punch and Judy**

Punch and Judy is a popular British glove puppet form which is normally played by one performer in a temporary booth erected in a public space, such as in a street, at the beach, at a festival, in a park, or at a country fair. It is also often performed in private settings, usually children's parties. It is very strongly associated with the seaside, although these days it is not very often to be found there. It is one of a number of popular European puppet forms believed to have derived from the Italian Pulcinella glove puppet show, but has developed its own characteristics. It emerged as a glove puppet show in Britain in the Regency period (1790s - 1830s).

Most presentations of the show revolve around a basic core episode: Punch disposes of his wife, Judy, and their baby, and then deals with the consequences. Nowadays it usually ends with Punch triumphing over forces more dangerous and naughty than himself, the Devil and the Crocodile. This restores the moral balance. (One significant change which has occurred in recent years is that in the past Judy was nearly always 'killed'; now her removal from the stage is more ambiguous, and in some shows she even makes a return at the end.) Within this loose structure there is considerable narrative latitude. There is no fixed script and the amount of improvisation varies from performer to performer. Some stick quite rigidly to tried and tested routines and jokes, others are highly responsive to audiences or their own momentary whims. Most experienced performers have a range of routines they can incorporate or leave out, and since the show is intrinsically episodic, this does not usually undermine any sense of coherence. The show is characterised by a great deal of knock-about ('slapstick') humour and there is much fighting. Punch persistently challenges the *status quo* in the form of Judy, a Policeman, a Doctor, or even a Hangman. Many performers and commentators believe that the oppositional nature of a two-handed performance makes this kind of conflict inevitable. There is room in the show to introduce topical figures, usually to be lampooned; these tend to have a short shelf-life. However, some topical figures have outlived their originals to become an expected part of the performance. The show relies heavily on audience expectation.

Punch and Judy is predominantly a children's form, although performers nearly always incorporate jokes made for the benefit of adults; the best deliberately structure the show around this double-audience dynamic in quite sophisticated ways.

Whereas the performer's income once depended on collections from passing trade, something which probably determined the episodic nature of the show, now it is far more likely to come from pre-booked shows. Such collecting is called 'bottling'.<sup>1</sup> Fees vary considerably, from as little as £30 or £40 for a children's party to perhaps £300 or more for a day's booking at a large corporate event. Most performers are very mobile, sometimes driving a hundred miles or more to perform, even travelling abroad.

It is extremely difficult to gauge the precise number of performers working today; estimates vary between 100 and 300. My researches suggest that the figure may be around 150.<sup>2</sup> This includes performers who do the show as part of a repertoire of children's entertainments and do not think of themselves as principally Punch and Judy performers. Even so, based on historical accounts, the number of performers is probably as great, if not greater than it has ever been at any one time.

I have met no performer who makes a living exclusively from Punch and Judy. Even those who perform it regularly might also work as magicians, perform other puppet shows, make and sell puppets or ventriloquist's dolls, or have a pension from a previous job. One or two have full-time jobs in unrelated industries and perform at weekends; a few are actors doing Punch between acting work. Some find it very difficult to get by, and many express anxiety about the unpredictability of the work. Nonetheless, a hard-working performer who has built up a good network of clients - places to which he can go back again and again, regular schools tours, perhaps a regular holiday pitch - and is prepared to do other kinds of puppetry, might hope to make £30 000 a year. However, it is in the nature of the work that it is very difficult to generalize about income. It is hard to get precise figures from performers, especially as some have what they call a 'back pocket' which eludes official scrutiny.

Economics notwithstanding, 'professional' performers may be distinguished from others, and these are the ones with whom this study is mainly concerned.

‘Professionals’ are characterised by a dedication to the form, a serious interest in it, a willingness and desire to maintain a high quality of performance and to engage in professional relationships with bookers, and an expectation that they will be paid a fee commensurate with their skills and effort. With this often go the typical necessities of the professional entertainer: publicity and an accountant.

Many performers express a considerable affective connection to the show and this goes a very long way to making up for the sometimes financial hardship of the work. On the whole they very much enjoy what they are doing and are sustained by the belief that they are making a unique, valuable and valued contribution to popular culture.<sup>3</sup> For some, being a Punch and Judy performer is deeply connected to their sense of identity, for others it offers pleasurable challenges in the exercise of an undoubted skill.

Most Punch performers are men, although there are no proscriptions on women performing. Currently there are probably fewer than 10 female performers in England and Wales and perhaps as few as five or six.<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to be exact since some women who work under the umbrella term ‘children’s entertainer’ do Punch and Judy along with other things. This preponderance of men seems always to have been the case and women figure small in the literature except occasionally as wives and helpers.

The view that the show is usually handed down from father to son is no longer accurate, though there are still instances of this. It is doubtful that it ever was to the degree that it is popularly held to have been. Performers now learn from books, from watching each other, from re-constructing shows from memory, and, increasingly, from seeing performances on video or DVD.

One significant change which has occurred since Robert Leach conducted his major research in the 1980’s (Leach 1985, see also below) has been the amount of work performers are doing abroad. As I discuss later, there is a history of performers travelling in Europe, and from its earliest days the show has been influenced by international puppeteers. There have been some deliberate cultural exchanges, notably by Percy Press Junior in the 1960s and 70s. There has also been a long

history of performers travelling to former British colonies; in some cases the show has taken root there. In recent years, however, especially with the advent of puppet festivals, these trips have become more frequent and regularised, particularly to the continental Europe. Again, as I detail in Chapter Six, the exchange has been two way. Not all performers travel abroad with much frequency, but a few do. Among these are Clive Chandler, Rod Burnett, Dan Bishop and Konrad Fredericks. It is in the nature of exchange that performers develop personal associations with festival organizers and are invited back time and again. This is part of an *ad hoc* but growing pattern of exchange of puppetry ideas. This exchange has been considerably facilitated by the advent of cheap air travel. The implications of this in terms of the development of popular puppetry are far reaching, and, as I suggest in the thesis' conclusion, this needs to be the subject of further research. What is important for current purposes is to be aware that for a number of performers, internationalism and their sense of themselves as having an international audience, are important to their understanding of themselves as Punch performers.

Punch and Judy has a considerable resonance outside of actual performance and to a remarkable degree it remains an icon embedded in the fabric of British culture. Many British people, even if they have not seen a Punch and Judy show, have heard of it and can make some attempt at describing some of the episodes and some of the characters in it. Conversations I have had with a wide range of people during the period of the study have thrown up a number of consistent views. Most people seem to have some view of the show which they are prepared to express without prompting. These views range from the slightly negative: 'I didn't think it was still going'; 'It used to scare me as a kid'; 'It's a bit violent isn't it'; 'I thought they had banned it', to the affectionate: 'I used to love Punch and Judy when I was little'; 'It's only a bit of fun, isn't it'; 'there's far worse on the telly'. In equal measure it seems to be powerfully associated with violence, nostalgia and childhood.

This familiarity and strength of feeling has made it a useful trope across a range of cultural registers. It has often been cited in popular sit-coms and TV programmes, especially those which have a nostalgic intention. I am thinking in particular of its appearance in episodes of *Hi Di Hi*, made in the 1980s and set in a British holiday-



camp of the 1950s, and *Heartbeat*, made in the 1980s, 90s and 2000s, a reassuring police series set in a small fictitious Yorkshire country town in a fondly remembered 1960s. It is occasionally referenced as having sinister undertones in popular films and TV, as for example in an episode of the popular detective series *Midsummer Murders* in which the local Punch and Judy performer triggers off a series of murders. M.R. James made use of its sinister potential in a short ghost story, 'The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance'. The 'darker' elements of the show have made it a useful cultural reservoir for artists working in a range of media. Notable among these are Harrison Birtwistle and Stephen Pruslin's 1964 opera, *Punch and Judy*; Susan Hiller's 1990 installation at Tate St Ives (remounted in 2004 at Tate Modern), *An Entertainment*; Russell Hoban's 1980 post-apocalyptic novel, *Riddley Walker*; and Jan Svankmejer's disturbing 1966 animation, *Punch and Judy*. Other important works which strongly cite or in other ways interpret the show are Tony Hancock's 1963 film, *The Punch and Judy Man* (Summers 1998 [1963]), Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean's 1995 graphic novel, *Mr Punch - the Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy* and, with a similar title, an animation by the Brothers Quay in 1986. It has also provided inspiration for post-punk artists, KLF, and the cabaret style band, The Tiger Lillies. The range of purposes to which the show is put by this eclectic set of artists is understandably wide. Some use the show to investigate the nature of memory, others to consider questions of violence, others to celebrate its liberational energy. Where these cultural products have ignored the ameliorating comic elements of the show, they tend to have been dismissed by performers themselves.

The show also has a persistent place as a social referent. When Paul McCartney and Heather Mills-McCartney's marriage ended acrimoniously in 2006, at least one national newspaper drew parallels with the puppet show (Fig. 1). When David Cameron was elected leader of the conservative Party, he famously declared 'an end to Punch and Judy Politics'. The show has become a place through which to reflect on issues around partisan strife, to comicalise and thus process that strife and to incorporate strife into a larger scheme of stability.



Fig.1 Paul McCartney and Heather Mills McCartney as Punch and Judy; front page of *The Daily Express*, 19 October 2006

Because of current sensitivities around the public display of violence, a degree of ambivalence attaches to the show. Nonetheless, it has found institutional acknowledgement as a marker of British identity. In 2000 it was exhibited in the Millennium Dome; in 2001 pictures of the main puppets appeared on a set on British postage stamps; in 2004 Professor John Styles was awarded an MBE (see Edwards 2004b) and in 2006 it became an ‘Official Icon’, one of a list of *Icons of England* in a Government scheme set up to ‘promote discussion of what it means to be English and to define English culture’ (Edwards 2006b: 10).<sup>5</sup>

Punch and Judy in Britain has not been subject to the same kinds of intervention by national or exterior agencies with agendas which, as I suggest below, have shaped popular puppetry in some other countries. This has left it in the position of being both reviled and supported and finding its own way through these pressures. Its ambivalent position is typically summarised by Sue Clifford and Angela King in their encyclopaedic ‘celebration’ of ‘the commonplace, the vernacular and the distinctive [in English popular culture]’: ‘Somehow the Punch and Judy show embodies the wild aspects of popular culture, shifting, offensive, anarchic’ (2006: 338).

## **The Ethnography**

*The myth that ethnographers are people without personal identity, historical location and personality and would all produce the same findings in the same setting is the mistake of naïve realism.*

John D. Brewer <sup>6</sup>

The overview I have outlined above tells us what the form looks like, but it does not account for how it has come to look like this, nor does it tell us how it looks from the point of view of the performers. I would like to say one or two things about how I intend to do those more complex jobs.

There is a close relationship between the theory by which I frame the research and the methodology by which I have carried it out. A major conclusion of this thesis is that in the last 20 or 30 years performers have come to take charge of how they see themselves and how they are seen. At the time of the last major study (Leach 1985) performers did not belong to organizations which validated and gave a sense of identity in the way that they do now, nor did they take charge of the representation of the form in the way that they do now. These changes may be thought of as changes in power relations and they hinge upon access to the means by which performers construct a sense both of self-identity and of identity for the form. I frame discussion of these changes through the ideas of a number of cultural theorists, including Raymond Williams (1973, 1981, 1985, 2001a, 2006), Stuart Hall (1964, 1980, 1996, 2006), and Anthony Giddens (1984, 1990, 1991), who themselves call upon the work of Gramsci (see especially, Mouffe 1979: 168-204) and Foucault (1972). The theoretical frame may be summarised in this quotation from Hall,

[...] because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power [...] (1996: 4).

This theoretical position assumes the centrality of *strategies* of identity-construction; I prefer the term *mechanisms* since it more accurately acknowledges the constraints rather than the possibilities by which agents negotiate power, but it serves a similar purpose. With Giddens (1991: 37-39), we may distinguish modern (and ‘late-modern’) mechanisms from ‘traditional’ or pre-modern ones. The distinction between

modern and pre-modern is important because it accounts for the contingency of modern identity-construction compared with the supposed essentiality of traditional identity-construction. In the case of contemporary Punch performers, those mechanisms include the ability to produce discourse and the ability to stage festivals and thereby to influence the way in which the form is read. This situation is complex, however, since current performers rely on practice which has developed as a result of former modalities of power; namely that the show is still considered a piece of children's entertainment and that performers depend on that view for their living. It is not a satirical show, though it might contain elements of satire. It will be seen below that the character of the show came about as a result of pressures at a particular moment and was part of a much larger process of (class) identity-construction. Early on in the thesis I map a history of changing power relations from the earliest days of the form to the current situation. I go on to explore the current situation.

The changing relationship between the performer and the show, or the tradition - the performers' ability to take charge of it and the constraints on that - is most clearly visible through attending to the 'practice' of performers.<sup>7</sup> It is not sufficient to look just at the things which performers produce, the show and the puppets; we need also to consider how those things have come about, what is intended by them, how they are used and how they are received. This means, at the very least, asking performers why they do what they do, understanding the degree of control they have over this, and grasping what it is they get from doing it. This requires an ethnographic methodology. This methodology is further supported by the invitation of performers to carry out such a study.

Ethnographies do not take place in a vacuum; each is a unique product of a number of interests meeting. In this case, the interests of some of the puppeteers themselves, of the ethnographer and of what is sometimes termed 'the academy'.<sup>8</sup> These interests met through the funding initiative of the Arts and Humanities Research Council whose own concern was that the collaboration should produce new findings which would make their way into the public domain. These interests represent the background to the study. At times, each has come to the fore and exerted its pressure on the shape of the final document.

Two connected areas form the focus of the research. One is the show itself: what does it look like now, how has it changed since the last research was carried out, and what space does it occupy in the social and cultural landscape? The other is the people who perform the show: who are they and why do they do the show? I would like to plunge in with a brief ethnographic account through which the questions which have come to the fore in the process of the research might be identified.

Towards the end of my field-work, as I was grappling with my 'data', I was invited to a meeting of performers. This had been arranged by the Punch organization which, along with Royal Holloway College, was one of the two collaborators in the project and through whom the research had been instigated: the Punch and Judy College of Professors (the College). Although the College has been in existence since the 1980s, this was the first time it had met in such numbers. Of the 18 members, 12 were present. Previous meetings had seen only four or five together, and these usually coincided with Punch and Judy festivals. This was the first time the College had congregated for the simple purpose of meeting, of celebration, and of taking stock. It is probably the case that the meeting was encouraged by my research. I had broached the idea of getting people together to see how they would engage with each other and to throw some questions around. This idea was taken up by Punchman Glyn Edwards. He had been instrumental in setting up the research as part of his ongoing work of keeping Punch and Judy alive and thriving; he might be thought of as a principal gate-keeper to the community, certainly as far as this project is concerned. Edwards describes himself as a 'Punch and Judy activist'. The means by which he promulgates the form, and what that tells us in broader terms about the relationship between the agent and the traditional form in contemporary society, is of central interest in the thesis. The meeting provided a snapshot of the College as it existed at that moment.

On a cool, sunny, blustery day in March 2009, the performers met at a beachside café in the Devon resort of Paignton. Discussions had taken place by email about the location of an appropriate venue. London was rejected because, although it might once have seemed a 'natural' choice, several members are based in the South West. It was also felt that holding it there would reflect the ability of performers to go anywhere, and to break with the historical centre of gravity of the form. Performers drove down or took the train. Those members who did not make it were mostly part

of an older generation for whom Devon was, as one put it, just ‘too far’. One older member had a paid show elsewhere and felt that the need to earn money took precedence. Performers came from London, from the Midlands, Cornwall, Brighton and Dorset. Paignton was chosen also because one of the members, Mark Poulton, lived there, and as his wife and young daughter had made themselves scarce for a few days, he could accommodate some of the performers. Some members of the College have become close friends and it is quite usual to ‘crash’ on somebody’s sofa or in their workshop when performing away from home.

Paignton held some historical significance for performers, too; it had seen a number of resident Punchmen over the years. The first was John Stafford who had worked there from the 1920s to the 1960s. Poulton emailed a photograph of Stafford’s pitch to members before they arrived. Another was Michael Byrom, whose 1972 monograph on Punch and Judy was considered to have inspired a new generation of Punch performers (Leach 1985: 144-145); one or two of these performers were at the meeting. Poulton himself had worked the pitch in the early 2000s.

Edwards had asked members to bring their Punch puppets as a tangible reminder of what they had in common and to show them off to passing tourists and to the local BBC TV news reporter whom Mark Poulton had invited to record the event. As performers arrived and chatted on the patio outside the café, the reporter put together an item for the early evening news, interviewing performers and corralling them behind a wall by the beach where they would pop up to squeal raucously into the lens, finally orchestrating a piece-to-camera where he was battered over the head with their slapsticks.

As we sat around a long table for lunch, I looked at the people who had gathered for the first time and who I had got to know during the previous 18 months of field-work. The youngest was in his 20s, one or two in their 30s, most in their 50s and 60s. It was a broad range of people. Some knew each other only by reputation. Two or three had trained as actors and still worked as actors; a couple were trained visual artists. Most did other forms of puppetry, some in television; one was an ex-TV producer, two or three were highly respected and influential figures in the puppetry community in general. Very few made their living only from performing Punch and Judy. Some

were married, some had children, some were gay, and some were single. All of them often travelled away from home to perform the show; all of them were paid to perform it. There were only two women at the table, Edwards' wife, Mary, and Alison Davey, Professor Brian Davey's wife. Mary, an accomplished puppeteer and puppet-maker in her own right, does a warm-up with marionettes before her husband's show and Alison dresses the puppets and acts as interlocutor for Brian during his show. Everyone at the table had some hands-on connection with Punch and Judy.



Fig. 2 College members on the beach at Paignton (photo, Mary Edwards)

The afternoon was given over to semi-serious discussions and I was invited to ask about things which had eluded me till now. This was a moment to consider my relationship with this community. Some of them I had had little contact with; others I had seen a great deal of, travelling with them, watching their shows again and again, interviewing them, watching them in their workshops, recording their shows, photographing their puppets and booths, staying in their houses. I had stored many of these memories, some on paper, some on camera, some on Dictaphone, and others in my head, and taken them back to my study to make sense of, to listen to again, to transcribe and to catalogue. All of this work rested on a bed of endless, pleasurable chatter, of talk about the show. Punch performers like to talk about what they do,

what it means to them, the experiences they have had with it. In talking about their experiences, they shape them, give them meaning, hold them up to be looked at, reshape them, and give them more meaning. They create a seamless narrative. Each does this in a different way. My task, as I see it, is to take their meanings, their stories, the things they hold in their hands and move about, the interactions they have with their audiences and each other, and give them back in my own words.

Later in the afternoon, the puppeteers headed out to the beach for a 'photo-call', to make a record of the event. They stood on the sand and threw their puppets in the air and cheered (Fig. 2). I was struck by their ability, and need, very rapidly to encapsulate and express a sense of identity through apparently spontaneous performance. In the evening we watched on television the news report that had been filmed that morning. What only a few hours ago had been a live event with its awkwardness, its roughness, was now edited into a discrete story, digitised and broadcast for public consumption.

We sat down again to eat and drink and talk. A quiz was held with questions about Punch. I was both embarrassed and relieved that I scored highest. I had proved myself; yet I realized that these people were not historians or theoreticians, that they are engaged more in doing the show than in thinking about it.

The events of that day were a reminder of the questions which this ethnography has sought to refine and to answer. How did this group of performers come to be together and associate as the College? How does their ability to meet and exchange ideas impact on the tradition? What is the make up of the community of performers? How do their differences impact on the tradition? Why do they relate to each other in the ways that they do? How are these different people interpreting the form? How are their individual narratives brought together to produce a narrative for the tradition? What is the role of the College in this? How is the form mediated? What is its place in the culture? How is it interpolated by exterior agencies? What role do performers play in how the form is understood?

Along with these are a number of epistemological questions which I will address first. What was my position in all of this? How have I come to be here and what shadows



and light does my being here throw on the picture? It is through these that questions about methodology, the literature and the orientation of the study might be addressed.

### **Positioning the ethnographer**

There are at least two sides to the matter of being positioned, both have a bearing on the outcome: how one positions oneself and how one is positioned by others. I will begin with the first.

Paul Rock suggests that it is an advantage for the ethnographer to have some prior familiarity with the territory,

[...] venturing into terrain that is too alien will be disconcerting because it offers no paths and little reassurance that one is looking around oneself with an intelligent and informed eye. The new and the strange which is not too new and strange may be the best compound, if only because ethnography demands a coming-together of the insider's understanding with the outsider's puzzlement [...] (2001: 33).

I was already familiar in two ways. I have been an actor and a street theatre performer for several decades. I have experienced the tribulations of the entertainer and the demands of work in an environment where a theatrical event has to be created almost from scratch, from the strong idea you present to a passing public and the challenge of keeping their eyes and ears fixed on you. In my performance work, however, I had never encountered a Punch and Judy show; we never appeared on the same bill, as it were.

My other familiarity was cultural. Punch and Judy was my first experience of live theatre. I was taken by my mother to the local village hall when I was about five or six. I remember coming in from the penetrating cold to the dim claustrophobia of the crowded hall and seeing on the stage at one end a booth which must have been set up already. I do not remember Mr Punch himself, but I vividly recall two episodes: the Crocodile putting his head above the playboard and stealing the sausages, and the Hangman being tricked into his own noose. Both produced a palpable frisson in the audience. This was in the early 1960s. Perhaps the fact that at home we had no television and seeing entertainment of any kind made by other people was a rare event accounts for the sharpness of the memory, or perhaps its intrinsic colour does.

However it is, the Punch and Judy show has always been a part of my cultural background, it has always been there. It is there not only as an early memory, but also as a readily available, if eccentric, reference point, part of the British repository of shared images.

At the start of the research, then, for me the show was an exotic yet familiar form whose workings were a mystery. It contrasted significantly with my own experience of working in 'mainstream' theatre, partly because it seemed to be a conservative and deeply populist form, representing an attachment to the past which most of my own theatre work strove to break from. In my street theatre work the past was referenced only in order to be reappraised. Much (subsidised) British theatre is underpinned by a desire, at least nominally, to move the agenda forward. Punch and Judy seemed to be a highly conventionalised form which moved in the opposite direction.

I brought to the research also an interest in the question of convention more generally. In my Masters thesis, I had explored the tension between form and meaning, and I had looked at how two very different theatre practitioners, Augusto Boal and Jerzy Grotowski, had striven in opposite ways to rid the theatrical experience of the determining impact of convention (Reeve 2002). I was curious about how Punch performers manoeuvred within the apparently narrow constraints of tradition, to what extent they were liberated, reassured or frustrated by convention.

I would like to say a little now about how I was positioned by the puppeteers.

Since the last major study was made, and for reasons which are detailed in the next chapter, some performers have taken steps to ensure the survival of the form. As I have suggested, these steps include the formation of organizations, the production of discourse and the instigation of festivals. This contrasts with an earlier less interventionist situation which, as I indicate later, relied much more on economic pressures to determine the shape of the tradition.<sup>9</sup> This change raises all kinds of questions to do with the 'reflexive monitoring of action' (ibid: 37) and how that conditions what action looks like.<sup>10</sup> In contrast with what was happening in the early 1980s and before, performers seem to be taking charge of their tradition, *qua* tradition. The instigation of this study was itself a part of that process. This had

implications for the choice of ethnographer and the relationship between ethnographer and the Punch community. To some extent this reverses the ethnographic paradigm as it is expressed by another puppet ethnographer, Joan Gross. She reflects on the difficulties of giving a voice to the 'other' in ethnography (or puppetry), 'Whatever model one follows, representation confers power and control on representers (puppeteers or anthropologists) because they determine the voices of the other' (Gross 2001: xvi).<sup>11</sup> The study of a reflexive process presents challenges for the ethnographer in terms of his own position and the impact he has on the subjects of the study and the form itself. This is even more so when the ethnographer has been invited to make the study as part of the production of discourse which is itself part of the narrative of reflexivity which is being examined. In other words, at times in the research process, I have found myself within the frame I have tried to keep hold of.

The College were pleased that I was applying to do this research because I was already known to them through my work as a street theatre performer as well as an actor and a theatre director. I had known one of the key instigators, Clive Chandler, when I was an undergraduate in the late 1970s. He was to become my non-academic supervisor. Although I had never met Glyn Edwards and he had never seen my work, he was receptive to me, I learned later, because I had performed as 'Mr Lucky, the man with the raining umbrella'. This was a walkabout street theatre show in which I was dressed as a drab figure from a landscape by Lowry and carried a heavy suitcase and an umbrella which rained on the inside and because of which I was in a perpetual state of comic despondency. This appealed to Edwards' sense of the absurd and he believed I was a man who would understand the thinking of the Punch performer, would be familiar with their world and would speak their language. Other performers told me they welcomed my doing the work as they regarded me as 'a friend of Punch'. This kind of statement suggested a sensitivity about how they were seen which I came to realise fuelled many of their activities. In the middle of the research Edwards made the disquieting remark that had I not been a 'friend of Punch', 'a lot of false trails would have been laid down'. This suggested a considerable degree of protection about the form.

The reverse side of this coin is that the ethnographer provides opportunities for the subjects of study to present themselves in particular ways. He or she becomes an

‘ethnodramaturg’ (Victor Turner, cited in Fabian 1990: 7); when the subjects are performers, this is accentuated. As Johannes Fabian says, ‘The ethnographer’s role [...] is no longer that of the questioner; he or she is but a provider of occasions, a catalyst in the weakest sense, and a producer (in analogy to a theatrical producer) in the strongest’ (ibid). It is sometimes difficult to know what is done for the researcher’s benefit and what would have happened ‘naturally’. Just such a confusion occurred on my first field-trip. I was on the sea front in the Welsh seaside town of Aberystwyth. Edwards had just put his frame up; it needed to be carried further down the promenade. I was filming at the time. Four performers picked it up and marched with it singing ‘I do like to be beside the seaside’. The area was practically deserted and I could not help but think that this was for my benefit and wrote as much in my field-notes. Edwards corrected me, saying there *were* people about and that the performers would have done it anyway.

Not all the performers I worked with were habitually ‘on’, most could make distinctions in their own behaviour about when they were and when they were not; most responded to me, at least in the privacy of their own homes, without affectation or show. I was generally met with honesty and an eagerness to engage in discussion.

It is not unusual for ethnographers to undergo a process of deliberate or fortuitous initiation prior to which their identity as understood by the community is uncertain and after which they become part of the group, accepted as an honorary (or even full) member.<sup>12</sup> This was my own experience very early on in the research and it occurred at my first encounter with members of the College at a three-day Punch and Judy festival in Aberystwyth in August 2006. This festival had been running for a number of years and Professor Chandler who had organized it thought it a good opportunity for me to get to know some of the community and especially for Edwards and myself to sound each other out. Five members of the College were performing as well as other puppeteers, some from abroad. Friends, relatives and helpers were also around. We lived and ate together in a modern university hall of residence on a hillside above the town, overlooking the sea. In the daytimes, puppeteers would head for the sea-front to perform; I would go with them. The evenings were spent drinking, eating and talking. One of the performers, Richard Coombs, was a new member of the College and on the third evening he was to have his ‘initiation’. Edwards announced that I

should become an honorary professor for the duration of the research and that I would be initiated then, too.

In the rather anonymous surroundings of a modern university common room in the midst of cans of beer, half-empty bottles of wine and a scattering of dirty plates and cutlery, an 'initiation ceremony' was hastily improvised. This was conducted by several members of the College and witnessed by a dozen or so other puppeteers and friends. In the sheer panic of the event, my recollection of Coombs' initiation is vague; however, my own remains vivid. I had to stand on a chair in the middle of the room and was required to recite verses from the song, 'Oh I do like to be Beside the Seaside' in an 'academic manner' whilst being hit over the head by several performers wielding slapsticks. I was instructed to uphold the highest standards of the tradition and not to bring the tradition into disrepute. The ceremony was accompanied by a cacophony of professors, hooting and jeering through their swazzles to undermine any sense of decorum which might otherwise infect the proceedings.

Through this process, what Clifford Geertz (1968) and George E. Marcus (1997) call *complicity* was achieved, even to the degree that I was in an arguably reverse position to that of the 'Punchman' in an early researcher's work (Mayhew 1949 [1851]) in which, as I suggest below, the informant is a kind of over-determined puppet in the text. It would be inaccurate and unfair to push this analogy too far, but I have at times been tempted to see myself amongst a group of performers used to moving inanimate objects about, anxious to state their case and getting me to do it for them. The 'inherent moral asymmetry of the fieldwork situation' (Geertz 1968: 151) was, if not entirely turned on its head, at least turned in the interests of the performers. It is not my intention to get too tied up with this debate, but to signal it as an ongoing condition of the research.<sup>13</sup> None of this is to suggest that relations have been tense, although I have had to exercise sensitivity in some areas.

Discussion of my relationship with the performers suggests a very different stance from the one adopted by writers about Punch and Judy in the past. As I will argue in the next chapter, the literature about Punch has tended to reinforce the function of the form as part of the hegemonic 'discursive formation' which early on used Punch to help construct an emerging set of class identities, and to see it through that lens.<sup>14</sup>

One of the findings of this thesis is that there has been a struggle for the construction of Punch through a range of discourses.

Whilst some academics, notably Scott Cutler Shershow (1994, 1995) and Rosalind Crone (2006), have commented on Punch's role in this process of construction, these have been historical studies and have not had the advantage of a contemporary 'insider's' view. Robert Leach conducted interviews with performers which sought to understand Punch as an oral tradition (1980, 1983), but in that work he did not see it as part of a process of *self*-construction. This was partly because the performers he interviewed were from an older generation and were not engaged in abstract reflections on the tradition. What constituted the tradition for Leach's interviewees was already settled by family convention. That group has largely disappeared.

It is worth saying a little here about Leach's significant contribution to the literature since it is a starting point for my own work; it helps to define it and yet it contrasts with my methodology. In part, my work continues the history of Punch from where Leach left off and brings the story up to date. Some of this history has to do with the emerging new relationship performers had with the tradition in the 1980s and how that has developed since.

Leach's work came about at a moment when popular culture was beginning to be discovered as an academic subject. The work of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams, among others, did much to enable popular culture to be read as an expression and signifier of broader cultural conditions.<sup>15</sup> Leach sought to locate Punch and Judy as an historically important form whose roots were embedded in the cultural and political upheavals of the eighteenth century. Importantly, he was the first to explain the make-up of the show as a response to the beginnings of institutional repressions of a developing underclass. He suggested that the emerging triumvirate of the law, religion and marriage as forms of social control were manifest in the show as the Hangman, the Devil and Judy. He was also probably the first to explicate a subliminal sexual motivation for Punch, for example suggesting Punch's fear of the Crocodile might be a form of *vagina dentate* (Leach 1985: 173). Though these views were rejected by some commentators, they offered a way of looking at the show which sought to account for its persistence.

Leach was also researching at a moment when the ‘bottled’ show was giving way to the now dominant contracted show. The *ad-hoc* relationship between performers and their audiences when performers might just turn up and perform was being replaced by more predictable appearances. This change, I argue below, was instrumental in shifting the performers’ sense of self.

Leach produced a useful taxonomy of performers against which to see the changes that have taken place in the last 25 years. He identified three groups of performers: The *swatchel omis*, performers who are part of a family tradition of Punch, often inheriting the show and the puppets from their fathers. The *beach uncles*, probably the dominant form in the mid to late twentieth century; these performers were not usually part of the family groups, and, loosely speaking, derive from the tradition of the pre- and post-war beach performers. And the *counter-culturalists*, generally college-educated performers emerging in the 1970s and 80s who were drawn to the tradition because it offered an alternative to corporate ideology, both through the iconoclastic figure of Punch and the lifestyle of the independent performer. Though each group performed the show in characteristically different ways, they contained many of the same elements and audiences probably did not make distinctions between them. Audiences still tend not to make distinctions, but performers have different views which it has become my purpose to investigate and describe. What had happened to these groups since the 1980s was part of the story to be told.

Looking at the form from the inside meant becoming, in ethnographic terms, a ‘participant-observer’ (Brewer 2000: 61). Although I never performed the show, I learnt to swazzle, I learnt to operate the puppets, and I devised part of my own script. I also worked closely with the performers, sometimes helping them set up, sometimes collecting money, carrying bags, finding parking-spaces, driving them about and building relationships with bookers. Participant-observation is an invaluable way of gaining insight into the experience of the community the ethnographer is working with, but it can present challenges. In larger group settings it is easier to disappear into the human foliage, as it were. When, as is usually the case with Punch performers, they are working alone, having a researcher alongside creates a radically altered working environment.

I used various strategies to deal with these challenges. During the recording of some shows and the observation of audiences, I would arrive at a venue separately from the performer and would not make a big fuss of being there, simply saying hello, perhaps commenting on the weather and keeping a low profile. At other times, in an attempt to elicit the performer's view of the event, I would arrange to travel with the performer. I would ask lots of questions and would be as helpful as possible. When I wanted to find out information not available from watching shows, I would arrange to interview performers in their homes or at places of their choosing. On a number of occasions, I would spend several days at a performer's house, perhaps accompanying them to shows, watching them make puppets or rehearse, or engaging in discussions about their work. I video-recorded scores of shows to study later and took thousands of photographs. I taped many hours of interviews which I later transcribed.

A consistency is apparent in the ethnographic methodology and the new kinds of agency which are revealed by it. The College invited the study to be done as part of its project of addressing popular misconceptions about the form, especially its persistent association with Victorianism and violence, and to bring knowledge and understanding of it up to date. This, rightly, assumes that performers have a choice in what they are doing and are engaged in endowing what they do with meaning. It also recognises that performers are using contemporary resources and strategies to do this. The study came about through an organization which probably would not or could not have existed under the previous kinds of association, either the families, or the more economically determined form of the mid twentieth century. Folklorists, whose study has been traditional forms, have in recent decades recognised the centrality of agency to the production of forms. Performers are no longer regarded as 'passive bearers of tradition' (Glassie 2001: 43) and methodologies of recording and study have reflected this view. Henry Glassie and others have come to use the term 'performance theory' (ibid: 45) to describe the relationship between agents, what they do, and the texts they produce.<sup>16</sup> Performance theory helps us to locate the individual voice within the larger structure of a tradition, to examine how the individual voice is in dialogue with that tradition, and to value the individual voice as an essential element in the continuation of a tradition. The performer is 'positioned at a complex nexus of responsibility' (Glassie 1995: 402), 'keeping faith' with both the past and the present. The active participation of the tradition-bearer impacts on the evolution of the



tradition, and is enabled in particular ways by the conditions within which the tradition finds itself. In this case these are the conditions of late-modernity, characterised by association over distance, methods of dissemination of information about the form, the ability for performers to meet and exchange ideas, and the production of discourse which seeks to control reception of the tradition. We might borrow Nikolas Rose's term 'technologies' to describe these particular characteristics. Rose defines technologies as: '[...] assemblages of knowledges, instruments, persons, systems of judgement [...], underpinned at the programmatic level by certain presuppositions about, and objectives for, human beings' (1996: 132). All of these characteristics were visible at Paignton.

### **The study amongst other puppet ethnographies**

The ethnographic approach allows access to a field whose boundaries are still being mapped. In a puppet masterclass I attended run by John Bell in London in May 2009, researchers working in the area of performing objects expressed a common anxiety that, unlike in other disciplines, puppetry lacked a consistent theoretical perspective through which to be discussed. Whilst there was a sense of freedom in this, there was an accompanying sense of anxiety. As a group, we felt that we were forging new ways of thinking and talking about the supposedly inanimate object. Fortunately for my own research, there is a particular body of puppetry work amongst which this study is intended to sit and this provides some signposts. As well as a number of important non-ethnographic studies of modern and historical folk puppetry, including Catriona Kelly on Petrushka (1990), Metin And on Karagöz (1975) and Bennie Pratasik and John McCormick on European folk puppetry more generally (1998), there are a few noteworthy ethnographic studies of contemporary folk puppets.<sup>17</sup> Among these are Ward Keeler on *wayang* (1987), Jane Marie Law on *awaji ningyo shibai* (1997) and Joan Gross on Tchantchès (2001).

What is most interesting, and useful, about all of these ethnographies is the way the folk puppet is seen to articulate concerns which are central to the community in which it finds itself. Ward Keeler suggests that 'In contemporary anthropology, much is made of the ways in which meaning is constructed by a culture's members' (1987: 261). He sets about understanding how meaning is constructed in Javanese culture

through the event of the *wayang* shadow puppet performance. In so doing he reveals subtleties about Javanese social interaction which other approaches might find elusive. Similarly, Jane Marie Law's study of *awaji ningyo shibai* puppetry and puppeteers (1997) is a way of bringing to the surface Japanese post-war concerns with identity. Law posits the revival of the traditional puppet as allowing a reconnection with the past. Joan Gross's study of the Liège puppet Tchantchès (2001) is a way of looking at power relations in a linguistically heterogeneous community. Processing the anxiety of how one is identified through how one speaks is the central motive of Tchantchès performances, just as that anxiety informs interactions between different linguistic communities in Liège. Researching puppet ethnography is a way of understanding a community's relationship with itself.

To put the present study next to these is to ask, firstly, what is it of which, in its contemporary context, Punch and Judy speaks, what does the performance of a Punch and Judy show bring to the surface, for performers, for audiences and for the wider community within which it finds itself? And secondly, how does the ethnographic method allow us to do this?

Each of the three ethnographies I have cited provides a model in different ways and I borrow from each of them. Law begins with a history of ritual puppetry in Japan which offers a background to how that form is currently re-construed and re-constituted in the light of contemporary needs. I locate Punch in an historical process, but suggest that Punch meets different contemporary needs than does Awaji puppetry. As I suggest, this difference revolves around the highly ritual nature of Awaji puppetry as distinct from that of Punch. Whilst there are ritual elements in Punch, notably its reliance on reassuring familiarity, these elements are far more secularised and far less pivotal to the role the form plays. Nostalgia, for example, plays an important role in both cases, but although it is part of the fabric and the pleasure of Punch, it is less central in confirming a sense of identity. What I take from Law is her confidence that there is a relationship between traditional puppetry and national, regional or class identity, that this has developed and modified over time, and that this can be got at through understanding how the performers approach their work.

Gross has useful things to say in several ways. Again, these revolve around how

puppet theatre can be instrumental in mediating a sense of identity. She describes not only how the Walloon puppet theatres initially spoke directly of the identity of working-class performers and audiences, but how, in their decline, they became adopted by larger forces, the bourgeois audiences and the state, in their use of folklore as means to secure a sense of national identity. In the process they became 'reified and packaged for consumption' (Gross 2001: 67). Punch was never adopted by the British state to the same degree, but its being spoken about by educated commentators changed its relationship to its audiences and its manipulators. As a result of the interest in Tchantchès by new audiences, contestations over what constituted the tradition began to develop. Whilst contestations over Punch were not so clear cut, we shall see that a similar process of management of a publicly 'owned' icon by a small group of skilled puppeteers has come about.

In both of these cases, how connections to the past are processed through the performing object is of central interest. It is of central interest to this thesis, too. The very different conditions within which the object finds itself leads to different findings. How past-oriented identity is accessed, affirmed, contested and made malleable through the traditional object is a common theme. Understanding this process requires a common methodology.

Keeler says something important when he suggests that the problem of 'surpassing description' without 'imposing alien judgements' when considering art forms from cultures which are not ones own may be resolved by 'considering an art form in the light of the relationships its performance occasions' (1987: 17). Punch and Judy belongs to my own culture, but the point is still useful. Relationships - between puppeteers, between puppeteers and audiences, between puppeteers and those who write about them - are occasioned by it and its meaning might be read in the light of those relationships. This in itself may be justification enough for the ethnographic approach, but it also enables us to understand what takes place in a show by considering the context within which it takes place: how and why it has come to be where it is and how its audiences respond to it.

One further commonality needs to be mentioned. Gross, Law and Keeler place themselves within the texts they produce and make explicit reference to their own

impacts on the outcome. I have already talked about the implications of this for this study. What it points to more generally is that these ethnographies involve a dialogue with performers, and that through this the voices of both the academy and the field are heard.

In discussing these ethnographies, I am signalling some of the conclusions this ethnography makes. Namely, that skilled performers are now more collectively instrumental in defining the form and in managing an icon of identity which was once publicly 'owned'; and that how the traditional form is handled, processed and understood, by performers, by audiences and by bookers, tells us something about the contemporary, late-modern relationship with the past.

I have discovered that the show plays a different cultural function from what it did when I was a child and from what it did when the last major study was carried out. There seems to be in Britain at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, a more mediated relationship with the past. Perhaps this is because 'the past' has been commodified, turned into theme parks and so on; or perhaps because audiences have come to notice what was always the case, that 'the past' is *always* in some sense (re)constituted. However it is, the show is more often used now to signal an acknowledgement of the past whose very acknowledgement also signals a disjunction with the past. Performers are more reflexively oriented towards the tradition than they seem to have been a few decades ago; the show is placed in more reflexively oriented contexts, too. This increased reflexivity had a bearing on how I was positioned by the Punch community. I use the term 'reflexivity' to mean, at its simplest, 'reflecting upon'; something which I will argue is a particular characteristic of the post-traditional mode of being (Giddens 1990: 36-39).

The study, then, is of the contemporary form. Although it contains some historical background, it is primarily concerned with Punch and Judy as it existed in England and Wales at the time of the study, between my first meeting with the performers at Aberystwyth in August 2006 and the Paignton meeting in March 2009. The geographical focus has come about both because there are almost certainly very few performers elsewhere and because the cultural currency of Punch seems to be different in those other places.<sup>18</sup>

## **The shape of the thesis**

In Chapter One I describe how the current sense of identity has come about and how it contrasts with earlier conditions. I go on in Chapter Two to look at how the organizations seek to manage this sense of identity. In chapters Three, Four and Five I consider the part that individual performers play in constituting the tradition, through bringing their own experiences and needs to it, experiences and needs which often differ from those of previous generations of performers. Here I consider how these impact on the material and dramaturgical aspects of the form. In Chapter Six I introduce the notion that context plays a critical part in determining what constitutes the form, both through how it is read and situated by audiences and bookers, and through how performers respond to those pressures. In Chapter Seven I extend this interrogation to include the more general cultural situatedness of Punch and Judy and how performers are negotiating its reception, particularly in and through the media.

## **Writing styles and conventions**

A degree of shaping takes place in the analysis and writing-up of research data, and discussions about the hermeneutics of writing-up occupy much ethnographic thinking; notably, the value of ‘author-saturated’ against ‘author-evacuated’ texts (Geertz, 1988: 9) is greatly debated. It is my intention to use a variety of modes appropriate to the content. Some will be analytical, as far as possible removing myself from the text; at other times, when I am involved in a dialogue with performers, or implicated in the production of discourse, I will be more visible in the text. This will involve subjective description. In the process of writing-up, key members of the College, Glyn Edwards and Clive Chandler (as well as my academic supervisor, Matthew Cohen) have been shown drafts of chapters and their responses have influenced what has been said and how. In seeking to respect both the demands of academic rigour and the desire amongst the Punch community that the document should be ‘readable’, I have sought to strike a balance in the writing.

Two terminological conventions need to be mentioned. Firstly, the gendered pronoun. To avoid gender bias it has been my practice, except where determined by context, to randomly use ‘he’ or ‘she’; however, it will be noticed that ‘he’ predominates over ‘she’ in the text, and this reflects the preponderance of men in the field. Secondly,

and partly for the same reason, I generally use the term ‘Punch performer’ rather than the more conventional ‘Punchman’. This raised issues with some performers. Partly they felt this might somewhat limit perceptions of them as they do lots of other things besides performing. More importantly, as was put to me by Clive Chandler, ‘performer’ lumps the best and the worst together and ignores the fact that the best individually create their shows and exhibit a smaller degree of mere replication implied by the term. Whilst I understood his concerns, no workable alternative was found. It needs to be stated, then, that the term is used when referring to them in their role as Punch puppeteer, whatever that role encompasses, and especially when distinguishing them from other types of puppeteer. It is hoped that any generalisation is avoided through talking about specific cases.

## Notes

1 Commentators disagree over the derivation of this term, though most performers believe it comes from the supposed practice of money being collected in a bottle during the performance. This would prevent the collector, or ‘bottler’, from stealing any of their earnings. The bottle was then smashed to retrieve the contents. Supposed elaborations on this practice involved the bottler holding a live fly in his hand. If the fly were alive at the end of the performance, it would suggest the bottler had not opened his hand to pilfer the takings.

2 This loose figure is based on membership of the Punch and Judy Fellowship, conversations with performers and a survey of Yellow Pages. Henrik Jurkowski was confident in 1998 that the number was around 300 (1998: 195). This difference does not indicate a decline so much as a problem in getting any kind of accurate figure. Some of the difficulties in estimating numbers may have to do with the anonymity of performers. Glyn Edwards, a leading Punch performer and someone who was instrumental in setting up the College and the PJF, has told me he thinks the number is around 300, but did not challenge my assertion that it could be nearer 150.

3 The term ‘popular’ is contested, especially when used in conjunction with the term ‘culture’. I use it in the way that Catriona Kelly does in her discussion of Petrushka. She distinguishes ‘popular’ from ‘high’, and in preference to ‘folklore’, since folklore carries the sense that it is less concerned with ‘immediate contexts and historical facts’ than it is with ‘remote origins’ (1990: 8-9).

4 I have seen shows by two female performers, Katey Wilde (Professor Peanuts) and Denise Pettit (Mrs Back-to-Front). Wilde is the daughter of Glyn and Mary Edwards and uses the performing name of her late grandfather who was a professional magician. (Glyn Edwards and Katey Wilde will be further discussed below). Pettit performs shows mainly for younger children. I have spoken to another female performer, Miraiker Battey, but I have not seen her show. Two important female performers have stopped performing in the last decade, Caroline Frost (Professor Caz) who is mentioned by Robert Leach (1985: 141) and who contributed a paper to *The Slapstick Symposium* (see below), and Wendy Warham, who worked a pitch at Swanage in Dorset. Rosa Peasley of Wolverhampton, now in her 70s, continues to perform (see Edwards 2009: 5).

5 *Punch and Judy, Icons of Englishness* website:  
<http://www.icons.org.uk/theicons/collectionm/punchandjudy> (accessed 18 December 2006).

6 Brewer 2000: 99

7 For a distinction between *object* and *practice* as a means of understanding a cultural form see Williams 1973: 16.

8 For a discussion of the relationship between 'the academy' and 'the field' see Clifford Geertz (1988).

9 'Intervention' is akin to Richard Schechner's notion of 'restored behaviour' (1985: 77); this involves the deliberate reconstruction of events or practices.

10 Anthony Giddens contrasts how traditions and cultural forms are more consciously shaped in the late modern period with how in pre-modern times they were shaped by local and less considered forces, such as the seasons, harvest and relations with the immediate community. This, he suggests, has considerable bearing on the whole idea of tradition, to the extent that, 'In oral cultures, tradition is not known as such, even those that are the most traditional of all' (1990: 37). The break with the embedded sense of self which this suggests, as it is currently experienced, is explored in Bauman 2008.

11 This reversal is not unheard of in recent ethnography. It has been explicitly acknowledged in work with Native Americans, amongst others, who have employed ethnographers to further a particular cause. These ethnographies sometimes come under the term 'applied' or 'action' anthropology (see Bennett 1996, and Payne 1998).

12 The often quoted example of this is Geertz's initiation into a community he was studying in 'Deep Play: notes on the Balinese Cockfight' (1973).

13 I saw a more graphic example of the control of discourse later on when a non-College performer who held very different views to that of The College was invited to a College-led workshop on the grounds, as Edwards graphically put it, that it was 'better to have him standing on the inside of the tent pissing out, than on the outside pissing in'; a particularly apt analogy for a Punch performer

14 The term 'discursive formation' is borrowed from Foucault (1972: 31-40). Lidchi (1997: 191) gives a workable definition: '[...] the systematic operation of several discourses or statements constituting a "body of knowledge", which work together to construct a specific object/topic of analysis in a particular way, and to limit the other ways in which that object/topic may be constituted'. I am suggesting that it is 'systematic' at the level of society as a whole, and, increasingly, at the global economic level.

15 For a clear analysis of the emerging cultural studies perspective at this time, and a discussion of the complexities to which it gave rise and of which it is necessarily composed, see Stuart Hall (1980).

16 This needs to be distinguished from the more familiar theatre studies understanding of *performance theory* which is a broader term perhaps most familiarly discussed in Richard Schechner's book of the same name (2003). There are similarities in that Schechner is interested in how the notion of performance extends beyond conventional theatre boundaries and how context is considered to contribute to its meaning; but in folklore studies, the term has a more precise definition and pre-dates Schechner's use.

17 See also, Bogatyrev (1999), Danforth (1983), Foley (2001, 2004), Kamenetsky (1984), Keller (1959), Malkin (1976), Myrsiades and Myrsiades (1988), Ozturk (2006), Sherzer and

Sherzer (1987), Smith (2004), Solomonik (1992), and Virulrak and Foley (2001). This list is not exhaustive, but it gives an indication of the range of non-ethnographic writing about traditional puppetry forms.

18 Although Leach says that ‘Scotland never seems to have been very receptive to Punch and Judy [...]’ (1985: 113), recent unpublished research suggests that there were quite a few performers there in the past. I am in correspondence with Martin MacGilp who has made some very thorough, unpublished, studies of local library and newspaper archives in Scotland and is uncovering evidence of shows which have not been reported in the more available puppet journals (see MacGilp 2009). He has found mention of several families performing in Scotland for a number of generations, including the Morrisons and the Codonas. From approximately the 1930s to the 1950s, George Peat had ‘five units’ touring the west of Scotland with Punch. However, as MacGilp suggests, Punch would be unlikely to be considered an icon of Scottishness as it has been of Englishness. Punch also appeared in the British colonies, certainly after the Second World War. Bruce MacIcloud, an important Scottish performer, toured Australia, New Zealand, India, Ceylon and South Africa. There are still a few Punch performers in Australia; one, Chris van der Craats, has told me there are three or four. Paul McPharlin was involved in the production of a number of Punch shows under the New Deal in the USA in the 1930s (see Hayes, 1930 and Howard, 2006).



## **Chapter One: History, historiography, association, organization and festival: the formation of an identity**

In this chapter I map a history of Punch and Judy from its earliest days to the formation of the Punch and Judy College of Professors, in order to lay foundations upon which to talk about the contemporary situation. This takes us up to the moment where the last major study left off. I lay out the cultural conditions under which the form developed and suggest that the emerging dominant culture during this period strove to '[...] reorganize popular culture; to enclose and confine its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms' (Hall 1981: 223). I argue that this shaped the performers' perceptions of themselves and helped determine the function and content of the show. I go on to suggest that, by contrast, in recent decades performers have become active bearers of their own tradition, taking charge of their own narratives. The thesis argues that this more than anything else accounts both for the variety *and* the consistency of shows which are currently performed. It is in analysing this taking charge that the actual human beings, their motives and contesting personalities rather than historical processes can more easily be seen. I conclude with a description of an event where this combination of human intervention and historical process finds expression: the Covent Garden Mayfayre.

### **Rhetorics of celebration and subordination in the histories**

It is difficult to separate the actual history of Punch and Judy from the writing of its history. Gross argues that 'When puppet theaters enter the intellectual discourse we can detect the process of selection and reshaping' (2001: 43). This process began very early on in the history of the glove puppet form of Punch and Judy. For reasons particular to the time it emerged, the show very quickly seems to have become appropriated within a developing middle-class discursive formation which served to construct an identity for the working-class. Most Punch historians have not remarked on this relationship; however Scott Cutler Shershow (1994, 1995) and Rosalind Crone (2006) do a very thorough job of describing the show's role in what they suggest is a mutually constitutive construction of identity.<sup>1</sup>

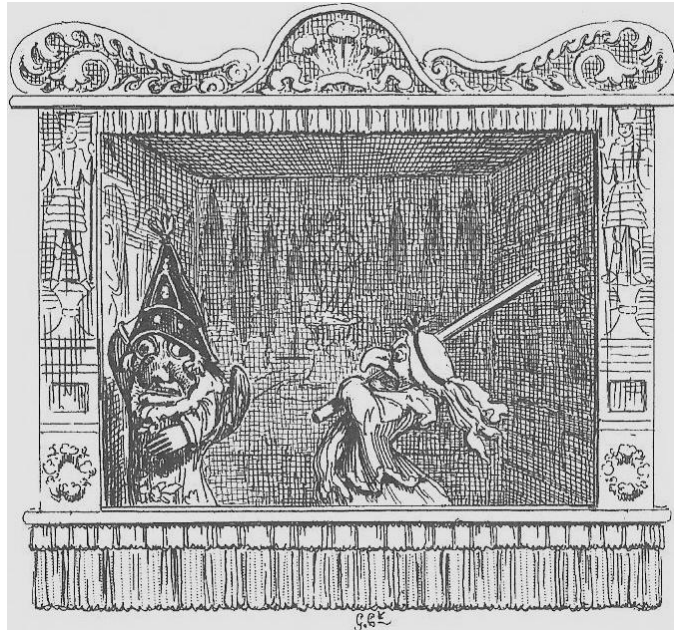


Fig. 3 Cruikshank illustration from the Payne-Collier transcription of Piccini's Punch and Judy show. Judy is belabouring Punch (1828: 108)

The marionette Punch had been mentioned by Pepys in his diary on 1662, and appearances at shows were documented by, among others, Sir Richard Steele in 1709 (Leach 1985: 22) and in a poem, 'A dialogue between Mad Mullinex and Timothy' by Jonathon Swift in around 1730 (ibid: 23). Early writings about the glove puppet show were distinct from these, however, in that they appear to have been deliberately produced for an educated audience. This may reflect developing notions that such an audience existed.

John Payne-Collier's 1828 transcription of a specially arranged performance by the octogenarian Italian performer Giovanni Piccini, with engravings by George Cruikshank, (Fig. 3), is prefaced by a 'history' of puppetry in England. It has a *faux*-literary style and extensive footnotes, some in Greek.<sup>2</sup> The book was reprinted many times and is still available. Speaight suggests that Collier produced the text more as a 'creative' than a documentary act (1970: 82), and in reading it we need to be aware of the special nature of the performance. Piccini was brought out of semi-retirement to perform and the show was halted several times so that Cruikshank could sketch the principal incidents. This is less problematic, as Leach suggests, than the 'literary overtones' of the text itself - a text, he believes, impossible to play with the swazzle (1985: 15). The transcription may well also contain episodes and dialogue Collier

remembers from seeing the show as a child in Brighton. It is a fascinating but unreliable glimpse of the show performed by perhaps its earliest exponent. (According to Leach [1985: 145], the script was the basis of a revival of a more subversive trend in performance in the 1970s and 80s.)

Some 30 years later, the exoticism of the show seems to have remained of central interest for the educated classes. In John Mayhew's 1851 interview with a 'Punchman', the showman is positioned within a discourse which accentuates and thus controls his otherness. The interview is part of Mayhew's huge documentary account of the capital's underclasses, *London Labour and the London Poor*. Some indication of Mayhew's opinion is clear from the fact that he places the showman in the category of the 'nomad' as distinct from the 'civilized man' (see Himmelfarh, 1981: 312). He is not given a name, he is a kind of exotic puppet within the frame of Mayhew's account; an account to which, according to Gertrude Himmelfarh, Mayhew 'added colour of his own' (1971: 316). Importantly, the puppeteer accedes to his being cast in this role. We should not be surprised by this; these men were trying to make a living, and, anyway, as McCormick and Pratasik point out, 'In most cases the showmen accepted patriarchal values without question and believed in the status quo' (1998: 11).

Twentieth century writers, Speaight (1955, 1970) and Byrom (1972), although they offer histories, do not 'locate "Punch and Judy" in the actual processes of social life and cultural transmission at a particular period' (Shershow 1994: 527). Leach goes some way towards doing this (1995: 30-48), but in raising Punch to the status of working-class hero, he ignores the fact that Punch is entirely self-seeking and '[...] in no sense represents liberation for its second titular character' (Shershow 1995: 167). It is as if, like other working-class 'heroes', Mother Courage or Shweyk, for example, or indeed Richard Hoggart's myopic working-class 'us' (1957: 72-101), Punch is a victim of his own charisma, individualism and desire for immediate gratification. These celebratory accounts which valorise Punch in either direction construct narratives which only reconfirm the process of assimilation.

### The performers' historian, George Speaight

The account to which performers themselves are most attached is that of George Speaight. Glyn Edwards in his obituary of Speaight states, 'George was pivotal to the Punch and Judy tradition as it has currently developed [...] George gave us the history of the tradition so that we might take it and help it blossom' (2006: 7). Speaight's *History of English Puppet Theatre* (1955), whilst in print, was the most comprehensive source for those interested in Punch and English puppetry. The research he did was thorough and painstaking, and his passion for Punch and Judy led him to hold an influential position. He was frequently brought out in defence and advocacy of the tradition, for example appearing as Pepys in Punch's official 325<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations in Covent Garden where he was interviewed by Glyn Edwards for his 1987 television documentary, *As Pleased as Punch*. Speaight was an articulate, enthusiastic and fondly regarded advocate.



Fig. 4 George Speaight as Samuel Pepys at the 325<sup>th</sup> birthday of Punch, Covent Garden (from the collection of George Speaight at the V&A)

But his was a partial and paternalistic view; one which is evident when we consider how he distinguishes between the marionette and the glove-puppet. He sees the marionette as 'an actor in miniature' (1970: 17), in the world of the 'wealthy and sophisticated' (ibid: 10), and the glove puppet as a 'species on its own' (ibid) in the world of 'the simple - the pure at heart' (ibid: 16). Amongst these he identifies an

otherwise disparate community: ‘peasants and labourers’ and ‘artists and poets’ (ibid); a community deeply imbued with an English and bucolic sensibility, albeit one which has been grafted onto an urban environment, and one which sees Punch as drawing his vitality from the tradition of ‘The English Clown’ (ibid: 22-29). Speaight situates Punch as an intrinsically English creation. It is a view which locates the origins of Punch not in the changing urban landscape of the late Regency period, but in an idealised pre-industrial environment.<sup>3</sup> Whilst it is easy to see how he can place Punch among the aesthetic of other vernacular English forms, ‘figureheads of ships, and the flamboyant horses of fairground roundabouts’ (1970: 119), we must consider that that notion of Englishness might itself be a construction, and one made from a particular (class) standpoint.

I take a different historiographical approach. Whilst acknowledging the complicity of performers in the construction of class identities, and the fact that the writings constitute much of the meaning of the form for performers, I seek to separate the actual chronology from the discourses in an attempt to account for its absorption into the fabric of the bourgeois discursive formation of which Speaight’s ‘history’ was a product.

### **Early Chronology of Punch**

Some commentators see an ancient ancestry in Punch. Byrom and Speaight draw a very faint line back to the stock figures of the Dorian Mimes; this may derive more from conjecture than hard fact. However, most commentators are agreed that the character of Pulcinella in the *commedia dell’arte*, which may have been a descendent of those Mimes, was the forerunner of Punch, the name being an anglicising of the original (see Rudlin 1994).<sup>4</sup>

How the Commedia figure Pulcinella transformed eventually into the English glove puppet Punch is a matter of some debate. We know that Punch was a very popular marionette from the late seventeenth century, having been brought to England as Pulcinella by Italian puppeteer Signor Bologna (Pietro Gimonde), very soon after 1660, following the *interregnum*. Samuel Pepys wrote of seeing a performance with Punch in it by Bologna in Covent Garden in 1662, and in the next few years recorded shows by other Italian puppeteers. Punch, the marionette (in this case with a rod into

the head and strings or wires to the limbs), soon became a regular character in the thriving puppet theatres of the eighteenth century, often providing comic relief. According to Philip John Stead, he was finding his way ‘into every kind of puppet show’ (1950: 60). He and his wife, then called *Joan*, catered for sophisticated audiences on the stages of the leading puppet companies of the time, those of Martin Powell and Charlotte Charke (Speaight 1970: 51-59). The puppet also appeared in shows in fairground booths around the country. Speaight suggests that glove puppets were sometimes used as well, appearing ‘at the window’ as an outside attraction to the larger marionette shows inside (1970: 72). Contemporary illustrations support his view (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 Detail from *The Humours and Diversions of Southwark Fair* by William Hogarth, 1733. Two glove puppet figures can be made out above the box to the left of the hobby horse, apparently crossing sticks; the sign above reads ‘Punches Opera’.

It is unclear whether these glove puppet performances contained Punch, or to what extent they resembled the show as it later became. Speaight believes they did, but his evidence is scant (Speaight 1995: 201). By the end of the eighteenth century, however, Punch had completely transformed into the glove puppet booth form we know today. In this form it retained many of the features of the marionette show, among them Punch’s shrewish wife, whom he regularly beat, and his encounter with the Devil. The show gradually introduced new features including a live dog, Toby, a

Hangman, a Clown, a Policeman or Beadle, and later, a Crocodile. Several of these originally purely puppet characters came to be associated with actual figures of the day. Scaramouch became Clown Joey after Joey Grimaldi; the Hangman came to be named after Jack Ketch, the most famous hangman of the early nineteenth century; and the servant, 'Nigger', or 'Shallaballa' became Jim Crow after the very popular black-face music-hall character performed by T.D. Rice in the 1830s (see Fisler 2005).

It is difficult to know the exact state of marionette puppetry in England at the end of the eighteenth century, though it seems to have been in decline. What is clear is that glove puppetry started to become more visible. McCormick and Pratasik suggest that this was due to another continental influx, 'The Napoleonic period released onto the roads of Europe a wave of showmen (especially Italians), with their simple booths and small troupes of glove puppets' (1998: 114).



Fig. 6 Samuel Collings: The Italian Puppet Show (Leach 1985: 38)

Among these show people was Piccini who arrived in England in 1779. It was shortly after this that the first records of the show appeared in the form of paintings and drawings. In these, the show is depicted in the streets with an audience comprising a wide social spectrum, and a mixture of adults and children, though predominantly adults (Fig. 6). It is unlikely that the subsequent establishment of the form was due to one man, and though Piccini is the only performer of whom we have any certain record, the seemingly rapid spread of the show suggests that it was taken up by others very soon after his arrival. Since Punch was already a popular figure, it is not difficult

to imagine puppeteers seizing on the idea. The fact that there were probably a number of different versions alongside the one we know today adds weight to this view (Leach 1985: 37-47). Speaight is reluctant to give much credit to Piccini, arguing instead that existing showmen hit upon the formula for success almost by accident:

[...] the puppet showmen were reduced to performing where and when they could in the streets, wherever people passed and could be induced to listen [...] they stumbled unawares upon the recipe for success [...] people would stop who would not have gone in to see a show (1950: 180-181).

In being thrown out onto the streets, as Speaight puts it, the show became very closely associated with its alfresco audience and their concerns. In order to keep the, literally, passing trade, the show had to reflect their interests. At this stage of its career it reflected deep anxieties about marriage and the law, satirically expressed. The exaggerations of violence towards one-another, child, Beadle, Doctor and foreigner, may have been a kind of wish-fulfilment amongst people whose lives were daily characterised by these irritations and anxieties.

What is interesting in England is the degree to which the figure was adapted to an already existing character whilst remaining consistent to its original. Punch is only one of several 'descendents' of Pulcinella, but in other European countries, and presumably through the same process of showmen crossing borders and intermingling, the character took root but transformed more radically, or came to be ousted by newer popular figures or already existing ones. In German speaking areas, for instance, the role was taken over by Kasperle, in Holland by Jan Klaassen, in Hungary by Vitez Laszlo. Speaight suggests that only in the countries not defeated by Napoleon did the 'Pulcinella character survive in its assimilated form' (1970: 145).<sup>5</sup> A question arises from this: if popular puppets or puppetry responded to local conditions, what were the local conditions which meant that in England Punch remained, at least outwardly, the same? I think the answer lies in the second part of my enquiry: how Punch became assimilated into the bourgeois discourse.

### **Historical context of the early form: assimilation by middle-class audiences**

Piccini's arrival in England and the transformation of the show into a glove puppet coincided with a period of deep and rapid social and cultural upheaval. We might



think of the resulting change in terms of William's notion of 'structures of feeling' (2006: 36), from one set or expression of social relations to another. The impact on all cultural forms and their ability to represent the emerging hegemony was called into question. Each had to find its own new place, adapt or perish. As James Walvin suggests, human beings were entering unknown territory, '[The] complex, interrelated forces of urbanisation and industrialisation had produced a society which, by the 1840s, was qualitatively different from any previous human society' (1978: 3). The laxities and excess of the Regency period were being replaced by the sobriety, industry, regularisation of work and moral uprightness (at least outwardly) of the Victorian. This inevitably wrought changes on popular forms of culture which were often subject to suppression. However, attempts to suppress popular forms and activities were not as straightforward as might be supposed and the changes often seem to reflect a sense of regret toward their passing, so that many remained in some residual, appropriated or even reinvigorated form.

Robert Malcolmson (1982) suggests that where popular forms and activities did survive, this was usually because they accorded with some economic or (middle) class interest, or were made to. So, for instance,

[...] those fairs, especially the smaller ones, which blended pleasure with business were usually much more resilient than those which were strictly for pleasure; when a fair became economically redundant (and many did during the Victorian period) it was much more liable to attack (Malcolmson 1982: 34).

Where class interests were less directly bound up with economics, other considerations were invoked. The gentry hunted, but the blood-sports of the working-classes were frequently outlawed. The basis of this type of discrimination was usually presented as moral. The Society for the Suppression of Vice, one of a number of such organizations which came into being in the early part of the nineteenth century and whose purpose was the improvement of public morals, argued that '[...] surely a greater benefit cannot be conferred upon [the lower classes], than to deprive them of such amusements as tend to impair their health' (cited in Malcolmson 1982: 41).<sup>6</sup>

New laws were put in place and old ones revived to regulate behaviour in public places. The vagrancy laws, originally introduced in the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries to deal with the threat of armed gangs then roaming the countryside, were re-instituted by a parliamentary select committee in 1821, along with a number of other laws, with the intention of the moral reformation of the people. It was clear, though, that these laws could be directed against itinerant performers, and objections were raised in Parliament by members who did not share the reformers' zeal. One MP hoped, '[...] that my friend Mr Punch, as well as any persons who carry wild beasts for show, will not be included in the list of vagrants by this law, as they are subject of great and general amusement' (cited in Wilson 2007: 390).

Feelings about Punch were indeed mixed. On the one hand he was the most ubiquitous example of entertainments considered to encourage idleness, and which therefore should be shunned in an age whose industry was largely prompted by a fear that the fruits of industry could easily disappear - a fear made the sharper by the reality of revolution across the Channel - and on the other hand he represented a time when the 'air was freer' (Wilson, in Reeve 2008a). In the 1820s, according to Ben Wilson, 'Older people looked back at Punch as a time when you could do what you wanted before the moral police came along'.<sup>7</sup> Punch was an especially acute reminder to the nineteenth century bourgeois of, '[...] what it was like when in youth he was really alive' (Sennett, 1977: 152). He represented also the kind of plain-speaking and lack of hypocrisy on which the English had prided themselves and which the new respectability was in danger of destroying. He was a repository of a particular kind of folk-memory which was held dear, but was no longer deemed entirely acceptable. The show continued to be played in the streets, but increasingly performers adapted themselves to the new conditions. Crone describes the changes succinctly,

It was a sense of nostalgia that prompted early Victorian middle- and upper-class men to invite Punch into their homes. They had found immense joy in the show during their youth as young 'men about town', seeing in the puppet a reflection of the pleasurable elements of Regency culture, including hedonism and misogyny. The process of street clearing and the increasing regulation of public space in respectable neighborhoods helped to fan this sentimentality as respectable men feared that Punch shows were fast becoming a relic of the past (2006: 1071).

This ambivalence with its confusions, regrets and possibilities was part of a larger process of creation of class-identity occurring at this time (see Williams 1958: xiii-xx).



Fig. 7 Punch in the Victorian drawing room c.1871 (Speaight 1970: 119)

Wilson suggests that in this different landscape, new economies were operating (Reeve 2008a). If Punch was to survive it would survive in a new way; as the purchasing power of the middle-classes increased, so they came to control the market and define the culture along the lines of the new respectability. Punch was cherished, but seen as vulgar. Its invitation into the middle-class drawing rooms in the middle of the century was suggestive of two counter-tendencies. Firstly, it reminded the newly arrived petit-bourgeois of the pleasure they had had as children when they watched the show in the streets and before they had drawing rooms to seek shelter in, and secondly, it was a means by which they could control and emasculate the vulgarity of which Punch was the keenest exponent. Mayhew's Punchman (Mayhew 1949 [1851]: 437-438) makes a distinction between the shows he performs for 'the street people', who are 'all for the comic', and the 'sentimental folks', for whom he is obliged 'to preform [sic] werry steady and werry slow [...] spiling [sic] the performance entirely'. He blames 'the march of hintellect' for the need to adapt, and indeed the economic prosperity at the beginning of the century produced a class of upwardly mobile families which were radically changing the make-up of society, demanding better education and buying and reading 'magazines eager to educate the willing masses' (Wilson 2007: 316).

Along with this came the now economically viable insulation of childhood. Crone suggests, 'The development of the Punch and Judy show after 1850 was fuelled by a

new middle-class concern with children's entertainment' (2006: 1073). She draws a compelling relationship between the increasing bowdlerization of the show and the increasing respectability of performers. They were becoming children's entertainers, exploiting the emerging notion that childhood was '[...] a special time, the best of times, a time that was sanctified' (Fletcher 2008: 10) (see Fig. 7). Prior to this it is likely that 'they did not make a serious distinction between adult and child spectators' (McCormick and Pratasik 1998: 79).

It should not be assumed, though, that performers were especially unhappy about the loss of some imagined 'traditional' relationship with their audiences; the show was a recent product of the urban conditions of the Industrial Revolution. Concern about this imagined loss did not really emerge for another century - the period about which I am principally writing. At the time there was a desired move 'upwards' as well as an appropriation;

[Popular culture in the nineteenth century] had a remarkable and (to opponents) alarming ability to diffuse itself upwards. Time and again entertainers who had started in the humblest circumstances, touring the fairs and the races, received the supreme accolade of a royal command performance [...] (Cunningham 1982: 67).

We might usefully apply Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's view of music-hall as a '[...] transitional form-in a transitional society - between earlier 'folk' and later 'popular' art' (1964: 56), to Punch and Judy, though perhaps at an earlier stage in the transition, and recognise through this the beginnings of a sense of professionalism and identity. As in music-hall (and indeed Punch sometimes appeared in the music-halls), Punch was performed by players who earned their money from being, like earlier folk artists, close to the community, but also, like later musicians and comedians, through their professional status, slightly removed from it. It had become an '*individual*' (ibid) rather than a communal art, but it retained many of the qualities of the communal forms: '[it] depended for its impact upon the conventions being known and accepted and endlessly repeatable' (ibid). Punchmen, then, in this period, of necessity accommodated themselves and their shows to the changing environment. As we shall see, this change solidified with the move to the seaside where the form became what it was generally recognised as throughout the twentieth century. Only later, at the beginning of the period of the present study, did a new set of performers

emerge who looked for a return to what they saw as the original, subversive, impulse of the show.

Before we consider the role of the seaside in consolidating the form and defining its performers, we might tentatively mention an area which has not been explored in the literature, but which might go some way to accounting for the class assimilation of the Punch workers. Punch and Judy seems to have emerged, had its strongholds in, and moved out from London. Gareth Stedman Jones, in exploring the history of the labour movement by looking at developments in working-class culture, compares London with other urban areas in the nineteenth century. He suggests that music-hall similarly emerged in the capital as an expression of working-class culture because London, with its '[...] tardiness of factory development, the prevalence of casual work and the shifting amorphous character of the new proletarian suburbs', lacked the homogeneity of the industrialised areas:

Trapped in the twilight world of small workshop production, London was not well-placed to sustain the defensive corporate forms of solidarity upon which working-class politics was increasingly to be based. The strength of its own political tradition had not been founded on the factory. It therefore registered the new situation in predominantly cultural forms (Jones 1982: 116).

The music-hall artists displayed what Jones calls, 'pre-eminently cockney attitudes', 'Fatalism, political scepticism, the evasion of tragedy or anger and a stance of comic stoicism' (ibid). These are many of the characteristics of Punch, who in his domestic rebellion represents not his class but himself. This discussion might lead us into considering Gramscian distinctions between *dominance* and *hegemony*, where,

A bourgeois hegemony is secured not via the obliteration of working-class culture, but via its *articulation* to bourgeois culture and ideology so that, in being associated with and expressed in the forms of the latter, its political affiliations are altered in the process [*italics in original*] (Bennett, 2006).

This sense of hegemony fairly accurately describes the process of assimilation to which Punch and Judy was subject. This process seems to have taken hold within a remarkably short space of time, between Piccini's arrival in 1779 and his final shows, some time in the 1820s.

### **The move to the seaside, professionalisation and the creation of a dominant form**

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Leach identified three groups of Punch performers working at the time of his study: the *swatchel omis*, the *counter-culturalists* and the *beach uncles*. In later chapters I will talk about the differences between these groups. For the moment I am interested in how the beach uncles came to be the most visible and numerous form.

Mayhew's Punchman (1949 [1851]: 433) remarks that, 'Watering-places is werry good in July and August. Punch mostly goes down to the sea-side with the quality'. In the first half of the nineteenth century it is probably true to say that the beaches were frequented by the well-to-do: those who could afford the fares, the accommodation and the time. The beach was often a 'replica of the spa' (Walvin 1978: 70), and regarded as having health-giving qualities; in keeping with the new morality, it seems to have been a place of sobriety. By the middle of the century, however, things were changing. With the coming of the railways and the unprecedented ability to move large numbers of people around cheaply and quickly, working-class excursionists were arriving and altering the character of the resorts. Different resorts reacted differently, some discouraged the day-tripper by excluding fairgrounds and stalls; others separated the different classes by putting different kinds of attraction in different areas and separating the higher class hotels from the rougher bed and breakfasts (see Walton 1982). By the end of the century, with the 'widespread regularization of the working week and the introduction of statutory holidays, and [...] the development of excursion trains' (Leach 1985: 98-99), resorts had generally become dominated by (the better-off) working-class visitors. Where the Punchman pitched his appeal in all this is hard to say. It is likely that if he came with the health-seekers, he brought the drawing-room respectability with him, at the same time he would have needed to adapt to his changing audience. James Walvin sees both an 'upward' and a 'downward' movement,

In the case of the spas and, later, the seaside resorts, there was a clear process of assimilation at work through which the forms of leisure of the aristocratic and propertied minority influences, first the *nouveaux riches* and middle classes, and later, in much diluted form, the lower orders (1978:14).

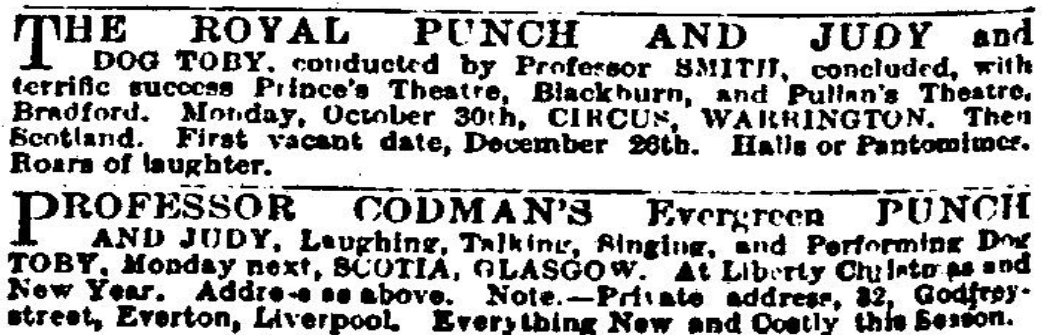
Regular appearances at the beaches had two effects. For many performers it gave them the chance to develop their entrepreneurial skills and to find ways of supplementing a sometimes precarious living. Some, like the Green family in Blackpool, ran a number of concessions (Leach 1983: 75); later showmen might run the deck-chair franchise or have a small beach-shop selling buckets and spades and so on. This anticipated the kinds of activities of entrepreneurs like Oscar Oswald in the 1960s and 70s who performed Punch and ran a magic shop selling puppets and tricks to Punch performers and others. Secondly, it confirmed the show as predominantly a children's entertainment. Some performers developed other talents, not necessarily part of the urban form - clowning, magic or even comedy routines - as part of a repertoire of skills. Their role was akin to that of the 'beach uncle' of the 'Nigger Minstrel' beach troupes whose particular job was to 'relate directly with the audience, especially the children' (Liddington 2007).<sup>8</sup> The role also developed because many Punch performers probably moved from the music-halls, especially after the First World War. They brought other performance skills with them, as well as some of the music-hall conventions, such as audience participation (see Speaight 1970: 125; Leach 1985: 137). The beach uncle is perhaps typified by Tony Hancock's Punchman in the film, *The Punch and Judy Man* (Summers 1963). In dress and deference, Hancock maintains a sense of respectability, but he occupies an indeterminate position in the social hierarchy, economically vulnerable, but able, and required, to move between different social strata.

By the early to mid-part of the twentieth century, then, with the increasing need, and desire, to adhere to notions of respectability, many performers had lost the rough and dissolute sense of the early street show. As Speaight suggests, by the 1950s the ways in which they expected to be treated at the beach indicates that they were thinking about themselves as professionals,

In recent years [...] there has been a tendency for Punchmen to avoid pitches on which they have to pass a hat round like a street busker; they like to think of themselves as entertainers at least as good as the concert-party on the pier, and they prefer the dignity of a railed enclosure, perhaps with a covered theatre, and with a proper admission charge made for entrance (1970: 126).

This developing sense was accompanied, in some cases, by a relatively predictable income, and was sustained by an increasing use of publicity.

Performers have always been aware of the need for publicity. Early on in the history of the tradition, publicity was very localised and rudimentary and consisted simply of banging a drum or playing the panpipes or perhaps a bugle to attract people who happened to be in hearing range. The booth itself would act as a visual magnet and the sound of the swazzle would carry some distance (Reeve 2008b, Proschan 1994). Later, performers would advertise in newspapers (Fig. 8). Later on, in the trade papers, such as the small ads in *The Stage* or specialized magazines like *The Puppet Master* (Fig. 9). More established performers wishing to attract presumably lucrative private engagements, would have their own brochures printed (Figs. 10 and 11). Many performers had postcards produced, especially to capture the seaside market. (Figs. 12 and 13).



**THE ROYAL PUNCH AND JUDY** and DOG TOBY, conducted by Professor SMITH, concluded, with terrific success Prince's Theatre, Blackburn, and Pullan's Theatre, Bradford. Monday, October 30th, CIRCUS, WARRINGTON. Then Scotland. First vacant date, December 26th. Halls or Pantomime. Roars of laughter.

**PROFESSOR CODMAN'S Evergreen PUNCH AND JUDY**, Laughing, Talking, Singing, and Performing Dog TOBY, Monday next, SCOTIA, GLASGOW. At Liberty Chulston's and New Year. Address as above. Note.—Private address, 32, Godfrey-street, Everton, Liverpool. Everything New and Costly this Season.

Fig. 8 Newspaper advertisements, end of the nineteenth century (Leach, 1985: 105)




In increasingly sophisticated ways performers could manage how they were perceived and create an image of themselves which was appropriate to the kinds of market at which they were aiming. Many of the Punchmen of the 1940s, 50s and 60s were all-round children's entertainers, making little distinction between their identity as Punchmen, as conjurers or as ventriloquists. In their publicity, Percy Press and Tom Kemp both wear bow ties and dinner jackets, and both refer to having been broadcast on the BBC, a mark of respectability (Figs. 10 and 11).



<p>1662 - 1962</p> <p>FOR THE YOUNG IN YEARS AND THE YOUNG IN HEART</p> <h2>PUNCH &amp; JUDY</h2> <p>FIRST-CLASS EQUIPMENT WITH AUTHENTIC PUPPETS, PLUS "TOP FLIGHT" MANIPULATION</p> <p>Available any time, any distance</p> <p>Now Booking — 1963</p> <p><b>PERCY PRESS</b>      <b>43, FITZROY ROAD, LONDON, N.W.1.</b></p> <p>Write for Brochure      PRImrose 2723</p>	<h2>TOM KEMP</h2> <p>PUNCH &amp; JUDY MAGIC :: VENTRILOQUISM NURSERY PUPPETS</p> <hr/> <p>Complete charge of parties undertaken</p> <p>Variety Shows with several performers provided</p> <hr/> <p><b>22 Willoughby Road London, N.W.3.</b> HAMpstead 2688</p>
<h3>THE PLAYHOUSE PUPPETS</h3> <p>( SAM KEMP &amp; MARGARET COOK )</p> <hr/> <p>Specialists String-Marionettes</p> <hr/> <p>Programmes for all occasions Lecture-Demonstrations</p> <p>Write for brochure</p> <hr/> <p><b>THE PUPPET STUDIO</b> <b>86 Streathbourne Road, Tooting Bec Common, London, S.W.17</b> Balham 5140</p>	<h2>GEO. WALL-MAN</h2> <p>presents</p> <p><b>MAGIC</b> <b>VENTRILOQUISM</b> <b>GULLIVER'S PUPPETS</b> and <b>Mr. PUNCH</b> "who makes him work too hard"</p> <hr/> <p>Please send letters of sympathy and cheques to</p> <p><b>60 BICKERSTETH ROAD, S.W.17.</b>      Balham 9767</p>

Fig. 9 Puppeteers' adverts (*The Puppet Master*, September 1962)

Mr. Press has entertained every class of audience for over 25 years... his artistry is carried through with expert and unexpected finish, refinement being the keynote.

<h3>CONJURER ...</h3>  <p><b>"It's FUN to be FOOLED"</b></p> <p>The senses are pleasantly deceived and we are transported to realms of fancy.</p> <p>CONJURING is an entertainment that never fails to please provided it is executed by an adept performer. The true magician manipulates his miracles under our very noses by what we know as "sleight-of-hand"...</p> <p>Mr. Press's Speciality is "Sleight-of-hand."</p>	<h3>PUNCH &amp; JUDY ...</h3>  <p><b>PUNCH our Pleasurable PUPPET</b></p> <p>The very English Puppet Show, Punch &amp; Judy is an ever popular entertainment with children and adults.</p> <p>MR. Press's interpretation follows traditional lines, yet he has added many little original touches that bring this time-honoured entertainment right up-to-date.</p> <p>Broadcast over the B.B.C. "Home" and "Light" programmes, and direct to America through the Columbia Broadcast System, Mr. Press's Punch and Judy Show has also been featured in the B.B.C. Television Service. The Show has been made into a film called "Punch and Judy," directed by T. Ratcliffe Holmes, for the Renown Picture Corporation.</p>	<h3>VENTRILOQUIST</h3>  <p><b>Ventriloquial Verbosity</b></p> <p>"Joey" is always welcomed with screams of delight from children of all ages.</p> <p>THERE is no doubt that the introduction of this type of entertainment greatly enhances a conjuring show. The jokes and quips that fly between Joey and Mr. Press are, of course, always in impeccable good taste, with a topical keynote that is guaranteed to give fun and amusement to everyone.</p> <p>Please keep this brochure and contact Mr. Press when next you are contemplating Private Parties, Cabarets, etc.</p>
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...er, well thought out impromptu act" — STRAND MAGAZINE : "Bound to excite comment among the multitude" — SUNDAY CHRONICLE : "Not only good tricks of his command but quite a humorist" — ISLE OF WIGHT TIM

Fig. 10 Percy Press publicity-brochure showing a variety of skills (from the collection of George Speaight in the V & A Museum)

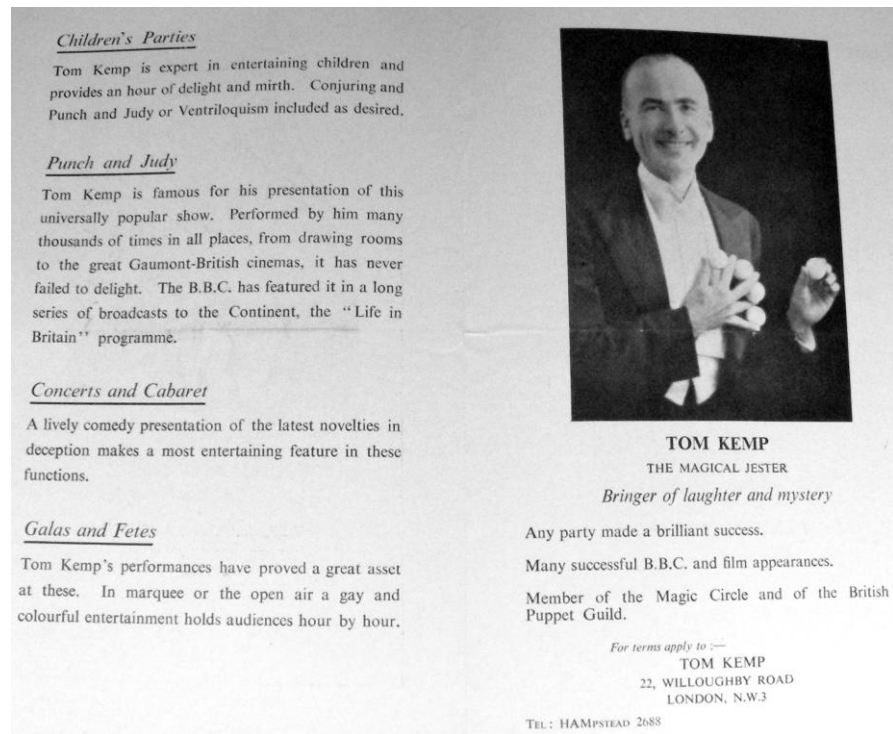


Fig. 11 Tom Kemp publicity brochure (from the collection of George Speaight in the V & A Museum)



Fig.12 Publicity postcard, Frank Edmunds booth, Weymouth beach 1926<sup>9</sup>

As we shall see, the beach uncle form was associated with economies of production and exchange and with a certain style of performance which led to the show homogenising into the one most people think of today. This style of performance involved a familiar interaction with the audience, including much use of audience calling out, as in the traditional pantomime. This contrasts with some of the swatchel omi shows and has been retained by most performers working today.



Fig. 13 Professor Green at Blackpool Sands, c.1930

### **Meetings and the history of association**

#### **Family and informal association**

The creation of a sense of what it meant to be a Punch and Judy performer which was expressed in the individual publicity has only relatively recently gained momentum in its collective manifestation as opportunities for association have increased. In the early days, Punch and Judy networks, if they can be so described, seem to have been of an *ad hoc* nature, characterized by both competition and camaraderie. This situation is perhaps typified in an exchange between two performers which Mayhew's informant related to him (Mayhew is illustrating the 'patter' or language of the showmen),

'How are you getting on?', I might say to another Punchman, 'Ultra cateva', he'd say. If I was doing a little, I'd say, 'Bonar.' Let us have a 'shant a bivare'- pot of beer. If we has a good pitch we never tell one another, for business is business. If they know we've a 'bonar' pitch, they'll oppose, which is bad (Mayhew 1949 [1851]: 434).

He goes on to describe how performers will look out for each other if, for instance, somebody is paying too close attention to the booth. The closeness of the community is suggested by the 'private' language that they use and it places them within a larger community of relative outsiders, 'buskers, mountebanks and puppeteers' (Leach 1985: 114).

How this sense of community translated into a discrete and articulated sense of identity is difficult to say, if it did at all, and it may be that performers associated for no other reasons than friendship or geography. Even how often these encounters took place is hard to establish since the numbers of performers is disputed. Speaight says that in the 1850s there were only eight in the whole of London and eight elsewhere (1970: 116), and that this remained the case till the end of the century; by contrast Dickens implies that they were thick on the ground (1972: 701); Stead states that in the first half of the nineteenth century they were 'ubiquitous' (1950: 65). There is too little hard evidence to be conclusive. Stead is certain, however, that the performers all knew each other (ibid: 127) and during the Victorian period could be characterized as having in common, 'a grave professional mystery [...] a thing of rites and ceremonies, with a kind of apostolic succession of exhibitors of the puppet' (ibid: 122). If this is the case and not the product of romanticizing hindsight, we can only guess how these 'rites and ceremonies' became established. What is likely is that certain central conventions and features were common to a great many, if not all, of the shows: the iconography of Punch himself, perhaps the episodes that were shown, and certainly the episodic nature of the show. This suggests a common sense of the form amongst practitioners and a set of popular expectations.

Precisely how these conventions were shared and disseminated is not recorded, though Mayhew's informant tells us he went out with his 'master' at first, and must have learnt the show from him. He also tells us that he was taught the 'secret' of the swazzle from Piccini from whom he bought the show. We can be fairly sure that in the nineteenth century the show was passed on or learnt first hand either from a practicing performer or from watching it.

We can be a little more certain about what some forms of early association looked like when we consider the dynastic performers, the swatchel omis. These did not have

the character of the later organizations. According to Leach (1980: 66), loyalties were to the family and exchanges of information and skills were localised. The shows were part of the family identity, part of its genetic make-up, and each family might have its own style of performance and favourite routines, as well as its own way of talking about the show along with its own 'rites and ceremonies'. These were passed on through the families and did not rely on the more abstract structures of association or dissemination on which the non-dynastic performers depend (and as a result of which the later organizations developed).<sup>10</sup>

### **Organized larger scale meetings**

There are no records of Punch and Judy performers getting together in any organized way much before the end of the nineteenth century, and even up until recent decades there have been very few organized gatherings. The first recorded large scale meeting took place on June 22 1887 in Hyde Park, London, in celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Contemporary sources disagree over the number of Punch and Judy booths operating on the day. Mr Didcott of 'Didcott's Theatrical Bureau', the agent who booked the acts, told the *Daily Telegraph* that he had to find pitches for 25 Punch and Judies (cited in Felix 2001), though Didcott himself had asked Samuel Bridges, a well known Punchman of the day, to find 15 Punch and Judy men (as well as at least one large marionette show and two performing cats with mice).<sup>11</sup> Didcott felt it necessary to reassure readers that the Punchmen were respectable, 'None of them were such as may be seen in the streets; they only appear at garden parties, fetes and gentlemen's houses' (ibid). This is suggestive of a change in how some performers were perceived. Mayhew's Punchman of 40 years earlier was working the streets *and* the drawing rooms. However it was, there seem to have been few of them about. Didcott tells us he had to scour the country to meet the requirements, 'Punch and Judy men are not a numerous body. I had two from Glasgow, one from Edinburgh, another from Liverpool and two from Manchester' (ibid). Another gathering took place in 1922. There is little evidence about this, except for a tantalising photograph, but it seems to have taken place at a football stadium, probably in London. In the picture there are perhaps 20 of them lined up with their booths.<sup>12</sup>

An increasing number of gatherings and festivals has marked the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. The first of these was the Punch Tercentenary Celebrations, a gathering of '[...] some forty Punchmen with their families, puppets and even some Dog Tobys' (Phillips 1962b). This was organized by George Speaight, Percy Press and Clarence May, rector of St. Paul's Church Covent Garden in whose grounds the festival took place. The location was chosen because of its association with the earliest record of a Punch show which Samuel Pepys made on 9 May 1662. A plaque was unveiled on the day to commemorate the event.<sup>13</sup> The Tercentenary attracted television, radio and newspaper coverage, the first such gathering to do so.

One other large scale gathering took place before meetings became an annual event in the mid 1970s. This was The Bankside Punch and Judy Festival held on the proposed site of the building of the Globe Theatre on Sunday 8 September 1974. 18 performers did shows and there were reportedly 'record crowds' of 800.<sup>14</sup> The festival was organized by Glyn Edwards who had attended the Tercentenary and was becoming an increasingly influential figure in the community. It was at this festival that the idea for a 'specifically Punchmen's organization' was first mooted, along with the idea for a newsletter and an annual gathering.<sup>15</sup> Such a gathering became a reality from the mid 1970s when the Covent Garden Mayfayre - to be described further below - came into being. Punch and Judy performers, who at the beginning of the century had gathered only very occasionally, at the end of it were meeting at least yearly with a fixed date in their diaries.

What characterised Bankside and was to characterise later gatherings was a determination and an ability by performers to use publicity as a means to sustain the tradition. Glyn Edwards had arranged for a great deal of pre-publicity; he contacted the local and national press as well as television companies. Edwards' work as a television producer gave him the skills and confidence to deal with the media and with the logistical demands of putting a festival together. These were in evidence in the next major gathering, the '325' celebration of Punch's 'birthday' in 1987, again at Covent Garden. Edwards was also instrumental in setting this up, and George Speaight was again called on for his support. There were over 100 Punch performers present, as well as puppeteers from other European countries (Fig. 14). Part of the

costs of bringing these performers from abroad was met through the decision to film the event as part of a television documentary that Edwards was producing about Punch and Judy (1987).



Fig. 14 Gathering of performers for the '325' celebrations Covent Garden, 10 May 1987 (photo by Nick Lockett)

In 1989 as part of Birmingham City centenary celebrations, entitled 'Show of the Century', 20 Punch performers appeared at Cannon Hill Park in Birmingham for a 'puppet cavalcade'. This was a council-funded event, organized by the city council for whom Clive Chandler was working as an advisor/programmer at the time. The event was repeated in the two years following.

The survival of the tradition into the twenty-first century was marked by a 'Punch and Judy Jamboree and International Slapstick Symposium' at the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham as part of The Great Midlands Millennium Puppet Party. The Jamboree contained many of the elements by which we can distinguish the tradition as it is currently managed from the looser and more externally or individually determined representations of the tradition which, as we have seen, characterised it up till now. These elements include the production of discourse, the deliberate association with non-British forms of traditional puppetry and the sophisticated exploitation of national and regional funding resources.

The Jamboree was organized by Glyn Edwards with funding from the National Lottery. He saw in it an opportunity to further embed Punch and Judy as part of the 'Government's thinking about Punch as part of the national identity' which was already evident in the plans to have a Punch and Judy show at the Millennium Dome.<sup>16</sup> The Jamboree took place over a weekend in May 2000 (Edwards 2000b: 1-3 and 15) and consisted of a range of puppetry shows including six Punch booths, a Pulcinella show, a Kasper show, a Vitez Lazslo show as well as non-Punch shows from around Britain and puppet shows from Asia and the U.S.A. There was also what was called *The Slapstick Symposium*, a public reading of 'papers' written and given by performers about aspects of Punch and Judy.

International meeting was also visible in another series of annual events between 2000 and 2006 at the Punch and Judy Festival in Aberystwyth where each year up to eight Punch shows, alongside puppet shows from abroad, performed over the long bank-holiday weekend at the end of August. Chandler organized this council-funded event and the Punch performers were drawn exclusively from the College.

### **The formation of the organizations**

As we have seen, largely due to increasing association in the second half of the twentieth century, performers were developing a strong sense of self and community. Eventually this resulted in the formation of two organizations, The Punch and Judy Fellowship (the PJF), established in 1980, and The Punch and Judy College of Professors, established in 1985.

The PJF and the College were not the first organizations to represent Punch and Judy, but probably the first to be driven principally by affective connections to the form.<sup>17</sup> Oscar Oswald (his real name was Cuthbert Quantrell), had set up the 'Association of Punch Workers' in 1955; it died with him in 1976. He had some difficulty getting people interested initially and finally sold memberships to people as they came to the shop. Most, though not all, were performers. The Association had no meetings, nor did it produce a journal. John Styles, an early member, believes it existed as 'an attempt to gather opinions and create a sense of fraternity'.<sup>18</sup> Oswald also owned and managed The Magical Mart, a London based company which sold and distributed



magical equipment as well as ventriloquist's dolls and Punch and Judy figures. Oswald was an astute businessman and it is likely that the Association was at least in part a means by which he could sell his goods; although he was himself a Punch performer and encouraged others, notably Styles, to take up the business (see Felix 1994: 27-36).<sup>19</sup> According to John Styles, Oswald 'inspired more people than anyone else [to take up Punch]' (1983: 98). The Association had a membership list of 159; the last member joined in 1965. At this time, Leach suggests, a few performers, among them Joe Beeby and John Alexander, were motivated to perform the show, '[...] not to make money, but consciously to keep up a tradition' (1985: 130-131). However, not until the 1980s did this affective rather than commercial inclination translate into setting up an organization.

If a moment were to be identified when the shaping of the form started to become institutionally undertaken, it is with the death in 1980 of revered Punchman Percy Press Senior and the subsequent formation of the PJF. For many performers the affective identity of the tradition was contained in the figure of this man. Press was often referred to as the 'uncrowned king of Punch and Judy', and there is a plaque to this effect in St Paul's Church, Covent Garden. Edwards believes that Press's personal standing, along with his position as chair of the Guild which ensured a voice for Punch in the puppetry community, precluded the need to form an organization while he was alive.<sup>20</sup> One of his sons, Percy Press II, as he termed himself, had been thinking of forming a Punch and Judy association for some time and after his father's death he retired from his day job as a General Post Office switchboard operator, 'in order to step out from his father's shadow, claim his inheritance and become active in full time Punch and Judy'.<sup>21</sup> He wrote to a number of other performers to canvas opinions about forming an association. Glyn Edwards was amongst those he asked and Edwards felt that this would be an opportunity to address some of the concerns about the future direction of the tradition. This is evident in the early draught proposals for the objectives of the PJF, which were aimed explicitly at 'the preservation and continuation of the highest traditions of the Punch and Judy show'.<sup>22</sup> This was the first time that these ambitions had been articulated. Edwards drew up the founding principles of the Fellowship and these were agreed by Percy Press Junior and the other founding members.

It was decided that membership of the PJF should be by invitation only so that it would '[...] come to be regarded by the public as a mark of high professional standing'. It was also felt, however, that the Fellowship should not be prescriptive, that there should be 'as few rules as possible', and that 'in the interests of harmony and conviviality, meetings may only take place on licensed premises or such places where satisfactory refreshment may be obtained [...]'.<sup>23</sup> This mixture of institutionalism and informality left the organization open to criticisms of elitism on the one hand and subject to unmediated struggles for leadership on the other. To some it became clear that Percy Press II saw the organization as a means to step into his father's shoes as king-pin in the Punch and Judy world. He was elected President for life and was perceived as handing out invitations to join, as one performer put it to me, 'like confetti'. He lacked the unifying charisma of his father and Professor Edwards among others felt that the founding principles of the PJF were becoming eroded.

Edwards believed that a number of pressures were coming to bear on the tradition which could only be countered by a more focused organization. These pressures were in the form of: 'political correctness in the mainstream', which since the early 1980s seemed to be dictating ethics in popular culture; the sense that Pulcinella and other European popular puppets had virtually disappeared and that Punch might go the same way; marginalization by less populist but more articulate constituencies in the puppetry sector; and the view that the kind of show which Punch and Judy had generally become lacked the vitality to survive these pressures for much longer. Edwards felt the show was heading into a 'cul-de-sac', typified by children's entertainers who had neither interest in the form, nor the skills to perform it well, and for whom Punch and Judy had become an adjunct, or as he puts it, 'a naff add on'. He wanted to see the formation of a robust organization which could encourage performers whom he believed were skilfully performing shows which contained the kind of 'edgy, layered, energy' which were part of a satirical tradition.<sup>24</sup> He also had his eye on the international picture and refused to allow the international view to be defined by Percy Press II who was one of the few international performers of the time and considered himself an ambassador for the form. Press's abilities as a performer were not well regarded, privately even by himself.<sup>25</sup> Edwards also saw the Millennium approaching and felt that a real psychological fillip would be achieved if

the form could survive into the twenty-first century. By 1985 he considered that the PJF was not going to 'get its house in order' and, after sounding out views amongst 'dissenters', decided to go ahead with the College.<sup>26</sup> The timing was prompted to some extent also by the approach of Punch's 325<sup>th</sup> 'birthday' and the need to prepare for this, something he did not want Press in charge of.

The failure of the PJF to carry through the initial objectives and its evolving into a more amorphous organization presented an opportunity for Edwards and others, John Styles among them, to create what they called a 'ginger group'. Their function was to speak forcefully from within the community, to generate more attention for the community as a whole, and to raise questions about the standards of performance which were acceptable amongst the community. The College may be thought of in Williams' terms as 'oppositional' (1981: 70); in this case, though, in opposition not only to more general institutions, characterized by the attempts to have the show banned, but also, as we shall see, in opposition to particular puppetry institutions and to parts of the Punch and Judy community itself. Clive Chandler describes College as an organization of 'rebuttal'.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the fact that many performers belong to both organizations, the history of relations between the College and the PJF has not always been an easy one. A low point came in the first PJF AGM, after the Covent Garden 325 celebrations, when, following an altercation with Glyn Edwards, John Styles was the recipient of a punch (a fist, not a puppet) thrown by Percy Press II. Relations are currently more amicable, and there is a discernable shift in feelings as more members of the College are being elected to the PJF's committee. Notably, in November 2008, Glyn Edwards was elected as editor the PJF newsletter, *The Swazzle*.

The production of a collective identity through organized festivals, technological means, and the dissemination of a narrative of the tradition through those same means, locates the tradition very firmly within the mechanisms and habits of thinking which characterize late modernity (see Giddens 1990: 21-29). At the same time it makes it subject to the tribulations of modernity in the form of disputes amongst organizations over what actually constitutes it.

The gradual move I have mapped from the family associations of the swatchel omis to the more recent distanced and (quasi) formal organizations, bears scrutiny through Max Weber's taxonomy of authority (see Peter Lassman 2000: 90-96). We may think of the dynastic associations as a form of *traditional dominance*. That kind of authority is often described in the histories as typified by patriarchal authority structures, where the show is owned by the head of the household and the sons are allowed to perform it only in the way he permits. Leach documents this kind of relationship and the loyalties it engenders: 'Philip Maggs remembered: "I was brought up to believe there was only one Punch and Judy man in the world, and that was my dad. All the rest were fakes and couldn't really do the show"' (1985: 114). The second of Weber's categories, *charismatic dominance*, is evident in the person of Percy Press Senior. His overarching influence precluded the need and the willingness to organize. Weber's third term, *legal dominance*, is applicable to the organizations. They have become, through the necessary articulation, and more importantly, publication of laws and rules, institutionally reflexive. As I discuss in the next chapter, the notion of *legal dominance* can further be broken down and differently characterised by the different organizations: the PJF might be thought of as a *bureaucracy*, and the College as an *adhocracy*.

### **Punch and Judy in the landscape of twentieth century British puppetry**

One of the particular pressures which prompted Glyn Edwards to set about creating an organization was the sense that Punch seemed to be being both marginalized and patronized in the changing landscape of British puppetry in the twentieth century. It is useful to extract this strand from the rest because it very strongly conditions the thinking of many Punch performers today. Notwithstanding my assertion that the history of the form is a history of assimilation into a middle-class discourse, a way of controlling culture through commodifying it, performers remain hugely individualist and passionately attached to the notion that what they are providing is an authentic *popular* form of entertainment.<sup>28</sup> That is to say, it is accessible to all and is not elite. This view is reinforced by their day-to-day experiences in the streets and on the beaches where they believe show is shaped by its encounter with its audiences. A view which typifies how Punch performers see this marginalization was made explicit to me in a conversation I had with Professor Clive Chandler about Henryk

Jurkowski's characterising of the development of 'art' puppetry as an erasing of popular puppetry forms.<sup>29</sup> Chandler contests this narrative, arguing very strongly that popular puppetry forms continued to exist and indeed to be the only ones most people are aware of, and that this picture is consistently misrepresented by puppetry writers and non-practicing 'theoreticians'.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, a division between 'high' and 'popular' forms of puppetry in Britain appears to have come about and might be explained in the following way. In the early years of the twentieth century in Europe, the puppet was investigated as a means to achieve what the human theatre could not. Theatre thinkers and practitioners such as Edward Gordon Craig (1921, 1956, 1996) and Arthur Symonds saw in the puppet a possibility of the refinement of the actor, an idea suggested a hundred years earlier by Kleist's disaffection with a seemingly inescapable human self-consciousness and his consequent idealization of the puppet (Kleist 1981 [1810]).<sup>31</sup> This pointed to a trend in thinking about puppetry which was to divide the popular from the 'artistic' later in the century. At this stage, however, the technical aspect of the puppet was more important than conceptual notions of 'high' and 'low'. McCormick and Pratasik suggest the perception of the puppet as art object led to an interest in the 'craft aspect, in terms of carving and design, and the technical aspects of jointing and controls' (1998: 208). This interest in turn led to the publication of Whanslaw's *Everybody's Theatre and How to do it*, in 1923, out of which grew the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild (the Guild or BPMTG), which was itself supported by Craig and other such luminaries as GK Chesterton. A commonality between artists, hobbyists and showmen was found in an interest in the mechanics of the puppet, and this shared interest persists to a large extent today.

However, the distance between 'high' and 'popular' whilst it could be accommodated at a certain level in the Guild, became increasingly visible to some Punch and Judy performers towards the end of the twentieth century. They saw, for example in the development of the Puppet Centre Trust (the PCT), a shift towards an emphasis - in funding and in representation - on 'artistic' forms of puppetry. Punch performers began to consider where they belonged in the new landscape and to see the need strongly to assert their own identity.

The origins of the PCT, which was set up in 1974, are complex and there is not room to go into detail here; however, the organization seems to have come about as a result of the desire by Penny Francis and David Currell among others, to gain greater recognition for the art-form. This coincided with a moment when the Wilson government was encouraging grass-roots arts organizations. As part of its restructuring, Wandsworth Council made the Town hall available as an arts venue and it became Battersea Arts Centre. It was here that the PCT found a home. It secured funding from Wandsworth Council and the Arts Council. Initially Edwards was enthusiastic, but with what he saw as a move towards elitist forms, he shifted his energies into promoting and sustaining Punch. The PCT continues to promote puppetry through organizing festivals, publishing its, now online, magazine *Animations* and providing a resource for puppeteers. It is especially interested in following and pushing forward innovative work which crosses and sometimes challenges conventional genres.

Informants disagree over what happened in the history of the relationship between the PCT and the Punch community and have different perspectives on it and contradict themselves in recalling the events and attitudes of the time. There are mixed loyalties at play. Some of the key figures in the PCT were themselves Punch and Judy performers; indeed *Animations* was edited for some years by Glyn Edwards and for many years carried a section devoted to Punch and Judy. Both Edwards and Chandler served terms as chair of the PCT. From the documentary evidence it would appear that there is no rift at all, but from discussions with Glyn Edwards, Clive Chandler and Penny Francis, it is clear that there are fundamental differences in opinion. Some of these may boil down to differences in personality. Penny Francis has upset a number of Punch performers, and she is aware of this herself, telling me that in forming the PCT, she had ‘picked up the flag and run with it, to the fury of many puppeteers who have not forgiven me yet’.<sup>32</sup> Edwards suggests that he and others could see the direction of puppetry in Britain being fought over by influential figures to the exclusion of the voices of many of the puppeteers themselves. Among them he cites John Blundall who set up the Cannon Hill Puppet Theatre in Birmingham, in 1968, and, Edwards believes, imported a European model of large puppet companies which ignores what he calls the ‘one-man-bands’ (specifically Punch and Judy performers) in the sector. In discussions with Professor Edwards, it is very clear that

what most angers him is when the tradition is taken out of the hands of Punch performers and, as he puts it, 'mediated through the likes of the Puppet Centre'. He is vehement in his view that only Punch Performers have both the necessary understanding of the form - an understanding born of doing the show - and, less tangibly, the sense of inheritance of the tradition, that gives them the right to speak about the form,

'[...] if anyone is going to talk about Punch and Judy, it's going to be Punch and Judy performers; if anyone is going to claim cultural rights over the Punch tradition, it's going to be the lineal descendents of Piccini and Mayhew showmen. We ain't giving it up, we ain't having it taken off us by other bodies, be they cultural bodies or government bodies or other art forms, we, us swazzling with Mr Punch is the direct lineal tradition from which all other has...we're the stone in the water from which all the other ripples have spread.'<sup>33</sup>

Whilst the heat with which some practitioners express their dissatisfaction with how they feel Punch and Judy has been discussed by non-Punch practitioners may be understandable in the light of their own strong attachments to the form, it tends to obscure the work that Francis and Blundall among others have done in encouraging puppetry in general in Britain. The PCT has provided a 'central role in the promotion and growth of puppetry in the UK' (Allen and Shaw 1992: 46), and for Blundall to have sustained a permanent puppetry company at Cannon Hill for 25 years was a major achievement; in fact many puppeteers working today, including Clive Chandler, gained valuable experience there. What concerns Punch performers is the sense that through the development of other forms of puppetry and the valorisation of those forms through funding and, as they see it, the disproportionate attraction of academics and theoreticians, their own form is losing out. The articulation of those concerns may also be explained by the fact that post-war Punch performers very often had access to levels of education not available to earlier Punchmen and that they are in a position to argue their case. The formation of the organizations is unlikely to have come about without these abilities.

By contrast, non-Punch puppeteers often feel unhappy about the way all puppeteers are commonly assumed by the public to be Punch performers, and they have

welcomed and encouraged the distinctions which organizations like the PCT have brought about.

### **Covent Garden**

In the next chapter I will investigate the influence of organization on the form, but before concluding this one, I would like to suggest that the Covent Garden Mayfayres signal that much of the sense of cohesion, support and identity which exists in the contemporary tradition, derives not from organization, but from actual meeting - a case strongly asserted by Clive Chandler among others. This kind of meeting has only become possible with fairly recent developments in transport and communication which have helped to engender a sense of community.

The Mayfayre is one of two annual events featuring Punch at Covent Garden; the other is the PJF festival which takes place in early autumn (this will be discussed below). The Mayfayre takes place on the nearest Sunday to Punch's 'official birthday', 9 May 1662, when Samuel Pepys recorded his seeing a marionette show in Covent Garden. It always takes place in the grounds of St Pauls Church, in London's West End. Covent Garden has a long association with street performers who were first encouraged to exhibit there in the 1970s when the site was threatened with demolition and office buildings were planned to replace the old market. A number of local interest groups got together to prevent this; among them Alternative Arts run by Maggie Pinhorn and Liz Weston who felt that street-theatre would help to generate and sustain the vitality of the area.<sup>34</sup> They worked closely with Covent Garden Community Theatre whose director, Richard Robinson, had a pragmatic interest in puppets: they could work alongside actors and cheaply increase his cast-sizes.<sup>35</sup> The Punch community were invited to take part in a one-off Mayfayre in 1975, but the event has continued ever since. Attempts to prevent redevelopment were successful and the area is now a very popular tourist destination. Shops and up-market craft-stalls have taken over and there is a permanent busking pitch on a wide open cobbled area in front of the church.

The Mayfayre is billed as a puppetry festival, but Punch performers see it as their own day and Punch fit-ups predominate. It is free and open to the public. Depending



on the weather, up to 20 booths might appear on the grass at the back of the church and on the paved areas around it, alongside stalls selling puppets and puppet memorabilia. In a good year, hundreds of people crowd around the booths (Fig. 15) and performers take it in turns to do shows from 11 in the morning until three or four in the afternoon. This follows a special church service dedicated to Punch. The churchyard is shielded from the noise of the city by the tall buildings around, the trees to the sides and the church to the front. But these also act as a crucible, containing and magnifying the sound of the shows. Sometimes several will take place at the same time and with audiences encouraged to join in and the sound of the brass band which usually plays, the noise can be tremendous. On sunny occasions, people will bring picnics and lay out rugs on the grass. There is a great sense of festivity and the churchyard is awash with colour, movement and noise.



Fig. 15 Covent Garden Mayfayre, booths and crowds, 10 May 2009

The Mayfayre is a very special occasion for many performers, some describe it as their 'Christmas Day', and it is eagerly anticipated. Though, since nobody gets paid, by no means all performers attend, for those that do it provides a reservoir of collective memories and a means to take some measure of the health of the tradition. It is an opportunity for the community to get together in relatively large numbers. Many performers come just to watch. Many people who are on the fringes of the community turn up, people who have an interest but are not performers. It is also a chance to catch up on news, to exchange ideas, to gossip, to showcase new routines,

to introduce new performers into the community and, most importantly, to sustain a sense of affirmation in the tradition in what performers feel are beleaguered times.

It has also become a chance for some performers to extend the boundaries of the form and to reinforce association with the Punch 'family' of puppets. Although there had been overseas performers at the Mayfayre since 1987, this has become increasingly the case. Glyn Edwards suggests that in the early days of the event, 'Foreign puppeteers passing through London would gravitate or be directed to it as the one place they would be likely to be accommodated'.<sup>36</sup> The process accelerated with the advent of what he calls 'festival networking' through the internet. In 2008, Clive Chandler invited Dom Roberto Performer Jose Gil to perform, and later Gil gave a show, *Rosa and her Lovers* at the after-festival gathering indoors at the Concert Artists Association (the CAA) around the corner from the church. Also appearing in 2008 was Pulcinella performer, Gianluca di Matteo. Nenagh Watson, formerly of Doo-cot Puppet Company, also attended; she gave an impromptu performance of the boxing routine, a standard episode in Punch, dressed as Joe Beeby, with puppets which once belonged to him.<sup>37</sup>

The meeting of Punch performers, other puppeteers and by-passers who might happen to wander in, at an event dominated by the form, provides a snapshot of the practices, personalities, cross-currents and affective connections operating in the field today.

In this chapter, I have laid out a history of Punch and Judy and sought to draw a narrative of early assimilation into a bourgeois discourse which has both 'softened' the show and provided an identity for performers who have gone on to collectivise that identity through association and latterly organization. I have explained this through more general conditions of cultural change. These conditions in the last quarter of the twentieth century produced performers with the skills and motivation to organize and to reflect on the tradition in ways which raise (and answer) questions about how traditional forms find their shape in the contemporary context. Where performers might once have adapted to the needs of employers in response to contemporary pressures, now performers are making more considered reflections upon what they believe constitutes the tradition. We have seen how the organizations

came into being and how they diverged. The next chapter looks at how performers have dealt with the challenges to individuation which inevitably arise when a cultural practice is, albeit loosely, institutionalised.

## Notes.

1 For a discussion of this process, see Stallybrass and White (1986), in which they suggest, '[...] the emergent bourgeoisie [...] made carnival into the festival of the other. It encoded all that which the proper bourgeois must strive not to be in order to preserve a stable and 'correct' sense of self' (179).

2 The accuracy of Payne-Collier's transcription has been much discussed, but Cruikshank's drawings are generally considered reliable.

3 McCormick and Pratasik's (1998) study of nineteenth century popular European puppetry usefully locates the forms in a history of urbanisation and goes some way to explaining how the 'traditional' and 'national' characteristics often ascribed to popular puppetry is in fact a reading-back into; a view which this thesis develops. A similar though not exact parallel of reading-back can be seen in the popular assumption that mummers plays had their hey-day in the medieval period. In fact, as A.E. Green suggests, there was a growth in the number of mummer's plays in the nineteenth century in industrialised areas; 'This does not suggest a rural tradition, receding under the onslaught of industrialisation, but either a new tradition or one that is expanding in response to demographic change and the foundation of new models of livelihood and living' (1980: 142).

4 There is some speculation that Punch was brought from India. Performer Pete Maggs believes this was the case (Reeve 2008a) as does Mariano Palhina (See letter from Ray DaSilva in *The Swazzle*, Summer 2009: 9).

5 Steve Tillis distinguishes 'monologous' (genetically common), from 'analogous' (independently evolved) puppets (1995: 245). The assimilated form, such as Punch, Polichinelle and Petrushka, may be considered 'monologous'; Semar in *wayang*, and Karagöz are 'analogous'.

6 For an account of the Society, see Wilson 2007, especially pp. 110-126.

7 From an interview with Ben Wilson in preparation for the radio documentary, *Mr Punch says "that's the way to do it"* (Reeve 2008a).

8 Tony Liddington performs with a troupe of Pierrotters and is a leading authority on the form; he holds probably the largest archive of Pierrot related material in the world. This quotation is taken from an education pack he produced for schools.

9 Figs. 12 and 13 are taken from puppeteer Chris Somerville's website <http://www.punchandjudy.com/seaside/htm> (accessed 15 February 2008).

10 The current Maggs family Punch and Judy performer, Pete Maggs, told me that his family refer to the counting routine in which Joey moves the bodies on the playboard to confuse Punch, as the 'floor'em', 'because that's what my dad called it and so I do.' (Conversation with Pete Maggs, September 18 2007.) No other performer I spoke to used this term about the routine. The Codman shows I saw in Liverpool had very distinctive characteristics which

seem to have ignored decades of development evident in other shows, such as audience participation, although they did include a character, Batman, taken from popular comic books, films and television (Ron Codman's show at Liverpool Maritime Museum, 9 February 2008).

11 Postcard from Didcott to Bridges in Geoff Felix's private collection.

12 I have been shown this photograph by several performers including Geoff Felix and Brian Davey.

13 The plaque reads: 'Near this spot Punch's puppet show was first performed in England and witnessed by Samuel Pepys in 1662'.

14 From a "'Round up" information sheet' distributed by Glyn Edwards to Punch performers after the event.

15 From a "'Round up" information sheet distributed by Glyn Edwards to Punch performers after the event.

16 Conversation with Glyn Edwards, 12 December 2007.

17 The interests of puppeteers in general were acknowledged in the formation of *The British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild* (BPMTG or 'Guild'), founded in 1925 and the *Union International de la Marionette* (UNIMA) founded in 1929; in 1963 the British Centre of UNIMA (BrUNIMA) came into being. All three organizations are still active and there is considerable overlap in membership between them. Many Punch performers are members of BrUNIMA and the BPMTG and the historically close association between Punch and Judy and these organizations is evident in the fact that both feature Punch in their logos. BrUNIMA and the BPMTG are small organizations with fewer than 250 members in each. This in itself is indicative of the small size of the puppetry sector as a whole. For a full description of the puppetry organizations in Britain see Chandler 2006, and Charlton 2006.

18 Phone conversation with John Styles, 12 August 2009.

19 John Styles gives an account of Oswald's business methods in 'Conversations with Punch' (Felix 1994: 27-30).

20 Conversation with Glyn Edwards, 21 June 2008.

21 From a chronology of the PJF and the College drawn up by Glyn Edwards.

22 Letter from Glyn Edwards to 'inaugural members' of the PJF, undated, but probably October 1980. The founder members of the PJF were Percy Press II, Professor Joe Beeby, Professor John Styles, Professors John and Max Alexander, Professor Punchinello (Glyn Edwards - he no longer uses this pseudonym) and Professor Jay Marshall, USA.

23 The previous three quotations are taken from a Letter from Edwards to 'inaugural members' of the PJF.

24 The previous three quotations are taken from a conversation with Glyn Edwards and Clive Chandler, 12 November 2006.

25 In a letter to Glyn Edwards dated 10 January 1981, Percy Press II says, 'I am a terrible performer anyway, but I seem to have acceptable cheek'.

26 These remarks are taken from a letter from Glyn Edwards to Penny Francis dated 'New Year's Eve '85'.

27 Conversation with Clive Chandler, 11 November 2006.

28 The same process of control was also evident with, among other things, the regularization of football (see Walvin 1978: 83-96).

29 Discussion with Clive Chandler, 30 December 2008. Jurkowski's view is contained in the following quotation (which I showed to Chandler in an early draft of this chapter):

'From the time of modernism a new puppet theatre, directed by people with artistic vocation came to prevail over popular forms. This coincided with the exhaustion of the formulae of different kinds of nineteenth century popular entertainments and was due to important social changes such as the extinction of illiteracy in most European countries and the appreciation of new genres like the cinematograph. In this situation, the naïve popular theater lost its audience. The ground had been cleared for new forms of puppetry, and this time it was occupied partly by artists and partly by educationalists' (1998: 74).

30 Punch and Judy performers are not alone in the puppetry sector in wanting to be in control of how their practices are represented in the face of what they see as non-practicing commentators determining the direction of puppetry in general. In 2006 the 'First Conference of UK Puppet Festivals' took place in Skipton in Yorkshire, and one of its stated wishes was to '[...] bring the art form back to the puppeteers, not allowing the theorists to take over' (Da Silva 2006: 'Introduction').

31 See Speaight (1955: 265-269) for a description of developments in early twentieth century British puppetry.

32 Conversation with Penny Francis, 23 January 2008.

33 Conversation with Glyn Edwards, 12 December 2007.

34 From a phone interview with Maggie Pinhorn, 8 March 2008.

35 Conversation with Richard Robinson, at the Covent Garden Mayfayre 2008; also broadcast on Reeve (2008a).

36 Personal correspondence with Glyn Edwards, 18 august 2009.

37 For a discussion of Watson's approach to Punch, see Reeve 2008c.

## Chapter Two: Organizations and the management of the tradition

*Traditionalization might help to explain how members of a particular group perceive themselves and their practices. It also might help to illustrate how and why cultural groups seek to legitimate the revival of certain practices by endowing them with a sense of continuity and authenticity.*

George H. Shoemaker <sup>1</sup>

*'Yeah, but having said that, we don't want to get pompous and all that, because this is all about Punch, and Punch will have none of this, he will have none of the Fellowship and the organizations and all that, he will say, 'no, I'm me, I'm individual, I am my own master, so I don't need all these other people, qualifying me, quantifying me.'*

Professor Brian Davey <sup>2</sup>

We saw in the last chapter how the formation of organizations began to actualise and make visible what increasing association and the ability to communicate across distance had made possible for Punch performers: a sense of identity and community. This signalled a shift in 'the modalities of power' away from the largely economically driven to one where an affective relationship to the form has come to the fore as a driving factor. It also signalled a shift in the management of the tradition from individuals deciding at the very local level what it is that they were doing, decisions driven generally by audience expectation and in particular by what 'worked' in the moment of performance. With the formation of organizations, these questions raised themselves in more abstract terms: what constitutes the tradition, what are its boundaries, who should be included in the organizations? The formation of organizations is one of the major changes which have taken place since Leach's research, and the affects of this change need to be addressed. In this chapter I am interested in what ways and to what extent those organizations determine what the form looks like, how it is culturally situated and how performers think about it.

The shift from an economic or familial to an affective relationship and the management of that relationship through organization involves us in questions about what Del Hymes and others call 'traditionalization' (cited in Schoemaker 1994: 365 and in Ben-Amos 1984: 116-117). Implied in that term is the sense that agents are somehow intervening in what ought to be 'natural' processes of development. Whilst it may be true that, as Giddens argues (1990:36), prior to modern systems of dissemination, especially writing, abstract notions of tradition were not really

available or meaningful, it is also true that cultural forms do not arise of their own accord.<sup>3</sup> They are the product of human agency, whatever the agent's relationship to the hegemony. This is evident in the fact that 'tradition bearers' are usually a small group within the larger community, having access to knowledge systems, texts and artefacts which others do not. Glassie (1983), for example, talks about the relatively small group of mumming performers in his study of the tradition in Ballemonne, Northern Ireland. These performers decided on which houses to visit, how many people should perform, the duration of the performance and the distribution of roles. Traditional forms may belong to the wider community, but the enactment of them is commonly the preserve of a few, and those few are active in deciding how the form will be enacted. To paraphrase E.P. Thompson (1963: 8), performers are present at the making of their own traditions. Performers have always to some extent made decisions about who they are and what they do. What distinguishes the management of Punch and Judy currently from how it used to be managed - either through the family groups, or through the conventions of the beach uncle - is the fact that in creating organizations, performers have had to make decisions at the institutional level about what the form is. In so doing they create reasons for those organizations to exist which in some way shape what the tradition is or does. As we saw, disputes over how this was to be articulated led to the splitting of the College from the PJF. When Percy Press Junior punched John Styles, he was presumably not only expressing a frustration about his own perceived loss of personal authority, but he was also articulating an anxiety about the direction of the tradition.<sup>4</sup>

The relationship between organization, the agent and the idea of tradition is a complex one, especially since the different organizations manage this relationship differently. In the course of the chapter, I will be addressing three areas where the organizations appear most significantly to impact on what Punch and Judy is and does today. Two of these areas impact on the form itself and its reception, these may be thought of respectively as the *poetics* and the *politics* of Punch and Judy; the other on how performers relate to each other, the *social world* that is afforded and supported by the organizations. I use the term *poetics* to denote 'the practice of producing meaning through the internal ordering and conjugation of the separate but related components of [the tradition]' (Lidchi 1997: 168). As we shall see, this includes not only the material and dramaturgical limits and components of the form, but also how

performers orientate towards the *idea* of tradition. By *politics*, I mean the role of the organizations 'in the production of social knowledge' (ibid: 185), that is, how the organizations seek to situate the form in the world. I take the term *social world* from Samuel Gilmore who defines it as a set of 'common or joint activities or concerns tied together by a network of communication' (1990: 150). This sits within the broader theoretical frame, or, more accurately, methodological frame, of *symbolic interactionism* which assumes agents are responsible for the construction of meanings through interaction with others (see McCall and Becker 1990: 3-4 and Rock 2001: 26-39). These areas overlap at times, so, for instance, when performers meet as an organization, they might do things which reinforce their understanding of themselves as people who produce Punch and Judy in a particular way and for particular reasons. These instances are available through ethnographic description. Other areas such as the production of discourse or how the organizations frame their expectations of members require a different kind of documenting.

There are limits to the determining impact of organization. Not all performers are members of the organizations and for those who are there are different degrees of attachment. The organizations serve different functions for different performers and for some, no function at all. This will be considered later in the chapter.

It would be a mistake to think that the PJF and the College are radically different in their interpretation of the tradition; this is not at all the case. They share a normative view of what the show looks like and, indeed, most of the members of the College are members of the PJF. The normative view finds a solid expression in the organizations' attitude to the swazzle, the instrument through which Punch's voice is produced. The PJF and the College agree that the swazzle is the irreducible core of the tradition. Non-swazzling performers cannot become full members of the PJF, nor, except under almost inconceivable circumstances, of the College.<sup>5</sup> The important differences are to do with the dynamics of intervention. As we shall see, in general terms, the PJF is more of a club-like, amateur, association; the College, by contrast, is exclusively an association of professionals. Paradoxically, however, the College has fewer institutional structures and operates on a more *ad hoc* basis. Some of this is to do with the difference in size, but more importantly in the way the College tries to manage, or rather stand back from managing, the relationship between the individual



performer and the form. This distinction is extremely important in understanding how the organizations differently approach the task of keeping the form alive.

### **The Punch and Judy Fellowship**

In the course of the research I became a member of the PJF, since membership is open to all. This gave me access to materials such as membership lists and copies of the PJF newsletter, *The Swazzle*; it also allowed me to attend PJF committee and general meetings and to get a sense of how the organization functions from the inside.

The PJF has around 120 members in all. There are three types of membership: Full, Associate and Honorary. Full members have to pass a public audition judged by other Full members. Associate members are not necessarily performers, but might simply be people ‘who love Punch and Judy shows, be they performers, historians, collectors or fans’.<sup>6</sup> Honorary members may be Full or Associate but are deemed by the PJF committee to have rendered valuable service to the PJF or to the tradition; unlike Full and Associate members, they do not have to pay a subscription. The distinction between Full and Associate came about in 1988 and was a response to the establishment of the College and its declared intention to maintain performance standards. There are currently around 40 Full members.

In its earliest days, the PJF was a very loose association, with only very occasional meetings, and the briefest of constitutions: ‘The PJF exists to guarantee the survival and the traditions of our national puppet’ (published in Richards 1985). As the organization grew in number, and because of the establishment of the College, members felt the need more fully to articulate what the organization stood for and how it functioned. A detailed constitution was drawn up in 1988 (see Sacco 1988) and amended in 2007. The ‘Articles’ cover such areas one might expect in such an association: definitions of the organization, types of membership, conduct of meetings, financial arrangements and so on. It is when we consider the ‘Objects’ of the PJF that we get some idea of how the *poetics*, *politics* and indeed *social world* of the organization are inscribed.

The important clauses in this respect are as follows:

To preserve and promote, the traditions, heritage and performance of Punch and Judy.

To defend the right of members to perform the Punch and Judy show without insult or persecution.

To support, encourage and inspire young performers to ensure continuity of the art of Punch and Judy into the future.

To promote friendship between members of the Fellowship who share an appreciation of the art of Punch and Judy.

To maintain an archive of Punch and Judy performers and performances, including both Fellowship members and, where known to members of the Committee, non-members, for the use of historians and researchers.

With its stress on ‘heritage’, ‘continuity’, and preservation, as well as the maintenance of an archive, the PJF sees the tradition as deeply reliant on its past. As we shall see, this contrasts with the College’s more future-oriented position.

It would be simplistic to suggest that the PJF’s dependence on what already *is* manifests itself in all its practices and that it is stuck in the past; however, it is clear that many members find reassurance in the outward symbols of tradition. This is clear from certain expectations and quasi-ritual practices: a badge, meetings, and decisions about where festivals should take place and what in fact constitutes a Punch and Judy festival. There are limits to this liking for symbols, however. It has become something of a joke amongst some PJF members, for example, that a PJF tie was produced which nobody wears. Formalisation is visible, though, in the assessment for Full membership status.

To become a ‘Full member’ of the PJF, explicit criteria need to be met. Performers are sent a copy of the assessment form in advance of their public audition and are marked against a number of criteria.<sup>7</sup> The two or three assessors are expected to confer with each other and adjust their scores in the light of this, ‘to give a balanced view which reflects a considered consensus of opinion’. It would be wrong to suggest that the PJF in having a systematic process of acknowledging good performance practice means to encourage mechanical reproduction of shows and the tradition, it does not; authority figures within the PJF are committed to the survival and maintenance of an energetic and vitalised form. What is of interest is how the

introduction of explicit criteria tends against innovation and the degree to which this reflects the *poetics* of the PJF.

Official meetings of the PJF are similarly formalised, in this case by a degree of ceremony and adherence to voting procedures. This can result in lengthy meetings and intricate discussions over protocol. Since these meetings often follow a hard day's performing, tempers have been known to fray and exchanges can become heated. Disagreements are sometimes fuelled by drink since meetings often take place at the CAA, which has a licensed bar.

### **The PJF autumn festival**

A sense of place has become an important marker for the tradition as it is understood by the PJF. Performers have developed strong emotional ties with Covent Garden, initially through the Mayfayre, and later through the autumn festival which unlike the Mayfayre, is organized by the PJF for PJF members. The first autumn festival took place in 1981, the year following the establishment of the organization. The numbers attending can vary considerably; during my first visit in 2006, eight performers appeared, in 2007, 10 and in 2008 only four. The festival takes place inside the market itself, and as a consequence has a more precarious footing than the Mayfayre in the relative sanctuary of the churchyard. Performers believe the market authorities allow the festival under a degree of sufferance.

A sense of siege is reinforced by the arrangement of the booths. The area the performers are allowed to occupy is relatively small; it lies at one end of the covered market and consists of a space some 12 meters by 12. The colourful booths are placed in a semi-circle facing into this space; audiences sit in the middle on thin rugs and plastic sheeting which is provided by performers, or stand on the periphery and watch (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16 Booths at the PJF autumn festival, 30 September 2007

A white plastic banner is suspended above the booths announcing the festival. Performances take place throughout the day; one show follows immediately after another. Audiences come and go, some stop to watch part of a show, others watch several in succession. Audiences are made up of children and adults. London is a very cosmopolitan city and there is a broad ethnic mix in the crowd. From time to time a plastic bucket is passed around to collect money, this goes into the coffers of the PJF and appears in the financial accounts as 'The Bottle'.<sup>8</sup> Performers 'bottle' for each other. The festival always takes place on a Sunday and the early shows of the day attract only small audiences; by mid-afternoon the crowds can be several hundred strong. People stand on benches to catch sight of the shows, children sit on parents' shoulders and spectators crane to catch glimpses through the crowd. Lots of photographs are taken and videos are made, sometimes with quite bulky and sophisticated equipment – this has been a growing trend in recent years. With a tradition of busking and street entertainment as well as a large number of market stalls selling craft goods, clothing and souvenirs, Covent Garden is a very popular tourist attraction. There are several relatively 'up-market' permanent shops in the market buildings, selling more expensive goods such as toys, jewellery and clothing. There are food and drink outlets, including the 'Punch and Judy Pub', so called because of the long association of the area with the tradition.

As with the Mayfayre, performers take the opportunity to catch up on news and gossip, to watch each others' shows and to show each other artefacts and items of

interest to do with the tradition. A number of stalls are set up selling Punch and Judy memorabilia and puppets. One or two performers I have spoken to bought their puppets at the festival, and it has become a very useful place for beginners to talk to old hands, to make contacts and to learn from watching a variety of performances. Any PJF member can set up a booth and perform, and there is no set order of performances; nor is there a set allocation of pitches. Some performers turn up without booths and borrow other people's. Some feel they have to arrive early to get the best site - although since the booths are in such a confined area, this makes no real difference - and to stake a claim for time of performance. This is negotiated with the organizer, a PJF committee member who struggles to make sure there is a degree of fairness in the allocation of time slots. Since the 'bottle' is communal, there is no economic advantage to going on at any particular time, but most performers like to have as large an audience as possible and early afternoon is the preferred slot. Some perform more than once. Performers are not paid and this discourages a lot of performers who live outside of London. Of those who have travelled from the provinces, one or two arrive the night before and sleep in their cars and others rely on the hospitality of London based performers. Some will stay at Geoff Felix's small flat the night before. These kinds of *ad-hoc* and friendly arrangements contribute to the considerable camaraderie of the event.

Some performers appear regularly, among them Professors Geoff Felix, Bryan Clarke, and Paul Jackson, as well as younger performers, such as Gary Wilson who are establishing themselves amongst the more experienced puppeteers. As well as an opportunity for members to undergo assessment for Full membership status, the festival also offers the chance for the PJF to scrutinise itself. The inward looking layout and the fact that performers are keen to show off new routines to each other and to engage in meta-commentaries on the form - routines, gags and references which can only be meaningful for other performers - suggests that there are in effect two audiences: the public and the private. There is a 'shared referentiality' (Blackburn 1996b: 15) amongst performers and the festival serves as a means to celebrate and to deepen this.<sup>9</sup>

It is a long, tiring day, full of constant noise and activity. Puppeteers arrive from around eight in the morning to set up. Shows begin at around 11 and the event

finishes at four or five in the afternoon. Some performers are keen to squeeze every last drop out of the chance to perform, others want to get off. The booths are slowly taken down, the puppets are folded up or turned inside out and packed away and the area is given back to the tourists and shoppers. Some performers head off, trailing their booths behind them on golf trolleys, or carry them in large kit-bags slung over their shoulders, to catch the tube to mainline stations or to pick up their cars. Most gather for a meal at a local restaurant or hotel.

A powerful sense of place is evident in the setting for the meeting which takes place after the meal. The usual venue, the CAA, is a club for variety artistes and it is a reminder that there are strong associations between Punch and Judy and the variety tradition in Britain; indeed many Punch performers are also clowns and magicians. This association is underlined by the fact that the current patron of the PJF, Ken Dodd, is one of the last entertainers who might properly be called a 'variety artiste'. His act consists of comedy, singing and dancing, and he is equally well known for live performance as for TV appearances.

The CAA is infused with a feeling of faded glamour. You enter by a tall, heavy wooden door from the busy street into the unexpected quiet of a shabby passageway to be met by another door, where you press an entry button and a voice asks what your business is. A buzzer sounds and you push the door open to find yourself in a narrow lobby with stairs leading to an upper floor. Along the walls and up the stairs have been plastered theatre posters, mostly from variety and light comedy shows, many from the 1960s and 70s, some from the 50s. These display the names and show pictures of well known television and theatre personalities of the day (Fig. 17). There is a palpable and melancholy sense that nothing is as fleeting as fame. At the end of the passage is a wooden-floored room, a small dance hall with a low stage at one end, and an upright piano. High on one wall is a large wooden panel bearing in gold lettering the names of the presidents of the 'Grand Order of Water Rats', a society of comedians and variety artistes.

Three or four rows of chairs have been arranged facing the stage. The members take their seats as the entertainer for the evening is introduced; he will be performing before the meeting this year as he 'has to get off to catch his train back to Norfolk'.

There are mumbles amongst some of the puppeteers that at £250 for a 15 minute slot, he had better be good. It is a tough job entertaining entertainers, but his acid wit softens the small audience and his undeniably non-pc jokes are greeted with the kind of glee that only forbidden fruits can provoke. There is a short break for ‘refreshments’ and the meeting proper begins.



Fig.17 Stairwell of the Concert Artists Association

A table is set up in front of the stage and three members of the committee arrange themselves behind it. The Chair proposes reading ‘The List’: ‘What, all of it?’, asks another committee member; ‘Yes’. Some 20 or so names are read out, and gradually I realise that this is a list of the dead, members of the PJF who have passed away since its inception. It is a roll call of people whose names are familiar to me because they have been spoken of as influencing the practice of many of those who I have been working with: ‘Fred Tickner, Joe Beeby, Wal Kent’, and so on. A minute’s silence is proposed, but this is interrupted after a very short time by a member who would like to get on with the meeting.

The invocation of the dead suggests an invisible absent-present audience of past performers and an obligation to respect and keep their memories alive. This is not surprising since most of the people listed had very close associations with many of the older members present. They worked next to them, watched them, learnt from

them and resolved to honour their practices; they became friends with them. This affective connection with the past is most obviously marked by the fact that the PJF has a 'Hall of Fame' which honours '[...] those who have made an outstanding contribution to the [...] art of Punch and Judy'.<sup>10</sup>

The reassurances of the past and the stress on continuity rather than innovation by which I am suggesting the PJF may be characterised, impacts on the way the PJF situates itself in the world, on its *politics*. This can be seen in the kinds of festivals it organizes, its dealings with the media and its journal, *The Swazzle*.

What might be termed 'PJF festivals' have generally been fairly small scale and have usually only presented Punch and Judy shows. As well as at the Covent Garden festival, PJF performers have featured exclusively in several festivals elsewhere. Typical of these was the *Nuneaton Punch and Judy Festival: A Celebration of Englishness* which took place in April 2008 (Fig. 18). There were six performers set up in pairs of booths around the town centre.<sup>11</sup> There was also a balloon modeller and a brass band. The festival came about through an association between Professor Mark Andrews who had performed in Nuneaton several times the previous year, and the Town Centre Manager, Alan Ottey. Andrews wanted to give a greater profile to the form in his locality, and Ottey wanted to bring more visitors into the town centre. Both wanted some way of marking St George's Day. Andrews tells me he chose the performers because either he had worked with them before and liked what they did or they were new to him and he wanted to see their work.<sup>12</sup> It was relatively simple to arrange. He rang a few people up, agreed with the Town Council that they would take care of local issues, clearing the event with town centre businesses and letting the authorities know that it would be taking place. Performers were paid from the Town Centre Management budget. Despite the cold weather, the event was a great success, most of the shows attracted and kept large audiences, and the event received a very positive response in the local press who welcomed its affirmation of national identity. The headline in one local paper the following week read, 'A celebration of Englishness. Town finds a fantastic way to recognise rich heritage and traditions of our country'.<sup>13</sup>



The PJF is not a proselytising organization and it has not, at least until recently, positioned itself as such. It encourages members to defend the tradition, but has no strategy to win over public opinion. When it talks to the media, it tends to do so in defensive terms; the PJF's 'Welcome Pack' which it sends to all new members in fact contains a section called 'Defending the Faith'. *The Swazzle*, 'The Mouthpiece of the PJF' as it calls itself, is an organ which speaks into its own ear; it is a newsletter which reports the doings and thoughts of performers to each other. It rarely makes references to other puppet traditions, and does not situate Punch within an international context.



Fig.18 Nuneaton Punch and Judy Festival, 19 March 2008

What might be characterised in this as a cherished parochialism is perhaps about to change. In autumn 2008, Glyn Edwards was appointed editor of *The Swazzle*. As I have suggested, this is part of a bigger picture of shifting relations between the College and the PJF which might mark a changing stance on the part of the PJF. In his first editorial, Edwards laid out his policy:

The *Swazzle* will look inwards to its membership and reflect whatever items they wish to bring to the attention of others and will look outwards to the wider world and reflect back anything that seems relevant to the work of keeping the Punch and Judy show in rude health (2009:3).

This outward view is something which underlies the thinking of the College and through which its own *poetics*, *politics* and *social world* is deeply informed.

## The College

### **The College structure and the poetics of performance**

Glyn Edwards was excited and very amused when one day I brought the term *adhocracy* to his attention. He believes it precisely describes how the College operates. The College is not a building, it is a small group of people who without apology consider themselves to be amongst the best Punch and Judy performers in the world. It is a strategic organization which is characterised by a lack of symbolism and protocol and whose rituals, when it has any, are improvised as the need arises (an example of this was my initiation into the College). The College has a logo, but Edwards suggests this is only for pragmatic reasons, it is 'a flag to rally round'. It has 'no emblems, secret handshakes, gold badges, club ties etc',<sup>14</sup> since, as Chandler once explained to me, 'none of the members would agree what these should look like'.<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 19 College members at Paignton, 18 March 2009 (back Row, l to r: Richard Coombs, Glyn Edwards, Clive Chandler, Rod Burnett, David Wilde, Dan Bishop, Brian Davey; front Row, l to r: Robert Styles, Geoff Felix, Reg Payne, Mark Poulton)

There is a degree of contingency built into the Constitution of the College. This is partly due to the fluidity of a small organization in which decisions can be made very quickly; it is also to do with how College orients itself to the idea of tradition. This is most clearly expressed in two areas. Firstly, in the right of members to exclude anyone who does not fit in with the dynamic culture of the College. It is not enough for performers to meet all the criteria for membership (the criteria are not written

down anywhere, but they include good design, good puppet manipulation, an accomplished level of performance and the use of the swazzle), they must also pass certain even less quantifiable tests. They will not be admitted if they are deemed to be, as is stated in Article Six of the Constitution, ‘a miserable old git’. The ‘acid test’, as Chandler explains, is that they must be both ‘people you would want to go to the pub with’ and, ‘people with whom you could hold an intelligent conversation about Punch and Judy’.<sup>16</sup> The second area, related to what Chandler means by ‘intelligence’, is contained in the statement in the Membership Policy which says, ‘The performance must also be one clearly shaped individually by the performer: a first rate copy of another Prof’s show will not qualify’. A defining view of the College is that the tradition can only be sustained by people of imagination who are prepared to make and capable of making a creative investment in the form. It will not be sustained by people who simply wish to imitate or reproduce what has gone before, or by people who do the show as an adjunct to their occupation as children’s party entertainers, or ‘weekend wand wavers’ as Edwards graphically puts it.

Professor Chandler talks about the distinction between very high quality replicas of others’ shows and shows demonstrating ‘individual shaping’, in terms of ‘photocopying’ and ‘genetic reproduction’.<sup>17</sup> The photocopy, after it has been copied and that copy copied and so on, will eventually fade, he argues; the ‘genetically reproduced form’ retains the character of its progenitors but has its own distinctive qualities by which it can be regarded as a living form; in fact it *grows*. After a period of time it may lose its original shape, but retain its essence. Edwards likens it to popular music, ‘A minstrel troubadour is not going to be the same as Frank Sinatra, but they are [both] singing love songs [...]’.<sup>18</sup> Chandler pursues the generative analogy and insists that the show must contain what he calls the ‘DNA’ of the form.<sup>19</sup> Edwards is succinct about what that DNA must look like: ‘an anarchic view expressed through the swazzle’.<sup>20</sup>

The distinctions might be thought of in Williams’ contrasting terms, ‘replication’ and ‘re-production’, where replication suggests ‘mechanical copying’ and ‘re-production’ contains ‘a fuller or newly directed realization of [a form’s] possibilities’ (1981: 197-198). What is especially useful in this definition of ‘replication’ is contained in Greg Urban’s contention that, ‘[...] the more “symmetrical and egalitarian” the relationship

between originator and copier, the greater will be the divergence' (Urban, cited in Gross, 2001: 182). This implies the kind of balance that College members are striving for by assuming creative responsibility and trying to make the shows their own. The insistence on 'genetic' as opposed to what might be called 'analogic' reproduction suggests that the College is seeking to encourage a form which, to borrow Williams' terms, both 'residual' and 'emergent' (1991: 204 and 1983: 10-12).

### **The politics of the College: festival and discourse**

As well encouraging innovation amongst performers, the College also seeks to *promote* the tradition. Key members bring considerable skills and experience to doing this. Edwards was once a TV producer and is adept at writing persuasive proposals, and at setting up relationships which can benefit the tradition. This Ph.D research project is an example of such relationship building. Chandler has considerable experience in running festivals and in applying for funding from local authorities and elsewhere. The skills to deal with different modes of dissemination puts Chandler and Edwards in a strong position publicly to articulate the shape and direction of the form. They recognise the need to make appeals to exterior audiences to do this.

From the inception of the College, it was Edwards' view that it should encourage the dissemination of positive discourses about Punch and Judy. An early example of this was the publication of *Mr Punch's Progress* (Hollis 1987), a short booklet in which College members talk about aspects of the show and its tradition. In 2000 the public reading of *The Slapstick Symposium*, a set of statements by the College about contemporary aspects of Punch and Judy, took a more sophisticated approach.<sup>21</sup> The reading was a central event in the Punch and Judy Jamboree at the Midlands Arts Centre (MAC). Edwards had, in his words, 'blagged money' from the Millennium Festival 'Large Amounts Fund' to put on a puppetry festival.<sup>22</sup> He invited overseas puppeteers and others to perform, to run workshops and to engage in dialogues about Punch and Judy.

Over the course of two evenings, the *Slapstick Symposium* papers were presented in the Hexagon Theatre at the MAC. There were four contributors. Dan Bishop discussed what he saw as the cathartic function of the violence in the show and talked

about this in relation to other countries whose anxieties about violence had led to the emasculation of their own national puppets; female performer Caz Frost addressed the issue of Punch's masculinity; Clive Chandler argued for a populist understanding of the show's supposed 'political incorrectness' and suggested that its popularity mitigates this aspect; and Glyn Edwards stressed the dynamic relationship between the show and its audience, arguing that the show is not fixed and needs to be seen as evolving. The choice of venue, of speakers and of content, and the ability to make those choices, indicate an empowered constituency of performers able to dictate the agenda.

As well as the content of the papers, the manner of delivery was designed to show that Punch was keeping up with the times. Professor Edwards insisted the papers were read out loud, if necessary to an empty space - in the event there were six or seven people present - and for the papers to be published almost simultaneously on the web. Photographs of the reading were taken and put on the internet on the same night. The distinctions between how the College engages in late-modern, disembedded mechanisms of traditionalisation and how the PJF finds reassurance in face-to-face meeting and the continuity of place are clear in how Edwards described the event to me, 'technically we're pushing this out into the world in the same way as a NASA spaceship is out there somewhere with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony on it. You just do it and the ripples go wherever they go.'<sup>23</sup>

The desire to appeal to a broad audience lies behind a project which includes developing links with international puppetry communities. The Aberystwyth Punch and Judy Festival (2000-2006) was one example of this. The festival always featured four or five College performers, the line-up changing each year, and a number of other puppeteers from Britain and overseas. In 2006 this included the Lempen Puppets from Yorkshire, Georges Vettiers with his elaborate Tchantchès theatre from Liège, and Hungarian Andras Lenart with his table-top rod puppet show, *Mikropodium*. Other years have seen Polichinelle and Dom Roberto shows. Chandler had to exercise considerable resourcefulness to get the funding for Aberystwyth, bringing Punch and Judy in as he puts it, 'on the back of funding applications for non-Punch festivals'. This is necessary, he feels, when some funding bodies are reluctant to give money to a form which does not at first glance fit with their agendas. Arts

Council England has not given money for specific Punch festivals, but has supported puppetry events which contain Punch and Judy. Glyn Edwards is skilled at ‘ticking the right boxes’, as he puts it, so that Punch stays in the frame. Chandler suggests that the first Aberystwyth festival was able to capitalize on other well-funded events to help subsidize its costs. The use of international performers, he says, reassures bookers who might otherwise be ‘over-cautious’. Edwards refers to these applications as ‘Trojan horses’, a tactical way to get Punch funded. But this is only part of the story. The College is intrinsically committed to the idea of Punch being acknowledged in the international context. Some performers, Dan Bishop and Rod Burnett in particular, are highly experienced international performers and there is a degree of cross-fertilisation in the traditions as a result of this. The College has had similar relations with the Dynamics puppet festival at the MAC in 2005 and 2007, and with Walsall’s Streets Alive festival. In these events, Punch and Judy is one element in a range of puppetry forms. In placing Punch and Judy next to other popular puppetry forms, the College hopes to give the form a securer foothold by implying and encouraging a ‘[...] broader network of relationships [or] intertextuality’ (Gross 2001: 143). It is engaged in the ‘social management’ of the form (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 74).

Internationalism centrally figures in a journal which, although not the ‘mouthpiece’ of the College, is as Edwards described it to me, ‘affiliated’ with it: *Around the World With Mr Punch*. Glyn Edwards saw a ‘[...] gap for a global way of reaching out to Punch enthusiasts’ and in 1996 started The Worlwide Friends of Punch and Judy.<sup>24</sup> This was not, Edwards says, an organization ‘as such’, it was simply a way of putting international enthusiasts in touch with each other. For Edwards it was a ‘deliberate rejection of the PJF’s inward looking agenda where “the membership” [...] were elevated over “the Punch tradition” and its wider needs’.<sup>25</sup> In 2001 the journal became an online publication and in 2008 it became a blog.<sup>26</sup> The Worldwide Friends is co-run with Diane Raines (Professor Freshwater) who lives and performs Punch and Judy in the United States. There are currently around 150 members. The journal has carried articles about Punch in Japan, Australia, Iran and America; it has drawn attention to Punch’s puppet ‘relations’ in Italy, France, Russia, Brazil and elsewhere.

So far in this chapter I have talked about the role that the organizations play in how they encourage performers to see themselves and to situate the tradition. There are clear distinctions in how the PJF and the College do this. The organizations are, in these terms, what Giddens calls 'structures of legitimation' (1984: 31), but they legitimate differently. However, this must be put in balance with the human beings who constitute those organizations. The oscillation between agent and structure is the motor of tradition and '[this] duality of structure, is always the main grounding of continuities in social reproduction [...]' (ibid: 26). The PJF and the College differently stress the role of the structure and the agent. The PJF, with its protocols and attachment to place, reassures its members of what Giddens calls the 'reversibility of time' (1984: 35). That is to say, what has happened can be made to happen again. In the College, the desire to be free of legitimating structures places reliance on the role of the agent and in so doing attempts to make the tradition continually contemporary. Edwards describes the production of discourse by the College as 'ripples in the water', always moving outwards.

The performers I have spoken to see themselves as Punch and Judy men and women, bearers of a tradition (in different ways), and members of organizations; usually in that order. For some, membership of the organizations rarely enters their thinking, except when the subscription is due; for others it is important to wear the badge and be active on the committee. There are degrees of attachment to both the College and the PJF. Some performers ask to join the College and to become Full members of the PJF, others are eagerly invited. The organizations do not dictate what the performers do, but they may influence how performers think about what they do. There is a range of motives for joining the PJF or the College. Some performers see College membership or Full PJF membership as a mark of distinction amongst their peers; they might also see it as a stamp of quality which they can put on their business cards. For some, membership confirms already existing loyalties to other members. These loyalties can have a pragmatic foundation: members pass work to each other. Chandler and Edwards also believe that the reassurance that employers gain by using the best performers works to the advantage of the tradition as a whole; whilst not all of the best performers are in the College, many of them are. For most performers the organizations provide frameworks for the sustenance of friendships and alliances driven by mutual interests and common experiences.

### **‘Independent’ voices**

Most of the Punch and Judy performers I have spoken to consider themselves highly independent; it is one of the reasons they do the show. Because of this, some performers prefer not to join organizations or do not see the need for them. A brief consideration of two of these voices will throw light on the tension between the organizations and the individual performer and their contrasting views of tradition. Both define what they do through their relationship with their audiences rather than through a relationship with any more abstract notion of the tradition.

Pete Maggs is one of the last dynastic performers in the country. As I suggested in Chapter One, a different set of allegiances and associations seems to pertain for performers who are part of a family. Leach (1985: 111-125; 1980, 1983) considers them as a separate group and they have their own family stories and mythologies. But it is dangerous to generalise. As a contemporary of the College and PJF performers, Maggs is subject to many of the same influences and pressures that they are; he has to negotiate his position in the current landscape, too. He chooses to do this in his own way. Professor Maggs is quite adamant that you cannot legislate a tradition and this, in his view, is what the organizations are trying to do. He strongly rejects the notion that the College and the PJF or anybody else has the right to set standards. When I put it to him that this is what the organizations are striving to do in order to sustain the tradition, he tells me, ‘We piss on their standards, none of us out here are dead yet.’<sup>27</sup> He believes that the organizations have attracted and promoted similar kinds of shows and that there is a similarity between many of the College shows in particular, which he believes is evident in their aesthetics and performance styles. He puts this down to the fact that, in his opinion, there is a ‘London *clique*’. The ‘London show’, he says, ‘is not *the* show’. Whilst Maggs is mistaken in his view that all the members of the College are London based, it is true that the close association between members of the organizations has meant that sometimes they use each others ideas and buy puppets from each other; however, it is probably fair to say that despite this, there is greater diversity of styles of puppet and performance inside the College than outside of it. The extent to which organization produces homogeneity will be examined later. Maggs believes that the show is defined by the kinds of relationship performers have with their audience and he considers these more variable and dynamic than a



legitimated tradition can accommodate. For him, the show must evolve of its own accord and that relies on giving the audience principal say in what happens in the show. There is a great deal of audience interaction in his shows.

The same concern about audiences informs Chris Somerville's decision to reject organization. Somerville runs the only purpose built puppet theatre in Britain, the Harlequin Puppet Theatre in Rhos-on-Sea, North Wales. He is also a Punch and Judy performer and he runs a Punch and Judy web site.<sup>28</sup> He has been a working puppeteer since the 1950s and has noticed developments in the field in general which he feels are distorting what he believes is the real picture of the appetite for puppetry and for Punch and Judy. He believes that shows that are any good will survive without funding and that Punch and Judy festivals are meeting a need which does not exist. He cannot see why anybody would want to watch several Punch and Judy shows one after another. Somerville harks back to a time when there was only one organization, The Guild. The picture he draws is of a simpler, idyllic time;

‘In the fifties there was a big appetite for puppets; there were lots of village arts and music societies, they would have talks and puppet shows, among other things. At that time people would be booked through conversations with Women's Institute leaders signing each other's diaries. You could plan little tours of the Lake District [...] the village halls would be full of people sitting on window-sills and so on’.<sup>29</sup>

The picture is of a world that has gone and the reality for most puppeteers feels much harder. Chandler believes that Somerville misreads the situation and argues that festivals he himself has organized have very deliberately sought to place Punch as a ‘strong element’ in a wider context which is how he regards Punch anyway. The cultural location that Punch and Judy occupies is shifting, under threat and more difficult to define; at the same time, technologies have arisen which have created different modes of association.

In this chapter, I have argued that that the organizations reflect different orientations towards the dynamics of tradition, and that these orientations are embedded in and reinforced and perpetuated by the structures and practices of the organizations. They have created levels and frequencies of association which did not exist in the past. Because of this, puppeteers are confronting the idea of what it means to be a Punch

and Judy performer in ways they have not done before. As a result, different responses to the idea of tradition are emerging. On the one hand the PJF seeks to honour and respect the tradition by celebrating its heritage and continuity. It does this through producing concretised associations, including quasi-ritualised meetings and strong attachments to place. This gives a considerable sense of identity and reassurance to performers. By contrast, authority figures within the College are keen to stress and promote the forward momentum of the Punch and Judy tradition and use their access to relatively sophisticated resources in order to do this. This results in strategically placing the form in international and broader puppetry contexts. It also foregrounds the voice of the individual puppeteer and promotes practice which emerges from considered, committed and imaginative investment in the form. This is not exclusively the preserve of College members and it does not mark an absolute distinction between the College and the PJF; rather it represents the basic orientation which helps to make puppeteers eligible for membership of the College.

The kinds of organization which have emerged towards the end of the twentieth century not only reflect technological changes which have enabled association to take place, they also reflect the shape of the performing community in terms of who is performing and why. Puppeteers are individual creative human beings before they are members of organizations, and their interests shape the organizations at least as much as they are shaped by them. The organizations give shape to and marshal energies which the best puppeteers already bring with them. They marshal their energies differently: the PJF perhaps finds strength in similarity, the College, by contrast, is, as Chandler describes it, ‘a collection of individuality’.<sup>30</sup> Where these energies spring from and how they are cultivated at the individual level will be the subject of the next chapters.

## Notes

1 1994: 365

2 Interview with Brian and Alison Davey, 10 July 2007.

3 Giddens suggests that traditional forms in traditional cultures are not recognized as such, and that the appellation ‘traditional’ has only come about as the result of what he calls ‘the reflexivity of modernity’,

In oral cultures, tradition is not known as such, even though these cultures are the

most traditional of all. To understand tradition, as distinct from other modes of organizing action and experience, demands cutting into time-space in ways which are only possible with the invention of writing[...] For justified tradition is tradition in sham clothing and receives its identity only from the reflexivity of the modern. (1990: 37-38)

As Benedict Anderson (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1983) argue, the notion of tradition was very powerfully employed in the creation of national identities in post-traditional communities, especially in nineteenth century Europe.

4 Percy Press Junior's outburst may have been the result of a seed laid some years before when he overheard his father remark to John Styles, 'when I die, the crown passes to you'.

5 Edwards expressed to me the College view, which reserves the right to be flexible in this way: 'I can't conceive how under any circumstances the Punch and Judy show without the swazzle would meet those criteria [of a non-swazzling member], but I don't see as a group the College would be so..' [*here he imitates the dry, nasal tones of a stereotypical bureaucrat*] "I'm sorry, but under article three [...]". [The constitution] says somewhere, basically we can do what we fucking like when we like, really [...]It's meant to be guidelines, not prescriptive because boundaries are anathema to Mr Punch'.

6 From 'The President's Pitch', 'A welcome from Des Turner President of the Punch and Judy Fellowship'; part of the introductory notes to the PJF on its website. [www.punchandjudyfellowship.org.uk/pitch.shtml](http://www.punchandjudyfellowship.org.uk/pitch.shtml) (accessed 9 November 08).

7 The criteria are as follows, they are reproduced here verbatim:

Overall Appearance. Proscenium, Canvas/Covering, The Performer, Look of the Show.

Speed and Attack of the Show. Projection, Pace and Subtlety, Making contact with the audience

Use of the Swazzle. Loud and clear, Deep and rich, Not jarring on the ear

Puppet characterisation. Individuality, Personality Traits, Life given to the Puppets

Manipulation of the Puppets. Slick manipulation, Puppets being held up and looking forward. Exchanging glances, Following the intonation of Speech

The Look of the Puppets. Colourful, Clean, Good eye line, Nice profile

Overall Entertainment Value. Audience participation, Enjoyment, Captivation.

There is a fuller explanation of each of these criteria in the PJF 'Welcome pack'. These criteria were drawn up by Geoff Felix .

8 From the 'Treasurer's Report for the AGM, 30 September 2007'.

9 For a discussion of the role of performers as their own audience, see Stuart Blackburn's ethnography of shadow puppetry in Kerala (1996a and b).

10 Extract from 4, above. Induction into the Hall of Fame is rare. During the research period only one person, Michael Byrom, was inducted, much to his delight. The two other inductees are George Speaight and Percy Press Senior.

- 11 The performers were Mark Andrews, Geoff Felix, David Wilde, John Thursby, Bryan Clarke and Pete Milsom.
- 12 Conversation with Mark Andrews, 19 March 2008.
- 13 *Coventry Telegraph*, 21 March 2008.
- 14 Personal correspondence with Edwards, 26 May 2009.
- 15 Conversation with Clive Chandler, 27 October 2007.
- 16 Conversation with Clive Chandler, 27 October 2007.
- 17 Conversation with Clive Chandler, 27 October 2007.
- 18 Interview with Glyn Edwards, 4 December 2007.
- 19 Conversation with Clive Chandler 27 October 2007.
- 20 Interview with Glyn Edwards, 4 December 2007.
- 21 Slapstick Symposium: [http:// www.punchandjudy.org.Punch&Judy\\_Symposium.htm](http://www.punchandjudy.org.Punch&Judy_Symposium.htm) (accessed 12 July 2009).
- 22 Interview with Glyn Edwards, 4 December 2007.
- 23 Interview with Glyn Edwards, 4 December 2007.
- 24 Personal correspondence with Glyn Edwards, 26 May 2009.
- 25 Personal correspondence with Glyn Edwards, 26 May 2009.
- 26 Around the World With Mr. Punch, online blog: <http://www.punchandjudyworld.org/portablog> (accessed 12 July 2009)
- 27 Interview with Pete Maggs, 18 September 2007.
- 28 Chris Somerville website: [www.punchandjudy.com](http://www.punchandjudy.com) (accessed 20 May 2009).
- 29 Phone conversation with Chris Somerville, 18 June 2008.
- 30 Conversation with Chandler, 25 September 2009.

### Chapter Three: Performers

*They are not all the same kind of people.*

George Speaight <sup>1</sup>

*It is a distinctive feature of social research that the objects it studies are in fact subjects, and themselves produce accounts of their world.*

Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson <sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I am interested in how the Punch performer's sense of identity has changed since the 1980s. This question revolves around the tension between the individual agent and the obligations of tradition. We saw in the last chapter how that tension has been managed by the organizations, in this chapter I want to consider it from the point of view of the individual performer.

The tension between the individual voice and the conventions of tradition is one of the motors of tradition. However, conditions of modernity mean that individuals' choices are nearly always less grounded, more contingent, and are open to debate and reinterpretation, in conditions of late modernity the more so. Weber (Scaff 2000: 105) argues that this is the product of rationalisation resulting in what he calls 'disenchantment' in which, '[...] modernity represents a loss of the sacred sense of wholeness and reconciliation between self and the world provided by myth, magic, tradition, religion, or immanent nature' (ibid). Giddens extends this argument and suggests that in the absence of 'ontological security' (1991: 375), agents continually have to assess and justify their own lives and the meanings of their actions. For Giddens this results in the production of 'lifestyle' choices which contrast markedly with traditional modes of being,

Lifestyle is not a term which has much applicability to traditional cultures, because it implies choice within a plurality of possible options, and is 'adopted' rather than 'handed down'. Lifestyles are routinised practices, the routines incorporated into habits of dress, modes of acting and favoured milieux for encountering others: but the routines followed are reflexively open to change in the light of the mobile nature of self-identity (ibid: 81).

Due to the 'more mobile nature of self-identity', performers on the one hand increasingly feel the need to justify their roles as Punch and Judy practitioners, and on the other, find that reflecting upon those roles provokes new interpretations of the

role and new and reinvigorating aesthetics and dramaturgies. Far from disabling performers, self-scrutiny has produced variety in performance which constitutes the kinds of 'DNA' the College believes gives life to the form. In this chapter I will be considering a range of performers whose experiences indicate the kinds of relationship between (auto)biography and performance that are currently shaping the form. The degree of self-scrutiny to which I am pointing is not universal amongst Punch practitioners and where it exists it is not expressed universally in the same way. Degrees and kinds of self-scrutiny have changed over time and have in fact become more acute in the last few decades. However, since performers do not change places like passengers getting on and off a bus at a terminus, one group replacing another wholesale, a number of performers are still working who were around when the last study was done. They sit side by side and influence each other.

### **Identity and tradition in practice and in the past**

Before embarking on the contemporary ethnographic analysis, it is useful briefly to consider two areas against which to contrast current experience: how identity and practice were interrelated in Punch and Judy in the past and, firstly, how they interrelate in other puppetry forms which might be considered less subject to the reflexive conditions of late-modernity; in other words, in more traditional communities.

In Chapter One, I traced the emergence of Punch and Judy and suggested that its evolution was determined by emerging class relations in an industrialising society, especially as it was expressed in cultural forms. This contrasts with more traditional societies where puppetry seems to have performed essential expressive or ritual functions and in so doing gave puppeteers a set of duties and a fixed place in the hierarchy. Jane Marie Law tells us that in Japan, for example, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, ritual puppeteers had very important roles in mediating between the realms of 'purity and pollution' (1997: 59), realms whose boundaries required vigilant negotiation. They would 'perform appeasement and purification rites from door to door at set seasons of the year, before audiences ranging from the poorest peasants to the imperial family' (ibid: 164). The puppeteer would occupy a prescribed, if liminal, space, geographically on the edge of the community, but, like the mid-wife or the night-soil man, brought in from time to time to carry out

potentially contaminating duties. There can be little doubt that they knew their place. In Indonesia, the role of the *dhalang* (puppeteer) in traditional shadow puppetry was no less central but was, and is, accorded considerable status. Keeler suggests that '[...] a *wayang* [shadow-puppet performance] brings honour upon its sponsors and pleasure to the community and thereby enters into the fabric of Javanese society' (1992: 48). The form plays an important part in negotiating '[...] the precarious balance of chaos and stability in society, and kinship dialectics of conflict and complementariness' (Cohen 2002: 167). The *dhalang* with his considerable repertoire of stories and skills is assured of his own value in this.<sup>3</sup>

The socially important role of the puppeteer in these contexts is sometimes framed in spiritual or quasi-spiritual terms in which puppets and puppeteers 'share[d] a world set apart from the everyday realm' (Law 1997: 51). Michael Schuster describes Indian *Gombayata* puppetry as '[...] a physical practice which leads to another state of being [for the puppeteer]', (2001: 63). In some instances puppetry performs a role which appears to serve the spiritual/emotional needs of the puppeteer at least as much as that of the rest of the community. In Stuart Blackburn's analysis of puppet-audience relations in shadow puppetry in Kerala, he describes a situation where there is no external and validating audience (1996a and b). The performers are their own audience performing for their own needs; he tells us '[the] play is not performed for entertainment' (1996a: 24). In all of the above cases the puppeteer would seem to have a deep sense of ontological security.

Where conditions due to urbanisation and industrialisation have changed significantly in these societies, the relationship between puppetry and identity has become more complex. In some cases, such as in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, in the wake of post-colonial political and cultural shifts, the puppeteer finds a new purpose and may be enlisted in projects of defining national identities. Surapone Virulrak and Kathey Foley go so far as to suggest that in Thailand, '[...] for those developing contemporary *hun* [doll theatre], their performance practice is a way of becoming truly Thai' (2001: 85). The case is similar in Vietnam, Foley suggests, where the traditional form of water puppetry, *mua roi nuoc*, has, '[...] through the metonymy of art, come to represent the essence of the nation' (2001a: 138). Even when traditional puppetry has become a tourist attraction it can still play an important part in defining

the nation's identity, and thus giving a firm sense of purpose to the puppeteer. Foley suggests that in the case of Burmese marionette puppetry the idealism of national ideology and the pragmatism of tourist consumerism have in fact 'co-conspired' to 'reinvigorate the traditional art' (2001b: 69-70). However, purpose is not the same as integration, and the relationship of the puppeteer to the tradition is inevitably altered, and prone to reflection. New kinds of puppeteers have emerged through the promotion of national forms in Southeast Asia, in particular, especially by universities. These puppeteers are drawn from the educated classes and are creating new forms (for which Foley, among others, uses the oxymoron, 'neotraditional' [2001b: 79]). New relationships with traditional forms can change the form and enable them to serve new audiences.

### **The European experience**

Rather than playing a central role in sustaining the spiritual or kinship needs of a community, western European traditional puppetry was a paid form of commentary or entertainment, or both at the same time. It stood on the sidelines and made gestures, some of them rude, and asked for money in return. It is perhaps a mistake to raise its sometimes satirical function to the level of meta-narrative; its impact has probably always been small and localised. McCormick and Pratasik suggest that, 'It was only with the folklorists of the nineteenth century that 'traditional' puppetry began to be perceived as culturally significant.' (1998: 10). The economic relationship reflects the fact that most of these forms evolved in periods of urbanisation and 'the growing notion of leisure' (ibid: 3) in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was only later that they became associated with ideas of national or class identity, either imposed from above, as with Petrushka and Kasper, or consciously adopted by puppeteers themselves who saw in them the means to express a developed sense of their own identity. Where they are less economically dependent, puppeteers are freer to enact other agendas. Tchanchè, for instance, emerged as a specifically working-class and partisan figure. Puppeteers already had an identity, they '[...] worked in factories, mines or small trades [...] They began putting on puppets [sic] shows in their homes after work for working-class friends and neighbours [...]' (Gross 2001: 50). The puppet was an expression of this identity, not the other way round, and the audiences, at least in the early days of the form,



were exclusively working-class. Performers had no need to adapt their shows to the demands of another class. As Gross suggests, 'For the puppeteer, it must have generated a comforting sense of power to create and animate a world of puppets after working all day as someone else's puppet' (ibid: 51). The puppeteer was first of all a member of a class and of a linguistic group, and only then was he a puppeteer using his skills to express his identity as a working-class Walloon speaker.

### **Late twentieth century Punch groupings and the current situation**

As I suggested in Chapter One, economic dependency and the ability to manipulate and respond to that economic relationship accounted for the emergence in the twentieth century of the dominant beach-uncle form. Leach argues that, by contrast, the swatchel omi's offered a link with a pre first-world war style of performance (1985: 110). He characterises them as 'first and foremost self-sufficient' (ibid: 120). Their shows were an expression of family identity, using the family script and puppets and often advertising themselves with the family name. As we have seen, one or two family performers are still working today, amongst them Ron Codman and his brothers in Liverpool and Llandudno and Pete Maggs in Bournemouth.

At the time Leach was writing, the counter-culturalists were an emerging group whom Leach believed were inspired by the notion of the 'outsider' (ibid: 145). He describes them as engaged in the 'resurrection' of '[...] a Punch who stands out against the prevailing tide of social convention [...] free to adopt a certain flamboyance [...] in sharp contrast to the spick and span blazer and flannels of the preceding generation' (ibid). For this group, Punch expressed something of the disaffection puppeteers felt with the banalities of popular culture. It was a way of tapping into popular roots, although it attracted a number of university educated performers who combined political awareness with artistic originality and intellectual wit. Since they are by definition a disparate group, it is harder to generalise about their motives. Some, like Rod Burnett and Martin Bridle, were art-college trained and saw the show as a means to combine an interest in the kinetic possibilities of the object with an interest in the immediacy of performance and an interest in folk forms, principally music. Others, like Professor Panic, saw themselves as anarchists and saw in Punch a natural ally (Green 2000: 7).<sup>4</sup>

Although many of the performers who were working in the mid 1980s still are, it is with considerably less confidence that a taxonomy may still be attempted. Cross-currents have developed; the counter-culturalists, for example, have influenced some of the younger puppeteers some of whom, despite this, have little politicised sense of disaffection. They, in turn, are adapting to changing environments, since the beach no longer offers the opportunities it did. Some older performers welcome the originality of the arts-inspired puppeteers and incorporate some of their ideas into their own shows. Other performers are emerging who do not regard themselves as fitting into any of the above categories.

### **A range of contemporary performers**

In the rest of the chapter I offer a series of profiles of current performers through which I consider their sense of identity as Punch and Judy practitioners. In the first three I examine performers who may be said to represent the three groupings which Leach identified and who are still working today. In the others, I consider performers who signal the kinds of relationships between biography and self-identity which are more evident since Leach was researching.

Several factors have influenced the choice of puppeteer I will be discussing. Firstly, they are all performers for whom performing Punch and Judy is very deeply ‘meaning-endowed’ (Goffman, cited in Brewer 2000: 10). They are therefore people whose energy and commitment sustains and shapes the form. This distinguishes them from those performers for whom the show is simply an adjunct to their principal role as children’s entertainers. Meaning-endowment carries with it both a purposefulness and an attachment to performance at an important level. My general theme is that since the mid 1980s meaning-endowment is in most cases more reflexively arrived at or striven for. I am suggesting that this process was in evidence amongst the counter-culturalists who were adopting the show for quasi-political ends, but less so in the other groups. This list is not exhaustive, there are others who just as easily might have been included, and their work will be referred to in later chapters. There are performers I would have liked to have worked with, but who were unavailable or unwilling to participate at the level needed. Whilst, for example, I managed to see

Ron Codman's show in Liverpool and interview him briefly afterwards, he was wary of me and I did not have time to develop a 'rapport', still less a 'collaboration'.<sup>5</sup>

### **Bryan Clarke: beach uncle**



Fig. 20 Bryan Clarke at the Covent Garden Mayfayre 2009

Bryan Clarke (Professor Jingles) (Fig. 20) is an important link with the music-hall/beach uncle tradition. He is a Full member of the PJF, and for several years was its Chair; he is a founding member of the College. Now in his early 70s, he is tall, slightly stooped, with white, brushed back hair and alert eyes under bushy white eyebrows. He speaks with an East London accent which reveals his working-class origins. He has been performing Punch and Judy since he was 12. He was influenced by the performers he saw in his youth, Percy Press Senior, Fred Tickner and Bruce Macloud among them. At one time he was 'the youngest Punch and Judy man in the country' (Felix 1994: 37). Clarke is also a puppet and ventriloquist doll maker and 'together with his wife Dorothy [is] probably responsible for making more professional Punch figures than any other person alive or dead.' (ibid) He learnt to carve from influential English puppet maker and performer Waldo Lanchester with whom he spent two summers in his early teens. He became a full-time entertainer in his late 30s having become disillusioned with life as a 'trouble-shooter' for British Foods, a management job which meant a great deal of travel and considerable stress. Until then he had been working part time as a Punchman, magician, ventriloquist and comedian; he turned fully professional in about 1975. For many years he had a

regular pitch on Lowestoft Beach and still performs hundreds of shows a year in schools, at festivals, at holiday camps, in parks and on the beach.

Bryan Clarke's Punch shows are powerful essays in the art of engaging an audience, and so is his life. Clarke says a Punch performer should 'Grab the audience, mould them, and make them part of your show [...]' (ibid: 44). This instinct to take charge of an audience through humour extends to his everyday encounters. In the course of my researches I met him many times and I stayed with him for a few days in his house, 'Storm Cottage', just behind a beach on the Suffolk coast. The house, several hundred years old, was once a boathouse and has weathered floods and storms that have seen newer buildings swept away. His conversations are often a sustained series of jokes and it can be difficult to get behind the mask of the professional entertainer. One bitterly cold evening I sat in his car and watched him through the plate glass window of a fish and chip shop as he was buying our supper; the only other customers were local teenagers. In front of me was the dumb-show of comedian and audience, he stood in front of them gesticulating and cracking jokes. Another time I went with him to a local school where he was performing, and whilst he was waiting to do the show he told jokes to the dinner-ladies who were serving tea and cakes through the hatch of the school canteen; the opening in the wall making an *ad hoc* proscenium arch. He worked them as he works a paying audience. He can be competitive as a performer, too, and knows his own ability. I have been with him in a social setting when a lesser comic has been telling jokes; he bided his time and after they had worked hard for a laugh he floored them with a casual one-liner. He tells me that at school he was class comedian and bully.

There is a self-awareness in Bryan Clarke's playing up of the Punch and Judy tradition which connects him in a direct line through the music-hall performers back to Mayhew's Punchman. These entertainers have a considerable affection for the puppet and a great deal of skill in performance, but they are prepared to invent and perpetuate mythologies about the form and themselves to meet their principal goal which is to make a living. In the process the Punchman himself becomes part of his own mythology, part of his own invented narrative. It is not so much that he necessarily believes his own stories, but that these stories are the growing stock of the performer's (auto)biography. He will bring them out at the right time for the right

effect.<sup>6</sup> One evening, sitting on his sofa, a glass of Brandy in my hand, the wind whistling round the cottage, unsettlingly he told me he was a trained hypnotist, but not to worry, he wouldn't hypnotise me. For the rest of the evening I wondered if he had. His performances, when they go well, are a kind of hypnosis.

At a certain point the two identities, Professor Jingles and Bryan Clarke, seem indistinguishable, but Bryan Clarke is usually alert enough to monitor his own performance. When he is 'out front' as the Punchman, he is always aware of the impact he is having on his audience. For instance, he will do a piece of balloon-modelling for a child he has called out from the audience and at the same time make eye-contact with other members of the audience, gaining their complicity, letting them know that he knows that what he is doing is ridiculous.

The presentational elements of his life are evident in various ways. He always looks dapper, in blazer and tie; he might change his clothes several times before going to do a job so that he can look, and feel, exactly right. Although he does not boast of his achievements, it is important to him that people know he is doing well. He often refers to the successful business he ran on Lowestoft beach and to the fact that even his wife does not know how well off he is. A friendly rivalry developed between him and another leading Punchman, John Styles. Styles had bought himself a Daimler, a status car; Clarke bought one too. On one occasion he tells me he performed at a festival where he was 'treated with little more than contempt'; the next day he went back having borrowed a neighbour's Rolls Royce. That day, he tells me, he was 'treated quite differently'.

Work takes precedence over almost everything; getting it is the continual anxiety of the self-employed entertainer. Clarke tells me a story of how, some years before, John Styles had been booked to appear on a popular TV chat show *The Wogan Show*. That day Styles' father had died. He rang Bryan to see what he should do. Bryan advised him, 'You can't turn TV work down'. But work is supported by a genuine interest in the craft of Punch and Judy, and in other kinds of puppetry. Bryan Clarke's bed-time reading is puppet books and his house contains a lot of puppet memorabilia. The mixture of the skilled craftsman, the adept entertainer and the shrewd business-head characterise a part of the Punch tradition which was in the ascendancy in the

middle years of the twentieth century. These performers are in the main children's entertainers for whom Punch may be a lifelong interest, but is principally a means to an end. It is one of a range of activities they are involved in. As with Mayhew's Punchman, economic interests determine the shaping of the show and the presentation of the showman; though for Clarke, after nearly 60 years of performing, the relationship between economics and personality is habituated.

**Pete Maggs: swatchel omi**



Fig. 21 Pete Maggs with Judy

The exact history of the Maggs family of Punch performers is not recorded and the traditions are handed down orally with all the potential misrepresentation, deliberate or otherwise that this entails. Pete Maggs (Fig. 21) is, according to himself, 'eighth generation Punchman' (Edwards 1985), according to Leach, 'up to sixth' (1980: 70). Maggs, now in his mid 50s, told me that he has been performing Punch and Judy since he was 26, according to Leach he was 22 (1985: 120). Maggs lives in Bournemouth on England's south coast, his family had moved there from Cornwall in the early 1900s.

As you drive north, away from the seafront, towards his house, the Victorian buildings decline from mansions to smaller, detached houses, to 1930s semis with occasional terraces of shops. Maggs lives behind one of these. When I called to see

him, his grown-up daughter and her boyfriend were tending an open fire in the back-yard. His huge Alsatian dog barked fiercely at me, sniffed me for a bit, and loped off. Maggs took me into the kitchen to make some tea, a hand-written notice on the fridge door read, 'get your own fucking milk'. We went upstairs to the sitting room, sparsely furnished with a wood-burning stove and a couple of chairs. I sat on the rocking chair and he crouched on the arm chair, occasionally pulling his blue cardigan around his shoulders. As well as a Punch and Judy man, Maggs is also a trained gas-fitter. He makes more money from gas-fitting than from doing the show, he tells me, and it 'makes a nice change', it is more 'down to earth' than his performing work.

He is an intelligent man and attended the local Grammar School; he listens to my questions and weighs them up before agreeing or disputing my, often naïve, assumptions. He is very happy to talk about Punch and Judy and it is clear that he has given the show a great deal of thought, not only in terms of how to do it, but also what it might mean. His description of learning the show is as unstructured and spontaneous as the rest of his life seems to be. He picked up bits of the show from his father, but then, '[I] learned how to put it together. In the end it's you on stage with bits of wood, squeaking, and a bunch of kids and you've got to make something of it. Preferably to get them to put some money in the hat'.<sup>7</sup>

Leach suggests that family shows are a 'prize possession', handed down from generation to generation, (1985: 120), and whilst it is easy to believe this is the case with the apparently almost hermetically sealed show of Codman which has no audience participation, it is more difficult to believe with Pete Maggs' show which relies to a very large degree on the driving energy and interaction of the audience. However, he tells me that this was the case with his father's show, and probably his grandfather's. In that sense he is keeping up if not a textual, then a stylistic family tradition. Where there is a stronger sense that being a Punchman is deeply ingrained is in the way he talked to me about other performers. I was forcibly struck by his naturally referring to them by the title 'Professor'; no other performer I spoke to did this. Maggs is also conscious of the difference between himself and the kind of performers represented in the media, performers who are in the music-hall tradition, men such as Tony Hancock in *The Punch and Judy Man*, or the smart but continually drunk Mr Partridge in the British TV sitcom, *Hi Di Hi*. He describes being thought of

as that kind of performer as ‘a curse’ (Edwards 1985). Where the beach uncle performers might rely on a constructed narrative of the tradition, visible in the kinds of puppets they use, the way they dress and the stories they tell, even indeed the ‘setting of standards’ which Maggs so much distrusts, for the swatchel omi performer the tradition is part of a family narrative.

For Maggs, it is to a lesser degree economically driven,

‘It’s not really about the money. Sheila [Maggs’ bottler] will come and tell me we’re not taking any money from this lot; if I’m enjoying it, then I’ll continue. If not, if they’re a tedious lot, if they’re not responsive [...] I’ll bring it to a close. You’re back the next day, they’re back the next day. You’ll do it again’.

Although money does play a part in doing the show, ‘We all like the clink of coinage’, he says to me, more importantly the show intensely connects him with the present moment, a feeling which has not changed since he spoke to Leach. Then he described it as ‘a release’, ‘along the lines of driving a motorcycle at 100 mph’ (Leach 1980: 66), now he says, ‘There are transcendental moments, without wishing to sound pompous. There are moments when it really isn’t you doing it. They’re rare, but they are the moments that make it *really* worthwhile.’

Where the music-hall tradition is characterised by a kind of schizophrenia, a role-playing on the part of the Punchman, Pete Maggs finds in the show a way of uniting his life with his work.

### **Rod Burnett and Martin Bridle: counter-culturalists**

Leach included Rod Burnett (Fig. 22) in his survey of the ‘latest generation of Punchmen’ emerging in the 1970s (1985: 145). Like several of the ‘counter-cultural’ performers Leach discussed, Burnett had been to art school. He left Exeter College of Art and Design with a first class honours degree in sculpture. He worked with Martin Bridle with whom he had been at school and college and it was whilst at college that they started experimenting with performing objects and produced a cabaret style puppet show, *The Cabinet of Intrigue* which was, Burnett tells me, ‘[...] far in advance of anything we’d seen’.<sup>8</sup> They formed a folk band, Exchange and Mart, and they toured both the show and the band. At this time, Burnett was lodging with



Vernon Rose who was a performer and folk singer himself and whose *Celebrated Theatre of Delights* included a Punch and Judy show. Bridle and Burnett were drawn to the idea of exploring folk puppetry as a means to combine their interest in object manipulation with their interest in traditional forms.



Fig. 22 Rod Burnett and Crocodile

Leach suggests that there might have been a connection to the earliest Punchmen amongst these performers in their '[...] romantic identification with the itinerant showmen of Piccini's day' (ibid), and certainly Burnett, then 'a kid', in his own words, enjoyed the life of the road. There was another connection with Piccini, and that was through an encounter with Michael Byrom who Leach suggests '[...] upheld Piccini's grim uncompromising show as the true *Punch and Judy*.' (ibid: 144-145). Burnett describes the meeting as 'a key moment in our psyche'. He tells me how Byrom's Punch would come up and start slowly banging his head against the proscenium arch; he would stare at the audience and bang his head again. When he hit the baby, Byrom's bottler, Ted Harnden, would intervene, whacking Mr Punch with his bowler hat and saying, ' Oi, you shouldn't have done that, what have you done to the baby? That's not on is it?' Burnett tells me '[...] it was anarchic, very disturbing, many parents were going, "what *are* we watching?"', but I thought it was great'. The desire to provoke underlies Burnett's thinking about Punch and Judy and he uses his skills as an artist to enable him to do that.

I first met Rod Burnett at the Aberystwyth Punch and Judy festival in 2006 and his interest in exploring the artistic possibilities of the popular puppet form was evident

in a conversation we had when he gave me a lift in his van to Bristol after the festival. We found ourselves discussing Kleist and the essential qualities of the puppet. We agreed it had something to do with its relationship to gravity, though we did not get much further. Burnett is a tall, slim, composed, charismatic, quietly spoken man in his 50s. He lives in Bideford in North Devon with his wife, Tanya, who is a successful children's author, and their children. His house is a large, white double-fronted, two storied Victorian building in its own grounds with a small cottage attached. 'Not bad for a Punch and Judy man, eh?', he remarked to me. Propped against his workshop in the garden is an old Punch proscenium arch which he no longer uses; a beautiful object starting to suffer from the effects of the weather. The house is stuffed with other beautiful objects: puppets he has made, paintings and books.

Behind Burnett's approach to puppetry lies a sense that live theatre is an important means by which society can escape the danger of becoming, as he puts it, 'autistic'. It is a way of engaging an audience's imaginative faculties which he feels other, now more pervasive, forms of entertainment do not do. He rejects outright the idea of being a children's entertainer, '[...] if that's what being a Punch and Judy man is', he tells me, 'then I'm not one'. He sees himself principally as a maker of *theatre*. In so doing he refuses to make distinctions between the adults and the children in the audience - to 'patronise' children, in his view. This contrasts with the attitude of many of the beach uncle performers who design their shows for parallel but separate audiences of adults and children. He thinks that some of them would see his views as 'bollocks' and he would probably be right. Bryan Clarke and John Styles see themselves more as entertainers and comedians than as educators or makers of theatre with a larger purpose. Burnett also produces and performs other puppet shows through his *Storybox* theatre company which tours schools with shows he has devised and made. He frequently performs Punch abroad. On the wall of his office there is a large year-planner; it is reassuringly full. He seems artistically and financially satisfied and is able to take time off in the summer when he wants to.

The distinction between Rod Burnett and the other two performers I have so far talked about points to shifting tensions between tradition and identity as it plays out in the contemporary context. Lacking the reassurance of a family tradition and

rejecting the constraints of the professional entertainer, Burnett constructs his own identity. He does this using elements of the show and importing popular and folk aesthetics to create a people's theatre form. He tells me that it is important for him to know what he is 'aiming for'. Unlike the seemingly random nature of Pete Maggs' life, something which deeply infuses his understanding of the show and his way of doing it, or the adoption of an existing role through which Bryan Clarke expresses himself, Burnett has created his own narrative. In it, he strives to make his natural skills as a visual artist meet his need to be doing something of value; something which allows audiences to make the kinds of imaginative engagements and take the imaginative responsibility that his own work results from.

Giddens suggests that, '[...] in conditions of high modernity, we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so. We have no choice but to choose' (1991: 81). Burnett's approach to the show is an instance of the shift towards choice which younger performers, if they are not content merely to imitate their predecessors, are almost bound to engage in. Being a Punchman and performing the traditional show once took precedence over the identity of the individual performers: the tradition may be said to have been authoring the performer. For Bridle and Burnett and some others who have emerged since the 1970s, the question has become: is it possible for the performer to author the tradition? Burnett believes it is; Martin Bridle is not so sure.

One day at his house, Bridle showed me a brochure for a forthcoming puppet festival. Pointing to a picture of himself on the front performing his show *A Spoonful of Stories*, he said,

'Well this is me with my stuff, and there's an old traditional puppet from Stan Parker's puppets, so I'm on the cover with one of my things that's completely different to Punch, so I'm part of the theatre thing there where I'm acting and performing with puppets, and what you get at the back [turning the brochure over], there's a Punch and Judy show there as well, and what do you get [he reads], "No puppet festival is complete without them, a great British tradition". Could be anybody, could be rubbish, who knows, who knows what it's like, it's just Punch and Judy. I don't want to be that person'.<sup>9</sup>

He and his wife Sue, who plays the bottler/ interlocutor role, have stopped performing the show until they can find 'the right format'. For them, the tradition is too confining to accommodate the individual voice.

This degree of conscious decision making about what the show should contain and what it is for pushes the show into the realm of the emergent and away from a reliance on tradition for its own sake. It tips the balance from ‘normative rules that are communal and traditional’ (Langlois 1985: 78), in the direction of ‘the completely novel text’ (Bauman 1975: 303). In classic discussions of folklore, this shift is one of focus between *parole* and *langue* (Veltrusky 1987: 143; Langlois 1985: 78-79; Ben-Amos 1984: 121-122), between the desires of the agent and the obligations of tradition. It is, though, a shift which may never be fully accomplished, since the normative elements of the tradition may be structurally embedded. This is a problem for Martin Bridle. The balance between the normative and the emergent is one which performers are currently addressing. This is not just a shift of emphasis in terms of focussing on individual creativity within conventional forms (as Glassie suggests in his advocacy of *performance theory* [2001: 44-45]), it is an actual shift in the relationship between the agent and the traditional form.

In the remainder of the chapter, I would like to examine four performers for whom this tension is very active, who find in the show a way of engaging their own ‘life-trajectories’ (Giddens 1991: 14).

### **Dan Bishop: finding an identity**



Fig. 23 Dan Bishop and Punch

Although Leach discussed Bishop (Fig.23), alongside Burnett and Bridle (1985: 145), he does not fit into the category of counter-culturalists in the same way that they do.

This is because the role of Punchman for Bridle and Burnett is a way of *doing*, for Bishop it is more a way of *being*. As such, it is a reminder of the classic narrative of the Punch performer who finds an affinity with the form at an early age and is compelled to take up the show. But it is different. In Bishop's case the decision was more conscious; doing Punch and Judy filled a vacuum.

At the end of a television documentary about Dan Bishop, *Consuming Passions* (Grimas 1989), Bishop makes an off-the-cuff remark to the off-screen director: 'Perhaps you can tell me who I am'. This comment follows a candid reflection on his occasional doubts about the quality of the show and the value of the work as a whole. These deep levels of anxiety example the kinds of ontological insecurity which Giddens suggests characterise late modernity. There may be particular biographical reasons, too, which underlie this anxiety. Bishop's natural father, an Oscar-winning documentary maker, left the family when Bishop was seven years old, and from the age of 10 Bishop was sent to boarding school. Both of these facts come up in the documentary and in his conversations with me, though he does not explicitly attribute his life-decisions to either of them. He did not take up Punch and Judy because his family had done it, or because he felt he had the natural attributes of an entertainer encouraged and provoked by seeing other Punch and Judy performers. He came to the show through hearing a chance remark at a point when he was considering what he should do with his life. He had trained to be a drama teacher, but finding that the job was not what he wanted, he moved to Cornwall and became an auxiliary coast-guard. Since he was not supposed to do anything else when on duty except look out to sea, he had plenty of time to think, and what he thought about was how he would approach the show; 'Mr Punch patiently showed me the ropes as I learned to be a Punch and Judy man' (Bishop 2007). He has been a Punch and Judy man since 1975.

Bishop is a member of the College and the PJF of which he was once Chair. He is a lean, spare, gentle, articulate, well-spoken man, now in his mid 60s. His house, *Punch's Pitch*, is full of Punch and Judy memorabilia. He lives with his wife Gemma, who works with him on his other puppet shows which he developed for primary schools after he had started doing Punch and Judy. These shows mostly teach children about ecological issues and use a variety of puppets including rod and shadow. I interviewed him in the same room he was filmed in for the documentary 20

years before. The same wicker screen stands under the same vine which grows through the wall. Some of the same pictures hang on the walls. Naturally, Bishop himself has changed; he is older, a little greyer and he says he has slowed down a bit. Now that he gets a state pension, he can afford to do fewer shows. A sense of continuity is important to him, it offers a groundedness perhaps lacking in his own self-identity. He tells me that he thinks Punch is so strong a character that he is in charge, 'he is telling me what to do in a way [...] if people are looking at Punch and [...] allowing a kind of cathartic effect, who's to say the performer isn't getting that even more strongly'.<sup>10</sup> Bishop often refers to Punch as if he is a sentient creature, with his own thoughts and desires. He showed me a passport which he uses for Mr Punch when he goes abroad; it is complete with photograph of Punch and stamped from many of the places Bishop has performed with him.

For Bishop, a deep grounding in the tradition provided the kind of security as a performer that allowed him to develop his own show; it also fulfilled a sense of responsibility he felt to the tradition. Living in Cornwall and not having much opportunity to see other shows, he worked in isolation. He relied on published texts and commentaries for his information, reading everything he could find. Speaight was his 'bible', he tells me. He was methodical in deciding what constitutes the tradition, comparing published texts and finding the common elements. Eventually after a great deal of rehearsal, often conducted in front of a mirror, he created a show which he felt, 'fitted me like my own garment'. This approach extends to his teaching of the show, and he insists that his students '[...] first embrace and understand the history of what they are dealing with before they try to interpret it in their own way'. It is only then that they are allowed to do things 'in the context of a modern audience'. The consequence is that the show is both undeniably traditional, with elements taken from previous shows - a use of familiar episodes, exchanges and characters, and so on - but it is also biographical. The design of his puppets, for example, as I will describe further below, is often a response to personal experiences. Of all the performers working today, Dan Bishop's approach to the tradition is perhaps the most deeply reflexively informed; though it points to concerns with the management of tradition with which many other contemporary performers are grappling.

Much of Bishop's work is abroad and it has brought him into contact with other puppeteers working in what he sees as a common family. This lends substance to his sense of identity - he feels himself to be part of that family - and it influences his work through borrowing from related traditions; 'The aeroplane has changed things', in his opinion.

### **Geoff Felix: historiographical performance**



Fig. 24 Geoff Felix, in Saville Row suit, erecting his booth

Geoff Felix (Fig. 24) is the first Punch performer I will be discussing who emerged since Leach's landmark study. Although Felix seems to reach back to a tradition which predates Leach, the nature of his interest in the history of the form locates him in the post-Leach period.

Felix, now in his 50s, trained as a drama teacher at the Central School of Speech and Drama in the late 1970s. He chose this course partly because it was funded, but also because its practical elements allowed him to develop his skills as a puppet and ventriloquial doll maker. He had already decided he wanted to be a puppeteer and

when he left college with a B.Ed in 1980 that is what he did. He is skilled in the use of marionettes and rod-puppets and he has worked on a number of live-animation television and film projects including Jim Henson's *Labyrinth* (1986) and Anders Ronnow Klarlund's *Strings* (2002), as well as several children's TV puppet shows. In recent years the increasing amount of digital animation has seen less live animation on screen and as a consequence there has been less work. In anticipation of this, Felix started doing Punch and Judy. His decision was not entirely pragmatic, however. He recalled seeing the show as a child and helping the Punchman to collect money; the memory of the pleasure he had then stuck with him and he decided he wanted to '[...] recreate the joy I had felt then for other people'.<sup>11</sup>

Professor Felix's roots as a Punch performer connect with the earliest days of the tradition. He was influenced by Joe Beeby who in the 1920s had seen Punchman Pegram and had copied his style (Felix 1993: 6). Pegram is likely to have seen performers who were familiar with Mayhew's Punchman who had himself seen the very earliest performers, Pike and Piccini. Mayhew's Punchman had in fact bought his puppets from Piccini. The tradition was passed on orally between these performers and the distance is surprisingly short; only five generations separate Felix from Piccini. However, Felix's desire to sustain the tradition through careful reference to previous performances exhibits a conscious application of historical as opposed to simply traditional elements which, in Schechner's terms, is a 'restoration of behaviour' operating in 'the subjunctive mood' (Schechner, 1985: 36). Professor Felix's show deliberately casts its audience's minds back. Of course, all Punch and Judy shows to some extent have done this, it is their stock in trade, but the deliberate historiography of Felix's show is a recent development, and hardly anywhere else so rigorously exercised.<sup>12</sup>

Joe Beeby may have been an influence in this respect as he had explicitly wanted to recreate the Victorian show. As Speaight puts it, '[he] heroically kept alive the tradition of street performances [at a time when most other performers] found their best market for shows in children's parties' (in Felix 1993: Introduction). Performers I have spoken to almost all remark that Beeby's show was a glimpse into another era. It was stylistically quite distinct from most modern shows. It had no audience participation and was characterised by the frequent interspersing of songs and



nonsense rhymes; the whole show was underpinned by a powerful and persistent rhythm. Where Beeby was content to evoke the spirit of a previous time through stylistic borrowings, Felix is more interested in material and aesthetic fidelities. This may be the result of his skills as a maker and animator of puppets.

Professor Felix's sense of responsibility to what he describes as an 'invisible army' of past performers is evident in various ways.<sup>13</sup> It has dramaturgical and aesthetic impacts and it has persuaded him to take on the role of archivist for the form. The walls of the bed-sitting room in his small flat in Wembley are lined with shelves full of folders containing meticulously cross-referenced articles, press-cuttings, photographs and letters, documenting the history of Punch and Judy. Another, smaller set of folders, archives the history of ventriloquism. He has also published two books of interviews with Punch performers (Felix 1993, 1994). He believes that the documenting of the form, the creation of a history, gives it value: 'Once you have a history', he tells me, 'you can then have pride'. This project of turning an oral tradition into a documented one springs from a desire to keep the form going, yet it runs the risk of fixing and so stultifying the tradition. Felix avoids this danger in his own performances through balancing a respect for the work of previous makers and performers with a personal interest in the form expressed in highly skilful manipulation and a willingness to respond to audiences in the present moment. This engagement is evident when I ask what drew him to the show. In response he reads a text in which Walter Wilkinson describes his first sight of the show and the impact it had on him (1943: 22-23). Wilkinson happened upon a Punch show on his way back to school after lunch-break; he followed the show and missed afternoon lessons. When the show finished and the crowd dispersed, Wilkinson says that he was '[...] seized with the vague feeling that something splendid had passed out of the world' (ibid). Professor Felix echoes this sentiment, '[...] there is something glorious about [the show] when it's in full flight, and that is what I want to keep going', he tells me.

Like all good performers, in reproducing the form Felix draws on '[...] the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power' (Michael Taussig, cited in Gross 2001: 181); but, unlike the performers Leach encountered, it is a power more often accessed through historical, documented rather than oral sources. A telling incident occurred on one of

my visits to him which illustrates the difference between his reconstructions and those of the beach uncle or swatchel omi performers. He was working on a three dimensional wall plaque of Lord Nelson, for his own amusement, and had discovered that the 'official' portrait of Nelson differed considerably from the real thing, of which there was documentary evidence; it was more handsome and more in accord with the popular idea of what looked heroic, fine features and swept back hair. In reality Nelson was an ugly man with a big nose. Felix was in a quandary over which he should reproduce; should he sustain the myth or show the reality? Performers of previous generations, if in the same situation, would probably have had no hesitation in reproducing the popularly inscribed version; for Felix the difficulty was very real.

### **Clive Chandler: reflexive populist**



Fig. 25 Clive Chandler

Clive Chandler (Fig. 25) is of the same generation of performers as Felix; he too was college educated, having taken a Drama degree at the University of Manchester in the late 1970s. He is a tall, curly-haired, highly intelligent man with a deeply wrinkled brow, a close cut beard and a sharply developed sense of irony. After graduating, he did a variety of jobs including working as an estate agent in Birmingham and teaching English in Spain. When he returned to England he took up stilt-walking and juggling and started busking in and around Birmingham where he lived. It was whilst

he was busking in the early 1980s that he saw a Punch and Judy show and decided, 'I'd like to do that' (Chandler 1998: 4). Being very resourceful, he carved his own puppets and made his own booth and he developed his own show based on other shows he had seen. In the mid 1980s he got to know Glyn Edwards when he worked as a warm-up on the Glyn Edwards' produced morning children's TV show, *The Saturday Show*. Edwards gave him his first swazzle. They have formed a close association ever since and, as we saw in Chapter Three, this has had a considerable impact on the development of the form in recent years. In the early 1990s he worked at Cannon Hill puppet Theatre under John Blundall where he honed his skills as a puppeteer. He devises his own non-Punch puppet shows which he tours to schools, and he organizes festivals of puppetry and community arts. He has helped to set up puppet organizations such as Puppetlink and Puppeteers UK which allow him to situate Punch and Judy within a wider context and to encourage links with other puppetry forms in Britain and abroad and to encourage arts organizations and festival organizers to embrace Punch and Judy as an unashamed part of British popular culture.

For Chandler, doing the show may have deep biographical roots. He acknowledges a connection between his own work and that of his father who was a Baptist minister. Drawing a comparison between his father in a pulpit and himself in a booth, Chandler describes the similarities,

'[My father] certainly waved his arms about, whispered and shouted and sought to captivate a crowd. There'd be a lively tune before he started, and they'd take up a collection when he'd finished. I'm the least religious member of my family, but maybe I've ended up with the most in common' (ibid).

He is keen to break down what he sees as the barriers between elitist and popular art and recognises an appetite for live performance amongst what he calls 'ordinary people' which he feels is not always met by culturally inaccessible theatres and art galleries. Rather than expect audiences to go to designated spaces to get their culture, he brings it out to them and he sees in Punch and Judy a direct way of doing this. The kinds of counter-cultural impulses which were being expressed by Burnett and Bridle through the injection of a visual arts sensibility into a popular performance form are expressed by Chandler through an interest in theatre; but for him they are mediated

through a greater democratisation of the arts than was going on at the time Burnett and Bridle were starting out.

On paper at least, Professor Chandler is one of the most successful puppeteers working today and represents the kind of lifestyle to which the professional contemporary puppeteer might hope to lead. He operates as a one-man puppet company which in its best year had a turnover of some £80 000, though his actual profits are considerably less. He lives in a comfortable four bedroom house in a leafy suburb of Birmingham. His wife works in education and his children are destined for university. It is a very far cry from the precarious life of the streets.

In recognising the potential of the Punch and Judy show within a larger scheme of grass-roots artistic activity, a scheme which enlists forms which speak with the 'voice of the people' (Speaight 1993), and in supporting that through the application of intelligence and professionalism, Chandler makes his identity as 'Punch and Judy man' an extension of his strong ethical sense of self. One outcome of this is that he refuses to be subsumed within the generic term 'Punch and Judy man', and in his billing prefers to be known as 'Professor Clive Chandler'. In performance terms, it means he does not slavishly replicate traditional elements, but consciously selects and incorporates them within a piece of theatre which has been structured to have an ethically consistent impact. This ethical sense also translates into an encouragement of other forms of 'accessible' puppetry and a rejection of 'elite' forms which he strongly believes are indulgent and self-serving and offer little for most audiences.

'Accessible' puppetry can mean popular international puppetry, and Chandler's vision of giving the people what they can engage with offers a broad canvas. At the festivals he organizes, he invites puppeteers from abroad who share his populist sensibility. At the 2007 Walsall International Festival of Street Arts, Streets Alive, he had invited, amongst others, a Pulcinella performer Irene Vecchia. I mentioned to her that Walsall could be quite rough, it is not a wealthy town. She replied, 'Good, that is where I like to work.' It is where Chandler likes to work as well.

### **Mark Poulton: post counter-culturalist**

So far I have attempted to explain the emergence of performers who do not fit into the categories which Leach offered. I have suggested that a different relationship to the form has come about in the last few decades and that this is characterised by a greater degree of reflexivity; performers are making more deliberate choices about taking up the show and about how it fits in with their sense of self. However, there are a number of performers for whom reflexivity of this kind seems inadequate to explain their decision to do the show and these performers challenge this hypothesis. I would like to consider one of these performers now.



Fig. 26 Mark Poulton and Punch

Mark Poulton (Fig. 26) was born in 1972 and he belongs to a relatively young generation of performers. When he was four years old, he tells me, he saw Guy Higgins's show on Weymouth Beach and immediately afterwards knocked on the door of the wooden booth to announce that when he grew up he was going to become a Punch and Judy man. He went home, took the stuffing out of his teddy bears, made a booth out of a cardboard box and did the show 'word for word'.<sup>14</sup> He maintained this resolve throughout his school career, to the dismay of his career's officer. He left school as early as he could, without any qualifications, and did his first season at the age of 16 in Llandudno 'for the Codmans'.<sup>15</sup> He had already won the title, 'Most Promising young Professor' (an accolade invented by the College to encourage

beginning performers). He now performs on Weymouth beach and is probably the last full-time beach performer in the country. In the winter he does schools shows and occasional children's parties, but because he refuses to do associated children's entertainments, such as balloon modelling and magic, he admits he does not get as much work as he would like.

Poulton's life is a mixture of freedom and anxiety. He has spent most of his career 'beaching', and, in the years before he was married, this gave him a considerable sense of liberty.<sup>16</sup> He would sleep in his camper van on the beach at Goodrington Sands or nearby Paignton at night and perform on the beach in the day time. Every week a new cohort of holidaymakers would arrive; in the evenings there would be parties and a lot of girlfriends. This, in many ways enviable existence, harks back to the romanticism of Walter Wilkinson's journeys (see Wilkinson 1930) and to de Hempsey's contention that being a Punch performer is a '[...] lovely, happy, free life' (1945: 21). This sense of freedom, however, belies the hard work and the worry which accompanies working outdoors for the 'bottle'. Poulton lives away from his wife and his young daughter for three or four months of the year, he works seven days a week, performing two or three shows a day, maintaining the booth and the puppets and watching for rain, hanging about in the town when the weather is bad. He has to pay the council to use the pitch and to rent the caravan in which he lives over the summer, and he shares his takings with his bottler, Rene. In wet summers the takings barely cover his costs.

Poulton's almost visceral attachment to the form nonetheless required shaping, and this came through watching Rod Burnett and Martin Bridle's shows, puppeteers whom he still reveres and parts of whose shows he has borrowed. There is a paradox in the performer who least demonstrates what we might call the reflexive-emergent process, learning from those who most demonstrate it. Indeed Burnett helped to inculcate a sense of practicality in Mark Poulton's passion for the show. Burnett wrote to Poulton's mother suggesting that if he were serious about being a Punchman, he should learn about the business aspects of the job, book-keeping, publicity and so on. Professor Poulton still has the letter.

The apparent compulsion to perform which Poulton expresses so vividly makes it difficult to argue that his decision to become a performer ‘[...] belongs to the reflexive historicity of modernity [...]’ (Giddens 1991: 96), especially since this decision was made at such an early age. This raises questions about the central argument that performers since Leach are engaged in conscious reconstructions of the notion of being a Punch and Judy performer which for earlier generations was either pragmatically adopted or born into. For Poulton, deciding to become a Punch performer appears to have been more a revelation than a decision. This experience is shared by a significant number of performers; Glyn Edwards, David Wilde, and others I have spoken to have expressed similar feelings. There are one or two teenage performers emerging who share this attachment. It is almost a pathology.

These examples allow the form to slip through the gaps in materialist, sociological discussions about traditional and post-traditional behaviour. Raymond Williams’ description of tradition, for example, which he tells us is ‘[...] selection and reselection of those significant received and recovered elements of the past which represent not a necessary, but a *desired* continuity’ (1981: 187), rests on the idea that ‘desire’ is not something abstract and ungrounded, but, ‘[...] effectively defined by existing general social relations’ (ibid). But this fails to account for motives which seem fundamentally personal and not in the least related to ‘general *social* relations’ (my italics). Giddens, on the other hand, distinguishes between *motives* which are often inaccessible and unarticulated, but yet are ‘a significant feature of human conduct’, (1984: 6) and *reasons* about which ‘competent actors can nearly always report discursively’ (ibid). He suggests that discursiveness takes on greater significance in post-traditional conditions where reasons can be elevated to the level of a public narrative, and which feed back into the (re)production of a form. This accounts for the production of discourses to which performers refer and which inform their practice. For Poulton and Edwards and others, however, *motives* though hidden, remain dominant.

One way to approach this conundrum may be to go back to Weber’s notion of the disenchantment of modernity, its supposed lack of ‘wholeness’ (Scaff 2000: 105). Where the work of Bishop in particular, and Felix, among others, might be seen as a therapeutic ‘*reenchanting*’ (ibid, italics in the original), Poulton’s connection with the

form seems to speak of an *enchantment*, as does that of Edwards and some others. (It may be that a new set of attachments is emerging, even in the course of the research, which might be called ‘post-reflexive’. I consider the implications of this view in the Conclusion.)

In this chapter, I have looked at how individual motivations for performance have changed in the decades since the last major study was made. I have suggested that, for the most part, these have come about because performers are in a position to reflect on the form in ways that they did not in the 1980s and as a consequence are putting the form to use in ways that they did not then. In general, this opens up a gap between the performer and the form which encourages the performer to make conscious decisions about what the show does and is for. The show has come to serve a range of different functions for performers. However, in the light of, as it were, unconscious attachments to the show expressed by some performers, it is necessary to put limits on the hypothesis, and to suggest that some are only reflexive *post hoc*. These are performers whose lives might be said to be authored by Punch. They nonetheless engage in dramaturgical and aesthetic decisions. In the next chapters I will look at how those decisions, reflexive and otherwise, translate into performance and aesthetic choices.

## Notes

1 Quoted in Felix 1994: ix

2 1983: 105

3 A number of extensive studies have been made which explicate this relationship between the *dhalang* and his role in performing this function; Keeler unravels the enactment of very subtle social negotiation in Javanese shadow puppetry (1987); and Mrazek diligently unpicks how this operates through practice (2005).

4 Panic is one of a small group of puppeteers who identify a pre-urban energy in the show; his interest in the natural history of the wood he carves with (see Green 2000), for example is echoed in the work of Brian and Alison Davey and is hinted at by a number of other practitioners. Martin and Sue Bridle exploit and gently mock this sense of a pre-urban idyll in their booth glove-puppet show, *Piggery Jokery*.

5 For a discussion of degrees of ethnographic engagement, see Marcus, 1997.

6 Law encountered a similar situation with Awaji puppetry where, in this case, audiences (re)constructed narratives to meet particular needs; at first she dismissed these stories as ‘[...] the fabrications of an unreliable informant’ (1997: 6); later she came to realise that ‘Stories



are more than just data' (ibid) and that the reconstructions tell the researcher more than raw data can.

7 Direct quotations from Maggs in this section are taken from an interview I conducted at his house on 18 September 2007.

8 Direct quotations from Burnett in this section are taken from interviews I conducted with him at his house on 31 July/1 August 2007.

9 Interview with Martin and Sue Bridle, 7 August 2007.

10 Direct quotations from Bishop in this section are taken from interviews I conducted with him at his house on 15 August 2007.

11 Direct quotations from Felix in this section are taken from interviews I conducted with him at his flat on 14 April 2008.

12 Some attempts at direct historical recreation have been made. Australian Punch performer Chris van der Craats (2009) has recreated the Piccini script and puppets; Professor John Thursby uses a Punch based on the Piccini puppet; Professor Paul Jackson tells me there are moves to perform the Piccini script.

13 'The Invisible Army' is a poem written by Felix to commemorate George Speaight. Felix gave a public reading of it from inside his booth at the first Mayfayre after Speaight's death in May 2006. He also read it aloud to me in his flat and imitated Speaight's voice as he did so.

*The Invisible Army.*

*Remember me? I've left you now, you young ones do not know.  
I'm George, I've gone beyond the grave, and now I'm in a show;  
I've joined an army, in a way, not soldiers bold and strong,  
But showmen like Piccini, and friends all long and gone.  
So, Punchmen, when it's raining and the wind begins to blow,  
And there's no-one there to watch you, and you'd really rather go,  
Remember this, remember, our gift to you today,  
We're watching, yes, we're watching; the stage is yours, so play!*

14 From an obituary to Guy Higgins, Puppeteers UK website, [www.puppeteersuk.com](http://www.puppeteersuk.com) (accessed 25 June 2007); and in a speech he made at the unveiling of a plaque to Higgins on Weymouth promenade in July 2007.

15 Conversation with Mark Poulton, 15 August 2008.

16 Pete Maggs uses the verb 'to beach', to describe working on a beach for the bottle.

## Chapter Four: The material culture of Punch and Judy

*One of the advantages of being a puppet character is that the demise of your handler does not necessarily end your performing career.*

Chris Abbot <sup>1</sup>

*[...] through making things, people make themselves in the process.*

Christopher Tilley <sup>2</sup>

The Punch and Judy show has a very strong material identity. In this chapter, I consider how that identity has been handled in the light of the changes in relationship to the tradition which I outlined in the last chapter. I also consider the life of the objects beyond the performance context, in the exchange of objects, and how the strong iconography of Punch and Judy allows it to be recontextualised in other media. The strong cultural location of the form feeds back into the production of the form, and performers respond to and exploit the strong identity of the form which is enhanced by these echoes.

Unpacking the decisions which have gone into making and choosing the objects which constitute the show and the tradition helps tell us to what degree performers feel bound by the tradition and to what degree they shape it. Making and using puppets is a very intimate and labour-intensive activity; the performer, better than anyone else, knows what her requirements are and how to make or adapt the puppets and the booth to suit her. The intimate relationship between puppet maker/user and puppet is clearly very different from the relationship you might have with your car or the electric kettle in the kitchen. And though, as Glassie argues (1999), these are forms of material culture as well, they tell a different story about the culture in which they are found. The user has very little say in the design of the mass-produced object, and the object is less able to express the user. Punch and Judy is in this sense a 'vernacular' form (Speaight 1970: 119); as such its technology '[...] contrasts with industrial systems of production. [It] depends on direct connections: direct access to materials and direct connections amongst suppliers, producers, and consumers' (Glassie 1999: 239). This directness, however, is mediated by a range of different attitudes to the obligations of tradition and these are expressed differently through the objects themselves by different puppeteers. There is a dialogue between the maker/user of the object and the object itself which tells us something about how performers relate to tradition. This dialogue requires us to consider not only the way

performers think of themselves, which I considered in the last chapter, but also the agency of the objects: whether the objects have histories, how they express those histories; whether the material objects themselves are, as Tilley puts it, ‘generative of thought and action’ (2001: 260).

It is necessary first of all to make distinctions between those material aspects of Punch and Judy which appear to be fixed, and those areas through which performers express their individual voices. The ‘fixed’ are what Glassie might call the ‘*invariant*’ features of the tradition (my italics) (2001: 44), or the ‘repeated features’, as Tillis would have it (1995: 227). We can then go on to ask how the variant features have changed since Leach was researching.

### **Physical and iconographic determinants and invariants**

Much of the physical character of the show has come about through economic necessity. According to Speaight, by the late eighteenth century, ‘[...] the fashionable craze for marionettes had burnt itself out’ (1970: 70). At the same time, McCormick and Pratasik argue (1998: 114), ‘Poverty, portability and presentation by a solo performer are all reasons why Pulcinella appeared more frequently as a glove puppet than a marionette’. The show could be moved quickly from place to place; unlike the marionettes it needed to support only one or two people; and the puppets were far easier to maintain and carry about than the delicate and complex string puppets. It need not be any higher than the raised arms of the puppeteer, or any broader than his bent elbows. The puppets need to be big enough to be visible from a distance, but light enough to be moved around vigorously. Because of this the show became proportionate to the human operator.

This is not the whole story, though, and it does not account for the significant physical differences between different national and regional glove puppet types. In contrast with Punch, the Neapolitan (*guarattella*) Pulcinella form is a much lighter figure and so can be moved about very swiftly (Fig. 27); some versions of the Portuguese Dom Roberto are even smaller and lighter and move with considerable speed (Fig. 28). There is probably a mixture of cultural and pragmatic reasons to account for these differences. The black mask and white costume of Pulcinella clearly

derive from his antecedent in the *commedia dell'arte* (Rudlin 1994: 138-146) (and it retained those characteristics in its home territory); Dom Roberto is thought to have been made from the stoppers of wine barrels easily available to early performers. The Dom Roberto booth is open to the sky, possibly because it was only ever played in fine weather.<sup>3</sup> Where these characteristics become determining is when they harden into emblematic, conventional forms, into iconographies, things that without which the show would hardly be recognised as such. In Dom Roberto, the flowery cloth which covers the booth has come to signify the show (Fig. 28); for Pulcinella, it is traditional to have a scene of the Bay of Naples as a backdrop.<sup>4</sup> In Punch and Judy these iconographic forms may be reduced to the booth, the physiognomy of Punch and the swazzle (though the latter may be contested by some non-swazzling performers).



Fig. 27 Irene Vecchia with her Pulcinella puppet. Note the small head of the puppet.

Distinctions may be made between the Punch and the other European glove puppet traditions in terms of how these iconographies are carried forward and developed. The other traditions all but died out and have undergone processes of revival; Punch has been a continuous and often thriving tradition. Compared with the hundreds of Punch performers, there are perhaps only five or six Dom Roberto performers, a dozen Pulcinella performers, three or four Petrushka shows and one or two Jan Klaassen performers (the Dutch form).<sup>5</sup> These performers have relied to a greater degree on secondary sources for their knowledge of their traditions. One Petrushka performer, Anatoly Arkhipov of the Moscow-based *Tut I Tam* puppet company, told

me he learnt the show almost entirely from books.<sup>6</sup> It is important to remember, also, that there is an increasing degree of cross-fertilization amongst popular puppet traditions. To take one example of this, Glyn Edwards taught swazzling and directed student performances at two of the three summer schools which constituted the *Scuola di Guarratelle*. The smaller size of the non-Punch communities means performers do not have the assurance that what they are doing has been tested over time amongst a large group of people. Unlike the dynastic performer who might use a puppet or booth that is already in the family, or the beach uncle who might buy his puppets and booths ready made, the revivalist must learn the practicalities from scratch.



Fig. 28 Portuguese puppeteer Jose Gil with his Dom Roberto puppet. Note the shape of the puppet head, made from a wine-barrel stopper, and the traditional pattern on the booth behind.

The normative material boundaries in Punch have remained more or less intact since Leach: the show is still performed in a booth using glove puppets, Punch retains his distinctive features, the swazzle remains central, the booth is still usually highly portable and there is still only one puppeteer.<sup>7</sup>

### **The puppets**

I will discuss the make-up of the cast in Chapter Five; here I would like to consider their material aspect.

The weight of the puppets is an important consideration, both because of carrying them around as a set and because of having to hold the individual puppets aloft for 20 or 30 minutes several times a day. Performers use as few as five and as many as 14 puppets, typically about 10. The weight can vary from puppet to puppet, depending on the character, the method of construction and the type of wood used. Pine is light but damages easily; oak is durable but heavy. Lime (also known as linden), is often used because, as it is close-grained, it carves easily and is strong. Often these woods are combined, oak, because it is strong, is often used for the nose and chin. Puppets with hollowed out heads - the usual method of construction - are lighter than solid ones. Usually Punch is the biggest, and so, heaviest, puppet. He generally weighs between half a kilo and a kilo, including costume. Judy often weighs about the same and the other puppets are a little smaller and weigh less, typically half a kilo. However, unlike, for example in the Tchanchès tradition, no particular point about status is being made in this difference in size and the effect is not obvious. Punch's head is approximately 20 to 25 centimetres from the neck to the top of the hat, around 10 or so centimetres wide and perhaps 12 or 13 centimetres from the back of the head to the tip of the nose, depending on its length. Punch and the hangman are traditionally the only characters with legs; Punch measures around 50 centimetres from hat to toe. These measurements usually only vary by a few centimetres from performer to performer.

### **Punch**

None of the other puppets in the show has quite such a fixed iconography as Punch. We cannot trace the exact history of this puppet, but commentators generally suggest that since a number of folk puppets exist which share significant characteristics with him there was probably a common ancestor. Over time, exaggerations to the form occurred and became fixed: the nose got bigger and the hump grew. How this figure came to be translated into the English form is disputed by commentators (Byrom 1972: Speaight 1995: 197), but it remains that the figure came to be dressed in the traditional motley, usually red and yellow, of the English jester (Speaight 1955: 170). Punch's distinct form may also hark back to the hunchback figure of the English Vice character of the medieval Morality Plays which finds its most developed form in Shakespeare's *Richard III* (Ackroyd 2005: 184).<sup>8</sup>

Leach's concern with what he calls the 'subliminal' meaning of the show (1985: 166-177) suggests that the iconography of Punch may have achieved its persistence not just through historical association, but as an extension of the carnival potency of the character itself. Professor Dan Bishop suggests there are phallic allusions in the nose, the chin and the hump (Grimas 1989), and the penetrative extensions of the puppet echo the 'grotesque body' which is central to Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of the carnivalesque as [...] 'the unmasking and disclosing of the unvarnished truth under the veil of false claims and arbitrary ranks' (1984: x). In other words, Punch derives his power through his ability to break the boundaries and to disrupt the conventional order; this propensity is manifest both in his shape and in the [...] disparity between [his] grotesque masculine sexuality [...] and his treble voiced eunuch tone' (Shershow 1995: 139).

### **The swazzle**

Any consideration of the materiality of Punch and Judy must acknowledge the role of the voice modifier, the swazzle, in the tradition. As noted above, discussions about the swazzle were pivotal in pinning down definitions of the tradition around which the organizations could form. It has probably always played a central part in the tradition, even to the extent that the term *swatchel omi* translates as *swazzle man*. For Mayhew's Punchman, the swazzle is the lexical root from which all the other objects take their meaning; he calls it the 'slum', and the puppets, booth and props he calls 'slummareys' (Mayhew 1949[1851]: 433).

The swazzle is a material object which has considerable dramaturgical and iconographic resonances. It consists of two slightly bent pieces of metal, traditionally silver, but more often these days aluminium, about a centimetre by a centimetre and a half with their curved sides facing each other. A piece of flat cotton tape is held between them, and then wound around them. It is tied together with a piece of strong thread. The swazzle is placed in the roof of the mouth just in front of the soft palate and as the breath is forced through it, the tape vibrates and it produces a sound. To articulate, it is necessary to move the lips and the mouth more deliberately than when speaking normally. The tongue is restricted in its movement by having to keep the swazzle in place. As a result, the consonantal range is reduced, but the vowel sounds

are lengthened. Performers have to build Punch's vocabulary around these constraints. Because of its material nature, it is highly inflexible and therefore highly determining. The sound transcends the individual performer, and performers cannot help but sound like Punch and therefore like each other. Chandler believes performing the show without the swazzle would be like 'performing the Aranjuez guitar concerto on a mouth organ'; it would lack its defining characteristic.<sup>9</sup>

Glyn Edwards taught me to use the swazzle and the effect of having a different voice emerging from my mouth was at first unsettling and then liberating. Because of the musical quality of the instrument, the voice tends to sing rather than speak. It gives a sense of power to the voice, partly because of the increased projection, but also because of its alien sound. For many performers this sound is the essence of the show. Its determining materiality makes of it a kind of puppet in its own right. As Leslie Katz and Kenneth Gross put it, it has a 'relentless energy for existing in the present moment' (1995: 3). The voice of Punch, produced as it is from material elements, yet lodged in the living tissue of the puppeteer, is an interloper mediating between these two worlds.

### **Puppet makers, inheritors and users**

Now that I have briefly considered the invariant material elements of the tradition, I would like to look at how these are handled by the different kinds of performers. Aesthetic variation tells us something about the relationship of the puppeteer to the tradition. One way of understanding these different approaches is to look at how the puppets are acquired and how they are produced. Broadly speaking, the groupings which Leach identified use different systems of acquisition: the swatchel omis *inherit*, the beach uncles *buy* and the counter-culturalists *make*.

Like the unwritten texts which were part of the capital of the swatchel omi shows, many of the puppets were handed on from generation to generation. They are well worn objects of some antiquity and quite distinct from the kinds of puppets that the beach uncles were and are using. They are not always pretty. Some had faces patched with leather to protect them from wear and tear, a technique which probably goes back several hundred years, if we can assume that Jonson's puppeteer Lantern Leatherhead in *Bartholomew Fair* (1966 [1614]) gets his name from the practice. The



use of leather often added to their rough but ‘rawly compelling’ quality (Leach 1985: 120). I have not come across puppets that use leather in this way, though Brian Davey tells me he used to patch his with leather, and the Codman and Maggs Puppets I saw were certainly rawly compelling.



Fig. 29 Ron Codman with his Punch and Judy puppets



Fig. 30 Ron Codman's Joey Puppet

Ron Codman's Punch and Judy (Fig. 29) have distinctive thick, black eyebrows and piercing blue eyes; his Joey (Fig. 30) is a beautifully costumed figure with a primitive energy. Professor Codman told me that they were made by his grandfather and have probably been in use for a hundred years.



Fig. 31 Pete Maggs' 'Black' puppet, with 'bone' through his nose



Fig. 32 Magg's Ghost puppet, left, and Paul Klee's ghost puppet, right

When Pete Maggs laid his puppets out on the carpet in front of me in his sitting room, I was astonished by how crudely painted and carved they were, yet they have a very powerful presence. There is a casualness about them, as if they have been hastily thrown together, and this supports Maggs' view of the show that its power derives from its 'random, absurd, accidental' quality.<sup>10</sup> The black character conjures up nightmare images (Fig. 31) and the ghost achieves the maximum effect with the minimum of brush strokes. It is an effect which seems to by-pass deliberation. In seeing them I was reminded of expressionist borrowings from 'primitive' forms (Gombrich 1972: 447) and the experiments those artists made to access the unconscious. I noticed this again when I came across a photograph of a ghost puppet made by Paul Klee at Geoff Felix's flat (Fig. 32). Not all family puppets are as raw as these, but what characterises all of them is a considerable individuality.

The puppets the beach uncles use tend to have greater homogeneity and to be less raw. This is probably because of their system of production and distribution. Where the swatchel omi puppets were made to be used by family members only, and handed down through the family along with methods of design and production, many of the puppets used by beach uncle performers were bought from professional makers. Inevitably this produced affective and geographical distance between the maker and the user.

There have always been makers who have sold their puppets, Mayhew's Punchman refers to, '[...] a real carver for the Punch business. He was dear, but werry good and hexcellent' (1949 [1851]: 431). By the late 1870s, Hamleys' toy store was selling sets of puppets (Speaight 1970:119). Thomas Rose Junior ('Roselia') (see Worbey 2008) was an important and influential maker working from the 1890s to the 1930s, as was Edwin Simms, or 'Quisto', working in the first half of the twentieth century. A system of distribution was evident after the Second World War when a number of outlets had been established. This both encouraged and met an increased demand for Punch figures. Among these outlets were dedicated toy stores. As well as Hamleys there was Pollocks in London, one or two large department stores, including Gamages, also in London, with toy and magic departments, and distributors of magic tricks and equipment including Oscar Oswald and Edwin Hooper with his Supreme Magic Company. All of these needed a supply of puppets for professional and

amateur performers as well as for sale to children and perhaps a few collectors. Sale was either direct or by mail order. As Punchman Richard Coombs pointed out to me, if you are buying by post, you want to know what to expect, so consistency would be important. The puppets needed to conform to a standard design. Standardisation would also make production easier. Shops and suppliers sought makers who could produce good quality puppets, to order and with predictability. In practice this did not always happen. Poulton tells me that when he was first performing he bought a Ghost puppet from a professional maker, but had to send it back as the quality was so poor. Felix tells me he ordered a Punch from a brochure, but was disappointed to be sent one clearly by another, inferior, maker. It may be that performers coming into the business in the last few decades are making demands on commercial puppet makers that earlier buyers were not.

Amongst the puppeteers who produced for these outlets were Fred Tickner and Wal Kent. Tickner showed Kent how to carve puppets and he made about 20 sets in all; Kent made considerably more, possibly hundreds. The demand for a relatively large supply of puppets had implications for methods of production. According to Tickner, Kent had 'a few sackfulls' of heads delivered which had already been turned on a lathe, and he 'built up from there' (Felix 1994: 6).

The Fred Tickner/ Wal Kent style of puppet with their characteristic very bright colouring and clean lines have come to typify the Punches which have been in use in the post-war period (Fig. 33). Many of these puppets are still in use, and they have influenced later makers, including, importantly, Bryan Clarke. Clarke also sold to Edwin Hooper and is still making puppets; he now sells to Pollocks and other toy shops as well as directly through his website. There are probably more Bryan Clarke Punch and Judy Puppets than any others in existence. Whilst these commercial makers produce puppets of quality of which they are proud and to which they feel some affective connection, this is balanced by a sense of themselves as professionals whose priority is to make a living. Bryan Clarke decides how much he thinks people will pay for a puppet, pays himself an amount for which he thinks his time is worth, and from that calculates how long to spend making the puppets. Nonetheless, the puppets can be made to order, and Clarke will change them to suit the needs of the buyer.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 33 Fred Tickner puppets in collection of Geoff Felix (back row, l to r: Punch, Beadle, Doctor, Joey; front row, l to r: Judy, Ghost, Hangman).

Standardisation of design has been encouraged amongst professional and non-professional makers by the availability of ‘how-to’ books, containing sometimes detailed instructions on carving, costuming and design; among them de Hempsey (1945), Fraser (1970) and Edwards (2000a).



Fig. 34 Typical Bryan Clarke Punch, owned and used by Gary Wilson

The beach uncle puppets have something of the look of children’s toys, and since the beach uncle shows were aimed principally at children, this is perhaps not surprising.



They usually have bright red cheeks, noses and chins (Fig. 34). They are simply carved and the detail tends to be painted on rather than carved as this saves time in making and is, according to, Professor Brian Davey - another commercial maker - 'just as effective over distance'.<sup>12</sup> The eyes are usually blue and there is often blue eye shadow around them. There are signature variations from maker to maker: Tickner's noses are quite rounded, for example, and Kent's are flatter. Bob Wade, another popular maker, gave his Punch and Judy long painted eyelashes. The hands vary from maker to maker, some are simple, flat, cut-out shapes, others are carefully detailed. Puppets by 'Quisto' (Fig. 35), an earlier maker, do not have nearly so much red and blue makeup and the nose is more delicate with a sharper hook, they have glass rather than painted eyes. Felix believes that the use of the colours may have been influenced by conventions of early twentieth century stage make-up, particularly the blue eye-shadow and the red dot in the corner of the eyes. Felix still sometimes uses this in his puppets. Performers from the music-hall may have brought these conventions with them. The Punches are almost exclusively dressed in red cloth of some sort, often corduroy or velvet, with yellow trim. This was the case for the swatchel omi puppets as much as it is for the beach uncle puppets.



Fig. 35 David Wilde with Punch by Quisto



Fig. 36 Bryan Clarke Judy puppet, owned and used by Gary Wilson

The Judy puppet is usually based on the Punch head, but painted and dressed differently (Fig. 36). The other puppets are much simpler; these are pieces of wood simply turned on a lathe with eyes quickly carved into them and noses attached by dowelling. Most of the supporting characters are made on the same basic template as can clearly be seen on the row of Bryan Clarke heads in his workshop (Fig. 37).



Fig.37 Bryan Clarke puppet heads in his workshop.

## Making commercial puppets

*'When it comes down to it, what were trying to do is a very stylised thing, so when you're pairing it down, you get to the core of it, the nub of the problem if you like [...] It's surprising how very similar all of our solutions are'.*

Brian Davey<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 38 Puppet heads in stages of carving.

Professor Brian Davey brings recent technological solutions to the commercial reproduction of the form, yet stays within the aesthetic boundaries of the beach uncle. I visited him at his home several times and he talked me through his process of making puppets. He lives near Lyme Regis on the border of Dorset and Devon with his wife, Alison, who acts as interlocutor and bottler in their show. They are in their late 50s now and grandparents, though they seem younger. They met when they were both 17 and doing a foundation course in fine art at college in London. Their house is set on a hillside overlooking a beautiful wooded valley; the conservatory-cum-dining room is very light and doubles as a sewing and painting room and a rehearsal space. Professor Davey also has a small workshop under the house where he does most of the carving and moulding. Like every maker I met, he apologised for the mess in his workshop. The Daveys have been making and performing with puppets for over 30 years and they tour a range of shows including rod and marionette; they also give demonstrations of puppetry to schools. The walls of their sitting room are hung with *wayang*, *bunraku*, and other puppets, many of which they have made. Professor Davey is a trained graphic designer and he was a puppet maker before he was a puppeteer. Later he was persuaded by Percy Press to do the show. His making is deeply informed by his practise.



In his study of *wayang kulit*, Jan Mrazek argues that the puppet is not only a pictorial representation, but also that it is '[...] made for performance in the way that an instrument is made to be used for a particular work or task.' (2005: 46). When I ask puppeteers about the design of their puppets and booths, meaning the aesthetic design, they usually reply as if I am asking about technical aspects, because for them these are foremost in their minds. Professor Davey tells me,

'When the puppet is completed, it's got to feel right on the hand, it's got to have good balance, it's got to 'work'; it's got to be able to pick things up, to do what you want it to do without thinking [...] it's got to do it naturally. I talk about the puppet taking over, if the puppet's been made properly [...] you can forget how to do this particular thing, that particular thing, 'cos the puppet does it for itself [...] You could have the most beautiful looking puppets in the world, but if they're made so it's difficult to operate them, then your show will show that, it will be slow and laboured, it won't have the life and vitality it should have'.<sup>14</sup>

The puppet's practical requirements have aesthetic consequences, the hands are small in proportion to the head, because small hands allow things to be picked up more easily, and big heads are visible. Davey believes disproportion adds to their puppetness. The details are painted rather than carved as this means they will not be chipped when the puppet is knocked about.

Davey's engagement in the making process and his intimate understanding of it is obvious in the pleasure with which he describes it to me. He works from full-size drawings which he keeps in a transparent plastic envelop to keep it clean in the workshop. He copies the outline of the head onto a block of wood, leaving off the nose and chin which he will carve separately and attach later by mortice and tenon joint or with strong dowelling. He then cuts away the bulk of the wood using a bandsaw, and as he gets to the finer details he uses a handsaw and then small electric sanders. Eventually he sands down and smoothes the wood by hand. This is the part of the process he enjoys most as it allows him to feel the shape and texture of the wood. He drills into the head at the top to hollow it out and remove any excess wood. This makes the puppet as light as possible and easier to handle. When he first made his puppets he gave them a beautifully rounded top, he would cut the top off like a boiled egg, hollow it out and stick the top back on; he then saw a Punch with a flat head and realised he had been wasting his time as the puppet's head would be

covered with a hat. This is the kind of thing, he tells me, which can only be learned by experience. He paints the head using white primer and then several coats of white emulsion, sanding down in between each coat. Using an airbrush, he applies the general flesh colour and the red highlights on the nose and chin; the details, the lips, the eyes and so on, he paints on with a paintbrush. He uses acrylic paints because they dry quickly; he speeds the process up using a hairdryer between coats of paint. Like most Punch puppets, his are operated with one finger in the neck, a thumb in the left arm for Punch, the right for the other characters, and three fingers in the other arm. For comfort, he pads the neck with fabric to stop it rubbing. He makes the hands using a fret-saw, following a pattern he has traced out on the wood. This gives him greater control than with a hand tool which he says could easily slip, making the fingers irregular. He makes the legs and feet in two pieces; he is careful that the grain of the wood in the leg goes in a different direction to the grain in the foot. This adds strength.



Fig. 39 Finished Davey Punch head, note the bright colours.

The same is the case for the nose and chin; the grain for these features is horizontal to the head so that when they are hit, they do not split. Using electric tools means that, except for the nose and chin, for which he uses oak, he can use pine rather than the traditional, harder woods like peach or lime. The grain of pine is very open which is difficult to carve with conventional gouges and chisels; it would split if you carved against the grain. Bryan Clarke also uses pine for the same reason.<sup>15</sup> The whole process takes one and a half to two days.

He has two other methods for making heads, using fibre glass and latex. Both involve making moulds from an original plasticene or clay model; the moulds are reusable and guarantee more or less identical reproduction (Fig. 40). These methods are considerably quicker than carving, though the figures still have to be trimmed and painted. As a result they are cheaper. The wooden Punch figures, dressed, sell for £200, the fibre glass for £120 and the latex for £65.



Fig. 40 Davey's mould for resin Punch

The costumes are made by Alison. She has large plastic tubs full of materials which she has collected over the years; she buys much more than she needs in case she has to replace or patch up existing costumes. There is nothing more frustrating, she tell me, than having to replace a whole costume for want of a little patch.

I visited several makers who say they produce commercially, but only two of them, Clarke and Davey, produce puppets in a cost-effective way; the others admit that they could not charge what it actually costs to make the puppets in the way that they prefer to. These puppeteers find that they have an emotional attachment to the objects and their making which outweighs commercial hard-headedness. The distinction between affective and commercial motivations problematises the idea of tradition in Punch and Judy. This became evident to me when Professor Davey suggested that 'purists' would object to his use of electric tools, and certainly to his use of latex and glass-fibre. Historically it is probably the case that puppeteers working for a living in an economically marginal form have always put pragmatism above sentiment. It could be argued that makers like Davey and Clarke are closer to 'traditional' motivations than those who seek reflexively to invest in these objects the kinds of attention which

spring from a desire to produce individuated forms which deliberately evoke a sense of tradition. However, the picture is complicated and shifting. New performers and makers, working from new motives, are themselves becoming the tradition.

### **Non-making beach uncles**

The word ‘purist’ was mentioned again one day when I went to see a performance by John Styles. Styles collects puppets, but he does not make them, all the puppets he uses he has bought or been given. As he packed away his figures after the show, he remarked that a ‘purist’ would be, ‘[...] horrified by my show as it contains puppets by so many different makers.’<sup>16</sup> He has no other explanation for the variety he uses other than that they ‘work best’. He uses puppets by Tickner, Kent and Clarke among others. I was struck forcibly by the idea that performers seem to acknowledge a Platonic ideal of the Punch and Judy show which most never in fact practise; this ideal surfaces when the puppeteer is encouraged to reflect on his practice by outsiders such as me.

The assumed valorising of aesthetic consistency implicit in Styles’ remark is one which raises questions which some younger performers are asking, but which the beach uncle and swatchel omi performers on the whole did not. The distinction can be seen most clearly between those performers who make and those who do not. Currently about half of College performers are makers; amongst Full members of the PJF it is a smaller proportion and amongst Punch performers working in the post-war period it was probably smaller still. Some, like Clarke and Davey, make because they can, and because it provides extra income. Others, like Bishop and Burnett, want to exercise greater aesthetic control over the objects.

Those who do not make are still interested in what the puppets look like but do not see it as a part of the definition of a Punch performer also to be a maker. Professor Edwards is absolutely clear that making and performing are different. He likens being a Punch performer to being a violinist; the violinist, he says, does not make his own instrument, ‘[...] why should the puppeteer?’ Nonetheless, he insists, he has a great deal of say in what the puppets look like. He is in fact deeply attached to the puppets and has used the same Punch and Judy for four decades, though they have been repainted and re-dressed many times since. Using new ones would require ‘breaking

in'. Mary Edwards makes many of his puppets, and those he buys she often adapts. Most performers will re-dress or re-paint bought puppets. Some, like John Styles' son Robert, are content to use ready-made puppets without much adaptation, though they will pick amongst a range of available puppets. The counter-culturalists tend to make their own, partly because some are art-school trained, and partly because they see the puppets as a means to express an individual voice. Clive Chandler says it never occurred to him to use puppets made by other people.

### **Aesthetic variety in post-Leach puppets**

Whilst nearly all the puppets are based on the same iconographic template, the range of variations on the theme amongst recent makers is as great as the number of makers. The motives for these variations are as various as well. As with Professor Davey, all the makers I spoke to placed practical concerns above aesthetic ones. Within these constraints puppeteers develop their own style.

For Professor Felix, this means always referring to existing puppets. He bases many of his puppets on Tickner's. Sitting behind his bench in his workshop in a cabinet is a set of Tickner puppets looking over his shoulder. He meticulously measures other puppets and plans his own from them, sometimes making precise copies. He models first in plasticene, then, using only a few hand tools, he carves the heads in lime, and uses harder woods, oak or beech for the noses and chins. He has no objection to power tools, but living in a flat with his neighbours very nearby, he thinks it best not to. At night, or in the early hours of the morning, when he has finished, he puts the head on a shelf so that when he gets up he sees it at a distance with fresh eyes. He costumes the puppets himself, contrasting Judy in blue with Punch's traditional red costume. Punch's colour is the 'fixed point' against which the other colours should 'sing', he tells me. He characterises the puppets according to whether they are good or bad: good ones smile, bad ones frown. Judy, an 'ambivalent character', has an 'insincere smile, like Cherie Blair' (the ex-Prime minister's wife). He uses a variety of puppets in different makers' styles to maintain visual interest.

Many performers who make their own puppets have only one set; because of his interest in historical forms, Felix has made several. He showed me three sets of puppets he was working on, each based on a different historical style. He occasionally

sells his puppets, but his painstaking approach means that this can be a slow process. Professor Durbin had to wait 10 years for a full set of Felix puppets. Durbin believed it was worth it because the quality was very good. These are important objects to Professor Felix; he usually only makes for people he likes and who will appreciate them. Felix's interest in making is clearly not only commercial.

In contrast to Felix is Dan Bishop. He made his own puppets, but does not consider himself a maker; he has only one set. Like Felix, he began by looking at existing forms, but then he adapted them. He used the same process of looking for common elements as he did when devising his script. He tells me he '[...] assembled all kinds of pictures of Punch', and then, 'whittled it down to what I thought it should be'.<sup>17</sup> Finding himself incapable of carving, he made his puppets from resin after moulding them in plasticene, a solution he came across in a children's book. Resin gives the puppets a softer, less defined edge than wood (Figs. 41 and 42). Unlike Felix, the design of his puppets carries biographical undertones, and although he believes he has a responsibility to sustain the tradition, he feels the most vitalising way for him to do so is through his personal response to the form. His Ghost is based on Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (Fig. 43), his Judy is based on an 'interesting looking woman' he once saw in a shop, and his Hangman is based, not, as traditionally, on Jack Ketch, but on the last English executioner, Pierrepoint.



Fig. 41 Dan Bishop's Punch



Fig.42 Dan Bishop's Joey



Fig. 43 Dan Bishop's Ghost puppet, after Munch

Like Bishop, another Cornish based performer, Reg Payne (Professor Goodvibes), uses the tradition as a starting point, but for him the show reflects more its locality. This has come about because of Payne's deep attachment to his adopted county. He has incorporated two Cornish Morris Dancers (Fig. 44) and a puppet of Prince Charles, Duke of Cornwall.<sup>18</sup> Payne is in his late 50s and has been performing Punch for about 20 years. He is a slim, Puck-like character of enormous energy, inventiveness and humour. When he picks up his puppets they take on a life of their own. When I photograph Judy, for instance, she jumps and remarks 'I didn't know

the paparazzi were here'. Payne had worked in middle-management in his twenties, but having always been, as he describes himself, 'an anarchist, a trickster, always playing practical jokes, a bit theatrical' <sup>19</sup>, he decided to give up his desk job and to travel; later it 'occurred' to him to do Punch and Judy. He contacted Percy Press II who wrote back a very encouraging letter, recommending various books. He made his booth from sketches in de Hempsey's, *How to do Punch and Judy* (1976), and signed up to a wood carving evening class. He had worked for a while as a boat builder so was confident with wood. He bought a few Bryan Clarke puppets from The Supreme Magic Company in Barnstaple, Devon, and made some of his own. Gradually he made more and more and adapted the Clarke figures.



Fig. 44 Reg Payne with his Cornish Morris Dancer rod puppets



Fig.45 Reg Payne's Ghost puppet



He started to incorporate sophisticated sight-gags, such as a flushing lavatory and a Ghost who lifts his shirt to reveal ribs underneath (Fig. 45). His puppets are infused with a sense of irreverence: has taken the form as it was realised by puppeteers such as Tickner and Kent and Clarke, the puppets of the beach uncles, and moulded it to his own personality.

A number of other performers who have moulded the show in their own way have had art-school training and this has impacted on the aesthetics of the objects. This is because they have the skill to translate an imagined form into a tangible one, and also often because they have an interest in the process of remembering. Burnett and Bridle created an aesthetic based on Vernon Rose's show in which he had 'recreated what you would like a Punch and Judy show to be like [...]'.<sup>20</sup> The puppets are a highly considered response to the traditional form. They explore the idea of the show being a reservoir of collective memory, reconstituted and given ideality in material form. (Bridle has extended this idea into his other work, especially his show *Piggery Jokery* which he advertises as a 'medieval perambulating theatre' a 'perverse pageant of archetypal imagery'.)<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 46 Rod Burnett's Punch; note the green and yellow coat

The decision to recreate a memory of a show was not entirely deliberate, the only show they knew was Rose's, and they had to rely on their own faint memories of shows they had seen as children. As a result, they '[...] basically invented stuff that was in the spirit of Punch', to the degree that Bridle says they got Punch's costume 'wrong': '[Rod's] Punch was yellow and green to start with 'cos we vaguely knew he was stripy, but they're always red, you know.' (Fig. 46).<sup>22</sup>

These performers are engaging in restorations of behaviour which place them outside the direct line of reproduction that characterises the beach uncles. Yet Bridle and Burnett's shows have been highly influential in their own right and feed back into the tradition by being copied by other puppeteers. As already noted, Mark Poulton saw their shows as a child and uses many of their jokes, though the material aspects of his show harks back to puppets by Tickner and others.

Memory plays an important part in the material decisions of a younger Punch performer, Richard Coombs. In his case he is not interested in exploring the process of memory in general, but of responding to his own memories. As a result, it is his own memory rather than the collective/ folk memory which is re-constituted. As a child he was strongly drawn to two shows he had seen on holiday at the seaside. He remembers the procession of different objects on the playboard; he liked the changes of texture and colour as these things came and went. He enjoyed the sensation of the puppets being taken away and knowing that they were not coming back, and he relished going to see the whole ritual again. His Punch costume is based on the Punch he saw at Broadstairs; not a Victorian figure, but like a dragoon guard in maroon. The head is based on the pictures in Peter Fraser's *Punch and Judy* (2001 [1970]). Coombs' fascination with texture and colour is evident in his puppets which are very carefully made, with enormous attention to detail (Fig.47). He takes a long time to make his puppets, partly because he wants them to last, but also because he wants to ensure that they recapture the pleasure he had as a child when watching them come and go.<sup>23</sup>

After training as an actor in the early 1980s, Coombs worked at Polka Children's Theatre in London and later as a puppeteer on a number of television shows. In all

these places he liked to spend time in the props and wardrobe departments where he learnt to make, ‘from seeing well-skilled craftspeople working’.

To make the costumes, he takes two pieces of cloth of the main colour of the puppet, boil-washes them to prevent shrinkage, cuts them to shape and, sandwiching a piece of non-absorbent fabric between them, quilts them together. He can tell at a glance from the colour on the inside of the puppet which figure it is. He sews a brass ‘D’ ring on the hem with which he will hang them in the booth; this he considers his ‘signature’. He attaches the costume to the head using strong PVA glue; unlike most other Punch and Judy puppets, the costume will never be taken off. It might be given bath in soapy water and then ‘retired’ when it gets too smelly.



Fig. 47 Richard Coomb's Punch and Judy

His puppet construction is unique; carving is ‘anathema’ to him. Instead, he builds up the heads using hundreds of profiles which he traces on plywood from card templates; he cuts these out with a bandsaw. He then cuts out the middle of these, leaving something like the crust of a loaf of bread with the insides scooped out. Although his puppets are large, they are light. He glues the profiles together working from the centre outwards. When he has made the whole head, he sands it down using an electric profile sander. He paints them using a small range of acrylics, mixing some, but as few as possible so that he can repeat the mixture when repainting or touching-

up. He judges the colour according to what looks 'right' with the fabrics. All of the puppets, along with the booth, are designed to create an aesthetic consistency.

The makers I have spoken about here are bringing the kinds of individuated response to the puppets which were largely unheard of 30 or 40 years ago. There is a discernable move away from the homogeneity of Punch puppets which characterised the middle part of the last century. Individuation marks a big distinction from performers, either swatchel omi or beach uncle, who might be thought of as working non-reflexively, that is to say, inheriting ways of doing things from a community of practitioners and not especially inflecting them with their own, often biographical, needs. What many of the post-Leach makers have in common is an interest in how the objects retain and reconstitute memory. Memory has always been part of the capital of the show, but for the swatchel omis it was embedded in a sense of family identity, for the beach uncles it was part of its commercial capital. For Felix, Burnett, Coombs, and Bishop, in different ways, this reconstitution of memory allows them to process a sense of their own place in the world.

### **Booths, prosceniums, backcloths and props**

The broadening of aesthetics evident in the puppets is evident in the booths as well, but again within physical and iconographic limits. The iconic status of the booth, like Punch himself, may have historical foundations. Glove puppet booths had probably been in existence in Europe long before Pulcinella developed; an illustration from a fourteenth century manuscript, *The Romance of Alexander*, clearly depicts one (see Leach 1985: 20). Later, the adoption of the sometimes quite elaborate proscenium arch from the early years of the Victorian period may reflect a satirical aping of the legitimate theatre. Crone (2006: 1058-9) suggests that Punch and Judy, in its early days, graphically exposed the absurdity of the idea of 'companionate marriage' for a large proportion of the population. At the same time it mocked the equally unrealistic notion of an ultimately benevolent universe which was being played out in the popular melodramas of the time. Framing Mr and Mrs Punch's domestic situation in the draperies of the conventional theatre would add considerable potency to this satire.

Almost all Punch and Judy shows take place in a covered booth or ‘fit up’ with a proscenium arch.<sup>24</sup> The early fit up was carried from place to place, sometimes with wheels built into the frame. Even now most fit ups are portable and so need to combine strength with lightness. The frames used always to be made of wood, now many are made of aluminium which is strong and light. Even though most puppeteers can now travel by car, weight is a consideration as the booth may have to be carried some distance to the performance area. Performers may have two or three booths to suit different circumstances. Some are lightweight for indoor use, others are more sturdy to withstand the British weather. Since many shows take place indoors, often in modern houses for private parties, the booth for these performances must not be too high. In Victorian times when ceilings were generally higher than in modern houses, the booths could be taller and the puppeteer could nearly always work ‘hands above head’.

Many performers are keen to erect and dismantle their fit ups as swiftly as possible; this means the ‘get-ins’ and ‘get-outs’ are quick and they can perform at several locations on the same day. Some performers see speed of erection and dismantling as a matter of pride; John Styles and Bryan Clarke both made a special point of showing me how their booths could be erected in less than a minute. A great deal of ingenuity has gone into designing booths which can be put up with the minimum of effort and time. However, a distinction might be made between those for whom commercially driven speed of erection is important and those, like Richard Coombs, for whom the time it takes to put up is secondary to what they see as the needs of the show. Coombs uses a lot of tricks and an elaborate booth, and this takes a long time to set up. Whilst few would disagree with Edwards (2000: 68) that speed of erection should never compromise the quality of the booth, we might conclude that for some post-Leach performers a different kind of economy is at work than for the beach uncles. This might reflect a distinction between the artisanal and, for want of a better word, the ‘artistic’ approach, and is a very telling marker of what motivates performers. Some performers design their own booths, others buy from professional makers, Clarke and Davey among them.<sup>25</sup>

The design of the covering of the booth has become standardised: nearly all of them are striped and most are red and white.<sup>26</sup> We know from contemporary paintings and

watercolours that early booths were more likely to have been chequered; the move to the seaside probably led them to adopt a more garish appearance. These objects had to be noticed from a distance and competed for the holidaymakers' attention with a number of other attractions, donkey rides, the pier, and so on. Framing the opening to the booth is the proscenium arch. The proscenium might once have been designed to amplify the sound, though I have come across only one instance of this - Dan Bishop has a picture of a booth with a very shallow funnel-like entrance (Fig. 48). With the advent of electronic amplification this function became redundant. The primary job of the proscenium is to separate the performing space from the rest of the world. Their secondary function is to provide an opportunity for the performers to put their individual stamp on the show, and it is here that the greatest variety can be seen.



Fig. 48 Detail of painting of booth showing proscenium arch shaped to amplify the sound (artist unknown)

There are elements of the proscenium which have come to be regarded as, if not typical, at least common. Mayhew's Punchman indicates the association with royalty '[...] I've played before rile [sic] princes.' (Mayhew 1949: 436) and this 'sanctions' him to have 'George and the Dragging and the rile Queen's Arms' (ibid) painted on the proscenium. Thomas Rose, 'Roselia', in the late nineteenth century, designed an elaborate proscenium arch with a royal coat of arms which some performers still copy (Fig. 49).<sup>27</sup> Bryan Clarke sells one and several performers use a version.

The iconography of the Roselia proscenium firmly locates the form within a specifically British cultural setting. Some performers embrace this association; others are keen to distance themselves from it. James Arnott's proscenium consists of a British Union flag fanning out from the playing area; this is a particular interpretation of the patriotic expression, it was painted when retro notions of 'cool Britannia' were in vogue, especially as referenced in popular culture by artists such as the Spice Girls (Fig. 50).



Fig. 49 Tony Clarke's Roselia proscenium arch



Fig. 50 James Arnott's retro booth and clock



Seeing it as a part of his childhood memory, Coombs integrates the flag into his design (Fig.51); anti-monarchist, Professor Goodvibes does not use it at all. Burnett underplays the nationalist rhetoric and incorporates it in more elemental iconography, dominated by the moon, the sun and stars (Fig. 52). Bridle abandoned the traditional shape altogether in an attempt to individuate the form still further (Fig.53).



Fig. 51 Richard Coombs' proscenium arch with integrated Union flag and flag of St George



Fig. 52 Rod Burnett's proscenium arch with Union flag supported by Devil and Crocodile .The wording on the sides reads, 'A cure for all ills. 3 doses daily'





Fig. 53 Martin Bridle with Punch and proscenium. It has moved far away from the conventional shape and iconography (publicity shot by permission of Martin Bridle)

Michael Byrom's proscenium arch reflected his view that the form derives more from Italian than English traditions and eschewed all references to the flag and to royalty, depicting clowns instead of lions and unicorns and declaring it a 'Punchinello' show (Fig. 54).



Fig. 54 Michael Byrom's 'Punchinello' booth, now owned and used by Paul Wheeler



Fig. 55 Brian Davey's booth and detail; it has no nationalist references at all. The covering is removed showing the 'hammock' into which the puppets are dropped. The forest scene on the backcloth is used for Davey's *Pooka* show.

Some performers reject nationalist associations in favour of pre-nationalist ones, and their prosceniums reflect this. Brian Davey has a proscenium which features elemental symbols and the Green Man of Celtic mythology (Fig. 55).<sup>28</sup> This was inspired by seeing Bridle's booth show, *Piggery Jokery* which evokes a medieval-bucolic way of life and was itself a development of his work as a Punchman (Bridle, 1997/8).

Some performers like to give themselves individual billing on the proscenium arch. Others feel that the tradition should take precedence over the performer. John Alexander (undated: 36) states categorically, 'I am not very happy to see the name of the performer dominating the head board. It is Punch who is the star of the show and the public have no idea who Bert Bloggs might be.' Some, such as the Codmans in Liverpool, have always advertised the family name on the proscenium as they are well known within their community; for some newer performers, such as Professor Chandler, distinctiveness underpins his reasons for performing. The show is a means to express the individual whose interpretation adds value to it.



Since the backcloth is less iconically infused, it does not exhibit the performer's reflexive relationship to the tradition in the way that the proscenium arch does. Decisions about what it looks like tend to be purely aesthetic or dramaturgical. A distinction can be made between those performers who use a plain black backcloth and those who use a pictorial one. Clive Chandler has a plain black backcloth because he believes the puppets stand out more clearly; Mark Poulton does not use one because then his puppets can seem to 'fly', as he puts it, literally and metaphorically. He uses long black socks to cover his forearms and help him to achieve this effect. John Styles, by contrast, believes a backcloth has an important dramaturgical function in creating, as he puts it, 'a sense of expectation' in the audience which is part of the excitement and pleasure of the show.



Fig. 56 Geoff Felix' street-scene backcloth with Joey and Punch



Fig. 57 Robert Styles' proscenium with St Pauls on backcloth

The locations pictured tend to be generic, though some may be specific domestic interiors, sitting rooms or kitchens, sometimes with a blazing fire. Usually, however, they are exterior, quite often a street of half-timbered houses (Fig. 56), or sometimes a beach or forest scene.<sup>29</sup> The location is almost never referred to in the show and the puppeteer is free to decorate the backcloth as they wish. Robert Styles is unusual in having a recognisable location in his backcloth, he wants his show associated with London and so has an interior with a picture of St Pauls through the window (Fig. 57).

One or two objects have become essential elements in the show to the degree almost of connoting it, particularly the sausages and the slapstick. The sausages appear in almost every performance. They are usually made of pink cloth, stuffed with cotton and tied with thread every few centimetres to form a chain or string. They are a key plot device in getting the Crocodile to appear. He is attracted by the chance of easy food and tussles with Punch for them, usually winning. A myth has grown up that there should be seven sausages representing the 'seven ages of man', but this is rejected by most of the performers I have spoken to. A slapstick rather than a solid piece of dowelling is now almost universally used as Punch's weapon. It is made of two pieces of wood two or three centimetres wide and joined together at one end so that when it strikes a solid object it makes a slapping sound much greater than the force exerted would otherwise produce. It has become almost a metaphor for the puppet-like quality of the violence and performers often use it to demonstrate to the audience that the violence is mock.



Fig. 58 Gary Wilson's trick coffin showing lifted lid and gap in base

Other objects which might once have been universally associated with the show have now all but disappeared. The gallows and the trick coffin (Fig. 58) are now rarely seen because the hanging has gone out of fashion. The gallows was used for Punch to trick the Hangman into hanging himself, and the coffin for disposing of his or other characters' bodies.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, new objects are being produced as performers seek to reinvigorate their shows with new tricks and routines. There are several books which performers can refer to when wanting to reproduce popular tricks (for example de Hempsey c.1945 and Green 1976, 1980). For some, the pleasure of invention and the solving of material problems is a principal motive for doing the show; for others it is a necessity required by playing to the same audiences on a week's holiday at the beach; for others who rely on the same routines and the same objects, the strength of the show is in its invariance. The Punch and Judy tradition consists both in fixing and in developing forms; the show is in continual tension between novelty and familiarity.

### **Extension and spillage**



Fig. 59 Mark Poulton's semi-permanent booth on Weymouth beach; the pitch extends considerably into the surrounding area

Most booths have attached or adjacent to them a number of objects which are functionally or aesthetically connected to them and which accidentally or deliberately contribute to the appearance of the performing area and often extend it (Fig. 59). Extension can be physical, as in the case of the mats which performers often lay out in front of the booth for audiences to sit on; aural, as in the case of the loudspeaker

which often sits next to the booth and carries the sound of the show; or temporal and geographic, as in the case of the signs which advertise the telephone number of the performer. Extension also consists in the selling of Punch related objects: badges, finger-puppets, colouring sheets and so on which audiences can take away with them. These often provide a significant extra income for the puppeteer.

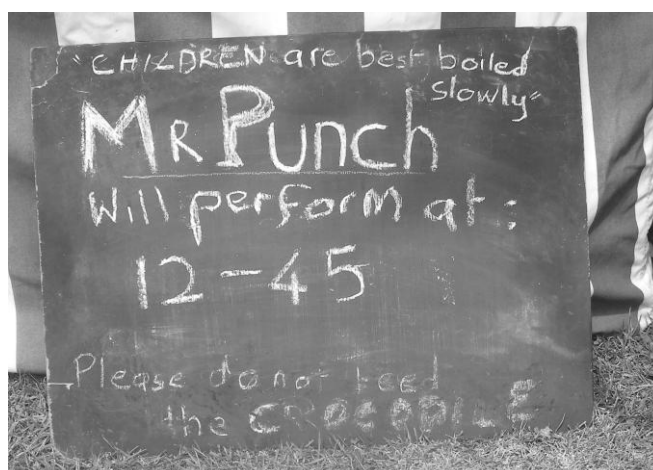


Fig. 60 Pete Maggs' *ad hoc* announcement board

Performers will almost always place a wooden clock-face on the playboard or next to the booth announcing the time of the next performance (Figs. 49, 50). This is often accompanied by a blackboard on which are chalked the times of the other performances as well (Fig. 60). These signs are an opportunity for the performer to contextualise the show. They tell an audience how to read a performance, sometimes giving short descriptions of the history of the tradition (Fig. 61). They are also a means to encourage an audience to put money in the bottle, informing them, for instance, that the performer relies on their generosity, and advertising a recommended donation (Fig. 62).

The objects are sometimes professionally made, but are more often home-made and since they carry few iconographic obligations, they reflect, even more than the proscenium arch, the individual character of the performer. They represent a kind of spillage or seepage where the performer discloses, consciously or otherwise, her aesthetic control. Some performers take great pains to see that these objects fit into an overall design, others regard them as having a purely pragmatic function. It is hard to know what levels of aesthetic integrity were sought or achieved in the past. Punch

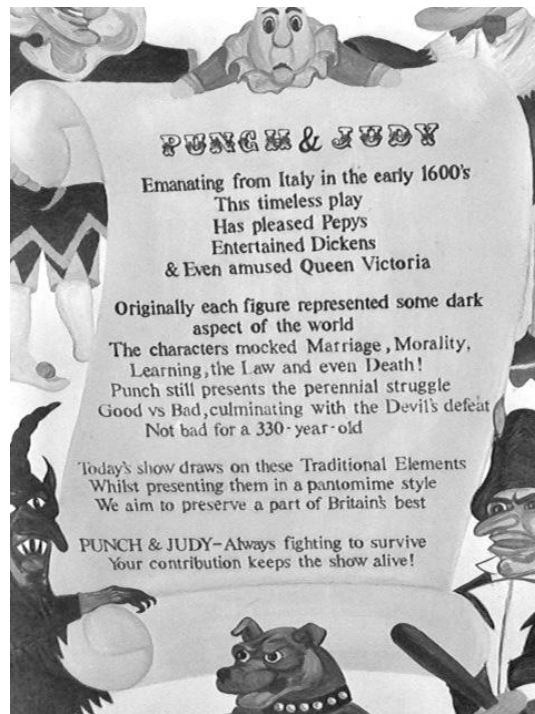


Fig. 61 Paul Jackson's 'letterboard' <sup>31</sup>

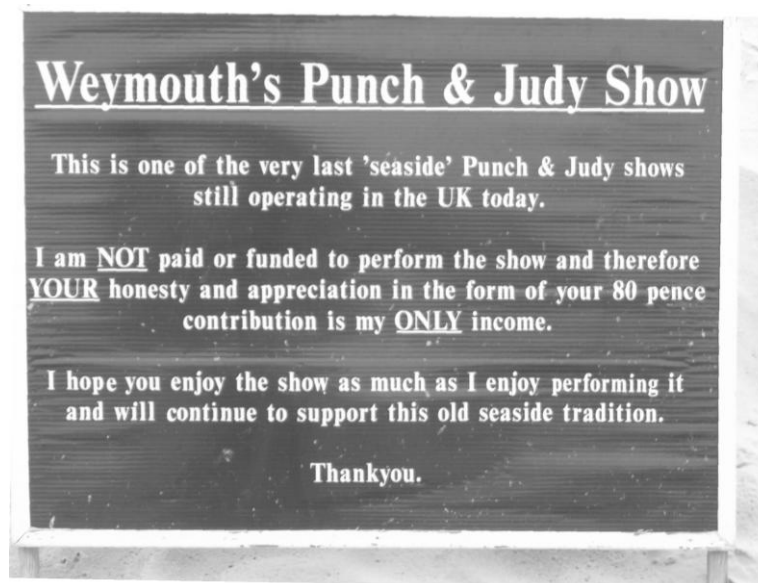


Fig. 62 Mark Poulton's beach sign

and Judy is a marginal form and these objects lie on the margins of that form and have rarely been documented. However, whilst performers have probably always varied in their attention to how these things look, the taking up of the form by professionally trained artists has meant that many current performers are producing objects of some sophistication. This raises questions around reflexivity and shifts in performers' perception of the form similar to those questions surrounding the puppets

themselves. Examining the function of these objects pushes us into complex areas of dramaturgy and context and how the two connect which I will deal with in later chapters.

### **Cultural relocation of the objects**

So far in this chapter I have talked about material objects which are used in performances or which help directly to support performances. Some of these objects inhabit spheres of exchange and influence beyond their immediate use. They are bought and sold, collected, photographed, put in museums and so on. I would like briefly to examine how those spheres interrelate and how they impact on the production and reception of the form.

Amongst some performers there is a lively interest in the exchange and collection of these objects, especially the puppets. Listening to performers talk about puppets which belonged to esteemed past puppeteers or old puppets whose provenance is not known but which are interesting in their own right, one is reminded that for some the affective historical weight of the objects is inseparable from its material function. Holding the puppets, putting them on their hands, picking things up with them, connects these puppeteers with previous generations of Punch performers. The puppets contain information which can tell the experienced puppeteer a great deal about how the original performer worked with them: their balance, their weight, how they were manipulated, their particular resistances. It is only by understanding this that one can see why these objects are so important to them.

One day Professor Felix showed me a photograph of the oldest Punch he had ever seen, a beautiful and sinister object. He had been allowed to try it on and says he could still feel the sweat of the performer. He photographed it and measured it so that he could reproduce it at some point. On one of my first field trips I had gone to Felix's flat to meet performer and enthusiastic collector, David Wilde, and he arrived with a suitcase of puppets, one of which he was very keen for me to see. This was the Punch that had been used by Tony Hancock. A great deal of detective work had gone into tracking the puppet down (see Byrom 2007) and now it was a prized possession. More recently he had managed to acquire at auction a set of 'Roselia' puppets, considered, Felix told me, 'the Rosetta Stone of Punch puppets'. For these



puppeteers, such puppets are texts which can be read and which can inform their own practice; they are deeply validating objects, a nexus through which the present can access the past.

These old puppets tend not to be used in performance, they are too delicate, but the interest in these objects for their historical value, inscribed in their wear and tear, alerts us to ethical and aesthetic dilemmas about restoration of puppets which *are* used in performance. Discussions take place amongst puppeteers about whether a puppet serves its function better pristine or battered. Some believe that puppets which display visible knocks are, as Cohen puts it, '[...] attuned to their performance ontology' (2007: 123), and that there should be a correspondence between the look of the puppet and the knocks it takes in the show. Others want their puppets to look fresh and clean. Carl Durbin told me that he felt clean puppets had a more 'professional' look. These are matters of degree and it has always been customary for puppeteers to carry out restoration work on their own puppets from time to time, replacing costumes, repainting, re-carving, and filling in parts which have become chipped. All do running repairs, sewing and painting, when they are out on the road. Professor Rod Burnett delighted in showing me a red felt tip pen which he uses to cover any blemishes to Punch's nose. It is perhaps in the area of repair and restoration that the implicit paradox in the term 'living tradition' is most visible.

Makers are often asked to restore other people's puppets, and it is here that puppeteers most differ on the question of restoration. Bryan Clarke will sandpaper a puppet back to 'base', and re-clothe and repaint as if it were a new puppet; James Arnott, a much younger puppeteer, prefers to repair them minimally, retaining as much of their original fabric and paintwork as possible.<sup>32</sup> This, even when he is restoring a Bryan Clarke puppet made as a copy of a Fred Tickner puppet. Younger performers seem to value the evidence of use and age more than older ones, many of whom want their puppets to look their sharpest for performance. A tension exists between the patina of use and the freshness of novelty. Questions of preservation tend not to trouble puppeteers who make their own puppets.

When the objects are removed from the performance context altogether, a different value system is engaged, and this usually means that the more the puppet is inscribed with use the better. An article about valuing Punch puppets in *Collect It*, a magazine

for hobbyist collectors, suggests that the restored and the un-restored puppets serve two incompatible functions,

The performance puppets themselves will usually have been regularly re-dressed and repainted, in order to maintain their bright and even gaudy appearance. This tends to make them less attractive to collectors, of course, so they are usually undervalued at sales (Peacock 2001: 53).

In this context, the objects have entirely ceased to have any use value and now have only exchange value underwritten by evidence of use.



Fig. 63 Gus Woods' booth, puppets and equipment in a glass case (Museum of Childhood, Bethnal Green)

Evidence of use makes them of more interest to museums as well where they become contextually associated with the past. Cohen (2007: 120) suggests that, 'The aura of the performance event adheres to puppets in the performance aftermath, potentiating their meaningful display in museums.' Whilst this is undoubtedly true, especially where the puppet is displayed complete with booth, as with Gus Woods' fit up in a glass case in London's Museum of Childhood (Fig. 63), the process is also a reverse one. The aura of the museum adheres to the puppet, lodging it in an irretrievable, un-contemporary space, forever historicized, temporally and physically unreachable. It shifts control of the discourse, to some extent, into the hands of museum curators and

historians and raises questions about ‘institutional power’ and ‘the politics of exhibiting’ (Lidchi 1997:185; see also, McLean 2008). It may be that these exhibitings validate the historicity of the objects which itself feeds back into how they are read in performance.

Punch and Judy is culturally positioned through references to its thematic and visual iconography in a wide variety of milieu: magazines, TV programmes, children’s toys and books. Often these products result from a different set of interpretations and motivations than the objects which are used in performance. Crone (2006: 1073-1074), for example, suggests that the production of nursery books whose message was quite at odds with the that of actual performance, reinforced a process of emasculation which affected the show in the late nineteenth century. This parallel existence continues today; Punch and Judy toothpaste, mugs and books are still produced. Performers sometimes find themselves complicit in the emasculation that this involves. Su Eaton and Martin Bridle wrote and illustrated a children’s book about the fictive interior of the booth, Punch’s backstage world (1984). They had wanted to create something quite unsettling, something ‘[...] like a Svankmejer animation, with lots of dark corners’, but found themselves conforming to popular expectation and the requirements of the publisher.<sup>33</sup> The result, Bridle says, was ‘lightweight’. Thomas Schlereth (cited in Jones 1993: 200), reminds us that when we use the term ‘material culture’, we must assume that ‘there is always a culture behind the material’. The culture that is behind these parallel materials may be at odds with the culture that lies behind the objects of performance. Yet, so solid, so evidential and so powerful are those materials, that they influence readings by audiences and production by performers of the actual performance materials. The capacity for this kind of recontextualisation is a characteristic of technologically sophisticated post-traditional reproductive systems. It complicates the relationship between performer and object considerably.

In this chapter, I have considered the relationship between the individual performer and the notion of a collective tradition. I have suggested that changes in that relationship have manifested themselves in the material elements of the show, creating consciously individuated forms. The shift from the preponderant beach uncle aesthetic to a less homogeneous one, suggests a shift in the hegemony of the form. I

also considered how the materiality of the form makes it prone to appropriation by differently informed cultural constituencies. In the next chapter, I consider how changes in that relationship impact on dramaturgical choices.

#### Notes.

1 2008: 15

2 2001: 258

3 Conversation with Jose Gil, 9 May 2008.

4 Conversation with Irene Vecchia, 10 August 2007.

5 Most of the Pulcinella performers are the product of the *Scuola di Guarattella* instigated in Naples, with public funding, by puppeteers Salvatore Gatto and Bruno Leone in 2000. Salvatore Gatto and Bruno Leone learnt from the two surviving performers, Nunzio Zampella and Giovanni Pino.

6 Conversation with Arkhipov, 4 June 2007.

7 In the Tony Hancock film *The Punch and Judy Man* (Summers 1963) there are two performers, but this a misrepresentation.

8 The popular association of these figures was made explicit as recently as the 1970s when in an episode of the TV sitcom *Are You Being Served?* members of the cast produced a version of the Punch show in which they dressed as the characters. Punch imitated Laurence Olivier's well known portrayal of King Richard in his film version of *Richard III*.

9 Conversation with Chandler, 2 January 2009.

10 Interview with Maggs, 18 September 2007.

11 Clarke currently charges £140 upwards for a Punch figure, slightly less for most of the others. Bryan Clarke's website address: [www.bryanclarke.co.uk](http://www.bryanclarke.co.uk)

12 Conversation with Brian and Alison Davey, 23 August 2007.

13 Conversation with Brian and Alison Davey, 23 August 2007.

14 Conversation with Brian and Alison Davey, 23 August 2007.

15 Geoff Felix has documented Bryan Clarke's carving methods (1994: 40-42).

16 Conversation with John Styles, 28 June 2007.

17 Conversation with Dan Bishop, 15 August 2007.

18 According to Payne, Prince Charles is much reviled and despised in Cornwall. Cornwall is a relatively poor region of England, Prince Charles owns much of the county and is believed by many to profit from its resources without giving much back to it. A puppet of the prince appears at the end of Payne's show and is knocked down by Punch.

19 Conversation with Reg Payne, 28 January 2008

20 Conversation with Martin Bridle, 7 August 2007.

21 From an advertising brochure for Hand to Mouth's *Piggery Jokery*.

22 Conversation with Martin Bridle, 7 August 2007.

23 Conversation with Richard Coombs, 9 May 2008.

24 'Fit up' is taken from the term used to describe itinerant theatrical companies, active largely in the nineteenth century, who would carry 'all that is needed to convert any village hall or similar space into a temporary theatre' (Alexander, undated :1).

25 John Alexander's *File Frame* (undated) is an extremely useful resource for performers who want to see what is available. It is a catalogue of different booths and how to make them.

26 In 1994 the College and the PJF decided to 'formally dedicate the red stripe [...] as an outward symbol of the red tape that was increasingly being wound round this and other age-old traditions' (College website, <http://punchandjudy.org>, accessed 21 November 2008).

27 Roselia was an important maker and performer. According to Leach, 'he operated on the pier at Great Yarmouth every summer from the 1880s to 1940, and took special pride in his skills as carver and painter' (1985:100). Felix believes 'his bold, vigorous carving set a standard for others to follow' (phone conversation, 20 September 2008). The puppets have great character, as can be seen in Fig. 81.

28 Davey believes the character of Punch is descended from a pagan figure, *Pooka*, images of which are incorporated in some very old church decorations as gargoyles and carvings on rood screens. He believes the energy of the figure is shamanistic and universal, merely finding a host in the figure of Punch. Brian and Alison Davey have extended this idea into producing a new show which they market as a fore-runner of Punch and Judy from 'back-along'; this is a glove puppet show in which Punch is replaced by Pooka, and the Crocodile by a Red Dragon.

29 John Alexander (undated: 38) suggests the street scene is taken from the Harlequinade, a short scene often tacked onto the end of a pantomime. Joey Grimaldi, on whom Clown Joey is based in the show, performed in Harlequinades, and the street scenery was reproduced in Pollock's Toy Theatre Harlequinade and copied by Punch performers.

30 At the climax to de Hempsey's published script, Punch and Joey dispose of the Beadle through a trick coffin (1945: 43).

31 The 'lettercloth' is the sign often hung at the front of the booth; Mayhew's Punchman uses this term. (Mayhew 1949 [1851]: 436).

32 Conversation with James Arnott, 21 January 2008.

33 Conversation with Martin Bridle, 7 August 2007.

## Chapter Five: Dramaturgy

*I liked the way that a puppet acquires its own personality: your hand becomes a metaphor for the body, the puppet a metaphor for the person. It's pure theatre.*

Richard Eyre<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I am interested in how performers make decisions about what takes place in performance. Some of these decisions are to do with topical or technological developments, things which have always impacted on the show; others are to do with how performers more generally situate the show in light of their own relationship to the tradition, what it is they think the show is *for* and is *doing*. As with the material elements of the show, there are dramaturgical boundaries beyond which performers tend not to stray.

One way of talking about the changes in dramaturgy since Leach's research is to separate them into categories of the *why*, the *how* and the *what* of performance. I argue in this chapter that the changes which have taken place since the 1980s impact mostly on the *why* of performance. I use the term *genre* to describe these. The other changes, the *how*, or *style* and the *what*, or *content*, are less dependent on the conscious situating of the performer as interpreter of tradition. Changes in style and content come about partly in response to what an audience wants to see and to the contemporary cultural landscape, and partly as a result of the new skills which performers are bringing to the form. Changes in *genre* more actively reflect the control individual performers are exercising over the form. These are not discrete areas and genre decisions may have implications for style and content. If, for instance, a performer wishes to highlight the historical nature of the form, they might use the Beadle rather than the Policeman; if the performer wants the show to be a form of ethical instruction, they might want to give it greater narrative coherence.

### **The agency of the puppeteer and dramaturgical limits**

Before examining these areas, it is useful to talk about two things which give particular force to the role of the individual in the tradition. One is agency in the glove puppet form, and the other is the relationship between standardisation and improvisation in oral tradition and how that has been affected by published texts.

The intimate connection between the puppet and the operator brings the question of agency of the performer centre stage. Unlike, for example, *wayang* in which, according to Keeler, ‘The self does not stand prior to speech [...] but is constructed in the play of speech itself’ (1987: 37), Punch and Judy foregrounds the personality of the operator.<sup>2</sup> This happens in terms of pace, vocal tone and accent for the different puppets, the kinds of jokes which the puppeteer uses, and the way she interacts with the audience. Good performers like to maintain these personality distinctions between each other; the best performers have very distinct performance personas. Early on in my research, Edwards was keen to point out that, as far as he was concerned, Punch and Judy is as varied as the people who perform it.

Keeler’s discussion of *wayang* helps us to recognise that Western theatre, by contrast, is preoccupied with the centrality of the voice as an expression of interiority and to see Punch and Judy as another form of vocal theatre. This intimate connection between the voice and the puppet very much stresses the personality of the puppeteer. Kelly suggests that this is in the nature of the glove puppet itself, with its restricted range of actions, compared with, say, the marionette (1990: 104). According to McCormick and Pratasik, Naples’ Pulcinella performer Zampella believed that ‘the manipulation of the puppets is of secondary importance [to the voice]’ (1998: 153). Punch is not a dumb-show, but a form in which the voice is always active, explaining, qualifying, badgering, bullying, playing with meaning. The puppeteer as originator of the sound, as shaper of meaning, cannot absent himself from the role of interpreter.

Moreover, because of the physical demands of the performance, usually in an outside space, always highly active, almost always using the swazzle which requires a very concentrated production of breath, a successful performance requires great physical and creative commitment. Although, with the advent of electric amplification, the show is probably not like the ‘[...] three hours hard labour with a pick and shovel’ as a performer described it to Leach (1980: 67), it is still hard work and puppeteers often emerge from the booth drenched in sweat. Performing with glove puppets is a highly engaged activity and although the puppeteer might not be visible, he is very present. So much so that for many performers an intense sense of presence becomes a reason for performing, it makes them feel ‘alive’.<sup>3</sup> Bauman calls this kind of engagement ‘[...] a special enhancement of experience’ (1975: 305) and it is something which

many performers crave. Edwards suggests that the ‘pure adrenaline’ of public performance is an addiction which accounts, in part, for many performers working beyond the usual retirement age.<sup>4</sup>

The centrality of the glove puppeteer is all the more evident when we consider the proximity of the puppet and the operator. Here we might use Stephen Kaplin’s ‘classification system’ (1999: 22) which distinguishes puppeteer-to-puppet relationships according to the ratio of puppets to manipulators, as well as the distance between them. He expresses this in terms of ‘centres of gravity’. Punch and Judy having only one operator, and the puppets being virtually part of the clothing of the puppeteer, they are in the ‘zone of [almost] absolute contact’ (ibid). The glove puppet is an extension of the puppeteer. Professor Brian Davey gave a graphic demonstration of this to me one day when, sitting in his conservatory-cum-workshop, he explained how the puppet feels on the hand. He ran his left hand from the centre of his chest, down his right arm to his fingertips and said, ‘that’s where the connection is’.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, we might agree with Speaight that, ‘The glove-puppet is essentially an actor’s medium; the speech and the movement of the hands are a direct projection of the performer’s dramatic sense, and the show stands or falls by the personality of the man inside’ (1955: 208). And yet, despite the centrality of the individual performer, one of the very noticeable things about Punch and Judy is the consistency between shows. An analogy that many practitioners use is that of the same song played by different performers, but differently arranged or interpreted. The agency of the performer is limited by the normative nature of the show. The tension between the normative elements of the show and the individual personality of the performer is one of the most interesting aspects of Punch and Judy performances (see Appendix A).

As I have suggested, it is likely that in the early days of performance there were a number of different versions played. It is also likely that the writing down of certain scripts contributed to the creation of the version as we know it today. Certainly the core elements of the show were largely in place by the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Changes in what constituted the show became inscribed on the printed page, newer versions appearing from time to time, many building on previous ones.<sup>7</sup> A similar relationship to the acquisition of puppets can be seen in the acquisition of texts. According to Leach, the swatchel omis had their own fiercely guarded family



versions which they handed down orally (1980: 66); many of the beach uncle performers are likely to have bought the script along with the puppets from the magic outlets. De Hempsey sold both puppets and texts, and his 1945 book, *How to do Punch and Judy* contains a script which was probably the basis for many later shows. The use of scripts may also have been the usual practice for those who had moved from the theatre. Performances sometimes took place as a part of a variety-bill, and the conventions of the music-hall as well as the approach to text, found their way into performance practice - especially audience response. This use of published text was no doubt especially useful when performers might not so easily have been able to see each others shows. Now the situation is quite different. With the advent of festivals and the internet, performers not only have access to a range of texts, but also to a number of different performances, and can borrow, copy, or steal ideas from each other very easily. Paradoxically, performers are probably less reliant on printed texts than they have been for a long time, and they are able to pick and choose amongst the shows they see. This kind of access can give rise to resentment when one performer has clearly used another's routine without asking.

I have not come across any performer who writes the script down, since, unlike acting texts, the show does not have to be transferred to another performer; it does not need to be recorded and can stay in the head of the performer. In many cases, the show is highly improvised around a set of possible routines and recording any one would be pointless.

The published texts are useful in showing us the emergence and disappearance of characters and gags, but cannot be taken as reliable evidence of shows which were ever actually performed. Nor, of course, do they tell us much about the quality of manipulation, or what might have been ad-libbed. Proschan (1981: 535) suggests that these documentary limitations are accounted for by the '[...] conventions of performance being well established'; it simply wasn't necessary to reproduce things such as the repetitions which must have occurred in performance. The texts are not intended to be played as printed, but as loose templates for reference. Some texts even carry explicit advice to adapt them. Fraser reprints the Collier text but tells his audience not to '[...] give an exact performance of [the] script unless as a scholarly exercise' (1970: 8); Edwards as a preface to his 'Starter Script' argues strongly that,

‘Punch isn’t part of our literary heritage he’s part of our folk heritage [...]. Take the script and use it as a starting point’ (2000 a: 116-132). The performance itself is a collation of fixed and fluid elements, some, like the puppets, tangible and determining, others, like the narrative, anchored by tradition, but varying with each performer’s interpretation. Others, like the contemporary interaction with an audience, are fleeting and unfixable. It is the ‘formula’ (Bauman 1975: 303) of traditional performance that allows the performer to range between the ‘[...] completely novel and completely fixed text [...]’ (ibid) in actual performance.

A very important determining factor in what happens in the show is the expectation of the audience. It is part of the show’s capital that it is a reminder of other shows. In an important sense each Punch and Judy show is every Punch and Judy show; performers rely on this familiarity and audiences relish it. Much like pantomime with its conventions, stock narratives and familiar characters, it works as a celebration of communal identity and is highly culturally specific. Its familiarity serves powerfully to collapse time between the present and a memory of childhood.

Current performances exhibit fluidity between the fixed and the novel in ways which are mediated by a number of factors. Some of these factors, such as topicality and shifts in taste, seem always to have been in play, others are new and have come about because of the uses to which recent performers are choosing to put the form. We might distinguish these factors as interior and exterior pressures.

In his study of Balinese *wayang kulit*, Brian James Thompson (1992: 287) argues that, ‘In order to perpetuate, a cultural perspective must be consistently presented to a people. Such presentation, occurring within the framework of a specific cultural context, involves the reformulation of tradition’; he calls this *indigenous reflexive reformulation*. The offering of a cultural form to an audience requires the selection and reaffirmation of content. When this selection falls within the authority of an exterior agency, for example a colonial or partisan authority with its own interests, the reformulation might be called *extra-indigenous*. This process was evident in the appropriation of Kasper by the Nazi authorities and Petrushka by the Soviets. More contentiously, it might be argued that the revival of traditional folk forms (such as Pulcinella) which had all but died out, even when revived by indigenous practitioners, might be called extra-indigenous. This is because those performers are involved in

reconstructing the tradition using written rather than oral sources.<sup>8</sup> One consequence of this has been debate amongst performers about what should constitute the revived form. Punch and Judy is subject to *both* indigenous *and* extra-indigenous reflexive reformulation. This is because on the one hand it is an unbroken tradition and has never been subject to explicit exterior authority, rather it has benefited from benign neglect; and on the other, because contemporary practitioners are reflecting on it, individually and through the organizations.

It is necessary, then, to distinguish changes in dramaturgy which are taking place because of reflection by performers on the form as a whole - changes in what I am terming *genre* - from changes which have come about in response to situations on the ground - that is, *style* and *content*. I will deal with *genre* first.

### **Genre: the *why* of performance**

The word *genre* might seem an exaggeration applied to varieties of a form which seem to exhibit more similarities than differences. Indeed, where large generic differences have been visible - such as in Walter Wilkinson's *Peep show*, Gordon McCrea's attempts to reinvent the form, Paul Zaloom's gay version, *Punch and Jimmy*, or Richard Hoyes' non-violent show - these have usually been contested by performers as not Punch and Judy shows at all.<sup>9</sup> However, when we examine the biographies of the College performers in particular, it is clear that even within the received notion of what constitutes Punch and Judy, performances are shaped by an increasing variety of intentions.

More traditional ways of thinking about the show are sometimes revealed in the way that some older performers talk about these new approaches. I have heard some puppeteers dismiss some of these shows by saying, 'That's not a Punch and Judy show, but a puppet show with Punch in it'. Older puppeteers are sometimes suspicious of things which cannot be accounted for as a direct appeal to an audience, things which seem to be driven more by the puppeteer than the spectator. Historically the spectator/performer relationship was driven by the immediate need to get money in the 'bottle'. Changes in the relations between performer and audience in terms of a less direct economic contact and the function that the performer is being asked to fulfil (for instance as living history, or memorialisation), have meant that the show

has come adrift from this earlier function. This has resulted in performers making different kinds of decisions about what they want to do with the show.

We might give names to some of the recent genres such as *historiographical*, *traditionalising*, *meta-theatrical*, and so on. Many of these genres may have only a single exponent, and this is itself indicative of the new relationship to the form. Performers rarely talk about what they are doing in these terms, but in approaching the form neither as inherited nor ready-made, they make selections which reflect their own, as much as a collective or received, view of the form.

### **Genre distinctions made through framing**

Genre can be context-dependent: a show may remain substantially the same but be read differently from place to place. These readings are sometimes passively *framed* - to borrow a term from Goffman (cited in Counsell and Wolf 2001: 27) - by the surroundings, or more actively *keyed* (ibid) by the performers. I went with John Styles to a performance at a primary school where he gave a talk before the show to indicate that he was giving a performance of something which children might have seen 'for over a hundred years'. He produced several artefacts, a top hat and an old Punch-shaped toasting fork, as evidence of its antiquity. He deliberately historicized the show. He told me he would do the same show elsewhere without the talk and it would not be thought of as especially historical. As we shall see below, Clive Chandler uses the same strategy in his performances for schoolchildren at the Museum of Cannock Chase.

Framing seems always to have played a part in the show. Mayhew's Punchman gave a demonstration of his own technique, announcing to his audience, among other things, that they will witness, 'the original and old-established performance of Punch, experienced many a year' (1949 [1851]: 435). Lacking the conventions of the 'legitimate' indoor theatre - a building, curtains, seats, regular performance times - the alfresco form requires very deliberate boundary-setting. The purpose is to help an audience answer the question, 'what is it that is going on here?' (Goffman, cited in Counsell and Wolf 2001: 28). There are a number of framing devices. Framing might consist of how the show is advertised, perhaps with music, or the beating of a drum, the ringing of a bell or a Tannoy announcement. It might consist of the events which

precede it, perhaps a magic show or a talk. It might consist of the way the performer chooses to interact with the audience. Conventions of framing allow an audience clearly to recognise that they are watching a Punch and Judy show.

In more subtle ways, framing also allows the performer to think of himself as performing a particular *kind* of show. Whereas, once, framings tended to be handed down in the family or were part of a conventional way of doing things, more recently, performers are faced with the more existential question, how do I frame the show and what am I saying when I do this?



Fig.64 George Speaight as Victorian bottler, with John Styles (from collection of George Speaight in V&A. Undated, photographer unknown)

The most visible framing device, apart from the booth itself, is clothing. In the nineteenth century, though the Punchman often remained hidden, his alter-ego, the bottler, was identifiable by his top hat, his drum and his pan pipes, held in place with a scarf (Fig. 64). With the move indoors, the performer would probably want to look as respectable as his income would allow. As we saw, with their increasing professionalisation and the adoption of the form by music-hall performers, they became more conscious of how they presented themselves. By the 1950s, the beach uncles tended to be relatively smart, in blazer and slacks, often with a straw hat. Bryan Clarke and John Styles both dress smartly and might be considered archetypal

beach uncle performers. Sometimes, as with Clown Smokey (Ron Townsend) (see Felix 1994: 13-20), performers might wear a clown costume. There were no hard and fast rules about costuming, though these two styles, *ultra*-ordinary (slacks and blazer), or *extra*-ordinary (clown costume), seemed to be the norm.



Fig. 65 David Wilde, and Quisto Punch, Judy and Baby

Leach (1985: 145) suggests that the counter-culturalists of the 1970s, who sought to revive '[...] a Punch who stands out against the prevailing tide of social convention', consciously adopted the outward forms of the '[...] outcasts and travelling entertainers' they imagined to have existed in Piccini's time. As a result, a new convention of dress arose. This convention persists today alongside the beach uncle and the clown. It varies, but often includes a top hat and a waistcoat. Chandler, Burnett and Davey, among others, sometimes adopt this costume (Fig. 66, 68). Chandler is quite conscious of what he wants to signal by this. He wears a top hat when he introduces the show and a bowler hat when he plays the portable organ; this indicates a figure slightly lower down the social scale. Chandler suggests that the costume performs a pragmatic function as well. He is more inclined to wear a costume in the street than when performing in a theatre: in the street his role needs to be more strongly distinguished from the passer-by, in order to give him greater visibility and control.

Although not all performers who have emerged since the 1970s have chosen to dress like this, the fact that some have makes all dress codes provisional. Emerging performers can no longer simply rely on established convention, but have to decide amongst a range of options. This has led to a greater variety of styles of dress

amongst younger performers. Some, like Geoff Felix (Fig. 24) and David Wilde (Fig. 65), adopt the smart attire of the beach uncle: Felix wears a Saville Row suit. Others, such as Coombs and Payne, wear quasi-clown costumes. Coombs has harlequin-patterned trousers and waistcoat (Fig. 67); Payne wears loose fitting bright red trousers and white shirt with a waistcoat bearing the black and white Cornish flag on the back. He also wears a top hat. Others, such as Bishop, wear the straw boater of the beach uncle, but with a more casual tee-shirt and jacket. Some performers, usually those who remain hidden before and after shows, do not particularly dress the part.



Fig.66 Clive Chandler at 2007 Skipton Puppet Festival in top hat with skeleton marionette



Fig. 67 Richard Coombs in quasi clown costume

### **The performer's role**

Dress is the most apparent of a number of framing devices through which the performer encourages the audience to read and respond to the show in a particular way. A more sophisticated framing strategy is the relationship the performer develops with his audience. Again, to a degree this is context-dependent. In a school, for example, the performer might want the audience to be well-behaved and will exercise control over them in the way that a teacher might. In less circumscribed situations, such as at the beach or on the street, performers have to negotiate their relationship from scratch. Their ability to do this can depend on the confidence the performer has in her role. Older beach uncle performers who fully embrace their function as entertainers tend to see this aspect as important as the show itself. The beach uncle typically, though not always, will win the audience over with jokes and magic tricks. Bryan Clarke is regarded by performers as one of the best at this. His show is very heavily framed by simple magic tricks, balloon modelling and repartee. I have seen him perform many times and although the repertoire of tricks he used was small, often repeated, and sometimes hackneyed, his capacity to engage with and so take control of an audience usually make his shows enormously compelling. Other performers, less certain of their role, can leave an audience wary. Keying the show as part of a children's entertainment sometimes means the frame is bigger than the show. Blackpool Punchman Martin Scott-Price does a 20 minute opening routine outside the booth, followed by a 12 minute show.

One or two performers who have not come up through the route of beach uncle have told me that it took a long time to find their 'persona' as Punchman. For the first few years of his Punch career, Brian Davey was reluctant even to be seen by the audience. Alison Davey, working as bottler, would act as intermediary. Only when he found the right costume - top hat and waistcoat (Fig. 68) - did he feel confident enough to face an audience outside the booth. Even now the show is presented by Alison who does balloon modelling and chats to the audience before the show (Fig. 69). In doing this she develops a quiet rapport with them; she does not have the patter of Bryan Clarke, but rather is a reassuring presence in front of the booth, asking if the children can see properly, or bringing the smallest ones to the front.





Fig. 68 Brian Davey, Galampton Gooseberry Pie Fair 2007

Whereas the showman persona seems ingrained in performers like Clarke and Styles, for some younger performers it has been imitated or constructed. This is sometimes evident in their language and tone. I have seen Felix use a slightly heightened, ironic, theatrical tone, especially when he is performing at Covent Garden amongst his peers; Bishop's Punchman is more cockney working-class than Bishop himself; and Chandler sometimes adopts a more working-class accent when he is performing than in 'real' life. He says it brings him 'closer' to his audience.



Fig.69 Alison Davey engaging the children before a show, Newton Abbot 2009

### **Presenting the show**

Performers also signal how the show should be read by what they do and say. Professor Chandler exercises control over his audience to the extent of instructing them in his introduction to the show when and how they will be expected to clap and cheer. Reg Payne, whose show is far more anarchic, uses the warm-up as an opportunity to whip his audience into a frenzy, diving in amongst them before the show starts and pretending that he is waiting for the performer to arrive until they point out that *he* is the performer. He harnesses the energy that this confusion generates to get the audience to participate. Felix deliberately tells his audiences that his show is historical. Burnett sometimes uses a very developed and quite specific theatricalising framing commentary.

It is worth recording Burnett's framing because it signals the kind of thinking and anxieties which some non-beach uncle and non-swatchel omi performers are bringing to the show.

This is the opening of a performance which took place at Bovey Tracey Craft Fair in June 2007. The Craft Fair is an annual event in the small affluent south Devon town of Bovey Tracey. Artisans and artists from the region hire stalls where they display their hand made wares; these include furniture, jewellery, prints, paintings and pottery. Entrance is five or six pounds and there is a slightly exclusive and manicured feeling about it. Instead of the ubiquitous chips, burgers and coke that are sold at most public fairs in Britain, here the fare is crepes, salads and elderflower cordial. Children are catered for by a 'making tent' where they can do their own felt, mask and rug-making. Burnett performs next to this tent in a neatly laid out area (Fig.70).

On this occasion there was an audience of 20 or 30, adults and children. The audience were polite but responsive and Burnett was able to talk to them relatively quietly. He was not wearing his top hat this time, but was dressed all in black: jacket, tee-shirt and trousers. It was a hot, sunny day and the audience were mostly sitting down. In the distance was the sound of a classical guitarist and, nearer, the hammering of a blacksmith's anvil. Burnett emerged from behind the booth.



Fig. 70 Rod Burnett at Bovey Tracy Craft Fair, June 2007

‘You think you’ve come to a nice little puppet show,’ says Burnett, ‘you haven’t. You’ve come to murder and mayhem. It’s called “the Punch and Judy Show”’.

He indicates the booth.

‘And in here are all the puppets; this is a real theatre. Have you ever seen one of those before?’

The audience says, ‘Yes’.

Burnett continues, ‘Have you?’

‘Yes’.

‘Then you’ll know how it works.’ Indicating the playboard: ‘This is the stage. Is that right?’

‘Yes’.

‘This is the proscenium arch, everybody say it.’

‘Proscenium arch’, repeat the audience.

‘Wow’, says Burnett, ‘we’re an educational theatre company. Proscenium arch, the curtains [...] Oh, inside is all the workings’, again he points to the booth, ‘[...] we’ve got the dressing rooms. Punch’s dressing room is just there, Judy’s dressing room is there, and it’s got the biggest star on it, not Mr Punch because we’re politically correct as well. And in the middle is one big room where all the other puppets go, yeah? And then there’s a staircase going all the way up to the top. Do you believe me?’

The audience is doubtful, 'No'.

Burnett reassures them: 'You wait and see [...]. There's the stairs, and the other big dressing room, that's where they have their cups of coffee and their sandwiches, and they can have a wash. There's a bathroom. And do you know what's in the bathroom?'

'A bath.'

'A bath, well done. And what's in the bath?'

'Water.'

'And do you know what's in the water?'

'A crocodile', says one boy.

'A crocodile, well done! Give him a big round of applause [...] So they are all waiting to see you; so what I've got to do, I've got to go in [to the booth] because they've got to go on my hands. I'm sorry to tell you that. You know, it destroys the illusion. But I am the puppeteer and I've got to make them work. So I am going to do that, but it takes a little bit of time, 'cos I'm getting old, so I need a bit of help; so I say, "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Punch and Judy show", and you give a big cheer and a round of applause, while I go and get ready. Here we go then, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Punch and Judy show!'

The audience clap and cheer; Burnett tells them they will have to keep it going until he gets inside. They do this and he starts the show. At the end of the show he brings out Punch and shows him to the audience.

In constructing an elaborate back-stage world, whilst pointing out that the show is an illusion, Burnett is putting the show in quotation marks. He is saying, we are going to pretend that this is real whilst at the same time acknowledging that it is not. He 'metacommunicatively manages' the show (Baumann and Briggs 1990: 75) to gain permission to perform it. This is a strategy he uses in his non-Punch shows as well, where he says to the audience: 'This is me, these are the puppets; now here is the show'.<sup>10</sup> Other performers use similar devices. Dan Bishop gives a demonstration of the slapstick to show that it does not really hurt, and then pretends that he is going into the booth for a sleep while the show is on. Chandler often gives a marionette demonstration beforehand. Deliberately or otherwise, this lets an audience know that they are watching something parallel to, but not actual, reality. Chandler reinforces

this notion by having Punch bang his head against the proscenium arch on his arrival to demonstrate the difference of the puppet from its human observers.

In the past, framing served to attract a crowd and to tell them about the special nature of what they were about to witness, now it often does both of these things, as well as giving an opportunity to answer current questions about the role of this seemingly archaic form, and to answer its critics. These concerns also impact on genre distinctions as they are expressed *within* some of the shows.

### **Internal genre distinctions**

What happens in a show tells us something about how performers reflect on the tradition. The beach uncles and swatchel omis tended to be pragmatists, doing what lay within the received notion of the show, so long as it put money in the bottle. Some performers still believe this is the test of the true show and enjoy the ‘edge’ working for the bottle gives them.<sup>11</sup> In this section I am interested in performers for whom what they do is informed by more reflexive conceptions of the form.

### **The traditionalised shows**

For Dan Bishop and Geoff Felix, a sense of obligation to the tradition has had the effect of preserving rather than radicalising the show. They retain many of the elements found in the beach uncle shows. There are variations of incident and jokes between their shows, but they take their material from the same root. They begin with the core domestic tensions and conflict; the shows might then diverge, incorporating different episodes from an existing range. In respecting what has gone before, they are tied to notions of what the show *should* be.

But they use different kinds of internal commentary. In a form which has a dual audience - children and adults - the skilled performer acknowledges both. The more obvious gags, the slapstick and the hiding and chasing, are played to the children; the commentary which overlays this is directed at the adults. Commentary might be a direct comic remark about a situation. Judy, for instance, might say after the baby appears, ‘Two kisses and you get a baby, ain’t that life!’ (Burnett, Felix, Poulton and Coombs use this line); or the commentary might be more sophisticated. In one Geoff Felix show I saw, both Judy and the Policeman drew attention to the fact that they

were in a piece of theatre. Judy ‘milked’ her reaction to the baby being thrown down the stairs, going into paroxysms of grief, but responding to Punch’s apparent alarm by saying, ‘I’m acting, it’s my big scene’; the Policeman begged Punch to let him have his stick and broke off to say to the audience, ‘Do you think I’m overacting?’

We cannot say what kind of internal commentary was going on in the early shows, though we do know the audience was acknowledged.<sup>12</sup> Commentary on the events has become a standard technique for most performers and may have derived from the self-reference that occurs in pantomime, and the cross-over of music-hall performers. The Codman shows I saw contained no such self-reference and might indicate a strain of family performance which did not absorb these later influences at all. Rather, his show was an apparently hermetically sealed babble of amusing nonsense and arbitrary incident, joined together with snatches of old song. The Joe Beeby show I saw on tape had a similar self-contained feeling. The fact that he explicitly wanted to recreate the Victorian show may be evidence that the show changed with the introduction of the music-hall performers. Because Bishop and Felix are bound to the tradition, they are unlikely to institute generic changes, however, and their commentary remains internal.

### **The innovating show**

Where performers are less concerned about traditionality, larger innovations are possible, to the degree of introducing new characters and of provisionalising the tradition altogether. Burnett’s looser approach can mean he sometimes forgets some of the ‘core’ elements. I was walking away from his booth with him one day after a show when he suddenly remarked, ‘My God, I forgot to put Judy in the show... Never mind, I’ll put her in the next one’. His spontaneous method produced routines which didn’t need her. He sometimes seems to be making the show up on the spot. During one show I saw, Joey had a discussion with Punch about what they should do. Trapped in a world in which they had to make their own decisions, they cast about for something to help pass the time; I was reminded of Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon. He also introduces new characters, such as two drumming bandsmen (Fig. 71). Payne explores this territory, too, relying on his own spontaneous inventiveness and the response of his audience and introducing new characters such as the Morris Dancers.

In both cases any narrative thrust of the conventional show is only a frame on which to build the performers' own interpretation.



Fig. 71 Rod Burnett's Guardsmen

### **The recursive show**

Edwards once described the tradition to me as a 'feedback loop', by which he meant each show is an echo of the past and of previous shows.<sup>13</sup> To use Marvin Carlson's metaphor (2003), it is 'haunted' by them. This is in the nature of tradition. Once the show becomes *traditionalised*, as with Felix and Bishop, those hauntings are concretised. These concretisings can themselves become material to be reflected upon in performance. The show is a palimpsest and the tradition accumulates layers like a series of Russian dolls. This multiple containment is a form of *recursion*. Daniel Everett uses two useful analogies to describe recursion:

A visual form of recursion occurs when you hold a mirror up to a mirror and see an infinite regress of mirrors in the reflection. And an auditory form of recursion is feedback, the squeal from the amplifier picking up and continuing to amplify its own output over and over (2008: 228).

Richard Coombs' show acts as a kind of doll containing the doll of traditionalisation. It has elements which deliberately satirise this traditionalisation, and which draw attention to its recursiveness. He likes to incorporate this idea in his show. On several occasions at the Covent Garden festivals in front of fellow performers, Coombs has begun with a scene between Clown Joey and a puppet of Samuel Pepys. Pepys,

dressed in restoration wig and coat, is at a pedestal writing in his diary. On stage there is a replica of the plaque on St Pauls Church, commemorating his recording the show (Fig. 72). Joey asks him what he is doing there. Pepys tells him he is a ‘diawist’ [sic], Joey says ‘that sounds painful’. Pepys asks what Joey is doing there, Joey says, ‘I’m doing a show, I’m supposed to be here’. Eventually Joey throws Pepys off the stage.



Fig.72 Richard Coombs with Pepys puppet, lectern and plaque (*The Swazzle*, June/July 2006: 5)

In another episode, Joey tells the audience that he is going to be doing his ‘very own’ Punch and Judy show. Next to him on the playboard is a miniature booth. He struggles to get inside it and remarks, ‘It’s very crowded in here; I don’t know why anyone does this for a living’. Two little Punch and Judies appear inside the mini-booth and start fighting. Joey brings them out and says to the audience, ‘How am I doing? It’s all puppets fighting one-another, it’s not very politically correct. Good job it’s funny or someone would try to ban it’. He resumes the show but cannot remember it. He emerges again. A smaller Joey appears inside the booth and starts to do the show, but, fearing that the audience might not ‘be able to see at the back’, he produces a smaller booth inside his booth, with another Joey inside it who produces a yet smaller booth. Eventually there is a booth inside a booth inside a booth inside a booth (Fig. 73). This visual image along with the familiar comments about the difficulty of doing the show and political correctness are a succinct encapsulation of



the current state of the tradition. Eventually this commentary is abandoned. Joey gets rid of the booths and the show ‘proper’ begins, with the words, ‘It’s very traditional this next bit, you all have to shout, “Wake up Mr Punch !” when I count to three.



Fig 73 Richard Coombs’ Clown Joey with Russian-doll booths, each an identical miniature of the others

Whilst many performers admire the wit and technical sophistication of this metatheatrical strategy, they believe it is not for everyday use; one Punchman likened it to the dress designs of Jean-Paul Gaultier, telling me, ‘Few people will copy it, but the ideas will filter down’.

### **Ethical narratives**

Leach sees a cohesiveness in the traditional show due to structural features of ‘balance, chiasmus [...] framing and cumulation’ (1985: 199). He suggests that these offer a grammar of performance which contains improvisation within a manageable whole and allow the performer a degree of security. I think another powerful tendency is discernible in the traditional structure which is driven more by the needs of the audience. This tendency is acknowledged in the structure of performance by some performers more than by others. It is akin to what Victor Turner calls ‘social drama’ (1985: 181) and contains much the same dramatic arc. In Turner’s model it

moves through four 'phases': 1: *breach* - infraction of 'regular norm-governed social relations'; 2: *crisis* - a period when the breach widens and participants are forced to ally themselves with one side or another; 3: *redress* - involving ritual or judicial processing of the crisis and 4: either *reintegration*, or 'social recognition' of *irreparable schism*. In the traditional structure of the show, these phases correspond to: 1: the break-up of the family, the 'killing'/disposal of the baby and Judy; 2: the appearance of the law in which the audience are encouraged to take sides; 3: the fight with the Devil in which Punch has the chance to make up for his crimes; and 4: Punch victorious is celebrated or, defeated, is carried off by the Devil. (It is rare to see the latter these days, though Bryan Clarke and his son Tony both have Punch taken away by the Devil. Most performers have Punch defeat the Devil and so be allowed back into society.)

Chandler uses the powerful desire of audiences to see this arc completed to give his show a reassuring sense of familial cohesion and continuity, and, as he put it to me, to allow him to do the show in a way with which he feels morally 'comfortable'.<sup>14</sup> This arc tries to take into account contemporary concerns with, for example, the role of the mother, which are addressed differently in the traditional show. This impacts not only on the explicit reintegration of Punch at the end of the show, in which Judy makes a public contract with Punch that he can rejoin the family only if he 'promises to be good', but also on certain performance decisions. He makes sure that Punch's actions are very 'person specific' and not to be taken as representative of all males: Punch hits himself a lot before he hits anybody else. Judy never hits anybody; this, he says 'gives her the moral high ground'. The baby is always silent; Chandler believes this prevents the violence from crossing the line into disturbing actuality. The show ends with a family tableau. Chandlers' desire to create an ethically consistent dramaturgy is part of a larger project of using puppets as a means to, 'test the boundaries and bring the audience safely back in'.<sup>15</sup>

The above examples are intended to show that newly individuated relationships to the tradition have produced performer-driven dramaturgical decisions. There are still a large number, perhaps the majority, of performers who rely on audience expectation, changing tastes and the habits of convention to determine what happens in their shows. This is not to dispute the quality of those shows, many of which are very

skilful, but to point to a trend in performance. Other changes in dramaturgy have come about because of less consciously interventionist forces. These are either exterior, such as changes in what audiences wish to see or is meaningful to them, or what is culturally acceptable; or interior, such as performers bringing new skills or technologies to the form. These changes express themselves in terms perhaps less contentious than genre: *style* and *content*.

### **Style: the *how* of performance**

#### **The bottler**

With the advent of the contracted show, a major change came about: the bottler as collector of money became largely redundant. There are exceptions. Alison Davey still works with her husband as front-woman, encouraging the audience to join in, giving reassurance, getting Brian to hurry up if the audience are tiring, as well as when necessary, collecting money. There are very few other shows now which use a bottler to this extent; Rene Smith, Poulton's bottler at Weymouth only collects the money. We do not know exactly what the bottler did in the past, aside from this, and his role must have varied from show to show. However, many nineteenth century illustrations show the bottler with drum and pan pipes, and this suggests an integral function. Watching Pulcinella performer, Irene Vecchia with her musician accompanist, Enzo (Vincenzo Mirone) playing along on the accordion, I was reminded of the considerable dramaturgical potential of a second performer.<sup>16</sup> Some contracted shows still benefit from 'bottler as bouncer' or 'bottler as performer', as Edwards put it to me. Mary Edwards often performs a marionette show before her husband's Punch show, and it is always useful to have a companion to stop children getting in the back of the booth, or to keep an eye out for rival attractions. However, most performers nowadays work alone.

#### **Rhythm, music and song**

One of the things I first noticed when I started going to shows again for research was the amount of tapping that many of the puppets do. In my acting work I am aware of using stress, especially in verse, and using silent 'beats' as an internal timing device. Many of the puppets *sound* these stresses and beats with their hands or with the stick or other props, especially when singing. The Crocodile does it with his snapping

jaws. The sound of the slapstick rhythmically making contact with puppets' heads or puppets bashing heads with each other is more or less continuous in some shows. It is not surprising that puppets express themselves in this way, having few other means. It is interesting to see to what extent this has changed historically, and how it reflects the changing role of music and song in the show, especially with the advent and preponderance of call and response shows.

Ron Codman's show (see Appendix B), which I was able to see live, and Joe Beeby's, which I saw on tape, might be regarded as glimpses of older-style shows, since neither use call and response. Both of these shows contain a great number of songs, some, seemingly improvised, nonsense and others well known folk and pop songs. In both, the shift between speaking and singing is seamless, as if they are part of the same speech register. In watching them, I began to understand why Mayhew's Punchman's show is called 'Punch's Opera'; there is a continual musicality, much of the dialogue a sort of recitative. In more recent shows there tend to be far fewer songs, sometimes only one or two: the inevitable 'I do like to be beside the seaside' and perhaps a nursery rhyme. Punch might sing about sausages as the Crocodile appears. The effect is that the show is far more prosaic, though still underscored with tapping.

The intrinsic rhythmic quality of the show is evident in some of the traditional runs of dialogue which still pepper many of the shows. The following appears in Geoff Felix's show (Fig. 74).<sup>17</sup>

The Policeman has just caught up with Mr Punch; the end of each line is punctuated with each puppet hitting the other, Punch with his stick, the Policeman with his hand:

*Policeman:* I have in my pocket a warrant to lock you up.

*Punch:* And I have a warrant to knock you down.

*Policeman:* There's a good one.

*Punch:* There's a better one.

*Policeman:* There's a tuppenny one.

*Punch:* There's a thrupenny one.

*Policeman:* There's a topper.

*Punch:* There's a whopper.

*Policeman:* Now look, if you do that again, you'll see what happens. [*Punch hits him hard, he falls down, hitting the playboard with a loud bang. He gets up and looks at the audience and says*], That's what happens.

This is played fast and light with a great deal of attack and sharpness. Though the last line is bathetic, and never receives the laugh performers seem to expect, rhythmically it resolves the run. The same reliance on rhythm is apparent in many of the traditional routines, the boxers, the 'counting', even the Hangman routine. Although I have seen many new routines, all the routines which depend on this kind of rhythmic underscoring are old.



Fig. 74 Geoff Felix' Punch hitting the Policeman (photo by Chris Gaspar)

I have had many conversations with Professor Edwards about the function of rhythm in the show and he strongly believes that it is the cornerstone of the form, embodying and enacting what he sees as a specifically *English* humorous rhythm. He likens it to the rhythm of the 'I say, I say, I say...' jokes. More technical work needs to be done in this area to verify his view; however, watching other folk puppets, Pulcinella, Dom Roberto and Petrushka, I have been very struck by their own characteristic rhythms. It is a matter of conjecture, but if a traditional puppet show embodies the rhythmic tendencies of the culture it springs from, then as that culture changes, so might the rhythms of the show. This seems in some ways already discernable in the shift from

the verse-like style of Codman to the prose style of some more recent performers. The peculiarities of the Codman nonsense verses may be the sound of an echo dying away.

### Technology



Fig.75 Swazzles and amplifier in Gary Wilson's booth.

Nearly all performers now work with electric amplification. I have only seen one who did not and that was Ron Codman and he was working in an indoor space.<sup>18</sup> This technology is increasingly sophisticated, small, light and portable. Where once the swazzle was the principal means to project the show, now it is the microphone, and the swazzle is amplified through it (Fig.75). The transition between speaking 'unmiked' to an audience outside the booth and the sudden jump in volume and change in tone as the performer goes backstage and switches on the microphone is often quite marked. Some performers, even when an audience is within a few feet, have come to rely on the microphone completely. With the ubiquity of technology in other performance spheres, radio, TV, film, it seems audiences accept this convention; but it can have a distancing affect. Most performers regard the microphone as an indispensable as it saves them physical effort whilst giving them considerable vocal authority (see Edwards 2000a: 80-83).

The use of pre-recorded music is now very widespread. With the advent of micro-technology such as the ipod, performers can carry around with them a huge array of sounds which can be played very easily. Despite this, a relatively small range of music is actually played. Music is usually broadcast before the show as the audience

are gathering or during what might be called the *pre-show*, when, for example, as I described in the Preface, a monkey-puppet might comically mop the stage and remove the clock. Davey, Durbin and Poulton use fairground organ music; Chandler uses ‘trad’ jazz; Edwards and Wilde use what Edwards calls ‘screamers’. This is very loud and brash American-style circus music. Performers use this music to attract a crowd and raise their expectations and excitement. Nobody I saw uses modern music.

Some still use live music *during* the show. Burnett plays a mouth-organ along to his Guardsmen who bash their drums and cymbals in time, until eventually order breaks down and they start to fight. Reg Payne plays a mouth-organ along to his Morris Dancers who wear bells and finger cymbals and carry sticks which they rhythmically bash into each other as they dance. The playing of live music has an energising affect on audiences who seem surprised and delighted by it, especially when it is integrated into the action. It adds to the liveness of the event.



Fig. 76 Reg Payne with extending neck character.

Other technological aspects of the show, the manipulation and the tricks, remain mechanical. Even now the most startling trick is the simplest and perhaps oldest, the extending-neck character (the Courtier in Piccini’s show). He is used by several performers, amongst them, Wilde, Felix, Coombs and Payne (Fig. 76). There are a number of seemingly more sophisticated tricks such as the sausage machine in which the Policeman or the Baby might be fed into the top of a box (Fig. 77). A handle is

turned at the side and ‘sausages’, with skins the colour and pattern of the figure who had gone in, come out of a hole at the side. This delights and horrifies audiences. The process is sometimes then reversed. These tricks still rely on simplicity of execution as well as portability. Performers generally do not like complex machinery that can go wrong in the heat of performance, or to have to carry more than they need. The challenge of producing and refining technically simple but effective tricks is one which many performers enjoy, especially those who are adept at making their own puppets.



Fig. 77 Gary Wilson with sausage machine and baby

Performers have always relied on novelty tricks to invigorate their shows and to fill stage-time. There is a strong connection between magic and Punch and much of the pleasure for performers and audiences is a well executed trick. Puppeteers delight in having puppets perform tricks, such as plate-spinning, which audiences associate with human performers. Many performers like to demonstrate their virtuosity through doing tricks. At the 2009 Mayfayre, Clarke revived a trick in which two Chinese puppets spin a full glass of water in a triangular frame without spilling any, to great applause. Coombs has gained a reputation for inventing *new* tricks. This has become one of his roles in the community. His novelties, such as a bubble-blowing Joey or a Monkey reading *Harry Potter*, or a ‘Chav’<sup>19</sup> using a mobile phone, are peculiar to him and unlikely to be copied by other performers. For the most part, because of its reliance on tested and reliable ideas, the tradition is technologically conservative. Pete Maggs believes that new ideas are very exciting at the time, but they can soon lose their appeal and performers go back to the ones that work.



## **Characterisation**

We have seen how art-school trained performers have brought a different aesthetic sense to the tradition; we might ask if the arrival of drama-school trained performers has brought a new approach to characterisation. (I distinguish between characterisation and character here. Character is what a stage figure *is*, characterisation is how character is revealed.) This is a very difficult question. It is impossible to tell from the inert scripts, pictures and photographs what varieties of characterisation were evident in the past. Traditionally, character was probably fairly broadly drawn: Judy is a shrew, the Devil a villain, the Policeman, perhaps stupid, Joey, clever and fast. It is certainly true that Ron Codman's characters are not especially delineated, except in terms of what they *do*; the same is true for Bryan Clarke's. Except for Punch, they mostly speak with the same voice. Nonetheless they are successful and entertaining in their own terms. Nuanced or elaborate characterisation in these cases is not sought. This may be to do with the limits of the form: the figures are fixed, they have to project over distance and outdoors, and they have to fit within the range of public expectation. The degree of subtlety with which performers characterise is a matter of individual taste, skill and interest. Payne, for example, makes amusing distinctions between his two Cornish Morris Dancers, the gruff and direct Johnny Morris, and his brother, the fey and nervous Desmond (Fig. 44). In so doing he develops a comedy of personality. Burnett's puppets are more conventionally and broadly distinguished. Except for Punch and the Devil, they sound the same, although, as we have seen, they have powerful physical distinctions. Distinctions tend to be made only where they serve the narrative.

## **Content: the *what* of performance**

Over time, changes occur in who appears in the show, what gags are told or enacted, what episodes are played, for a variety of reasons. At their simplest these are to do with recognition. The servant in the Piccini text, for example, has no part to play these days because there are few servants; the Beadle is disappearing because Beadles no longer exist. However, some characters reappear after long absence. The Devil was unfashionable for much of the twentieth century, but now he appears frequently. As a traditional form, content reflects a tension between the ideology of the past, expressed sometimes in the nostalgic form of the puppets, the way they are dressed

and their domestic relations, and what is permissible or can be justified in current conditions.

### **Characters**

As I have suggested, there is a core cast of puppets: Punch, Judy, the Baby, the Crocodile, the Policeman or Beadle and the Devil. These appear in nearly all the shows I have seen. Regular appearances are also made by Joey the Clown, the Doctor and the Ghost; less regular ones by two Boxers, a Monkey or Monkeys, Hector the Horse, a Black character, ‘Chinese’ or ‘Japanese’ performers of tricks (Fig. 106), a spider, Mr Nobody (Fig. 76) (the character with the extending neck), and perhaps a puppet Dog Toby (Fig. 78) (replacing the once often-seen live Dog Toby).



Fig.78 Mark Poulton and Dog Toby puppet

The number of puppets used in each show varies from performer to performer and may be dictated by such things as the length of show or the confidence of the performer. Some performers are very good at making routines last for a long time and require few puppets; others like to bring new characters on frequently.

Speaight suggests that some characters are of topical interest, ‘every contemporary event introduces a new hero or a new villain’ (1970: 91). Percy Press used a Hitler Hangman (Stinton 2008: 183). Edwards was sent a picture of some late nineteenth century puppets which contained what looks like a Prussian army officer, possibly Bismarck (Edwards 2009: 9) (Fig.79). Edwards has a ‘health and safety’ puppet (see

below) (Fig. 82.) Richard Coombs currently uses a Barack Obama puppet. Some use puppets from popular culture, Paul Jackson uses a Darth Vader puppet from the film series, *Star Wars*. Some invent puppets for personal reasons; Mark Poulton occasionally uses a pink, furry Crocodile which he made to please his young daughter (Fig. 80). No major new figure has appeared since the Crocodile in the 1860s (Speaight 1970: 91). These temporary characters derive from current affairs or from popular culture. Guy Higgins in Weymouth replaced the Devil with J.R. Ewing, a character from the immensely popular American TV show *Dallas*. The Boxers might be given the names of well known fighters. Coombs used a plate spinning Tony Blair for a few seasons.



Fig. 79 William Henry Lawrence with Punch, Judy and topical puppet, possibly Bismarck, on his lap (*The Swazzle*, Summer Issue 2009: 9)



Fig. 80 Mark Poulton and his Pink Crocodile

These characters, working as they do in the public space, are an opportunity to reflect popular, and sometimes populist, opinion. In 2008, Glyn Edwards created a 'Health and Safety Officer', complete with fluorescent yellow jacket. Edwards decided to introduce him after he had received a letter from a local authority asking him to fill in a form about the health and safety implications of his show. Believing that audiences would respond to the absurdity of the situation and tapping into common concerns with over-bureaucratisation, he has Punch showing the official the sausage machine and demonstrating it by feeding him into it, in an echo of the traditional Hangman scene where the Hangman is tricked into putting his own neck into the noose. This story was followed up by the local and national press.

Richard Coombs similarly taps into popular anxieties with his 'Chav' character who sometimes replaces the Devil. The puppet, dressed in the conventional chav attire of track suit, Burberry cap and hooded jacket, is shown talking in a working class, south east England accent to his friends on his mobile phone. He boasts to Punch that he has string of 'ASBOs' (Anti Social Behaviour Orders) to his name and that he got these for hitting people and being a nuisance. Punch tells him that *he* can hit people too and goes to fetch his stick. The Chav meanwhile arranges to meet his friends at the local shopping mall to 'cause some trouble'. Punch reappears and hits him. The Chav asks, 'What about my human rights?' Punch hits him again, declaring, 'That's the way to do it'. Joey arrives and congratulates Punch for dispatching him, saying, 'I think you did society a favour. Three cheers for Mr Punch!' They pick him up and drop him into the booth. The demonisation of the Chav echoes popular sentiments and on the occasions I saw this, the audience enthusiastically cheered Punch. It is likely that popularly disliked figures will continue to emerge and be pilloried in the show; that is one of its interests for audiences and puppeteers.

## **Race**

The popular form is problematical, however, when it presents characters who are objectified not by what they *do* but by what they *are* and this is something with which contemporary performers are having to grapple.

In many traditional folk puppet forms, gender, race and regional stereotypes play an important role in justifying and sustaining the hegemony of the protagonist. Kelly

refers to this as ‘male, proletarian self-assertion’ (1990: 99). The phallocentrism of Punch is hard to deny; the world is portrayed from his perspective and most of the rest of the cast become *other*, defined in relation to his desires and anxieties. In most European folk-puppet forms this impacts on the portrayal of the female characters and on other ‘minorities’ as well.

Perhaps the commonest racial stereotypes in European folk puppetry were the Gypsy and the Jew; the caricatured Jew is still present in Turkish Karagöz.<sup>20</sup> In Punch and Judy these harshly caricatured figures have never really existed, and the racial minorities, the black character, Jim Crow, ‘Nigger’ or Shallabala as he has variously been called, and the juggling Chinese characters, are creatures of merely exotic interest, and tend not to be vilified.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, they are still caricatures and performers are increasingly sensitive to charges of racial stereotyping and avoid this by leaving these characters out altogether, or by playing down racial difference. Puppets with highly exaggerated features, like the Roselia black figure (Fig.81), have largely disappeared. Where the black characters do exist, they are usually integrated into the show without explicit comment on their race. They might appear as one of the Boxers, or simply as a puppet in the counting routine.



Fig. 81 Richard Coombs and Roselia Black Character; note the articulating mouth

Some performers make more positive steps towards integration, and this raises a range of complex and timely questions. These might be explicated by examining Professor Edwards’ decision to make his Health and Safety Officer an Asian character. Edwards believes that puppet casting should be ‘colour blind’, reflecting

the contemporary racial make-up of Britain. He realised that in practice this presented an ethical ‘minefield’. His initial thinking was prompted by the fact that his real life doctor was black. However, since a contemporary doctor is not considered a ‘quack’ as the traditional doctor is, Edwards reckoned that Punch would lack the motive to hit him. He thought of making him a ‘new age’ doctor instead, but rejected the idea because a black new age practitioner might be considered, in his words, ‘mumbo-jumbo’, and thus racialised. He settled on the idea of a Health and Safety Officer as he would be defined ‘by the colour of his coat not his skin’.<sup>22</sup> There remained the problem of what he should sound and look like. Edwards believes that puppets are intrinsically exaggerated, and that when a black character’s features are pronounced, this produces a stereotype. It was easy not to give him any kind of special voice or accent, he told me, a bigger problem was appearance. In the end, since the puppet is Asian rather than black African, its features, apart from skin colour, are Caucasian, and Edwards could take an existing puppet and over-paint it (Fig. 82). This may seem like avoiding the issue, but for Edwards it is a lesser of evils. The presentation of shows in increasingly mixed ethnic communities gives these concerns real purchase. The lens of popular culture still makes visible the received differences more than the received similarities between ethnic groups. Popular puppetry is a yet more powerful lens in this respect.



Fig.82 Glyn Edwards with Health and Safety Officer and Punch (from *Daily Mail* website, accessed 21 March 2009)<sup>23</sup>

Whilst most Punch performers try to eradicate stereotyping, there are recalcitrant exceptions. As we have seen, Pete Maggs has a black cannibal puppet (Fig.31) which



carries the markers of the racialised, and ‘savage’, *other*: a bone through his nose, and a cooking pot in which he puts the baby. Maggs’ show, driven as it is by a sense of arbitrariness, implicitly allies the black man with disorder, chaos and violence. Other performers, though trying harder to soften the racial caricature, use old puppets which carry the racial markers of a less enlightened time, and when Codman’s puppet appears singing ‘The Camptown Races’, an earlier set of relations is immediately invoked (Fig. 83).

Performers tell me that audiences accept these representations. David Wilde happily uses a black character, Charlie Cheesecake, and I asked him if he had ever had any complaints. He told me that he hadn’t, indeed he was once congratulated by a black audience member for showing a black character. Maggs told me he had never received any complaints. Chandler believes that often the weight or charm of the performer’s personality will persuade an audience to accept otherwise questionable things. It may also be that audiences feel unable to object to these stereotypes. In outdoor spaces if an audience member objects, it is easier for them to walk away than to stop and complain. It is very hard to form a picture of how these characters are received.



Fig. 83 Ron Codman’s Jim Crow puppet

## **Judy**

Just as more nuanced racial relations needed to be taken into account by performers, so the changing position of women has problematised the representation of Judy in the show. But Judy cannot be so easily dealt with; she cannot be gotten rid of without fundamentally altering Punch's motives. If we are to accept that the violent relations between Punch and Judy emerged from '[...] a tradition in early modern plebeian culture that [...] regularly depicted marital conflict as arising from female challenges to the 'natural' patriarchal order' (Crone 2006: 1059), and that Punch resolves these challenges by killing his wife, then the show has inherited a picture of marital relations which, however satirically intended, relies on the objectification of Judy. In her harassing demands to look after the baby, her sexual reluctance, her striking the first blow and indeed her ugliness, Judy is a gorgon constructed by men. In response to this, Punch is a wheedling child, unable to take adult responsibility as it is envisaged in more recent conceptions of marriages of equality. Whilst this essentially nineteenth century picture of marriage may have held sway for a considerable time, the relative liberation of women with the easing of divorce laws, growing economic independence, smaller family size and the acceptance of women as sexualised in their own right, has considerably altered lived experience. This presents challenges for performers.<sup>24</sup>

In early versions of the show Punch's sexual needs found fulfilment outside of the marriage. In Piccini's show there is a character called Pretty Polly who appears and '[...] jigs backwards and forwards and sideways' with Punch immediately after he has killed Judy (Collier 2002 [1828]: 115). She features heavily in Birtwistle's adult opera where she is a central driving force behind Punch's killing of Judy. In becoming preponderantly a children's show, she ceased to have a role. When sexuality became an acknowledged part of marriage as it has in the last few decades, performers have had to think about how to deal with it.

Practitioners approach this situation in a variety of ways. Many make the relationship quite comical. Clarke and Edwards, among others, exploit the potential embarrassment of the kiss. Judy insists that she will only kiss Punch, as he wishes, if the children do not laugh, which of course they do. The kiss is highly comicalised, with a great deal of rolling about and Punch gleefully pronouncing, 'Kissy, kissy,



kissy'. Often Judy will then say, 'you're worse than the milkman', or some more topical figure. Mark Poulton referred to the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, when he was discovered to be having an affair with one of his assistants, and for some time after. Geoff Felix still mentions England footballer Wayne Rooney in this capacity (in the early 2000s Rooney had gained a reputation in the press for liking older women). When Punch hits Judy, Clarke, Poulton, and others, have her remark, 'My mother warned me I should never have married you'.

Some performers more readily acknowledge a shift in the balance of power, giving Judy more sexual confidence. Burnett and Poulton comically hint at Judy's sexual awareness. At one point in both shows she tells Punch to lie face down on the playboard to take his 'punishment' after he has hit her. She tells him to lift his bottom, 'higher', and 'higher', and says to the audience, 'what a little beauty, I'm going to smack it'. Punch becomes both sexual object and naughty infant. Poulton makes a less ambiguous sexual reference when he has Judy kiss Punch's bottom, and say to the audience, 'That was nice, but we mustn't go there'. There is only so far performers can go within the confines of a role in which Judy is essentially Mother and in a form that is for children. The issue of whether Judy is sexually active raises questions about the show's reliance on earlier models of femininity - models in which as Richard Hoggart puts it,

[...] a working-class mother will age early [...] at thirty, after having two or three children, she will have lost most of her sexual attraction; [...] between thirty-five and forty she rapidly becomes the shapeless figure the family knows as 'our mam' (cited in Brooke 2001: 787).

The authority this figure had within the household was easily recognised by an earlier generation, and it accounted to a large degree for Punch's wish to be elsewhere. It was also the staple of much British popular culture. In recent decades the mother's role, identity and self-identity have radically altered; as a result, the role of Judy is coming under scrutiny. Poulton's sexualising of Judy in this way may be because he is a younger performer.

Other performers negotiate the objectification of Judy by theatricalising her, by turning her into a pantomime Dame. For some, this means having a masculine

persona 'offstage' when she calls 'up' to Punch, but adopting a feminine one in 'public' when she sees the audience. This is often very funny, especially as s/he can switch in and out of this persona at will. But it sidesteps the issue. One or two performers tackle the problem head-on. Chandler gives his Judy an independent life outside the domestic confines: when she leaves the house, she might go to the pub or to see her friends. She is an independent woman; unlike in nearly all the other shows I have seen, she does not rely on Punch to call her away from some domestic task such as cooking or changing the baby, but appears of her own accord. We see her side of things as she tells the audience that she is having a miserable time because she is married, 'to a man', 'a man who is lazy; he does no washing up, he does no cleaning, he does nothing in the house; all he does all day is to sit in an armchair watching the football on the telly and drinking beer.' She then might ask the children, 'Your dad's not like that, is he?' I have seen this get a loud ripple of recognition from the children, and a stronger one from the mothers. Chandler believes the treatment of Judy and any ethnic characters is not a theoretical question, 'What you do needs to be appropriate to the times, to the general cultural conditions and to the particular audience and frame' he tells me.<sup>25</sup> He believes it is appropriate for Judy to drive the narrative, to fetch the policeman, to be the one to reintegrate Punch and to round up the show.

A similar solution is sought by Katey Wilde (Professor Peanuts), one of the few female performers working today. She is in her mid 30s and is Glyn and Mary Edwards' daughter. I interviewed her in the Edwards' sitting room after a performance. She performs mostly to young children and the show has a quietness of tone which she considers appropriate for them. The booth is designed to appeal to young children, too, it is brightly coloured and decorated with sun and moon and stars, each with a smiling face. There is very little violent knockabout and a lot of simple hiding routines. Punch does not kill Judy; they have a comic fight (in which she uses a wooden spoon and the puppets are not hit), after which she fetches the Policeman. The baby is dropped accidentally by Punch as she tries to give it to him to look after. Judy is a far more contemporary character than usual. Rather than the traditional mob cap, she has glamorous red hair with a pair of sunglasses stuck into it (Fig. 84). She wears a purple bolero and a fashionable dress. Despite using the same basic head shape as the Punch puppet, she is painted to look like an attractive young mother. She has the lifestyle markers of a contemporary woman, too. When Punch

calls her up she tells him she is in the middle of reading *Heat Magazine*. She leaves the baby with Punch so that she can go to the gym. She threatens to expose their domestic problems on *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, a daytime television programme which offers a diet of sensationalist, domestic strife.



Fig. 84 Katey Wilde's Judy puppet

Edwards had encouraged his daughter to make Judy a modern woman. He explained to me that he wanted to find ways of moving the show away from its association with nineteenth century gender relations. A conversation I had with his daughter made me wonder if this was possible. She told me that as a woman she identifies as much with Judy as with Punch and wanted to make Judy central and 'real'. She admitted that she was finding this difficult. Knowing that I was an actor, she asked me before the show if I could give her any advice on how to sustain this portrayal of Judy since she found that at a certain point in the show her Judy reverts to a 'theatrical type'. I was unable to help her, and it may be because the function of Judy is structurally embedded in the narrative: her dramatic function, as with nearly all the other characters, consists in her being an obstacle to Punch's self-gratification.

Edwards more than perhaps any other practitioner working within the traditional frame has sought to address the ethical anomalies of the show and to counter criticisms which are based upon these. He has encouraged other performers to answer these criticisms by producing shows which are intelligent, sharp, vital, committed,

innovative and timely. He describes his endeavours as trying to strip the layers of dirt off an old oil painting to reveal the bright picture beneath. Three lines of thinking emerge from this analogy. Firstly, as we have seen, what is revealed may be immovable dramaturgical structures, namely the kinds of rigid gender relations which the show originally sought to satirise. Secondly, holding on to those structures produces controversies which performers use to fuel their own libertarian stances. And thirdly, the current cultural location of the show evidenced by where it is often performed (in theme parks, museums, country fairs and so on), points to a nostalgic appeal which may rely on the very dirt which is being scraped from it.

It needs stating that Edwards has expressed some disagreement with me in my suggestion that elements of the show are structurally embedded to the degree that they put limits on how much it can change.

### **New dramaturgies**

In seeking to retain the iconoclastic energy of Punch whilst jettisoning what some see as the structurally embedded inequity of the figure expressed in the violence and the treatment of the *other*, some puppeteers have tried to create new narratives and forms. Most famously, in the 1920s and 30s, Walter Wilkinson got rid of the two central characters and the violence in his 'Peep Show'. (Despite the intention to change the show, Punch performers thanked him for effectively reviving the interest in their own tradition [see Turner, 2007: 4].) For 20 years until 2005, Nick Palmer toured *The Punk and Judy Show* to festivals and street theatre events in Britain and Europe. The anarchic figure of Punch was easy to translate into an aggressive punk, but Palmer made Judy a dominant figure and the baby more 'independent' which he suggests made the violence less of a problem. The show was done as a table-top form using rod puppets. Palmer says it was generally embraced by Punch and Judy performers, largely because of its energetic irreverance.<sup>26</sup> Palmer and Wilkinson in their different ways addressed the elements of the show with which they were least comfortable: for Wilkinson, the violence, for Palmer the treatment of women.

Edwards made his own attempt at seeing what would happen if the show were to be updated in his *Punch and Judy Episode 2: Attack of the Clowns*.<sup>27</sup> This was an indoor

theatre show which Edwards performed with Martin Bridle and Josh Darcy and which was devised in collaboration with iconoclastic theatre director Ken Campbell. Edwards had asked the Arts Council if they would fund a Punch project, they agreed but only if it could be shown to be 'innovative'.<sup>28</sup> Edwards, thinking off the top of his head, as he told me, came up with the idea of using Campbell and set about selling the idea to both parties.

The show was an attempt 'to see what might have happened to the show if it had not gone into the nursery'.<sup>29</sup> The programme announced, 'The living tradition lives on to be - once more - not suitable for children'. The staging consisted of two booths, Bridle's and Edwards', and a table at which was a large ventriloquist puppet in the form of a brown bear, Edgar McBear, operated by Darcy, Campbell's long-time collaborator. In Part One, McBear is given a brief, fictionalised 'history' of the show. He critiques the piece with the intention of updating it to the twenty-first century; the new version to be played in Part Two. Any opportunity to make elements more 'meaningful' to a modern audience is grasped, so that, for example, Pretty Polly is changed to Kylie Minogue; Judy does not go out to do some domestic task, but secretly to have 'carnal knowledge' of another puppet; the Hangman is replaced by Osama Bin Laden who blows himself up as he demonstrates his suicide bomb to Punch; Punch is found to be unable to sustain an erection and Judy has to be artificially impregnated.

Whilst much of the surface of the show is altered, those aspects which are retained tell us something about the tenacity of some of the embedded tropes and structures. The swazzle is kept because, we are told, it is 'essential'; Judy remains a nagging wife, although, because she is 'an awful old trout', she has a make-over and emerges looking like the model, Jordan. This does not prevent her being killed by Punch. There are two oriental karate fighters, recalling the Chinese jugglers. The phallic drive of Punch is evident both in his desire for a younger partner and, most graphically when he is put in the sausage machine. A giant golden penis and testicles emerge, to the accompanying comment, 'There's a part of him that won't lie down'. In retrieving the show from its association with juvenile entertainment, this reading reveals it to be at root what Leach suggests it always was, '[...] the battle of the sexes as experienced in Punch's fantasy' (1985: 170).<sup>30</sup>

Whilst at the time there was some talk of reviving the show, its relatively large practical and economic requirements have made this unfeasible. The failure to overcome these difficulties may point to larger questions about the appetite (amongst performers and audiences) for such an innovating project, and by implication, point to their appetite for the familiar.

In the last three chapters I have looked at the relationship between the individual performer and the tradition, and have examined how recent biographical experience has contrasted with that of the beach uncle and swatchel omi performers and how that has impacted on material and dramaturgical performance decisions. I have suggested that the individuation expressed in these decisions has not affected the fundamental narrative of the show, nor its dependence on an assumed underlying set of relations. I have suggested also that these relations may be outmoded and that this problematises the show for some audiences and for some performers. In the next chapters I turn the lens around and explore how the tenacity of perceptions of the show allows the form to find a home in some contexts and resistances in others. I will go on to examine how performers use these resistances as a way of keeping the form on the agenda.

## Notes

1 1993: 77

2 Laurence Kominz further explicates the difference between Western and Eastern puppetry traditions in his discussion of *bunraku* (1990). He distinguishes the Judeo-Christian from the Buddhist and Shinto traditions which '[...] teach that inanimate objects, "grass rocks and trees", have spirits and may partake of the divine. Puppets and masks used in festivals and religious ritual dances are sacred. They confer temporary divinity upon heir human users, the opposite of the Western situation in which the human magician gives a soul to a lifeless puppet' (66).

3 Conversation with Mark Poulton, 24 July 2008.

4 Conversation with Edwards, 27 June 2009

5 Conversation with Brian Davey, 10 July 2007.

6 For clear evidence of this, see the Papernose Woodensconce (Robert Brough) script of 1854 (Woodensconce, 2001 [1854]). This contains many of the elements found in today's show. Two of its main characters have disappeared, The Distinguished Foreigner and Dog Toby, but most of the rest remain and are the basis of the modern show.

7 For an analysis of the historical development of the text see Byrom (1972).

8 The 'retrieval' of *awaji ningjo* puppetry offers a case somewhere between the continual production of Punch and Judy and the reconstruction of a form like Petrushka. Law's examination of this process throws some light on the uses of traditional puppetry (1997: 214-263).

9 Scottish puppeteer Gordon McCrea, rejecting the 'horrible vortex of the drama' (2000: 5), suggested that the form could be radically adapted for a variety of community groups; Zaloom's show contains many of the familiar gags and situations, but uses a gay couple instead of the usual heterosexual partnership; a broadcast of Hoyes' show was given on BBC Radio 3 in 2002 and transcribed in *Around the World with Mr Punch* (Edwards 2002).

10 Description by Glyn Edwards; personal communication, 1 June 2009.

11 Punchman Konrad Fredericks told me he believes this direct economic relationship authenticates the show (telephone conversation, 4 April 2008). Mark Poulton feels more motivated under these circumstances (in conversation, 15 December 2008).

12 The Piccini text of 1828 begins with a 'Prologue' to the audience (Collier: 95), and the Mowbray script of 1887 has Punch speaking to the audience (Byrom 1972: 42).

13 Conversation with Glyn Edwards, 2 December 2007.

14 Conversation with Clive Chandler, 28 October 2007.

15 Conversation with Clive Chandler, 28 October 2007.

16 Streets Alive Festival, Walsall town centre, 10-11 August 2007.

17 Performed at the PJF Covent Garden Festival, 30 September 2008.

18 Merseyside Maritime Museum, 6 February 2008.

19 The term *chav* it refers to a widespread culture of working-class young people, typified by a particular dress code, displays of ready cash, in the form of gold chains and rings, and a hedonistic lifestyle. This group is often demonised by the popular press, especially the right-wing press, and is associated with petty crime and 'anti-social' behaviour, car theft, public drunkenness, swearing in public and so on. They are a cause of fear amongst some communities, a fear exacerbated by their media representations.

20 See Metin And (1975: 71) for a discussion of the character of the Jew in Karagöz. And is disturbingly ambivalent about the accuracy of this caricature. Evidence that the ethnic minorities in Karagöz are still caricatured came at a discussion at an event called *The Parliament of Fools*, part of the Dynamics Festival at the Midland Arts Centre on 4 June 2007. A short demonstration of a Karagöz show was given by performers from Turkey, followed by some discussion of the portrayal of minorities. The performers argued that to caricature them is to signal their acceptance within Turkish society.

21 Most ethnic representations - Jim Crow and the Chinese Jugglers - are taken from stage representations, either 'derived from the heritage of minstrelsy' (Fisler, 2005: i), or, via a similar route, taken from the tradition of pantomime, where the exotic figures as a land of make-believe, as in *Aladdin*.

22 Conversation with Glyn Edwards, 2 December 2007.

23 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-498009/Punch-Judy-man-introduces-the-idiotic-new-character-the-health-and-safety-officer.html> (accessed 20 July 2009) For Edwards' transcription of the episode, see Around the World With Mr. Punch, website; specifically, <http://www.punchandjudyworld.org/wwfbloggem/index.php?itemid=538catid=3#more> (Accessed 20 July 2009).

24 Stephen Brooke (2001) locates many of these changes in the immediate post-war period.

25 Conversation with Clive Chandler, 10 August 2007.

26 Conversation with Nick Palmer, 11 August 2007.

27 *Attack of the Clowns* was first performed at The Little Angel Theatre in London on 2 October 2004; it was then shown at the Midlands Arts Centre on 6 and 7 October 2004. It was shown again at the MAC on 3 and 4 June 2005.

28 Conversation with Glyn Edwards, 2 December 2007.

29 Conversation with Glyn Edwards, 2 December 2007.

30 In fairness, Edwards told me that in putting the show together, he and Bridle deliberately decided to bring out the phallic 'sub-text' in response to Leach's drawing attention to it.



## Chapter Six: Contexts and negotiations

*The case of tradition is complicated [...] because appeals to traditional symbols or practices can themselves be reflexively organised and are then part of the internally referential set of social relations rather than standing opposed to it. The question of whether tradition can be 'reinvented' in settings which have become thoroughly post-traditional has to be understood in these terms.*

Anthony Giddens<sup>1</sup>

So far I have been concerned with the production of the tradition. I now begin to consider the second major strand in this thesis: reception. In this chapter I am interested in the changes in the cultural and geographic location of the show which have occurred since Leach's research was conducted and how those changes signal different functions of the show and different structures of authority surrounding it. Till now I have talked about performers as if they were more or less autonomous, making biographically informed decisions about what and how they perform and organizing themselves in the light of their own perceptions of tradition and their own wishes for its future. Now we see how those decisions are negotiated in the world, and how the world inflects them.

Discussions about the impact of context on the meaning of a performance have been a central concern of folklore theorists (see Baumann and Briggs 1990; Ben-Amos, 1971 and Young 1985). Katherine Young is especially concerned with recognising the determining influence of context whilst also recognising the limits which need to be put on what is considered to have influence. To this end she distinguishes 'context' from 'surround' (Young 1985: 116-117), surround being what merely occupies the same space without determining the event. She cites Barbara Smith in suggesting that the event is the 'center of a causal nexus' (ibid: 118); performance events do not occur randomly, but are 'occasioned' by a set of conditions. The event, in this case the performance of a Punch and Judy show, occurs at a particular time and place through a particular set of conditions which are its context. Context, then, need not be local. It can, for example, be the school curriculum which provides the impulse for a performance in a school or on a museum visit; or it can be a festival devised by performers and local businesses to celebrate 'Englishness' as a means to bring footfall to a town centre; or it can be the vision of a beach manager that a beach

*should* have a Punch show. Context is, as Young suggests, ‘constitutive’ (ibid). In this chapter I am interested in how context currently constitutes performance.

I will argue that this reveals itself on two connected levels. Firstly in terms of location: new locations have emerged in recent decades and these impact on the reading of performances. Secondly, in an area more difficult to get at, it reveals itself in the autonomy, or otherwise, of performers. At its crudest, this is evident in the difference between the bottled show with its direct relationship with its employers (who were at the same time its audience), and the contracted show where the relationship might be quite distant. In the former, the puppeteer could exercise some degree of direct control, deciding when to pack up and go, or whether to bother performing at all. In the latter, the performer is not always aware of the agendas at play; the employer is at a remove.

Pete Maggs expressed this difference in clear terms when he said to me,

‘[When you are bottling] you haven't got anyone sitting in judgement. If you blow it on the beach, you won't take your money, that's it. If you blow it at a [booked] gig you've got a committee that are gonna sit and judge, and say, “Ooh, he wasn't very good was he?” And that's your lot on that one. I've blown a few, I'm sure I'm not alone in this. You go to places where you're just the wrong person on the wrong day, that's all there is to it.’<sup>2</sup>

Of course, it must be remembered that in the bottled show the performer is dependent on the audience putting money in the hat, and to that degree, he lacks autonomy. The history of the show is the history of performers struggling on the street or adapting to the interior.

Amongst performers, there is a degree of ambivalence towards the bottled show. Like Pete Maggs and Konrad Fredericks, many regret the passing of the freedom implicit in being your own boss, hearing ‘the clink of coins’ in the bag. As one put it to me, ‘a cheque has no sound’. At the same time, they like the security of a bank account. With this goes the need to employ accountants, to plan, to think further ahead. They are aware that there is loss and gain on both sides. Performers for the most part welcome the work opportunities this new range of contexts offers. Some, however, seek to shift the agenda in their own direction by instituting festivals of their own. Control is a central issue in all of this. Paradoxically, perhaps, the very portability of

the show, whilst accounting for its survival, makes it susceptible to 'issues of social power' (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 73).

The distinction between contracted and bottled is an instance of a larger process of disjunction which plays out in the cultural location of the show. Performances are employed increasingly to fulfill or suggest some constructed notion of, for example, Englishness or the bucolic which have very little to do with actual history but which seek to satisfy a sentimental need encouraged by commercial, heritage and municipal interests for a variety of reasons. There is nothing new in Punch referring to its history - Mayhew's Punchman calls his show an 'ancient novelty' (1949 [1851]: 437) - what is new is the degree to which the past is arbitrarily summoned up. Where, for example, performers were once answerable to an immediate audience, more and more they are answerable to the demands of intermediaries. These are town-centre managers and theme park designers who may have agendas which locally coincide with those of the performers, but which globally situate the performance in a vision of the past which significantly modifies the reading of the show. This is part of a pattern of commodification which has become increasingly pervasive and sophisticated since Leach's research was carried out. Intimately connected with this agenda-setting and helping to effect it is the increasing interiorisation of public space, where the shopping mall, the high street and even the beach become, to use Guy Debord's word, 'spectacularised' (1973) (see Reeve 1994, 1996 and Debord 1973), and to use Giddens's, 'phantasmagoric' (1991: 244). It is the world of what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'the stroller', the epitome of whose natural environment is the shopping mall; a site of '[...] mis-meetings, of encounters guaranteed to be episodic, of the present prised off from the past and the future, of surfaces glossing over surfaces' (1996: 27-28). It is the fictive realm of post-modernity.

Having acknowledged these general trends, it is important also to point out that on the ground the picture is more complex, less conscious and more susceptible to the whims and interests of individual bookers and performers than this theoretical analysis would suggest. By looking at a variety of contexts, during the course of the chapter I will attempt to locate the performer in this complex web of interests.

### **From Mayhew to the Millennium Dome via Tony Hancock**

*[...] the notion of 'survival' as something that has no real function in the present cultural context, misses the point that both nostalgia and self-conscious deployment of the past are, indeed, functional in the present.*

Joan Gross<sup>3</sup>

Before examining particular performance contexts, I would like briefly to mention two or three instances which reveal the historical process of disjunction from the immediate to the distanced. In Chapter One, I detailed the way the show was assimilated into a discursive formation which saw it emerging at a pivotal point in class constructions. I examined how that played out through Mayhew's positioning of the Punchman and how that reflected the constructions of identity to which performers were subject. I would like now to consider two later examples which show how those relationships developed.

The first set of class relations is evident a little over 100 years after Mayhew in Tony Hancock's 1963 film, *The Punch and Judy Man*, directed by Jeremy Summers. These relations at this stage in the history of the form have become fractious, fragile and contingent. This is in part due to the anomie of the central character, but more importantly, it is due to a growing sense that the structures which sustain the hegemony are in fact sham. The film is set in a small English sea-side resort, Piltdown. Clear lines of demarcation are drawn between the beach-workers - beach photographer, sand-sculptor and Punchman - and the petit-bourgeois town-hall authorities. They are visible in the segregation of the public bar and the lounge bar, and, more insidiously, in the control of the town's historiography.

The Council wants a gala to celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Seafront illuminations are installed, and a private evening function is arranged, presided over by the mayor. The local aristocrat, Lady Jane Caterham, is guest of honour. From the balcony of the hotel in which the private function is held, she makes a speech to the holiday-makers and local residents on the promenade below. This is a speech about the history of the town, its long association with the sea and the hardships of the 'fisherfolk' her discourse assumes the crowd to be, but which plainly they are not. The doublethink that this evocation of a disappeared England instances is evident again when Hancock's show is introduced to the invited guests. The MC announces, 'Just to show

you how things used to be, we turn back the clock for the Punch and Judy man'. The show is enrolled to sustain a fiction of collapsed time; it is at the same moment contemporary and historical. The Punchman's function is to mediate between the present and the past in the commercial interests of the town council, and on their terms. For Hancock this is unendurable and he leaves town.

The film contains the exaggerations of satire, but it exposes the genuine anxieties of the socially marginalised and economically dependent performer. It might be thought of as operating at a pivotal moment where those anxieties, in a larger sense, were about to be answered. The film was made in 1963, a year situated, as Philip Larkin memorably put it, 'Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban/And the Beatles' first LP' (1988: 167). The edifice, or some might say reassurance, of class was to be undermined with the explosion of working-class/popular culture and its exploitation in the mass-media.

The collapse of aesthetic certainty and the valorising of popular taste produced contingencies of style which Frederic Jameson called the 'cultural dominant' (1984: 55). It was no longer possible to conceive of a unifying aesthetic, but rather of a '[...] force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses - what Raymond Williams has usefully termed 'residual' and 'emergent' forms of cultural production - must make their way' (ibid: 57). The residual makes its way in a variety of places, principally through constructed or appropriated sites of nostalgia. We may disagree with Jameson's overarching description, but the central point remains the same.<sup>4</sup> The loss of certainty makes of the past an arbitrary reservoir of appropriable images and performers must negotiate their place amongst this.

The Millennium Dome in which the Punch and Judy show was one of the exhibits offers a picture of what that negotiation later became. The Dome was intended to be a living compendium of what it was to be British at the end of the second millennium. I performed some street theatre there and I got to know it quite well. I experienced it as a confused repository of half-conceived ideas realised on a grand scale. A huge tent-like structure at the side of the Thames, it contained various nebulous 'Zones' - *Religion, Money, Transport, The Body*. One of them represented the British seaside. Bathed in a permanent artificial sunshine where the shadows never lengthened, performers' booths, which they brought with them, were set up on a shingle beach.

There were deckchairs and a row of beach huts. The sound of waves and seagulls was broadcast through loud-speakers. Parties of school-children would be ushered in only to be taken out a few minutes later to see another *Zone*. This made doing shows of any length quite difficult. The experience of seeing the show was unlike what might happen at a real beach. Without a real sea to wash them, the pebbles grew filthier with the detritus of dropped crusts and sweets as the year went by.<sup>5</sup>

Gradually, however, as performers became familiar with the environment, they were able to exercise some control. Initially they would disconnect the wires to the loud-speakers, but later would persuade the technicians to lower the volume. They would negotiate with audiences to stay for entire shows. They made some headway into making the space their own.

The relationship with their employers remained very distant. Des Turner, president of the PJF, acted as agent. By a process of discrete phone calls and soundings-out, he found the best performers and organised the dates. Puppeteers would turn up, sign in and start work. They had no contact with the people who had considered using Punch and Judy appropriate. Performers were happy to work there, though, because the money was good and the environment was safe and dry.

In the shift from the street to the interior to the beach to the interior beach, the show has increasingly been used to recall some other, increasingly absent, increasingly desired, experience. At the same time, the shows are, of course, actual experience. In the rest of the chapter I examine the tension between these levels of experience as it is played out in a variety of contemporary contexts.

### **The beach**

Although performances are more likely to be seen inland, at shopping centers, festivals, parties and theme parks, the beach retains a considerable associative weight in the minds of audiences and commentators. So much so that at times in the press the absence of the show at the beach is taken to indicate the death of the show altogether. A recent article about Mark Poulton in *The Independent on Sunday* carried the headline, 'Meet the last of Britain's Punch and Judy men'.<sup>6</sup> Even where, as with the Dome, shows are performed away from the seaside, they are sometimes

contextualised within an artificial 'seaside' setting. Glyn Edwards and Katey Wilde have performed a series of shows at a country house hotel which had a space which had been designed to look like a beach, with beach huts, real sand, a beach-bar and a beach-volleyball court. I went with Clive Chandler to a children's party in Warwickshire which had a seaside theme, complete with fish and chips in newspapers, helium filled 'lobsters' and a 'bouncy' sand-castle (Fig. 85).



Fig. 85 Clive Chandler's booth at seaside themed children's party

This strong associative weight bears on the beach itself: the show is often employed to reinforce a sense of 'the seaside' at the seaside. This is evident in both the change in the pattern of frequency of shows at any one beach location and in the relations between performers and employers.

Leach (1985: 148-149) conducted a survey of Punch and Judy beach shows in 1979. Of the 125 'large and small seaside resorts' he looked at, '[...] no fewer than 43 had some sort of show'. In the published list, 10 had performers working at the same beach for more than a decade, two for over 30 years. Although the survey asks how long individual performers had been working at particular resorts rather than how many years performances had been taking place at those resorts, it is clear that there was a pattern of continuous performance (of five years or more) in at least 15 of them. I attempted the same survey by talking to performers and, wherever possible, to beach-managers or whoever was responsible for employing the performers. I did not contact resorts not on the list, assuming, based on conversations with performers, that resorts which had not had continuous performances were unlikely in the intervening

years to have adopted them, at least in any significant numbers. Although the survey was by no means exhaustive, two interesting findings came from it.

I discovered that there are probably no more than five or six beaches in England and Wales which have shows that in any sense can be called 'permanent'. The Codmans still regularly perform at Llandudno; John Poulson is a regular at Southwold; Miraiker and Peter Batty have a pitch at Clacton-on-Sea (they use this up to three times a week during the summer, but not when other more lucrative bookings come in). Gary Wilson has a contract to do three shows a week in the summer at Western-Super-Mare. There is a regular, though not professional, performer at Swanage in Dorset and, a few miles along the coast, Mark Poulton in Weymouth. Poulton is probably the most 'full-time' beach performer. He does two or three shows a day, weather permitting, seven days a week, from late May to mid-September.

The other finding was more impressionistic. It was often difficult to discover who was responsible for agreeing to performers to work on the beach. Contacting local authorities often involves a web of relationships; in the larger authorities this web can be very complex. As well as this, a number of authorities have merged and one single local authority might be responsible for a very large area, covering several beaches. I contacted several council-run tourist and information centers; whilst these were usually friendly, most were uncertain about when, or in fact whether, their resorts had Punch and Judy shows. There was a sense in which performers, once seemingly a highly visible part of the landscape, have disappeared from the community. When they do appear, they are usually imported.

Even when a performer is as visible and permanent as Mark Poulton, the relationship with the town and his position within it is highly contingent. Decisions about his livelihood are taken by authorities with whom he has no direct contact and who are based some miles away. Weymouth has a beach manager, Kevin Good, with whom Poulton is on friendly terms; he says he can 'pop into his office' any time, and they 'speak the same language'. However, Good is responsible only for the day-to-day running of the beach: he organizes the deck chairs, making sure the beach traders (food vendors, the donkey-ride and *pedalo* proprietors and so on) carry out their business safely and within the bylaws. The bigger decisions are taken at a higher level. Jo Martin, the Tourist Officer, is Good's boss and she told me that a new



‘Business Plan’ was about to be agreed. This would affect the overall aesthetic of the beach and would be in line with the regional Tourist Board’s thinking which would be ‘implemented’ at County Hall level.<sup>7</sup> This new aesthetic might see the seafront redesigned as a Mediterranean café-style environment. Martin was not sure where Punch and Judy would fit into this. The decision to change the seafront is pressing because Weymouth will host the sailing events for the 2012 London Olympics. The impact on Poulton in the short term is anxiety about his future and in the longer term might mean a loss of livelihood. Despite their plans, the council has not thought it necessary to ask visitors how they regard the Punch and Judy show. Martin told me that its value ‘must be judged by Mark’s own findings. It must be worth him doing it or he wouldn’t continue’.

A similar dynamic of distanced bureaucratic decision making and individual powerlessness is evident in the story of Brian and Alison Davey’s decision to stop performing at Lyme Regis in the early 2000s. Like Poulton, they rented their pitch. The Council sent a representative to the beach to count the audience numbers, to calculate the summer’s takings on the basis of this and from this to work out how much to charge. However, as Alison explained to me, this was on a sunny day with a good crowd; they made a ‘good bottle’, the best that you could expect. Much of the rest of the summer the weather was bad and takings much smaller. The Council would not hear these arguments and raised the rent to an amount which made it unfeasible to perform.<sup>8</sup>

This kind of story is not uncommon and it echoes Leach’s findings in the 1980s when he suggested,

Most resorts regard the Punch and Judy man as an attraction, but far too many treat him with a lack of respect bordering on obstructionism. For instance, it seems absurd to charge the Punchman perhaps £50 or £100 for his pitch and yet provide him with no protection from vandals, supply him with no alternative wet weather pitch and offer him no storage facilities. The amount the Punchman pays to the corporation is so little in their terms that it can make no impact on their financing, whereas, particularly in a wet summer, it can be quite a sacrifice to the showman (1985: 150).

Writing in 1987, Martin and Su Bridle and Rod Burnett foresaw the decline of the beach show as a result of the ‘short term interests’ of local councils which were ‘[...] certainly not designed to attract the best professional performers who could, after all,

be working on a secure contract in holiday camps or perhaps turning their talents to other forms of income' (Bridle, Bridle and Burnett 1984: 9).

This is indeed what they did.

The pressures for change did not come solely from professional performers responding to treatment by local councils. The way the beaches were used was changing too. The fact that Weymouth retains a full-time performer may be due to its being, according to Jo Martin, one of the few resorts which still attract holiday makers for week-long stays. With the virtual ubiquity of the car, many visitors to resorts are day-trippers. Performers are aware that where once upon a time, if the weather was poor, visitors would have no choice but to stay at the seaside, possibly watching a show, now, at the first sign of rain, they will take to their cars and head inland to indoor attractions, or back home. Poulton believes people have become reliant on sometimes inaccurate weather forecasts and will plan their day around the likelihood of rain and not venture to the coast at all. This makes it very difficult to predict how many people will be at a beach and is probably a major reason for the decline of the permanent beach show.

Nonetheless, the beach retains a huge affective resonance amongst the British public. In their 1998 study of, '[...] the experience and perceptions of beach users [in England]', Sylvia M. Tunstall and Edmund C. Penning-Rowsell found that, '[despite its] decline in popularity since its heyday [between 1950 and 1974] when the annual holiday at the seaside was the norm [...] it can still be characterized as a "resilient" social construction'. Importantly for us, they found that,

Perhaps one of the important meanings of the beach visit is an experience which reconnects people with their past, with visits made in childhood and youth. The visit may provide an element of continuity in changing lives as people revisit places they have known in their childhood, with their own children and thereafter with grandchildren. Recalling the features that make up the beach, [...] is like re-reading the favourite book or reviewing the family photo album [...]. Visitors to the beaches studied, therefore, appear to seek the reassurance of the familiar rather than risk the speculation of the unknown. Habit and convenience also play a part. Nostalgia for past times and a desire to reconnect [with] them are factors that motivate the seaside visit (236).

This combination of affection, unpredictability, and mobility on the part of visitors,

has meant that seaside resorts have had to use whatever resources they could to attract customers. One very powerful way of doing this has been to call upon the beach's affective capital by creating galas and festivals which concentrate an array of nostalgic activities in a short space of time. Punch and Judy shows often feature in this.

One such event I visited was the Morecambe Heritage Gala (10 September 2006). Morecambe is a seaside resort on the Lancashire coast. It was once a thriving holiday destination but has had falling visitor numbers since the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> David Wright, the Festivals and Events Officer for the town, has made considerable efforts to reverse this trend. The Gala itself is one of a number of events he organizes to the same end. There has been a Fish and Chip Feast, an annual Guy Fawkes Celebration, a Sand Castle Festival and a Maritime Festival (Figs. 86 and 87), even a Hurdy Gurdy Festival. Some of these are one-offs, others have been running for several years.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 86 Local volunteers recreate a Regency 'press gang'; Lancaster Maritime Festival, 8 April 2007



Fig. 87 Street theatre company invoke the spirit of the past; Lancaster Maritime Festival

The Heritage Gala in 2006 included two Punchmen, David Wilde and Clive Chandler. They performed in a marquee, The Punch and Judy Palace, on a small green near the railway station. This was the station where holidaymakers from the big northern towns would once have disembarked for their annual break. Next to this was a sand sculptor, with sand tractored across the road from the beach. (The sand on the beach itself was imported from elsewhere as part of the town's sea-defence scheme.) 1940s buses ferried people up and down the promenade; there was a vintage-car rally around the town-centre and a spectacular fly-by of Second World War fighter-planes over the sea. As well as events which link in an unbroken chain with the past, other attractions which re-imagine or construct simulacra of the seaside were on view. A pierrot troupe, The Pierrotters, combined the costumes and white make-up of the traditional pierrots with the energy of rock and punk (Fig. 88); a 'Victorian Curiosity show', The Gaiety Engine, gently satirised the Victorian sideshow; and a street theatre show, The Bathing Belles, revived memories of the 1920s as two women in costumes of the period emerged from striped bathing huts to perform synchronised 'keep fit' manoeuvres on the pier. (The construction of historical simulacra is a consistent theme in recent British street theatre. Its location next to actual survivals of the past such as Punch and Judy raises questions about how that form negotiates its position as public-space theatre. This will be explored later in the chapter.) It was warm and sunny the day I went and there was a turnout of many thousands.



Fig. 88 Pierrotters' publicity shot, conjuring up a mixture of nostalgia and contemporary energy

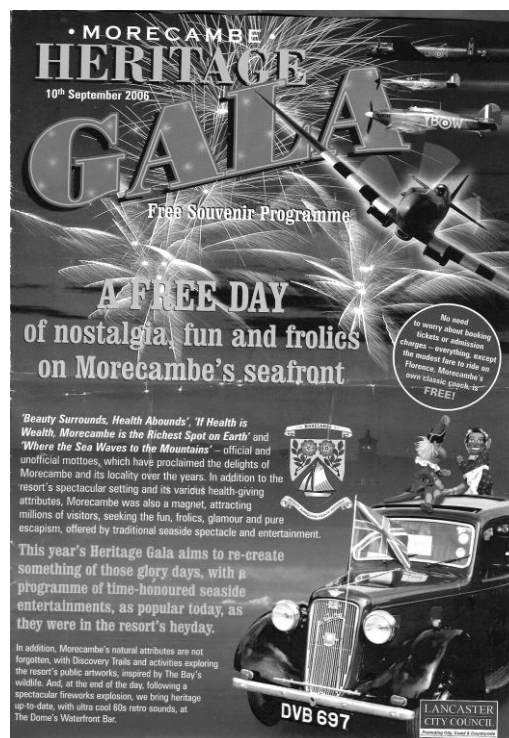


Fig. 89 Brochure for Morecambe's Heritage Gala 2006

A different set of economies is in place with these big events compared with the local and small scale continuities of the past. A temporary infrastructure of stages, marquees, toilets and PA systems has to be set up. Security barriers are put in place

and the event requires complex co-ordination. Brochures are printed (Fig. 89); performers are shipped in from all over the country. The local Punch and Judy man is somewhat side-lined in a park away from the main events, whilst Chandler and Wilde take centre-stage. The performers are paid a fee of several hundred pounds for the day.

### **Organizers**

It would be a mistake to assume that because these events are large-scale they are a cynical and corporate exploitation of public nostalgia. Sometimes they reflect the interests of particular driving individuals who believe themselves to be in touch with popular values. In the case of Morcambe, this is David Wright. Wright has a genuine interest in live popular entertainment, especially puppetry, and he believes that it is his role to encourage what he calls ‘market intervention’, using funding from small businesses to keep popular traditions alive. He works long hours to ally traditional forms with a sense of strong local identity in the minds of sponsors and audiences. (There is a degree of eccentricity about some of these figures. Wright, for instance, has not owned a television for 30 years and sincerely believes Lancaster is ahead of the world in having a sedan festival since, with the shortage of oil, he is sure the sedan will make a come-back.) Aberystwyth has its champion of Punch and Judy in the shape of the Town Clerk, Jim Griffiths. He has fund-raised and fought hard for the annual Punch and Judy Festival which ran from 2000 to 2006. It is only through a mixture of guile and dogged determination that these events take place. Funding is annually sought and this makes the events precarious.

Surprisingly, perhaps, unlike the ‘permanent’ beach sites, these municipally run sites of re-imagining often incorporate a greater sympathy with the interests and values of the performers. Chandler worked closely with Griffiths to design and decide what shows should take place in Aberystwyth. Wright has made it his job to find the best shows and not to rely on the local *Yellow Pages*. He found out about the College through Chandler and only ever used performers who were members. It is hard to know what the cultural influence on these figures is, but they work with an astonishing zeal to support popular forms and this seems to spring from a genuine belief in the value of ‘folk culture’. Perhaps, as canny operators with a budget to manage and a passion for their own communities, they look for quality in the

performers they employ. There is clearly also a commonality in their individualism and that of the best performers. It is in these sites that much of the energy for the survival of the form seems to lie.

### **Country fairs, steam rallies and heritage sites**

*When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning.*

Jean Baudrillard<sup>11</sup>

Although Leach (1985: 131-133) documented a shift in the 1950s and 60s from performers doing shows at beaches and for individuals at birthday parties to performers being employed by a range of more institutional authorities - local councils booking performers for several weeks in the park during the holidays, department stores booking a show at Christmas, shows being booked to promote commercial interests and so on - he does not document the use of shows in settings which deliberately evoke a sense of rural nostalgia. Since country fairs, National Trust properties and such events as steam rallies are now places where Punch and Judy performers find a lot of work, this suggests a change since Leach was researching. Glyn Edwards' experience of working through this period confirms this view. He believes that if there was an interest in heritage in the 1960s and 70s, it did not embrace Punch and Judy, and this was reflected in the bookings he was getting. Whilst he was taking bookings at museums and libraries, he was not getting bookings at National Trust properties or country fairs.<sup>12</sup>

Most commentators agree that the idyll of rural England was in large part an invention. Raymond Williams sees it as a response to the 'shock of change' of nineteenth century industrialism, '[...] understandably, but at the cost of misrepresenting the long and difficult history of actual rural society' (2001: 118).<sup>13</sup> Martin Weiner considers it a response to the failure of 'workshop England' at the end of the nineteenth century and a consequent retreat to a place '[...] less affected by modern forces [...] a repository of precious national values lacking in the urban and industrial society created by the nineteenth century', a place where 'Folklore, customs, crafts, music and dance all began to be "discovered" and popularized for an urban readership' (197: 200). Contemporary commentators occasionally remarked on the inauthenticity of the bucolic. *The Penny Illustrated Paper* of 21 August 1862

referred to Punch and Judy, along with other such attractions as ‘clown cricket, maypole dancing and brass bands’, at the great exhibition at Crystal Palace, as ‘pretendedly rustic’. More recently, the centrality of the rural idyll to the nation’s sense of self has been challenged. Peter Mandler argues that

A well-rounded assessment of English culture at this period would not put anywhere near its centre phenomena such as the folk-song revival or the staging of maypole dances in a few dozen villages; such things reflect the values of some *bien-pensant* Bohemians and would-be squires [...] Hardly any contemporaries would have recognised them as emblematic of the ‘national culture’, as claimed by the ‘Englishness’ literature (1997: 169).

Nonetheless, in the late twentieth century, the growth of country fairs and the like suggests that the countryside has become not only an important leisure destination, but also a repository of a certain kind of nostalgia. Country lanes and main highways to the Lake District and South West clog with traffic in the summer. Clearly, people are escaping the urban environment in search of *something* else. The popularity of television programmes which envisage an ideal rural or semi-rural past and the consequent popularity of the actual places where they are filmed with coach parties descending on them, attest to the desire to make the reassuring fiction of these programmes a reality.

Country fairs vary from the enormous county shows, such as the Royal Cornwall Show, attracting tens of thousands of people over a long bank-holiday weekend in June, to very small church fetes in little villages, perhaps attracting a hundred or so people and lasting a few hours. The larger events are highly organized and ticketed, whole fields are given over to car-parking. There may be vintage-car rallies, horse and dog shows, steam engine displays. There will be marquees with crafts and produce stalls which might attract stall-holders from around the county or even the region. The Punch booth will be one amongst a huge array of sights and sounds. The smaller fairs might have one or two marquees, often selling second hand bric-a-brac, home-made produce such as jams and cakes, and perhaps a small beer tent. There may be games for children, such as ‘hook-a-duck’ in which plastic ducks in paddling pools are lifted out on long poles, or ‘splat-the-rat’ where a soft toy rat or bean bag is released down a plastic pipe and hit with a mallet before it hits the ground. At one fair I visited, a prize was given to the person who could hammer the most nails into a



piece of wood in a given time. These games are make-shift and simple. The Punch and Judy show here is more visible and may be one of the main events. At any of the fairs, large or small, there is likely to be the pervasive smell of fried onions and beef-burgers. This has become the smell of festivity in Britain.

Punch and Judy may be enlisted to sustain a construction of the rural since it is one of the very few entertainments that signals the vernacular. As such, it can be seen alongside Morris dancing and, at Easter, maypole dancing. However, unlike many of the festivals and fairs which purport to celebrate calendrical events often tied to the agricultural year (see Roud 2006), Punch, as an urban product has no calendrical significance, and is not part of the rural heritage as is hinted at in these fairs. It may be seen as a product of what Giddens calls the post-traditional shift to ‘empty time’ (1991: 16) where festivities are no longer connected with local events, notably harvest, and where, with the invention of the mechanical clock, time and space became separable. The easy accessibility of these events means that they are often sustained by visitors who have no connection with the immediate locale at all. The festivals themselves are often of uncertain or even dubious heritage. Where they claim connection to ancient tradition, this connection is often an interrupted one.



Fig. 90 Medieval style musicians at the Galmpton Gooseberry Pie Fair, 30 June 2007

The Galmpton Gooseberry Pie Fair in South Devon, although it has been running only since 1994, has all the markers of a much older event, including Morris dancers, the ‘tradition’ of processing the pie and medieval-style street musicians (Fig. 90). The village centre is closed to traffic and stalls are set up along the main road. The

pub car park is the centre of activities. Here a brass band plays, the 'giant pie' is cut up, hot-dogs and burgers are sold, Morris dancers perform and an Elvis impersonator is to be seen singing to the enthusiastic cheers of the crowd (Fig. 91). On the day I visited, the weather was good and the streets were thronging. Brian and Alison Davey set up their booth at a small road junction in the middle of the village.



Fig. 91 Elvis Presley imitator at the Galampton Gooseberry Pie Fair, 2007

The Downton Cuckoo Fair near Salisbury in Wiltshire (Fig. 92) is a much larger event. It takes place on the first Saturday in May and, according to its brochure, marks the beginning of spring. It has been running since 1980, although it revives a supposedly much older festival which was interrupted at the beginning of the Great War.



Fig. 92 Crowds at Downton Cuckoo Fair 2008



Fig. 93 Morris dancers at Downton Cuckoo Fair 2008

It too has Morris dancers (Fig. 93) as well as a Maypole and the coronation of a ‘Cuckoo Princess’. Again, the main road is closed to traffic and stalls are set up along it. There is also a large field with a bouncy castle and several small fairground rides. Pete Maggs performs under a tree in this field (Fig. 94). Nearby there is a ‘hog-roast’. A small stage is set up next to the main street and various local bands - pop and folk - perform throughout the day. It would be hard to overestimate the popularity of these events. In 2003 Downton attracted 15,000 visitors, on the day I went it was difficult to move.<sup>14</sup>



Fig. 94 Pete Maggs' booth at Downton Cuckoo Fair 2008

More often to be found are events on a smaller scale than either of these, and these sometimes show a more immediate connection with local life, since one of the purposes of these fairs is the judging of local horticultural and handicrafts produce. There is often fierce competition amongst regular competitors for the best runner-beans or Chrysanthemums, the best lemon-curd or walnut cake, the best photograph or painting on a given theme. The fairs have a local organizing committee and often a strict set of rules for entrants. These can be important events in the village year and help to sustain a community's identity. Punch and Judy and other entertainments are brought in not consciously to sustain an historical fiction, but simply to provide entertainment that feels 'appropriate' to the organizers. At the 'Stoke Fleming Horticultural and Sports Society 131<sup>st</sup> Annual Exhibition and Sports' (27 August 2007), for example, Brian and Alison Davey performed alongside a local trad jazz band (Fig. 95).



Fig. 95 Band and visitors, 'Stoke Fleming 131<sup>st</sup> Annual Exhibition and Sports'

By contrast, some small-scale events seem deliberately to mimic the tradition of the village fete. In August 2007, I visited one at St Agnes in Cornwall where Reg Payne performed. Entitled 'Pimms in the Park', this was its second year. It took place on the local recreation ground. Unlike the fair at Stoke Fleming, it signally lacked organization and a confident sense of identity. There were two or three marquees, a tent selling Pimms and beer, a police car for children to clamber over and play the siren and a marquee for Payne and a magician. It was clear from talking to a number of the visitors that they had either traveled from some distance or had second homes in the village and most of the year lived in London. The organizers seem to have

brought with them their sense of what a country fair *should* consist of.

The historical eclecticism of these fairs is echoed in the popular confusion over what constitutes the historical. The BBC website about The Cuckoo Fair suggests that it, '[...] has everything you would expect from a medieval fayre: dancing around the maypole; *line dancing*; street performers; Morris dancers [...]' (my italics).<sup>15</sup>

The picture that emerges is one in which a vague idea of what constitutes the rural is a frame upon which are hung a variety of quasi-historical, actual-historical, and quasi- and actual-vernacular, forms. Punch and Judy is easily appropriated into this vague scheme. Performers are not required to adapt their shows in any way to meet any clearly defined rhetoric of the countryside or the past. It must be acknowledged that recreations of an authentic sense of history are not central in the agenda of these fairs. The vague correspondence they have to the past is in truth an excuse to bring people together for a day out in a place which affords some reassurance of continuity. The 'lack' that some commentators suggest this appetite for reassurance points to may not even be consciously felt (see Bennett 1996).

A more calculated rhetoric of the past is to be found in the work of such organizations as The National Trust and the Campaign for the Preservation of Rural England. The growth of these organizations since the Second World War suggests a change in attitude towards the countryside which Peter Mandler (1997) believes was a minority way of looking at it prior to that, when,

While appreciative of scenic beauty and its recreational potential, the mass audience was distinctly hostile to the traditional rural social fabric which was thought unpleasantly feudal and anachronistic; the idea was not to preserve the countryside, but to break it up and/or put it to good use (173).

In recent decades, The National Trust in particular has become more visible, and both organizations have positioned themselves centre-stage in how to manage perceptions of the countryside and of (especially architectural) heritage. David C. Harvey describes the Trust as '[directing] its efforts [...] at meeting and manipulating a public appetite for the 'olden-time'. He goes on,

The achievement of this carefully mediated heritage product [...] has meant that some bits have to be left out of the narrative - elided, covered over or simply destroyed - while what exists appears to support a conservative and

backward-looking agenda of nostalgia that is a long way from the ideals of its founders (2008: 28-29).

However, although Punch and Judy shows appear frequently at National Trust properties, we must be careful not to overstate a precise connection between these events and a calculated construction of a sense of history. Whilst they are consistent with the Trust's general association with the 'olden time', their inclusion is often quite pragmatic. Chris Somerville, who has been doing Punch shows at National Trust properties for over 20 years, believes that children do not naturally want to go to stately homes, but they will go if there is something for them to do. Sometimes the shows will chime with a particular event or sense of place - the 'St George's Weekend' at Tatton Hall in Cheshire, for instance, or in the 'Victorian Playroom' at Penryhn Castle. Again, whilst fitting in with a general sense of the past, decisions about how that is interpreted might be taken at the local level. In Somerville's experience, Punch is booked by the events organizer, if there is one, or in smaller properties by the wife of the manager who will book what she thinks is appropriate.<sup>16</sup>

In all the rural-nostalgic contexts of the show, even the large-scale and apparently institutional, the enlisting of elements to sustain the notion of the rural-nostalgic hardly seems, except in the most general sense, over-determined. What is evident since Leach was researching is that there are more places to perform, performers are better able to make themselves known to bookers and, like the visitors, are able to travel long distances at little inconvenience. Very few other forms carry the resonances of the vernacular and the historical which fit in with the general flavour of these events.

### **The show in the urban context and contemporary forms of street theatre**

We may more clearly see how Punch and Judy is situated as a conservative, nostalgic and reassuring trope when we contrast it with the kinds of *urban* public-space theatre which have increasingly come to feature in Britain in the last 30 or 40 years. Punch has all but disappeared from the streets. This is due in large part to increasing traffic and noise. When it is to be found in the urban space, it is usually at discrete festivals or at the behest of shopping-centre managers.

It is worth mentioning one rare site of continuity for Punch in the urban setting since

it throws into contrast the more general trend of street theatre in Britain, currently. This is the annual Walsall Illuminations, a six-week, nightly festival which takes place in a municipal park in the autumn. The festival centres around a huge display of coloured lights hung from the trees in the park, and on specially constructed scaffolding. There are fairground rides and food stalls, and two large entertainments marquees. Clive Chandler and Glyn Edwards usually take it in turns to perform in one of these on Saturday and Sunday nights. The festival is extremely popular, attracting thousands of visitors every night. The organizer told me it is considered by most local people as an essential part of the town's identity. The festival has been going on for over 60 years and part of its appeal is that parents have brought their children who have in later years brought their own children. Punch has been on the bill here for much of that time. It sits within a popular tradition of fairgrounds, but one in which an association with a particular location has largely died out. The festival I visited in 2008 may be its last. Due to the general financial problems following the economic downturn, local authorities are having to cut-back on spending. The Illuminations are a huge drain on Walsall's financial resources and the show has had to be cancelled, having made a loss in 2008.<sup>17</sup>

There is not room in this thesis to look in detail at the current state and history of street theatre in Britain, and few studies have been done in the area.<sup>18</sup> However, from my own work as a street theatre performer and through discussions with festival organizers, I am conscious of the kinds of thinking which are taking place on the ground. I am defining 'street theatre', broadly, as performance which takes place in the public space, outside the confines of private theatres or houses. I am aware that the increasing control of public space, either through the expansion of the interior space, as in the case of shopping malls, or through the use of surveillance, makes this definition harder to sustain. However, the very contestation of 'private' and 'public', controlled and free, is one of the reasons why forms of street theatre are so attractive to performers and audiences.

Much recent street theatre work has a radical flavour, if not necessarily a radical impact. That is to say, rather than striving to create a sense of reassuring continuity, as Punch often does, it seeks to invigorate the public space by problematising or even subverting its identity. According to Anne Tucker, co-runner of one of Britain's

longest established street theatre festival organizing companies, Manchester International Arts, this is because the influences on this work came from the loss of funding of many small scale and politically active theatre companies in the 1970s. This was as a result of Margaret Thatcher's arts initiative, 'The Glory of the Garden'.<sup>19</sup> In response, many performers sought work, support and inspiration on the Continent and these experiences later fed back into British work. Continental street theatre was often more dynamic and subversive. This ethos itself, Tucker thinks, may have grown out of the politicised public-space theatre work of practitioners such as Augusto Boal.<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 96 Mike Lister as *The Spurting Man* for Avanti Display (photo, Ged Murray)

Tucker believes that the job of street theatre is to provide opportunities for 'meeting' and 'transformation'. In Britain, 'transformation' has sometimes translated into temporarily changing an urban environment. One such example occurred in 2004, in Manchester. St Anne's Square in front of the Town Hall was transformed, literally overnight, into a French farm complete with grass, cows, chickens, vegetable plots and French 'farmers'. The public was reportedly, '[...] astonished, surprised, intrigued and delighted' (Tucker 2004: 16). Manchester based street theatre company, Avanti Display, turn large buildings into fountains, often accompanied by pyrotechnics and opera singing. On a smaller scale, companies like Avanti (Fig. 96) and The Natural Theatre of Bath among many others, endeavour to use the street as a



backdrop to a certain kind of performance which temporarily subverts the street's usual identity. Performers might appear as 'nudists' (Fig. 97) or visitors from another planet (Fig. 98) where the rules of encounter are altered. Tucker believes that the reorientation which this produces creates opportunities for new kinds of engagement amongst spectators.



Fig. 97 Natural Theatre *Nudists* in Ashton-Under-Lyne, Lancashire (photo, Paul Hermann, in Staincliffe 2000: 57)



Fig. 98 Natural Theatre's *Coneheads* in Middleton, Lancashire (photo, Paul Hermann, in Staincliffe 2000: 55)

These experiments often use character types which are lodged in the collective memory, and places them in unlikely settings, or has them do unexpected things: middle-aged nudists throwing beach-balls to each other on an Oldham street; 1960s police constables hugging and kissing; a Loweryesque figure with an umbrella that rains on the inside. Alan Reeve identifies this strategy as part of a 'competition of desires' in which '[...] one interest attempts to render as an object another interest which is attempting to do the same to it'. In these events, control of the reading of the space is '[...] temporarily inverted [...] through dissimulation and through an ironic posing as the very object intended to be controlled by the space' (1996: 43). The ironising of these figures is one of the few available alternatives to their being recruited in the 'spectacle' of the urban in the mode which Jameson calls '[...] the well-nigh universal practice' of pastiche (ibid: 64). Through the exercise of wit, these figures have achieved what Jameson believed was no longer possible; they have found a 'vocation' for parody.

By contrast, with little possibility, or desire, for ironic self-presentation (the recursive strategies of Richard Coombs may be an exception), Punch and Judy as an uninflected residual form is susceptible to appropriation in the post (or high)-modern landscape of pastiche. This is most apparent when it is seen in interiorised public locations such as shopping centres where the environment is carefully (stage)-managed.

There is sometimes a tension between the agendas of the bookers who may see the show as a decorative adjunct to the spectacle of the location, and performers who want to take centre-stage and engage with an audience. Some performers prefer not to work under these conditions, others will, but resent the occasional demands of centre managers for them to hand out leaflets advertising 'sales' and so on. Others try to manage the space in their own way.

One example of this tension was the appearance of the show at St Pancras Railway Station in London in December 2007 around the time when it was re-opened after extensive refurbishment. Glyn Edwards, David Wilde and a non-swazzling performer, Professor Eek gave shows here. The station is now both railway hub and shopping-centre. The Punch and Judy shows were put on as part of a series of events designed to attract shoppers into the station. On the day I visited there were a number

of actors dressed in Victorian costume wandering around the concourse chatting to customers and telling them about the events on offer. In a large side room children were given materials and encouraged to make 'Victorian toys'. On the wall of this room a large video screen was showing a roaring fire. In another part of the station there was a 'Victorian, panto-style' show and a Father Christmas. The events had been organized by a public relations company, and they recruited (as I was told by the PR company) 'real' actors in 'authentic' costumes. The whole was deliberately understated. Edwards had been asked if he could do his show from behind one of the tastefully designed flats which decorated the concourse, he would perform through a hole which usually housed a TV screen. Edwards refused, saying it would defeat the object. A compromise was agreed and he set his booth up in front of the flat (Fig. 99). Disputes then occurred over how much space could be allowed for the audience. Performers moved the rope barriers further back, health and safety personnel moved them in again.



Fig. 99 Glyn Edwards' booth at St Pancras, 21 December 2007

Unlike the street theatre performers I have talked about who are sometimes licensed to disrupt, Punch and Judy performers working in the public space are subject to the demands of the bookers to adhere to a reassuring and non-subversive agenda. This is sometimes at odds with their own sense of themselves as provocateurs, their instincts as live performers and their knowledge of the dynamics of the interactive event.

### **Performances in schools and museums: unambiguous associations with the past**

A location which because of its explicit agenda creates fewer tensions for performers is in the educational context, in schools and museums. We have already seen how performers often frame the show differently in these settings, whilst keeping the content more or less the same as elsewhere. Although the agenda is more transparent, as with the rural-nostalgic settings, the very historicising of the show raises larger theoretical concerns about who dictates the cultural position of the show. Placing it in these contexts reinforces readings of it as an historical, not a contemporary form. However, in practice, performers are happy to take the work - it is indoors, safe, the children are unlikely to cause trouble and the cheque is not going to bounce. Some performers also take a pragmatic stance in relation to the theoretical issue. Chandler sees the educational context as a 'Trojan horse', providing an opportunity to keep the show going and to create audiences of the future (not only for Punch and Judy but for live performance more generally).

#### **Cannock Chase**

It is worth examining one particular event as it allows us to see the kinds of situating and negotiations in operation in this context.



Fig. 100 Heritage artefact: the mine wheel, Cannock Chase Museum

Clive Chandler, Glyn Edwards and Katey Wilde have a regular contract at The Museum of Cannock Chase where they take it in turns to perform. The Museum is near Staffordshire in the Midlands; it was opened in 1989 and is housed in the

colliery buildings of a former coal mine. The mine closed in 1974. The wheel which operated the mine lift still stands outside the main building (Fig.100). The museum houses both temporary and permanent exhibitions. There is a 'Miner's Cottage Gallery', showing how such a dwelling might have looked around the turn of the twentieth century; a 'Forties Room' showing the interior of a typical urban house during the Second World War; a 'Coal Mining Gallery' giving the history of the mine and a recreation of the interior of a mine, complete with life-size model pit-pony; and a Toys and Games Gallery with cabinets of old and modern children's games and toys. These are the permanent galleries. Among the current temporary exhibitions is one called 'Carry on Punch and Judy', a touring exhibition designed by Glyn Edwards.<sup>21</sup>

The Museum has built strong relationships with schools in the Midlands and has an outreach programme where staff take exhibits, usually toys and games, into classrooms and give talks and demonstrations. School parties also visit the museum and it runs day-long events showing children around the museum and again giving demonstrations. These days are usually themed. The Punch and Judy show is part of a themed day about how children used to live. The children on these events are of primary school age. The Museum has had Punch and Judy shows as part of this experience for more than 10 years, and, according to the Museum's Director, Alisa Smith, they are extremely popular and children look forward to seeing the show when they visit. The show also supports the children's learning objectives in the National Curriculum: it is explicitly referred to in one of the government's History Units for primary years One and Two called, 'What were seaside holidays like in the past?'

The puppeteers have been working here for long enough to feel themselves to be part of the team in the museum. This is an unusual situation, most relationships with employers and co-workers are fleeting. Chandler enjoys the repartee and familiarity with the staff that this allows. The space where the performers work has come to feel very familiar, too. The puppeteers know where to set up, where most easily to 'get-in' and where to plug in their equipment. The room is painted yellow and Chandler now calls it the 'custard room'. On one occasion when I visited it, he complained that it had been re-painted and the hooks he usually hangs his cables on had been removed. The sense of ease that this kind of familiarity gives is palpable. Chandler knows

exactly what is required of him, he knows there will be few unexpected challenges and he expects he will be able, therefore, to do a good show.

Professor Chandler told me that when he first performed here there was no explicit instruction that he should give the show an historical framing. He decided to do this himself, and he has developed a sophisticated process to do so. He describes this as ‘gently taking the audience back in time’. The process involves temporarily wresting authority from the accompanying teachers.

As the children are brought in, they are given very firm boundaries by the museum staff, or ‘guides’. They are told to come in quietly and not to run about. The guides know that there will be a range of behaviours from the different schools and that they have to be clear about the behaviour that is expected at the museum. During the lead-in to the show 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.

As the children come in, Chandler quietly walks the marionette Dog Toby around the room and amongst the children. They start to be drawn in. When a second group arrives, he shows a marionette of an old man on a unicycle which the children find very funny. He then performs a plate spinning routine, first getting some of the children to hold the plates and then bringing out a parent-helper who he gets to hold and spin four plates at once. This provokes a big response from the children; they laugh and clap. The parent is slightly embarrassed, she is on the spot, the focus of attention. The children enjoy her discomfort. Chandler is beginning to shift the power relationship in the room. At the end of the routine there is a big round of applause, after which Chandler sits on a chair that he has placed in front of the booth. There is a clear division between the children and the performer, and the other adults: the children all sit on mats and the adults all sit on the benches around the room.

He introduces himself, this is the first time he has spoken: ‘Hello, my name is Clive ... what’s my name?’; ‘Clive’, the children respond. ‘I’m now going to show you things that will make you laugh’. He prepares the ground and sets new ground rules.<sup>22</sup> ‘Clap for the old entertainer’, the children clap. He demonstrates his music box and asks them what it is, rewarding a child with a round of applause when she answers correctly. He tells the children to wriggle, ‘because you’ve been brilliant’, they wriggle. He points out that the adults have not wriggled, he tells us to wriggle, we do and the children laugh at us. He is gradually reinforcing the new relationship, a relationship where it is safe to laugh at adults, the adults who had been very clear about the boundaries in the museum.

Chandler demonstrates his mechanical music box, explaining that if you could go back in time you wouldn’t be able to download music from the internet, you would have to make your own music. He then shows more marionettes: ‘Betty’ the trapeze artist, and the Skeleton. The children react strongly to this puppet, a mixture of fear and excitement. He directs this energy; he tells them to blow on the skeleton to make his head come off, and blow again to make him come apart completely, and to blow again to put him back together. He then asks one of the children to teach him to juggle. He brings out a girl from the audience. He gives her his hat and tells her that if she is successful, she will be rewarded with a big round of applause. He asks her name, ‘Chloe Smith’ (I have given her a pseudonym); he says that we will call her ‘Miss Smith’, and he asks her to show everybody what teachers look like when they are happy; she smiles. Through a series of questions that Chandler asks her, ‘should I throw this ball in the air and catch it, should I throw two?, from this hand to this?, under my leg?’, the child does indeed ‘teach’ him to juggle.

During the first part of the session, through calm, quiet, clear instructions and encouragement, Chandler has re-drawn roles for the people in the room. He is the entertainer; the children are sometimes the audience, sometimes the teacher, sometimes the helper. These are roles in which the children are expected actively to participate and in which they are permitted to enjoy themselves. The adults in the room have become observers, sometimes referred to, but no longer the ones who dictate the rules. The children are gently given a new role. He explains that

‘50, 100, 200 years ago, even before your teachers were born, when people didn’t watch television, and people would have to wait for someone with a bell to come along, like this [he rings a bell], children would watch a Punch and Judy show.’

He asks the children if they would like to *be* those children. The children eagerly nod assent. Their role as historical participants is now clearly established and they can watch the show.

Although they have now been transported into the past, Chandler’s show retains the contemporary references it always has: Judy is off to the pub, Punch, we are told, watches television all day. Nobody seems to mind the inconsistencies.

At the end of the show he allows the children to handle the puppets as he brings them back to the present. He 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.<sup>23</sup>

Since the show is framed within the museum which is itself insulated within its educational setting, the narrative of history within which the children are enrolled can be very carefully and uncontroversially maintained, especially with such an adept performer as Chandler. The children are given licence within a larger inviolable frame. Chandler is aware of the sensitivities around the show, particularly, he tells me, in front of female primary school teachers whom he regards as the most likely to take offence. In giving the children a role and temporarily taking charge of them in this carefully constructed fictive frame, Chandler is able to allay those sensitivities.

Other performers use similar, if less developed strategies in other museum and school settings. At the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, I saw Geoff Felix give a show as part of their St George’s Day celebrations. Outside the museum, on the same day, a Maypole had been erected and Morris dancers performed. Surrounded by museum-cases containing dolls houses, on an upstairs mezzanine in an area called ‘The Village Green’, Felix’s show had a very strong boundary and focus (Fig.101). As with Chandler’s show, this permits him to defuse any controversy. He tells the audience that the show is ‘[...] not particularly



politically correct, I'm afraid, but it's historical and that's how we get away with it'.<sup>24</sup> These contexts are safe havens for performers.



Fig. 101 Geoff Felix's show at The Museum of Childhood, surrounded by glass cases

### **Reintegration: festivals, control and internationalism**

So far in this chapter, I have suggested that in contrast to the experience of continuity of performance on beaches and in the streets which typified the experience of the show up to the 1970s, a break in continuity has occurred which has seen the show performed in sites of nostalgia, in deliberate celebrations of the beach, of the rural-nostalgic, or in more explicit recollections of the past in museums. I have suggested that continuity has in fact become all but impossible. This is indicated by the kinds of ironising street theatre which are taking place now. I have also suggested that the show is less at home in contemporary public settings, except where those settings are already sites of spectacle. It might be concluded from what might be called a crisis of representation, that Punch and Judy has found itself in a ghetto of nostalgia - always a reminder of something that *used* to happen. If it has, it needs to be said that it is in many ways an attractive ghetto for performers; they are finding more opportunities for well-paid work than they had prior to this. However, changes seem to be taking place which alter the picture. Since these are changes which are happening as I am writing, it is difficult to say with confidence where they will lead.

The show seems to have weathered what Edwards among others has called the 'storm of political correctness' (see below), so that shows are to be found in locations where for a number of years they would have been problematic. This shift I think may be partly connected with changing attitudes to symbols of Englishness. In very recent years the flag of St George, for example, has ceased to be a symbol of the far-right. Its re-appropriation in the mainstream has probably been encouraged by its association with the England football team. During big international football competitions, it flutters from car aerals and hangs from bedroom windows; its sinister political meaning has been diluted. Alison Denning, the booker at the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green, told me that until quite recently having a St George's Day festival would have been problematic. The change came about because she felt able to accommodate the calls which older, white residents of the borough were making to have their identity acknowledged amongst the multicultural expressions. This was because the symbols which expressed that identity had ceased to have such clear associations with the far right. There had been a previous showing of Punch and Judy in the borough in 1995, in Newham, but, perhaps in a sign of the times, it was then called *Judy and Punch*. Denning was keen to achieve two, perhaps competing, ambitions: not to exclude anyone, and not to water down the celebration of Englishness. She recognises that this was a difficult balance to strike. However, this is the fourth year that the event has taken place and the response has been universally positive. Events are moving very quickly, and how this softening of attitudes towards the flag will play out in the light of the British National Party's apparent growing popularity as evidenced in the May 2009 European and local elections remains to be seen.

By contrast, performers, including Edwards, and especially Chandler, are instrumental in setting a new public-space agenda for Punch and Judy. It is an agenda which seeks to reset the balance in perceptions of the show away from an overriding association with nostalgia to a greater sense that it is a contemporary and contemporarily meaningful form. The strategy they use is to place it amongst other, often international, popular puppet forms. Chandler and Edwards have set up a number of festivals, amongst them The Aberystwyth Punch and Judy Festival, The Dynamics Festival in the West Midlands and the Streets Alive Festival in Walsall. Importantly, these performers are not reliant on the vision of non-performing

organizers or town-centre and shopping-centre managers. As I have suggested, they have the skills and experience to apply for funding and to set up structures - liaising with venues, with marketing agencies and with arts organizations - which determine the content of the festivals.

Other forms of puppetry which are included in these events are quite eclectic and, although they celebrate the other 'descendents of Pulcinella' (Speaight 1970:142), their focus is broader. At the 2007 Dynamics Festival, for example, as well as the Moscow-based company *Tut I Tam*'s Petrushka (Fig.102), Cengiz Ozek, from Turkey did two different Karagöz shows, Anton Anderle, from Slovakia brought two marionette shows, Marc Beuton from Belgium gave marionette performances and Daniel Rafiel from France showed his street booth show, *Pepe* (Fig. 103). Andras Lenart from Hungary performed at the last Aberystwyth Festival, (Fig.104) as did Georges Vettters with his Tchantchès. At Walsall, Irene Vecchia performed Pulcinella, Beuton gave shows as did Marten Liermann, a marionettist also from Belgium (Fig. 105). What unites these shows is their appeal to a popular audience. Most of the shows are robust enough to be performed in the street and they celebrate contact with passers by.



Fig.102 Anatoly Arkhipov of *Tut I Tam* and Petrushka booth from Moscow at the Dynamics Festival 2007



Fig.103 Daniel Rafiel's *Pepe* booth from France at the Dynamics Festival 2007



Fig. 104 Andras Lenart performing at the Aberystwyth Punch and Judy Festival 2006



Fig. 105 Marten Liermann (at rear in sunglasses) with his street marionettes at the Streets Alive Festival, Walsall 2007

International exchange has played an important part in developing these kinds of festival. Although it is an area which I have not had the opportunity of investigating in any depth, it is clear that some performers are very influenced by what they encounter abroad and integrate these experiences into their shows. Burnett tells me he does so many shows abroad that he sometimes forgets how he does the show for a British audience. Dan Bishop takes painstaking measures to adapt his shows for his foreign audiences, committing to memory key sections of the show in other languages which he learns phonetically. He showed me a list of 14 different translations which he uses. He calls this 'lego language' after the toy building blocks (2000:1). Although, as mentioned above, some performers feel this alters what they see as the essential 'English rhythm' of the show (Edwards 2004a: 16), it is, one senses, part of an evolutionary process which may help to back the tradition out of the cul-de-sac of nostalgia in which it is in danger of getting stuck. The exchange is two-way and other popular puppet traditions benefit from Punch performers visiting their homes. The Petrushka show I saw at Dynamics had clearly borrowed heavily from Punch, incorporating, for example, a counting routine. It is not surprising that in revivals, performers use material from contiguous traditions. This exchange goes back and forth. Professor Chandler showed me a trick where the Devil is announced by a burst of flame. He had recently learnt this in Portugal from a Dom Roberto performer, he himself had learnt it from Dan Bishop who had brought it from England.

I have spent several evenings after international festivals sitting in pubs or puppeteers houses or gardens amongst performers who share a common and lively understanding and vocabulary. On one such memorable occasion, I sat in Clive Chandler's garden, having eaten supper and drunk quantities of alcohol, when Irene Vecchia and her accompanist Enzo, produced an accordion and small drum and started singing a Neapolitan song. The singing was fierce and loud. The beautiful sound went on and on, filling the night air and the surrounding well-tended gardens. The neighbours must have wondered what this exotic sound was. For us, sitting around the table, it was a sign of international community in the voice of the (extra)ordinary people.

In this chapter, I have suggested that the show has become dislodged from its previous immediate relationship with its audience and has come to be mediated by constructed sites of nostalgia. I have also suggested that we must be wary of

attributing to this move any kind of systematic and conspiratorial attitude on the part of bookers. The shift has been carried out through individual bookers and festival organisers who have varieties of attachment to the show, some regarding it as fitting in with a general and useful picture of the past, others who are passionately concerned about popular culture and even puppetry itself. It is unlikely that the show will return to the continuity which Leach's findings some 30 years ago suggest it represented then. What is beginning to happen is that new alliances and associations are emerging - especially internationally - and this offers a set of contexts which constitute the show as popular rather than nostalgic. It would be simplistic to argue that the control which these festivals indicates means that performers have returned to the unmediated ownership of the show signalled by the 'bottle' and their ability to pack-up and go whenever they feel like it. It does not; but they are finding ways to contextualise the show which meets their own thinking more than that of bookers and shopping-centre managers. Contestations over what the show is and means are played out at the individual level of immediate contact with audiences and at the institutional level of where the shows are set, who books them and how those contexts are created. It remains to consider the kinds of contextualising which performers are engaged in beyond performance itself, in the representation of the form in the media. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

## Notes

1 1991: 150

2 Conversation with Pete Maggs, 17 September 2007

3 2001: 99

4 Giddens, for example, prefers the notion of 'Radicalised Modernity' to 'Post-Modernity' (1990: 150), since it allows greater recognition of the agency of the individual.

5 Described to me by Glyn Edwards, 18 November 2008

6 Article by Kate Youde, 4 May 2008. I was interviewed for this article and it went on to qualify the headline, quoting me and saying, 'despite the seafront decline, the number of performers [has] remained constant'.

7 Phone conversation with Jo Martin, 10 August 2007.

8 Conversation with Alison and Brian Davy, 10 July 2007.

9 Phone conversation with David Wright, Morcambe and Lancaster's Senior Festivals and Events Officer, 15 April 2008.

10 These are specific initiatives designed to build a sense of character and identity for Morcambe. See, Carter and Masters, 2002: *Interpretation and Marketing Strategy for Morcambe Bay* <http://www.morecambebay.org.uk/PDF/strategy.pdf>. (accessed 17 April 2008); see also: <http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/news/2008/nov/lancaster-commemorates-guy-fawkes-with-explosive-aerial-extravaganza> (accessed 15 January 2009); <http://www.thevisitor.co.uk/visitor-features/sandcastle-festival.4384947.jp> (accessed 17 April 2008); <http://www.citycoastcountryside.co.uk/sites/the-very-first-annual-uk-hurdy-gurdy-festivalp56600> (accessed April 17, 2008); <http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/news/2007/apr/the-nineteenth-annual-maritime-festival/> (accessed April 17 2008).

11 2006: 293

12 Conversation with Edwards, 23 September 2007.

13 For a discussion of the considerable hold the notion of the country had especially on literature in the nineteenth century, see Williams, 1985: 1-8.

14 Figure taken from the BBC website  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/wiltshire/entertainment/days\\_out/downton\\_cuckoo\\_fair.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/wiltshire/entertainment/days_out/downton_cuckoo_fair.shtml)  
(accessed 17 April 2008)

15 Description taken from BBC website, see note 12.

16 Conversation with Chris Somerville, 23 September 2007.

17 The Illuminations have been cancelled until 2012 following a 'record low attendance' in 2008, see  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/blackcountry/content/articles/2008/09/25/walsall\\_illuminations\\_2008\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blackcountry/content/articles/2008/09/25/walsall_illuminations_2008_feature.shtml) (accessed 21 March 2009).

18 Perhaps the clearest analysis of street theatre written from the inside remains Bim Mason's 1992 book, *Street and Other Outdoor Performance*.

19 Conversation with Anne Tucker, 08 February 2008.

20 See especially, in this regard, by Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) and *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1995).

21 This exhibition opened at the Museum of Cannock Chase in January 2009, toured other museums in the Midlands during the year, and returned to Cannock to finish its tour in November and December 2009.

22 A similar establishment of ground-rules is recorded by Proschan (1987) in his description of Percy Press II performing in Washington USA.

23 I saw and recorded this show on 16 November 2006.

24 I saw and recorded this show on 26 April 2008.

## Chapter Seven: Reception and controversy

*In my opinion the Street Punch is one of those extravagant reliefs from the realities of life which would lose its hold upon the people if it were made moral and instructive. I regard it as quite harmless in its influence and as an outrageous joke which no one in existence would think of regarding as an incentive to any kind of conduct.*

Charles Dickens.<sup>1</sup>

*Punch and Judy no more encourages violence than Goldilocks encourages squatting.*

Glyn Edwards<sup>2</sup>

It has been a central thrust of this thesis that reflexivity has resulted in an articulation of the form by performers. I use the term ‘articulation’ in the double sense that Gramsci and Stuart Hall do (Hall 2006: 485), as a putting into words or expressing, and a place at which things are connected and around which they move. Articulation is an ambivalent process of complicity and resistance. Performers want the show to be celebrated, welcomed and given support, they also seem to enjoy the rebelliousness which Punch offers and which complete inclusiveness would somehow diffuse, emasculate or even erase. As we have seen, this happened in the sanitizing of Kasper and Petrushka. I have argued that performers have become increasingly interventionist and that this contrasts with notions of tradition which rely on tradition’s intrinsic, or ‘natural’, tie to a community for its survival. The unmooring of Punch from any calendrical or geographic association, if it ever had any, left it in a state of contingency, having somehow to justify its existence. Through the process of unmooring, it became mediated, it needed to be talked about, defined and reflected upon, to survive. One way of maintaining its visibility is to welcome discussion, even if that discussion is of its controversial aspects. The form needs the oxygen of recognition. The degree to which recognition has increasingly been managed, or articulated, by performers and capitalised on by bookers is a marker of the changes which have taken place even since Leach conducted his studies.

It would appear, on the surface at least, that controversy has become a central and justifying thematic for performers. Many performers have told me that Punch will do what he wants, will rebel against constraints and ‘red-tape’, whatever those look like, and that this feeling is important for their wanting to perform the show. Recognising



that many performers express some very deeply felt connection with the character, to the degree that, as we have seen, many were ‘bitten’ by the ‘bug’ of Punch from an early age, makes their embracing of controversy hard to explicate. It may be as much psychologically as politically motivated. It would require a different set of skills than my own to explain it in these terms. What can be done, though, is to examine the processes through which performers manage, harness and articulate controversy. As we have seen, in the formation of organizations, the production of discourse, and the instituting of festivals, some have become very skilful at this. In this chapter, I am interested in how this articulation operates within the broader cultural frame, especially in relation to the media and its interests and particularly how it works through encounters between performers and the media. This takes us a step outside the immediate performance context and allows us to see what strategies performers are using to sustain and define the tradition.

I begin in this chapter by looking at controversy as a motif of the form. I go on to consider how performers currently feel the show is regarded, and how that has altered even during the period of the study. I illustrate this by looking at how the show made the news at a particular moment during my research and how that moment was negotiated on both sides. I conclude by showing myself in the picture as a mediator between the performers and the media in the process of making a radio documentary about Punch and Judy and I examine the questions which this posed for me as an ethnographer.

### **Controversy and the contemporary performer**

*Popular culture [...] refuses to behave appropriately*

Wahneema Lubiano<sup>3</sup>

At the turn of the millennium, it appeared that performers found considerable energy through defending the show against charges of being politically incorrect, or ‘non-PC’. This seemed to accord with a general popular sense that whatever ethically condonable impulse lay behind sensitivities around terminology, the perceived absurdities of such things as changing *Baa Baa Black Sheep* into *Baa Baa Rainbow Sheep* rendered those sensitivities as *over-sensitivities*.<sup>4</sup> The publication of *The Slapstick Symposium* (2000) with articles, for example, explicitly about political

correctness (PC), and Edwards' comparing the lively 'outrageousness' of the show with that of *The Simpsons*, typified the views of performers that the show stood alongside other popular expressions in representing the 'real' feelings of the people as opposed to those of anonymous bureaucrats and 'humourless' dictators of morality.<sup>5</sup> If shows went too far and were *offensive*, they argued, they would alienate their audiences (this has been reiterated by performers frequently throughout the research). If, however, they 'thumbed their nose' at 'convention' (Edwards 2000c), this would accord with an underlying popular view that convention, especially as expressed and codified by over-zealous (often European Union) politicians, was often imposed from 'above'. The implicit message was that Punch had returned to being (or had remained) the 'voice of the people' it had been originally. This sense has provided performers with a rich seam of material and meta-commentary in performance and in discourse. It has given them a place from which to argue their case and has, on occasion, brought out a subliminal alliance of 'the people' and Punch with more permanent symbols of nationhood than those represented by bureaucrats and 'humourless fundamentalists' (Edwards 1999a: 1).<sup>6</sup>

It is perhaps useful to try to get some grasp on the contested term 'political correctness' which has been used in the rhetorics of both the left and the right and to locate the performers within that debate. Arguments over the power of language, especially when those arguments are ideologically motivated, have led commentators on the right to regard insistence on certain ways of naming things as a form of politically motivated thought-policing. This has led to what Andrew Ross refers to as 'the Right's sleazy appropriation of the term Political Correctness' (Ross et al. 1993: 2), through which it ridicules attempts by the left to redress what it sees as lexicographically sustained power asymmetries.<sup>7</sup> This debate found especial focus when 'alternative comedians' achieved prominence in Britain in the late 1980s. Motivated by a desire to reject heretofore dominant racial and gender politics as expressed in the popular media, they became a target of right-wing opprobrium. This was probably the moment when the term 'political correctness' gained popular currency.

Alongside this ideological tussle over terminology is the sense amongst 'ordinary people', for whom commentators on the right often claim to speak, that the 'official

truth' represented by PC terminology masks the real views which lie behind it. This may in fact be the case, as people often adjust how they speak and what they say according to what they feel is acceptable in different contexts (see Morris 2001 and Barreto and Ellemers 2005). What these commentators object to is a sense that a kind of censorship is being imposed, even to the degree that history is being re-written (see Hitchens 1999 and Redwood 1999). This touches a deep nerve amongst many Punch performers who ally themselves with 'the people'. It is this reading of PC to which performers respond. In an echo of the objections to cant which Wilson suggests made the show popular in its earliest days, they see themselves as exposing the hypocrisy which they regard as implicit in PC (see Reeve 2008a).

What is problematic for liberal commentators on popular culture, myself included, is that the views expressed in that culture may not accord with our own views. Lyn Spiegel sums up the ironies attaching to that arguably contradictory position,

If we [academics] deem the object incorrect we can feel somehow better off than the common folk, who don't have the critical tools to see their own destruction by commodity culture [...] Conversely, if we embrace the popular as 'resistant', 'subversive' or just plain post modern fun, we can feel as though we have somehow reached a higher plane than our intellectual peers because we are in touch with 'the people', their joys, pleasures, and meanings. (Ross et al. 1993: 27).

I have no wish to become too entangled in this debate, not least because academic discussions about popular culture and PC rarely have in mind such traditional practices as Punch and Judy when they talk and write about the complex intersection of these forces and we need to hold above us this qualification when we use their analyses. Putting traditional forms and PC together raises another set of questions to do with, on the one hand, what we mean by 'popular', when we might actually mean 'minority', and on the other, with the suspension of current political sensibilities when we look at 'historical' forms. One productive way of approaching the quandary is offered by Ella Shohat,

Charting neat diagrams of 'ins' and 'outs' is not only boring, it misses the point: it fails to negotiate [...] popular cultures in a relational context, to ask the question of who is producing and consuming what, for what purposes, for whom, and by what means – always with an eye on the power constellations and the emancipatory projects at stake [...] what in one set of relations might

be politically incorrect [...] might be at least strategically correct within another set of questions. (ibid: 22)

The set of relations in this case is between puppeteers, audiences and commentators, and the puppeteers have their own strategies for negotiating those relations.

An episode in Colchester in 1999 is a typical narrative of attempted banning of the show and how performers dealt with it. Edwards recorded the episode in *Around the World With Mr. Punch*:

[...] a local Prof fell foul of the local Anti-Domestic violence group. They approached the elected councillor who chaired the district Arts and Leisure Committee to complain. The Chair asked the performer [...] to withdraw scenes of Punch hitting Judy when booked by the council [...]. This he did, but substituted a figure of the councillor and hit her instead. The gauntlet thus thrown down was picked up by the councillor in question who decided to seek support in getting Punch added to the list of other activities (such as those promoting the occult, those liable to lead to public disorder) not permitted on council premises [...] (1999b: 1 and 7-9).

On the eve of the vote, a local paper ran an article arguing that the council would be a laughing stock if it were to go ahead with the ban, and would fail to represent the feelings of the community. The Councillor who had proposed the ban was overwhelmingly voted down, securing only one supporting vote. Edwards produced a press-release which is worth quoting in full as it shows clearly the way in which such episodes are refracted through the lens of the Punch community:

The Punch and Judy performers of the UK are delighted that Mr. Punch has been cleared of charges levelled at him by Colchester Borough Council of being “of questionable public morality”. They applaud the common sense of the Arts and Leisure Committee in recognising that slapstick is not an incitement to domestic violence. Mr. Punch is delighted to announce that he will be appearing at the heart of the nation’s Year 2000 Festivities both in the Millennium Dome at Greenwich and in his very own Millennium Puppet Party in the Midlands where he will continue to entertain as he has done throughout the reign of 16 British monarchs. (ibid)

Whilst instances of actual banning are extremely rare, activists such as Edwards do not hesitate to use the publicity generated in threats to ban the show as a means to articulate popular concerns about the voice of ‘the people’ not being heard and to confirm their own sense of themselves as ‘stalking horses’, flushing out hypocrisy,

over-earnestness and cant.<sup>8</sup> It would be tempting to suggest that there is a direct line amongst contemporary performers back to the earliest shows which expressed a robust rebellious sensibility, and perhaps emotionally there is. However, as we have seen, in the generations that have passed, the show stopped being concerned with adult issues of marriage and the repressions of the law and became a children's entertainment, emasculating any possible political force along the way. It is only really since the emergence of the counter-cultural sensibility that performers have drawn out from the show any potential for political comment, and this has been on a small scale. I am thinking of Reg Payne's lampooning of Prince Charles as an exploiter of Cornwall and the Cornish, and the association performers had with the Covent Garden *Alternative Arts* in their ousting of local big-business interests. What engagement with controversy points more towards is a sense that performers believe the show speaks for 'common sense' and represents the views of 'the people' opposed to those of 'self-appointed' legislators of public morality.

What is interesting in this is that those legislators emerged from the same generation as the counter-culturalist performers whose dislike of legislation encouraged them to take up the show, and who were probably inspired by the same liberal motives. This kind of inconsistency has given rise to instances where performers have been booked because they are seen to represent a grass-roots sensibility, but in practice have encountered challenges to the content of the show. I was at such an episode at a school in Norfolk when Bryan Clarke had been booked to perform at an event organized by outreach agencies from the local council. Norfolk is a large and largely rural county with limited public transport facilities. Some poorer families find it hard to access some council services in early-years child care, health advice, debt and alcohol counselling, and so on. One or two of the groups at the event represented agencies dealing with domestic violence. There were complaints that there was a Punch and Judy show at all and Clarke was asked to tone down the violence. He agreed but was in an awkward position; he felt he understood best what 'worked' in the show, but he had to accommodate his employer's needs. In the end he was irritated and disheartened and the shows were a little perfunctory and not especially well received. On the whole these instances are exceptional, bookers usually know the constituency to which they are playing. However, it suggests that there is still a divide amongst audiences. Some reject the show's implicit gender politics and others

welcome its opportunity to debunk what they see as over-earnestness. Who 'the people' are and how they are defined remains a central, contested and very thorny question in all of this, especially since discussions of popular culture are bound to revolve around questions of dominance and hegemony.

### **Current performers' attitudes to controversy**

What I have said so far in this chapter is intended to describe the uses to which performers put the show's topos of controversy. Performers' view of *themselves* as controversialists, however, is far more complex (not to say at times contradictory), as I discovered when I attempted to talk this question through with members of the College at their meeting at Paignton. This meeting took place during the writing of this chapter and I wanted to take the unique opportunity of asking them collectively about certain, what seemed to me, central issues, controversy being one of them.

I wondered if political correctness as it had so evidently been exercising them in their writings and shows had been as energising as it appeared. I was surprised to discover that on the whole they had tired of defending themselves against these charges which they felt, in any event, were largely generated by the press to create good copy. They were glad that the story was moving on. I spent some time trying to dig out their feelings about controversy in the light of this, since on the one hand they often told me they enjoyed and were drawn to the idea of Punch as 'naughty' and as a 'rule breaker', and on the other they seemed reluctant to engage with actual controversy.

They explained this reluctance to me in terms of particularity and the public space. When Saddam Hussein was hanged, for example, or when the toddler Jamie Bulger was murdered, the baby-hitting and the hanging became problematic. Some of those performers who still did the hanging stopped doing it for a while; Chandler had considerable anxieties about how to manage the baby scene. Richard Coombs suggested that when painful incidents in the outside world parallel too strongly those in the show, the show becomes 'unbalanced'; in effect, the lens is turned the wrong way round, the fabric is warped. The show ceases to be 'universal', as Coombs described it and 'timeless', as Chandler and Burnett put it. Political correctness was tiresome, then, because it particularised things in the show - gender, race relations and violence - which were not intended as particular, but as archetypal, and indeed

which destabilise the show when they become particular. Controversy is limited by what is (un)acceptable in the public space. Chandler suggested that this might be understood if we consider the clear distinction between what is possible for comedians in a ticketed theatre where people have chosen to see, for example, an outrageous comedian, and what is sensible to perform in the street. Chandler believes the show contains an inherent controversy in its challenge to authority which does not require 'pumping up' at any time. The show has to be sensitive to a broad spectrum of views.

We might theorise their disquiet about particularity if we consider Umberto Eco's discussion of the frame (1984). He argues that the particular is a reminder of the frame, and once the frame is brought into view a challenge to the hegemony is potentiated. Punch and Judy, like carnival, rarely challenges the hegemony because the popular is always infused with, takes its symbols from and reinforces the hegemonic. Its function is cathartic, not frame-breaking.

It became clear in the discussion that performers believe that in the last two or three years a number of things have changed in audiences' attitudes, or rather, in the confidence with which they feel able to express them. These changes make accusations of political correctness not only *not* counter-productive, but actually helpful. Coombs said that bookers have begun to ask if the show is 'politically correct'. Until recently he might have feared rejection by admitting that it wasn't, now many bookers *welcome* the fact that it isn't. Typically, now, Coombs says, when he tells bookers that he is doing 'a good old-fashioned Punch and Judy show', the response is 'thank goodness for that, we've had enough of that [PC] nonsense, we don't want that, we want what we remember'. Chandler now feels more comfortable in advertising it for schools, as does Burnett who until recently was at pains to separate his Punch and Judy work from his other puppet shows for fear of losing work. Burnett also believes that in a context of popular culture where violence, swearing and offensiveness have become increasingly acceptable, any controversy in Punch and Judy looks very tame by comparison, so audiences do not worry about it

### **How the agenda has moved on in the media**

The degree to which the show has become allied with popular views - or perhaps the other way round - is evident in the way it has become part of the weaponry of the popular media rather than its target. I saw a very clear example of this when I made a field trip to Glyn Edwards' house in Worthing and he was caught up in the middle of a scramble of interest in his new Health and Safety character. Edwards had recently moved to the area and had informed the local paper of this as a way of getting publicity. He mentioned being asked to fill in a risk-assessment form for another local authority. The story escalated, and after the local paper had run it, it was taken up by one of the nationals, *The Daily Mail* whose readership could be said to be particularly vexed by what they regard as legislative interference. The local BBC TV news decided to send a reporter to Edwards' house to do an interview.

Edwards believes that what happened in this process was informative. He was reassured to see that Punch and Judy was still alive in the popular awareness; and it indicated for him that the media had started to see the show as a corrective to the excesses of political correctness, not as an instance of political *incorrectness*. For Edwards, this represented a major and very welcome shift. The process was informative for me as well. I was astonished by the sheer speed at which the story gathered momentum. Journalists have an ear to the ground, but with the advent of the internet, the ground is now littered with sensors which pick up rumour and relay it instantly. Within a matter of 48 hours it had gone from local to national interest. At the same time, as Edwards pointed out to me, stories are as quickly forgotten as created and the momentum needs to be continually maintained.

I also noticed a degree of ambivalence on the part of the broadcasters. This ambivalence was evident when I interviewed the 'video-reporter' who arrived at Edwards' house to record the story. An intelligent, capable and busy man in his early 30s, he was camera-operator, sound-recordist, script-writer, editor and probably, though not on this occasion, in-vision reporter too. He had an acute professional sense of what would play well. I asked him why this was an interesting story; he said that the BBC like stories which show the 'ordinary person' exercising what he called 'free will' (he possibly meant to say 'free-speech'). I then asked if the BBC were opposed to the kind of health and safety legislation that the character embodied, he said, 'no'.



Recognising that a balance is being attempted by the media - celebrating the freewill (or speech) of the typical viewer whilst acknowledging the need to put limits on behaviour through legislation - allows us to see the contradictions within the picture. Punch's individualism is admired, but individualism's concomitant disregard for others, which legislation seeks to regulate, can be troubling. The tension between celebrating the exercise of individual desires and the fear that creates for the rest of the group is what the show has always dramatised; it is the central, and irresolvable energy and appeal of the piece. It has always at times provoked controversy for this reason, as Dickens' response to an outraged spectator shows; however, until the last part of the twentieth century, that controversy was expressed by a minority. Objections to Punch on these grounds in the last few decades has become part of a more general anxiety about the treatment of the *other* and has taken on the character of an 'official', or permitted, view of the form.

In recent years Punch and Judy has become a place at which the changing tensions between the popular and the official can be exposed. The debate around the show which took on an earnest dimension in the 1980s and 90s, in the early 2000s has begun to change as attitudes to sexism, racism and representations of violence in the media are becoming more nuanced. Outright rejections of explicitly gendered or racialised expressions, such as when the *The Black and White Minstrel Show* and *The Benny Hill Show* stopped being commissioned, respectively in the 1970s and the 1980s (see Lewis 2006), have given way to a more relaxed and some might say more mature approach to such expressions. Although offensive (mis)representations of race, such as those expressed in the *Black and White Minstrel Show*, are unlikely to find a place in the mainstream, films in which white actors 'black-up' and represent ethnic minority groups, and in which women are treated as objects of ridicule, desire and fear, such as in the *Carry On* series, are still regularly shown on British TV. In fact the current touring Punch and Judy exhibition, noted above, is called *Carry on Punch and Judy* as a way of signalling the show's place within a populist tradition of broad humour. The use of gender, age and even racial stereotypes in recent very popular TV comedy shows in Britain, such as *Little Britain* and *That Mitchell and Webb Look*, and through the work of Sacha Baron Cohen, offer a more sophisticated window on the debate. On the surface they lampoon PC earnestness, and in so doing draw attention to what is patronizing in PC modes of thinking; but they also point to a

more complex discussion where private beliefs are at times at odds with publicly permitted expressions.<sup>9</sup> They act to mirror and expose often hidden, unpalatable and unprocessed beliefs. Of course, as we have seen, explicit expressions of racism and sexism are rejected by (most) performers and the show has, on the whole, altered to meet general current sensibilities. The black character rarely appears, and Judy, though not wholly transformed, in some instances takes a more central position. Both performers and ‘PC fundamentalists’ appear to be moving closer together.



Fig.106 Bryan Clarke’s ‘Chinese’ puppets, Chung Lun One and Chung Lun Two

Once again, experience throws up intransigent counter-examples. At the 2009 Mayfayre, Bryan Clarke presented an episode with two ‘Chinese’ puppets (Fig. 106). These were blatantly racialised, they spoke in *faux*-‘oriental’ accents, they were painted bright yellow and were called Chung Lun One and Chung Lun Two. The routine was enthusiastically applauded by the audience, a mix of puppeteers and general public. Clarke told me later that he had not done the routine for 10 years; he wanted to see if it still ‘worked’ and was pleased to see that it did. He told me that there was a Chinese man watching and he asked him afterwards if he had found it offensive, the man said, he hadn’t. A great many questions arise from this event: what were Clarke’s motives for doing the routine; why did he feel it necessary to ask the audience member what he thought; was the audience member giving an honest response; what did Clarke feel it necessary to tell me about this; what were the audience applauding, was it his skill in carrying out the routine, or his audacity in performing with these characters? There is not room to answer these questions here, but they serve to show the complexity of the situation when in the face of moves against racial stereotyping, a performer seems to be testing the boundaries, sticking

two fingers up at those who would make judgements about what he is doing and being applauded for doing it.

### **My role in articulating the discourse through the media**

In Law's investigation into Awaji puppetry, she concludes by asking a fundamental ethnographic question: 'How did my presence influence the process which took place before me?' (1997: 256). She recognises her own 'implication' in the process of revival of the form and her own place in the construction of the 'narrative about what Awaji puppetry means' (ibid). I would like to ask the same question now.

As I have suggested, the process by which this study has come about - the desire by the College to have the form described as it currently stands in order to shift it from persistent associations with nostalgia, violence and Victorianism - is one which raises questions about its intended outcome and poses potential challenges to an objective stance. The ethnographer is part of the story and influences it in lots of different ways, the more so when the consultants have a vested interest in a particular outcome. Whilst admitting that one's influence might be (hopefully) minimal, the moral obligation is not diminished, in either direction. A moment occurred in the research when this question reached centre-stage for me and where I had to think through how I might influence the constructed narrative and where my obligations lay. I was approached by the BBC to make a radio documentary. Since this moment involved a dialogue with 'the media', it is pertinent to talk about it now. It offers a way of looking at how the form is currently perceived by relatively informed and influential programme makers and how that perception might be managed, given the need to make a compelling document. As I was continually reminded by my producer, this was not an academic exercise, but one which needed the audience to keep listening. A tension between complicity with performers who want their story favourably told and with the BBC who, whilst not seeking controversy, nonetheless want an interesting narrative, needed to be negotiated. As well as this, producing such a document would go a considerable way towards meeting the implicit funding obligation to encourage a 'transference of knowledge'.<sup>10</sup> This in itself raised interesting epistemological questions similar to those surrounding the construction of discourse with which I began this thesis. In making this programme, I found myself at the nexus of a network of desires, obligations and interests which, whilst ethnographically a rich place to be,

had potential impacts on a number of people and so had to be very carefully managed.

In June 2007, I was doing field research at the Glastonbury Festival, trying, and failing, to see Punchman Chris Maddocks (Professor Panic) and occasionally performing in the mud with Clive Chandler's giant Punch and Judy puppets, when I met an old friend from my undergraduate days. She had become head of commissioning for comedy, documentary and drama on BBC Radio 4. She eagerly suggested I write and present a programme about Punch and Judy for a popular arts strand on this national channel and put me in touch with one of her producers, Sara Davies.

Following discussions with Davies, it was obvious that in wanting a clear thrust to the programme, either as debate or narrative, she was picking up on the more colourful aspects of my research: the fact that Pete Maggs, for instance, had a black cannibal puppet; that the show had been, in her words, 'banned by many local authorities'.<sup>11</sup> Whilst I could see that this would make compelling listening, I felt I had other obligations to meet: to give a balanced view and to keep the good-will of my consultants, the performers themselves. We arrived at a new understanding which would place me in the role of inquisitor, posing commonly asked questions: How did the show originate? Why does it continue to be played? What are its underlying meanings? And so on. This allowed me to take an ostensibly naïve and 'neutral' role and so to elicit the voices of the performers, not unlike the ethnographic method itself. Assuring puppeteers that their views would get a positive airing ensured their co-operation. I was also able to interview my Ph.D supervisor in the role of academic expert and to use the BBC as a means to access other experts such as Ben Wilson and to get hold of interviews made for other programmes, such as one with Harrison Birtwistle. As it turned out, I found myself pushing at an open door. Davies proved amenable in letting me dictate the content of the programme, and in fact it was only due to my insistence, in the end, and in the interests of balance, that the controversial aspects of the show, namely the violence, were examined.

Making a radio programme is different from doing ethnographic research and it impacts differently on consultants, sometimes for obvious reasons. Interviewing

consultants in the normal course of my research, I would try to be as discrete as possible, not thrusting microphones at them, but asking if I could record our conversations and usually placing a small, mobile-phone sized, digital recorder on the table or wherever convenient between us. Whenever possible, I would avoid holding it so that it ceased to become an extension of me and as far as possible would be forgotten about. Most of my interviews were informal and fairly free-flowing. If I had a specific issue to address such as around technical questions, I would tell the consultant before-hand; if not, I would have a general theme, but I would be interested in performers' own shaping of ideas. Interviewing for broadcast is quite different. For technical reasons, especially in noisy conditions such as the Mayfayre where I did many of the interviews, it is necessary to hold a large microphone quite close to the interviewee. It is sometimes necessary to ask interviewees to repeat points, to clarify, to rephrase, in fact to self-edit. Interviews are often hurried; grabbing somebody between shows, getting their consent on the hoof. The result can be that, in contrast to ethnographic research where much work is done establishing rapport and building trust in order to get behind the ready-made, polished response, these responses emerge again. Later, interviews are edited, often to highlight a particular point and to cut out the 'noise'- hesitation, repetition, coughing, nerves - the texture which constitutes much of human speech. Digital technology allows even the smallest word or hesitation to be removed. Davies was aware of these compromises and remarked that whilst this was from time to time discussed amongst programme makers, nobody had found a solution to them. The process of editing and shaping, of course, is part of the hermeneutics of ethnography, but, one hopes, is nowhere near as heavy-handed as the staging of the mediated documentary. Within both processes there are power asymmetries, but the broadcast situation magnifies them and places a responsibility on the programme-maker to address them. Geertz (cited in Marcus 1997: 89) describes a 'complicity of mutual interests' between ethnographer and consultant which results in a kind of 'anthropological irony', each interest using the other.<sup>12</sup> When a third interest is brought to play, this irony is made enormously more complex.

To my relief, the documentary I produced was very well received by the Punch performers and by audiences. Here was a programme about Punch and Judy which was not at the same time a programme about controversy. Troublingly, in the process

of managing expectations and needs, the degree to which this was a matter of elision *or* a reflection of actuality, became difficult to say.

I talked in the Introduction to the thesis about my process of recruitment as ethnographer of the community. To the degree that this process was part of a conscious and therefore reflexive project on the part of the College, so this thesis is a part of the discourse which the College wishes to articulate. There is always a tension in ethnography between the perspective of the viewer and the perspective of the viewed, hence the need for participation as well as observation. That tension can never be entirely eradicated, it is in the nature of standing in different places, and it ought to be productive. During the discussion about controversy at Paignton, it became clear to me that this tension contained an informative political dimension, one which required me to examine my own position and in the light of which to question my response to theirs. This is a quite natural situation. Joan Gross (2001: 255), a woman looking at Tchantchès, expressed an occasional sense of ‘guilt’ about her decision to research a ‘male performance form’ when her female colleagues asked her about the work. From time to time people have expressed surprise when I have mentioned that I have been researching Punch and Judy, sometimes because they feel it is too slight a form to merit it - an objection relatively easy to counter - and sometimes because they feel it is politically ‘suspect’, a more difficult objection to deal with. My own position has been at times at odds with that of performers, and discussions about controversy have helped me understand their position.

In this chapter I have considered the role that controversy plays in the performers’ work, and sought to expose how political correctness in particular has been a place where performers and the popular media have in recent years found common ground. In the process of thinking this relationship through, I have recognised my own responsibility towards the performers who have generously helped me in my researches. In doing so, I have also recognised my obligations towards the ethnographic process which, in order to set the record straight, requires a degree of distance. It is impossible not to become part of the story one is telling and it is necessary to make some acknowledgement of that fact. The meeting at Paignton marked a good point at which to begin the necessary process of distancing and to think about leaving the field.

## Notes

1 Cited in Hollis 1981: 16. This statement is frequently brought out by performers in defence of the tradition. Dickens was responding to a complainant about the show who was looking to him for support.

2 In interview with reporter for the BBC local early evening news, 19 March 2009. This retort is often made by performers in defence of the tradition.

3 1995: 10

4 For a typical reporting of PC and terminology, see Alexandra Blair in the Times, 7 March 2006 [http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/women/families/article738220.ece](http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/families/article738220.ece) (accessed 21 July 2009)

5 Chandler: 'Punch and Political Correctness', and Edwards 'Punch in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' both in *The Slapstick Symposium* [http://www.punchandjud.org/Punch&Judy\\_Symposium.htm](http://www.punchandjud.org/Punch&Judy_Symposium.htm) (accessed 10 November 2006)

6 An alliance between anti-pc and British nationalism is evident in the kind of rhetoric which is expressed by, for example, *The Campaign Against Political Correctness*, a web-based organization. Its web-site (<http://www.capc.co.uk>) states 'Nothing good is likely to come from something which was started to destroy our country as we know it and which is so controlling and dictating'. The site also carries a picture of Punch and Judy and a clip from a Punch and Judy show in the sit-com *Are You Being Served*, in its section on 'PC and Nostalgia' (accessed 30 March 2009)

7 For a lucid discussion of the relationship between power and language, especially as it relates to political correctness, see Andrews 1996.

8 Pete Maggs described performers to me as 'people who use their folly as a stalking horse'. I understood this to mean a way of revealing the true relations between things. Conversation, 18 September 2007.

9 For a discussion of the discrepancies between public behaviour and private attitudes see Leaf van Boven, (2000).

10 Conversation with the Arts and Humanities Research Council, *Collaborative Doctoral Award Approaches Conference*, 24 November 2008.

11 Second radio Commissioning Proposal.

12 For a nuanced discussion of Geertz's view, see Marcus 1997.

## Conclusion

*[...] the real problem is not how to build identity, but how to preserve it; whatever you may build in the sand is unlikely to be a castle. In a desert-like world it takes no great effort to blaze a trail - the difficulty is how to recognize it as a trail after a while. How to distinguish a forward march from going in circles, from eternal return?*

Zygmunt Bauman <sup>1</sup>

*[...] no generation speaks quite the same language as its predecessors.*

Raymond Williams <sup>2</sup>

An ethnographic study is not a scientific document and the ‘findings’ are inevitably in some sense impressionistic. It is good to avoid the misleading process by which, ‘The interpersonal contingencies and experiential give-and-take of fieldwork [...] congeal on the page into authoritative statement, table and graph’ (Conquergood 1991: 181). To that extent, the preceding chapters with their descriptions and analyses *are* the findings. It is necessary, however, to refine those impressionistic ‘findings’, to some extent, so that we are reassured that we know something now that we did not know at the outset. I would like then to address the more general questions I posed early on. These are questions to do with what the form articulates about the community within which it finds itself - in the way that, as I suggested, Gross, Keeler and Law argue their chosen forms articulate something about the societies in which *they* find themselves. I would like to finish by pointing to some of the areas for further research which might spring from the current work.

### The ‘findings’

If we were to compare what takes place in a Punch and Judy show now from what took place 30, 50 or even 100 years ago much would appear the same. The puppets, or most of them, the booth and many of the episodes played today would be familiar to audiences watching then. Most of the changes which have taken place since I was a child appear minimal: the loss of the hangman, the occasional incorporation of a topical puppet or reference, the virtual disappearance of the bottle. The biggest change at this level, as I have suggested, is the survival of Judy and her reappearance at the end of some of the shows. The key elements by which the show is recognised *as* the show persist. Audiences amongst whom I have sat and stood then and now have responded in much the same way; children find the Crocodile unsettling, as I did



then, they shout out on cue, as no doubt I did then. Looked at this way, the central finding would be that the form demonstrates a very remarkable consistency. But this finding neglects the more subtle changes which have taken place; changes to do with more complex sets of relationships and understandings and which are only accessible through ethnographic study. Those changes are to do with the cultural location of the form, the kinds of investment performers are putting into the form, the way that they relate to it and the way that it has come to be organized, managed and sustained. Most of these changes in the 'changing same' (Gilroy, cited in Hall 1996: 4) of the show lie beneath the surface. I have sought to reveal these less visible changes in the course of the thesis.

I organized the thesis in two main areas: *production* and *reception*. This enabled me to separate performers' perceptions of what they were doing from the actual impact of what they were doing. I separated production into a number of areas: production of the tradition, through discourse and historiography and organization; production of identity; and production of the material and dramaturgical elements of the form.

It became clear that, in contrast to earlier informal modes of association, the College and the PJF exercise greater control. They have come to make decisions about what constitutes the tradition, they support those they recognise as performers of the tradition, and they make pronouncements about what they see as the limits and purposes of the tradition. In effect, they manage the tradition. In so doing, they reflect upon the tradition. I have argued that the different ways in which they do this express different understandings of the dynamics of the tradition. For the PJF this means a more past-oriented stance. For the College, which more keenly expresses anxieties about, and an intention to do something about, the survival of the form, this means defining itself as an organization which encourages what it sees as innovative, future-oriented approaches.

How these orientations manifest themselves in and are the result of biographical relationships to the tradition was the subject of the next chapter. In this, I sought to expose a range of attachments to the tradition which contrast with former kinds of attachment. I suggested that these new attachments explain the new kinds of investment which are taking place, and the resulting, sometimes generic, changes in

aesthetics and dramaturgy. These are expressed through a number of different mechanisms, each reflecting the motivation of the performer. For Clive Chandler, for instance, the mechanism is the production of an ethically grounded narrative played for audiences reckoned to be excluded from other forms of artistic experience; for Rod Burnett it is the production of, and the playing with, a meta-theatrical frame; for Dan Bishop, the use of personally meaningful references in the production and validation of self; for Richard Coombs, the use of colour and texture as a piquant reminder of ephemerality; and for Geoff Felix, the mechanism of archaeological excavation and reinvigoration - a role which it plays for a number of performers. Others have other motivations and mechanisms. These contrast with earlier kinds of attachment which have come under the categories, 'swatchel omi' and 'beach uncle'.

Differences in how these various attachments to the form express themselves and how performers manage the tension between individuation and the obligations of tradition in material and dramaturgical terms was the subject of the next chapters. Whilst it is apparent that the show has a tremendous iconic energy and presence, it is also apparent that there are considerable structural constraints on how much the show can alter without changing its fundamental character. We saw that one or two performers have come up against this obstacle. Their decision to abandon the form is instrumental in allowing us to understand the differences between Punch performers and those puppeteers who use Punch as a found resource to say things beyond the scope of the form.

The structural familiarity of the show, notably the relationship between Punch and his wife, the centrality of the domestic set up and the celebrated rebelliousness of Punch, seem to constitute the cultural capital of the show. In approaching the second strand of the thesis, namely *reception*, it is this capital, I suggested, which makes it interesting to audiences and valuable to bookers and employers. This is in large part because the form is very often associated with the past, but also because those structures provide a set of dramatic relationships which are intrinsically compelling, but which rely on an outmoded set of constraints: inescapable marriage and the harridan wife. I argued that this presents something of a quandary for some performers who may wish to rid themselves of persistent associations with the past and yet are reliant on it to find a context for performance. This is by no means all

performers. It also presents an easy target for some commentators who associate the show with no longer acceptable representations of behaviour, especially when they are represented in public. The show's cultural capital both profits and encumbers it. I pointed to the complexity and contradictoriness of this situation in the last chapter.

### **What the show articulates about contemporary Britain**

Seen in these terms, the concerns which Punch and Judy articulates are concerns with how in post-industrial western societies we (by 'we' I mean members of those communities) respond to popular symbols of the past. These are concerns in fact with how we relate to the past itself, the degree to which we can take charge of those symbols and invigorate and integrate them with our own contemporary needs, or the degree to which we are determined by them. What has happened in Punch is part of a much larger shift in orientation towards the past and its symbols. The new constituencies of performers emerging in the 1970s and '80s used the symbols of the past which the show so patently was, to try to speak about the present. The nostalgic capital of the show was not used for its own sake but as part of a repertoire of colours and sounds and textures which, it was hoped, allowed audiences to recognise their own, historically-rooted, appetite for transgression, vicariously and contemporarily enacted by Punch. Discussing the findings in this way allows us to set the research within broader questions about traditionalisation and how in contemporary Britain the familiar symbols of the past serve, and are appropriated, to construct identities in the present. We might usefully think of the shift in how symbols of the past are used as a shift from a set of relations in which, as A.E. Green puts it, popular art was 'popular by origin', to one where it is 'popular by destination' (1980: 139).

This places Punch within a cluster of symbols as far-ranging as the monarchy, Shakespeare, the English Pub, fish and chips, the double-decker bus, and so on, which carry and constitute a sense of what it is to be (specifically) English, but whose meanings have come to be contested in the process of construction. The way these icons are proposed and collected, and the (encouraged) debate surrounding some of them in the Icons of Englishness project is a good marker of the current resistances and difficulties of arriving at a fixed sense of English identity.<sup>3</sup> This suggests a very different place from the one that Punch and Judy occupied shortly after its emergence when it was absorbed into the process of constructing class-identities. The variety of

attitudes towards symbols of identity which Punch in its ambivalent position signals, points to a much more fluid and contested sense of (national and class) identity as it manifests itself in this phase of late-modernity. At the same time, this contesting has meant that decisions about what constitutes culture at the *meta* level are consciously made and fought over through institutions and organizations which are themselves the product of late-modernity.

The show has come to be a marker of a recalled, if never actual, time. As such it seems to speak of a desire for continuity whose very articulation speaks of discontinuity. It has taken on increasingly contradictory meanings in a way which reflects a general reorientation to the past. Its very contradictoriness is a marker of both polysemy and recalcitrance: its reception is context-dependent, yet it resists change.

It is necessary to put some limits on what can be said about how the show articulates the contemporary relationship with the past. The form remains, though familiar and easily recognised by most British people, a sideshow. We cannot think of it as central to the community's understanding of itself in the way that, say, Tchotchkes was to its Liege audiences, or in the way that Keeler suggests *wayang* is to Javanese society. People do not deliberately go to it to process or seek reassurance about a sense of who they are; they usually happen upon it. It articulates perhaps more in the way that Awaji puppetry does, whose reception is a kind of barometer in relation to how the past is processed. Most of the time it does not enter people's thinking, but when it does, or when they come across it, or when it is mentioned to them as it has often been when I have told people about the work I am engaged in, it seems to trigger a range of often ambivalent responses. These responses are conditioned on the one hand by strong memories of it from childhood, positive or negative, recollections of particular instances of seeing it, fragments of episodes in it, the puppets, the colours, the sound; and on the other by a sense that it is in some way controversial and perhaps either ought not to be permitted, or that it should be encouraged as a mark of freedom of expression. Its reception amongst adults is rarely unmediated by often quite layered, not to say, contradictory, thinking. This ambivalence may signal a fragmented response to the past which Punch and Judy betokens. Britain has become a far more multicultural place in the last few decades, new power relations between

the sexes seem to be in play and new ways of thinking about and dealing with children are common. The reality of the world the show represents is not recognised in the same way that it was 40 years ago, so it occupies a very different place for its audiences. That the representation of an earlier supposed set of relations is responded to differently by the different groupings which now constitute British society, is something which performers are negotiating.<sup>4</sup> An instance of this deep ambivalence occurred when the set of British postage stamps with Punch characters on was released in 2001. Performers were keen to do a show at the launch event, but the Post Office would not allow it for fear it would offend people.

### **Further research**

At first glance, extending the discussion looks hampered by the very uniqueness of the form. What can Punch and Judy possibly speak to us about anything else? Certainly it has similarities with other 'traditional' British performance forms, pantomime, with its set of popularly sustained conventions (see Lewcock 2003), and Morris dancing and Mumming with their appeal to a sense of the vernacular. But that does not get us very far, since these forms do not share the continuity of discrete, particular and iconographic practice which so mark Punch and Judy, especially as a public-space form which claims to be contemporarily responsive. In the case of Morris dancing and Mumming, greater capital appears to be invested in their sense of antiquity; audiences are obliged to read them as survivals.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the pull for many contemporary Punch performers is to the future, however structurally difficult that might actually be. The key to opening up the question may lie in this difference. This might be done by looking at emerging influences which I have not addressed in detail and which might form the subject of further research.

For a form whose roots seem so embedded in the past, Punch and Judy is remarkably responsive; even in the short period of the study there have been shifts in the form's production and reception. To get some hold on what currently constitutes the form, it has been necessary artificially to stop the clock, as it were; much as Cruikshank stopped the show when he recorded it. This has meant ignoring the fact that one of the elements which constitute tradition is the fact that it takes place within time and is continually subject to change. It is only at the end of the period of study that some of the changes that have taken place in the period of the study are coming into focus.

These changing areas might form the basis for further work. I have identified three areas in this respect: changing relations with the broader puppetry community, internationalism, and the emergence of younger Punch performers who are not reflexively engaged in the tradition in the way that I have suggested the post-Leach performers have been. I would like briefly to talk about these now.

I suggested in Chapter One that one of the reasons for the formation of the College and the increasing collective self-identification of Punch performers was the sense of marginalization they were experiencing in relation to other, 'elite', puppetry forms. They felt like patronised or despised poor relations working in a field which historically belonged to them, but from which they had been usurped by newcomers who deigned to speak about them or on their behalf. They were engaged in a restitution of authority. There have been some small changes in this relationship in the last two or three years and at least one accommodation from a, perhaps, surprising quarter. Nenagh Watson, who had worked with Manchester based radical lesbian puppet company Doo-Cot from its inception in the 1980s till its demise in 2007, has come to recognise the value of a form she was once suspicious of (see Reeve 2008c). Her interest in the artisanal aspects of Punch and Judy has led her to investigate it as a way of thinking about how the past finds a voice in the present and how a tradition of honed craft and practice might carry an intrinsic value which is accessible and resonant in a contemporary context. This interest, though articulated differently, is akin to that of some of the performers I have been discussing. Where some other puppeteers have referenced Punch in order to reject what the form is assumed to stand for, Watson is interested in taking it on its own terms and in accepting that its popularity signals something meaningful for its audiences.<sup>6</sup> She is not yet sure where the work will lead, although she intends to perform the show at some point. Some Punch performers are encouraging and helpful towards her, but, as yet, are also not sure how it will reflect their own sense of the show. Watson's interest in the form sprang from working closely with Glyn Edwards and from researching Awaji puppetry. She found a commonality in the traditions which transcended cultural differences. How the form is regarded by other members of the broader puppetry community might be further investigated.

This area relates to the second possible further area of research: internationalism. We have seen that performers are increasingly working internationally, performing at festivals abroad and responding to invitations overseas. Foreign puppeteers working in popular forms are increasingly invited to perform in Britain and interchanges of ideas and practice are taking place. This is part of a wider picture of globalisation, and its influence on the form has yet to be fully investigated. Tilley (2001: 267) suggests that, contrary to the 'far too simple' equation that globalisation produces homogeneity, it is at least as likely that 'Global processes organize diversity' (ibid). A show which is taken to Italy and performed for an Italian audience, for example, may return to Britain more, not less, nuanced, in sharper, not vaguer focus. I have come across a range of attitudes amongst performers about how they should approach performing abroad. Glyn Edwards believes that the show's capital as a distinctively English/British form is lost if it is translated. As noted above, he suggests this has to do with its characteristically national rhythms; Dan Bishop, by contrast, is prepared to sacrifice this for the sake of comprehensibility. Performers report a variety of experiences when working abroad. The degree of hybridisation that international work produces is a central question in how the popular forms speak to international communities. Discussions about internationalism bring in train questions not only about what constitutes the show, but also about how puppeteers think about themselves and their identities: do they consider themselves part of an international community working across national boundaries or of a national community working across those boundaries? How does the audience think of itself when meeting an international show? These questions require more focussed conversations with visiting international performers and extensive field-trips abroad.

One way of looking at the dynamics of change which are due to internationalisation might be to consider how the form has taken its own direction in places which tend not to situate Punch within a community of cognates, where the form has been subject to a greater degree of separate development, as it were. I am thinking especially of the experience in the United States and Australia. Lacking the relatively large community of performers mutually reinforcing a sense of identity and obligation, and lacking also the opportunities to intermingle with other European traditional forms, the limited research I have done suggests they have been shaped by local circumstances.<sup>7</sup> This also requires further research.

The case of Nenagh Watson and of the international puppeteers signals a departure from notions that identity is singular and always bound to a sense of place and instead alert us to the degree to which '[...] transnational [...], regional, more local and even personal identities' (Graham and Howard 2008: 8), might be coming to replace national and class ones. But it is too early to say how this will affect the form in the coming years.

The third strand of further research has to do with how emerging performers perceive themselves. Much of this thesis has been taken up with the idea that performers have been engaged in constructing identities for themselves. I have suggested that since Leach, this identity-construction has taken on a more reflexive quality. This has resulted in a diversification of motive and has resulted in new ways of thinking about aesthetics and dramaturgy. I am becoming aware of performers entering the field for whom this kind of reflexivity plays a smaller part.

As I have stressed, there is still a mixture of performers working side-by-side. Some performers who have been around for a while, such as Mark Poulton, do not seem to belong to either the beach uncle tradition, nor do they come from the swatchel omi heritage, nor do they have the reflexive attitude of the (then) newer performers.<sup>8</sup> They do the show because they want to do the show, and they do not especially think about what it means when they do it, although they believe there is a genuine appetite for it and that they are meeting that appetite. There are other younger performers, some quite well established now, such as Gary Wilson and Robert Styles, who do not express any particular sense of theatrical, ethical, political or biographical disquiet, but who are investing the show with originality and wit because they find themselves amongst a community of performers for whom originality and wit has become a qualifying characteristic. In other words, the wave of reinvigoration of which the counter-culturalists were the most visible component has left in its wake an assumption amongst younger performers that the show is by definition capable of a high level of theatrical skill and engagement, with a long heritage to support it. They tend not to concern themselves with, or even especially be aware of, the threats to the form's survival which so motivated Edwards and others.



New sets of handings-on are taking place and have become clearer in the last two or three years. The full implications of this are yet to be disclosed, so they can only be hinted at here. On one of my last field-trips Rod Burnett remarked to me, with some surprise, that younger performers are increasingly telling him that he has been a profound influence on them, although this had never been his intention. He strongly influenced Poulton who was quite unaware of Burnett's own influences. In the three years since my researches began, I have come across one performer, Joe Burns, now 17 years old, who stands in relation to Poulton as Poulton did to Burnett. He has watched many of his shows and has got help and encouragement from him. By his own admission, his own show is pretty much a copy of Poulton's; but it is beginning very markedly to gain its own characteristics. Burns recognises his indebtedness but tells me he is confident enough now to use some of his own material. It has been fascinating to see how his show has grown in assurance and how he has matured as a performer in this short time. He performs fairly regularly, and it is clear that his performance decisions, whilst influenced by Poulton, have found their own shaping through his own development of a particular performance persona. In this instance it is as if the show has been, to use computer terminology, *re-booted*. It has found a new lease of life but without the performer knowing it needed one.

Like Robert Styles and Gary Wilson, Burns is amongst a group of younger performers who seem unencumbered by questions of reflexivity. For them the show expresses no more or less than the ability of a popular form to adapt and survive in a society which has become quite relaxed with a wide range of expressive forms, which are no longer especially connected to a sense of class and which are comfortable in their contingent relationship to the past. This suggests a great freedom to do the show in response to what is happening in the moment of performance. A new picture is emerging even during the period of the research which already makes the central notion of the reflexively ordered tradition look like a passing trend.

This is consistent with the idea that the show is finding its location as one amongst a proliferation of available forms in the *bricolage* which constitutes the late-modern landscape; we might use Baudrillard's notion of *hyperreality* to describe this (see Bauman 1992b: 151).<sup>9</sup> Where reflexivity might once have been the preserve of the artist, part of their strategy of playing with materials and forms, now that capacity and

desire to play is part of a general mode of existence, part of the mundane (and highly media-ized) fabric of the world. It is the dominant mode. Forms which no longer have an intrinsic connection to a sense of place or a hierarchy of meaning (and that really means most forms), are appropriable by producers of popular culture; we are more likely to encounter Mozart in an advert than in the concert-hall, it is as likely to be sampled as heard whole.

In this thesis, I have intended 'reflexivity' to mean 'reflecting upon', and I have striven to make clear distinctions between performers who have thought hard about what they are doing and why and those who have not. Ulrich Beck, Wolfgang Bonss and Christopher Lau offer an alternative definition, however, and suggest instead that we are now entering/have entered a period of what *they* understand by the term 'reflexivity' (2003). They define this as *non*-reflection upon, a kind of reflex-action, an unconsidered re-action where amongst the huge array of choices and images, there is no time to choose. The epitome of this is the non-stop, ever-changing vista of MTV.<sup>10</sup> Emerging performers, brought up as they have been in this ever-proliferating period, seem to reflect less upon the form.

In this thesis, I have constructed a narrative in which the 'natural', economically and familiarly derived and constituted identities of the beach uncles and the swatchel omis were replaced by the self-constructed identities of the counter-culturalists. I am arguing that increasingly, in response to the dissolution of class and national boundaries, those strategies of narrativization may be giving way to a sort of free-floating identity, the identity of 'the quasi-subject' (Beck et al.: 25). The formlessness and freedom of the quasi-subject adds a particular complexity to the role of the traditional form and what it means for its performers. It creates opportunities to assume identities and have them validated by reference to the past, but in a context where the very ability to produce constructions is dependent upon the contingency, and therefore lack of intrinsic assurance, of those forms. It is impossible, perhaps, for somebody of my generation not to feel a sense of disquiet, and even envy at this freedom. Whether the forms which attach us to the past have sufficient weight to survive into the future and what they will look like when we get there is a question to be asked then.

## Notes

1 1996: 23

2 2001 [1977]:195

3 Edwards has told me that he believes that it 'served the master agenda behind Icons of Englishness that Punch was assimilated from another culture. Promoting a diverse heritage of Englishness is clearly a political decision' (private correspondence). For a list of such symbols, see 'The Icons of Englishness' website, [www.icons.org.uk](http://www.icons.org.uk) (accessed 19 June 2009).

4 This raises all kinds of questions about so called folk-forms in the heterogeneous post-traditional community. Catriona Kelly goes some way to addressing these in her discussion of Petrushka, which, like Punch, emerged as an urban form. She finds definitions of folklore which are predicated on the notion that they address 'the same reference group' (1990: 10), as Ben-Amos suggests, inadequate to describe a tradition which has always played to a mixed community, in ethnic, gender and class terms. As a consequence, Kelly prefers the term 'popular' to 'folk'.

5 For an account of an attempted 'modernizing' of a Mummers play and its subsequent 'return to the older form' see Russell 1981.

6 I am thinking in particular of the Lempen Puppet Company in Skipton, Yorkshire who 'returned' a Punch figure to the 'wild' and removed the layers of acculturation which, in their view, obscured the true puppet underneath, in their show *Puppets in the Wild*.

7 In the States performers seem less constrained by what they feel ought to constitute the show. (See Hayes 1930; Howard 2006; Judd 1879). Film of American shows can be seen on Youtube, (see, especially, *Punch and Santa Claus*, a 1948 version by George Prentice <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Asp7rqB8muA>, (accessed 9 February 2009); and the Marx Brothers *Monkey Business*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXZQOHAoU1K>, (accessed 9 February 2009). For a sense of the contrast with current American shows, see also the Freshwater Pearls website: [www.freshwaterpearlspuppetry.com/films](http://www.freshwaterpearlspuppetry.com/films) (accessed 1 July 2009). The Australian situation was described to me by Chris van der Craats who believes that because one of its principal purposes is to remind audiences of what life was like 'in the old country', that is to say Britain, it deliberately tries to retain its historical form.

8 I recognise that the use of these three terms to denote attitude to the tradition might look like a 'reliance on disciplinary stock categories' (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001: 162) which as a form of grounded methodology ethnography seeks to overcome; however, I have sought to show the limits and contingencies of these terms. The inability to place Poulton and others in these categories is not, I believe, an analytical failure, but, rather, indicates an historical development in the form.

9 The *hyperreal* is a condition in which, 'Everything transcends and leaves behind the very opposition which it stood for and which used to lend it an identity of its own [...] Reality has devoured everything, and everything can claim reality with equal justice' (Bauman 1992: 151).

10 This they call 'second-modern society' (Beck et al. 2003: 2), in which, in contrast to 'first-modern society' characterised by constructed but clearly-visible boundaries - 'nation-states, the national and the international, society and nature [...]' (ibid: 21) - '[...] second-modernity individuals haven't sufficient reflective distance on themselves to construct linear and narrative biographies' (Scott Lash, cited in ibid: 23).

## Appendices

### **A: Three contemporary versions of the core episode**

*The following are three versions of the core episode of the show; they demonstrate how different performers interpret this episode differently. Each is a transcription from a particular performance.*

#### **Geoff Felix: Covent Garden PJF festival, 30 September 2007.**

*Punch is alone; he has just finished gleefully singing 'Pop Goes the Weasel'. He calls downstairs.*

*Punch:* Judy! Judeey!  
*Judy:* (*From downstairs*) What do you want, Mr Punch?  
*Punch:* Come up here.  
*Judy:* I can't come up there.  
*Punch:* Why not?  
*Judy:* 'Cos I'm stuck in the middle of a rice pudding.  
*Punch:* (*Appearing*) Now Mr. Punch, I'm very busy. (*Seeing the audience*) Oh my goodness me. Hello everybody!  
*Audience:* Hello Judy.  
*Judy:* Thank you everybody. My name is Judy and (*slapping Punch*) this is my disgusting husband, Mr Punch.  
*Punch:* Give us a kiss.  
*Judy:* Give you a kiss? (*Slapping Punch*) Certainly not.  
*Punch:* Judy! Give us a kiss!  
*Judy:* No.  
*Punch:* (*Stroking Judy affectionately*) Judy, give us a kiss.  
*Judy:* I'm shy. If I kiss you, they will go 'Oooh' and I'll be embarrassed.  
*Punch:* I want a kiss.  
*Judy:* (*To audience*) Shall I give him a kiss?  
*Audience:* Yes, give him a kiss.  
*Judy:* All right. Let me blow my nose first. (*She vigorously and loudly blows her nose on her apron*). Are you ready?  
*Punch:* Yes. (*They circle heads rapidly; Punch ends up on top. They kiss loudly*).  
*Judy:* (*Pushing Punch away*) You're worse than the milkman.  
*Punch:* I want another one.  
*Judy:* Another one?  
*Punch:* Yes. (*They repeat the kiss, this time Judy ends up on top*).  
*Judy:* You're worse than Wayne Rooney.  
*Punch:* What?  
*Judy:* Well, he likes the older woman.  
*Punch:* I want a kiss.  
*Judy:* Again?  
*Punch:* Yes. (*They begin the routine, but Judy ducks below the playboard as Punch moves towards her. Punch bangs his head on the proscenium*) Where is she gone?

Judy: (*Emerges with the Baby. Punch sees them and falls backwards in a dead faint*) Two kisses and you get a baby; well ain't that life? (*She gives the Baby to Punch*)

Punch: (*Throwing the Baby to Judy*) I don't want him.

Judy: (*Throwing the Baby back*) Mr Punch, I want you to look after my Baby while I go downstairs to put the kettle on. I want you to teach my Baby to walk.

Punch: All right.

Judy: You're not to do anything naughty.

Punch: I won't.

Judy: Are you sure?

Punch: Yes.

Judy: Are you sure you're sure?

Punch: Yes.

Judy: Want to phone a friend? Look after the baby and I will see you soon. (*To the audience*) Bye. (*There is no response*) I said, 'bye'!

Audience: Bye Judy. (*Judy disappears downstairs*).

(*Punch places the baby at one side of the stage and retreats to the other.*)

Punch: Walkies! (*The Baby waddles towards him, swinging his arms*) Walky, walky, walky, walky. (*Punch picks up the Baby and places him at the far side of the stage again*) Walky! (*The Baby dashes across the stage into his arms. Punch laughs and places the Baby down again*) Walky! (*This time the Baby turns away from Punch*) Oh. (*Punch looks at the Baby*) Sweeties! (*The Baby rushes into his arms. Punch puts the baby down again*) Walkies! (*The Baby falls to the floor. Punch attempts to stand him up several times and fails. Eventually he sits on the Baby. The baby starts to cry*) That's the way to do it.

Judy: (*As she comes upstairs*) Mr Punch, I heard my Baby cry. (*She notices Punch sitting on the Baby; this stops her in her tracks*) What are you doing there?

Punch: Baby sitting.

Judy: Baby sitting? That's the worst joke I've ever heard. (*She hits Punch with the Baby for emphasis as she says this. She gives the Baby to Punch and speaks to the audience*) Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, if you see Mr Punch hit my Baby or make my Baby cry, I want you to shout 'Judy' very loud and I will come and sort him out. (*She prods Punch with her hand*) Mr Punch, *they* are watching you. Now are you going to be good?

Punch: Yes.

Judy: (*Prodding him again*) You're not going to be naughty?

Punch: No.

Judy: Look at me. (*Punch looks at her and starts to quake with fear. She speaks to the audience*) You watch him, everyone, and I will see you soon. Bye.

Audience: Bye.

Judy: I said 'bye'!

Audience: Bye.

Judy: Right, lady with her arms folded, chewing gum, bye!

*Audience:* Bye. *(Judy goes downstairs).*

*Punch puts the Baby down; the Baby moves away, Punch retrieves him. This happens several times. Punch gently strokes him.*

*Punch:* Good boy, good boy. *(The Baby farts loudly; Punch looks astonished and smells his bottom. Punch falls over).* Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. *(He picks the Baby up and starts to hit him, first of all as if bouncing him up and down, then pushing him backwards and forwards against the proscenium, and finally picking him up and hitting his head on the floor).* You naughty, naughty, naughty boy.

*He throws the baby downstairs and laughs. Judy appears, watches him laughing for a while and then prods him to get his attention. Punch sees her and squeals in surprise, backing away to the edge of the playboard.*

*Judy:* *(Coolly)* Mr Punch.

*Punch:* What?

*Judy:* Where is my baby.

*Child audience member:* He dropped it.

*Judy:* He dropped it?

*Audience:* Yes!

*Judy:* Did he make my baby cry?

*Audience:* Yes!

*Judy:* Did he throw the baby down the stairs?

*Audience:* Yes!

*Punch:* Oh no I didn't.

*Audience Member (Richard Coombs):* Oh yes you did.

*Judy:* Thank you, Richard.

*Punch:* Oh no I didn't.

*Audience:* Oh yes you did.

*Punch:* *(In sing-song manner)* Oh no I didn't.

*Audience:* *(In same sing-song manner)* Oh yes you di-id.

*Judy:* Enough. *(She begins throwing herself about the stage)* Oh, oh, oh, my poor Baby Biscuit.

*Punch:* What?

*Judy:* Yes, we called him biscuit because we were crackers to have him. *(She resumes throwing herself about the stage)* Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.

*Punch:* What are you doing?

*Judy:* I'm acting, it's my big scene. I know what I'm going to do; I'm going to get my big stick. *(She goes downstairs)* Are you sorry up there?

*Punch:* No.

*Judy:* *(Emerging with a slapstick)* You will be. *(She hits Punch fiercely several times)* Take that, and that and that.

*Punch:* *(Grabbing the stick from her)* You take that. *(Judy falls to the floor).*

*Judy:* *(Lifting her head)* Oh my poor head. *(Punch hits her again)* I think I'll go home to mum. *(Punch hits her again)* I've got a headache. *(Punch hits her again)* Are you sure this is politically correct?

*Punch:* *(Hitting her and knocking her downstairs).* Get out of it.

**Clive Chandler: Walsall Illuminations, 18 October 2008.**

Walsall illuminations is a council run evening event in Walsall's town park, it takes place in the autumn. The shows are performed in a marquee.

*(Punch has just fallen off Hector the Horse.)*

Judy: (From downstairs) Mr Punch!  
Punch: Who's that?  
Judy: It's me.  
Punch: Who's me?  
Judy: It's Judy.  
Punch: Who's Judy?  
Judy: I'm your wife. I'm coming upstairs.  
Punch: All right; I'm coming downstairs.

*Punch says goodbye to the audience several times until he considers their response loud enough, popping up and down behind the playboard and through the gap around the proscenium until, finally, he disappears.*

Judy: (Coming upstairs) Oh dear me. (She hums the theme from the Radio programme 'The Archers') What a day I'm having. (She spots the audience) Oh, visitors. Hello.  
Audience: Hello.  
Judy: Oh that's nice. Are you all having a nice time?  
Audience: Yes.  
Judy: I'm glad you're having a nice time. I'll tell you something for nothing. I'm not having a nice time at all. (She puts her head in her hands).  
Audience: Ahh.  
Judy: You can do better than that. I said I'm not having a nice time.  
Audience: Ahhh!  
Judy: I'll tell you why. 'Cos I'm married. I'm married to a man – it's not funny – I'm married to a man and he's called Mr...  
Audience: Punch.  
Judy: You're right, he's called Mr Punch. And do you know what? He's lazy. He does no washing up, he does no cleaning, he does nothing in the house. All he does all day is sit in a nice big chair, drinking beer and watching football on the television. Your dad's not like that is he?  
Audience: Yes.  
Judy: Anyway, never mind your dad, has anyone seen Mr Punch?  
Audience: Yes.  
Judy: Can you tell me, is he upstairs or downstairs?  
Audience: Downstairs.  
Judy: Thank you very much. I'll go and find him; he can do his share of the housework. (As she goes downstairs) Mr Punch, where are you?

*(Punch comes upstairs, singing.)*

Judy: (From below) Can't see him down here.

*(As she comes up, Punch goes down. They bob up and down several times, missing each other.)*

Judy: Hold on, hold on, I've had enough of this, going up and down like a yo-yo. You can laugh; I still don't know where he is.

*(Punch appears behind her; the audience try to tell her, shouting and pointing; Judy turns round, by which time he has disappeared. This happens several times.)*

Judy: There's nobody there. Is he hiding from me?

Audience: Yes.

Judy: Ooh, two can play at that game. I'll tell you what, if he's hiding from me, I'll hide from him. I'll hide behind the curtains. If you see him, say 'Punch', I'll jump out and catch him.

*(She hides, Punch comes up; she misses him. This happens several times. Finally she manages to grab him and pin him to the playboard.)*

Judy: Mr Punch, I've caught you; what have you got to say for yourself?

Punch: Give us a kiss.

Judy: I'm not giving you a kiss 'cos you've been a naughty boy.

Punch: I've been a good boy.

Judy: You've been naughty.

Punch: Good.

Judy: Naughty.

Punch: Good.

Judy: *(To the audience)* Has he been good or naughty?

Audience: Naughty.

Judy: You're right, you're right. My mother was right; I never should have married him. Now, Mr Punch, I want you to look after the Baby.

Punch: The Baby

Judy: The Baby. I'll get the Baby. Do you want to see the baby?

Audience: Yes.

Judy: Everybody wants to see the Baby. I'll bring the baby upstairs and show

him to all the boys and girls and all the lovely grown ups, and they can all say 'ahh'. *(She fetches the Baby)* Here we go: the Baby.

Audience: Ahh.

Punch: What a beautiful baby.

Judy: He is a beautiful Baby.

Punch: Chip off the old block.

Judy: Mr Punch, you look after the baby and don't fall asleep. *(To the audience)* What did I say?

Audience: Don't fall asleep.

Punch: I promise.

Judy: If he does fall asleep call Judy. Keep an eye on him, you know what he's like.

*(As Judy leaves, Punch falls instantly asleep.)*



*Audience:* Judy!  
*Punch:* Oh shut up.  
*Judy:* (*Reappearing*) Did you fall asleep?  
*Punch:* No, no, no.  
*Judy:* (*To the audience*) Now, now, now. Mr Punch said ‘no, no, no. Is it ‘no, no, no’ or ‘yes, yes, yes’?  
*Audience:* Yes, yes, yes.  
*Judy:* (*Moving Punch to lean against the proscenium arch, and holding his head up*) Keep your head up there and don’t fall asleep. (*Punch falls over; Judy lifts him up, banging his head noisily against the proscenium. This happens several times. She speaks to the audience.*) If you see his head down there again, you’ll have to call Judy ever so loud. I’m going down the pub. For a pint. Of gin.

*(As Judy leaves, Punch falls asleep; the audience shout for Judy, Punch wakes up. This happens several times. Judy returns.)*

*Judy:* Mr Punch, you fell asleep, you big old banana nose. (*She slaps him*) Don’t fall asleep when you’re looking after the Baby.  
*Punch:* All right.  
*Judy:* You’d better sing the baby a song. Mr Punch will now sing ‘Oh what a beautiful baby’ in the key of C.

*(Judy goes downstairs and Mr Punch sings.)*

*Judy:* (*From below*) That’s a nice song. Keep the baby near you. Make sure he doesn’t get lost.  
*Punch:* All right, Judy.

*(Punch sings and dances, the Baby dances with him, eventually wandering off. The audience point this out to Punch who looks for him. The Baby eludes Punch for some time. Finally Punch catches him.)*

*Punch:* Sit! Stay there, stay there.

*(Punch starts to sing again, the Baby starts to wander off; Punch notices this and the baby comes back. This happens several times. Punch tires of this and chases the baby; when he catches him, he smacks the baby a number of times.)*

*Judy:* (*From below*) Mr Punch, are you smacking the baby?  
*Punch:* No.  
*Audience:* Yes.  
*Judy:* (*From below*) Is he smacking the baby?  
*Audience:* Yes.  
*Judy:* I’d better come up there and see what’s going on. Now, has he been smacking the baby?  
*Audience:* Yes!  
*Judy:* Mr Punch said ‘No, no, no’; is it ‘Yes, yes, yes’ or ‘No, no, no’?  
*Audience:* Yes, yes, yes.

*Judy:* (To Punch). I'm not having any of that. (She moves Punch to the side of the stage) Keep your hands in, stay there. It's not big, it's not clever and it's not politically correct. Stay there and don't smack him. (To the audience) If he goes anywhere near the baby, you now what to do. Call Judy.

(Judy leaves. Punch edges towards the Baby. The audience call for Judy. Punch, unable to restrain himself any longer, finally grabs the Baby and starts to smack him. He fetches his slapstick and hits the baby with it, eventually knocking him downstairs.)

*Punch:* Oh dear, the baby's fallen down the stairs. That's the way to do it. (He goes downstairs).

*Judy:* (From below) Is he looking after the baby?

*Audience:* No!

*Judy:* I'd better come up and see what's going on. Now, now, what's happened to the baby; where's he gone?

*Audience:* Mr Punch hit him downstairs.

*Judy:* I'll tell you what, we'll call Mr Punch upstairs. I'll count to three, we'll all say 'Mr Punch'. One, two, three.

*Audience and Judy:* Mr Punch!

*Punch:* I can't hear you.

*Judy:* He said he can't hear us. We'll have to shout. One, two, three: Mr Punch!

*Punch:* (Coming up with his slapstick) What's all the noise?

*Judy:* I'll tell you what's all the noise – you show me what you did to the Baby, after three. One, two, three.

(On 'three', Punch knocks her off the playboard with his slapstick.)

*Punch:* That's the way to do it.

**Reg Payne (Professor Goodvibes): Pimms in the Park, St Agnes, Cornwall, 12 August 2007.**

Pimms in the Park is a small village fair.

(The two Cornish Morris dancers, Desmond and Johnny Morris have just finished their routine when Judy calls up to them from downstairs.)

*Judy:* Oi, what's going on up there?

*Desmond:* (Looking down) It's a dragon, it's a dragon.

*Johnny:* It's not a dragon, it's Judy, we'd better get going. Say 'goodbye' to everybody quickly.

*Desmond:* Goodbye everybody, quickly.

*Johnny:* Goodbye, everybody, see you later. (They go downstairs. From below) Go on Desmond, down the backstairs, we'll go out the catflap. Oh, hello missus.

*Judy:* Don't you 'missus' me. What were you two doing up there? Have you been dancing up there with those big hob nail boots on?

Johnny: 'Twas only a bit of fun.  
Judy: I'll give you some fun. Where's me frying pan?  
Desmond: Steady on there, missus.

*(There is the sound of puppets being bashed about with a 'frying pan' – actually tambourine.)*

Desmond and Johnny: Oh, ow, ow, oh, ow!

Judy: Horrible little buskers, go and busk somewhere else. Look at all this mess all up me stairs. *(Judy emerges and sees the audience)* Oh my God! Hello my darlings, hello. Say 'hello' to your aunty Judy.

Audience: Hello.

Judy: Hello everybody, it's lovely to see you all out here today. Are you having a nice time, everybody?

Audience: Yes.

Judy: I should ask you all again. Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, are you having a lovely time?

Audience: Yes.

Judy: The man in the blue shirt at the back there, are you having a nice time, sir? *(There is no response)* You're not a foreigner are you; you're not one of these foreign workers, perhaps you don't understand. Somebody tell him; it's only your aunty Judy, darling, that's all. Oh, there's a man down here with whiskers. Oh, hello darling; ooh, he's all whiskery. I wanted Mr Punch to grow whiskers, you know. I don't know why, it just tickled my fancy. But there you go. Has anyone seen Mr Punch anywhere?

Audience: No.

Judy: Oh. You haven't got a beer tent here have you?

Audience: No. Yes.

Judy: Who said yes? That lady at the back there with a cowboy hat on, yes you. It's no good trying to hide from your aunty Judy. Have you seen Mr Punch in the beer tent?

Audience member: No.

Judy: No, you haven't. Well, he must be around here somewhere. Mr Punch! Mr Punch, where are you.

*(There is the sound of loud snoring from below.)*

Judy: There he is, fast asleep on the lavy. Mr Punch, wake up. *(More snoring)* It's no good, I haven't got a loud enough voice. *(To the audience)* Have you got nice loud voices everyone

Audience: *(Very loudly)* Yes!

Judy: All right, there's no need to shout that loud' you'll wake the Baby. I'll tell you what, I'll count to three and we'll all shout 'wakey, wakey Mr Punch!' After three, one, two, three...

Audience and Judy: Wakey, wakey Mr Punch! *(Punch laughs from below).*

Judy: You've done it, you've woken him up. Mr Punch, come up here, quickly.

Punch: *(From below)* I can't.

Judy: He says he can't. What's the matter with you?

*Punch:* I haven't got my trousers on.  
*Judy:* He says he hasn't got his trousers on. (*As if only just realizing what he has said*) Oh, oh my god, he hasn't got his trousers on down there. He's only got his spotty knockers on. You don't want to see him in his spotty knickers do you everybody, no.  
*Audience:* Yes!  
*Judy:* Oh no you don't.  
*Audience:* Oh yes we do.  
*Judy:* (*As Punch pops up, pushing him back downstairs; from below*) Behave yourself. Get back down there. Oh, those are my knickers. (*Punch laughs*) Take mine...just a minute, cancel that. Put your foot in there.  
*Punch:* Where's my foot?  
*Judy:* What do you mean, 'where's me foot'? On the end of your leg. Now put your foot in there. Ooh! Not in there. (*Punch laughs*) Behave yourself. Now, go upstairs and say 'hello' to everybody, nicely. Now, off you go.

(*Punch emerges, joyfully singing 'I'm [sic] a jolly good fellow'. He sees the audience.*)

*Punch:* Hello.  
*Audience:* Hello.  
*Punch:* (*Dancing fro side to side*). Hello, hello, hello. (*He twizzles round on his back and falls down the stairs*) Ooh me nose. (*He springs back upstairs, laughing*) That's the way to do it, that's the way to do it. (*He sings*)

Here we are again, happy as can be,  
 All good friends and jolly good company.  
 (*Calling downstairs*) Judy, oh Judy

*Judy:* Oh my God. What do you want now?  
*Punch:* Come upstairs.  
*Judy:* (*Emerging*) What are you after now?  
*Punch:* (*Sidling up to Judy*) Oh Judy.  
*Judy:* (*Pushing him away*) What do you mean, 'Judy'?  
*Punch:* Oh Judy.  
*Judy:* He's after something, I can tell. What do you want now?  
*Punch:* Give us a kiss.  
*Judy:* Give you a kiss?  
*Punch:* Give us a kiss.  
*Judy:* Clean your filthy face. He's worse than the milkman. (*Punch laughs*) I can't give him a kiss up here, in front of all these people.  
*Punch:* Yes you can.  
*Judy:* No I can't, not in front of everyone. (*To audience*) Can I now?  
*Audience:* Yes!  
*Judy:* You want me to kiss Mr Punch up here?  
*Audience:* Yes!  
*Judy:* You filthy lot. I'll tell you what I'll do.  
*Punch:* Yes?  
*Judy:* I'll give you a kiss if you make me a promise.

*Punch:* What's that?  
*Judy:* What do you mean, 'what's that'? Everybody knows what a promise is don't they?  
*Audience:* No!  
*Judy:* Say after me: I promise...  
*Punch:* I promise...  
*Judy:* To look after...  
*Punch:* To look after...  
*Judy:* The baby.  
*Punch:* The sausages.  
*Judy:* Not the sausages. (*Punch laughs*) The baby.  
*Punch:* The baby.  
*Judy:* Now you've promised. (*Punch quickly tries to kiss Judy*) Just a moment. Too much viagra in his sausages. Remember last time we had a kiss up here?  
*Punch:* We had a baby.  
*Judy:* We didn't have a baby. Chance would be a fine thing, I tell you. Last time we had a kiss up here somebody watched us and went, 'oooooh!', like that and I got all embarrassed. Now I don't want anyone to watch today, I want you all to put your hands in front of your eyes, and no peeping through your fingers. Yes you down the front with the red shirt on with the skull and crossbones, yes you! Who do you think I'm talking about? Put your hands in front of your eyes before I come and smack your bum. And you in the green there; yes you. Yes you of indeterminate gender, put your hands in front of your eyes. And you Calamity Jane. And you sir at the back with a pint of beer...oh, it's a lady; must be that time of year. Put your hands in front of your eyes. It's a terrible example to the children, isn't it?  
*Audience member:* Oooh!  
*Judy:* Shut up, we haven't even started yet. Here we go. (*To Punch*) Are you ready?  
*Punch:* Yes, I'm ready.

(*They stand back to back, circle heads and start to kiss; they writhe about for some moments, Punch on top, then Judy on top.*)

*Audience:* Ooooooh!

*Judy hides behind the curtains, embarrassed.*

*Punch:* That's the way to do it.  
*Judy:* (*Emerging*) That's not the way to do it. (*To audience*) Were you watching me kissing him?  
*Audience:* Yes!

(*Judy goes below and calls up.*)

*Judy:* Mr Punch, Mr Punch, where's the baby?  
*Punch:* Where is he?

*Judy:* What do you mean, 'where is he?' It's no good asking you anything in this mood. Oh, here he is?

*Punch:* Where is he?

*Judy:* He's down in the coal hole stuck between two slices of bread and some marmite.

*Punch:* (*Laughing*) Bring him up here.

*Judy:* Oh, just a minute, I think he needs the potty.

*Punch:* He's got a spotty botty?

*Judy:* No, he needs the potty. (*A stream of water sprays over the playboard wetting the audience, who scream. Judy sticks her head out from under the playboard and talks to the audience*) I'm sorry about that everyone, a little bit of splashback; he didn't get you wet did he?

*Audience:* Yes.

*Judy:* I'm sorry about that. You know what little boys are like with their winkies, they spray about all over the place. And some of you big boys over there you needn't smirk either. I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll go and get the potty and pass it up to Mr Punch. (*She disappears inside*) Here it is; now grab hold of it. (*She hands up a lavatory with an overhead cistern and a pull chain*) Has he got the potty up there everybody?

*Audience:* Yes.

*Judy:* Now don't shout, you'll upset the baby. He's a beautiful baby. (*She emerges with the baby*) There you go.

*Punch:* (*In horror*) What is it, what is it?

*Judy:* What do you mean, 'What is it?' It's our beautiful baby.

*Punch:* Oh, isn't he ugly.

*Judy:* He's not ugly.

*Punch:* Yes he is.

*Judy:* No it's not, it's not an ugly baby is it everybody?

*Audience:* Yes!

*Judy:* Oh no it isn't.

*Audience:* Oh yes it is.

*Judy:* Oh no it isn't.

*Audience:* Oh yes it is.

*Judy:* You at the back, you'd better look in the mirror next time your shaving. And you missus. (*To Punch*) Now listen here, you look after the baby.

*Punch:* Oh no.

*Judy:* Oh yes. You promised me you'd look after the Baby if I gave you a kiss.

*Punch:* No I didn't.

*Judy:* Yes you did. (*To audience*) Didn't he promise to look after the baby if I gave him a kiss?

*Audience:* Yes.

*Judy:* Don't trust 'em girls: they don't mind helping to make them but they don't want to look after them afterwards. (*To Punch*) Now you listen here, you either look after the baby or I'll get my mother over. For the week.

*Punch:* (*Immediately*) Give us the baby. (*Judy hands him the Baby*)

*Judy:* Now listen here, you put the baby in the potty and let him do a little pooh, a piddle and a paddle. All right? *(To audience)* We have to do all three together, darlings, 'cos we're on a water meter. *(To Punch)* Now put the baby in the potty to do a pooh, a piddle and a paddle, and don't let him fall down there, he'll break his little noddle. *(Indicating the floor in front of the booth. To audience)* Can you keep an eye on Mr Punch, everybody?

*Audience:* Yes!

*Judy:* Mums, will you keep an eye on him?

*Audience:* Yes.

*Judy:* Dads, will you...no, that's multi-tasking with a pint of beer in the hand isn't it? Mr Punch, put the baby in there and let him do a pooh, a piddle and a paddle, and don't let him fall down there. Oh, and don't let him lick the bowl; it's a filthy habit he's got into recently. *(To audience, as she leaves)* If he's naughty, call aunty Judy. Now put the baby in the potty.

*Punch:* What?

*Judy:* *(From below)* Oh, my god, I don't believe it, he's forgotten already. Somebody tell him to put the baby in the potty.

*Audience:* Put the baby in the potty.

*Punch:* *(Singing and dancing about)* Put the baby in the potty, put the baby in the potty, put the Baby in the potty.

*Judy:* *(From below)* All right, don't make a song and dance about it.

*Punch:* All right, put the baby in the potty. *(He stands the baby up in the lavatory).*

*Judy:* *(From below)* Are you keeping an eye on him everybody? Don't let him fall out.

*(As she says this, the baby starts to fall out of the lavatory and over the audience side. Punch retrieves the baby. This happens several times, to the screams and shouts of the audience. The baby starts to become interested in the pull chain, flicking it backwards and forwards.)*

*Punch:* Oh look, he's playing a little game.

*Judy:* *(From below)* What sort of a game?

*(The baby takes hold of the chain and pulls it. This flushes the lavatory and, accompanied by a sharp whistling noise, the baby is flushed away, his neck extending in the process, but finally completely disappearing. Punch looks into the lavatory bowl and laughs.)*

*Punch:* That's the way to do it.

*Judy:* *(As she comes upstairs)* I said, what sort of a game? Where's my Baby,

where's my baby gone, where's my baby?

*Audience:* He went down the toilet.

*Judy:* I beg your pardon?

*Audience:* He's gone down the toilet.

Judy:           *(Looking into the lavatory)* Oh my god, my baby's gone right round the bend. *(Punch laughs)*. Don't stand thee laughing, what are you going to do?

Punch:          Uh. Use the sink.

Judy:           Use the sink? *(She quickly gets a slapstick from below and starts hitting Punch with it)* I'll give you 'use the sink'.

*(She pushes his head into the lavatory and hits him several times. Punch grabs the stick and does the same to her. Finally she is knocked down the stairs.)*

Punch:          That's the way to do it. *(He looks downstairs)* Oh dear, oh dear.

Judy:           *(From below)* That's it, Mr Punch, I'm going to get a Policeman. You're going to be in trouble.

### **B: An older style show**

**Ron Codman: Liverpool Maritime Museum; 9 February 2007.**

*(The following short sequence contrasts with the extracts In Appendix A, demonstrating a show with the flavour of an earlier period, characterised by greater reliance on rhythm, no audience interaction and a greater degree on nonsense.)*

Policeman:      That's a whopper.

Punch:           *(Knocking him downstairs)* That's a topper. Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy.

Joey:            *(Emerging from below)* Here we go looby loo, here we go looby lie, here we go looby loo, all on a Saturday night.

*(Joey head-butts Punch in the stomach, Punch tries to hit him.)*

Joey:            Missed me. La, la, la, la la la la; all on a Saturday night.

*(During this sequence Punch tries to hit Joey, but only succeeds in tapping on the playboard in time with the song. Joey also taps, with his head.)*

Joey:            I think I'll have a lie down now.

*(He lies on the playboard, Punch takes aim at his head and counts tow three, Joey moves away as he reaches three, Punch misses him. This happens twice. Joey disappears below and sticks his head through the front of the booth.)*

Joey:            *(Singing)* 'I am sailing, I am sailing...' *(He disappears inside again. We hear his voice)* I love the sea, I love the navy, I love biscuits(?), cold porridge and gravy. *(He pops up again)* One, two and a half.

Punch:           Stop it, stop it, stop it.

Joey:            *(From below)* Yeah, stop it, stop it, stop it.

Punch:           What a pity, what a pity. Cowardy, cowardly custard.

Boxer:           *(From below)* Cowardy, cowardly custard? Who's calling me cowardy, cowardly custard? I'll just come up and have a look. *(He appears)*. What are you making that noise for? Go on, go on, you rascal, get downstairs. *(He head-butts Punch in the stomach. Punch goes below)*.



*Punch:* What a pity, what a pity.  
*Boxer:* Yes, what a pity. Now then, we're going to have a boxing match between two boys, and they're going to spar two rounds under the Marquis of Queensferry's rules; sorry, Queensbury's rules. So here we go: in the blue corner Willy Win and in the red corner, Willy Might. *(The other Boxer appears)*. Right, OK, listen for the bell.

*(An electric bell rings. The Boxers slap each other about the face.)*

*Boxer 1 :* *(Having knocked the other on the floor)* One, two  
*Boxer 2:* *(Having recovered, knocking the other Boxer down)* Three!  
*(They continue slapping each other until a voice from below calls up.)*

*Voice:* Alright boys, second round. That's it, take your places, boys. Shake the cobwebs away.

*(The boxers shake themselves vigorously. The bell rings, they continue slapping each other. Eventually Boxer 1 wins and swings Boxer 2 about.)*

*Boxer 1:* Here we are, Master Punch. I've won the fight. *(He throws Boxer Two downstairs)*.  
*Punch:* *(From below)* What a pity, what a pity. Oh boy, oh boy ,oh boy.  
*Jim Crow:* *(From below)*. Yeah! Oh de Camptown Races sing this song, dooh dah, dooh dah. Yeah! *(Crow and Punch appear)*. Hello Master Punch, sit down alongside-a-me and I'll sing you a little song. *(He swings his legs over the playboard)* Ooh, look at my trotters!

*(They sing, and tap together in rhythm on the playboard. [I was unable decipher the words here], Punch goes below.)*

*Jim Crow:* Well, I'll have a lie-down now. Come on legs, up you come.

*(He puts his legs on the playboard and tries to get comfortable. His legs start to kick and move about.)*

*Jim Crow:* Stop it, legs. I won't bring you out for a walk again. *(The legs drag him along the playboard)* Come back here, where are you going? Hey. *(Sings)* 'These boots were made for walking'. Oh my word, I don't know. Never mind. Let's have another lie-down, shall we?

*(He settles down and there is a voice from below.)*

*Devil:* Fee, fi, fo, fum.  
*Jim Crow:* Eh?  
*Devil:* *(Appearing, with fork)* I am the devil. Yes, fee, fi, fo, fum. *(He approaches Jim Crow and prods him with the fork)*  
*Jim Crow:* Fee, fo piddly bum. Stop your tickling, Devil. *(The Devil goes below)* Yes, anyone else down there? *(He lies down again)*.

*(Batman appears and sings, ‘La,la, la, la, la, Batman’, to the tune of the 1960s TV show, and disappears again.)*

*Jim Crow:*     What Batman? Dear, oh dear oh dear.

*(The Ghost appears and strokes Jim Crow with his sheet.)*

*Jim Crow:*     Stop your tickling. *(Sees the Ghost and taps it on the head)* Ooh, a hanky with a snowball.*(The Ghost disappears)* Where’s it gone? *(It reappears. Jim Crow shakes with fear)* Oh Mammy. It’s taken all the stitches out of my britches.

*(He goes back to sleep. The Crocodile appears and takes Jim’s hand in his jaws.)*

*Jim Crow:*     Stop your tickling.

*(The Crocodile takes Jim’s head in his jaws.)*

*Jim Crow:*     There’s a flea in the bed.

*(The Crocodile throws Jim downstairs.)*

*Jim Crow:*     Ooooh. I’ve fallen down the coal-pit and knocked the bottom out.

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