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A JUSTIFICATION OF PUPPETRY
AS AN ART FORM

by

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INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to point out the fact that the puppeteer, the same as any creator of art, should consider the potentialities of his medium if it is to achieve an organic quality. He must, therefore, look directly to the powers of expression that are uniquely inherent in his art, and, thereby, look beyond mere operating technique. The serious puppeteer would have very little difficulty assembling a sizable library of construction manuals and "how-to" guides on every phase of puppet mechanics. This is evident in the ready availability in many a super-market of such excellent paperbacks as the Sheri Lewis volumes for young children as well as a considerable bibliography of advanced texts available from the New York Drama Bookshop or other similar sources. There is, however, a minimum of published material devoted specifically to puppetry as an art form. Because the practicing puppeteer is often unaware of the artistic potential of his medium, it was felt that a brief study of its justification as an art form was a worthwhile undertaking.

Two popular misconceptions, particularly in the United States, are that puppetry is primarily for the light, even trivial, entertainment of children; and that, for the most part, it is an imitative art with very little artistic identity of its own. Unfortunately, many of its current uses tend to encourage these misconceptions.

A review of the long rich heritage of the puppet disproves

these erroneous ideas. High moments in its history confirm the fact that the puppet can be used as a significant instrument of adult entertainment, at the same time maintaining its independent artistic identity.

Puppet theatre today is enjoying increased popularity mainly through the mass medium of television, but it is failing to reach its potential as a recognized art form. The average spectator continues to identify the puppet with innocuous cuteness and the puppeteer with a juggler or magician--the more strings and gadgets he can operate to produce lifelikeness, the better. New uses, to be sure, have been found for the medium beyond entertainment and mere amusement. As a recreational outlet and as an advertising gimmick, this ancient art has been rediscovered by contemporary society. Education applauds its merits in meaningful correlation, in arts and crafts, and in communication. Physio- and psychotherapists each find ways in the puppet to stimulate individual effort or to project and identify behavior problems.

However, puppetry can and does go beyond mere "use" and, in an aesthetic sense, like all great art, can "stretch the mind some distance beyond the limits of the understanding" as Herbert Read so aptly puts it, "whether that 'distance beyond' . . . be spiritual or transcendental, or . . . even fantastical."¹ The difficulty remains, none the less, that the modern

¹ The Meaning of Art, p. 70.

puppeteer continues to foster the misconceptions through failure to recognize those factors which make puppets a distinctive form of dramatic expression. With one of the most integral design-motion arts through which to express himself, he becomes stultified by mimicking historically traditional routines without adding any genuinely artistic interpretations of his own; he makes a fetish of manipulative virtuosity; he disregards independent experimentation and looks to other puppeteers for stimulation thereby perpetuating a limited status quo. All of this reflects the puppeteer's neglect of the rich sources of inspiration possible from other art forms--modern dance, contemporary theatre including "the absurd," painting and sculpture, and in natural objects.

PROCEDURE

Background material for this study has been obtained through the four major sources described below: library collections, viewing of professional performances, association with a national puppeteer's organization, and personal experience.

Library materials, primarily books and periodicals, have come from two main sources--the New York Public Library and its Theatre Collection, and the private collection of Mrs. Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin, one of the founders of the Puppeteers of America and presently Vice President of UNIMA (Union Internationale Des Marionnettes).

Since puppetry, like all of the theatre arts, is transitory, a time art, its critical literature must of necessity record only the writer's reminiscences of past performances. Therefore, in order that this lively art may be directly evaluated, actual attendance at public performances has been mandatory. This has been accomplished at such diverse types of puppet theatres as The Turnabout in Los Angeles; Tantamount Theatre of Carmel Valley, California; Kungsholm Miniature Grand Opera Theatre, Chicago; Les Poupées de Paris of New York City; Llords International now on world tour; and The Stony Creek Showcase in Connecticut. As a substitute for live performance, significant productions on television have been watched (including such outstanding artists as Sergei Obraztsov of Russia).

Membership in the Puppeteers of America, a national organization of professionals and amateurs whose object is the improvement of the art of puppetry, and receipt of its quarterly, The Puppetry Journal, has offered an excellent introduction into the many phases of the art. Furthermore, participation in six of the organization's week-long Festivals and Workshops, has provided exceptional opportunities to witness wide varieties of puppet performances; to meet professional puppeteers from various parts of the United States, Mexico, and Canada, as well as therapists, educators, religious workers, and recreation leaders who find contemporary uses for the art form; to share experiences and ideas with enthusiastic amateurs and hobbyists; to study (at the Festival Exhibits) collections of domestic and international,

historical and contemporary puppets; and to benefit from the many panel discussions, resumé's, critiques, and general explorations made by experts in the field.

Actual experience in the art of puppetry has been gained through the personal operation of a fist puppet theatre, giving performances before church, school, and professional organizations in the surrounding community, and through assisting Girl Scout troops and elementary school classes in their puppetry projects.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tony Sarg, one of the leaders of the puppet revival in America during the first part of the 20th century, was dismayed at the lack of puppet literature not only from the historical and critical viewpoint but from the technical. Few people were even familiar with the word "marionette." A bewildered lady at one of Sarg's first performances in 1916, for instance, referred to the puppets as "Marie Antoinettes."²

Outside of the 1828 publication in England of a somewhat modified version of Punch and Judy as played for a half-century by the wayfaring puppet-showman, Piccini, and immortalized by George Cruikshank's drawings,³ virtually no puppet literature

² "The Revival of Puppet-Play in America," Theatre Arts, July 1928, 12:468.

³ Edited with an introduction by Payne Collier, who somewhat rearranged the old performing text.

existed in the English language at the time Sarg was writing. Some few references considered the historical puppet. Blackwood's Magazine in April 1854 contained a translation from Charles Magnin's Histoire des Marionnettes en Europe depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'à Nos Jours of 1852, which, drawing heavily on a previous dissertation of Father Mariantonio Lupi, translated into French in 1757, traced the general outlines of the development of the puppet from that of the divine image.⁴ Some articles on actual performances in different parts of the world could be found, such as one in The Atlantic Monthly, June 1894, describing a Sicilian puppet show in Palermo.⁵ Much of the writing, however, prior to the 20th century, such as "Puppets, Ancient and Modern," by a Francis J. Ziegler, in Harper's Magazine, 1897, viewed the puppet in the light of a picturesque old-world art, one that had died out completely and was never to return.⁶

There were also references among the works of many renowned writers who, for various reasons, had given the puppet their attention, among them Goethe, George Sand, Charles Dickens, and George Bernard Shaw. Their references, in the context of this study, are of differing value, because they did not consistently recognize the unique artistic qualities of puppet theatre. Goethe and George Sand, undeniably enamoured of the puppet, none

⁴ "The Puppets of All Nations," 75:392-413.

⁵ E. Cavazza, "At the Opra di li Pupi," 73:797-802.

⁶ December, 96:85-91.

the less thought of it mainly as miniature theatre, obeying the same fundamental laws as those governing the human stage.⁷ That the puppet, on the other hand, could be a legitimate member within the sphere of the fine arts was memorably stated by Shaw in his letter to the Italian puppet showman Vittorio Podrecca:

What really affects us in the theatre is not the muscular activities of the performers, but the feelings they awaken in us by their aspect; for the imagination of the spectator plays a far greater part there than the exertions of the actors. The puppet is the actor in his primitive form. Its symbolic costume, from which all realistic and historically correct impertinences are banished, its unchanging star, petrified (or rather lignified) in a grimace expressive to the highest degree attainable by the carver's art, the mimicry by which it suggests human gesture in unearthly caricature--these give to its performance an intensity to which few actors can pretend, an intensity which imposes on our imagination like those images in immovable hieratic attitudes on the stained glass of Chartres Cathedral, in which the gaping tourists seem like little lifeless dolls moving jerkily in the draughts from the doors, reduced to sawdusty insignificance by the contrast with the gigantic vitality in the windows overhead.⁸

Other references could be found in writers such as Arthur Symons, British poet and critic active in the Symbolist Movement in literature, who asserted in his "An Apology for Puppets" that puppets were actors, not mechanisms imitating actors, and that gesture on the stage could be compared with rhythm in verse.⁹

It was not, however, until 1908 that the puppet revival was heralded by its foremost inspiration of the 20th century, Gordon Craig, and his provocative essay "The Actor and the

7 Paul McPharlin, "The Aesthetic of the Puppet Revival," unpublished Master's Thesis, Wayne University, 1938, pp. 13-14.

8 Max von Boehn, Dolls and Puppets, p. 5.

9 In Plays, Acting, and Music, pp. 193-196.

Über-Marionette." Artist, designer, and theatrical critic, Craig argued against naturalism in the theatre and for an interpretative, depersonalized art of acting.¹⁰ This timeless advice has often been misapplied, although Craig's theories remain an inspiration to the puppeteer. As the main power behind the publication of the slim, limited editions of The Mask and the diminutive periodical called The Marionnette, Craig brought to light more of the writers, artists, and poets who also had spoken theoretically of the puppet.¹¹ Anatole France, one of Craig's "discoveries," wrote in his La Vie Litteraire of some of the most renowned puppets of 19th century Paris, the Petit Theatre under Henri Signoret.¹²

Valuable also in Craig's volumes were the English translations of such significant investigations in puppetry as portions of Father Mariantonio Lupi's dissertation on the marionettes of the ancients¹³ and the researches of P. C. Ferrigni (otherwise known as "Yorick"), involving ancient puppets in Greek and Egyptian temples, and of historical puppets in

¹⁰ The Mask, April 1908, 1:3-15.

¹¹ While residing in Florence, Italy, Craig edited and published 15 volumes of The Mask, in conventional quarterly format, between 1908 and 1915. Only twelve issues of his second periodical, the full title of which is The Marionette Tonight at 12:30, appeared in 1918. It is a small pocket-sized pamphlet, devoted entirely to the art of puppetry, and is now extremely rare.

¹² "Les Marionnettes de M. Signoret," Vol. II, pp. 145-150; "Hrotswitha aux Marionnettes," Vol. III, pp. 10-19.

¹³ Craig's translation is taken from Vol. I of Lupi's Storia Litteraria della Sicilia, and appeared in The Marionnette, June 24, 1918, 1:155-162.

Greek and Egyptian temples, and of historical puppets in Italy, Spain, England, and France. Drawing heavily upon Magnin (see p. 6) who in turn had drawn upon Father Lupi, "Yorick" does enlarge, however, upon the study of the Italian puppet theatre.¹⁴

As the early 20th century revivalists became eager to investigate and reapply the ancient art, the puppet became a source of literary inspiration. A popular volume, A Book of Marionettes, with representative illustrations of all the periods treated, was written by Helen Haiman Joseph in 1920. This was the main source of puppet history in English. The Heroes of the Puppet Stage, a discussion of leading puppet characters throughout history by Madge Anderson, appeared in 1923.

One entire issue of Theatre Arts, July 1928, was devoted to this rediscovered medium and included accounts of the puppetry experiments of such 20th century European artists as Alexandra Exter, the Russian cubist,¹⁵ and important essays such as one by the 19th century German dramatist, Heinrich von Kleist. Considering only the marionette, Kleist expressed a mechanical aesthetic in maintaining that the center of the puppet was the only point under the control of the puppeteer, the remaining limbs

14 The anonymous translator in various issues of The Mask notes that Ferrigni planned a long series of volumes on the history of the Italian theatre. At least one is known to have been published, entitled Storia dei Burattini (The History of Marionettes), from which several essays were taken for inclusion in various issues of The Mask (see bibliography).

15 Louis Lozowick, "Alexander Exter's Marionettes," Theatre Arts, July 1928, 12:515-518.

being merely pendulums. Thus, with the further advantage of defying gravity, as well as obeying it, he believed it was obviously impossible for a human being even to equal the performance of a marionette.¹⁶ (Charles Dickens sensed this innate kinetic quality of the puppet a century after von Kleist when he wrote the following report of a performance in Genoa:

In the ballet, an Enchanter runs away with the Bride, in the very hour of her nuptials. He brings her to his cave, and tries to soothe her. They sit down on a sofa . . . and a procession of musicians enter; one creature playing a drum, and knocking himself off his legs at every blow. These failing to delight her, dancers appear. Four first; then two: the two; the flesh-coloured two. The way in which they dance; the height to which they spring; the impossible and inhuman extent to which they pirouette; the revelation of their preposterous legs; the coming down with a pause, on the very tips of their toes, when the music requires it; the gentleman's retiring up, when it is the lady's turn; and the lady's retiring up, when it is the gentleman's turn; the final passion of a pas de deux: and going off with a bound. I shall never see a real ballet, with a composed countenance again.¹⁷)

Other important published material of this revival can be found in the many French, German, Russian, and Chinese plays written especially for the puppet, and translated by the founder of the Puppeteers of America, Paul McPharlin, in his 1929 book, A Repertory of Marionette Plays. Through his enthusiastic research a wealth of literature was accumulated, including the limited editions of Puppetry, a yearbook which he edited and published himself from 1930 to 1947. Now extremely rare, these are compendiums of puppet lore--historical sketches, technical

¹⁶ "A Marionette Theatre," translated by Dorothea B. McCollister, Theatre Arts, July 1928, 12:476-484.

¹⁷ Cruisings and Adventures in Italy and Africa, pp. 46-47.

articles, photographs, lists of producers, book reviews, and international news notes. Secrets of puppet manipulation and structural techniques, long held jealously by puppeteer families, were fully revealed. These volumes contain everything from the diagram of a ningyo from the Japanese Bunraku-za to a formula for a smoke cartridge; from "How to Make a Punch's Whistle" to, further on, "What to Do in Case You Swallow One."

Graduate research has produced Master's theses reflecting the widening scope of the puppet. Significant ones were written by Raymond R. Jones, State University of Iowa, 1931, "A Manual of Puppetry"; and Paul McPharlin, "The Aesthetic of the Puppet Revival," Wayne University, 1938. A more recent investigation was conducted in France, in 1958, by Nancy Cole, Stanford University, "A Study of Guignol, of Lyons."

Professional puppeteers wrote plays, shared their techniques, and searched for interpretive possibilities. Outstanding in this group were Forman Brown, The Pie-Eyed Piper and Other Impertinent Puppet Plays (1933); Marjorie Batchelder, The Puppet Theatre Handbook (1947); and Nina Efimova, Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre (1935). Specific types of puppets were investigated, their national characteristics sought, and historical periods were explored. Marjorie Batchelder, continuing her interest, investigated "Rod Puppets and the Human Theatre" at Ohio State University in 1947. Likewise, Paul McPharlin, compiling from original sources, issued a basic history, The Puppet Theatre in America, 1524-1948 (1949); and George Speaight brought out his

equally important The History of the English Puppet Theatre (1955). Frank W. Lindsay probed the most popular age in the puppet's history with his Dramatic Parody by Marionettes in 18th Century Paris (1946). Puppeteers wrote their memoirs; many of these combined autobiography with travelogue and, in warm human terms, reflected the universality of the art. One of the most famous is Jan Bussell's The Puppets and I, published in London in 1950.

New uses found for the medium (in education, recreation, therapy, rehabilitation, advertising, cinema, and television) gave impetus to an increased exploration and recording of these findings. Articles on puppetry, popularized in a wide variety of periodicals, ranged in appeal from the purely popular to the highly esoteric. Typical examples from the magazines of popular appeal within the last fifteen years are: "Puppet Theatre," by H. J. Kennard, a diagram for a simple fist-puppet stage designed to keep the kids out of mischief in the summertime, appearing in Popular Mechanics Magazine in May 1961; "Shadow Theatre Presented by the Children for Christmas," by Margo Hoff and Phelan Kappo, a painter and a poet, who urged new techniques for the ancient art of the shadow theatre in House Beautiful, December 1960; "Antwerp's Puppets Play to a Different Audience, but the Show Bill Is the Same as a Century Ago," by R. Kiek, in Holiday of March 1949, describing a third-generation puppeteer performing in a Belgian wine cellar.

The magazines of special interest are represented by "Tex-

ture on a Stick," by Elizabeth Sasser, an architecture and allied arts professor, who applauds, in School Arts of March 1957, the possibilities of collages that come to life; "Puppets in Advertising," in which Cyril Beaumont, the ballet historian, writing in Graphis, May 1960, notes the universal symbolic possibilities which can make text seem irrelevant; "Puppetry for Librarians," by L. Hunt and L. Hatch, in Library Journal, September 15, 1961, which tells how puppets can be more effective than dust-jacket exhibits to stimulate reading; and Lawry Hawkey's "The Use of Puppets in Child Psychotherapy," British Journal of Medical Psychology, 1951, illustrating through case histories the effective use of puppetry in helping children "act out" their phantasies. Finally, in this area of special interest, is the bi-monthly Puppetry Journal, the official publication of the Puppeteers of America. Now in its fifteenth year, it provides a primary source of contemporary criticism, general information, and photographed illustration of domestic and world puppetry while providing a means by which both amateur and professional puppeteers may communicate and share their views.

Strictly factual or reportorial periodicals such as Newsweek, in an article entitled "Opera in Miniature," July 13, 1942, reports on a Danish restaurateur, F. A. Chramer of Chicago, whose Kungsholm puppet opera rivals the attraction of his smorgasbord; and "Puppets Puncture Pomposity," about a top puppet team in America, Bil and Cora Baird, out to interest adults in puppets as reported in Life of February 1, 1963.

Today, in large libraries, there is a great quantity of literature pertaining to the puppet. For instance, the New York Public Library and its Theatre Collection contains in its card catalogue more than two full drawers of puppet holdings. Many valuable references, however, are still not in English translation. Much of the existent literature disregards the unique capability, the magic that is the puppet's potential life, the same magic that such theorists as Arthur Symons, Gordon Craig, Heinrich von Kleist, and G. B. Shaw recognized. The revivalists themselves would agree that the "secrets" do not constitute the whole art of puppetry for the simple reason that, as artists in any medium are aware, intuition begins where purely objective knowledge ends. The following excellent references are by those who have recognized this important fact. Basil Milovsoroff, at one time active in the Puppeteers of America, indicated some of the possibilities of inanimate theatre in his "Reality, with Strings Attached," July 1953.¹⁸ Sergei Obraztsov of Russia has written of his own background as professional artist and actor in My Profession (1950), a book which investigates the puppet's distinctive form of dramatic expression. An undated manuscript (about 1960) by Henryk Jurkowski of the Ministry of Culture in Poland, is an attempt to clarify the puppet as an artistic medium in its own right. A final example is J'aime les Marionnettes by Paul-Louis Mignon (1962), a historical and critical review of

¹⁸ Theatre Arts, 37:71-73.

European puppetry profusely illustrated with action photographs of puppet performances.

The most valuable literature for this particular study has therefore been these few representative investigations into the puppet's unique artistic qualities rather than the purely mechanical aspects of construction and manipulation.

FINDINGS

PUPPET ARTISTRY--THEORY

Puppetry Defined

Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines the puppet as "a small-scale figure of a human or other living being often constructed with jointed limbs, appropriately painted and costumed, and moved usually on a small stage by a rod or by hand from below or by strings or wires from above." The derivation of the word itself is assumed by Webster to have come from Middle English and French, from the Latin for "doll." Most people, even many puppeteers themselves, because of the general assumption that the words "puppet" and "doll" are therefore synonymous, would unquestioningly accept this definition as accurate and complete. Puppetry, however, is not merely manipulating dolls in a realistic manner as so many members of an audience would assume. The basic intent of a doll is to reproduce a three-dimensional image of the human form, often complete with specific human

functions. The puppet is not confined to this restriction as would be assumed by the concept set forth in Webster's definition. No such limitations can be imposed within the sphere of the fine arts, of which the puppet theatre is a legitimate member. Max von Boehn, in his comprehensive historical survey, Dolls and Puppets, makes this clarifying statement on page 24:

The creations of art have to take the spectator's imagination into account; the doll does not allow the slightest scope for the play of the imagination. . . . The doll . . . has forced into its service all the refinements of a progressive technique, not striving toward an aesthetic impression, but aiming at ever completer illusion. It can come surprisingly close to nature, but the nearer it approaches its goal the farther it is removed from art; . . .

Clearly, a more estimable definition of a puppet must be considered before there can be any justification of the medium as an art form. Paul McPharlin, expressing the attitude of many of the Revival enthusiasts, brought the potentials of the medium into sharp relief when he defined a puppet as a theatrical figure animated by a human being.¹⁹ Fundamentally, then, the puppet becomes an instrument of artistic expression. It has no limitation in form because, by its very nature, it can be the ultimate in make-believe. One of the best descriptions of the true potential and function of the puppet in McPharlin's terms is contained in Basil Milovsoroff's succinct definition which effectively rectifies the misconception of Webster's stereotype: "A puppet may be man, animal, insect, a teakettle, or tomorrow."²⁰ (Plate I).

¹⁹ "The Aesthetic of the Puppet Revival," p. 1.

²⁰ Milovsoroff, on. cit., p. 72.

PLATE I

ELAINE MILLER

Hand Puppets

TOP: Christmas tree from Clement Moore's The Night Before Christmas. This tree can cooperate with its owner by bending down to receive its ornaments.

LEFT: Tortoise from Aesop's The Hare and the Tortoise.

RIGHT: Typewriter from interpretation of LeRoy Anderson's musical composition, "The Typewriter." The denouement is reached when the typewriter devours the typist.



The Lively Arts and the Imagination

The expanded concepts of McPharlin and Milovsoroff do not therefore limit the puppet to a human or animal module. On the contrary, the puppet may assume any form and maintain an existence within that form. A simple cube lying on a shelf is merely a cube. But a cube given controlled motion becomes a puppet that is at one and the same time still a cube. On the other hand, a human being who walks onto the stage dressed in a cardboard box is still a human being dressed in a cardboard box. His insistence that he is a cube is totally unconvincing and severely taxes the audience's ability to suspend its disbelief. In this more expanded concept of the puppet, therefore, any limitation in form is imposed upon it only by the limitations of the puppeteer's own imagination. Other contemporary time arts such as live theatre and the dance are of necessity confined within the limits imposed by the human module. Unfortunately puppet tradition has too often followed this limitation by the imposition upon it of anatomical constructions and "life-like" movements.

Contemporary painting and sculpture have long since gone beyond the literal and in its stead have made use of an abstract metaphoric language. Only recently theatre and dance, becoming increasingly dissatisfied with previously accepted conventions of portraying man's relationships, have also attempted in certain "avant garde" forms to eliminate that audience identification with reality which destroys the abstractive quality of an art

experience. Alwin Nikolais, dance choreographer, directs the attention of the spectator to "the motion, the shapes and to the time and space in which these occur." In his attempt to dehumanize the human dancer, he makes elaborate use of costumes and props to get away from identification. Arms and legs are extended; much use is made of elastic, of material that can be draped, stretched, and moved. In a dance called "Noumenon" free-formed sculptural shapes were brought to life without revealing the dancer's own actual body.²¹

Contemporary theatre has also attempted a dehumanization process. Ionesco, an "absurd" writer, admits that he found inspiration in the simple caricatured truths of Punch and Judy. In his attempts to revitalize contemporary theatre beyond a degenerate state of what he felt was neither theatre nor literature, and disturbed by the incongruous combination (as was Gordon Craig) of the flesh-and-blood actor with the stagey artificial qualities of theatre, Ionesco has dehumanized his actors into a puppet-like existence reflecting the basic absurdity of the condition of the human being--unable to understand either himself or his neighbor, unable to communicate his few thoughts. There is an analogy in these "absurd" experiences with the different motifs in an abstract painting. The plays do not follow the conventions of traditional theatre with plots that can be summarized

²¹ Alwin Nikolais, "Growth of a Theme," Dance Magazine, February 1961, 35:30-34.

in narrative form. Rather, there is an interaction of the "character" and dialogue which are meaningful only in their interpretation and totality. The characters are not developed as in traditional theatre, but represent basic human attitudes. Events have no definite beginnings and endings in time; instead, they are types of situations that will probably go on endlessly repeating themselves. Real life is not portrayed. Even in the language the spectator experiences a new perception of reality. (In the process of his learning English, Ionesco explained how the repetitious language exercises from a primer inspired him to construct dialogue compatible with the "absurd.")²²

The motion picture, too frequently a parasite of the human stage, has found a contemporary approach for its own unique possibilities which are completely unrealizable in the theatre. The very fact that the camera can shift gives the observer himself a sense of movement. In techniques of blurring and fading, of juxtaposed shapes, in extreme close-ups, reality can be manipulated as form that grows out of an idea. Such themes as the early life of Helen Keller can become penetrating in a subjective sense. The actual frustrations of feeling and grasping in a silent, dark and blurred world can be made a part of the spectator's experience. The motion picture used in such a way has possibilities which are uniquely different from those of the stage. Art films such as Alain Resnais' Hiroshima mon Amour and L'Année

22 Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, passim.

Dernière à Marienbad attempt to create reality through form as well as through theme. Like an abstract painting these films can be interpreted in several different ways. Time itself is not considered in a traditional sense; there is no definite past or present. Image, sound, and movements interact with one another to create complex patterns. More recently, artist John Howard has created a new scope for the motion picture in adapting the principle of spectrum dispersion to photography. Critics are quite in agreement that the process can constitute a new art form. "It can take the most mundane subject matter, a heap of rusty metal or a patch of dirty snow, for example, and transform it into flowing, delicate images like Japanese prints set in motion."²³

This is not to suggest that the puppeteer should attempt "absurd" plays with his medium any more than he should deliberately design a human form and proceed to dehumanize it; or that he should conceive of his medium purely as an art which depends entirely upon the sensitivity of the retina through design in movement, without any conceivable idea behind it. These contemporary artists of theatre, dance, and the motion picture, however, reflect a continual probing into the creative values characteristic of various media.

²³ Paul Pinson, "The Amazing Modern Art Machine," Chicago Tribune Magazine, November 17, 1963, pp. 27-29.

The Ironies of Imitation

It is ironical that puppetry, inherently possessing the very attributes which artists in other media have striven to acquire through such attempts as dehumanization has, for the larger part of its existence, been forced to falsify its own unique capabilities.

In all fine arts creation, not imitation, is the aim. Scene designer Robert Edmond Jones was essentially in agreement with G. B. Shaw (see p. 7), when he made the following statement:

. . . unless life is turned into art on the stage, it stops being alive and goes dead. . . . Truth in the theatre, as the masters of the theatre have always known, stands above and beyond mere accuracy to fact.²⁴

The discrepancy between what we actually see and what we imaginatively see when looking at a painting or statue and what we actually hear and what we hear imaginatively when listening to a symphony or a recital involves participation on the part of the spectator. When actuality leaves little room for imagination the basic truths of art are lost, as in trompe-l'oeil paintings, wherein "fool the eye" virtuosco effects deceive the spectator into taking that which is painted for that which is real; or in such stage designs as those of David Belasco, who searched so intently for accuracy that he actually dismantled and reassembled an entire interior of a dilapidated room--with

²⁴ The Dramatic Imagination, p. 82.

patched furniture, threadbare carpet, tarnished and broken gas fixtures, tumble-down cupboards, dingy doors and window casings, even the faded paper on the walls.²⁵

Because of the very nature of puppetry, such a complete imitation of life is unattainable regardless of a misplaced attempt to achieve it. However, numerous efforts toward lifelike appearance and movements have been traditionally recorded in puppet history. At one time in the 18th century, Italian puppet dancers were considered so human that the Roman police required the dress of wooden ballet performers to conform to that law which regulated the costumes of living performers. All "wooden-legged Sylphides [had] to be attired in sky-blue inexpressibles."²⁶ The nineteenth century marionettes of Geisselbrecht could not only move their eyes but could cough and spit, discharge flint-lock guns, draw their swords from their scabbards, and pour out wine.²⁷ An outstanding misapplication of such an attempt toward reality within the last decade was the "Super-Actor" puppet of Michael Meyerberg in the 1950's. It was designed to recreate on the motion picture screen any conceivable human expression--and more. It was to be controlled with no visible strings, wires, or joints, and to possess a "skin" of a texture indistinguishable from the human variety. The rubber compound proved to be toxic, and after some twelve years and

²⁵ David Belasco, The Theatre Through Its Stage Door, p. 77.

²⁶ "The Pedigree of Puppets," Household Words, January 31, 1852, 4:439.

²⁷ Boehn, op. cit., pp. 329-330.

\$500,000, the calibrated iber-marionette, fortunately, was no more.²⁸

A less extreme example of this type of misapplication in puppetry is the attempt toward popular adult entertainment, Les Poupées de Paris, originally at the 1962 Seattle World's Fair and later at the 1964 New York Fair. Because the average mentality of the viewing adult, however, was considered, as Newsweek aptly put it, to be on the level of "a crackpot who makes passes at department store dummies,"²⁹ the effort did not prove worthy of the opportunity. This spectacular a la Hollywood-Las Vegas took advantage of the fact that mere puppets could be permitted the omission of clothing and performance of actions typical of the Paris Folies but legally denied human beings at the Fair. Miniature costumes designed by Balmain cost as much as \$2,000 apiece. Star puppets resembling such personages as Mae West, Charles Boyer, and Liberace spoke with the recorded voices of the stars themselves. Charlie McCarthy even appeared as a marionette--a puppet of a puppet, as it were. A skating ballerina glided over real ice in a crystalline forest. A bawdy Balinese girl swam in a pool of real water. Live birds in moving cages on overhead trolleys appeared with more of the same sparsely clothed beauties who, although they boasted most intriguing curvatures, had most ugly knee-joints. The puppeteers, Sid and

²⁸ Roderick MacArthur, "The Super-Actors Emerge," Theatre Arts, March 1952, 36:21-22.

²⁹ "Vest-pocket Vice: Les poupées de Paris," Newsweek, December 24, 1962, 60:44.

Marty Krofft, with generations of the family craft behind them, believed they were bringing the "most modern in production technique and design coupled with a flair for spectacular showmanship."³⁰ The New York Times summed up the short-lived performances of the Poupées off Broadway with a pithy comment: "Technically admirable puppets used without wit or taste."³¹

The Place of Puppet "Reality"

It is recognized that in the puppet medium as in all media there are not only different levels of appreciation but possibilities within different styles for various degrees of artistic interpretation. That a skillful imitation or selection of reality is not without a certain charm and value is testified by such modern reproductions in the Italian realistic tradition as that of the Kungsholm Miniature Grand Opera Theatre in Chicago with its proscenium inscription from the Danish, "Ej Blot Til Lyst," ("Not Only for Amusement.") A diminutive conductor leads a full-size opera orchestra of fifty-two puppets, complete with violins, cellos, bass violins, harps, clarinets, flutes, French horns, bassoons, kettle drums, and other instruments. Operated by trained music students, the thirteen-inch rod puppets are animated in certain predetermined grooves from below the stage

³⁰ Program note from Les Poupées de Paris, New York version, off Broadway, 1962.

³¹ "Off Broadway: Les Poupées de Paris," New York Times, April 7, 1963, Sec. X, p. 1.

and, because of their gliding, unlikelike patterns of movement, lend an aspect of psychical distance to the otherwise illusionary devices of the miniature. Costumes are exact copies of those worn by Metropolitan and La Scala opera artists. Set pieces, such as the chandelier of genuine crystal seen in the first act of La Traviata, or the brass candelabra of forty-four lights in act three, are constructed to simulate reality. Stage properties consist of miniature period pieces, most of them produced in the director's workshop, including everything from spinning wheels, tables, chairs, fireplaces, and clocks, to vases, candlesticks, plates, and jewel boxes. Guest artists sing for the puppets by way of recordings from the two great opera companies, La Scala, Milan, and L'Opera, Paris. Twenty-four full operas are represented in the repertoire.

Such an endeavor, however delightful, does not claim a significant form of its own but is rather a hybrid of many of the art forms. Definitions often proclaim puppetry as a synthesis of all the arts--a combination of various arts which merely function together. Susanne Langer, on the other hand, in her theoretical Feeling and Form (p. 24) finds that the "fundamental unity of the arts lies not so much in parallels between their respective elements or analogies among their techniques, as in the singleness of their characteristic import . . ." Therefore, where puppetry may have need of aspects of the other arts, ideally, these must be used to serve the art of puppetry.

Allardyce Nicoll has aptly stated: "In every art form there

are essential premises which must be agreed to before anything of creative value is produced."³² Nicoll's premise does not recognize rules; there are no formal rules as to what constitutes good puppet theatre any more than there are specific rules for any of the art forms. It does, however, verify the fact that the true interpretive power of a medium does not lie in a skillful imitation of another form if it is to offer a singular aesthetic experience. Just as a woodcut is not made to resemble an etching, a water color to look exactly like an oil painting, or a marble sculpture like one of metal, it is recognized that each medium presents its own limitations and that these very limitations can become its raison d'être. It is therefore contradictory for a puppeteer to invite his audience to pretend it has purchased cheap seats high in the gallery of a theatre and is witnessing a live production from a considerable distance--the very procedure usually followed by one internationally known American puppeteer before each performance. Arthur Symons recognized one of the essentials of puppet theatre when he countered this idea with the following approach:

To sharpen our sense of what is illusive in the illusion of the puppets, let us sit not too far from the stage. Choosing our place carefully, we shall have the satisfaction of always seeing the wires at their work, while I think we shall lose nothing of what is most savoury in the feast of the illusion. There is not indeed the appeal to the senses of the first row of the stalls at a ballet of living dancers. But is not that a trifle too obvious a sentiment for the true artist in artificial

32 Film and Theatre, p. 11.

things? Why leave the ball-room? It is not nature that one looks for on the stage in this kind of spectacle, and our excitement in watching it should remain purely intellectual.³³

Michael Meyerberg's attempt to hide the controls was not the first example of a refusal to accept the limitations of the form and, in turn, to make these limitations strengths. The 1740 writings of the Jesuit, Francesco Saverio Quadrio, tells of a net of very fine thread stretched across the stage to confuse the eyes of the spectators so that they would not notice the strings or the very prominent rod by which the marionettes were moved. Children were sometimes used among the four-foot high Italian marionettes to enhance the illusion and perplex the spectators.³⁴ Tony Sarg made use of a little live monkey which appeared on the stage with the other puppet characters of "The Green Suit," and the audience was enthralled with what it believed to be a most intricate and beautifully manipulated puppet.³⁵

This does not mean, however, that the real cannot be juxtaposed with the unreal. Actually, such combinations exist successfully in other art forms. The collage, for example, combines actuality with the imaginary. In sculpture such assemblages as soldered pipes and machinery parts become new forms and exist in their own right. A sensitive artist can mount an

³³ Symons, op. cit., p. 194.

³⁴ Speaight, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

³⁵ Anne Stoddard, "The Renaissance of the Puppet Play," Century, June 1918, 96:175.

old window shade, torn and mended, on a large canvas, but because of its position on the frame, because of the angle of the curtain pull, because of the selection of related colors, it can be appreciated as a work of art. A painter can conceive a theme such as "Orange-Peels in the Gutter," and because of its design qualities, because of its lilt, regardless of its subject, the canvas can be considered a work of art. Sergei Obratstov can simplify a puppet to that point where its head is but a ball, its body the puppeteer's bare hand. An impossible form with an apparent three arms on one side and one on the other becomes, in motion, a reproduction not of the habitual mechanics of human movements but of their emotional content (Plate II).

Obratstov deliberately brings together the real and the unreal when his own hands sometimes become those of the puppet he is manipulating. In doing so he is recognizing that the audience is unprepared for this obvious disproportion and, moreover, will imagine that the hands are capable of movement beyond their actual human capacity (Plate II). The puppeteer recognizes the independent acting ability of his hands in this instance, just as he feels the puppet he is operating is independent and yet under his control as an instrument of expression. Obratstov was one of the first to employ hand pantomimes; other puppeteers have added new interpretations to the original idea. Also proving that art is subtraction rather than addition, the French troupe of Ives Joly has further explored, through hand pantomime, the special kind of expression inherent in puppet theatre beyond a

PLATE II

SERGEI OBRAZTSOV

Obraztsov is officially titled "Honored Artist of the Republic" by the Soviet Union, where puppet art is accepted on a basis of equality with other arts.

TOP: A puppet version of Tchaikovsky's "We Were Sitting Alone by a Murmuring Brook," an interpretation of the sadness and the irony of courtship.

From Puppets and Puppetry, by Cyril Beaumont, p. 119.

BOTTOM: "If only you, my dreams, would come to be
• • •"

From The Puppetry Journal, Nov.-Dec., 1963, p. 22.



mere imitation of human beings and animals. Using only "their eight expressive hands plus bits of cloth, paper and fur and a few changes of white and brilliantly colored gloves [they] produce an art which is sincere artistry and sheer poetry. . . . Movement and imagination are their chief props. . . . The total effect is stylized and abstract. Its simplicity compels the spectator to bring something of his own imagination into play."³⁶ Such interpretation by Joly as the "Sea Fauna" luring its prey is decidedly of the puppet theatre and would be impossible in any other medium (Plate III). George Latshaw, representing the United States at the International Puppet Festival in Colwyn Bay, Wales, May 1963, introduced new whimsey with his "Hand in Glove." Mane Bernardo of Argentina, professor of sculpture, painting, drawing, and history of art in the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes, University of La Plata, Argentina, has created such musical pantomimes as "Romantic Idyl 1900" (Plate IV).

The puppet, therefore, as well as a painting, a piece of sculpture, or a musical composition, can become a total activity of which the spectator is conscious because he himself imaginatively participates. The puppet artist as well as the painter, the sculptor, the poet, or the musician can express more than a visual art, more than audible sounds. Since, imaginatively, transitions can be experienced which do not actually occur, such prosaic gimmicks as movable eyes and clacking mouths are not,

³⁶ Herb Scheffel and Lea Wallace, "Masters of Pantomime," The Puppetry Journal, Jan.-Feb. 1952, 3:9, 20.

PLATE III

LES MAINS JOLY

"Sea Fauna." An artistic understatement which stimulates the imagination of an audience.

From Puppet Parade, a Collection of Pictures.

Published by The Puppetry Journal, n.d.



PLATE IV

Top: GEORGE LATSHAW

"Hand in Glove"

Bottom: MANE BERNARDO

"Romantic Idyl 1900"

From The Puppetry Journal, May-June 1963, p. 15.



accordingly, the height of the puppet's potential. Puppeteers such as Mathurin Dondo, professor at Columbia University the early part of the twentieth century, believed, for instance, that part of the expressiveness of his puppets could be attributed to the slightly asymmetrical treatment of the features which gave an illusion of movement. The audience could accordingly imagine the expressions to change, even that the mouths and eyes opened and closed.

On the other hand, quite actually and believably, the puppet can do things man himself would find humanly impossible. This is one of puppetry's mainstays. True, Peter Pan's Wendy can fly through the air by complicated contrivances which aid her flight, but the audience becomes overly interested in the mechanical device and overly concerned about its workability. Human beings do not normally fly any more than they can believably assume such characterizations as that of a cube. However, one does not question the ability of a puppet to fly or to turn himself into an inanimate object for that matter. Such vehicles as Thackeray's The Rose and the Ring provide such puppet opportunities as that of Porter Gruffanuff who is turned into a door knocker by the fairy whom he has insulted. Suffering a certain amount of human discomfiture as his body contracts and is pulled through the hole of the door, Gruffanuff is capable of surmounting the impossible and is left with only his ugly head to serve as a knocker. Such a character is not merely a trick puppet used for the sake of the trick alone or to point up the dexterity of the

manipulator; it is a well integrated puppet interpretation. It is, moreover, in marked contrast to the puppet who, in close human imitation, draws a purse from his inner coat pocket (not a simple process to be sure!), or one who extinguishes a lamp so that it appears to be blown out by his own breath.

The juxtaposition of the possible with the impossible offers unique credulity in puppet theatre and, artistically, becomes one of the few justifications for any use of lifelike imitation. In Obratzsov's "An Unusual Concert" horses parade gaily in a circus ring, but, at the finale, when one of the horses leaps upon the trainer's back and is carried off in that manner, this "switch" is within the puppet's prerogative. A temperamental lion in this writer's own first puppet circus eventually grabs the whip from a most harried Ringmaster and forces him to jump through the hoop (Plate V). Bil Baird, American puppeteer, claims that there is no dancer who has not wished his legs could be longer, his head smaller. The puppet, capable of just such distortion, can therefore express what Pablo Picasso at his Museum of Modern Art show in 1939 termed "a conception of what nature is not."³⁷

With this added power of exaggeration, lifelike imitation can also be effectively used for parody. Since man cannot effectively ridicule himself without some sort of disguise, the puppet can be that disguise. Obratzsov, as an artist and an

³⁷ Nelson Lansdale, "With Strings Attached," Dance Magazine, December 1953, 27:37.

PLATE V

Left: ELAINE MILLER

Hand puppet lion from The Circus.

Left center: BASIL MILOVSONOFF

Bug-on-Skis from unknown stop-motion film.

Right center: MARJORIE BATCHELDER MCPHARLIN

Table puppet.

Right: ELAINE MILLER

Finger puppet mouse from Clement Moore's The Night Before Christmas.



actor, was particularly interested in justifying the puppet's existence; his search brought him to the conclusion that puppets, instead of being mere imitators of human beings, are in reality instruments for showing up their foibles. "They need not look like real people, . . . they need not even act like people; they had only to move and be symbols of the curious traits of man."³⁸ Henryk Jurkowski, another sensitive puppet artist, head of the puppet section of the theatre division of the Ministry of Culture in Warsaw, Poland, finds the puppet a symbol which has the power to evoke experiences of the spectator and yet keep its psychical distance. Interestingly enough, he discovered that when puppets were used to interpret a shallow, rather superficial play such as Moliere's The Involuntary Doctor, the triviality of the characters was converted into a humor impossible to obtain through human actors. Where, before, it had repelled, puppet interpretation transformed it into "a symbol of human dispositions and elusions."³⁹

Beyond the animation of the inanimate, the juxtaposition of the real and the unreal, and the opportunity for parody within the symbolic puppet, fantastic creatures can believably exist in puppet theatre. Humpty Dumpty complained to Alice in Wonderland that if he were to meet her again he probably wouldn't recognize her for the simple fact that she was so ordinary, "so exactly

³⁸ Sergei Obraztsov, "Actor with Puppet," Puppetry, 1941, p. 7.

³⁹ "The Puppet Theatre," unpublished manuscript, p. 6.

like other people. . . . the two eyes, so--nose in the middle, mouth under. It's always the same. Now if you had the two eyes on the same side of the nose, for instance--or the mouth at the top--that would be some help."⁴⁰ The world of fantasy created in Alice in Wonderland is excellent material for puppet theatre. Separated from the reality of daily experience with all of its limitations of logical relationships, such a nonsensical and imaginative exaggeration inherently possesses a large degree of that "distance" necessary before there can be an aesthetic attitude toward an art form or object. Often, however, the theme or idea which the puppet conveys does not prompt any distancing or interpretation, and the spectator's attention is directed toward an applied art of manipulation rather than to Shakespeare's "stuff as dreams are made on." A caterpillar smoking his hookah, a borogove ("a thin, shabby-looking bird with its feathers sticking out all round--something like a live mop," a tove ("something like badgers, like lizards, and like corkscrews,")⁴¹ even Humpty Dumpty himself--where else, but in puppet theatre, can such creatures become realities?

⁴⁰ Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, p. 236.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 231-232.

PUPPET ARTISTRY--PRACTICE

Psychical Distance Through Puppet Control

Roger Fry, the British art critic, advanced the theory that vision abstracted from necessity becomes purer. When viewing an object that exists for no practical purpose, one "sees" in a more significant way.⁴² This detachment or aesthetic attitude as it is sometimes called must take place before there can be an art appreciation in any medium. Live theatre strives for a psychical distance or detachment from its surroundings by such devices as the proscenium arch, costuming, lighting, and theme. The puppet has not only these means but a primary advantage over the human actor--its varied types of control, each with its own innate "distancing" possibility. Essentially an art of pantomime and of movement, puppetry, however, is not restricted to a mere miming of human gesture. Rather, it has within its potential an essential movement which grows out of the intrinsic characteristics of the control by which the puppet is operated, its material construction, and its design. The relative merits of the various types of puppets cannot be compared; no one type is the most effective or expressive. Each form has its place and its unique possibilities either alone or in combination with the other types.

The Hand Puppet. Puppets receive their classification from

⁴² Hunter Mead, An Introduction to Aesthetics, p. 32.

the method by which they are controlled. The most direct control is that of the hand itself. Puppets so operated are designated as hand, glove, or sometimes fist puppets. Attempts have been made to falsify the structural truth of this type by simulating human movement. If, however, the operator's hand is respected as the framework rather than disguised, it is in this very limitation of approximating human vraiseemblance that the strength of the hand puppet can be found. Not being mimetically shaped like a human being, the figure cannot be expected to move like a human being. Since the puppeteer's wrist in much hand puppet construction becomes the puppet's waist, this pivot alone becomes the one natural point for the approximation of lifelike movement. The "arms" on the other hand are quite short, naturally limited by the operator's finger length. The more an attempt is made to extend the arms the less effective they will be in making use of the hand puppet's outstanding talent--the actual handling of props. "Arm" extensions and "shoulder" padding can therefore belie the structure and, instead, limit finger and wrist movement. To attempt other logical human movement is to deny the basic skeleton of the hand puppet's frame. Within this control of fingers, wrist, and the arm itself, there are innumerable possibilities for design and movement--a movement which is imaginatively rather than logically credible, as, for example, the puppet's capability of moving with lightning speed. The very directness of the fist puppet control also determines the type of idea it can best portray. The simple caricature of Punch and

Judy could, for example, be interpreted in no other way. Opportunities for wooden "noggin whacking," for the handling of props, for abrupt entrances and exits abound as uninhibited Mr. Punch throws his baby out the window, beats his wife to death, hangs the hangman, and kills the devil.

Vicariously, the spectator is provided with an experience of effortless movement which he himself would find impossible to achieve. The hand puppet usually has no legs and actually needs none. This "limitation" also can be considered a part of the truth of its existence. Its roots, apparently, are down below. Everything--props, more puppets, anything--can pop up from this nether-land to its turn on stage and then simply return below. Versatility too is within the domain of the glove puppet. Robustness is not its only nature. Just as the UPA cartoonists proved, with such creations as Gerald McBoing-Boing, that restraint can also bring merit to the animated cartoon with its grossly over-done super-human speed, sensitive puppeteers such as Benjamin Blake, primarily a painter and teacher who is experimenting with color, texture, movement, and sound to produce an aesthetic experience in puppetry, has proven that subtle variation in movement is a creative possibility (Plate VI).

William Simmonds, English architect, painter, and sculptor, discovered a union between what the puppeteer makes the puppet do and what the puppet, by his own nature, can do.⁴³ Gordon

⁴³ Helen H. Joseph, A Book of Marionettes, p. 158.

PLATE VI

BENJAMIN BLAKE

In contrast with the usual robust movements of the first puppet, Benjamin Blake, in "Fisherman and His Wife," explores more subtle variations. Note also the use of hand properties.

From The Puppetry Journal, July-Aug. 1961, p. 17.



Craig had also investigated significant movement and went so far as to recommend the use of duplicate puppets, each designed for specific movement according to its own intrinsic capability. The application of this duplicate idea extended the movement possibilities in this writer's own fist puppet interpretation of the English folktale The Three Sillies. One of these characters is the simpleton husband, Jasper (Plate VII), whose loving wife makes him shirts without a neck hole and who then beats him over the head with a frying pan until the head comes through. As a fist puppet character, he is quite believably miserable as he dutifully accepts the pounding process in a way totally impossible for a human actor. However, after he is enlightened by William, the hero, Jasper reappears as the antithesis of his fist-puppet self; he has become a "morate" puppet (a simple rod type control which is held by a central rod extending down through the head inside the costume). The arms are not under direct control in this type of puppet; their movement comes merely from the twirling of the rod. In this instance, such a gesture conveys Jasper's pleasure with himself and his triumph over the little woman. In his uninhibited glee he can also hold the scissors over his head (an impossibility for the short-armed fist puppet) and, with quick up-and-down motions, convey the heights of his ecstasy.

The Rod Puppet. Rod puppet classification includes those which are controlled by external wires connected directly to such parts of the puppet as head or hands or by a central column

PLATE VII

Left and Center: ELAINE MILLER

Jasper from The Three Sillies. Duplicate puppets extending movement possibilities by means of hand control and rod control ("morate").

Right: RAJASTHAN PUPPET--INDIA, 19th CENTURY

This puppet, controlled by only two strings, has no legs, and its movements become more stylized than those of the conventional marionette. Reflecting its religious roots, this puppet takes on a sort of divinity and, once made, is never destroyed or replaced. Skirts which wear out are never removed; a new one is put on top.

Bottom: ELAINE MILLER

Construction-paper snake.



to which internal levers and control wires are attached. A wide range of construction methods is possible within this category-- from flat two-dimensional to solid three-dimensional figures.⁴⁴ Combinations of the types, such as hand-and-rod, provide movement of a different nature from that of the hand puppet. In extending the hand puppet's short arms to more natural lengths and providing positive control through the attached rods, the rod puppet becomes, by its nature, capable of a flowingly graceful, dignified movement and, as a consequence, of more seriously dramatic, even tragic themes. The fully proportioned and accentuated arms and bodies can thus compensate for the loss of the ability to handle props, yet still maintain some of the direct quality of the hand puppet technique (Plate VIII). As in the hand puppet, legs are not essential and without such dangling contrivances movement can be suggested rather than mimicked. With the center supporting rod type, a twist of this rod produces an acceptable stylized animation. Free of the jerkiness often ascribed to the marionette, rod operated puppets excel in finely controlled movements. Remote from humanity in design and movement, this type of puppet above all the other types can express religious themes. It is very difficult in live performance to convey, without triteness or embarrassing irreverencies (or both), important religious figures such as the Holy Family, Jesus, the

⁴⁴ Although the "shadows," or, more familiarly, shadow puppets, may be considered as a separate development apart from that of the more conventional puppet, they are usually included in rod puppet classification.

PLATE VIII

Left: LEWIS MAHLMANN

Judith from Bluebeard. Hand-and-rod type.

Right: TONY SARG

Fish Footman from Alice in Wonderland. Marionette
closely copied from original Tenniel drawing.



Saints, or even God. The puppet by the very nature of its being non-human transcends these difficulties, and the rod puppet is especially capable of such interpretation. Since rod figures may be of any size which can be adequately supported, very large puppets are possible. Rod puppets on a giant scale, combined with some string controls, were designed by Robert Edmond Jones and executed by Remo Bufano for Stravinsky's "Oedipus Rex" with Leopold Stokowski conducting the oratorio and the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra in 1931. This illustrates an interesting example of the use of puppets to achieve a special effect. It was felt that the essential gestures of oversized rod puppets (ten feet high) would be more effective than human actors. Masked manipulators dressed in black controlled the figures both from a forty-foot bridge and from below (Plates IX and X).

Pauline Benton, an authority on Chinese shadows, has found that in oriental philosophy "what one is not supposed to see, one does not see."⁴⁵ This is a decided philosophical advantage over the Western attitude and is reflected in the ability of the Chinese to overlook the thick-handled sticks which are the shadow control rods and in such sincerely artistic forms as the Japanese Bunraku where the operators, although completely visible at all times, are considered merely the shadows of the puppet and so actually appear to fade into the scenery after a few

⁴⁵ Pauline Benton and others, "Shadow Figures," Puppetry, 1935, p. 42.

PLATE IX

ROBERT EDMOND JONES and REMO BUFANO

From this design for the setting of "Oedipus Rex" one can imagine the impact of the final scene after Oedipus has just blinded himself. "He stands in the light, blinded, covered with blood, tall, gaunt, and emaciated. He raises his blackened eyes. Slowly his hands go up as far as they can, without reaching anything, only to come down just as slowly. There is nothing but the earth left for him, toward which he now sinks in despair." (Remo Bufano, "Marionettes Make a New Entrance, Puppetry, 1931, p. 24.)

From Puppets and Puppetry, by Cyril Beaumont, p. 133.

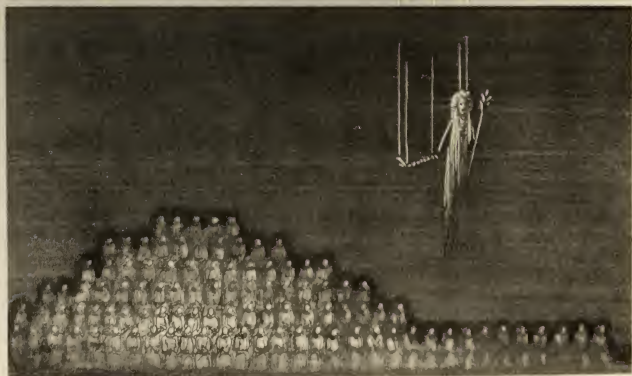


PLATE X

ROBERT EDMOND JONES and REMO BUFANO

Ten-foot rod puppets by Remo Bufano after design by Robert Edmond Jones for Stravinsky's "Oedipus Rex." Left to right: Jocasta, Messenger, Oedipus, Blinded Oedipus, Shepherd, Creon, and Tiresias. The Blinded Oedipus, the Shepherd, and the Messenger are the property of the Detroit Institute. Others belong to the Brander Matthews Museum at Columbia University and to Cedric Head, collector and puppeteer.

From The Puppetry Journal, March-April 1962, no page number.



minutes⁴⁶ (Plate XI). With a more remote control in order to diminish the appearance of the rods, it is necessary to work out added details in jointing the figures and, accordingly, to acquire a greater precision of manipulation for effect.

By no means limited to an impression of two-dimensionality, the shadow puppet has within its means a psychical distancing which transcends reality no matter how realistic the intent. Paul McPharlin inferred that "solid environment-hedged human beings escape in their inverted life dreams" to an emptiness, a flatness, an "airless Martian landscape" resembling the space of the shadow screen.⁴⁷ The spectator creates in this space imaginately as, stimulated by the placement of set pieces, the area becomes either expansive or confining. The Chinese excelled in just such a placement of scenery and of figures as well as in a mastery of the control rods with all of their subtle nuances of motion. Enchantments and bewitchments could effectively take place--one figure, quickly drawn away, was replaced by another in the ensuing blur. "Distancing" is further reinforced in shadow play by a unity of material; props, scenery, and characters are all related, being made and colored in the same manner. Depending upon their mass for effectiveness, such traditional figures as the shadows of the Javanese Wajang exemplify the possibilities of refinement within the mass as well

⁴⁶ Betty McGee, "The Japanese Puppet Theatre," Educational Theatre Journal, March 1951, 3:44-48.

⁴⁷ "Aesthetic of the Puppet Revival," p. 92.

PLATE XI

JAPANESE BUNRAKU PUPPET

Japan's unique form of puppetry, the Bunraku, survives at Osaka and is a national institution. Each puppet requires three operators. The chief puppeteer is dressed in an ancient ceremonial robe and manipulates the head and right arm, while his two assistants, dressed in black robes and hoods which signify nothingness, operate the left arm and the feet. This puppet is the character Bunschichi, made in 1832, and now owned by John Zweers, Pasadena, California.

From History of Puppetry, Los Angeles County Museum, 1959, p. 11.



(Plate XII). Whether in colors, as in the case of Chinese shadows, or in the black and whites of the Javanese, the rod controlled shadow puppet has great potential in contemporary expression. The relative position of the figures from the screen determines degrees of relative intensity and so offers all of the chiaroscuro effects of the abstract patterns of the photograph, with the added advantage of motion. The delicate, otherworldly movements which are characteristically those of the shadow puppet provide an opportunity in this medium for poetic expression.

The rod puppet, recognized for its unique quality of construction and, consequently, of design and movement, is a type which deserves more experimentation (Plate XIII).

The String Puppet or Marionette. The marionette, a string-controlled puppet which is designed to move predictably between the pull of the string and the pull of gravity, is less direct than the other types of control. Popularly considered the most complicated and, not always justifiably, the highest form of puppetry, a large part of its existence has been prostituted in imitating that which human beings can do better. Because the nature of the marionette's design is such that it is a completely whole figure (from movable head to articulated feet) which swings in a pendular fashion between the two forces, there can be extremely close resemblances to the movement of the human body itself, and this similarity accounts to a large degree for the lifelikeness to which it has been so frequently subjected.

PLATE XII

JAVANESE WAJANG KULIT (SHADOW)



PLATE XIII

FERNAND LEGER

Modernist rod puppets for "Les Boxeurs," ballet
by J. Chesnais.

From Puppets and Puppetry, by Cyril Beaumont,
p. 62.



While complete abstraction is possible in the string controlled puppet as well as in the other types, it is true that satire and humor, or even tragedy, is conveyed only through some association with reality and the human element. The legend of Dr. Faust, the master of necromancy who sells his soul to the devil in return for power, has, over the centuries, become to the marionette what Punch and Judy has always been to the hand puppet. Such a vehicle abounds in magical transformations and provides opportunities for amazing characters controlled by strings. The Mephistopheles designed by Harro Siegel, with the students of the puppetry class of the School of Arts and Crafts, Braunschweig, Germany, is strikingly expressive design compared with a mere copying of realistic proportion. Mephistopheles' hand, of primary importance in the characterization, is larger than the head. The facial expression is that of a mask--a limited statement which carries conviction. The legs are frankly articulated without an attempt to conceal movable joints. One does not question the fact that this figure represents a unity of design and movement and that its expressive possibilities can provide the spectator a departure from actuality (Plate XIV). Likewise, in a scene from Le Mariage de la Flûte, Gera Blattner's Théâtre de L'Arc en Ciel ingeniously humanizes musical instruments. The flute, given an enticing femininity, receives the violin and the violoncello, rivals for her love. They fight a duel using their bows for rapiers. The violin wins and all ends happily as the other instruments celebrate his successful troth.

PLATE XIV

HARRO SIEGAL

Mephistopheles from Faust. The Marionette Theatre
of Braunschweig, Germany.

From The Puppetry Journal, Jan.-Feb. 1958,
p. 15.



Such an interpretation frankly admits of artificiality. No attempt is made to hide the means by which the marionettes are controlled; rather the control strings are emphasized and become an integral part of the overall design (Plate XV).

The marionette is therefore at its best when it abstracts the essentials from reality. Ideally, of course, the supra-realistic is its domain. Not only can it defy gravity, assume highly improbable forms with related movements, but even the "fourth dimension" poses no problem. Trick marionettes can, for instance, exist in several planes of space simultaneously, as exemplified by the often used "come apart" skeleton, whose bones separate and dance in all directions at once. Another favorite, centuries old, is the Grand Turk and Family, a large single puppet that suddenly disintegrates into several small but fully formed figures. These are indeed tricks and, as such, become stereotyped. However, it is within some of these possibilities that new interpretations can be found. There are combinations of control such as those found on the giant four- to five-foot Sicilian puppets, weighing some eighty pounds, which are operated from above by one large central rod but with string controlled movement to arms, shields, and such parts as helmets of the heavy armor. This type illustrates an excellent example of an acceptance of the control limitations and of the conventions of an essentially folk tradition. Since the puppet cannot possibly walk like a human being, it assumes a heavy, stilted walk that is uniquely its own (Plate XVI). The traditional two-

PLATE XV

GERA BLATTNER

Figures from Le Mariage de la Flûte, Theatre de
l'Arc en Ciel.

From Puppets and Puppetry, by Cyril Beaumont,
p. 56.



PLATE XVI

SICILIAN PUPPET

Salvatore Macri, third generation Sicilian puppeteer, in the United States on a grant from the International Puppet Museum, Stony Creek, Connecticut, stands with two of his antique puppets.



stringed Rajasthan puppet from India is another example of a puppet which, through the centuries, has established a language of movement (Plate VII).

Thus, when the limiting disguise of human mimicry is removed from the marionette and it is allowed to be its own honestly artificial self, there is found, within its very own resources, the expression of an art form.

The Finger Puppet and Others. The diminutive finger puppet, sometimes called digit or digitator, fingerette, or fingerine, makes use of the operator's fingers, usually for the puppet's legs. As in the hand puppet, the control is direct, and the puppet is accordingly built around the movement of these fingers. Additional controls by means of strings or rods can be manipulated by the free hand. While restricted in size and movement, the finger puppet has some advantages which are distinctly its own and, within its own scale, has possibilities for artistic expression. Herb Scheffel, American artist in this type of control, elatedly claimed he could carry his whole show in his coat pocket⁴⁸ (Plate XVII). The dimension of the puppet predetermines an intimate performance and exaggerated movements which are neither repetitive nor lengthy. Since animation is limited, more or less, to actual leg movement such as the precise steps of a dance, leaps, tip-toeing, and running, secondary movement is important to the overall figure. The tail of the Mouse, for

⁴⁸ Herb Scheffel, "Table Top Theatre," The Puppetry Journal, May-June 1953, 4:20.

PLATE XVII

HERB SCHEFFEL

Finger puppets for ballet, "Pas De Voodoo."
From The Puppetry Journal, March-April 1962,
no page number.



example, from Clement Moore's The Night Before Christmas, provides just such a supplementary motion (Plate V).

Other diminutive figures such as those used in the stop-motion technique of puppet films can be considered as a separate classification of puppet. Their movement is a combination of manipulation and the technique of the animated cartoon. That is, these puppets are placed by hand in consecutive positions for each frame of film, exactly as is done with separate animated cartoon drawings (Plate V). Many of such films produced in Czechoslovakia and Poland, as mentioned below, may rightly be considered an art form. Imaginative design, movement, and themes reflect the unquestionable artistry of the producers who create them. An example of an incongruous attempt in stop-motion technique appeared in the Cinerama production of The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm. Little puppet gnomes performed their bit within the intimately confining area of the poor shoemaker's shop. This is in direct contradiction to the very scope and concept of this particular form of the wide screen. At its best, Cinerama is meant, literally, to envelope the spectator in special visual effects, motion, and sound. To be surrounded, therefore, with no more than a magnified stereotype of the animated cartoon only serves to deny the whole concept. It is encouraging to learn of such an indigenously animated form as Karel Zeman's Inspiration. In this Czechoslovakian stop-motion film a glassblower is inspired by falling raindrops and, as his imagination carries him on, a fantasy develops. Maintaining that nature

which the art of blowing glass bestows upon the medium, these figures are highly imaginative and delicate in their glassy structure and movement.⁴⁹ In the English film The Red Shoes a puppet cutout of newspaper became animated. Again, maintaining the quality of the paper, its movement was integral.

The motion picture and television have provided new opportunities for mass entertainment. However, as in the case of Les Poupées de Paris, "art" in these media cannot easily be divorced from money-making. Imaginative use of the puppet in film and on the home screen is rare, just as genuine creativity in the medium of the animated cartoon is, unfortunately, the exception. The rolling-eyed, clacking-mouthed variety-act puppets merely perpetuate the public's misconceptions of puppetry just as the monotonous "smashed-cat" routine of the typical cartoon, with its constant mad pace of near-sadistic brutality disguised as slapstick, becomes an accepted convention, totally ignoring the delightful possibilities displayed by such cartoons as The Great Toy Robbery, a recent Canadian release. Well-integrated charm as found in the film Lili is a noteworthy example of such imaginative use. Extensions of the leading characters, the puppets were caricatured symbols of the characters' inner selves and, because they were puppets, able to communicate with each other in a way their human counterparts found impossible. The puppets used on the screen for Inspiration, The Red Shoes, and Lili

⁴⁹ Kamil Bednar, Puppets and Fairy Tales, p. 47.

stimulate the senses rather than dull them and, as such, represent effective use of this aspect of puppetry.

Other types of puppet manipulation exist. Many of these, however, are either too restricted or rely too heavily upon incidental movement to be considered an artistic medium. Table puppets, for example, are useful in creative dramatics with young children and are so classified since their animation is derived as the operator merely pushes them about on a flat surface (Plate V). A jiggling puppet, usually a toy, is primarily capable of but a repetitive jerky motion. Relying upon the flexibility of construction for its complete abandon in movement, this type may be attached to string or rod, or may obtain its animation from a springboard. The operator, in the latter instance, sits upon one end of a thin board and holds the figure, probably by a rod, to the other end. A knocking upon the board agitates the figure.

Puppetry as Design in Motion

The puppeteer chooses for his expression that type of control and, consequently, that type of movement, which will most effectively animate his design. Because an inherent distancing device which can be negated by the so-called formal features of composition is literally built into each of the various types of puppet control, design and motion in puppet theatre are therefore closely related. The puppet itself, as a work of art, is a creative design; as an actor, it is design in motion. When

realism is not the puppeteer's goal, design and its related motion have limitless possibilities. Artists in other media have gone to great lengths to add movement to design. Intent upon establishing a participating relationship between the spectator and the object, Moholy-Nagy created, for example, kinetic paintings in which spirally-bound transparent perforated leaves could be moved by the spectator himself in such a way that varied air space between different picture layers would create a variety of light and color combinations of his own choosing.⁵⁰ Brancusi, in order to add the element of time to a sculpture that was static, "The Fish" and "Leda," placed them on a revolving base. The Futurists, interested in design in motion, attempted to record the movement and change in objects rather than their appearance at any specific time. Calder's mobiles are moving forms with changing relations in space.

The puppeteer, inheriting the most integral design-motion art of all, creates not only with the basic elements of design (the emotional qualities of line, form, and color), the tactile characteristics of materials, and sound and light, but also, most important of all, with movement. A puppet resting upon a museum shelf therefore exhibits but a small part of its artistic potential.

With regard to the basic elements of design, psychologists find that specific lines represent a kind of graphic record of

50 Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Experiment in Totality, p. 202.

aspects of nature which have to do with association and memory. C. L. Watkins in his Language of Design (p. 169) maintains that a universal language of design exists which artists intuitively use and that this "language is universal not only because any-one of any race can comprehend it, but because any artist working in any medium or in any style may employ it." Horizontal lines, he clearly illustrates, can, because of their association with nature, be used to convey repose, peace, and finality. Likewise, vertical lines convey stability, inspiration, and majesty; diagonal lines, movement conflict, and distortion; a zig-zag line, confusion; or an S-curve, grace and lissome movement. The universal language of color (yellow and red are warm; blue and green are cool; at a certain intensity contrasting colors produce an afterimage that is based upon optical illusion, and so on), needs no further elaboration. Therefore, while theory does not negate intuition, and the sensitive artist in any medium does not create from a formulated language, the puppeteer, like other artists, draws from such sources as his own reaction to these basic design elements.

Recognizing this universality of a design "language" it is understandable why artists from the time of the cave man have possessed an innate ability to visualize artistic forms in rocks, shells, branches, or roots. Leonardo da Vinci is said to have advised students to look at chance forms like cracks in plaster and knots in boards and to attempt to make figures out of them. He recognized this process as an exercise for the painter's im-

agination. A striking example of this idea can be seen in an exhibit at the Nelson Art Gallery, Kansas City, Missouri, entitled "Chinese Landscapes of the Four Seasons." These are actual sawed slabs of marble, the patterns of which evoke images that are given the appropriate titles of "Many Wonders of Summer Clouds," "Bright Moonlight on the Autumn Stream," "Winter Peaks Hoard the Snow," and "Range Upon Range of Spring-Green Hills." Admitting that his inspiration comes from finding as well as seeing, Picasso has created such sculpture pieces as "Bull's Head," 1943, from the handle bars and the seat of a bicycle. Hence, a piece of driftwood became Basil Milovsoroff's source and inspiration for a rod puppet to be used in his interpretation of Saint-Saens' "Danse Macabre" as shown in Plate XVIII. The quality of the marble, of the bicycle parts, and of the driftwood is not camouflaged. Each represents a selection and a rearrangement. If, for instance, gourds are chosen merely for the structural framework of a group of puppet heads, as recommended by Patricia Platt in "Those Versatile Gourds,"⁵¹ the imaginative potential of the gourds--the shapes, colors, and textures--are in reality buried in this so-called "direct" armature use.

No other form of theatre offers such possibilities in imaginative use of materials. The varying textures of rough mat, rough glossy, smooth mat, smooth glossy and materials of different physical properties such as metal, wood, celluloid, oil-

⁵¹ The Puppetry Journal, July-August 1962, 14:31-32.

PLATE XVIII

BASIL MILOVSCROFF

Rod puppet from Saint-Saens' "Danse Macabre,"
fashioned from driftwood.



cloth, silk, burlap, or paper "stimulate the tactile sense, to make an appeal through the sense of vision to the sense of touch and thereby extend and enrich the aesthetic experience."⁵²

Because under the generally intense artificial light of the stage things appear different from "reality," the puppeteer should be inspired to create imaginatively rather than to attempt a simple illusion. A real mirror, therefore, in the hands of a puppet, becomes a travesty, while incidentally annoying the spectator with its flashing reflections. Real hair, or, as once was once seriously suggested to this writer, genuine artificial teeth, imposed upon the figure of the puppet, convert what should be an artistic creation into a kind of monstrous hybrid. The puppet artist should be concerned therefore with only the essential qualities of the substances with which he works. This being the case, materials may be used creatively for their own visual and tactile qualities. As Marjorie Batchelder points out, the "lean and hungry wolf made of sheet aluminum, with a long flexible spine to which ribs are attached, catches the essence of wolfish starvation, and one does not miss the covering of fur."⁵³

Materials used not only for their visual qualities but for their innate possibilities of movement contribute another factor in psychical distance. Mildred Osgood, New York puppeteer and

⁵² Louis Lozowick, "Alexander Exter's Marionettes," Theatre Arts, July 1928, 12:518.

⁵³ Rod-Puppets and the Human Theatre, p. 284.

art teacher, constructed the filmiest of fairies from tubes of organdy. Ethereal and buoyant, their movements were appropriately delicate. A paper snake, constructed from a heavy water-color paper, folded and scored, embodies a textural quality and a remarkable springy, live movement (Plate VII). Henryk Jurkowski commends the stony, marblelike figures of animals in the play "About Johnny the Goldsmith and the Burgomaster's Daughter" by the "Baj" Warsaw Theatre in 1956. The bear, he states, moved heavily and slowly like one would presume a stone bear to behave. One could feel in the movement the "overcoming of matter," and, for this reason, the bear's animation was more interesting than any attempted "realistic" movement. Shapes of puppets also suggest movement patterns. A barrel-shaped puppet can conceivably move in half-turns or half-twists based on an imaginary vertical axis.⁵⁴

With the infinite possibilities in this most plastic of all theatres there are but few instances where the puppeteer's inspiration can justifiably adhere to a pattern of literal adaptation. In the rare examples where an illustrator has to interpret the writer's mood that the two--writer and illustrator--have become inseparable, an identification is established on the part of the viewer which discourages the use of any other form. Lewis Carroll's illustrator, Sir John Tenniel, established the appearance of Alice in Wonderland and his matchless illustrations

⁵⁴ Jurkowski, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

were appropriately the models for the design of Wonderland characters for Tony Sarg's production in 1930 (Plate VIII). Neither can there be any other Winnie-the-Pooh, Piglet, Eeyore, or Christopher Robin than those depicted by Ernest Shepard for A. A. Milne's classic, a fact immediately recognized by Bil and Cora Baird whose NBC telecast a few years ago literally reproduced these figures. Even within such preconceived standards, however, there is ample scope for individual interpretation.

Puppetry as Theatre Art

The puppet artist has unparalleled opportunities to create not only the actors themselves but the other components of theatre consistent with these actors to produce an additional quality in the dramatic structure of the play, the episode, or the idea. In all of these facets--scenery, props, light, sound, stage, costumes--the puppeteer must keep in mind the fact that he is designing for an imaginative (i.e., a non-human) theatre unrestricted by the laws of physics applicable to the human actor. Even the scenery of puppet theatre, as well as the props, can become animated and move in manners most unpredictable and "unrealistic." Imaginative possibilities harmonious with the style of a particular performance are often more technically feasible in puppet theatre; disproportion presents no problem.

Light and sound can be valuable in creating this imaginative theatre. The puppet's unchanging features can achieve a seeming plasticity of expression by the angle, play, and color of light

falling upon it. Furthermore, many puppeteers find the human voice emanating from a puppet to be incongruous. Contemporary experiments with the tape recorder and other electronic media, such as those conducted by Vladimir Ussachevsky, composer and lecture-recitalist of Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, offer exciting possibilities in the field of sound (in voice as well as music) which would be more in keeping with the qualities inherent in puppet theatre.

The stimulation available in such forms has been pointed out by Marjorie Batchelder, who advised the puppeteer to investigate other media. For instance, the extraction of basic shapes, the emphasis and rearrangement which express an emotional quality instead of a definite locale, can be found in the abstract paintings of Lyonel Feininger.⁵⁵ Stage designs themselves can be drawn from such sources. There are innumerable possibilities other than the all too familiar box-like form of the conventional proscenium construction. The stage can, and frequently should, expand to allow for the extended concepts of design in motion. In Ray Mount's 1957 production of "Sinbad the Sailor" at the Annual Festival of the Puppeteers of America, the stage, the properties, and all the scenery were wholly unified in this manner. The waves of the ocean were at the same time the necessary masking draperies through which puppets could appear at random. The

⁵⁵ "Abstract Art Gives Pointers to the Puppeteer," Puppetry, 1944-1945, pp. 49-50.

entire stage proper, including all acting areas, was Sinbad's ship itself. This, then, became a unification of all components in the performance as a whole.

In costuming, simplification and exaggeration are the primary considerations. Costuming is not to be considered, therefore, in terms of constructing doll clothes but rather as an integral part of the design and movement which makes up the whole of puppet theatre. As the puppet is not likely to make any basic costume change in the course of a performance, the lines and forms of his bodily shape are often literally built into his structure. In no way must costume interfere or detract from his freedom of movement.

Just as artists in many fields have turned periodically to the art of the primitive for their stimulation, the designer for puppet theatre can find a rich source of inspiration in unstudied creative dramatics. The child quite naturally emphasizes only the significant aspect and has an amazing capacity for projecting himself sincerely through his medium. This innate ability to see with the inner eye, to emphasize through simplification and subordination must be reawakened in the adult. When Obratsov used his uncovered hands to express puppet bodies, he recognized the fact that simply designed ball heads were in keeping with the whole. Minutely delineated features would have been incongruous. All art is composed of this significant aspect, this synthesis of the component parts toward the total effect. As Paul McPharlin suggested in regard to a puppet character, an

old lady was to knit in a rocking chair and comment on the action of the play like a Greek chorus:

Her outstanding features, or significant aspect, include rocking chair (a permanent part of her anatomy), white hair, open mouth, tight shawl and knitting needles. She need not bend at the waist or walk; her only joints can be at the jaw and wrists; her main action is rocking, done by the chair. With these few details in evidence, the character is complete. Anything added will be merely in the way.⁵⁶

The spectator at a puppet performance should not actually be interested in whether or not the show was strung with "500 miles of fishline,"⁵⁷ any more than a viewer at an art gallery should be concerned as to how many buckets of paint Jackson Pollock used for his "Detail of One" in 1950. The artistic creation is the end result. If puppetry is to continue to advance as an art form it must rid itself of its craft concept simply of manipulation.

Craig applauded the puppet for its lack of egocentricity so prevalent in the human actor. The puppeteer who insists that the puppet be merely a cute trick which shares the spotlight with himself does not markedly contribute to the medium. In fact, this attitude can result in a dissipation of artistic potential. Such, indeed, was the unhappy result displayed by the Tantomount Theatre in Carmel Valley, California, endowed with physical facilities the envy of many a struggling puppeteer.

⁵⁶ "Styles in Puppet Design," in A Book of Puppetry, p. 29.

⁵⁷ An actual advertisement for a puppet show travelling through Kansas several years ago.

Their performance of Hans Christian Anderson's "The Nightingale," which this writer witnessed, was enacted on the puppet stage, without benefit of masking curtains, so that the manipulators could be watched as they performed. Unfortunately, they did "perform," and the audience became so torn between the obvious pyrotechnics below the puppet stage and the excellent performance above, that it was unable to determine which display was legitimately the performance it had paid to see. That this "open playing" can be effectively accomplished is evident in the Japanese Bunraku and such artists who can forget the self in their projection. They, and all who share their view, demonstrate a sincere realization that puppetry can indeed be a legitimate art form.

SUMMARY

It is therefore realized that in order to consider puppetry as an art form one must define it in terms other than those which merely describe animated dolls. Puppets, properly regarded as theatrical figures controlled by human beings, are restricted by no human module; the only limitations are those of the puppeteer's own invention. Like contemporary theatre, dance, and the motion picture, puppetry, also, must undergo a continual probing for its own particular abstractive quality that is at the same time an art experience.

The puppeteer, like artists in other media, should avoid the

stereotypes of literal interpretation. No genuine creativity can recognize set "rules"; if a medium is to offer a singular aesthetic experience, its interpretive power lies in the recognition of its unique artistic qualities. The animation of the inanimate, the juxtaposition of the real and the unreal, the actualization of the humanly impossible, and the imaginative creation of a world of fantasy can become realities in puppet theatre, independent of any other form of expression.

That detachment which distinguishes the art experience from the common everyday experience is effected additionally in puppet theatre by the varied types of control, each with its own innate "distancing" possibility. No one type of control is the most expressive; rather, each type must be recognized for its own intrinsic characteristic, for the essential movement which grows out of its control mechanism and its designed material. If this designed movement is recognized for its artistic truth rather than vraisemblance, the spectator can experience vicariously and imaginatively a movement which is uniquely of puppet theatre.

Considered as design in motion, the medium offers limitless possibilities. Materials may be used not only for their visual and tactile qualities but for their innate movement potentialities. Unparalleled opportunities exist in puppet theatre for the creation not only of the puppets themselves but of the other components of theatre consistent with these imaginative "actors." Analogous with all art forms, the significant aspect or synthesis

of these component parts toward the total effect is of paramount importance. Inspiration, too often lacking in the constant repetition within the medium of puppetry itself, can be a more vitalizing process if drawn from other resources as well.

Beyond craftsmanship or "performance," and infinitely more than a trick or a "gimmick," these animated theatrical figures can be a medium of artistic expression deserving the nomenclature "art form."

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A JUSTIFICATION OF PUPPETRY
AS AN ART FORM

by

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This analysis is an effort to justify the existence of puppetry as an art form and, thereby, to correct those frequently perpetuated misconceptions that the medium is primarily for the trivial entertainment of children and an imitative art with very little artistic identity of its own.

The primary sources of this study have been two important library collections (New York Public and the personal collection of Mrs. Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin); actual viewing of professional performances in major areas of the United States; membership in the Puppeteers of America; and personal experience through the operation of a puppet theatre.

Although scattered references did exist, there was very little puppet literature in English until the puppet revival during the early part of this century. The English artist and designer, Gordon Craig, found the puppet to be superior in many ways to the human actor. Craig's theories and translations of valuable historical material appeared in limited editions of periodicals he himself published. Other revivalists probed the many facets of the medium; new uses in education, recreation, therapy, advertising, the motion picture, and television have encouraged increased exploration and publication in books, periodicals, and graduate theses. Much literature still remains untranslated, however, and a large part of that which has appeared in English does not recognize the unique capability of puppet theatre.

The puppet, when considered in the terms of the definition

by Paul McPharlin, a leader in the puppet revival, as a "theatrical figure animated by a human being," has unlimited artistic possibilities in contrast with the stereotype suggested by the average dictionary definition which recognizes the puppet merely as an animated doll. Although creativity does not acknowledge rules in any medium, puppetry, like all of the lively arts, must undergo a continual probing for its own particular quality that establishes it as an art experience.

"Reality" in puppet theatre must allow for the imaginative participation of the spectator. A skillful imitation of another form has no place. The animation of the inanimate, the juxtaposition of the real and the unreal, the actualization of the humanly impossible, and the creation of a world of fantasy are the "realities" of puppetry.

Psychical distance, necessary for any aesthetic experience, is strengthened through the puppet control types--the hand, the rod, the string, or the fingers themselves. Essential expressive movement grows out of each control mechanism and the properties of its designed material.

Considered as design in motion, the medium of puppetry offers unique possibilities unfeasible in human theatre. Unlimited by the human module, the puppets themselves and all of the components of puppet theatre must be realized in terms of significant aspect. Creative stimulus can be a more revitalizing process if drawn from other art forms as well. Furthermore, puppetry has within its potential more than craftsmanship and virtuoso manipulation which merely draws attention to the personality of its operator.

