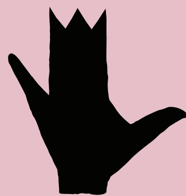
Puppets: Theatre, Film, Politics



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Puppets: Theatre, Film, Politics

Puppets: Theatre, Film, Politics

edited by Joanna Kordjak and Kamil Kopania

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1.
Tina Modotti, *Hands of the Puppeteer*, 1929, silver gelatin print, digital image, Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

1.

2.
Zofia Gutkowska-Nowosielska, *Girls*, 1948, oil on canvas,
Starmach Gallery, Kraków, photo: Marek Krzyżanek

2.

'A Collage of Things, Stories, Objects, and People'

Joanna Kordjak

> I like to make puppets. It's like creating worlds …
> I like puppets because you make them with anything, like a collage. Or rather they are a collage of things, stories, objects, and people.[1]

The art puppet's immense potential as a vehicle of artistic expression, noted by Enrico Baj (a painter and graphic artist who collaborated with Massimo Schuster[2] and made memorable

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contributions to puppet theatre), got fully appreciated only in the early twentieth century.

Exploring the fringes of mainstream culture in its search for ways to revive the art language, modernism created a fertile ground for the 'discovery' of puppet theatre by artists and its recognition as a visual art in its own right. This newfound appreciation was underpinned by emerging theatrical theories. Maurice Maeterlinck, convinced of the need of finding a new actor, penned at the turn of the centuries a 'trilogy for marionettes', believing they would cope with the challenges posed by a symbolic and psychological drama. Particularly influential was Edward Gordon Craig's theory of the über-marionette, which spawned a trend in dramatic theatre to puppetise the actor gesture. Some went as far as to suggest that Craig was proposing to replace the live actor with an inanimate figure. Importantly, this flow of inspiration was a bidirectional one: acknowledged by the avant-garde, puppet theatre was not only being influenced by contemporary artistic trends (cubism, surrealism, or Dadaism), but also itself exerting an influence on its various fields. No longer concealed (a breakthrough Craig and others had helped usher in), the artificiality of the puppet and its mechanical movements inspired new concepts in choreography and costume design. One of the most spectacular examples of this were the experiments conducted at the Bauhaus by Oskar Schlemmer, involving, for example, the transfiguration of the human form by means of cubist costumes and masks (as described in his 1928 theoretical essay, *Man and Art Figure*).

Artists' keen interest in puppet theatre was also fuelled by the fascination and anxiety aroused by the puppet, related to the rapid advances in technology and mechanics and a growing sense of the dehumanisation of the modern world, and reflected in literature and art in the figures of all kinds of humanoids, mannequins, or automatons.

For centuries, puppet theatre was considered an inferior genre, akin to street theatre, a form of tawdry, sometimes obscene, low-brow entertainment, and yet, despite (or because of) that, one that was hugely attractive. A turn towards previously disparaged genres in early-twentieth-century high art was a token of revolt against the hypocrisy and spiritual bankruptcy of bourgeois culture. By looking elsewhere, avant-garde artists were hoping to release themselves from its academic constraints. Moreover, drawing on pop culture (which puppet theatre belonged to) was also a way of 'undermining' its high-brow or elite counterpart and overturning existing hierarchies, a crucial strategy of the avant-garde.[3]

The great subversive potential of puppet theatre was also noticed: with its wit, irony, and mockery, it was a potentially perfect (and relatively safe) medium of socio-political critique, a function that was actually a raison d'être of travelling puppet theatres in the past.[4]

The story of one of the most famous puppet characters ever, written by Carlo Collodi in the late nineteenth century, turns out to be a multi-level metaphor charged with ideological and political subtext. Telling

3.
The Great Ivan by Sergey Preobrazhensky and Sergey Obraztsov, dir. Jan Wilkowski, stage design: Adam Kilian, puppet design: Zofia Stanisławska-Howurkowa, 'Lalka' Theatre in Warsaw, 1963, photo: archive of 'Lalka' Theatre

3.

of the adventures of Pinocchio, a wooden puppet that wants to become a real boy, it became a timeless metaphor of growing up.[5] At the same time, it could be interpreted as a critique of bourgeois society, where grown-ups are passive marionettes, manipulated by various external forces, money, and power.

This political and social potential of puppet theatre is highlighted in a series of extraordinary photographs taken by Tina Modotti in Mexico in the late 1920s. They occupy a special place among the rich photographic documentation of twentieth-century puppet theatre, and not only as an outstanding achievement in the field of avant-garde photography. *Hands of the Puppeteer*, the best-known picture in the series, explores the relationship between the actor's body and the puppet (which is not to be seen here except for the control strings). Being aware of the photograph's background allows us to go beyond issues of the anthropology of the body and interpret it first and foremost as a political statement coming from a 'revolutionary' artist.[6] Staged by Louis 'Lou' Bunin as a puppet show in his theatre in Mexico City in 1928 and documented by Modotti, Eugene O'Neill's famous play *Hairy Ape* was a scathing political satire, Marxist in its ideology and dealing with class divisions, class struggle, and the emergence of working-class consciousness. In this context, *Hands of the Puppeteer* can also be considered an emotionally charged image of social relationships at the time: the political domination of the well-to-do classes and the subordinate position of the working class, deprived of agency and identity, reduced to the role of easily manipulable marionettes.

In the context of the socio-political upheavals witnessed by the twentieth century, puppet theatre, perceived as a metaphor of human existence in the world and man's dependence on superior forces (for centuries identified with a God-Creator), acquired new, secular meanings. It corresponded with avant-garde principles: firstly, as an instrument of socio-political commitment, and secondly, by opening up a new, incredibly attractive space for avant-garde formal experiments. Among those embracing puppet theatre in their quest for new possibilities and new means of expression for art language were the futurists, the expressionists, the Dadaists. They made puppets for their own needs (as Paul Klee, who over the course of over a decade built several dozen for his son, Felix), or as part of regular or occasional collaboration with cabarets (Oskar Kokoschka, George Grosz) or professional puppet ensembles (Enrico Prampolini for Vittorio Podrecca's Teatro dei Piccoli in Rome, Sophie Taeuber-Arp for Alterna in Zurich). Puppet theatre made it possible to transgress the boundaries of various creative disciplines (painting, sculpture, stage design), but also to undo the oppositions between pop culture and elite culture, between children's theatre (viewed as marginal and inferior) and 'real' art. Thanks to puppet theatre, 'childishness' was gaining wide access to the grown-up world. However obscene or grotesque its forms might be, the theatre puppet nonetheless retains something 'childish'. As a miniature of the adult, it is like a child, but also like a doll, a toy.

4.
Jerzy Nowosielski, illustration for A. Fiedotov's article 'Anatomy of the Puppet-as-Actor in Teatr Lalek', 1951, pencil on paper, Starmach Gallery, Kraków

The child and childhood are key cultural tropes of the twentieth century, even if both need yet to be properly mapped. Puppet theatre allowed artists to explore those areas: tap into new, seemingly inexhaustible sources of inspiration, but also to make art, informed by recent discoveries in psychology and psychoanalysis, for a new kind of viewer: the autonomous child.

To embrace various aspects of 'childhood' — children's sensitivity and imagination, but also the 'childhood' of art, that is, all kinds of primitive practices — was one of the central tendencies of modernism. They were viewed as sources of 'regenerative' energy, and it was precisely because of its rootedness in children's world and its special sensitivity (compared to the sensitivity of mentally ill persons, which was being 'discovered' at the time) that puppet theatre fascinated artists. It reminded them of a certain wonderful property of small children, who are able to endlessly shift the identities of objects, change their functions, and build ever new stories around them while playing.[7] Similar to a children's game, puppet theatre provided a convenient space for rejecting certain social tenets, order, and established norms of behaviour, for releasing and expressing primal needs and instincts.

It also made it possible for the artist (and the spectator as well) to get in touch with the primal and archaic: their own prehistory. Robert Anton referred to his one-man puppet theatre in 1970s New York by saying that it was his childhood world haunting him, as he was confronting his puppets, which he manipulated, consoled, punished.[8] Anton used his miniature theatre as a means of exploring his own identity, the various (also darker) aspects of his own personality, one that allowed him to rekindle his childish sensitivity, to evoke old fascinations and fears. For no matter how much we deny a primitive belief that objects have a life and a power of their own, we still — despite common sense — experience a sense of anxiety when confronted with a puppet. Puppet theatre thus makes us aware that the concept of human superiority

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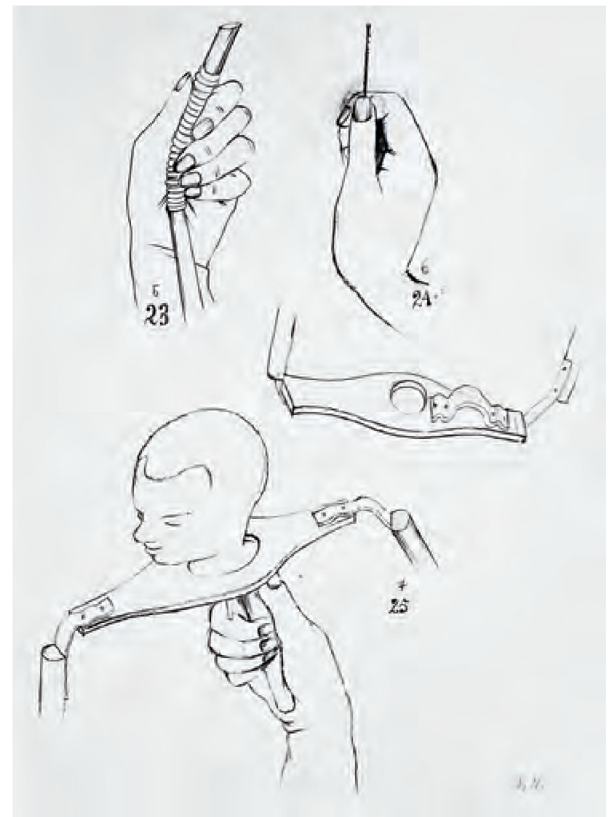

over the material world may be somewhat exaggerated. The uncertainty inherent to this form of theatre, stemming from the ambiguity of the puppet as an entity suspended between being alive and dead, moving and still, human and inhuman, made it possible to describe it using the Freudian category of the uncanny (*Unheimlisch*).[9]

Another aspect of puppet theatre, discovered and embraced by twentieth-century artists, was the extraordinary autonomy that it offered: besides designing and building the puppet, the artist could direct it as well as design its setting: scenic space, lighting, sometimes sound, choreography. We can doubtless say that the puppet's gaze (the puppet being not only an object to look at but also a subject capable of looking at us) and its movement (an externalisation of emotions and thoughts) are the quintessence of its life. If so, then the puppet designer's role in animating the puppet is perhaps as important as that of the puppet master or voice actor. This is because the puppet's design — its visual expression (from facial play to body proportions) and construction (and thus its manipulability) — determines its character.

Scale featured significantly among the diverse means used by artists to enhance the puppet's expressive power. This meant playing with the size of the puppet itself (usually making it smaller, but sometimes larger, than the human figure) as well as with the sizes of the respective characters vis-à-vis each other. The purpose of this was usually to highlight the play's moral.[10] But the size of the different parts of the puppet's body and face could be adjusted too. A monstrous head, large goggling eyes, a caricatural upsized nose or mouth, served to boost the character's power of expression and stage persona, to highlight certain personality traits. The whole face became thus one great grimace, a cunning gaze, or a mocking smile. The characters' scale, their distorted proportions and other deformations, were subject to laws of their own. Whatever the style, puppet theatre always remained close to the poetics of reverie and the logic of dreams, and especially so in stories where the protagonists underwent various metamorphoses (transformation into a beast, dissection, or flattening).

However, avant-garde art's experimental forays into puppet theatre in the 1920s and 1930s were a marginal phenomenon and didn't revolutionise the core of the movement. Significant changes occurred only after the war, with osmosis between art and puppet theatre intensifying and the latter taking a lot of influence from various artistic movements that had emerged in the meantime. The exhibition at the Zachęta gallery and the publication accompanying it focus on precisely this moment in the history of puppet theatre in Poland, zooming in on the metamorphosis (and roots thereof) of this theatrical genre in the 1950s and 1960s. The purpose is to present selected productions as well as larger phenomena in the context of the art of the time, but also to set them against the era's socio-political background with its specificity (such as the nationalisation of puppet theatres and their regular subsidisation both in big cities and in numerous smaller ones). During that time, puppet theatre became

5.
The Great Ivan by Sergey Preobrazhensky and Sergey Obraztsov, dir. Jan Wilkowski, stage design: Adam Kilian, puppet design: Zofia Stanisławska-Howurkowa, 'Lalka' Theatre in Warsaw, 1954, photo: archive of 'Lalka' Theatre

art theatre. Its osmotic exchanges with other art genres were producing ground-breaking, cutting-edge results. Contributing decisively to the fine artistic value of Polish puppet theatre at the time was the heavy involvement of visual artists, not only stage designers but also painters and sculptors (who achieved great accomplishments in this regard). This was no doubt made possible by the nationalisation of puppet theatres and the financial stability they consequently enjoyed, which allowed them to keep a large number of visual artists on their payroll, providing the latter with an interesting alternative space for art making. Under Socialist Realism, puppet theatres (like other disciplines) had to conform with official directives concerning both their repertoire and the formal aspects of their work, but they still offered artists a chance not only for a steady income but also for enjoying relative artistic freedom (much more so than in dramatic theatre). The authorities doubtless noticed the immense propaganda potential of puppet theatre and its role in shaping the 'new socialist man' (think how important the child was for *that* project). Despite that, the genre (though subject to censorship) went beyond clear-cut distinctions of 'ideological correctness' and compliance with the tenets of Socialist Realism. It is worth

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noting that puppets played an important propaganda role outside of puppet theatre. Giant effigies of politicians or symbols of hostile ideologies became an important feature of street propaganda shows.

Puppet-theatre historians point to the turn of the 1950s and 1960s as a special time in the process of puppet theatre's self-discovery and self-identification.[11] Abandoning (both in Poland and elsewhere in the world) the imitation of 'live theatre', artists began to explore and expose its immanent property — 'theatricality'. The identity of the performing actors was also being uncovered as the stage screen (traditionally hiding 'all things human' from view) grew smaller and smaller. Radical reforms in this regard were introduced already in the 1950s by Jan Dorman at his Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre (Teatr Dzieci Zagłębia) in Będzin. This was connected to another innovation, embraced, for example, by Leokadia Serafinowicz at the 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre (Teatr Lalek i Aktora Marcinek) in Poznań — the blurring of the boundaries between puppets, actors, stage decorations, and the audience. The reduction or outright removal of the screen made the actor visible, revealing the actual backstage of puppet manipulation and bringing to light the previously concealed creative process. Exposing the theatrical machinery and the motoric forces, this demystification 'disenchanted' puppet theatre, divesting it of a certain metaphysics (at least as it was previously construed). A move away from naturalism in puppet design was bound up with this. Not only was the puppet animator revealed, but also the puppet's identity, its artificiality. This trend had its opponents who believed that side by side with a human actor the puppet actor lost its persuasive power. However, once laid bare (only in confrontation with the animator's living body), the puppet's true nature — the materials it was made of (papier-mâché, wood, rags) — proved an important new value in theatre. Many artists exploited the expressivity of materials and their textures, tapping into the sculptural potential of the ever more abstract puppet, which was becoming a kind of assemblage of fragments, bits, and pieces. The art of Jan Berdyszak, who from the mid-1950s worked with 'Marcinek' theatre, designing one-of-a-kind, avant-garde stage sets and developing a novel concept of theatre (not only) for children. While clearly informed by his background in painting and sculpture, here he was able to go beyond their constraints. The use of 'readymade' materials — sheet metal, cans, tow, jute bags, straw — added extra value. The puppet was an element of a comprehensively designed stage reality consisting of space, materials, form, movement, lights, colours, and sounds.

As a result of various early post-war experiments, the notion of the theatre puppet was changing: no longer perceived as a substitute or imitation of the human actor or the human being per se, it became a real object. It was also functionally recast as one of the possible means of expression besides masks, the actors themselves, or their hands. At the same time, the puppet's expressive capabilities continued to grow. New types of puppets were invented, with anthropomorphism no longer obligatory.

6.
The Tinder-Box by Hans Christian Andersen, dir. Jadwiga Stasiniewicz, stage design: Jadwiga Maziarska, Puppet Theatre of the Opole Region Theatre, Opole, 1955, photo: archive of Alojzy Smolka Opole Puppet-and-Actor Theatre

Also changing was the definition of the puppet and its relationship with the human being. Anything that the live actor was able to turn into a stage character could be a puppet, even properly framed fragments of the human body (the puppetised body features, for example, in *Conversation with One's Own Leg* (*Rozmowy z własną nogą*), a show staged by Leokadia Serafinowicz at the 'Marcinek' in in 1966). Sometimes the costume and mask covered the actor completely, turning them into puppets (as in Adam Kilian's designs for *Enchanted Steed* (*Zaklęty rumak*) at the 'Lalka' Theatre in Warsaw in 1960).

Discovered by the avant-garde, the potential of the animated object was explored in many ways. Procedures pioneered by the Dadaists and surrealists, whereby ordinary objects (ready mades) were repurposed and symbolically elevated, found perfect application in puppet theatre of the second half of the twentieth century. Evoking all kinds of loose associations, endowed with an 'inner life' and a personality of their own, on the stage these objects turned into puppet-theatre 'actors'.

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Early post-war Polish puppet-theatre shows were interdisciplinary projects, unique in their combination of experimental visuals and soundtracks with modern pedagogical and educational concepts (such as Jan Dorman's 'theatre as children's play'). Sometimes, like at 'Marcinek' in Poznań, they were the products of collaboration between the director, the stage designer, and the composer. A serious and critical inquiry into puppet theatre (as a youth-oriented genre) can provide impetus for further much needed research into one of the key themes of modernism — the child and art for children. Nor is there any doubt that the image and geography of post-war Polish art become more complete, its canon much broader, when puppet theatre and artists' participation in it are taken into account. Recognising puppet theatre as a space of visual experimentation makes it possible to add some missing names to art history, such as those of Leokadia Serafinowicz or Jerzy Kolecki who devoted their careers to the genre. Another interesting case is that of Zofia Gutkowska-Nowosielska who, following a brief (but highly intriguing) episode as a painter, from 1949 devoted herself entirely to designing puppets and stage sets for puppet-theatre shows.

Also an analysis of the mutual flows of inspiration between puppet theatre and other disciplines — painting, sculpture, environment art, or music (among those writing for puppet theatre at the time were outstanding composers such as Krzysztof Penderecki

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7.
Enchanted Steed by Bolesław Leśmian, dir. Zbigniew Kopalko, stage design and puppet design: Adam Kilian, 'Lalka' Theatre in Warsaw, 1960, photo: Edward Hartwig, archive of 'Lalka' Theatre

8.
Zofia Gutkowska-Nowosielska, stage design for *Blue Arrow*, 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre in Łódź, 1963, gouache on paper, archive of 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre

or Jerzy Maksymiuk) — proves highly fruitful and expands our knowledge of post-1945 Polish art. Through the persons of puppet and set designers, e.g., Adam Kilian, Zofia Stanisławska-Howurkowa, Lidia Minticz, or Kazimierz Mikulski, puppet theatre was related to stop-motion puppet animation, a genre that made bold advances at the time and, like the former, went beyond child-oriented or cross-over art.

Remembering little-known episodes of puppet-theatre contributions by several leading figures of the early post-war Polish art scene (Stanisław Fijałkowski, Jerzy Nowosielski, Jadwiga Maziarska, Jan Berdyszak), we cast a different light on various aspects, or even the entirety, of their work. In the puppets designed in the first half of the 1950s for a theatre in Opole, just like in her collages of fragments of photographs or scraps of fabric, Maziarska exploited a painterly effect achieved through contrasts of colours and textures. Her efforts to go beyond stylistic convention and introduce innovative designs encountered, however, the management's resistance and provoked accusations of formalism.[12] 'It's best to have your own theatre, even a tiny one', she wrote in a letter to Erna Rosenstein. 'I didn't suppose I'd come to feel the form of theatre so strongly'.[13] Her own puppet theatre, which she was planning to start in Kraków during the post-Stalin 'thaw' period, would have certainly given her the creative control she needed to go beyond near-realism in puppet

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Zofia Gutkowska-Nowosielska, stage design for *Blue Arrow*, 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre in Łódź, 1963, gouache on paper, archive of 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre

and scenery design (the avant-garde shape it would have likely assumed is hinted at by two much later sculptures inspired by theatrical experience: *Effigy I* and *Effigy II*).

The anatomic puppet-and-actor studies executed in the 1950s by Jerzy Nowosielski, in turn, as illustrations for Soviet theoreticians' essays published in *Teatr Lalek*, correspond interestingly with a contemporary drawing series that features the motif of subjectified women. Another, particularly interesting example is Andrzej Pawłowski's epidiascope theatre, a unique, never-realised concept he developed from the early 1950s onwards, which brought together all the components of his subsequent artistic work. Based on optical experiments, using mirrors and lenses to rescale and distort the characters, it combined the rational and scientific with the metaphysical and anticipated another key aspect of Pawłowski's work as a product designer. Puppet theatre — the only one that can fit its cast in a suitcase (allowing it to reach rural and small-town audiences) — made it possible to realise a project that was socially useful in the truest sense.

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[1] Enrico Baj, ‘Moi, la marionette’, *Puck*, no. 32, 1992, p. 6, quoted in Henryk Jurkowski, *Metamorfozy teatru lalek w XX wieku*, Warsaw: Errata, 2002.

[2] Massimo Schuster was a theatre director, pedagogue, and puppet artist associated with Peter Schumann’s Bread and Puppet Theatre.

[3] This aspect is noted, for example, by Kenneth Gross in his erudite essay on the phenomenon of the puppet and puppet theatre; idem, *Puppet. An Essay on Uncanny Life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

[4] A theme elaborated on by Dariusz Kosiński in his essay in this volume, p. 59–71.

[5] The image of a child-puppet (which still isn’t a ‘real person’) acquired an additional meaning in the context of modern pedagogical and educational concepts, in the light of which the child gained dignity and subjectivity.

[6] It is political on several levels. Upon her arrival in post-revolutionary Mexico, the Italian-born artist got closely involved in the Mexicanidad movement that sought to revive Mexican culture by tapping its sources, i.e., folk culture (where puppet theatre featured importantly alongside other *artes populares*).

[7] In this sense, the theatre puppet is akin to what Donald Woods Winnicott called ‘transitional objects’ — stuffed toys that play an important role during childhood; idem, *Playing and Reality*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

[8] Quoted in Jurkowski, p. 239.

[9] The concept of the uncanny was applied to puppet theatre by Ernst Jentsch in the essay ‘On the Psychology of the Uncanny’; see Gross.

[10] Or to send an ideological message, as in the puppet adaptations of *Ivan the Terrible* or *The Tale of the Five Brothers*, where the juxtaposition of puppets with a live actor was meant to visualise the class struggle.

[11] See Jurkowski, *Metamorfozy teatru lalek …*, and idem, *Dzieje teatru lalek. Od wielkiej reformy do współczesności*, Warsaw: PIW, 1984.

[12] Alojzy Smolka was the executive director of the Opole Region Theatre at the time.

[13] *Kolekcjonowanie świata. Jadwiga Maziarska. Listy i szkice*, ed. Barbara Piwowarska, Warsaw: Instytut Adama Mickiewicza, 2005, p. 65.

10–11.
Jerzy Nowosielski, puppet design for *Adventures of the Vagabond Bear*, 1950, gouache on paper, Starmach Gallery, Kraków

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12–13.
Jerzy Nowosielski, puppet design for *The Tinder-Box*, 'Pinokio' Theatre in Łódź, 1956, gouache on paper, Starmach Gallery, Kraków

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14.
Zofia Gutkowska-Nowosielska, puppet design for *Star Child,*
Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Lublin, 1963, gouache on paper,
archive of Hans Christian Andersen Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Lublin

14.

Puppets Can Do More, Puppets Live Longer

Kamil Kopania

'I have always been lured by the irresistible charm of visuals in movement, gesture, action. Precisely the superiority of visual form over the plot. The domination of the visible over the audible in puppet theatre.'[1] This is how Janina Kilian-Stanisławska, one of the outstanding figures of post-war Polish puppetry, emphasised the extraordinary role of visual design in puppet theatre. Surprisingly, the genre, despite being particularly closely connected with the visual arts (especially in the post-war period), has been little researched by art historians. Even art historians haven't recognised issues related to the aesthetics and visual aspects of puppet theatre as a subject in its own right, deserving thorough, multifaceted interdisciplinary studies that would make it possible, for example, to see trends in puppet theatre in the context of developments in painting, sculpture, and other plastic or, more broadly, visual arts. Granted, those interested in the subject can resort to publications devoted to particular artists, who had decades-long liaisons with puppet theatre (e.g., Jan Berdyszak, Ali Bunsch, or Adam Kilian), but most of those are either preliminary studies or documentations.[2] True, the visual contexts of not only puppet theatre have

been discussed by Henryk Jurkowski, whose erudite studies offer broad insight into twentieth-century theatre trends.[3] The problem, however, is that a comprehensive, critical study, based on thorough archival research, of the history of Polish puppet theatre with a focus on its visual qualities, the achievements of particular scenographers, or the more or less experimental character of the different scenes, still hasn't been written yet.

Crucially, a view from the perspective of the visual-arts recipient has been missing from art-historical reflection on Polish puppet theatre. Puppet shows have a longer life span than live-actor dramatic theatre. With puppets or other visual forms or objects animated on stage, their aesthetic, metaphoric, or symbolic potential is definitely less affected by time. To some extent, puppet shows from several decades ago can be vivid and attractive for the present-day viewer, precisely by reason of their visual aspect, of forms that can be perceived as standalone artworks.

A critical analysis of the achievements of the different artists and communities is also of significant importance for puppet-theatre history. The number of puppet theatres active in Poland after 1945 was high. Some had better publicity and more pull, others less, from today's perspective certain phenomena or persons may seem undeservedly marginalised, others overvalued. With limited communications and sluggish flow of information otherwise, the output of stages in major cities like Kraków, Poznań, or Warsaw may have naturally overshadowed the work of theatres based in smaller urban centres such as Lublin, Opole, or Rabka. Today, based on performance documentations, preserved stage designs or puppets, a critical analysis of those phenomena can be attempted. This will make it possible to sketch a new map of Polish artistic life (inclusive also of provincial puppet-theatre communities), redefine entrenched hierarchies, and recognise persons, trends, and phenomena that have so far been insufficiently researched or even marginalised.

Even a cursory glance at the folksy travelling commercial puppet theatres active in the 1930s and rooted in a centuries-long European tradition of small stages of this kind reveals the potential and timelessness of puppet theatres in a new, enlivening way. The heads of the hand puppets of Sylwester Drzewiecki's travelling theatre, which together with its documentation were offered for sale in late 2018 by an antiques dealer, proved not only interesting as a testimony of the era, but also surprisingly exciting in formal terms. Though clearly rooted in folk theatre, which is usually viewed as lacking major artistic value or ambitions, the polychrome-wood puppet heads (crafted by Hieronim Różański) have an intriguing power of expression. Fine sculpting technique, backed by a sufficient dose of imagination, made possible the creation of these convincing figures, whose appeal remains true also outside the scenic context. The situation is also interesting with the better-recognised Vilnius Puppet Theatre (Wileński Teatr Łątek), active 1936–1959, first in Vilnius and after the war in Białystok. Łódź, and, above all, Gdańsk. The creative careers of its founders, the sisters

15.
Ewa and Olga Totwen, 1949,
photo: Kazimierz Komorowski,
archive of Grażyna Totwen-Kilarska

15.

Olga, Ewa, and Irena Totwen, coincided largely with the period of the Second World War and the — in many aspects no less difficult — early post-war years. Thanks to the sisters' passion and determination, however, and the support of Jan Żejmo, who for several years served as the company's administrative director, Vilnius Puppet Theatre succeeded in staging a dozen or so shows, all in traditional marionette technique. Popular with the public, the Totwen sisters' stage was nevertheless criticised by the new generation of puppet professionals as well as by many experts, either for lack of artistic value or — which needs to be considered in the context of the era's only correct cultural policy — for lack of proper repertoire and politically accurate content. Although the legacy of the Totwen sisters can hardly be called avant-garde or ground-breaking, from today's point of view it still appears interesting for a number of reasons.[4] Let us take for example the set of marionettes for the play *The Nightingale* (*Słowik*) (1947), which was staged in Łódź and then in Gdańsk. The marionettes open a wide field of reflection on the presence of the Orient in mid-twentieth-century Polish culture as well as on the way the public at large gets informed about distant countries. Precisely crafted, they combine a stereotypical notion of the Far East with a certain degree of knowledge of Asian puppet theatre or, for example, costume design. The marionettes' faces clearly owe a lot to the early-modern tradition of depicting the Chinese as grotesque figures. Looking in hindsight, procedures such as giving the characters particularly sharp features or differentiating them by means of bizarre haircuts or beards and moustaches allowed Europeans to build associations connected with their own culture area. Rendering outlandish, nearly caricatural representations of the exotic people, Europeans often defined themselves as members of a superior civilisation. This kind of depiction was also a means of attracting interest, creating humorous situations, and, last, but not least, shaping desired aesthetic solutions.

The way the Chinese marionettes from the Totwen sisters' theatre present themselves is a good example of how certain stereotypes and associations can persist for centuries. This is by no means to suggest that the Totwen sisters themselves deliberately shaped a caricatural image of the inhabitants of the distant country; rather, the phenomenon that is meant here is that they naturally drew on a past tradition that today may seem problematic or is seen in different light. Looking at the 'Chinese' marionettes of the Vilnius Puppet Theatre, it is hard not to get the impression that they were made with great passion and precision,

16.
The Nightingale, stage design and puppet design: Olga and Ewa Totwen, Vilnius Puppet Theatre, 1947, photo: archive of Grażyna Totwen-Kilarska

16.

but without closer knowledge of Chinese realities, including theatrical ones. Whereas the characters' stylised countenances look indeed 'Chinese', the puppets' forms and proportions are more like Burmese or Thai (and their costumes can be considered eclectic, loosely based on elements of various garments worn in Far Eastern countries).

The reason why so much attention has been devoted here to *The Nightingale* and its marionettes is that the Vilnius Puppet Theatre, though in a way archaic, emphatically anticipated a trend that would become common throughout Polish puppet theatre in the following decades: a fascination with the Orient. For all intents and purposes, this subject has been missing from research into Polish puppet theatre. Whereas historical or folk themes have been discussed in numerous publications (and are widely viewed as part and parcel of post-war puppet theatre), popular, long-running shows set in the Far East have escaped researchers' scrutiny. The stage sets and puppets meant to refer spectators to the realities of China, Vietnam, or Korea were designed by the leading post-war scenographers working for puppet theatre. Their concepts shaped the (mainly young) spectators' knowledge about distant countries. It is worth finding out how realistic and how conventional those concepts were, to what extent they represented different cultures accurately and to what they were but a stylisation serving particular artistic effects. After all, such-and-such a repertoire with Far-Eastern references as well as specific ways of depicting distant lands and cultures weren't unconnected with international politics and the fact that Poland was one of the satellite states of the Soviet Union. The 1940s and 1950s were a period of intense diplomatic traffic between the Polish People's Republic and communist countries such as China, Vietnam, or North Korea, which otherwise weren't always in good relations with the Soviet Union. Official contacts had their effect on culture, including on puppet theatre, where reflections of the era's politics can be sought.

Another subject that requires further research is the work of the first post-war puppet-theatre artists, activists who in the difficult realities of the late 1940s and early 1950s laid foundations for what sometimes would become leading stages. Knowledge of the artistic merits and ambitions of the genre's post-war pioneers is rather modest, their achievements forgotten or mentioned only in passing.

In many cases we can speak of interesting personalities whose artistic potential wasn't fully realised solely because of unfavourable historical circumstances. A good example is Piotr Sawicki, the founder of the 'Świerszcz' Puppet Theatre, the later Białystok Puppet Theatre. No one denies his founding role, yet he has remained overshadowed by the successive generations of Białystok puppet artists. In the context of Sawicki's work in the field of puppet theatre, also the rest of his rich oeuvre remains poorly recognised.[5]

Sawicki, who didn't receive formal artistic training, was a dilettante in the old sense of the word — someone who, largely as an amateur, on the spur of the moment or inspired by outside circumstances, took up various creative activities. He approached them with passion and commitment, instinct, but also with laboriously acquired theoretical and practical knowledge. The list of his diverse works is very long. Over the course of several decades, Sawicki sculpted, painted,

17–18.
Much Ado about Nothing by William Shakespeare, stage design and puppet design: Piotr Sawicki, staged by the theatre of the 2nd Polish Corps, San Basilio, 1946, photo: archive of Piotr Sawicki Jr

photographed, designed sgraffiti and posters, and even made liturgical vessels. He doubtless had a fine sense of form and a keen eye, which wasn't without significance in the context of his theatrical work. The latter has been associated with typical activistic, educational theatre for young audiences, a reading suggested by Sawicki's preserved puppets as well as the repertoire of his stage.

Still, artworks can also be found in his oeuvre that cast a different light on his theatrical practice. Costumes and masks for an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, staged by the theatre of the 2nd Polish Corps in San Basilio in 1946, come to mind in the first place. From today's perspective, these masks are highly original. Diverse in form and scale, they prove that their author knew and understood selected aspects of the history of European theatre (such as the commedia dell'arte tradition), and, above all, was able to employ various artistic means in order to create an impressive gallery of the dramatis personae. Rich in texture, colour, and form, they perfectly resonate with the costumes, where as wide a range of artistic procedures has been involved. Means of expression and, partly, aesthetics of this kind have been associated with Kazimierz Mikulski and the performances he directed at the 'Groteska' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre (Teatr Lalek i Aktora Groteska) in Kraków in the 1950s and 1960s. Bearing this in mind, we can safely say that, creating the masks and costumes for *Much Ado about Nothing*, Piotr Sawicki was ahead of his time.

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Also worthy of note is his photographic output documenting the productions of the 'Świerszcz', as evidenced, for example, by his documentation of its first show for adult audiences, a 1962 adaptation of *L'Histoire du soldat* by Charles F. Ramuz and Igor Stravinsky directed by Zdzisław Dąbrowski with scenography by Zofia Pietrusińska. The scenery and the puppets, which clearly alluded to the theatrical experiments of the constructivists and of the Bauhaus, have been perfectly captured by Sawicki, allowing the viewer to get a feel of the whole scenic space and appreciate the qualities of the puppets themselves.

Piotr Sawicki isn't the only pioneer of Polish puppet theatre whose life and work have been only cursorily researched. There has been equally scant research into the activity of those artists who, having their background elsewhere, flirted more or less intensely with puppet theatre. Among them were such important and recognised pre- and post-war artists as Marian Bogusz, Jan Berdyszak, Stanisław Fijałkowski, Eugeniusz Get-Stankiewicz, Tadeusz Kantor, Lech Kunka, Kazimierz Mikulski, Jadwiga Maziarska, Jerzy Nowosielski[6], or Zofia Stanisławska-Howurkowa.

The intensity of painters', sculptors', graphic designers', or photographers' contacts with the puppet-theatre community varied. Some of the above, like Berdyszak, Mikulski, or Stanisławska-Howurkowa came to stay, becoming some of the most-recognised, appreciated, and influential scenographers after the Second World War, often blazing new paths for puppet theatre. Others collaborated with puppet theatres either short-term or occasionally, but all contributed to stage or puppet designs an element of their own artistic experiences and visions, often clearly avant-garde in nature.

Yet the whole reflection on their legacy has been limited to mentioning and (less often) discussing selected productions they were involved in (albeit without touching upon the broader context of their non-theatrical work, without analysing the formal means used, their origins, the underlying theoretical frameworks, the mutual relationships between, for example, painting and theatre, and so on) or stressing that 'outstanding visual artists'

were involved in the production of particular shows. It seems logical that those visual artists, if they were 'outstanding', informed rather significantly the character and quality of those productions or, speaking more broadly, helped define the shape of Polish puppet theatre as such. Yet art-historical studies have tended to view the art of theatre as a domain first and foremost of directors, then perhaps of actors, but less so of scenographers. The latter appear as serving an auxiliary role to directors and are only briefly mentioned, which is surprising since in puppet theatre scenographers — if only because they can create the characters — have much more say over the look of the show than in dramatic theatre.[7]

Strangely, research devoted to Polish avant-garde artists' links with puppet theatre has been limited too. While Western European artists' preoccupations with the genre — from the modernists, through constructivism, surrealism, Bauhaus, to the post-war avant-garde — have been thoroughly discussed, the reader may get the impression that in Poland such links didn't exist. Andrzej Pawłowski,

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19.
Ali Bunsch, stage design for *The Tale of the Enchanted Gander*, 'Miniatura' Puppet Theatre in Gdańsk, 1959–1960, gouache on paper, Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography in Łódź

20.
Ali Bunsch, puppet design for *Flight into the Unknown*, 'Miniatura' Theatre in Gdańsk, 1958, photo: State Archive in Gdańsk

21.
The Tale of the Wandering Soldier by Charles F. Ramuz and Igor Stravinsky, dir. Zdzisław Dąbrowski, stage design: Zofia Pietrusińska, 'Świerszcz' Puppet Theatre in Białystok, 1962, photo: Piotr Sawicki

who, inspired by the Bauhaus, but also by Sergey Obraztsov's State Central Puppet Theatre in Moscow, for several years worked on creating an epidiascope puppet theatre, remains virtually unknown to art historians. He patented his design — which was meant to make puppeteers' work easier and puppet theatre more accessible to the public at large — and sought to develop it further.[8] Ultimately, however, his efforts were in vain, due to lack of interest from the puppet community and the limited availability of precise optical instruments, yet the experiments led eventually to the *Kineforms*, which occupy an important place in the history of 1950s and 1960s Polish art.

Pawłowski's epidiascope puppet theatre emerged in the context of Kraków's highly specific art community, which featured, let us not forget, the dynamic 'Groteska'

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22–23.
Lech Kunka, stage design for to the *Frigate Oronga from the Ahu Island of Giants*, 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre in Łódź, 1971, gouache on paper, archive of 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre, photo: Marek Krzyżanek

22.

theatre as well as many avant-garde artists experimenting with puppets, to mention but Tadeusz Kantor, whose theatrical experience included Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Death of Tintagiles* (1937). The pre-war 'Cricot' Artists Theatre (Teatr Artystów Cricot), which a whole range of avant-garde artists creatively collaborated with, may have been an inspiration for Pawłowski too. Many of those artists, such as Maria Jarema or Henryk Wiciński, experimented with puppets in various fields. The former designed puppets, but also made sculptures inspired by the world of puppet theatre. The latter's creative output is replete with works of a similar nature; among them are numerous sketches of puppet designs or featuring puppet motifs.

Tadeusz Kantor is an exception that confirms the rule, but even in his case there has been an absence of thorough reflection on his artistic liaisons with pre-war puppet artists, which were numerous. Among those who were influenced by his art or worked with him were Ali Bunsch, Andrzej Łabiniec, Kazimierz Mikulski, or Jerzy Zitzman. Those contacts are mentioned by researchers, but as anecdotal evidence rather than as facts that that may have significantly contributed

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to the visions of theatre represented by various puppet artists. Curiously, there is no literature on Kantor as a puppet-theatre scenographer. Even if this was a marginal part of his oeuvre, it still deserves proper study and analysis.

Thinking about artists working with or for puppet theatres in Poland, it is worth remembering that many outstanding figures remain underappreciated or utterly missing from studies devoted to puppet-theatre history. Let us think, for example, of Jerzy Kolecki, the long-time scenographer and director of the ‘Rabcio-Zdrowotek’ Puppet Theatre (Teatr Lalek Rabcio-Zdrowotek) in Rabka in southern Poland. His legacy includes not only stage designs, but also paintings and graphics. The former are extraordinary in their diversity, formal discipline, and sensitivity of colour and texture, and generally highly avant-garde. The small theatre, performing mainly for children staying in sanatoriums in the health resort, produced visually sophisticated shows, surprising in their mature, open-minded approach to the young viewer. Designing his sceneries, Kolecki assumed that kids would naturally accept his aesthetic, which required more abstract thinking, an ability to analyse the world based on less realistic forms. His vision of theatre, practiced

24.
The Adventures of the Little Lion by Hana Doskočilova, dir. Tomasz Stecewicz, stage design and puppet design: Helena Naksianowicz, 'Kubuś' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Kielce, 1974, photo: archive of 'Kubuś' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre

24.

in Rabka in the 1960s and 1970s, was far more innovative, unorthodox, and timeless than those theorised and practiced by many doyens of Polish puppet-theatre scenographers.[9]

It was a different case with Helena Naksianowicz, who lived and worked in Kielce. There is no doubt that 'Kubuś' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre (Teatr Lalki i Aktora Kubuś) in Kielce wasn't a leading nationwide hub of puppetry arts, suffering from lack of permanent space and long-term funding. Despite those unfavourable circumstances, through the enthusiasm of many people, the stage endured, becoming eventually a significant cultural centre.[10] Unlike its Rabka counterpart, the Kielce theatre was hardly experimental. This doesn't change the fact that Helena Naksianowicz patiently developed her unique artistic language as a scenographer, painter, author of collages, as well as poet, successfully deploying it in her work for the 'Kubuś'. Her several dozen designs, though traditional in style, are highly evocative,

marked by noble simplicity and sophistication underpinned by her extraordinary sense of material, form, and texture, which played an important role in her collages. Naksianowicz had a grasp and understanding of puppets that was doubtless informed by her several years' experience as a designer at the 'Gromada' Toy Industry Labour Cooperative (Spółdzielnia Pracy Przemysłu Zabawkarskiego Gromada) in Kielce. The puppets designed by Naksianowicz for the 'Kubuś' in the 1960s and early 1970s haven't been preserved; all we have are her scenographic designs, which reflect her mastery in conceiving expressive sets and highly subtle puppets. Her artistic language can, however, be analysed most fully based on the documentary photographs preserved in the 'Kubuś' archive.

Attesting to the importance of understanding puppet-theatre scenographers' non-theatrical practices is the case of Wiesław Jurkowski who, when joining the Białystok Puppet Theatre in the early 1970s, had already had several years' experience as a New Figuration painter and graphic artist. Invited to collaborate by Krzysztof Rau, he formed with him a tandem that over the next dozen or so years produced several dozen plays for young and adult audiences. Jurkowski's stage designs contain clear references to his non-theatrical work. This was apparent in one of his first projects, a 1972 adaptation of Tadeusz Różewicz's *The Card Index*, where both the background forms and the monstrous-sized puppet effigies display similarities with figural and non-figural motifs to be found in Jurkowski's paintings from the early 1970s. The former are formally disciplined, 'technical', as it were, to make them possibly most convenient in animation. The construction, form, structure, and colour schemes of the puppets (as well as scenic spaces) are expressive and sparing at the same time; Jurkowski is careful to avoid any redundant ornamentation or gaudy variety. He also has a keen sense of dimensional work; many of his puppets are very sculptural. Combining in his work reflections of the work of Paul Cézanne, the cubists, but also drawing inspiration from folk art, Jurkowski continues executing extremely sophisticated paintings and graphics in which the above qualities are clearly evident.

Just as certain puppet artists have been overlooked or under-appreciated, so have been some of the puppet theatres. There is hardly any doubt that the academic reflection on the first decades of their work in post-war Poland has been dominated by the most vibrant — or rather largest — centres such as Łódź,

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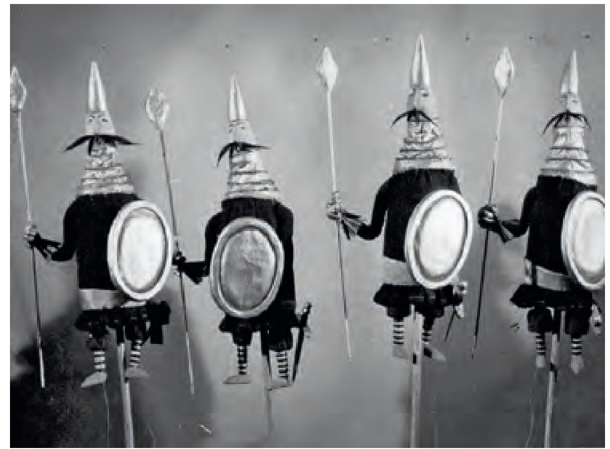

25.
Shoemaker Twine by Maria Kownacka, dir. Alojzy Smolka, Eugeniusz Aniszczenko, Jan Potiszil, stage design and puppet design: Tadeusz Kantor, Puppet Theatre of the Opole Region Theatre, Opole, 1953, photo: archive of Alojzy Smolka Opole Puppet-and-Actor Theatre

Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań, or Wrocław, which, when there was less exchange of information, were the natural focus for critics and then theatre historians. This isn't a rule, though, as suggested, for example, by the critical recognition enjoyed by the 'Banialuka' Puppet Theatre (Teatr Lalek Banialuka) in Bielsko-Biała, where outstanding artists were on board, such as Jerzy Zitzman or Andrzej Łabiniec, both graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, strongly indebted to the city's artistic climate of the 1940s and 1950s. The former — a painter, director, scenographer, and dynamic theatre manager — was an author of many interesting theatre shows, but also animated films. Son of Franciszek Zitzman, an acclaimed pre-war portrait painter, associated with the Green Balloon (Zielony Balonik), he was from his early years familiar with puppets and puppet theatre, not only in its traditional version but also the avant-garde one, having been directly involved in the production of Kantor's *The Death of Tintagiles* in 1937. Łabiniec, a painter too, for decades close to tachisme in his practices, became one of the most productive scenographers working not only for 'Banialuka', but also for many other stages in Poland. His artistic experience, like Jerzy Zitzman's, had much to do with the avant-garde, particularly the Kantor circle. Little as it may seem to be reflected in his scenographic works, which are highly realistic, the formal discipline of his puppet-theatre designs, their well thought-out and often expressive colour schemes, should be traced back precisely to his art studies in Kraków and his first standalone artistic practices.

Still, the interesting work of puppet theatres based in smaller cities often received only local recognition, despite the fact that what they proposed artistically in the 1960s and 1970s appears today, at least in terms of scenography and puppets, not only as interesting, but also ground-breaking, cutting-edge, attractive for a contemporary, history-oriented theatregoer. A good example of this is the Puppet-and-Actor Theatre (Teatr Lalki i Aktora) in Lublin, which during that period staged several eye-catching shows with intriguing puppets and scenic designs. Particularly worthy of note are shows such as Oscar Wilde's *Star Child*, directed in 1963 by Stanisław Ochmański, with music by Krzysztof Penderecki and phenomenal, elegant scenography by Zofia Gutkowska-Nowosielska. The puppet and scenery designs, more on the traditional side of puppetry, please the eye with their high degree of artistry, attention to detail, their comprehensive, particularly cohesive vision of the characters, natural world, and elements. A year later, Gutkowska-Nowosielska designed the scenery and puppets for *Jumper Roller* (*Skoczek toczek*) by Jan Malik, where we can admire vivid, synthetic but nuanced landscapes that form a background for realistic, subtly stylised puppets. Also highly suggestive are Wanda Fik's puppets for *The Overcoat* by Nikolai Gogol (1965); simplified, conventional in character, achieving their effect through general shapes rather than details, they rouse the imagination, forcing the viewer to conceptually invest the protagonists with individual characteristics while suggesting that they are typical representatives of society, their lives marked by routine. The expressive power of Fik's puppets arises also from their formally sparing costumes with interesting geometric and textural accents that enhance their materiality and spatiality. Painterly and oneiric qualities, in turn, manifest themselves in Zenobiusz Strzelecki's scenery for an adaptation of *The Little Prince* (1965), with the fleeting, delicate structures

26–27.
Wiesław Jurkowski, puppet design for
The Card Index, Białystok Puppet Theatre, 1972,
gouache on paper, artist's collection

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28.
Henryk Wiciński, stage-design sketch — two puppets, 1930s, pencil on paper, deposited in the National Museum in Kraków/photo: Karol Kowalik

and forms conjuring up a truly fairy-tale mood. Defining the look of a 1972 staging of *The Tinder-Box*, with scenery by Jerzy Michalak, are simplified, geometric puppets, impacting on the viewer with their geometric figures and curvatures, contrasted with a rich, dense background, accompanied by the runny, fluid figures of the pugs. Elżbieta and Czesław Barańskis' scenic design for *Alice in Wonderland* (1972) should also be considered as painterly, visionary, and metaphorical. Already the few above-mentioned stage productions legitimate the question of whether the Hans Christian Andersen Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Lublin shouldn't be treated with greater attention than has been the case hitherto.

The history of Polish puppet theatre deserves genuine, interdisciplinary reflection, particularly one that will consider the genre's visual aspects. Puppets as a means of expression proved attractive for many artists. Those artists have left a rich legacy, still poorly researched, but clearly demonstrating that puppet stages were an important element of the panorama of Polish art. In many cases they became sites of interesting experiments with form, colour, space. The scenic and puppet designs for particular shows reflected wider artistic trends, pursued by representatives of other disciplines, but they also expanded the field of creative explorations and experiments. Ultimately, puppets were fascinating in themselves, inspiring various artistic endeavours. Above all, however, they are living works of art, capable of functioning outside the theatrical context.

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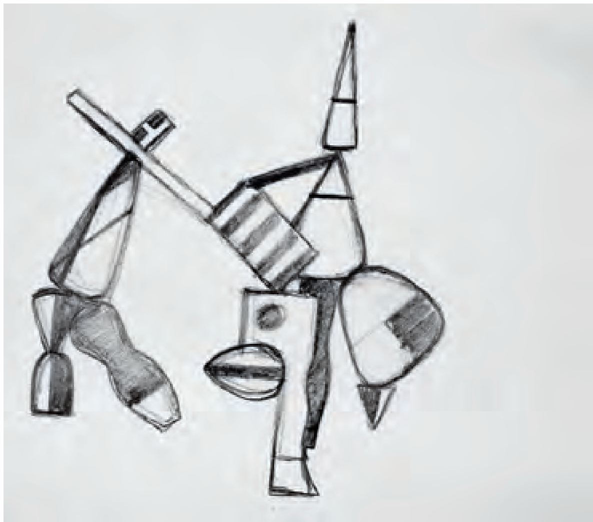


[1] Janina Kilian-Stanisławska, *Po piętnastu latach w teatrze lalek: Państwowy Teatr Lalka 1944–1959*, Warsaw: Państwowy Teatr Lalka, 1959, p. 13.

[2] 'Lalkarze — Materiały do Biografii' series, as part of which over thirty volumes have been published, as well as the few more exhaustive studies, e.g., *Ali Bunsch. Od szopki do horyzontu*, exh. cat., ed. Monika Chudzikowska, Warsaw: Teatr Wielki — Opera Narodowa, Muzeum Teatralne, 2013; *Adam Kilian — fascynacje*, ed. Aleksandra Rembowska, Warsaw: Teatr Lalka, 2015; Violetta Sajkiewicz, *Przestrzeń animowana. Plastyka teatralna Jana Berdyszaka,* Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2000; Honorata Sych, *Tajemnice teatru lalek*, Łódź: Muzeum Archeologiczne i Etnograficzne w Łodzi, 2010.

[3] On the research and work of Henryk Jurkowski, see Kamil Kopania, 'Prof. Henryk Jurkowski — in memoriam', in *Dolls and Puppets as Artistic and Cultural Phenomena (19th–21st Centuries)*, ed. idem, Białystok and Warsaw: The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw — the Department of Puppetry Art, 2016, pp. 6–9. Seminal publications on the history of Polish puppet theatre: Halina Waszkiel, *Dramaturgia polskiego teatru lalek*, Warsaw: Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza, 2013; Marek Waszkiel, *Teatr lalek w dawnej Polsce*, Warsaw: Fundacja Akademii Teatralnej im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie, Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie, 2018; idem, *Dzieje teatru lalek w Polsce, 1944–2000*, Warsaw: Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie, 2012. Over the last twenty years, several dozen occasional publications have also been issued, documenting and discussing the work of the different puppet stages.

[4] See Małgorzata Abramowicz, *Od figurek do marionetek. Historia Wileńskiego Teatru Łątek, Wilno 1936–Gdańsk 1959*, Gdańsk: Muzeum Narodowe w Gdańsku, 2015.

[5] The first steps towards redressing this have already been made, see Bożena Chodźko, 'Piotr Sawicki. Od zabawy w teatr do teatru lalek', in eadem, *Tradycja i współczesność. Od etyki do socjotechniki*, Białystok: Wydawnictwo Prymat, 2018, pp. 183–198.

[6] It is worth mentioning that a comprehensive study of Jerzy Nowosielski's work for puppet theatre has been published quite recently: *Jerzy Nowosielski. Teatr lalek. Notatki — część piąta*, ed. Dobromiła Błaszczyk, Andrzej Szczepaniak, Kraków: Galeria Starmach, 2015.

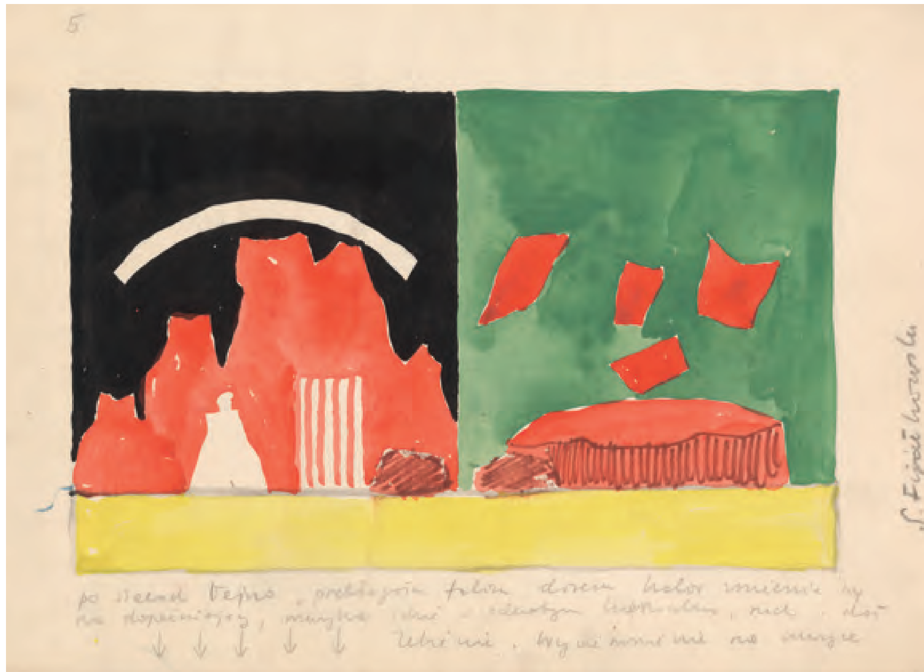
[7] Interestingly, puppet-theatre theory emphasises the significance of the visual aspects under the scenographer's creative control, as well as the fact that a protagonist defined first and foremost by the scenographer can be used to convey ideas and drive the plot.

[8] Kamil Kopania, 'Teatr lalek, Bauhaus, Richard Teschner, Kineformy. Kilka uwag na temat wczesnej twórczości Andrzeja Pawłowskiego', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, no. 39/40, 2002, pp. 255–262.

[9] See more: *Teatr lalek Jerzego Koleckiego*, ed. Karol Hordziej, Kraków, 2018.

[10] Kamil Kopania, *Forma. Barwa. Faktura. O scenografiach Teatru Lalki i Aktora „Kubuś" w Kielcach i ich relacjach z innymi gałęziami sztuk plastycznych*, Kielce: Teatr Lalki i Aktora Kubuś w Kielcach, 2016.

29–32.
Stanisław Fijałkowski, stage design for *Kalevala,* 'Pinokio' Puppet Theatre in Łódź, 1960, gouache, watercolour and pencil on paper, Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography in Łódź



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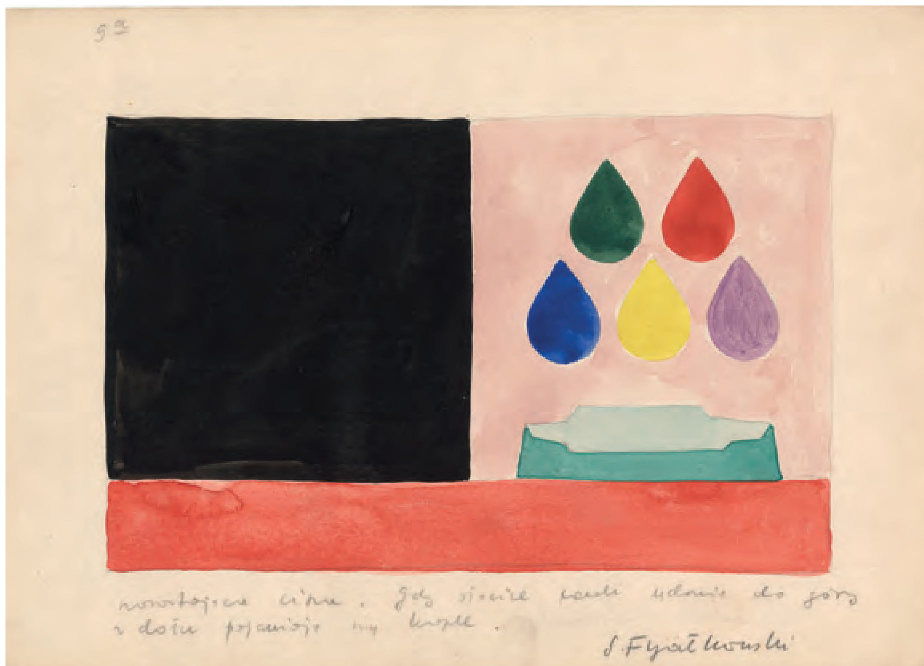

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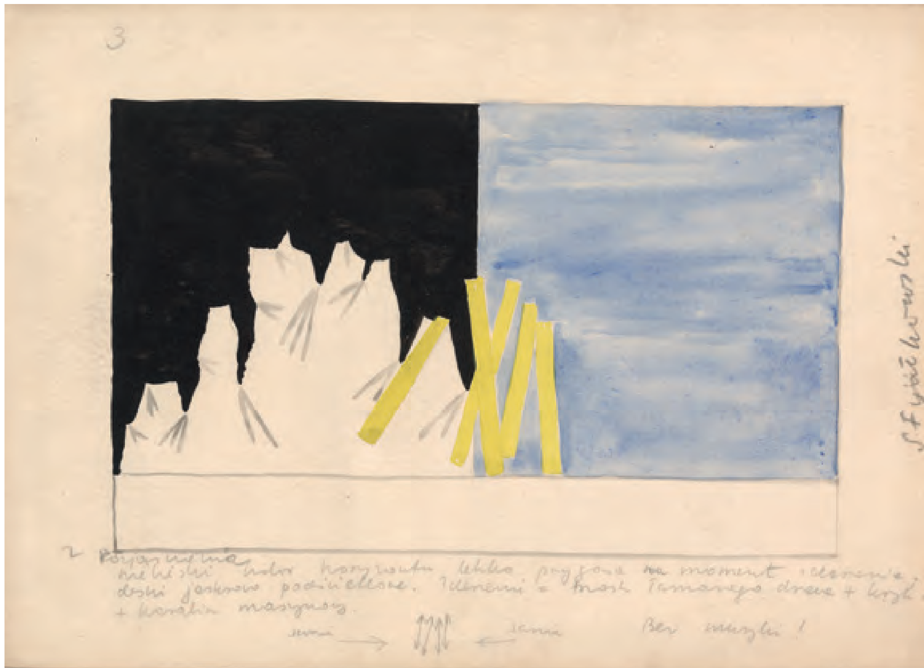

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Stanisław Fijałkowski, stage design for *Coffee Grinder*, 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre in Łódź, 1959, gouache on paper, archive of 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre

33.

Puppet Theatre for Adult Audiences in Post-war Poland

Karol Suszczyński

From the very beginning — and this means from ancient times — the art of puppeteering was an entertainment for all. Children were no exception; the child was as good a spectator as the grown-up. This started changing in the second half of the nineteenth century when pedagogues and teachers began to lend themselves to the modernist concept of education through theatre. In the course of the following decades, this led to the genre's impoverishment and its being geared almost completely towards young audiences.[1] After the Second World War, when the eastern

34.
The Tarabumba Circus by Władysław Lech, dir. Władysław Jarema, stage design: Andrzej Stopka, puppet design: Zofia Jaremowa, 1945, photo: Jerzy Frąckiewicz, National Archives in Kraków

34.

model of theatre as a state-funded cultural institution was adopted in Poland, puppet theatre — in a way at the request of the puppeteers themselves[2] — was pigeonholed as children's theatre, determining its repertoire and development vectors for years to come.

With time, however, theatres started straying away from the officially prescribed model. Directors as well as creative personnel felt a strong and justified need to try new challenges, to defy stereotypes, to diversify repertoire, and last but not least to reach new audiences. When the educational potential of the puppet had lost its attraction of novelty and become something ordinary, it was time to go back to the roots. Not everyone, however, had the ambition, or gut, to present the power apparatus with requests for non-standard practices. Not everywhere were the first experiments successful, and many were discontinued. For the same reasons, puppet theatre for adult audiences for years remained marginal to the cultural mainstream.

About sixty such shows had been produced by the mid-1970s. Not many, one could say, given that each of the twenty-plus puppet theatres in the country premiered from three up to even five or six plays a year. But the same institutions were doing a great job winning new viewers for puppetry.[3] Most of them were run by outstanding individualities, some of them true visionaries, unceasingly searching for their own style and new means of artistic expression. Puppet theatre in Poland was fundamentally transformed by them, regaining — though usually only for a short while — its generic characteristics.

First to introduce repertoire for grown-up audiences was the 'Groteska' Puppets-and-Actors Theatre in Kraków (Teatr Lalek i Aktora Groteska). From the outset, its founder, Władysław Jarema, wanted to build an institution that would be a meeting place for all inhabitants of the city. Consequently, the first two premieres[4], *The Tarabumba Circus*

35.
Puppeteers, 'Groteska' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Kraków, 1949, photo: Jerzy Frąckiewicz, National Archives in Kraków

35.

36.
The Martyrdom of Piotr Ohey by Sławomir Mrożek, dir. Zofia Jaremowa, stage design: Kazimierz Mikulski, 'Groteska' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Kraków, 1959, photo: Juliusz Wolski, archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

(*Cyrk Tarabumba*) by Władysław Lech and *La serva padrona*[5] by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (both 1945), were not specifically aimed at any age group. A circus-style puppet revue (with jugglers, clowns, animal acts) and a puppet comic opera, both featuring marionettes[6], were meant to captivate audiences with their light tone and playful form, helping viewers forget the recent trauma of war.

Jarema believed that the puppet was able to draw the interest of an adult spectator also as a medium of valuable and intellectual contents, that it was able to exude an aura of magic and uncanniness, and most importantly, that it was able to cope with repertoire written for live actors. He demonstrated that for the first in Jan Drda's *Playing with the Devil* (*Igraszki z diabłem*)[7] (1952), using rod puppets, whose technical features, providing for an almost realistic acting style, corresponded perfectly with the poetic and witty folk tale. Called by some critics the 'peak achievement' of 'Groteska'[8], the show created new theatrical value where the puppet characters were so credible and moving that also the adult spectators went back home in a cheerful mood.[9]

Jarema proved himself right for the second time in a two-part show based on Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński's *If Adam Were a Pole* (*Gdyby Adam był Polakiem*) and *Grandma and Grandson, or, the Might of Miracles* (*Babcia i wnuczek, czyli noc cudów*) (1955). His wife, Zofia, directed the dramatic miniature from the Green Goose Theatre (Teatrzyk Zielona Gęś) repertoire, and Jarema himself the two-act farce. The shows used different aesthetics and different media. The first part of the show was performed with rod puppets[10], whose dynamism enhanced the piece's pun and ridicule. After the interval, mask-wearing actors entered the stage,[11] which

36.

was interpreted as an interesting example of surrealist theatre. And it was precisely masks that paved the way for 'Groteska' to develop a truly unique style that was perfected in the following years by Zofia Jarema.

Of particular importance was her world-premiere adaptation of *The Martyrdom of Piotr Ohey* (*Męczeństwo Piotra Ohey'a*) by Sławomir Mrożek (1959), with stage design by Kazimierz Mikulski. The use of masks not only heightened the play's grotesque plot, but also resulted in numerous exaggerations, impossible to achieve in live-actor theatre. Marek Waszkiel so described the show's aesthetic: 'The masks had dominated the actors' figures, turning them into puppets, as it were, shifting the real into the realm of the absurd …'.[12] The adaptation was, therefore, also a caricature of Mrożek's play, which facilitated its new interpretations. Jan Błoński wrote in *Dialogue* that the Kraków Ohey was actually a 'comic contemporary Job'.[13] The show made 'Groteska' and its style famous, and theatre lovers came from all over the country to see the one-of-a-kind production.

The mask's power of expression — familiar from the theatre of ancient Greece and then from the Italian *commedia dell'arte* — found a fertile ground. Thanks to Mikulski, and later other stage designers as well, the form became firmly rooted in Polish puppet theatre as a means of metaphorising the theatre language.[14] The successive premieres by 'Groteska' only confirmed its theatrical value[15], even if they merely followed already proven paths and weren't outstanding artistic achievements in themselves.

In the 1950s, adult productions were also presented by the 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre (Teatr Lalek Arlekin) in Łódź. Here, however, it wasn't a trend but rather an isolated phenomenon that reappeared once in a couple of years. 'Arlekin' was founded and run for a long time by Henryk Ryl, a well-known populariser of puppetry arts. Ryl had devoted himself almost exclusively to theatre work for very young audiences, constantly experimenting in search of new means of artistic expression (from classic puppetry genres, their technology perfected over time, such as mechanical puppets and rod puppets, through a theatre of masks, shadows, or objects, to two-dimensional stained-glass puppets).[16] So when he decided to stage shows tailored for adults, he was able to build on his previous experience.[17] The first of such productions at 'Arlekin', Molière's *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* (1954), garnered the most positive response from critics and viewers alike.

37.
The Doctor in Spite of Himself by Molière, dir. Henryk Ryl, stage design: Zofia Gutkowska-Nowosielska, 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre in Łódź, 1954, photo: Jan Malarski, archive of 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre

37.

Ryl's ambition was to demonstrate that the puppet can handle 'great comic

38.
Zofia Gutkowska-Nowosielska, stage design for *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, ‘Arlekin’ Puppet Theatre in Łodź, 1954, gouache on paper, archive of ‘Arlekin’ Puppet Theatre

38.

repertoire' as well as a live actor. This purpose was achieved, not least with the help of scenographer Zofia Gutkowska-Nowosielska, who created an unforgettable gallery of vivid, exaggerated types. She dressed the puppets up in period costumes with diverse details, giving the male characters grotesquely large wigs and huge eyebrows, and equipping the females with seductive gazes or attractively plump, rubenesque proportions. The critics praised not only the characters' appearance and pliability — the show used a new type of puppet, the pistol puppet, which allowed for particularly smooth movement[18] — but also the fact that the puppets helped moderate the farce's otherwise coarse humour, seen as too vulgar for live-actor theatre.[19] The show's authors were also applauded for the elaborateness of its narrative structure, seldom encountered even in dramatic theatre.

Performed by realistic puppets, the satire on rich and unreasonable burghers and a gibe at hypocrites pretending to be experts was greeted by gales of laughter from the audience. 'I know of no other puppet show that has encountered such a reaction'[20], Ryl wrote in his memoirs. They key to success was doubtless the rod puppet — the same type of puppet that had so enchanted the audiences of *Playing with the Devil* in Kraków. Tweaked to operational perfection through inventive mechanical improvements, the rod puppet lived up to expectations. Exploiting its comic potential, Ryl demonstrated that a puppet was capable of outdoing the dramatic actor and captivating viewers young and old.

In the following decade, the ranks of theatres that tailored their repertoire to suit not only young audiences were joined by the Poznań-based 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre (Teatr Lalek i Aktora Marcinek). The credit for that went to the institution's new director, Leokadia Serafinowicz,[21] who already in her first season staged, with Wojciech Wieczorkiewicz, an adaptation of Gałczyński's *The Ball at Professor Bączyński's* (*Bal u profesora Bączyńskiego*) (1961) for mechanised puppets, a show very well received by the local press[22], and by specialists compared to Jarema's first productions with the 'Marcinek'. And small wonder: Serafinowicz studied puppetry under the tutelage of Władysław Jarema, assisting and performing in both *The Tarabumba Circus* and *Playing with the Devil*.

Serafinowicz's approach, however, was much more expansive. Just as Ryl kept pursuing new and attractive means of expression in theatre for young audiences, so she constantly sought to contemporise the artistic language, and that not only in performances aimed at younger viewers but also at older ones. She also invited the cooperation of other theatre makers — including foreign ones — whose ideas and concepts helped to make the 'Marcinek' repertoire more diverse. The shows featured masks, sculptures, costumes, mixed styles, or materials (wood, wire, mirror, paper, wicker) as content media.

In choosing the adult repertoire, Serafinowicz looked to both the great dramatic literature and to contemporary authors. Consequently, over several seasons, the Poznań company staged adaptations of Johann Wolfgang Goethe (*The Story of Reynard the Fox*, 1961), Vladimir Mayakovsky (*The Bathhouse*, 1967), Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (*The Cuttlefish* and *The Crazy Locomotive*, 1968), or Tadeusz Różewicz, Miron Białoszewski, Ireneusz

Iredyński, and Andrzej Bursa (in *Szury*, a medley of dramatic miniatures, 1975). This line of artistic thought was later labelled the Young Stage.[23] Each of the shows was performed using a different set of media, often impossible to compartmentalise precisely within the puppetry arts. Particularly noteworthy were Stanisław Wyspiański's *The Wedding (Wesele)* (co-directed by Jan Berdyszak, 1969) and Cyprian Kamil Norwid's *Wanda* (1970), directed by Wojciech Wieczorkiewicz, with unique stage design by Serafinowicz.

The authors of the puppet adaptation of *The Wedding* rejected altogether the original stage directions and chose to go their own way, both in the construction of the scenic space[24] and in the selection of the visual material. The primary medium was straw. Upon entrance, spectators discovered straw figures [*chochoły*] seated here and there in the audience, and when the show began, they saw the protagonists themselves — straw puppets adorned with lightweight materials. The characters had no facial features, were universal (sometimes abstract), and it was only details that made it possible to distinguish between them (the Broom, for example, wore a red tie and the Bride a white ribbon veil). The puppets served, therefore, as signs, their powerful symbolism heightened particularly in the second act, when fantastic figures — the puppet operators — entered the stage. They held the straw wedding guests in their hands, dialoguing with them. Thus the adaptation's authors aptly referred to the motif of the *chochoły* dance, pointing to the '*chochoł*-isation'[25] of all of the ceremony's participants.

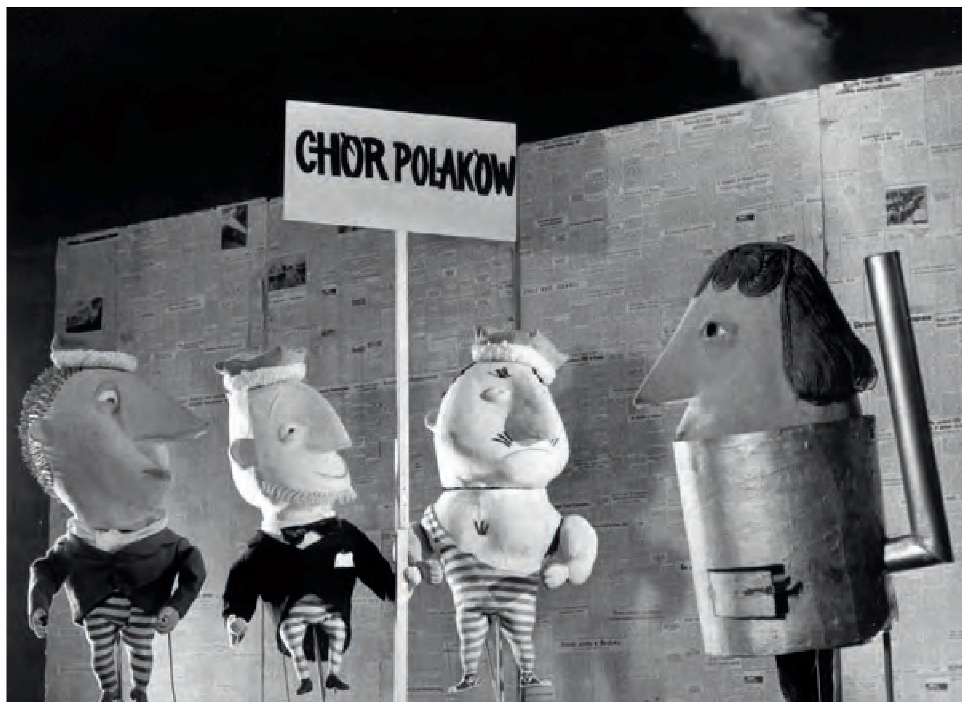
Wanda dazzled viewers and critics with a different visual-aesthetic concept. To conjure up the world of ancient Slavs, wood was used as the primary material.[26] The carved puppets, with facial features only hinted at (similar in style to *świątek* carved folk saints, albeit captured in dramatic gestures), were original thanks precisely to its qualities — the Elders made with rotten trunks, the Maidens with fresh, still glistening logs. Only the two main characters were hybrids, combining natural materials with the human body: the actress playing Wanda had been placed on a tree trunk, growing out from it like an incomplete animate figure, whereas Rytygier, the foreigner, was clothed in a sheet of metal that flowed in waves to the ground. The show was performed in a slow and hieratic manner, with the soundtrack and the vocal parts of a boys' choir contributing to the atmosphere of an ancient Slavic mystery play.

Leokadia Serafinowicz fostered at the 'Marcinek' a model of theatre that was artistic and intellectual at the same time, sensitising the viewer to the means of expression used in the performance. Its development was gradual and systematic — from grotesque, exaggerated figures to poetic and metaphoric puppets. Some of these pioneering ideas can only be likened to avant-garde theatre concepts. It needs to be remembered, however, that Serafinowicz was originally a painter who grew interested in theatre only later in life. Her ambitions and creative ideas were, therefore, rooted first and foremost in the visual arts — the same path as trodden by Tadeusz Kantor or Józef Szajna.

In the history of post-war Polish puppetry, the theatre that staged more premieres for adult audiences than probably any other was the Wrocławski Teatr Lalek (Wrocław Puppet Theatre). The trend was initiated by Stanisław Stapf, who took over as executive director in 1963.[27] He wanted a theatre like none other. The idea was to create a space not only for meaningful educational practices, but also for new artistic experiments that would give the actors a respite from their everyday work

39.
The Ball at Professor Bączyński's by Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, stage design: Leokadia Serafinowicz, 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Poznań, 1961, photo: Grażyna Wyszomirska, archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

39.



in repertoire tailored for young audiences.[28] Unlike his colleagues from other theatres, Stapf himself directed little, leaving artistic matters to in-house or outside creative personnel.

In November 1967, supported by Klemens Krzyżagórski, a columnist and journalist with much enthusiasm for puppet theatre, Stapf opened, at the Union of Socialist Youth's Working Youth Club, at the Piwnica Świdnicka in the City Hall in the market square, a space called the Small Stage (Scena Mała), geared primarily at adults.[29] The inaugurating premiere, *Momento de verdad* (1967), based on the writings of Frederico García Lorca, was directed by Andrzej Rettinger, with stage design by Jerzy Szeski. Interestingly, with precisely that show the artists defined the Wrocław company's style, in which puppets in adult-oriented repertoire always performed alongside live actors.[30] Over the next seven seasons, a number of premieres — mainly monodramas and small-cast plays — were shown at the Scena Mała, which can be divided into two groups.

The first was defined by the practices of Andrzej Dziedziul, the most outstanding Polish puppet artist of the 1960s and 1970s. Exploring ever new means and modes of expression, using puppets and various other forms as a pretext for conversation with the audience, as well as constantly improving

his acting technique, Dziedziul was the first in Poland to pursue the style of the Western European solo puppeteer — a person focused on their own work, personally responsible for most components of the show, and developing the technology of their puppets. Already a month after the Lorca adaptation, Dziedziul presented at the Small Stage an official premiere of *Grand Duke* (*Wielki Książę*) (1967), a monodrama based on William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and sonnets. The show had a flashy aesthetic, and Dziedziul in turns animated the puppet characters, dialoguing with them, or played the guitar and sang lyrical songs. Documenting his work, Małgorzata Aliszewska wrote that the performance introduced viewers to a 'completely new way of thinking about theatre, where the actor perfectly abridged the dramatic work … removing nothing of its depth and investing it with new meanings'.[31] *Grand Duke* was a success that opened the door for Dziedziul to international puppet festivals and paved the way for his further successes.

In the following years, Dziedziul showed at the Small Stage the monodramas *An Update on Faust* (*Stan losów Fausta*) (1968) based on the writings of Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Christopher Marlowe, and *Who Killed Don Quixote* (*Kto zabił Don Kichota*) (1969) inspired

40.
Witches, dir. Wiesław Hejno, stage design: Eugeniusz Get-Stankiewicz, Wrocław Puppet Theatre, 1971, photo: Zdzisław Mozer, archive of Wrocław Puppet Theatre

by Miguel de Cervantes, both with visual design by Eugeniusz Get-Stankiewicz, the larger-cast *You Compose a Drama* (*Dramat układasz*) (1971) based on The *Un-Divine Comedy* (*Nie-Boska komedia*) and other works by Zygmunt Krasiński, with stage design by Stanisław Losse, and finally a two-man show inspired by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's *The Water Hen* (*Kurka Wodna*) and *Cockroaches* (*Karaluchy*) and the letters written to him by his father, Stanisław Witkiewicz, called *Glątwa* (1973), with objects and forms designed by Jerzy Czerniawski. Even though other artists helped Dziedziul design the visuals and puppets in all those shows, they were invariably based on his own concept, which he fine-tuned over time; he also kept improving the mechanics of the puppets.

The second group of shows presented at the Small Stage included the experiments of other artists, notably Wiesław Hejno, later a long-time director of the Wrocław Puppet Theatre. Hejno began his career in the 1960s as a puppeteer, but soon changed his profession and became a theatremaker. Always wary of imitative theatre that showed the world in miniature, he strove instead towards a theatre of visual metaphors, symbols, and ideas, a theatre that mixed styles and built actor-puppet relationships. His greatest successes came in the 1980s, when he staged, with Jadwiga Mydlarska-Kowal and Zbigniew Piotrowski, a triptych with hyperrealistic puppets, centred around existential issues, later dubbed *The Phenomenon of Power* (*Fenomen władzy*)[32]. But he had interesting achievements even before that. In the first period of his work for the Small Stage, it was notably *Witches* (*Czarownice*) (1971), with stage design by Eugeniusz Get-Stankiewicz, a show Dziedziul co-wrote with Jan Kurowicki. The witchcraft-trial story had a contemporary tone to it and could easily be seen as drawing parallels with the everyday relationship between the individual and the system. The lead characters were played by live actors, whereas the puppets — performing over a screen or directly over a costumed actor — comprised a grotesque crowd of onlookers that gathered to witness public trials and executions. Construction-wise, they were closely akin to stick puppets, but their hands were replaced by actors' hands, sticking out from under long capes — prehensile and dynamic, they contributed an additional narrative of gestures. The puppets' aesthetic forms were varied: most had skull-like faces, but there were also some with grotesquely exaggerated heads.

Bringing out the puppet operator into open view, expressing its ideas through diverse media, and tackling topical issues that left no one indifferent, Hejno's theatre set the bar of artistic investigations high indeed. Breaking new ground and pushing limits, in the following years Hejno experimented with adult puppet theatre in ways encountered nowhere else.[33]

In the 1970s, another adult-oriented puppet theatre emerged, the Białystok Puppet Theatre (Białostocki Teatr Lalek), run from October 1969 by Krzysztof Rau.[34] A creative, active, and dynamic individual, Rau quickly started introducing new and more demanding repertoire. He was supported in that by Klemens Krzyżagórski, the same one who was opening the Small Stage in Wrocław with Stanisław Stapf in 1967. And so, by early 1972, a theatre space called Rotunda had launched in Białystok, meant for young and adult audiences alike.

For the inaugurating premiere (1972) Rau chose Tadeusz Różewicz's *The Card Index*. He invited the collaboration of stage designer Wiesław Jurkowski and of Henryk Dłużyński, a dramatic actor from Aleksander Węgierko Theatre (Teatr im. Aleksandra Węgierki) in Białystok. The choice of an outside dramatic actor was dictated by the fact that

no BTL actor at the time was ready to play a lead role; Rau even began rehearsals with one of his puppeteers, but had to call it quits after a couple of days. The show's concept was groundbreaking. A live actor was surrounded by large puppet effigies that had recognisable anatomies but lacked distinct characteristics, with the facial features on their huge heads barely hinted at. Those simple, though dehumanised — and thus frightening — visual forms assumed the function of signs or ideograms alluding to the Protagonist's gradual loss of memory of his own past. The adaptation was widely praised,[35] including by Różewicz himself. The success informed the theatre's subsequent repertoire choices, and Rau turned into a genuine theatre manager.

His first move was to recruit Andrzej Dziedziul. This opened up new prospects for the artist, who had just left the WTL and was looking for new challenges, and gave Rau a portfolio of ready-to-perform shows.[36] Still, it took a longer while for Rau's conception to prove successful, a perfect example of how much work and time is needed to change the local community's stereotypical notion of puppet theatre as a children's art — in this case it was twenty years.

There is no doubt that each of the artists (and there were many more during that period besides those few mentioned here) who made the effort to introduce puppet repertoire for adult audiences in his theatre was convinced that the puppet had great potential, was able to go beyond its culture-defined function, and was capable of achieving impossible feats (especially in live-actor theatre). Visually diverse, the puppet can entertain as a grotesque

41.
The Threepenny Opera by Bertolt Brecht, dir. Zofia Jaremowa, stage design: Kazimierz Mikulski, puppet design: Lidia Minticz, 'Groteska' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Kraków, 1958, photo: Adam Drozdowski, archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

manikin, but it can also charm audiences with its unpredictability and changeability, sensitising them to different means of artistic expression. Cast in plays written for dramatic theatre, the puppet as an extra component of the scenic work enriches them with a new, fantastic-metaphorical layer, often emphasising existing meanings or allowing for their reinterpretation.

42.
The Card Index by Tadeusz Różewicz, dir. Krzysztof Rau, stage design: Wiesław Jurkowski, Białystok Puppet Theatre, 1972, photo: Ryszard Sieńko, archive of Białystok Puppet Theatre

42.

1

Which doesn't mean that that there were no puppet shows for adult audiences before that: from the beginning of the twentieth century until the outbreak of the Second World War they appeared regularly.

2

In 1952, at the 2nd National Congress of Puppeteers in Warsaw, a 'vast majority of the delegates opted for puppet theatre as a theatre for children'; see Marek Waszkiel, *Dzieje teatru lalek w Polsce, 1944–2000*, Warsaw: Fundacja Akademii Teatralnej im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie, Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie, 2012, p. 304.

3

And not only adult ones, but viewers of all ages.

4

Stage design: Andrzej Stopka, puppets: Zofia Jaremowa. The first version of the show was staged during the war, in 1940, by the State Polish Stick-Puppet Theatre (Państwowy Polski Teatr Kukiełek) that was active in the area of Grodno and Nowogródek.

5

Stage design and puppets: Andrzej Cybulski and Marian Szulc.

6

The shows reflected the influence of the puppet-revue productions of Vittorio Podrecca's Rome-based Teatro dei Piccoli and the art-revue propositions of Sergey Obraztsov, director of the State Academic Central Puppet Theatre in Moscow — both were very much in favour of an entertainment-focused model of puppet theatre at the time.

7

Stage design by Kazimierz Mikulski and Jerzy Skarżyński, puppets: Lidia Minticz.

8

See for example Antoni Łubkowski, 'Igraszki z diabłem w krakowskiej Grotesce', *Dziś i Jutro*, no. 13, 1953; Zbigniew Kornecki, '„Igraszki z diabłem" widowisko dla dorosłych', *Słowo Powszechne*, no. 275, 1952.

9

'Adults … leave amused and touched like kids'; quoted in Henryk Vogler, 'Lalkowe „Igraszki z diabłem"', *Życie Literackie*, no. 21, 1952.

10

Puppets: Lidia Minticz. Minticz specialised in designing rod puppets, an art which she practiced to perfection. It needs to be stressed that it was a period when that particular type of puppet began in theatres all over the country as a highly realistic form.

11

Stage design by Kazimierz Mikulski and Jerzy Skarżyński.

12

Waszkiel, p. 111.

13

Jan Błoński, 'Konfrontacje: Mrożek w krakowskiej „Grotesce"', *Dialog*, no. 3, 1960, p. 127.

14

It is worth mentioning that theatres — not only Groteska — began to introduce masks also in the repertoire for children.

15

Masks were used, for example, in Tadeusz Różewicz's *The Card Index* (1961), in *Tarantoga* (1963), an adaptation of the writings of Stanisław Lem, or in Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1965) — all those shows were directed by Maria Jarema and designed for stage by Mikulski.

16

For that reason, unlike other puppet-theatre artists, he didn't develop his own distinct style.

17

Over the course of more than twenty years, Ryl staged romantic dramas: puppet adaptations of Juliusz Słowacki's *Balladyna* (1957, stage design by Jerzy Adamczak) and *Lilla Weneda* (1966, stage design by Adam Kilian), both performed with rod puppets; avant-garde pieces: Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński's *Coffee Grinder* (*Młynek do kawy*) (1959, stage design by Stanisław Fijałkowski) in a highly visual staging that incorporated elements of the theatre of hands or objects, or an adaptation of the *Mahabharata*, the Sanskrit epic of ancient India, called *Nal and Damayanti* (1962, stage design by Wacław Kondek), performed with hieratic puppets — moving figures able to hold gesture phase without the operator's help.

18

Used for the first time two years earlier in a children's show, it sported a 'pistol-like grip, fastened to the body and built to fit the actor's hand', which allowed the puppet to twist and turn its head; quoted in Henryk Ryl, 'Warsztat teatru lalek', in Henryk Jurkowski, Henryk Ryl, Alina Stanowska, *Teatr lalek. Zagadnienia metodyczne*, Warsaw: Centralny Ośrodek Metodyki Upowszechniania Kultury, 1979, p. 117.

19

'The puppets exchange blows and insults in a manner both highly convincing and free of any vulgarity — which in the case of this particular comedy would be hard to achieve in live-actor theatre'; quoted in Bożena Zagórska, 'Molier dosłowny i nowy', *Gazeta Krakowska*, no. 261, 1955.

20

Henryk Ryl, *Dziewanna i lalki*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1967, p. 146.

21

Serafinowicz ran the 'Marcinek' from the beginning of the season 1960/1961 through end-March 1976.

22

See for example Tadeusz Byczko, 'Tylko dla dorosłych. Premiera „Zielonej Gęsi" w Marcinku', *Głos Wielkopolski*, no. 26, 1961.

23

Officially in the season 1972/1973 when the theatre had already staged a dozen or so premieres for young and adult audiences.

24

Jan Dorman described in a most interesting way: 'I recognised two sections: one closer to the viewer, a dark rectangle of the screen with a long slit; the other in the background, a white suspended wall, also with a slit, dividing the upstage. The slits are irregular and resemble human figures frozen in a dance that had ended before the show. The composition of the stage works on its own; it is impressive'; quoted in idem, 'Wesele w poznańskim „Marcinku"', *Teatr Lalek*, no. 3/4, 1968, pp. 64–65.

25

Spodek [Marek Skwarnicki], 'Człowiek z lalką', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 20, 1969.

[26] Also important were the linen curtains on which the play's original manuscript had been transferred; some reviewers saw this as a reference to runic alphabet.

[27] The company was then called the 'Imp' Puppet Theatre (Teatr Lalek Chochlik), a name Stapf soon decided was limiting and incompatible with his artistic ideas.

[28] He had already tested a similar approach at the 'Baj Pomorski' Actor-and-Puppet Theatre (Teatr Lalki i Aktora Baj Pomorski) in Toruń, where he directed an adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1955, stage design by Eligiusz Baranowski), among other plays, but his career there was abruptly cut short.

[29] Later the Small Stage was also active at the Music and Literature Club (Klub Muzyki i Literatury) and the Journalists Club (Klub Dziennikarza).

[30] See Magdalena Gołaczyńska, 'Lalki bez granic. Dzieje Małej Sceny', in *Lalki i my* [publication accompanying the fifty-fifth anniversary of the WTL], ed. Maria Lubieniecka, Wrocław: Wrocławski Teatr Lalek, 2002, pp. 83–95.

[31] *Andrzej Dziedziul — dokumentacja działalności*, ed. Małgorzata Aliszewska, series 'Lalkarze — Materiały do Biografii', series editor Marek Waszkiel, vol. 33, Łódź: POLUNIMA, Pracownia Dokumentacji Teatru Lalek przy Teatrze Lalek Arlekin w Łodzi, 2004, p. 55.

[32] The triptych consisted of *The Trial* by Franz Kafka (1985), *Gyubal Wahazar* by Witkacy (1987), and *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1989).

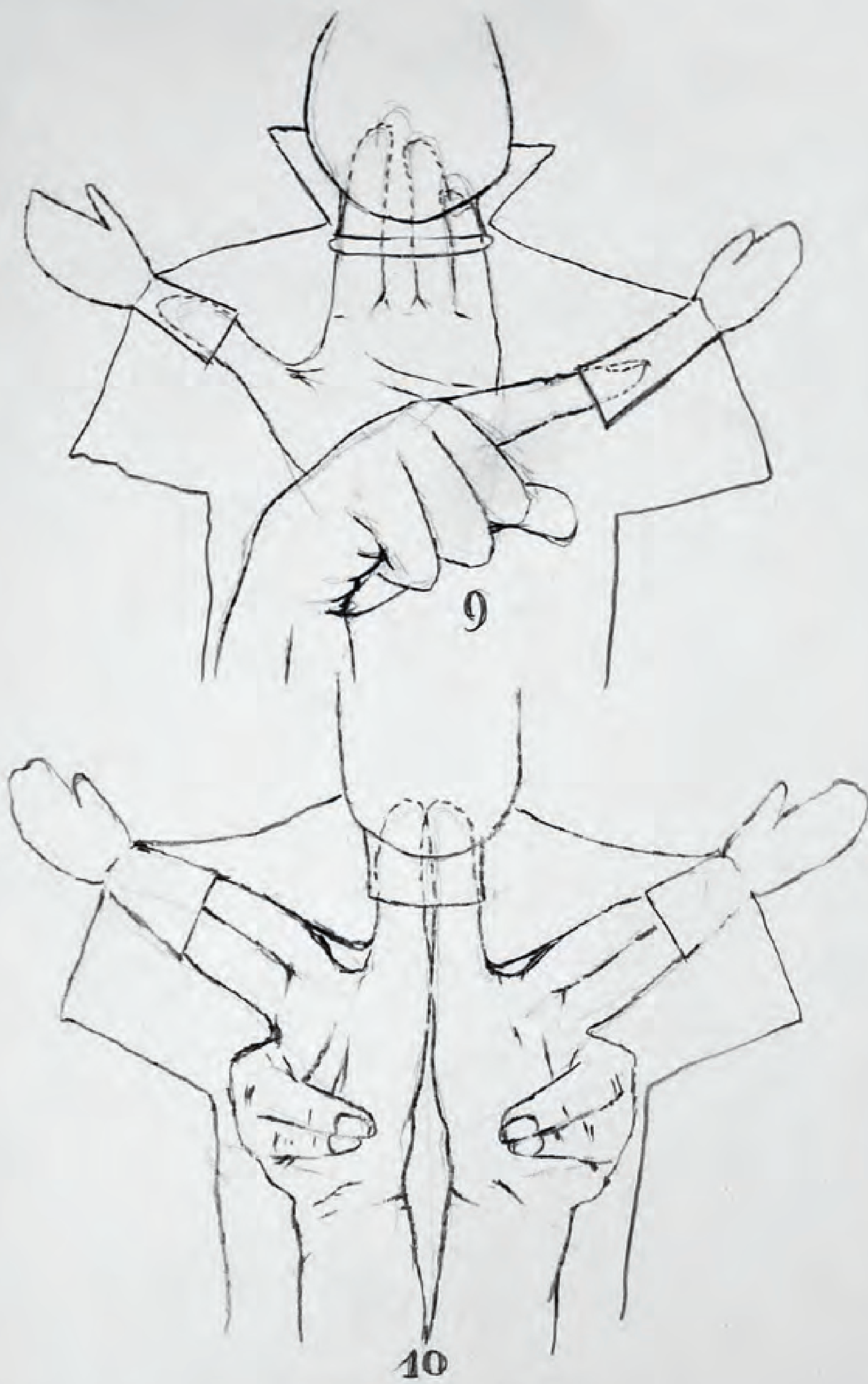
[33] During that period he presented the following at the Small Stage: *Dziejba leśna*, a puppet-performed poetic montage for works by Bolesław Leśmian, with stage design by Zbigniew Więckowski; a two-part show called *Świątki* (1972), consisting of *Confession in Wood* (*Spowiedź w drewnie*) by Jan Wilkowski (stage design by Jerzy Chodurski) and *Passion. The Mystery of the Suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ* (*Pasja. Misterium męki naszego Pana Jezusa Chrystusa*) by Michel de Ghelderode (stage design by Eugeniusz Get-Stankiewicz); and *Journey into the Green Shadows* (as *Podróż do zielonych cieni*) by Finn Methling.

[34] Then still called the 'Świerszcz' Puppet Theatre (Teatr Lalek Świerszcz).

[35] See for example Bożena Frankowska, 'Dramat dnia wczorajszego', *Gazeta Białostocka*, no. 307, 1973; Lech Piotrowski, 'Bohater wśród lalek', *Teatr*, no. 8, 1972, p. 13.

[36] Among them were Dziedziul's performances from the Small Stage — *Update on Faust (Stan losów Fausta)*, *Glątwa*, or *Grand Duke* — and from elsewhere, e.g., *Oh, Cruel Fate!* (*Ach, losie okrutny!*) (1975).

43.
Jerzy Nowosielski, illustration for A. Fiedotov's article 'Anatomy of the Puppet-as-Actor', in *Teatr Lalek*, 1951, pencil on paper, Starmach Gallery, Kraków



43.

The Politicality of the Puppet

Dariusz Kosiński

Raising the issue of the political dimension and significance of theatre puppets requires one to immediately broaden the scope of investigation and go beyond the simple question of the presence (or lack) of such themes in professional puppet theatre[1]. The point isn't to present and discuss the political shows in its repertoire (though some of those will be mentioned), but rather to reflect on the potential political significance of the puppet or of the very fact of reaching for an effigy, a material representation of the human figure. In this essay — necessarily synthetic and based on selected examples — I will attempt to trace and indicate examples of such political theatricality or theatrical politicality that is specific for puppet theatre or such that is realised with particular success in it or through it. All the selected examples are from Polish culture and theatre, which doesn't mean that the conclusions apply to it only. Those, of course, are not ultimate conclusions but rather hypotheses, formulated in the hope of contributing to the reflection on the meanings and functions of the puppet.

In effigie

An almost classic, often cited and discussed example of the political use of the puppet in historical Poland is the history of Sheepskin Coat (Barani Kożuszek). This was the nickname of a pioneer of political performance in Poland, a street artist of whom little is known beyond what is related to his immediate artistic activity. Some sources suggest that his real name was Walenty and that the moniker owed to one of his songs rather than his dress. Having lived on alms, he is usually considered a beggar. Today, however, we would rather call him a street artist, a busker, though he was more than just a musician. We know that he gained popularity as a street comedian and satirist who made jokes about women, but also criticised the sumptuous lifestyles of the rich. Among the era's many political street comedians, he distinguished himself during the Kościuszko Uprising, when he regularly organised radical satirical shows at Miodowa Street in Warsaw. In those, Sheepskin Coat presented public characters considered as traitors of national interests and then beheaded them using a little guillotine. This was likely accompanied by commentary, perhaps some additional scenes, for the very act of cutting off a puppet's head couldn't have been attractive enough for Sheepskin Coat, as accounts tells us, to repeatedly draw crowds of Varsovians.

After the fall of the insurrection, this pioneer of Polish committed theatre paid a dear price for his activities. He was put into a correctional-and-forced-labour institution and never walked a free man again; when the Prussians took over power in Warsaw, he was transferred to the city jail and then to Spandau prison, where he died in 1806. He was brutally interrogated to reveal the instigators of his shows, but — as the legend goes — he betrayed no one. By no means denying him courage, I would like to note that perhaps he had no one to betray, being the sole author of his satirical performances, his inspirations drawn from the sentiment of his audience — the Warsaw street.[2]

His own invention notwithstanding, Sheepskin Coat took advantage of one of the fundamental political properties of the puppet — its ability to substitute for the unavailable body of a public personality through its material representation — an effigy. The notion of substitution, along with its instrument and product, the image, has been the subject of much attention in performative studies, particularly in the version proposed and developed by the American researcher Joseph Roach. In a book published over twenty years ago, *Cities of the Dead. Circum-Atlantic Performance*, Roach argued that performance (whether in theatre or in visual arts) 'offers a substitute for something else that preexists it'. It 'stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire to embody and to replace'.[3] To name this effect of surrogation, Roach uses the term 'effigy', which refers us directly to the legal phrase 'in effigy', from the Latin *in effigie*, 'in representation'. This denotes a legal norm, present in European law from the Middle Ages, under which if a convicted criminal had fled or died from other reasons, it was possible to apply the death penalty to his image: a portrait or effigy.

It is at this point, at the intersection of the absence of law and art, that there appears probably the most unambiguously political figure of the effigy or puppet. Its anthropomorphism makes it possible to perform an act that is impossible yet considered by a political community as necessary — to mete out punishment to or carry out an operation on a figure that substitutes for a real political actor. The old law, remembered well into the eighteenth

century, indicates that the operation wasn't merely a symbolic act. Without violating physical integrity, it is performed on what is central for the political scene — the role, the character embodied by a particular living person. Beheading national traitors, Sheepskin Coat sought to neutralise their political effectiveness, evincing their social rejection and denying their claim to representation. The strength of the reaction shows how successful this attempt was — for 'symbolically' executing political actors, the satirist paid the price of his freedom and, ultimately, his life.

The same politicality of the puppet that the eighteenth-century performer mobilised was later embraced by many others, less often, of course, in times of subservience and political oppression and more frequently and more openly during political crises and upheavals (as during the November Uprising of 1830–1831 when we have accounts of puppet shows with scenes of the hanging of the traitors of the 'Polish cause'[4]). They are perfectly familiar today too, even if their intense use and our exposure to images of politicians' effigies being carried around, abused, and finally destroyed (usually burned) have dulled their sharpness and muffled the impact of the subversions thus effected. Still, such operations continue to stir public controversy, whether they are presented within a cultural framework meant to partly weaken their political radicalism (such as during the Day of Anger on 21 March 2012 where protesters against the Civic Platform government burned and drowned an effigy of PM Donald Tusk in what was a reenactment of the Marzanna traditional spring rite) or are staged as radical provocations that deliberately break the law (as in the infamous 'action' of the nationalist Piotr Rybak who burned an effigy of a Jew during an anti-immigrant demonstration in November 2015).

Puppets and Puppet Shows

Visual substitution is closely related to another, almost obvious tradition of political puppets — their use as vehicles and surrogate objects of satire. Representations of public figures are not burned or pierced with swords here but ridiculed, the procedure of surrogation replaced by the mechanism of caricature. Difference works as powerfully as similarity here: an image is transformed and used in such a way that it exposes and makes manifest precisely that which the satirist believes the public figure is trying to hide from public view. To see a living public actor in a scandalous situation, with an 'unkempt appearance' highlighting the shortcomings of their image, is a rare occurrence, and when it does happen it can make quite a bang, even finish a career (remember the massive outcry when the behind-the-scenes language of Polish politics was revealed in the Sowa & Przyjaciele recordings?). Puppets not only make it possible to freely stage such situations, but also facilitate a kind of self-admission or confession. In this way, satirical puppet shows become a stage that reveals what the 'theatre of politics' conceals — a stage of 'truth'.

In Poland, this function of puppet satire has been enhanced by situating it in a very specific temporal and cultural context — the Christmas season. A vast majority (though not all) of satirical puppet shows are informed by nativity plays (*szopka*). Evicted from churches, those vibrant pageants survived in private homes, in the streets and squares, as a popular genre of folk theatre. The representation of a religious scene — the show's origin and justification — was gradually expanded to include secular

elements, connecting the 'holy night' with the spectators' present. Traditionally perceived as a time when boundaries and divisions were suspended, creating a more open world, the Christmas season was particularly suited for such combinations. As a result, after the adoration of the child Jesus by the three Magi and the shepherds the plays introduced characters based on public personalities, at first not necessarily caricatural but rather serving as a kind of update (a practice that is still present in the Catholic Church today). That was true for one of the earliest such examples we are aware of, when, in a nativity scene in Warsaw during Christmas 1790, 'figurines representing high officials close to [King] Stanisław August'[5] appeared in the stable following scenes featuring more traditional characters.

Satirical and political puppet theatre saw its heyday much later, of course, with the rise of the cabaret, which embraced a format already present in folk culture, shedding the religious context but retaining the basic dramatic structure. The satirical puppet shows of the Zielony Balonik in Kraków (1906–1908 and 1911–1912) or the Momus in Warsaw (1909) featured easy-to-recognise characters that unashamedly laid bare — through their very appearance, through song and recitation, and sometimes through their actions — their prototypes' embarrassing or shameful characteristics. The political potential of satirical puppet shows was, however, fully exploited only during the Second Polish Republic, when performances of this kind, organised annually from 1922 by the literary collective Skamander, originally meeting at the Pod Pikadorem café (1922–1926) and later at the so called Duża Ziemiańska at 9 Kredytowa Street, enjoyed great popularity. Rhymes for those legendary shows were written by Jan Lechoń, Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, or Marian Hemar, with sets designed by Zbigniew Pronaszko, Wincenty Drabik, or Władysław Daszewski, among others.

The Skamander puppet shows were presented as anti-establishment satire, mocking the political heavyweights of the era, but their political sharpness was blunted by the context of the carnival party of a close-knit community. Those weren't potentially subversive *misérables* (like the street performers entertaining the working-class public), but privileged members of the super elite taking advantage of their position and their often close acquaintance with dignitaries such as Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski to laugh at them and with them in the spirit of Carnival indulgence. Being featured in a *szopka* show didn't mean being censured; rather, it was a token of popularity and standing.

Similar mechanisms were at play in many later satirical puppet shows, up to the *Polish Zoo*, broadcast by Polish public television in the early 1990s, which wasn't strictly a *szopka*-style format, but followed the same model of political caricature. Created by a team led by Marcin Wolski (texts), Andrzej Zaorski (direction), and Jerzy Kryszak, the show aired every Saturday and provided current political commentary delivered by 'animalised' figures of actual politicians. If I remember well, however, the greatest attraction wasn't the commentary,

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Puppets designed by Władysław Daszewski for a political puppet theatre written by Marian Hemar, Jan Lechoń, Antoni Słomiński and Julian Tuwim, from left: MP Mieczysław Niedziałkowski, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, General Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski, 1930, photo: National Digital Archives

but the very fact that this or that politician has been represented as a puppet animal. It wasn't the texts (which were hardly great poetry, and often heavily biased) but above all the puppets that drew audiences and made viewers wait with eager anticipation to see what new political actor would appear on the show and in what guise. The Kaczyński brothers as twin hamsters, Tadeusz Mazowiecki as a turtle, Hanna Suchocka as a lama, or Antoni Macierewicz as a bloodhound — designed by Jacek Frankowski, the puppets not only aroused enthusiasm, but also mobilised often ambiguous, politically critical attitudes. Of course, there was the real risk that viewers would come to perceive political life merely as a zoo, reducing the show's political dimension to an actually anti-political sense that everyone is a swine, but the significance of *Polish Zoo* for the political life of the 1990s shouldn't be ignored, nor should the political power wielded by puppet shows featuring caricatures of political celebrities.

Mean Masks

That power was also tapped in a more direct way, retaining the element of satire, but moving it into the sphere of outright negation, where political significance is not so much mocked

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as cancelled through caricatural uglification. Such procedures are usually employed for propaganda purposes, in actions that send a clear message and have an obvious address, whereas their subjects are often out of reach, with the puppet caricatures serving as a vengeance of the powerless, a bit like in punishment in effigy, even if nothing is burned or decapitated here. Instead, the criticised person is stripped of power, degraded, and belittled, reducing ominous figures to the level of puppets that are easy to deal with or eyesores worth nothing but scorn.

Such surrogate operations were carried out, for example, in Poland during the German occupation, when life-threatening monsters were enacted with puppets to undo their grimness and help accommodate the horrors of wartime living. That was the guiding principle of the unambiguously political, propagandistic even, puppet theatre of the Home Army's Information and Propaganda Bureau. Operating clandestinely in Warsaw, the project was run by the outstanding theatre director, Eugeniusz Poreda, and in 1942–1943 presented two shows written by Krystyna Artyniewicz: *Streets of Warsaw* and *Nativity Play 1943*. Of particular interest to us here is the latter, which according to Marek Waszkiel consisted of three parts: *Surviving* (a 'revue of great politicians'), *The Street* (a parade of 'distinct Warsaw types'), and *Nativity Play* (with 'smugglers and the children of Zamojszczyzna' as shepherds, Hitler as King Herod, and Roosevelt, Churchill, and Sikorski as the Three Magi).[6] Herod, as we know, eventually landed in hell, so the political appropriation of the nativity-play format was clearly meant to convey the idea of future retribution.

The above-described mechanism was also exploited, albeit in a different way, in propaganda spectacles staged by the regime that seized power in Poland after the Second World War. Its most important social ceremony was the May Day parade, which in the early

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45.
Puppets from the satirical TV show *Polish Zoo*, from left: racoon — Andrzej Drzycimski, mouse — Danuta Wałęsa, lion — Lecha Wałęsa, photo: Paweł Kopczyński, PAP/CAF

46.

46.
May Day parade in Warsaw, 1952,
photo: Zygmunt Wdowiński, CAF

47.
May Day parade in Warsaw, satirical effigies, 1953,
photo: Jerzy Baranowski, CAF

47.

48.
Actor Jerzy Wicik with the Bikiniarz puppet by Jerzy Zaruba, *The Little Puppet Shop*, 'Baj' Theatre in Warsaw, 1953, photo: Franciszek Myszkowski, archive of 'Baj' Theatre

48.

1950s assumed the form of a laboriously organised mass spectacle with large crowds of people, disciplined military-style, performing strictly controlled choreographies. Those parades used monumental decorations informed by the tradition of religious processions with feretories and figures, as well as by secular pageants — processions of vehicles on which tableaux vivants or other acted scenes are presented. Besides the mythical heroes of communism or symbols of its 'great achievements' (in Warsaw this would have been a model of the Palace of Culture and Science or a metro station), they featured caricatural representations of 'imperialists' and their allies: either live actors wearing grotesque oversized masks and playing with specially selected props (models of atomic bombs, bags of dollars) or large puppets.[7] Part of a moving procession, those were momentary sights only, devoid of any plot and limited to the very display of a grotesque version of 'enemies of progress'. Interestingly, they bore titles informed by the ludic tradition of street or boulevard theatre, such as *The Trumanillo Circus*, *The Churchiliad*, or *The Dollar Wedding, or, The Atomic Nuptials*. The May Day satires feigned 'ludic laughter', seeking to conjure up an illusion of grassroots popular sentiment. That notwithstanding, they were very interesting visually, their dramaturgy skilfully coordinated with the rest of the procession, and the burlesque actions of the characters making people laugh whatever their political views.

With all the differences, similar mechanisms are used in contemporary political satire, including as part of protest movements. One of the most widely known examples of this kind of work are the performances of Klaudia Jachira, a political activist and professional puppeteer, author of the puppet Jarek, which she performs with in YouTube videos as well as live at street demonstrations. Her practices in the latter context have caused significant controversy over the way she caricaturally appropriates an image without, however, the quotation marks of a theatrical framework. Whereas as a character in a satirical television show Jarek isn't different from the puppets

of Skamander or *Polish Zoo*, brought to a rally of the Committee for the Defence of Democracy it is doubly out of place, so to say. This transfer beyond theatre and beyond the adequate environment of political support in itself sends a powerful political message, as evidenced by vile attacks on the puppet's creator and operator.

Didactics of Latent Politicality

Having finally arrived through the streets and squares at the theatre as a building and an institution, we need in the first place to confront the traditional notion of the puppet show as a didactical and pedagogical tool geared towards children, including small ones. Regardless of how eagerly puppet artists search for alternative ways of understanding their art, the view that considers it a preparation for 'adult' or 'real' life has long been entrenched. Puppet theatre is perceived as a theatre for children, and it is in this perspective that its politicality is usually framed as an attractive and non-direct communication of principles and values that will inform later attitudes and decisions.

This pedagogical politics of the puppet was advocated not only for children but also for adults considered by the privileged elites as socially immature, literally uneducated. Oblivious of the political ambivalence of such a project, with its hierarchical and colonising approach towards the native subjects, playwright Michał Bałucki discussed precisely such a function of puppet shows in the 1890s, envisioning a network of mass-audience puppet theatres that would present, 'historical Polish plays to give the people an idea of their past, then genre plays, highlighting and castigating various faults and follies of the lower classes

> … scenes characterising the reign of this or that king and evoking pivotal moments in history, as well as contemporary dialogues, be it on drinking, barratry, or politics, presented in an amusing and merry way, with songs, dances, etc.'[8]

There is no doubt that this education, even if didn't directly deal with politics, was highly political in itself, using theatre as a means of promoting ideas and values considered 'correct' by the political and artistic elites.

In the history of Polish theatre, an extreme example of such educational policies can be found in shows from the communist period. At their basis was the development in the early post-war years of a dense network of state puppet theatres modelled on the Soviet system. That model was inherently political, of course, its objective being to control the minds of the youngest generation. Propaganda didn't need to be blatant; it was enough to draw from the repertoire of folk and fairy tales with the classic folk hero fighting abuse and exploitation, ridiculing the rich, exposing the shamness of their power and beauty. A political ambivalence worked at the very heart of children's puppet theatre, turning Tom Fool into the hero of a myth upheld by the 'popular' regime.

In that situation, making sure that artists conformed with the doctrine of Socialist Realism and picked up themes consistent

with the lines of Party propaganda didn't really require exerting much pressure on them. The leading researcher of Polish puppet theatre, Marek Waszkiel, argues that Socialist Realism had relatively little impact on it; he cites Jolanta Ewa Wiśniewska, who has calculated that in 1949–1955 shows written according to the official aesthetic and political guidelines accounted for a mere 20 percent of the repertoire. It is another matter that they were often created by outstanding artists, as exemplified by *The Little Green Bridge* (*Zielony mosteczek*) ('Lalka' Theatre in Warsaw, 1950), a play, written by Jerzy Zaborowski, directed by Jan Wilkowski, and designed by Adam Kilian, about the changes occurring in the Polish countryside thanks to the new political system.

However, Marek Waszkiel's argument about Socialist Realism's small impact on puppet theatre is true first and foremost for aesthetics. To support it, the researcher cites the assertion that the only outstanding production with a strong political message was Grzegorz Frant's *Sambo and the Lion*, staged by Henryk Ryl and Ali Bunsch at the 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre in Łódź in 1950. The play was about the brotherhood of peoples and races united in their struggle against imperialism and racism. Here too, however, the visuals 'muffled', according to the Party ideologues, that message, turning, Waszkiel writes, a propaganda show into an 'attractive, fine piece of puppet theatre that combined puppets with live actors, introduced surprisingly modern stage design, and would remain a hit for over a decade'.[9] The point is, however, that precisely that ingenuity was, in the case of puppet theatre, a desirable device in the longer term. Of course, in the early 1950s, when the heavy shadow of Stalinism hung over Polish culture, there were servile Critics who Scathed puppet shows deemed not Socialist or Realist enough. But even then puppets — for their very materiality and shape — enjoyed greater artistic freedom than dramatic theatre played by live actors with real bodies and real voices. The latter could be impelled to demonstrate utmost faithfulness in rendering real on stage the communist fantasy of the world. But puppet theatre could always elude that pressure, for even the most realistic puppet remained obviously an inanimate object manipulated by a hidden operator. The very principle of puppet theatre meant that there was a crack, an opening, that in dramatic theatre could be violently gapped. Moreover, its fundamental metaphor (the manipulation of the marionettes) could be politically dangerous if it tried to use it to materialise a naively 'realistic' vision of the world. Puppet theatre existed and was supported by the regime for different reasons than drama theatre — it served to politically and pedagogically exploit a fantasy.

The politicality of children's puppet theatre, closely connected with its didactic aspect, was and continues to be all the more effective since it's latent. As has been mentioned, this is due to its being largely a theatre of fairy tales, a lore which stands as a great reservoir of folk experience, an experience of centuries of subservience, if not of exploitation and violence. Therefore, it adopts a very clear political position — against power and its abuses — right at the very start.

Rebellion of Ludic Laughter

For centuries, puppet theatre was the theatre of the popular class, of fairs, markets, and backyards. It was sometimes invited to palaces and manors, but there grew mechanical somehow, turning into

49.
Sambo and the Lion, dir. Henryk Ryl, stage design: Ali Bunsch, 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre in Łódź, 1950, photo: archive of 'Arlekin' Puppet Theatre

50.
The Little Green Bridge by Jerzy Zaborowski, dir. Jan Wilkowski, stage design: Adam Kilian, 'Lalka' Theatre in Warsaw, 1950, photo: archive of 'Lalka' Theatre

a fancy automaton. In the big-city squares, however, it retained one of the supreme — if frequently ignored by the historian — powers of theatre, namely the ludic power of laughter, of impudent and ruthless mockery fuelled with sometimes barely suppressed anger and sense of injustice. Polichinelle and Punch, Petruhska and the Jew in Polish nativity plays, are recurring figures, particularly well rooted precisely in puppet theatre, of popular discontent and desire of retribution, but also of folk cleverness and the substitute pleasure of fooling the landlord or bullying other, even weaker subjects.

Puppet theatre's long-time affinity with the roadshow and the market fair also has its political dimension. Playing to the yeoman but depending on the landlord for support, puppet artists necessarily developed a set of tactics allowing them to function at the fringes of the social system and in between the elements of its structure. The fact of being almost constantly on the move, so characteristic for their life, in itself made them politically suspect in a world that bound people to their place in order to better control them. With all its lacks and wants, however, life on the road gave puppet artists a sense of freedom that settled subjects could never attain.

This, of course, is a somewhat idealised, perhaps even mythic image. But precisely such a myth — of an itinerant artist always slightly at odds with authority yet constantly and successfully asserting their freedom — is almost a founding myth for puppet theatre. Its power, including political power, is evidenced by one of the most influential and most critically acclaimed productions of Polish puppet theatre that I would like to deliberately cite in the conclusion of this essay. I mean, of course, Leon Moszyński's *Guignol in Trouble*, directed by Jan Wilkowski, with scenography and puppets by Adam Kilian ('Lalka' Theatre in Warsaw, 1955). The main character is a mythical travelling puppeteer Jean who uses a Guignol puppet and a Brechtian alienation effect built with live commentary to talk to kids about the cruelty and absurdity of war, exploitation,

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51.
Guignol in Trouble by Leon Moszyński, dir. Jan Wilkowski, stage design: Adam Kilian, 'Lalka' Theatre in Warsaw, 1955, photo: archive of 'Lalka' Theatre

and hunger. When Guignol is put in jail, one of the politically most powerful scenes in the history of Polish (not only puppet) theatre takes place. Halina Waszkiel describes it thus,

> In order to console Guignol, Jean asks the audience to play an echo game. The spectators call out the character's name and then repeat after it: 'ho-ho', 'you aren't alone', 'down with Canezou!', 'down with the Constable!', and finally 'long live freedom!' One can easily imagine how sharply those words resounded in Polish theatre in March 1956.[10]

Now a legend, the moral of *Guignol in Trouble* was elucidated in a song by Witkowski, which I too conclude this essay with, highlighting the final stanzas:

51.

There will always be those
who wish others ill:
a rotten constable, a wasteful owner,
and a judge who just fits the bill.
Instead of being astounded
look for each other, ye honest!
If this moral has moved you
Spread a message like that
And drop a few pennies
In my old leather hat.
I'll sing the moral again
For every penny you give me
I'll sing it a hundred times more
So people can actually live it.

To give evil a mighty opponent
look for each other, ye honest!

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While I am a supporter of alternative names such as theatre of figures, theatre of animation, or theatre of objects, and fully agreeing with Halina Waszkiel's proposition to replace the limiting and 'patronising' term 'puppet' with the term *animant* (see eadem, *Dramaturgia polskiego teatru lalek*, 'Studia o Teatrze' series, vol. 7, Warsaw: Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie, Fundacja Akademii Teatralnej w Warszawie, 2013, p. 10), I will still use 'puppet theatre' and 'theatre puppet' throughout this essay because the subject of my interest are manually operated anthropomorphic figures used deliberately in performances held deliberately for the purpose. Even if some of them are not strictly theatrical in nature, belonging instead to the world of political representations — from demonstrations, marches and so on — they appear in it as borrowed or transferred from scenic space or at least originating in the same cultural practices as puppet theatre.

2

More on Sheepskin Coat and his literary legend, the main element of which is Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's novel about him (1881), see Juliusz W. Gomulicki, 'Legenda i prawda o Baranim Kożuszku', *Stolica*, no. 51/52, 1960, pp. 14–15; digital version: http://mbc.cyfrowemazowsze.pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=922&from&dirids=1&ver_id=17518&lp=1&QI=%215988C21EBAB84CFD724F3-E4A90183186-16 (accessed 4 December 2018).

3

Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead. Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 2–3.

4

See Marek Waszkiel, *Dzieje teatru lalek w Polsce (do 1945 roku)*, Warsaw: IS PAN, 1990, p. 96.

5

Ibid., p. 84.

6

Ibid., p. 203.

7

See more in Piotr Osęka, *Rytuały stalinizmu. Oficjalne święta i uroczystości rocznicowe w Polsce 1944–1956*, Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2007, pp. 137–138.

8

Michał Bałucki, 'Projekt teatrzyków ludowych', in *Pamiętnik Zjazdu literatów i dziennikarzy polskich 1894, Vol. I: Referaty i wnioski*, Lwów, 1894, pp. 1–2, quoted in Waszkiel, p. 119.

9

Marek Waszkiel, *Dzieje teatru lalek w Polsce, 1944–2000*, Warsaw: Fundacja Akademii Teatralnej im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie, Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza, 2013, pp. 52, 54.

10

Halina Waszkiel, 'Guignol w tarapatach', *Encyklopedia Teatru Polskiego*, http://encyklopediateatru.pl/przedstawienie/34433/guignol-w-tarapatach (accessed 4 December 2018).

52.
Marcin Bikowski playing in the performance *Baldanders*, dir. Marcin Bartnikowski, Białystok Puppet Theatre, 2006, photo: Paweł Chomczyk

52.

Presence. The Puppeteer's Body

Marcin Bartnikowski

The puppet is dead and alive at the same time. This makes it different, on the one hand, from man and, on the other, from other theatrical artefacts. I had a most profound experience of this quality of the puppet in a non-theatrical context, viewing Patricia Piccinini's and Ron Mueck's hyperrealistic sculptures at the Venice Art Biennale. Though not puppets as such, they are so realistic you react to them as if they were overscale effigies rather than sculptures in the strict sense of the term. Piccinini and Mueck render figures reproduced in such minute detail that we can notice the pores of their skin, or even get a scare after mistaking an artwork for an exhibition viewer. I myself almost fainted with terror once when one of the (obviously flesh-and-bones) boys who seemed to be standing on display at the Venice docks marched out briskly from the exhibition room. But even without such extra attractions, hyperrealistic mannequins cause an uneasy feeling, confronting us with our own death. But Piccinini and Mueck go even further than that. Mueck plays with scale. His *Boy* is a huge sculpture of a squatting child, where we are overwhelmed not so much by size itself as by the detail that, against all logic, makes us believe that the monster we are facing is real. It can get up and walk out anytime, like the child mentioned above. Piccinini has created a series of hybrid creatures, half-pigs, half-humans, but very humane in their expression. Not only is a sense of life evoked here but, due

to the hyperrealism of the representation, we begin, bizarrely, to identify with the monstrosity, recognising our own features in the hybrids, growing monstrous ourselves. Fortunately, in the mind only. Puppets have their limitations.

The combination of our own corporeality and the corporeality of a dead object has a twofold effect: it animates the dead and devitalises the living. It is for a reason that puppets have always been most at home in theatre when the subject of the play is sex or death.

The above issues have been tackled by Radosław Filip Muniak who, without actually considering puppet theatre (something we would have welcomed), has perfectly captured the difference between the apotheosis of life conveyed by classical sculpture and the links between the puppet and death:

> The puppet terminates the artwork (and all the meanings associated — particularly today — with it) on the formal level like in the alchemical 'death of matter' … on the existential level of the reception of the artwork, this change is bound up with the puppet's disturbing ability to make absence present. Classic sculpture expresses an apotheosis of man, both as an image for the viewer and as the apex of man's creative ability to work with matter and his grasp of mimesis. By both negating these achievements and inscribing itself in them, the puppet places the spectator in the uncomfortable position of the witness of their own death. Lotman believes that this is caused by the puppet's motionless face, which, combined with its mechanical movement, blurs the sharp distinctions of dead versus alive and artificial versus real. In this sense, anthropomorphic figures suck humanity out of us, which is why puppets make us feel strange: we no longer control our own image, the puppet's deadness and frozen potential of life reflecting our own aliveness and potential of death, the living interweaving and interpenetrating with the lifeless. The result is a sense of unease and uncanniness.[1]

I know from experience that when a successful illusion of life is conjured up on stage — thanks to skin-imitating latex, the puppet's unexpected realistic gesture, or a hint of bodily shape — the effect can be very striking indeed. We may be perfectly well aware of the falsity of theatrical production, yet when confronted with our own corporeality we feel almost like at a spiritualistic séance where life emerges out of nothingness (I am inclined to agree with Muniak here: it is a life that sucks humanity out of us), and that is often forgotten. Artists, of course — both sculptors and puppet-makers — take full advantage of the fact. Whereas the former operate solely through the physical properties of their works, the latter enjoy a much broader field of expression thanks to the potentialities of their own body. The possible physical activities are very diverse, depending on the movement or stillness of the puppet and the puppeteer themselves. The puppeteer is present in various ways as they accompany the puppet's life. This is an issue I will take a closer look at by discussing the many relationships between the puppeteer's

53.
Bread and Puppet Theatre, *Uprising of the Beast*, 1990,
photo: Tony D'Urso, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0

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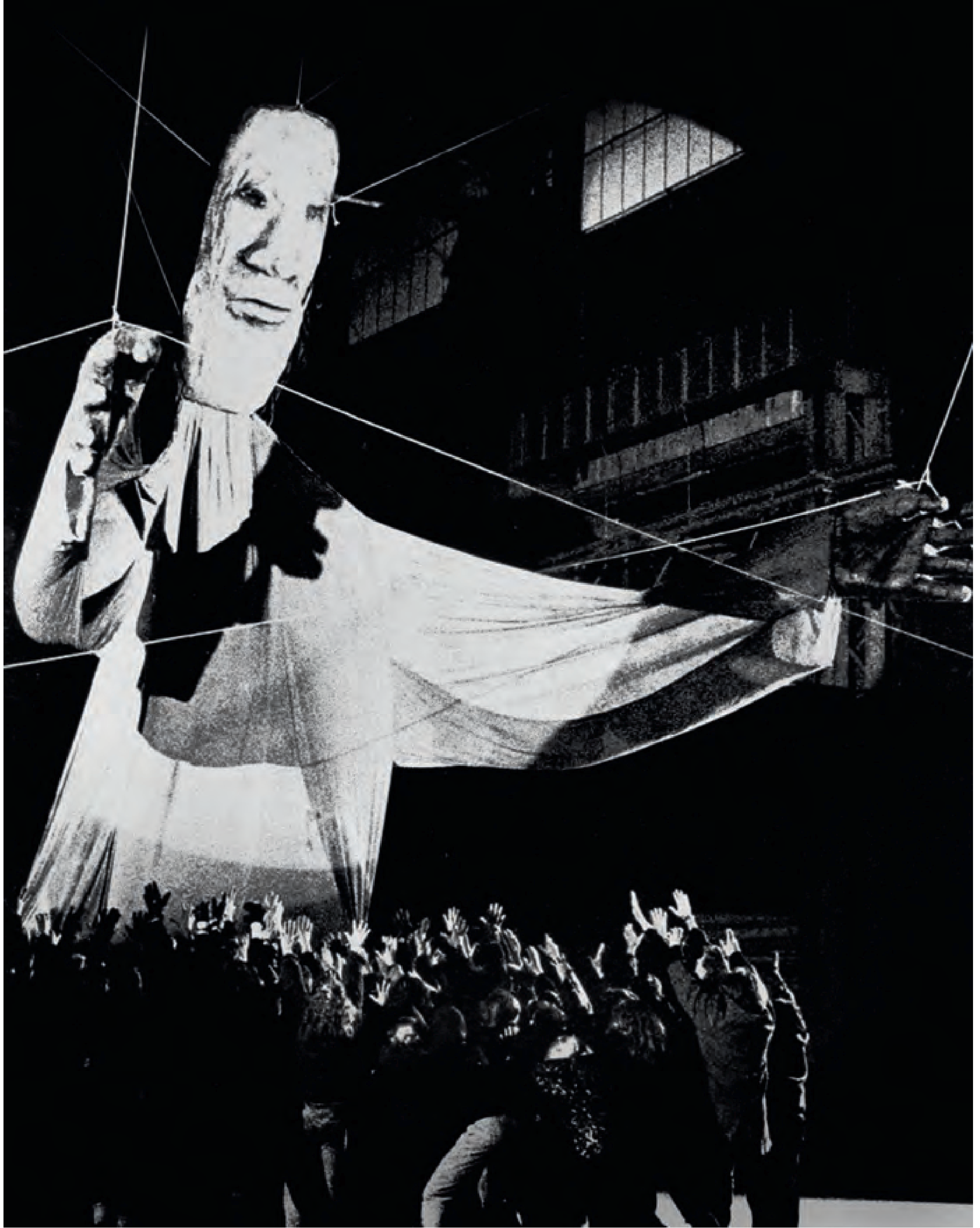

54.
Neville Tranter playing in the performance *Schicklgruber, alias Adolf Hitler* by Jan Veldman, dir. Theo Fransz, Stuffed Puppet Theatre, 1976, photo: Georg Pöhlein

55.
Ilka Schönbein, *Creatures*, Theater Meschugge, 2018, photo: Marienette Delanné

body and the body of the puppet itself. First, however, let me consider the phenomenon of stage presence as such, for it is it that makes puppets what they uniquely are.

I am in favour of a definition of puppetry formulated, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, by Jan Wilkowski in an interview.[2] He said that the puppeteer is an actor who simply likes to act with puppets. I will neither enlarge on the idea nor argue for it; I only need it for the clarity of the argument to follow. The body is a basic acting tool that, if used in the right way, makes scenic illusion believable. The paradox of acting bodily practices is that the body has to be unconstrained, alive, and natural, just like in real life. In other words, one should neither pretend nor enact. It's very simple. Anyone who has ever been on stage knows that novice attempts to act make our body exactly the opposite of the above: it becomes rigid, dead, and a fundamental source of lie.

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Body work issues are familiar to all actors, even experienced ones. I've played in a show where the actors were to just walk around the stage naturally as the public entered. Watching them from backstage, I was able to precisely pinpoint the moment when the first viewers appeared — my colleagues' step changed, became more rigid. Since they were conscious and well-trained actors, they soon relaxed and returned to their previous, natural walk, but the first moment of transition from life to an illusion of life surprised and overwhelmed them. That was because they paid too little attention to it, weren't focused enough (being aware that the spectators, busy looking for their seats, wouldn't be watching them closely at this point yet). At such moments, the internal critic turns on (you're under scrutiny, watch out!) and a sense of shame kicks in, causing an automatic bodily reaction. Concentration is needed to achieve truthfulness. One shouldn't, however, focus on the body and on trying to be natural (do we normally analyse the way we make steps when walking?), but on the task itself: a precisely, existentially set goal that will automatically, subconsciously activate our body. This is achieved with the help of various methods, usually involving technical exercises and the imagination. In *The Secret Art of the Performer*, Eugenio Barba calls this bodily disposition an energy that is released through the combination of stage presence and acting dynamics:

> Applied to certain physiological factors (weight, balance, the position of the spinal column, the direction of the eyes in space), these principles produce pre-expressive organic tensions. These new tensions generate a different energy quality, render the body theatrically 'decided', 'alive', and manifest the performers' 'presence', or scenic bios, attracting the spectator's attention before any form of personal expression takes place. This is, obviously, a matter of a logical and not a chronological 'before'. The various levels of organisation are, for the spectator and in the performance, inseparable. They can only be separated by means of abstraction, in a situation of analytical research and during the technical work of composition done by the actor or dancer.[3]

The puppeteer has to share this energy with the object that they manipulate. It is in this sense that the puppet literally sucks life out of the actor. The theatre anthropology formulated by Barba deals with the various modes of the actor's presence, being informed to a large extent by the observation of Asian theatre, where the roles of the actors, dancer, puppeteer, singer etc. are often interchangeable. In *The Secret Art of the Performer*, Barba mentions two concepts derived from Indian theatre, introduced by the dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi: *lokadharmi*, that is, behaviour in daily life, and *natyadharmi*, behaviour in dance. The former is present in life and its realistic onstage renditions, with the provision that actors then undergo the above-described conscious process. The second kind of movement 'puts the body in form'.[4] A body-transforming energy is born, which creates a new scenic life. This is evident in Kathakali actors, for example, who, once onstage, morph into monstrous, precisely operating puppets of automated graceful movement, or in the performers of the codified Ramayana ballet in Indonesia. The puppeteer needs both kinds of movement, but it is the latter that is highly characteristic for puppet theatre, which uses movement

56.
Odin Teatret & CTLS Archives, Mr Peanut on the Brooklyn Bridge in New York, 1984, photo: Tony D'Urso

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to animate form[5], where form means the puppet in all its varieties, the actor themselves, transformed using, for example, mask and movement or a combination of these two modes of animation.

One of the things that amazed me as a freshman of acting studies at the Department of Puppetry Art in Białystok was how the whole body was involved in learning the classic puppet techniques, where the puppet player is usually invisible. I thought puppets were animated manually, which was utterly wrong. In order to animate a visual form, to fill it with life, the puppeteer, hidden behind a screen, has to work with their whole body. The first exercise in learning to animate the puppet was to walk with one hand stretched upright and observe how the movement of the body transmitted (or not) to a relaxed wrist. It needs to be added that relaxing your wrist is an exercise as difficult and challenging

as doing a natural stage walk. A hand puppet — a natural extension of or add-on for the human hand (the theatre-school training puppets are just sponge-ball 'heads' that you fit over a naked hand) — perfectly evinces the process of the transmission of movement from man to the puppet. This is often called 'walking under the puppet'. The puppeteer should perform almost the same as the puppet does and with the expression that the puppet is supposed to convey. Of course, the puppet's movement is miniature, but the number of steps, turns, stops etc. performed by the puppet and the animator has to tally. To watch animators hidden behind a screen is a fascinating thing. All processes occur naturally here, something that is reflected in the tension of the whole body, but is most evident in the puppeteer's facial play, which can in no way be transmitted to the puppet's motionless face. This, I feel, results in mimical over-expression because we subconsciously make up for the fact that the puppet's face doesn't obey us. The more natural and unconstrained the puppet player's movement, the better the puppet performs. We can call this, after Barba, a transmission of the actor's energy to a material object, or speak of 'putting the body in form', and literally too.

In screen techniques, where the puppet is manipulated indirectly, things become somewhat more complicated. And so a rigid rod puppet transmits rhythm more than anything else; it cannot imitate bodily gestures nearly as well as the marionette, but it perfectly conveys the energy and temperament of the person manipulating it. The (seldom used today) Javan puppet built by Sergey Obraztsov after Indonesian *wayang kulit* shadow-theatre puppets, which has a movable peg (*gapit*) to animate the head and body and two rods (*chempurit*) to operate the arms, is better able to transmit the details of the puppeteer's movement, but this very precision of gestural imitation strips it of vitality and blocks the possibility of expression. Therefore the puppeteer's body has to be calmer. This, I admit, is the reason why I haven't been able to master Obraztsov's Javan, but for many of my colleagues the challenge proved a kind of meditation.

There exist, of course, puppets — such as marionettes — whose only limit in theory are the operator's hands and their technical dexterity. Whoever has watched a marionetteer's body and face knows what wonders can happen there. We are dealing here with a body that is focused and calm, but very present, alive, and immersed in process. That it cannot be seen doesn't matter: it is its quality that crucially determines the quality of the puppet's life.

The above modes of bodily junction between man and the puppet correspond with a typology of relationships between the actor's body and the puppet that I will now present. I discern four types of such relationships:

1. The Vampire
   (the puppet sucks energy out of the actor and functions by itself);
2. The Thief
   (the puppet steals the actor's energy, but the actor can still exist on stage);
3. The Icon
   the puppet functions only as a reflection of the actor's bodily energy, transforming the actor);
4. The Siamese Twin
   (the puppet fuses with the actor and their energy, turning the actor into a puppet).

The unserious terminology is used here for the sake of emphasis; it has the advantage of putting the puppet in an active position. It also needs to be added that the above are ideal types, whereas in real life one encounters their

combinations, hybrids etc. I will describe each in detail, citing performances and puppets that I've remembered as successful and discussing them in the context of my own work to better describe the mechanics of those relationships.

We are dealing with a Vampire every time the puppeteer is invisible or when they focus all their energy on the puppet, expressing themselves solely through it. Everything I've said so far about screen techniques and marionette manipulation applies here. If the puppeteer is visible, they have to minimise body tensions so that they don't draw attention away from the puppet, which doesn't mean that their body becomes dead (as discussed earlier). This method has been employed for centuries wherever the aim was pure illusion and a theatre world consisting of puppets only (puppet street comedy, post-war screen theatre, etc.). But it has also been used in a far more interesting way. In the late 1990s, Henryk Tomaszewski directed an adaptation of Heinrich von Kleist's *On the Marionette Theatre* at the National Theatre in Warsaw that featured the different kinds of theatre mentioned by the author of *The Prince of Homburg*: the theatre of words, of movement, and finally the marionette theatre as the most perfect and most authentic one. An extraordinary thing happened: despite an excellent cast of actors and the director's work as a master of movement, a simple marionette theatre this time sucked energy out not only of Waldemar Dolecki, hidden behind the scenery, but out of the other performers too. The simplicity and naivety of the medium overshadowed the glow of philosophical expositions and dance/pantomime visuals. Only puppets can do that.

We took advantage of the 'vampirism' of puppets when working with Marcin Bikowski in 2006 on the performance *Baldanders* based on my dramatic text (I will keep returning to this show further in the essay). Nearing the end of the work, we felt there were still some narrative ruptures at a few places and we wondered what to do with them. At some point, Bikowski came up with the idea of a tiny puppet, called Worm, which appeared at various moments, commenting, interfering with the plot, triggering off subplots. It ultimately even produced the punchline. Operated with a single finger, the tiny puppet riveted the audience's attention, arousing feelings of sympathy, amusement, even compassion. And so when in the finale the main protagonist tore its head off, you could clearly hear the viewers' reactions of anger, consternation, and grief. Worm appeared also in the relationship of the Thieff, discussed in the following paragraph, but it was twice the Vampire, stealing energy through a finger. It focused that energy in its tiny head, so when it released it, we had the effect of steam violently escaping from a boiling pot.

The Thieff is a puppet that works in dialogue with the operator. Actually, theirs is a relationship of two thieves stealing from each other, difficult insofar that the actor has to impart a life to the form while existing corporeally on the same terms as it does. Neville Tranter is a master of this method, creating shows where he always plays a significant role and has large talking muppet-like puppets as his partners. Let us consider this on the example of the outstanding performance, *Schicklgruber, alias Adolf Hitler*, directed by Theo Fransz and staged by Tranter's Stuffed Puppet Theatre. Based on a text by Jan Veldman, it tells of Hitler's last days in the bunker. Tranter plays Hitler's adjutant, who has been saved even though his mother, suspected of being Jewish, has been shot at Hitler's orders. Such a role defines a very specific relationship between the actor and the puppet he operates. The adjutant respects and fears the Führer, but

he also hates him. His blocked, withdrawn body, crammed into soldierly rigidity, is a sharp contrast with Hitler's broad gesticulation, aggressive mien, and self-confidence. We know, though, that in this case too it is precisely the actor who has to surrender their corporeality to the Thieff, so Tranter faces a challenging task. He also directs the puppet so suggestively that we stop looking at his mouth when he speaks in its voice. As a result, we watch two complete characters in dialogue. This isn't the only hurdle that Tranter has to negotiate. He also plays the exalted Eva Braun, the blasé Himmler, a Mexican *muerte* figure, and several other characters — all in dialogue and all masterfully. Tranter, a professional dramatic actor, first got interested simply in puppets and eventually focused on their mimic variety. Asked whether he wouldn't like to return to dramatic theatre, he replies that there, he would never bring together a cast as fine as that of his puppets. As it turns out, puppets can even squeeze out living actors.

In *Baldanders*, we embraced the principle of bodily dialogue in a literal manner and on many levels. The show tells of a demon of transformation that embodies various characters, talking to them before (Vampire!) and during the act. And since the demon picks up weak and defenceless persons, it usually talks to them about identity, searching for its weak spots. Therefore, Marcin Bikowski as Baldanders divided himself in two, dialoguing on a meta-level. A scene with a suicide woman, for example, inspired by Roland Topor's *The Tenant*, dealt precisely with the question of the body, its affiliation and sovereignty:

> Teeth, once separated from the individual, are no longer part of their body. It's the same with hands. Let's say they take away my hand. Okay, I'll say: me and my hand. They take away my legs, I'll say: me and my limbs. They cut off my head and what am I supposed to say: me and my body or me and my head? And why really should my head, a part of my body, appropriate the title of 'myself'? Because it contains the brain? But there are larvae, worms, creatures that have no brain. Do there exist separate brains for them that say: me and my worms?[6]

Let us change this question to one more directly related to our subject: where does the puppet's body end and the puppeteer's begin? Who steals from whom? In *Baldanders*, the coloured latex we used as imitation of skin looked rather ghastly in close contact with the actor's body. The play was set in the scenery of a travelling freak show, very close to the viewer in order to produce a comical effect of quoting from horror, but it horrified for real and when, for example, the puppet lost an eye (with over one hundred performances all kinds of situations happened), you could hear actual gasps of fright. This degree of combination of real and artificial bodies can truly consternate.

The strangest type of them all is probably the Icon, a puppet that operates through stillness, often used where death manifests itself strongly. In Krystian Lupa's staging of Thomas Bernhard's *Extinction*, the corpses of the main character's parents come to hang over the stage as his obsession and pang of conscience, forcing Franz to erase the evil of his whole life by writing about it. Though Franz doesn't physically interact with the corpses, they are nonetheless a source of profound tension. In their presence, nothing is as it was before; a process of the erasure of memories is set in motion. This is unlike in a staging of Stanisław Wyspiański's *Resting*, written and directed by Paweł Passini, where the actor playing Wyspiański faces a puppet that is an effigy of a dead Wyspiański. Again we touch upon

57.
Liebe und das ganze Theater, Kobalt Figurentheater Berlin, 1998, photo: Sören Stache

the 'puppet effect' here, that is, the experience of our own death through contact with our alive/dead doppelganger. In *Resting*, the matter is even more complicated because the actor Maciej Wyczański at some point exposes himself as a someone who plays a role and builds up a complex stage relationship between himself, Wyspiański, and Wyspiański the corpse. An actor confronted with death (or an actor in transience) talks to the audience, which is able to identify with his position. This *memento mori* was obviously intended and worked simply through a still effigy, the Icon.

I used Icon puppets as a director of Marcin Bikowski's monodrama, *Bacon*. The performance opens with a scene of the vernissage of Francis Bacon's exhibition in Paris, on the eve of which he has learned about the death of his lover, George Dyer. The whole world is narrated from this perspective. We are inside the artist's head as they has to decide whether to mourn or to continue playing his role. A puppet representing Dyer's head remains present on stage and the actor has to play towards it, despite it, for it. This causes a sense of discomfort. At the beginning, we wondered whether to search for Bacon's formal movement, his timbre of voice, his character, but then we decided that would be a great lie. But a strange thing happened during the rehearsals. Playing towards the puppet, Bikowski underwent a physical transformation. His body started assuming a new form, his voice changed too. The Icon acted like a catalyst, but also gained a meaning. There was a another puppet in *Bacon* that operated on a similar premise, Pius X, a quotation from Bacon's work. It appeared as the protagonist's remorse, remaining silent. Its silence and stillness contrasted with the actor's growing

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58.
Headless Giant, Annual Domestic Resurrection Circus,
Glover, Vermont, 1995, photo: Ron T. Simon (fineprintphoto.com)

58.

nervousness, so the puppet became stronger and stronger. That's what puppets are best at.

The Siamese Twin operates a bit like the Thieff, but we encounter it when the actor, having merged with the form, becomes a puppet themselves and despite being physically divided into two or more spheres has to convey a sense of unity. One of the sequences in the performance *Twin Houses* by Cie Mossoux-Bonté is a splendid example of this type of relationship. Nicole Mossoux — a Belgian dancer who uses puppets in her shows — conjures up here a two-headed creature comprised of herself and a manipulable head resting on her shoulders. In an extraordinary letter-writing scene, the heads become hostile towards each other, which ultimately leads to the operator's beheading. This grim scene is not so much a realistic rendition of two conjoined figures as a metaphor of the doppelgänger, who, like in Dostoevsky or Poe, is a harbinger of self-annihilation. As a dancer, Mossoux is very much physically involved, operating in various rhythms, as if she was torn by an actual inner conflict. Since she unrealises the movement of her body, using what has earlier been

defined as *natyadharmi*, she turns her body into a puppet. This gesture of mortification adds life to the artificial head and makes her actions probable. A very similar approach was employed by the Japanese artist Hoichi Okamoto, who used life-sized puppets while making his own movement unreal by employing butoh-dance techniques. He surrendered not only his movement to the life of the puppet, but also the vitality of his own body. He became a puppet.

I've had the opportunity to create a similar character, playing the Two-Headed One in *Baldanders*. Unlike Nicole Mossoux, however, I was a real figure in a travelling freak show, a variety-theatre owner who sneers at his troupe's degenerations, yet turns out to be physically abnormal himself. Playing such a dual character (a humanised puppet and a puppetised human) is fundamentally dialogical and offers a lot of possibilities, but is also a torment for the body, which, retaining a sense of oneness, has to halve itself. Not being a dancer, I felt this rather acutely. First I worked on isolation, then on alleviating a sense of division. Since I've played this show over a hundred times, with time I got used to the duality in unity and finally my body fully embraced the idea of twinhood.

Most fine puppet-theatre performances are based on liminal situations that combine the above-described types, but the processes occurring in the performers can usually be described using the above terms. Sometimes it also happens so that the body itself is a theme in a puppet show. I've had my closest experience of this so far when working on the show *The Danton Case. Self-Interview*[7] by the Malabar Hotel Theatre, an adaptation of Stanisława Przybyszewska's eponymous drama and her *Letters*. Among the motifs we used were heads rolling off the guillotine, but also mutilated body parts that in the context of the apology of Maximilien Robespierre and the revolution, expressed directly by the text of the play and the figure of Przybyszewska present on stage, produced a rather disturbing effect. What seems most important to me, however, is the juxtaposition of these objects with the living bodies of the actors who act with them, towards them, and despite them. The 'puppet effect' was intended here and inherent to the events transpiring on stage: the drama of the mental personality of someone (Robespierre) who in the name of an idea becomes a master of death and life. We know the uncanny feeling caused by posthumous images, which here connects with the function of the Jacobin leader: 'In Przybyszewska, Robespierre is a kind of actor, an actor of the mental plane, confirming its existence with his every gesture, always so precise. His face is a kind of theatre mask. If the face of a ghost is a mask, it's logical that a spiritual man must become an actor.'[8]

We have thus made a full circle, returning to the thought that we began with. Here, looking death in the eye, we see the fullness of life. Deadness activates the vital, strong, creative. Such is the function of puppets in ritual, such it is in theatre sometimes — too seldom, though, since contemporary theatre usually forgets about the potentialities of the puppet, degrading it to an infantile educational tool.

[1] Radosław Filip Muniak, *Efekt lalki: lalka jako obraz i rzecz*, Warsaw: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2016, p. 26.

[2] An interview for the TV documentary *Jan Wilkowski's Theatre of Miracles* (*Teatr cudów Jana Wilkowskiego*), part of the Great Theatre Reformers series broadcast by Telewizja Polska in 1996–1998.

[3] Eugenio Barba, 'Theatre Anthropology', in idem and Nicola Savarese, *The Secret Art of the Performer. A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 7.

[4] Ibid., p. 8.

[5] Ignoring real-life movement often leads to mannerism, examples of which are frequent in puppet theatre.

[6] Marcin Bartnikowski, *Baldanders* (unpublished), private archive.

[7] Magdalena Miklasz directed the show and wrote the music, Marcin Bikowski created the puppets, Ewa Woźniak designed the sets, and I was the dramaturge (and actor).

[8] Kwiryna Zięba, 'Esencja i egzystencja twarzy', in *Maski*, ed. Maria Janion and Stanisław Rosiek, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1986, p. 221.

59.
Jerzy Kolecki, stage design for *Tomek in Wonderland*, 'Rabcio-Zdrowotek' Puppet Theatre in Rabka, 1967, artist's family collection

59.

Puppet Theatre in Rabka

Karol Hordziej

I’ve never been seriously interested in puppet theatre. Although Jerzy Kolecki, puppet theatre scenographer and director, was my grandfather, he was no longer professionally active in this field when I was born, and this particular aspect of his life for years remained for me but a family legend. I never thought of it in the context of contemporary art either. That changed when artist Paulina Ołowska made a house that once belonged to our family, located near Rabka, her home. Paulina discovered for the contemporary art world the posters my grandfather designed for puppet-theatre shows in the 1960s–1980s. She showed them in their original form in exhibitions and used their motifs as inspiration for her own works. Her best-known installation of this kind was probably *Emily’s Face* (painting on glass, 2014) on the façade of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw building, realised as part of the exhibition *As You Can See: Polish Art Today*. The face on the now non-existent former furniture store was the face of Alice from Wonderland from my grandpa’s 1975 poster. Thus I became aware of Jerzy Kolecki as an artist who in his theatre work for young audiences

pursued a modern artistic vision — unlike my grandfather who, when I knew him, devoted himself mainly to traditional canvas painting. Following up on the process, initiated by Paulina Ołowska, of discovering his theatre work in the field of the visual arts, I organised the exhibition *Jerzy Kolecki's Puppet Theatre*, which took place at the BWA Gallery in Tarnów in 2017. I brought together in its original painting designs, preserved puppets and stage sets, as well as posters, treating them as paintings, sculptures, and works of graphic art rather than as artefacts from a theatre archive. Alluding to their theatrical function were selected photographs from the archive of the 'Rabcio-Zdrowotek' Puppet Theatre (Teatr Lalek Rabcio-Zdrowotek) in Rabka. It proved a fascinating collection which showed that the Rabka theatre, founded in the early post-war years, was an extraordinary phenomenon. The realities of the era are best captured by photography, and besides isolated photos from the undertaking's early period, the archive contains outstanding, truly artistic photographs by Jerzy Sierosławski, which show many of Kolecki's otherwise unpreserved stage sets. Browsing through the existing literature on puppet theatre, I noted that photographs usually appeared in them merely as illustrations of text, whereas some of those I'd found definitely deserved more. I decided that it would be interesting to craft a photography-based narrative instead. In this visual essay, I would like to talk about puppet theatre through photographs from the Rabcio archive, in the hope that the approach opens up new possibilities of interpretation and allows readers to gain some direct insight into the subject. The last illustration in this essay is a quotation from an anniversary publication issued by 'Rabcio-Zdrowotek' Puppet Theatre in 1969, which is a kind of modernist essay formulated by Jerzy Kolecki. Its postulates of visual education and treating the youngest theatre audiences seriously are as valid today as ever, especially when, as the text's author, we combine the ability to look with the art of making choices and participating consciously in the contemporary world.

60.
Let us start with the open-air picture (Bukowina Tatrzańska, 1950s). I am intrigued by the situation, its theatricality obviously stretching beyond the small scene on which a puppet show is under way. The sight of children on their knees, gazing intently in the same direction, brings to mind images of miraculous revelations. In the background, the theatre stage is visible, surprisingly small compared with the size of the screen behind which the puppet operators are hidden. In effect, we notice rather a rhythm of draperies in an open-air space, and it feels as if the picture has been composited with several non-matching images.

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61.
The next picture was likely taken a couple of years later. It gives us a sense of what the Rabka theatre was in the first decade of its existence. Founded in 1949 as a community initiative for young sanatorium patients, it soon became a touring theatre. The first roadshows took place at a dozen different venues in Rabka, where the stage and the puppets were, as we find from an oral testimony, brought in by means of a simple handcart. Soon the company began reaching other places in the area, first by a horse carriage and finally by the first automobile — a decommissioned US Army Dodge truck, soldiers now replaced by actors. Another picture shows them in the back of the truck during a trip to one of the many places in southern Poland that the 'Rabcio-Zdrowotek' performed at in the 1950s and 1960s.

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Puppet Theatre in Rabka

62.
A one-of-a-kind audience and high emotions. Undergoing long-term treatment, separated from their parents, the kids, for practical reasons, had to wear uniform clothes. And yet in this picture the emotions are so strong that it is their individual nuances that force themselves to the forefront. In the centre of the picture, there is a kind of rupture between the girls. Whereas those on the left seem to be enjoying a funny scene, their neighbours look rather terrified. Aiming the lens away from the stage helped capture some spontaneous theatre playing out in the audience.

62.

Karol Hordziej

63.
This is a still image, yet so much is happening here. Although no footage showing the Rabcio puppets in action has been preserved, the potential movement can be induced from their expression and their very construction. The monkey, from one of the early shows, is stretched on a vertical line. We can guess that this allowed for dynamic movements of ascending and descending. Despite its being an inanimate object, the impression of life (captured in the gaze) is almost disturbing. The puppets in the theatre's storage, crafted by Stanisław Ciężadlik, a folk artist from Mszana Dolna, or Władysław Biedroń, a puppet constructor and mechaniser, among others, seem similarly alive.

63.

64.
At first, the Rabka theatre used marionettes — puppets animated by means of a system of strings and rods held from above — which were popular at the time. Such theatre was naturally more intimate, the stage smaller than in later years, when marionettes gave way to rod puppets — larger ones, operated from below, permitting a grander stage. The scenery of those shows made it possible to tell more elaborate stories, whereas the former ones resembled silent cinema instead, based on exaggerated gestures or situation comedy. The picture is from a 1952 show called *Rabcio's Adventures in the Circus* (*Przygody Rabcia w cyrku*). The acrobatic scene with a dancer doing the splits on a rope perfectly illustrates the puppet's inherent duality, determined by its specific, non-human anatomy. Although the puppet only has several moving elements, it can, with the actor's help, perform a movement perfectly imitating a dancing ballerina, or even go beyond the limitations of the human body by combining classical ballet with circus acrobatics. At this point, one is reminded of Heinrich von Kleist's *On the Marionette Theatre*, where he argued that the puppet was superior to and an unparalleled model for a live dancer; not only because of its flexibility, lightness, and unique 'charm', but also because of its special ability to defy gravity and fly.

64.

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65.
The transition from modest marionette theatre to more elaborate puppet theatre connects in Rabcio's history with Jerzy Kolecki, who, with a degree in painting earned at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, joined the company as an actor and went on to become its long-time managing and art director (1961–1977). During that period, he designed several dozen stage sets that successfully transposed his painterly visions to stage. When they were sometimes criticised for being too painterly, he took that as a compliment. Compared with the early marionette shows, where the scenery was usually just a background for the puppets, Kolecki's designs seem like painting expanded into 3D, arranged in time to match the narrative of the play. The scenery for Lucyna Krzemieniecka's *A Story True of Almonds Blue* (*Historia cała o niebieskich migdałach*) (1957), with fantastic, graphically simplified tree forms, is scanty yet monumental.
The expressive lighting is reminiscent of photographic formal experiments of the 1920s.

65.

Puppet Theatre in Rabka

66.
Kolecki's scenic designs become even more expressive in black-and-white pictures, where contours and distinctly dimensional forms as well highlighted faces and hands (often deliberately out-of-scale compared with the rest of the body) play a major role. Employed in this and other designs, procedures such as distorted proportions or bodily deformations (look at the abstract shape of the witch's head) serve to make the puppets even more expressive. Bold, cutting-edge formal solutions, close to organic abstraction and surrealism, allow us to situate those works within the domain of modern art and perceive them in the context of the changes taking place in painting and sculpture in the 1950s and 1960s. Significantly, it was precisely in the field of theatre for young audiences that Kolecki's artistic potential manifested itself most fully. Experimenting with new and unconventional forms and materials to produce the most evocative scenery, he presented himself as a truly modern artist, whereas his non-theatrical work, consisting of sacral, portrait, and landscape painting, remained very traditional.

Using the language of contemporary art to design children's shows, Kolecki showed that he treated the young spectators very seriously, being aware not only of their creativity but also their special sensitivity. In his later years, the artist admitted in interviews that children were actually the focus of his artistic preoccupations. To contacts with the art world Kolecki attached little importance (which partly explains why until recently he remained a virtually unknown artist, unacknowledged by art history). The picture is from *Shoemaker Twine* (*Szewczyk Dratewka)* (1958) by Maria Kownacka.

66.

67.
The next picture shows a scene from *Tomek in Wonderland* (*Tomek w krainie dziwów*) (1967), directed by Stanisław Ochmański. The scenery has been built using simple means, but the artistic idea behind it is sophisticated. The theme of the show — fantastic lands and their inhabitants — kindled the imagination and encouraged formal experimentation. In many of his puppet designs, Kolecki prefers abstraction to anthropomorphism, as evidenced by photographic documentation. One such archival picture shows, against a black background, unreal cats' figures with geometricised heads and a dimensional magic tree that brings to mind abstract forms from the era's painting or sculpture.

According to Kolecki's testimony, the photo sessions were treated very seriously by their author, the late Jerzy Sierosławski, the member of the Association of Polish Art Photographers (ZPAF), who came to Rabka to work at the X-ray room at one of the sanatoriums in order to later pursue his artistic vision in theatre as well. Sierosławski sought to capture the essence or spirit of the show in a couple of shots.

67.

Puppet Theatre in Rabka

68.
The puppets built in the workshop of the Rabka theatre were animated by puppet actors, but ensouled by their designer, Jerzy Kolecki, who concluded the work by personally painting their eyes, eyebrows, and mouths. Creating the character's facial expression, he defined its role, personality, and behaviour type. The art of actually operating the puppet, in turn, was supported by the technical ideas of the theatre's chief constructor and mechaniser, Władysław Biedroń. The picture shows actor Mariusz Zaród holding the Kai puppet from Joanna Piekarska's 1976 adaptation of *The Snow Queen* by Hans Christian Andersen. The actor's left thumb rests on a metal ring that allows the puppet to turn its head around. With a small team, such technical devices made a lot of sense, allowing for complex puppet movements without the need for a second actor. But the picture shows not only a smart mechanism, but something more — an intriguing relationship between the puppet and the actor, a sense of curiosity, tenderness, and sympathy in the latter's eyes as he looks at his puppet. Perhaps this is their first meeting — in order to properly manipulate a puppet, the actor had first to learn it and discover its potential.

68.

69.
In a theatre of rod puppets, operated from below, the actors are under the stage, hidden behind a screen. The theme of Sierosławski's picture, like of Alfred Stieglitz's famous *The Steerage* (1907), are people — actors in this case — crowded in second-rate space. They seem bowed down by the cramped space — we are watching the toil of physical work, a rhythm of criss-crossing arms and unnaturally bent bodies. Also interesting to see are the actors' ordinary clothes, devoid of any stage pretence, unnecessary when the work is done in hiding.

69.

Puppet Theatre in Rabka

60.
archive of Kolecki family

62.
from 30th-anniversary publication, 1979

61, 63–69.
archive of 'Rabcio' Puppet Theatre in Rabka
65–69.: photo: Jerzy Sierosławski

There are different ways to view theatre. You can rely primarily on acting, on mise-en-scène, on visuals. You can treat it as entertainment or as a teaching aid. Whatever your approach, the educational element, in the broadest sense of the word, is always at the heart of theatre work. This is due to the very essence of theatre, its multilayered and complex nature.

A theatre performance absorbs and engrosses the viewer completely — with the story, the acting, the visuals, the soundtrack — to the point where they spontaneously and directly express their emotions with facial expressions, gestures, or laughter. and one more thing: a theatre performance, experienced together, forms a bond that unites all participants. And if the story takes us to foreign countries, the characters and what they go through remove borders: we feel one human family.

That is why theatre, which is a symbiosis of all artistic disciplines, is so important. The power of theatre is disproportionately greater than the sum of the different kinds of art experienced separately. From this stems the makers' responsibility for the show, the quality of its form and content. In theatre for young audiences, this is responsibility to the child, which firmly believes everything we present it with.

We want our work to give the child a wealth of experience; we believe that we teach the child to look, see, understand, and feel, that we teach a sensible, feeling- and reason-supported perception of the world, thus forging an ability to make sound judgment and discern between right and wrong and preparing the child for conscious and active participation in the contemporary world.

Jerzy Kolecki in *Teatr Lalek „Rabcio-Zdrowotek". Rabka 1949–1969* [20th-anniversary publication], Rabka, 1969

70.
The Tailor Thread by Kornel Makuszyński, dir. and stage design: Jan Dorman, Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre in Będzin, 1958, photo: archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

70.

Jan Dorman. Play and the Avant-garde

Justyna Lipko-Konieczna

Today the possibility to imagine the scale and vectors of the revolution that Jan Dorman started in Polish puppet theatre is offered by his archive, kept at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw. This collection of fascinating materials documenting the artist's legacy, organised by show and type of document, provides an invaluable insight into his philosophy and work method, which allowed him, in the special kind of theatre that is the theatre for children and youths, to discover the potential of a new theatre aesthetic, a new philosophy of education, and above all a new philosophy of art.

Dorman's theatre was extraordinarily demanding intellectually, yet highly democratic. At its centre was a spectator who was only learning the ropes of the dominant cultural code and assimilating that knowledge in a way determined by their age and sensibilities.

Does the gesture of making the child, with its imagination, language, behavioural strategy, the pillar and basis of theatrical research, preclude practicing theatre as a high art? Nothing could be more wrong. Dorman's artistic strategy combined various philosophical, aesthetic, and cultural trends, all of which shared the idea of the emancipation of the child as a subject that is getting

to know its social environment. The founder of the Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre (Teatr Dzieci Zagłębia) viewed the child as a causer of things, a subject who establishes meanings — and that was the essence of the revolution he started. Disagreeing with the objectification of children by social institutions such as school or theatre means redefining social, cultural, and institutional hierarchies. If the subjectivity of the child as a cultural recipient is to be seriously considered, then it is necessary to discard old educational models and start building new ones, relational rather than hierarchical.

Dorman found out early on how challenging a task he had set himself. I mean here the first period of his work, which he called the 'theatre of expressions'. Anecdotes about it, many of them concocted by the artist himself, abound. I think however that this early phase, based on his school-theatre experience, informed in turn his later reflection on theatre as an educational medium, a democratic and creative medium through which the child learns about the world. If the child is an equal partner in the circulation of knowledge, which it is obviously part of, then in communicating with it one needs to allow for its sensitivity, way of functioning, imagination. Allow not only on the basis of one's assumptions about what the child language and its governing rules are, but on the basis of psychological, pedagogical, and cultural research into the language and sensitivity of the 'other'. Dorman construed the child as a 'cultural other', which points to a fundamental ontological distinction between children and adults, manifested in their different notion of the essence of things, time, space, necessity, and causality. An educational system can ignore this radical difference, imposing a 'mature', that is rational and knowledge-based, way of thinking about things, or acknowledge it, thus opening a bridge between two possibilities of understanding and practicing reality — and art. Dorman decided to make it central to his work.

His attitude had been informed not only by his pre-war contacts with pedagogues advocating in educational theory a new, subject-oriented approach to the child, but also by the post-war realities of the Zagłębie region. Reading the archival materials left by Dorman, one appreciates how sharp an observer he was. His attention was drawn by ordinary behaviours, small gestures, the dramaturgy of commonplace interactions in urban space, by words and the way people accentuate them, by details of the environment, and even by the poetics of signboards and advertisements in shop windows or on the walls of war-damaged buildings. Jan Dorman was a Benjaminian flâneur and at the same time a researcher of culture, first and foremost those of its aspects that he considered theatrical and we today often call performative. One of the most dramatic observations that influenced his subsequent pedagogical and theatrical work was the disappearance of children's games from the backyards of the Zagłębie agglomeration. Dorman noticed also that the children he encountered at school as their art teacher spoke quietly or in whispers, nor could one hear their voices in the street. Both observations were tantamount to the reflection that war had deprived the child of playtime experience, causing a serious crisis in the structure of play.

At that time, having discontinued his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków because of the war, Dorman had got a job as an art teacher at a primary school in Sosnowiec; he and his wife, Janina, also ran an extra-curricular art club. He was faithful to a philosophy of pedagogy promoted by one of Poland's first cultural pedagogues, Stefan Szuman. An important figure for Dorman,

who attended his lectures in Kraków even before the war, Szuman's central premise in child education was to educate through art, to involve children in creative activities as much as possible.

In his early notes on theatrical experiments in work with children, Dorman didn't yet call his practice 'theatrical'. Running art activities in the school clubroom, organising kids' free time, he quickly discovered that the best way to help children memorise their school material was to use counting rhymes and rhythmical repetitions. Thus his charges were able to, say, quickly master a mathematical formula they earlier found difficult to grasp.

Dorman decided therefore to introduce play-elements to both his curricular and extra-curricular classes. If the kids didn't play in the streets, backyards, or school corridors, if they found it difficult to speak loudly and behave expressively and spontaneously, as in play, then, Dorman decided, its element had to be restored in a different way — through the initiation of theatrical situations. Those situations had to be open-ended so that the children found in them a space where they could let their imagination run free and process the initial situation in any direction they wanted. In those transpositions by children, following up on Dorman's initial propositions, there began to appear recurring elements: micro-activities, rhythms, words. Thus was developed the score of *Malowane dzbanki* (*Painted Jugs*) (1945), Dorman's first complete school theatre show. The children co-wrote the text, crafted the decorations and costumes, and played the roles. The rhymes the kids spontaneously recited during rehearsals were woven into the show. And indeed, characteristically for Dorman's later linguistic explorations, the text of the play pretty much borrowed its construction from children's counting-out rhymes — their structure and rhythm were a resource inherited for years, passed on to each other by the successive generations of children in the cultural space of a house, street, backyard. In the disappearance of street games and frolics, the blabber, the cultural noise that fuels the child imagination, Dorman saw a dangerous rupture in the formation of social bonds based on creative interaction. The medium of theatre would reinstate the lost element of experience, transgress the trauma of war in the initiation of interrupted cultural practices. The idiom of play and the related idiom of counting rhymes, which are nothing but creative ways of playing with language, served a communication function, making it possible to reinvest things, conditions, and events with meaning. Developing his method of pedagogical-theatrical work, the founder of Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre soon found out that the activity framework he proposed helped children to build a sense of self-worth and uniqueness and develop their sensibilities, but also to acquire the necessary social skills and competences that had been impaired by the war.

Let us ask, therefore, how Dorman viewed play and what this cultural, educational, and existential category meant for him. I think he treated it very seriously. His notes feel close to the thought of Johann Huizinga, as explicated in the book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. According to the cultural historian, the idiom of play is central to all cultural institutions: it is on play that the festival is predicated, every ritual stems from it. One could say that Huizinga viewed play as a fundamental cultural pattern and all cultural practices as deriving from it. If we tried, based on the ruminations of the author of *Homo ludens*, to define the basic function of play pursued by Dorman in his theatre, this would be the relational function, with relations construed broadly: both on the interpersonal level and

as a relationship with the world, one's more or less immediate environment, its animate and inanimate objects, flora and fauna. The idiom of play is not constituted by the relational function itself, but rather by the relational function emerging creatively and spontaneously between the self and the world. Discovering the world, the self becomes thus an author of meanings, which are constituted in play and in play abandoned or transformed, and the world, which it remains in such a creative relationship with, appears as a space of endless possibilities. It is not, however, just pliable material in the child's hands. If I speak here of the world as a space of endless possibilities, I mean the real world, consisting of the environment and all the entities inhabiting it, which the child enters in a creative, cognitive, partner relationship with. I think, therefore, that the child's seriousness in play is measured by its creative seriousness in its attitude to the world it inhabits and in which it has to find its way around as well as it can: its survival in the world and quality of life depend on it.

If, in the context of Dorman's theatre, we speak of the relational function as a fundamental function of play, we need to make it clear that it enters in a direct relationship of dependence with the cognitive function, thanks to which the child behind to understand the mechanisms governing the environment in which it is learning to live. Krystyna Miłobędzka wrote about this function in her book on Dorman. Her motto was: 'The child is unconsciously a poet. The poet is consciously a child.' Searching for a way to summarise the early period of Jan Dorman's work, a period aimed at developing a new formula of theatre as a creative laboratory which kids would shape with their imagination, expression, and activity, and through which they would regain the experience of play they had lost because of the war, I will refer to a most difficult existential, ethical, and philosophical question, which was asked after the Second World War by Theodor Adorno, namely, whether it is possible to write poetry after Auschwitz. Adorno was a philosopher and cultural critic who believed that the only way to emancipate humanity from totalitarian regimes, which had been the cause of war, led through art rather than rationalism — and that means there is no simple answer to his question. It also needs to be noted that while it happened to have been verbalised by the author of *Minima moralia*, the question troubled many. The post-war humanists became divided trying to answer it. Jan Dorman's reply to the ethical challenge implied by it was unique and emotionally moving. The possibility of writing poetry — construed here more broadly as art making in general — needs to be regained for the sake of the youngest participants in culture, those who constitute mankind's most defenceless and at the same time most creative and poetic resource. A congruent perspective expressed by Adorno in his theoretical writings and by Dorman in his theatre laboratory seems worth stressing. Both mistrusted logocentrism and rationality as the overriding order. In its stead, Dorman introduced the child's imagination, its language, its cognitive strategy as expressed in play and beyond it, including analogical rather than causal reasoning and a rejection of the existing hierarchy of meanings, replacing it with the free play of imagination that creates new connections and relationships between them. The idea, therefore, was to reformulate certain entrenched worldviews, to revisit them from the perspective of the child as an 'other', since the adult perspective — whether in art or in politics and great history — has failed so terribly.

It needs to be noted that for a long time Dorman abstained from addressing the war directly in his theatre, believing

that in a situation where young people had been so heavily traumatised this would be tantamount to pedagogical abuse. But images of war were concealed in many of his shows in particular characters, such Mother Courage from Bertolt Brecht's war drama, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, played here by Janina Dorman. Her presence was independent of the story and, in this sense, alogical and anarrative, for it referenced elements of the collective unconscious, revealing themselves and being revealed in those shows often in a poetic manner. The experience of war was also manifested through props (crutches and the figure of the wounded soldier in *The Happy Prince* (*Szczęśliwy Książę*) as an image that isn't elaborated upon but simply appears on stage) and music, including rhythm; in Dorman's earlier productions it was present as an unverbalised point of reference. But when the prospect of a world conflict became real again — the time of the Cold War and the arms race — he didn't hesitate to deal directly with the short-sighted and anti-humanitarian attitude of politicians and dictators vying for power at all cost, even at the price of war, by presenting the famous show, *What Time* (*Która godzina*), based on an eponymous children's book by Zbigniew Wojciechowski. A global war is prevented in it at the last moment precisely by children.

Dorman's second phase in developing a new language of children's and youth theatre within the genre of puppet theatre was the so called 'theatre of impressions'. He coined the term to mark a distinction between children's theatre made by young people (the 'theatre of expressions') and children's theatre made by adults. The former was the Experimental Child Theatre (Eksperymentalny Teatr Dziecka), founded and run by Dorman in Sosnowiec in 1945–1949. In 1951, it was relocated to Będzin and renamed as Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre. For organisational and structural reasons it was a live-actor ensemble, but Dorman was by no means disowning the first phase of his investigations. Having spent several years making theatre from the viewpoint of and with the 'other', researching their language, imagination, cognitive perspective, and so on, it was now necessary to pass on that knowledge through practice to a cast of actors. To do that, the artist needed to organise and systematise not only his method but also his philosophy. Thus began Dorman's activity as a theoretician and researcher of his own theatre. He understood that what he had been proposing and presenting in his successive shows as a new model of theatre for young audiences was a revolution in genre aesthetics and that it would be hard for him to find many fellow travellers in the Polish puppet-theatre community.
In 1951, after many years' efforts, the artist was assigned a professional theatre space and a regular budget from the city council and was able to start thinking about his work method in the long term and on many levels. He didn't rush things. Besides his reflections on the role of the play element, the archival materials documenting the second phase of Dorman's work mention also the names of the great reformers of European theatre: Bertolt Brecht, Vsevolod Meyerhold, or Antonin Artaud. Some time later, working with grown-up actors, Dorman will be testing their ideas on stage, compiling them with his own discoveries. Traces of those experiences will find their way into his subsequent scripts, where the auteur's deliberations coexist with, or actually replace, other stage directions. And so Dorman's 'theatre of expressions' was informed, on the one hand, by his children's theatre experience and the idea of the spectacle being based on the structure and poetics of children's play and, on the other, by the achievements of great avant-garde theatre makers. This gave rise to a unique, one-of-a-kind theatre,

the territory of which Dorman would keep exploring throughout the rest of his practice.

In this essay I would like to discuss two examples characteristic for the first phase of those experiments. One of Jan Dorman's most radical gestures was the gradual elimination of the screen. In puppet theatre, it was a necessary element of the show, concealing the puppet animators behind it, but also a conventional feature, bound up with the ontological premise underpinning the genre. When the mechanism of their animation was screened from view, the puppets seemed to be operated by the hand of an invisible yet omnipotent demiurge-creator. The purpose of the screen, therefore, was to help realise a particular metaphysical concept. The actors weren't perceived by the audience as causing things to happen in the show; they were an invisible machinery in a metaphysical manifestation of being that theatre made it possible to experience. It is hardly surprising that, having worked for many years with children as actors, Dorman began his revolution in the 'theatre of impressions' by doing away with the screen as an attribute that ensured the metaphysical effect in theatre. When kids play, they need no screens or curtains to call new realities into being; they creatively and playfully arrange ever new situations, shifting meanings, abolishing 'great-chain-of-being'-style hierarchies. For children, there is no qualitative or existential difference between an inanimate object, to which they ascribe various properties reserved by adults for humans, and parts of animate matter. The various elements from the child's environment, engaged in play as actors, are therefore vested with agency and subjectified, even though rational thought considers them inanimate, inert things. It is the child that, through its sensibility, attentiveness, and creativity, constitutes new potentialities in play, establishes new connections and relationships between people, animals, plants, and things, lends meaning to things culture considers unimportant, lowly, and unserious. Eliminating the screen, Dorman offered the young spectator a relationship based on equality and mutual respect. The gesture could also be understood as a declaration that in his theatre the viewer would be treated seriously, as a fully legitimate participant in the theatrical event, as someone whose sensibility and intellectual creativity no one doubted, in front of whom nothing needed to be pretended. Moreover, as a viewer of and participant in the show, the child was allowed to formulate meanings about what it saw and experienced. The cognitive process so triggered off was meant to be like play: dynamic, surprising, based on analogies, antinomies, synecdoches, metonymies, non-linear and open forms, contrasts. The names of things, traits, or activities were replaced with other names bearing to them a relationship of cause to effect, part to whole, content to container. For the work of the child imagination to be activated, the actors had to perform on stage like children at play. They had to establish the theatrical situation right in front of the kids, without pretending that it had been given beforehand. As a result, the child was included in the events transpiring on stage and enjoyed equal opportunities in the cognitive theatrical adventure. It thus became, from its earliest

71.
What Time, dir. and stage design: Jan Dorman, Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre in Będzin, 1964, photo: archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

71.

years, a cultural agent, a causative participant in culture, which it was part of in the first place. The elimination of the screen enabled also the extremely important relational function by dint of which the barrier of lifeless decoration between the children as the show's recipients and participants and the actors as its equally legitimate participants was removed. The artist wrote in 1966:

> In the child's room, besides the conversation between puppets, there is also direct contact between the child-actor and the puppet; besides the puppet-puppet relationship there is also the child-puppet one. The child is a witness of conversation and a companion of conversation. If this is so, then let us show the actor. Let us push the screen aside.... [In such a theatre], the actor doesn't have to pretend, the actor can play. The actor's role becomes more interesting because, eliminating the screen, we enter a stage world full of conventionality and metaphors. The actor changes roles directly in front of the viewer's eyes, playing multiple characters without actually being any single one of them. The actors speaks on behalf of the puppet, speaks to the puppet, and gets in touch with the audience.[1]

A second important example of the development by Dorman of revolutionary ideas in theatre was the concept, discussed some time ago separately by Krystyna Miłobędzka[2] and Ewa Tomaszewska[3], of introducing to two kindergartens in Będzin large theatrical objects that would later feature in a show. I mention here the performance, *The Duck and Hamlet* (*Kaczka i Hamlet*), which premiered at Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre in 1968, because I've been greatly impressed reading the classroom observation journals kept by the teachers at both kindergartens. Dorman asked the theatre carpenter to craft two large wooden ducks, one yellow, one blue, each on bicycle-size wheels. Each duck was equipped with a drawbar to lead and animate it. The ducks were brought to the kindergartens in agreement with the teachers, but without the kids' previous knowledge, and soon their presence was accepted. The children's reactions to them were recorded in the observation journals: what they did with them, how they behaved towards them, what they said to and about the ducks. The journals reflect how the kindergarten children included the ducks in their community, making them legitimate participants in it. After a couple of weeks, the props were unexpectedly removed from the kindergartens, and the kids received invitations for a theatre show. When they arrived on the given date and got seated in the audience, they saw their ducks on stage, now animated by actors.

What left me truly amazed was the discovery that Dorman used the contents of the journals as dramatic material; namely, the journal notes comprise almost a performance script inlaid with excerpts from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The actors' lines, their interactions with the ducks — the way they dressed them up, decorated, paraded around, played with, cared for, or were envious of — everything was derived from the journals. Transferring directly to stage from the kindergarten the social principles that the children had developed in their relationship with the object, Dorman makes it clear that children are highly capable of shaping different relationship models at the same time, and that those models can coexist on an agonic as well as consensual base, which — as in play — is subject to dynamic transformations. Their character is as creative as it is socially creative; having identified with the object and been subsequently distanced from it (when it was placed on stage), the child becomes aware of the processual nature of social

72.
The Duck and Hamlet, dir. and stage design: Jan Dorman, Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre in Będzin, 1968, photo: Zdzisław Kempa, archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

72.

mechanisms, which it often unconsciously participates in and which it can now distance itself from, an important aspect of adolescence. The cognitive function of Jan Dorman's theatre becomes clearly pronounced here.

In *The Happy Prince*, based on a story by Oscar Wilde, we find, in the Statue of the Happy Prince, a special example of an object's subjectivity being established in relation to the actor and in front of the child as a legitimate participant in the theatrical situation. This is illustrated by the following fragment of the script:

Actor: walks with his props around a clothes hanger; starts singing, quietly at first, then louder and louder, the song becoming uneasy and predatory:

'On a high plinth, towering over the city, there stood the Statue of the Happy Prince'.

The actor leaves the hanger and walks over to the stage ramp to address the audience directly:

'It was hugely admired too. Hugely'.

The actor returns to the hanger, starts circling it again, his arm raised, singing:

'It was all covered with delicate gold leaf'.

The actor again leaves the hanger and says:

'And it was hugely admired too. Hugely'.

The actor returns to the hanger as something interrupts his words, forcing him to restart the enchanted circling ritual.

'His eyes were of shiny sapphire, and an immense ruby glistened on the sheath of his sword'.

The actor still hasn't had enough of walking around this dusty hanger encumbered with charts borrowed from Brecht's plays — how long will convention imprison him —

'It was as beautiful as the weathercock. Only less useful.'

Does this actor really have to repeat the same words and actions over and over again.[4]

The above description of a theatrical situation offers an insight into the process — occurring through theatrical action in the imagination of the child as that action's recipient and interpreter — of the establishment of the play's protagonist: the plinth-based Statue of the Happy Prince. Through a convention of ritualised play, the child is made to recognise the protagonist in the clothes hanger, around which the actor's repetitive routine is centred. The actor walks around the hanger, singing over and over again the phrase, 'On a high plinth, towering over the city, there stood the Statue of the Happy Prince.' Then he faces the audience and lets it know how the protagonist just established is to be treated: 'It was hugely admired. Hugely.' The description provided suggests that the statue is covered with gold leaf, has sapphires for eyes, and a ruby in the sheath of its sword. The actor resumes his circling around the statue and his incantations, from which further information is derived. 'Why are so sad, Prince?', the actor asks.

In *Men, Play and Games*[5], Roger Caillois discerns four play forms: agon (competition), alea (chance games), mimicry (mimesis, role playing), and ilinx (vertigo, a practice known to all children). The record of a theatrical action performed by an actor contains, therefore, a clear trace of Dorman's work method, emphasised by his own questions in italics. Questions that, as readers in this case but also as potential authors of theatre for young audiences, we should ask ourselves, keeping in mind the child as the addressee of its stage practices. Dorman didn't require the young viewer to simply accept the author's text; the text would 'click' provided that the actor on stage or the director in the performance would find the right formula for it. That is why the director referred to the actor's action with the following words: 'He wants to convey to the audience the text entrusted to him by the author. But why failure? Isn't the word enough?' And so, in front of the kids' eyes, the actor changes the convention: he stops reciting the lines realistically, cocks his head, and starts singing. This is where we find the essence of the revolution proposed by Jan Dorman. The artist talks to children about the different theatre conventions, about the components of a shared theatrical situation, and this conversation is like a playful game in which viewer-age hierarchies as well as hierarchies between means of expression or genres have been annulled.

The scripts left by the artist, available in his archive, his comments for television, the accounts

of those who worked with him[6] or those who remember his shows, make it possible to understand the key principles of his theatrical method. The concepts of processuality and transformation (as in laboratory work, which is exactly how the founder of the Experimental Children's Theatre construed his practice) seem apt here. In theatre as a laboratory, where meanings constantly shift and beget new ones, the show never ends and, as an endless cognitive act (remaining in the viewers' memory even after it has concluded on stage), opens human perception to new intellectual territories. Jan Dorman thought of theatre as inherent to education for living in culture.[7] The destabilisation of signs and meanings, the loosening of causal relationships, the distortion of entrenched denotations and referents — all those procedures served to engage the audience in the show, but also to build a strong and lasting bond between the work and the viewer. They opened up a space of creative speculation, of searching for one's own interpretation

73.

73.
The Happy Prince by Oskar Wilde, dir. and stage design: Jan Dorman, Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre in Będzin, 1967, photo: Zdzisław Kempa, archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

of the performance, and finally of finding one's own place in the order of meaning.

A fragment of an archival recording shows Jan Dorman among his actors. He spreads out sheets of paper on which children's drawings can be seen; those are works created in response to the show *Pony* (*Konik*)[8]. One of the actors comments on a drawing they have selected:

> The child draws what it feels. Look at those drawings. Each features human figures. Except this one. There are only two elements here. A ladder, which the protagonist climbs up, and a horse, but a horse without a rider. So the child leaves place for whom? For itself.[9]

Dorman replies:

> Children perform. They are not outside the show. They are inside it. Inside. So if they sit so [Dorman props his chin on one hand, imitating the childish gesture of wonder or concentration] and comment, it means they perform and their commentary belongs to the order of the performance, it is not outside the show — it is part of it.[10]

The recipient that Dorman directed his theatrical message at was the child. The motto, 'Our theatre doesn't define thoughts — it encourages thinking', is aimed, with extraordinary empathy, precisely at children, formulated with them in mind. This is the main line of Dorman's theatrical revolution. Theatre is meant to create a shared space for the germination of free thought while respecting the different experiences and backgrounds of its recipients and treating them as equal co-authors of the theatrical situation.

[1]
Jan Dorman, 'Lalka w inscenizacji. Notatki z praktyki reżysera', *Teatr Lalek*, no. 1/2, 1968.

[2]
Krystyna Miłobędzka, *W widnokręgu Odmieńca. Teatr, dziecko, kosmogonia*, Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2008.

[3]
Ewa Tomaszewska, 'Kaczka i Hamlet. Eksperyment teatralno-pedagogiczny', in *Sztuka w edukacji i terapii*, ed. Mirosława Knapik and Wiesława A. Sacher, Kraków: Wydział Pedagogiki i Psychologii Zakład Arteterapii Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Impuls, 2004.

[4]
Jan Dorman, script for *The Happy Prince*, based on the story by Oscar Wilde, Będzin, 1967, p. 3.

[5]
Roger Caillois, *Men, Play and Games*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

[6]
Interviews with Dorman's collaborators, including his actors, carried out as part of the project, *Dorman. An Open Archive*, at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw, provide an invaluable testimony here.

[7]
That is how he justified introducing high-culture elements to theatre for young audiences, e.g., the figure of Hamlet in *The Duck and Hamlet*. Watching a *Hamlet* performance as a grown-up, the viewer will awaken in themselves a memory of the perspective of an 'other, and their theatrical experience will acquire the dimension of a meeting with oneself as a participant in culture.

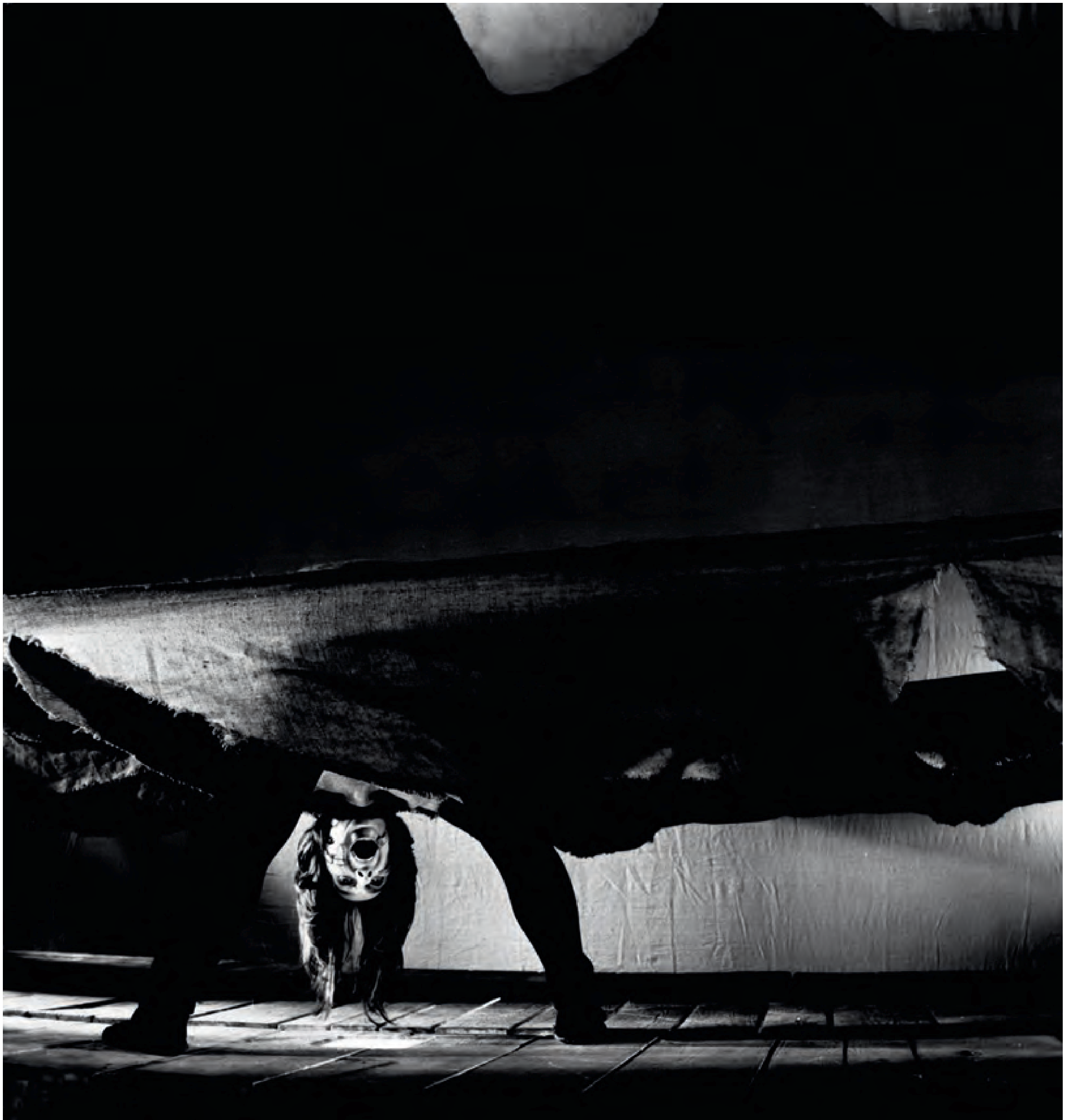
[8]
Pony, dir. J. Dorman, Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre, Będzin, premiere 8 February 1975.

[9]
Jan Dorman i jego teatr, documentary film, dir. Janusz Kidawa, 1985.

[10]
Ibidem.

74.
Talking with My Own Leg, dir. Leokadia Serafinowicz, stage design: Jan Berdyszak, 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Poznań, 1965, archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

74.



Leokadia Serafinowicz and Her Theatre of Trans-generational Community

Dominik Kuryłek

> The child has the creative readiness of a poet. I define the centre of theatrical action and give the actors an object to start a plot or contrive an intrigue. That's all. The child responds to an impulse sent 'from the stage' for themselves — in themselves — with its own vision of theatre, sometimes bearing witness to this by drawing.[1]

The entire lifetime work of the director, stage designer, actor, and poet, Leokadia Stefanowicz (1915–2007) — an extraordinary career by any measure — was focused on the child. The Poznań-based 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre (Teatr Lalki i Aktora Marcinek), which she ran from 1960, became one of the most eminent puppet theatres in the country, turning

Poznań into a hub of art for the youngest audience.[2] Stefanowicz put her excellent management skills to full use here and built on her long-time experience of working for children's stages including Kraków's 'Groteska' theatre (1948–1956), Wrocław's 'Rozmaitości' (1956–1958), and Bielsko-Biała's 'Banialuka' (1958–1960). She also had the gift of recruiting talented artists and putting their input to the forefront without claiming too much credit for herself[3], and the collaboration ethos was fundamental to the project. The director, the stage designer, the composer, the actors, the visual artists, the lights operators, the wiring technicians — everyone felt responsible for the show.[4] As a result, the authorship of the 'Marcinek' productions is, as researchers admit, hard to precisely ascertain.[5] All were a result of collective involvement, but wouldn't have happened if it were not for the person of Serafinowicz and her original concept of art for children, which she developed working with outstanding Polish and international puppet artists and perfected with an inner circle of collaborators that included Wojciech Wieczorkiewicz, Krystyna Miłobędzka, and Jan Berdyszak, among others.

Serafinowicz's team set its sights first and foremost on the main recipient of puppet theatre — the child. The purpose of theatre, they argued, wasn't simply to teach[6], but to engage the young spectators' imagination so that the show, initiated by grown-up actors, would actually by created by them. Viewing such a spectacle would be like playing an imagination-stimulating game.

Most suitable for achieving this goal, Serafinowicz and her colleagues thought, was puppet theatre akin to 'visual theatre':

> The role of children's theatre is to acquaint young viewers with the art language … to teach them conventions … to nourish the child's aesthetic sensitivity and enrich its imagination … to encourage the child to interpret events or emotions not through the all-explaining word but by solving the riddle of a gesture or situation.[7]

Recognising kids' extraordinary ability of critical thinking, Serafinowicz wasn't afraid to tackle difficult issues in her theatre for the youngest.

> Treating our spectator seriously, we feel obliged to confront them with issues of contemporary life. Without refusing them the right to joy and fun, and to emotions, we want to be telling him the truth about the complexity of life, the complexity of the world, the necessity of making choices. This is our need of realism.… Truth attained is more valuable than truth received. To teach critical judgment, to teach thinking — those are the precepts of our work. We also feel obliged to confront our viewer with issues of contemporary art. We want to talk to them about life in the language of contemporary literature, contemporary visual arts, contemporary music, to teach them to look at and engage with contemporary art forms …[8]

The painter, Jan Berdyszak, whose skills as set designer Serafinowicz was quick to recognise, appreciated children's theatre because it allowed him to make art for an audience possessed of a virtually boundless imagination.[9] Berdyszak believed that the child is open to new, contemporary art forms and, unlike the adult, free from cultural stereotypes. A young audience is able to accept even the most radical artistic convention, but doesn't tolerate falseness on the stage and makes that very clear. Berdyszak was also appreciative of kids'

75–76.
Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds by Krystyna Miłobędzka, dir. and stage design: Leokadia Serafinowicz, 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Poznań, 1969, photo: Grażyna Wyszomirska, archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

ability to join the creative process. The best way to get in touch with young people was to leave them space for their own ingenuity.[10] Theatre for children is capable of stimulating the child's creative abilities, developing its individual skills, and forging a unique community between children and grown-ups.

Berdyszak's ideas resonated with a co-author of the successes of 'Marcinek', the talented poet Krystyna Miłobędzka, whom Serafinowicz successfully recruited to write for the Poznań theatre scene.[11] What Miłobędzka had in mind was 'poetic theatre'[12], centred not on the puppet but on the juvenile spectator. She paid much attention to the specificity of child perception, to the way the child views and tries to participate in the adult world. She employed children's language and customs in order to encourage independent thinking, ingenuity, and activity.[13] 'What you produce for the child must be interesting. It is necessary to maintain a balance between didactic elements and that which is formulated in the language of art, that which is play. The point in theatre is to avoid the child remaining but a passive viewer'[14], she wrote.

Miłobędzka also sought to make sure that children creatively contributed to the spectacle and that a special bond emerged between them and the grown-up actors. She acknowledged that for a child, art is 'yet another of the realities that they are exploring'.[15]

Being aware of the role of sound in captivating audiences, Leokadia Serafinowicz frequently used contemporary music for her shows. She was particularly interested in jazz improvisations alluding to ordinary sounds from the daily reality as well as in intriguing melodies produced using modern technology. Not surprisingly, perhaps, she early on contacted one of the most progressive contemporary music

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77.
Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds by Krystyna Miłobędzka, dir. and stage design: Leokadia Serafinowicz, 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Poznań, 1969, photo: Grażyna Wyszomirska, archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

77.

composers, Krzysztof Penderecki, and brought him on board for a number of children's operas, the most famous of which was *The Bravest of Knights* (*Najdzielniejszy z rycerzy*) (1965).

Miłobędzka, Berdyszak, Wieczorkiewicz, Penderecki, and other friends of 'Marcinek', and above all the director, Leokadia Serafinowicz, sought to make theatre not only for children but also *with* children, a theatre where the 'child will identify with the show's author and, sitting in the audience, will be present on stage'.[16]

Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds (1969)

One of the most successful shows in this spirit was *Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds* (*Siała baba mak*).[17] It was translated into French, German, English, Spanish, and Italian, and performed about eight hundred times in Poland and abroad, e.g., in Liège, Venice, West Berlin, or Havana, on theatre stages and in public space. It invariably won acclaim from kids and grown-ups alike.[18]

The original title refers to a children's game. The main characters are Telltale (Skarżypyta), the Clowns (Pajace), and King Lul (Król Lul). The show features children's activities sourced from children's folklore[19], with the protagonists playing traditional games such as *siała baba mak*, *król lul*, *kółko graniaste*, etc., but also games invented by the author, Krystyna Miłobędzka. They play on invisible instruments, deliver speeches, play war, and smoke make-believe cigarettes, using props, gestures, and the spoken word. Following the logic and rhythm of child play, the spectacle does without a precise storyline. Telltale joins the goings-on with the intention of turning play into reality. According to Joanna Żygowska, the main protagonist is a 'spoilsport' — he wants to be more important than others, turning play into a competition where power is at stake. The show characteristically features sudden decelerations and accelerations typical for child play as well as, one of Miłobędzka's trademarks, lots of movement: of actors, objects, associations, and meanings.[20]

Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds can be interpreted as a play that concerns itself with power. The author asks: who organises reality, who decides that it should change, and how is such change effected? How should the individual behave towards the power-wielding group? How does imagination stimulate change? Such serious subjects were, Serafinowicz and her team believed, very much understandable for children.[21]

Miłobędzka's original concept was for actors, dressed in grey costumes and equipped with props 'appearing as if by magic', to draw decorations on onstage screens.[22] But Berdyszak came up with a different idea — he proposed producing a variable, modular set of wicker baskets and loops that, 'animated' by the actors, would transform in real time into royal thrones, towers, gates, bridges, cannons, telescopes, nesting holes, hiding places, or just walls.[23] The design also made it possible to deconstruct the whole theatrical set-up. At some point, the baskets created a theatre-within-theatre on the stage, a kind of partition screen, behind which there performed puppets/masks worn by the actors.[24] Costumes were ambiguous too: King Lul, for example, wore a red mantle and a red crown, to which was attached a narrow bail with dangling arms and legs and a quasi-beard, a mask that was also a puppet. The Clowns were dressed in costumes that had faces painted on the knees and elbows. They wore hats with little clownish arms, legs, and heads. Those masks/puppets

were miniature copies of the actors themselves, duplicating their identity, whereas Telltale's mask consisted of a nose-covering trunk and oversized ears, a reference, according to Violetta Sajkiewicz, to an 'elephant in a china shop' — a clumsy person, someone appearing in a wrong place at a wrong time.[25] The mask changed owners during the show, transferring the character's personality onto different actors.

Once the sets were ready, the director began working with the actors. The archive of the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw keeps her notes for the spectacle, in which she very systematically explains her meaning.[26] Reading Miłobędzka's play, the actors should notice that it causes a 'sense of imbalance, disorientation, a nice feeling of oscillating between the consciousness of a child and that of an adult'. Serafinowicz was thus encouraging the actors to play for both kids and grown-ups, to introduce the spectators to a world where the relationship between the child and the adult is fluid. A show performed in this 'ambivalent state' is meant to emphasise 'how much onstage situations resemble real ones — how similar we are to kids and how much kids resemble us'. The actors should remember that for child-adult dialogue to be satisfactory, it has to discuss issues meaningful for both sides, using language comprehensive for all. Kids are very attentive and highly imaginative viewers, and they shouldn't be treated in a condescending manner:

> The child is a human being with a lot of sensitivity and great creative abilities, just not that much experience … it has its own sense of judgement. It is a free-thinking viewer, unconstrained and very creative indeed. A viewer who doesn't arrive at the theatre with preconceived tastes, who accepts everything unselfishly.

Serafinowicz encouraged her actors to make dynamic theatre: conflict-based, surprising, and emphasising the mutability and alterity of theatrical forms. A theatre meant as a 'first school of dialectics — a dialectics of thought and imagination'. She put together all the components of the show — text, decorations, actors — in such a way so as to inspire critical thinking about the surrounding reality in both kids and adults. The text was based on children's folklore, familiar to the young viewers, and the actors not so much performed as simply played on stage. The result was visual theatre, easily comprehensible to children, one that Serafinowicz and her team considered most suitable for stimulating young people's development and kindling their imagination.

Art for Kids . . . and Adults

Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds can be perceived as Leokadia Serafinowicz's artistic manifesto, but also as her critique of the conventional definition of childhood, which in Poland fifty years ago was regarded as unserious, carefree, requiring constant scrutiny and supervision

78.
Fairy Tales, dir. Krystyna Cysewska and others, stage design: Jan Berdyszak, 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Poznań, 1965, photo: archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

from the (wiser) adults.[27] Serafinowicz challenged the binary child–adult opposition, annulling the hierarchical relationship between the teaching grown-up and the kid being taught: both received an equal chance to learn from each other. This was consistent with concepts developed by psychologist Maria Tyszkowa, who collaborated with Serafinowicz and admitted years later that their work together had served as inspiration for her research.[28] Tyszkowa stressed that the child is an 'entity that is becoming', and art is meant to help it build its own development perspective and to provide it with building material for mastering the surrounding reality and creating a new reality in its own actions.

> By making art and experiencing its works, the child gains a chance to multiply those experiences that the real world provides while temporarily freeing itself from this world's pressures and requirements. Contact with art, therefore, makes one richer inside and allows one to develop a sense of distance to oneself and the real world as well as giving one the springing power necessary to go beyond what one has already achieved.[29]

78.

The role of art in the psychological development of both children and adults was viewed similarly by Serafinowicz herself. Making art for the child, she emphasised its similarity to the grown-up, convinced that the two could operate together in the space of art.

Theatre of Trans-generational Community

What sociology understands by generational structure is a set of practices whereby some people are defined as 'children' and some as 'adults'. The categories of 'childhood' and 'adulthood' remain in this process in a constant yet unequal relationship. Pointing to a similarity between children's studies and women's studies, Leena Alanen has arrived in her research on generationality at the conclusion that the very concept is discriminatory against children and that childhood has to be researched in a way that allows for the child's perspective.[30] Not only are childhood and adulthood sociological constructs, but so is the distinction itself. It seems that, by focusing on similarities, Serafinowicz (and her whole team) wanted to deconstruct the distinction and create

instead a theatrical space of trans-generational community. Similarities between children and grown-ups were exploited as platforms for stimulating the work of imagination regardless of age. *Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds* was an excellent example of this way of thinking. A striving towards community with the spectator was characteristic for 1960s theatre, where the stage was meant to be open to the audience, and vice versa. Compared with phenomena such as The Living Theatre, Bread and Puppet Theatre, or Odin Teatret, Serafinowicz's theatre stands out in that its purpose was to realise a trans-generational community of kids and adults.[31]

The Problem (?) of Serafinowicz

Although the roots of children's theatre in Poland go back to the pre-war years, and despite the fact that after 1945 this art form developed rapidly, thanks to the commitment of individuals and the support of state-sponsored institutions[32], examples of theatre centres that actually treated the child in a way that allowed for the specificity of its perception were few and far between. Theatre that sought to be comprehensible to both kids and grown-ups, fully recognising of the potential and specificity of the medium, let alone theatre geared towards trans-generational community, was almost unique. Besides 'Marcinek', such was Jan Dorman's Children of Zagłębie Region Theatre (Teatr Dzieci Zagłębia).[33] Unlike Dorman, however, Serafinowicz was constantly searching for new means of expression, constantly experimenting with form. She staged shows where the puppets were reduced to objects, as in *The Bathhouse* (*Łaźnia*) (1967) or *The Cuttlefish* (*Mątwa*) (1968). She drew extensively on folklore and folk culture, producing the spectacular children's operas, *The Bravest of Knights* and *Katie Who Lost Her Geese* (*O Kasi, co gąski zgubiła*) (1967). She played up the relationship between the actor and the puppet, with the latter acquiring a symbolic function in the animator's hands, as in *The Wedding* (*Wesele*) (1969) or *Wanda* (1970). Deciding to collaborate with outstanding artists, she constantly subjected her own ideas to critical review, which helped her develop various modes of communication with the youngest viewer. Adopting mutability and collectivity as her artistic method, she was akin to those contemporary artists who looked towards collective work as a counterbalance to oppressive social systems.[34] In the 1960s and 1970s, when the art world favoured distinct, usually male, individualities, this kind of attitude sentenced the outstanding director to obscurity, from which she has only recently begun to be brought back.[35] The few publications devoted to Serafinowicz confirm the uniqueness of her work[36], but much remains to be done in this respect, including in the field of the visual arts, which have recently paid more and more attention to women's art and art for children.[37]

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79.
The Fox Song by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, adaptation: Leokadia Serafinowicz, dir. Wojciech Wieczorkiewicz, stage design and puppet design: Jan Berdyszak, 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Poznań, 1961, photo: Brunon Cynalewski, archive of Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw

79.

1
Plastyka kreująca teatr dla dzieci. III Biennale Sztuki dla Dziecka, exh. cat., Poznań: BWA, 1977, n.pag.

2
Leokadia Serafinowicz was the managing director and art director of the 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre in Poznań in 1960–1976, and a programming consultant there through 1980. She was also involved in organisational work. See *Leokadia Serafinowicz, Dokumentacja działalności*, ed. Honorata Sych,'Lalkarze — Materiały do Biografii' series, vol. 12, ed. Marek Waszkiel, Łódź: POLUNIMA, Pracownia Dokumentacji Teatru Lalek przy Teatrze Arlekin, 1996.

3
As suggested by the enunciations of her colleagues and friends in the catalogue of her monographic exhibition; see *Teatr lalek Leokadii Serafinowicz*, ed. Robert Fizek et al., Poznań: Ogólnopolski Ośrodek Sztuki dla Dzieci i Młodzieży, Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, 1986.

4
An anniversary catalogue published in 1971 lists visuals personnel, foremen, wiring technicians, carpenters, dressmakers, etc.; see *Teatr Lalki i Aktora w Poznaniu, 1945–1970*, ed. Andrzej Górny, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1971.

5
See for example Violetta Sajkiewicz, *Przestrzeń animowana. Plastyka teatralna Jana Berdyszaka*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2000, p. 33

6
Henryk Jurkowski noted that schools had such expectations towards theatre; see idem, 'Aktualne problemy teatru dla dzieci i młodzieży', in *Sztuka i dziecko. Materiały I Biennale Sztuki dla Dziecka*, Poznań: Wydział Kultury Powiatowej Rady Narodowej, 1973, p. 190.

7
Teatr Lalki i Aktora w Poznaniu, 1945–1979, p. 14.

8
Leokadia Serafinowicz, 'Nie tylko dzieciom', *Polska*, no. 4, 1971, pp. 13–20.

9
Sajkiewicz, p. 35.

10
Ibid.

11
The following plays by Miłobędzka were staged there: *Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds* (*Siała baba mak*) (1969), *Homeland* (*Ojczyzna*) (1974), *In the Circle* (*W kole*) (1974), *Janosik the Highwayman* (*Janosik*) (1975), *The Tale of ...* (*Bajka o ...*) (1976), *Ptam* (1977).

12
A term suggested by Joanna Żygowska, author of a recent monograph on the poet; see eadem, *Skrzydła dla dzieci. Teatr poetycki Krystyny Miłobędzkiej*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Pasaże, 2018, pp. 57–70.

13
Ibid., p. 64.

14
'Dziecko i teatr. Z Krystyną Miłobędzką rozmawia Maciej M. Kozłowski', in *Wielogłos. Krystyna Miłobędzka w recenzjach, szkicach, rozmowach*, ed. Jarosław Borowiec, Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2012, p. 587.

15
Krystyna Miłobędzka, *W widnokręgu odmieńca. Dziecko — teatr — kosmogonia*, Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2008, p. 61.

16
Ibid.

17
The show was directed by Serafinowicz and designed by Berdyszak. It can be supposed that Wieczorkiewicz's accompanied the making of the spectacle in a less formal way, e.g., through discussions, since during this time he was preparing in Lublin another important 'Marcinek' production, *This is Poland* (*To jest Polska*).

18
'Yet in Leokadia Serafinowicz's adaptation, this experimental play by Miłobędzka is received by children with enthusiasm and genuine joy'; see Ewa Piotrowska, 'O prawdziwym teatrze', *Nurt*, no. 7, 1970.

19
After Jerzy Cieślikowski, children's folklore can be understood to include rhymes, chants, game-play phrases, sayings, games, pranks, etc.; see idem, *Wielka zabawa. Folklor dziecięcy, wyobraźnia dziecka, wiersze dla dzieci*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków: Ossolineum, 1967. Żygowska suggests broadening the term by referencing its English-language equivalent, childlore, which points rather to traditional knowledge, traditional stories, to child wisdom; see eadem, p. 23.

20
Żygowska, pp. 38, 49, 54, 61–70, 106.

21
On *Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds*, see more in ibid., pp. 104–110.

22
See Krystyna Miłobędzka, *Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds. A Revue for Children* (*Siała baba mak. Rewia dla dzieci*), p. 1, typescript in the Folder no. 70 of the Leokadia Serafinowicz home archive, archive of the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw.

23
Violetta Sakiewicz has proposed analysing the modularity of these modular set-ups in the context of minimal art; see eadem, pp. 88–89.

24
A tautology characteristic for conceptual art.

25
Sajkiewicz, p. 113.

26
All quotations from Leokadia Serafinowicz's text for the programme of an Italian tour, manuscript in the Folder no. 70 of the Leokadia Serafinowicz home archive, archive of the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw.

27
Krzysztof Kosiński, *Oficjalne i prywatne życie młodzieży w czasach PRL*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Rosner i Wspólnicy, 2006.

[28] Maria Tyszkowa, 'Moje spotkania z Leokadią Serafinowicz', in *Teatr lalek Leokadii Serafinowicz…*, pp. 49–50.

[29] *Sztuka dla najmłodszych. Teoria — Recepcja — Oddziaływanie*, ed. Maria Tyszkowa, Warsaw and Poznań: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1977, p. 6.

[30] Leena Alanen, *Explorations In Generational Analyses*, in *Conceptualizing Adult-child Relations*, ed. eadem and Berry Mayall, London: Routledge, 2001.

[31] Its similarity to community theatre was noted by Violetta Sajkiewicz, pp. 77–78.

[32] More on theatre for children in pre- and post-war Poland through the 1970s, see Wanda Renikowa, 'Tradycje teatru dla dzieci w Polsce', in *Sztuka i dziecko…*, pp. 161–182; Henryk Jurkowski, 'Aktualne problemy teatru dla dzieci i młodzieży', in ibid., pp. 182–199. On the history of puppet theatres in Poland, see Marek Waszkiel, *Teatr lalek w dawnej Polsce*, Warsaw: Fundacja Akademii Teatralnej im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie, Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza w Warszawie, 2018; idem, *Dzieje teatru lalek w Polsce, 1944–2000*, Warsaw: Akademia Teatralna im. Aleksandra Zelwerowicza, 2012.

[33] On the theatre of Jan Dorman, see Krystyna Miłobędzka, *Teatr Jana Dormana. Kto jest kim w sztuce dziecka*, Poznań: Ogólnopolski Ośrodek Sztuki dla Dzieci i Młodzieży, 1990; Ewa Tomaszewska, *Jan Dorman. Poeta teatru*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Śląsk, 2010; *Archiwum Jana Dormana. Inspiracje, praktyki, refleksje*, ed. Wiktoria Siedlecka-Dorosz, Marzenna Wiśniewska, Warsaw: Instytut Teatralny im. Zygmunta Raszewskiego w Warszawie, 2017.

[34] As, for example, in the exhibition *Peer-to-Peer. Collective Practices in New Art*, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 2018, curator: Agnieszka Pindera.

[35] Worth remembering here is the feminist research project HyPaTia, aimed at researching, bring back from oblivion, documenting, and popularising knowledge about the role of women in the history of Polish theatre (hypatia.pl).

[36] Besides the above-mentioned publications, several master's theses have recently been written on the artist as well as a biographical note: Marek Waszkiel, *Leokadia Serafinowicz*, in 'Słownik scenografów teatru lalek 1945–1995', *Teatr Lalek* (1995), no.1–2.

[37] To mention but the monumental research project and exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, *Century of the Child. Growing by Design 1900–2000*. Alas, the performative arts, including puppet theatre, were missing from the show.

80.
Music Box, 1960, dir. Jerzy Kotowski,
stage design: Jerzy Krawczyk,
Se-Ma-For Studio of Small Film
Forms in Łódź

80.

Potentially Dangerous. Polish Post-war Stop-Motion Puppet Animation

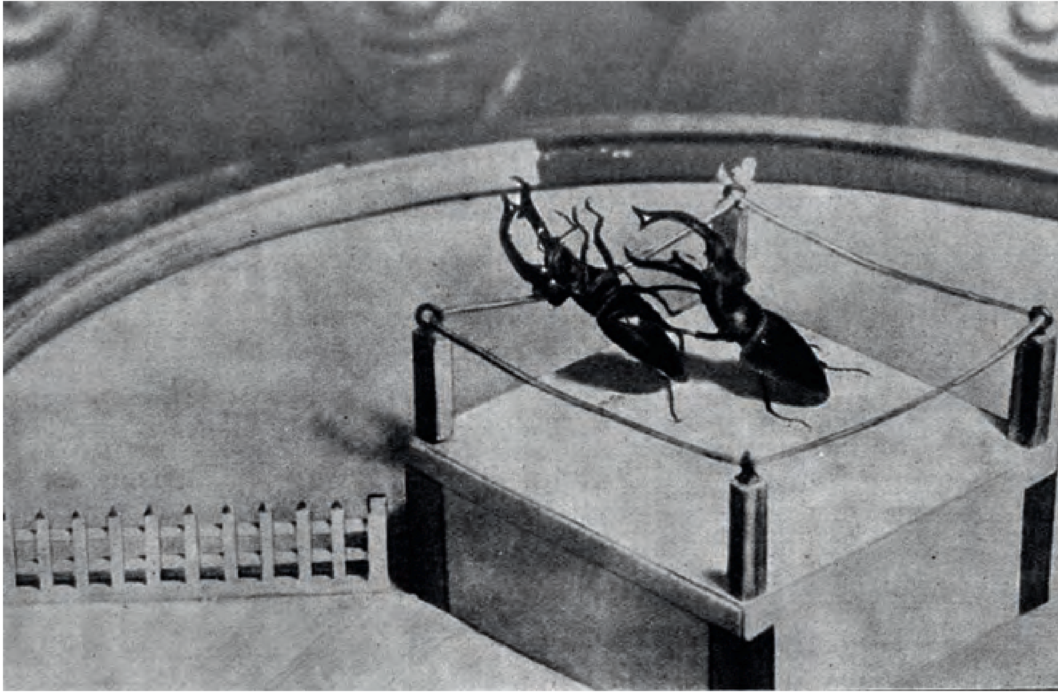
Adriana Prodeus

A Forgotten Tradition

It is significant that Zenon Wasilewski's 1947 *During the Reign of Krakus the King* (*Za króla Krakusa*) is considered as the founding myth of Polish puppet animation, whereas the pre-war tradition is forgotten. If a starting point so defined is called into question at all, it is solely to bring up the film's fragile predecessor, *Krakus* (1939), which didn't survive the war. That Feliks Kuczkowski's 'synthetic' works, free plasticine animations, came first is mentioned in specialist literature only.[1] One of Kuczkowski's films showed, in close-up, the face of a spectator laughing at the sight of a tiny actor sitting on his nose, while in another one, *The Conductor* (*Dyrygent*, 1922),

81.
Władysław Starewicz, *Fighting Beetles*, 1910

81.



the titular character had an ample forehead 'to be able to frown upon the viewers with his wrinkles' to the rhythm of music. Finally, his commercials — *Beetroot the Nurturer and the Sacharinians* (*Burak żywiciel i sacharyniaki*, 1929–1930) and *Pudding* (1929) — formal hijinks and fantastic anecdotes, improvised, script-less 'vision cinema'.

This forgotten tradition, easygoing and witty, free of the duty to depict national themes and disengaged from the harness of a linear plot, could, therefore, serve as a much stronger source of inspiration for Polish puppet film than the failed, boring adaptation of a legend about the origins of the Polish nation state. It could, were it not for the fact that no vision films have been preserved, just some publicity stills, and Kuczkowski has been memorialised for posterity only by Karol Irzykowski, as the mythical Canis de Canis.[2]

More vital beginnings of Polish puppet film should, therefore, be sought nearer the origins of cinema itself, and not in Georges Meliès's Paris, but in Kaunas, in 1910. It was there that the entomologist, Władysław Starewicz, filmed fighting stag beetles, accidentally producing a work of puppet animation. Besides the context of how the protagonists are

'killed' and then stop-motion 'revived (an idea present in most nineteenth-century treatises on puppetry), horror in his works is a result of the viewer's confrontation with their own lifeless reflection. In this sense, puppet animation always looks into death; it makes us meet our doppelgänger. Starewicz, however, has failed to be recognised as the founding father of Polish animation because he had no followers and didn't, save for declarations of Polish identity, participate in the artistic life here, and perhaps also because the generic plots of his films smack too much of the musty prop shop of petit-bourgeois theatre. That is a pity, for beyond the bare outlines of plots there lurks truly Dantean horror here, with the insect-headed knights and grotesque fantastic figures amid mysterious nature establishing a surreal pedigree of Polish animation thirty seven years before Wasilewski's film. The pagan-times story, glossing over belief in gods despite showing a Svetovid statue in one of the scenes, and glorying instead an attitude of obedience to authority, has in turn been widely hailed as the beginning of Polish animation since the pre-1989 era.

Cineoptics

If we traced a development line from Kuczkowski's pre-war experiments, the tradition's follower would be Andrzej Pawłowski, author of the famous *Cineforms* (*Kineformy*, 1957), which were freely improvised for-camera. First, however, in 1950, he presented their director predecessor:

> A large, flat, handy suitcase. It opens, revealing a stage frame, a curtain, and upstage a mirror titled at 45 degrees towards the spectator. A puppet theatre.... Here the puppet is horizontal, the actor is seated comfortably at the back, whereas the viewer, thanks to the mirror, sees all the puppets in a normal, vertical position, but doesn't see the mirror itself.[3]

Another project was epidiascope theatre with puppets several centimetres tall, a large screen, and a lens that projected a 'blurry, distant image which grew closer and sharper to then melt away again into indistinct forms'.[4] Pawłowski combined here the medium of photogram with the idea of a show whose every performance is unique.

Kamil Kopania writes so on the significance of theatre as a machine of moving images: '[Pawłowski] considered puppet theatre as a medium for ambitious artistic experiments based primarily on light, colour, sound, and optical deformations of the puppet.'[5] This is confirmed by another project developed by the artist in the 1960s, namely, sculptures that could not be seen but only touched in a kind of tactile theatre. 'They have been placed inside boxes that have a hole to put your hand into. The hand experiences through touch the sculpture's surface and shape — the directional senses, muscular and osteal. Quite a different and new reception.'[6]

The concept of animated shapes, construed broadly, including as experiments with the recording of changeable colour effects, returns in *Cineforms* in live projections.

> Forms appeared on a small screen. They didn't represent anything and brought everything to mind, completely abstract, inexplicably and powerfully alive, biological, being born and dying truest deaths, dramatic to the point of exhaustion. On top of that, there was music, the only music possible for them, featuring Bach, and the voice of Yma Sumac, Martenot waves, and animal

82.
Andrzej Pawłowski with a hand puppet of his own design, 1953, photo: artist's family archive

82.

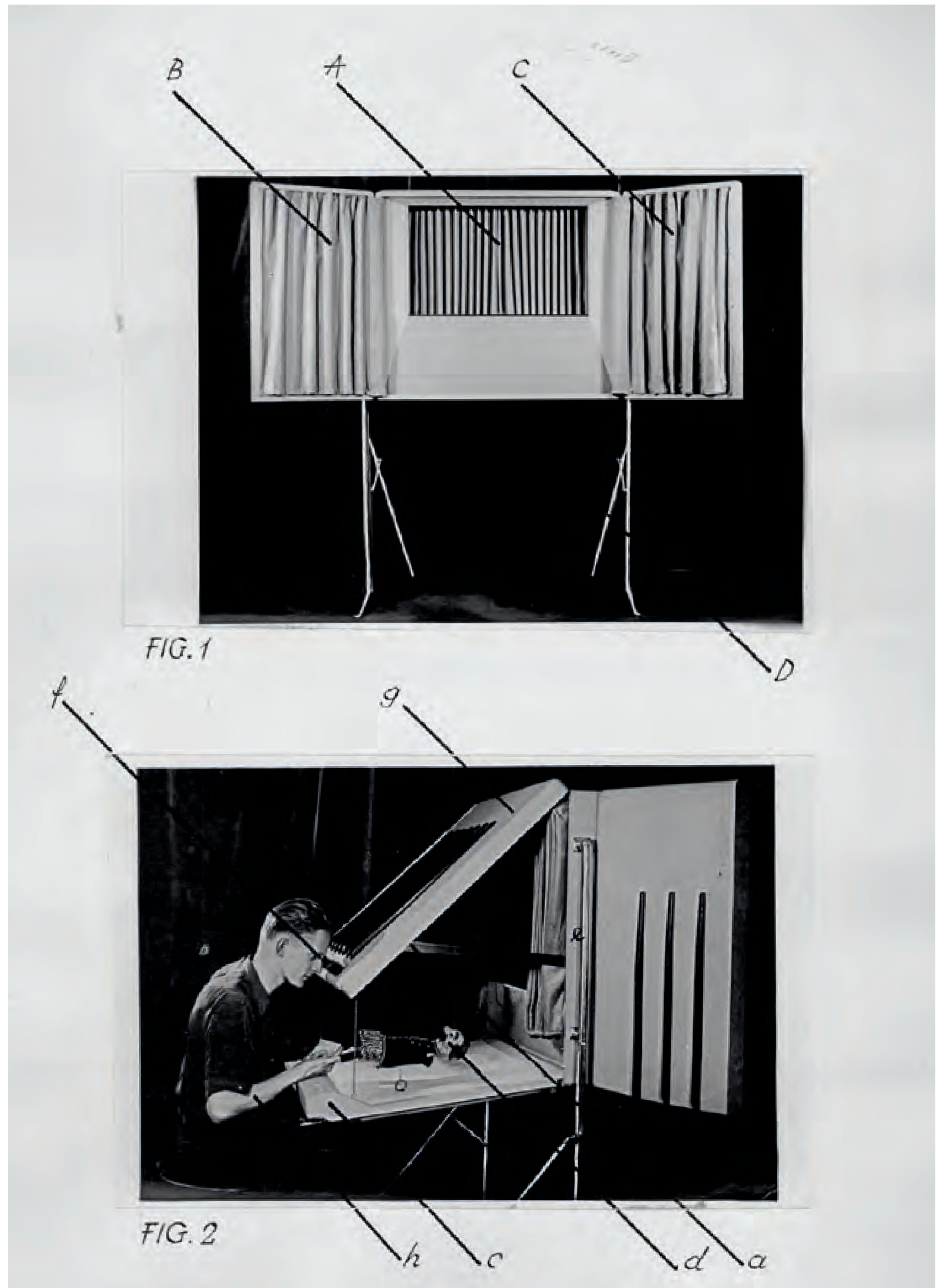
> calls. After the show, you could peek into the apparatus. Pieces of cardboard, strips of plastic foil, a few glass balls, a light bulb, and a lens. That was all.[7]

The idea of using ordinary elements to conjure up a fantastic illusion will return in other films, since artifice is the basis of trick film. At this stage, however, Pawłowski was interested first of all in perfecting his invention, so after animating the shapes manually, he employed an electric engine for the purpose (e.g., in the works presented in the Polish pavilion at the 11th Milan Triennial of Architecture), and finally filmed them in motion.

One of the two works of this kind, *There and Here* (*Tam i tu*, 1957), begins with an image of a multitude of swaying arms, from among which a hand emerges, triggering off a kaleidoscope of images that evolve like waving corals phosphorescing in dark water. A similar, though somewhat less spectacular effect had been achieved three decades earlier by the Themersons in their photogram films.[8] In Pawłowski, the visual poem concludes with an image of human profiles painted in geometric patterns. One of those resembles a wound around the eye — like a trace of the author's apparently unconventional vision. It is significant that in both films, but also in exhibitions and his stage shows, the crystals of colour emerged from the tarry background that underscored the uncanniness of the colour spectrum. The following story tells us something about Pawłowski's vision. In 1943, he was sent by the underground Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) sent to work at the Jagiellonian University's Gardening Unit in Prądnik (Kraków), to watch military trains at a junction being built there. 'We watched with two other guys, at night, in winter time, straining our eyes, the days getting shorter and shorter', the artist reminisced. Many years later, his eyesight deteriorated and, unable to work in the darkroom, he started experimenting with luxography using the human body, sans camera. So perhaps *Cineforms* were informed by a special kind of vision, similar to the one that underlay Władysław Strzemiński's *Afterimages*.

83.
Andrzej Pawłowski, portable mirror puppet theatre, Kraków, utility model description Ru-9603, published 24 April 1951, photo: Warsaw Patent Office Archive

fig 1. A — stage curtain, B and C — openable doors, D — legs as seen by the audience
fig 2. a — mirror (reflectign the puppet image towards the audience), b — vertical wall, c — actor's hand support, d — puppet, g — lid/cover tilted at 45 degrees, h — actor's hand



83.

Pioneering Self-Irony

To do justice to the author of *During the Reign of Krakus the King*, it has to be admitted that he worked in extremely difficult conditions. The great effort involved in making the film and the enthusiasm surrounding its premiere meant that it achieved legendary status. Many press reports stressed how the filmmakers carried heavy bags of gypsum that were used to build the sets.[9]

Wasilewski fundamentally informed the history of Polish puppet film because he deeply believed in the future of animation and through the mid-1960s, making films at the Se-Ma-For Studio of Small Film Forms (Studio Małych Form Filmowych Se-Ma-For), trained successive generations of puppet artists. All the important stop-motion puppet animation films of the subsequent decades were in fact made by his early collaborators, such as Lidia Hornicka, Adam Kilian, Jerzy Kotowski, Teresa Puchowska-Sturlis, Edward Sturlis, or Jerzy Zitzman, and then by *their* collaborators in turn, to mention but Teresa Badzian, Halina Bielińska, or Włodzimierz Haupe.[10]

Liaisons between puppet film and other disciplines, such as scenography or the visual arts, merit a discussion of their own, far exceeding the bounds of this essay, I will therefore present only the key visual references. Of course, without proper cinematic language, that is, script, cinematography, and editing, no work meant to endure in time is going to be more than merely a pretty picture. And caricature is a special kind of picture: exaggerated, focused on portraiture, and meant to ridicule a person or phenomenon. It forms the basis of animated film because, as Ülo Pikkov writes, the two share similar ways of building overblown characters and a distinct, contrast-based narrative.[11] A grotesque image of life matters more in animation than realistic detail. Early animators, such as Max Fleischer or Emile Cohl, began with caricature; Dziga Vertov used it in *Soviet Toys* (1924). Eastern European animators were also able to publish in satirical magazines such as *Szpilki* in Poland, *Dikobraz* in Czechoslovakia, *Krokodil* in the Soviet Union, *Kerempuh* and *Jež* in Yugoslavia, or *Pikker* in Estonia. That is why the fact that Wasilewski, a pioneer of stop-motion puppet animation and teacher of the next generation of animators, had his background in the satirical community would have far-reaching consequences. Debuting in the 1920s in *Cyrulik Warszawski*, the co-founder of and contributor to *Szpilki* started by making collages of photographs and newspaper clippings, before switching to scenes featuring plasticine characters which he sculpted and then photographed. His caricatures were usually political, anti-Nazi, and in his late period full of bleak humour, eroticism, and Roland Topor-style surreal imagination.

Such transformations are not to be found in his animation work, which was apparently governed by different laws. He learned the craft in Włodzimierz Kowańko's studio in 1935 and tried then, unsuccessfully, to make his first animated films. Two years later, he made plasticine-animation commercials for the Trio-Film studio, and shortly before the war, the abovementioned adaptation of the Wawel Castle legend, *Krakus*, financed with private funds. His 'human characters, which look as if they have been carved in wood and live in a strange, romantic world reminiscent of the perspective of Makowski's paintings'[12], to use Jan Lenica's words, defined the imagination of his successors. Does Wasilewski's further history demonstrate that he couldn't develop as a film artist in an era of condemned formalism?

In the truly subversive *Mr Plumelet Is Dreaming* (*Pan Piórko śni*, 1949), a dreamy clerk flies in his bed over the city, singing about rebelling against the alarm clock. Once inside an expressionistic office with travelators and escalators, he stands up to his boss, ties him in a knot, and locks him away in a drawer. Now in charge, he decrees a four-day work week, a two-month paid vacation, and 'allotments of sunlight and fun' — employee postulates that remain valid today. He also takes his secretary to a love island, but suddenly the alarm clock comes back and every thing turns out to have been a dream. The innocent humoresque was shelved for its rebellious potential (which it retains), while Wasilewski, disillusioned, busied himself with respectful fairytales. But already when making *The Michałkowice Story* (*Opowieść michałkowicka*, 1954) at the Wrocław film studio, he told Andrzej Kossakowski: 'I'm in an experimental period, and I strongly believe I'm creating a new cinematic genre.'[13] His successive films from 1956–1958 — *Two Dorothies* (*Dwie Dorotki*), *Magical Gifts* (*Czarodziejskie dary*), *Cat On-a-Fence* (*Kotek Napłotek*), and *Shoemaker Twine* (*Szewczyk Dratewka*) — don't reflect the transformation, but in *Attention, Devil!* (*Uwaga diabeł!*, 1959) Wasilewski is clearly self-referential. He portrays the audience's caricatural laughing faces at an illusionist show. This is pure animation: chairs jumping through hoops like circus animals, tables fighting like Starewicz's beetles, an umbrellas-and-broom horse parading proudly on stage. The reaction of the spectators, who are laughing their heads off, being disproportionate, the sole impassionate viewer looks through binoculars into his neighbour's head, probably in search of the brain. Suddenly a scorpion-like devil appears. We watch its onstage adventures on a TV screen, like a bedtime show (an allusion totherole forced upon animation). And it may be precisely the genre of adult animation — dealing with evil and other difficult themes, but always ending with a moral and to applause — that the devil symbolises. One can hardly imagine a more bitter reflection on the situationxof its makers.

84.
Zenon Wasilewski, caricature, *Szpilki*, no. 37, 1938

84.

JAN SZELĄG – STANISŁAW JERZY LEC 30 gr

Szpilki

Nr 37 Rok IV „PRAWDZIWA CNOTA KRYTYK SIĘ NIE BOI" (KRASICKI) 4.IX.1938

Polska zamierza zrezygnować z fotela w Radzie Ligi Narodów

Fot. Zenon Wasilewski

This tone is also discernible in Wasilewski's successive projects, especially in *Five Minutes for Health* (*Pięć minut dla zdrowia*, 1959) and *Crime on the Street of the Ventriloquist Cat* (*Zbrodnia na ulicy Kota Brzuchomówcy*, 1961). The first miniature, devoted to morning

85.
Attention, Devil!, 1959, dir. Zenon Wasilewski, Puppet Film Studio in Tuszyn near Łodź, photo: National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute

85.

gymnastics, shows the protagonist training his body. He does it with such zeal that the doctor has to break him down into pieces, but once reassembled, the exercises resume. A political allusion is noticeable here: the title can be construed as a caricature of the idea of keeping yourself fit as an efficient mechanism, an element of the system the protagonist is part of. The other animation, a witty ballad on love defying social conventions, told through genre cinema — action film and romance — introduces contrast between two-dimensional characters and a three-dimensional setting. A theme present in animated film to this day[14], it references both the class division of society and the political divide imposed by authority; at the end, we hear: 'Beware of the flat ones', but we don't really know who is flat in this world.

The filmmaker was also sarcastic about his discipline in *The Wooden Horseman* (*Drewniany jeździec*, 1964), where worms gnawed at figurines made of raw wood, or finally in *The Man from the Mirror* (*Człowiek z lustra*, 1966), where we watch the delirium of the schizophrenic protagonist. According to Kossakowski, the 'greatest paradox is that Wasilewski, a man of a complex psyche and biography, and of highly fertile imagination, is known today mostly as an author of cheerful films for children'[15], whereas he was apparently an artist broken by his epoch, which he nonetheless sarcastically commented on in his characteristic style.

Giannalberto Bendazzi writes that for the first fifteen years after the Second World War, animation in Eastern Europe had much in common with Soviet animation of the 1930s: it was geared mainly towards children, focused on moral and civil education, and resistant to stylistic changes.[16] Earlier, however, in the late 1950s, some changes in this respect could be noticed in films such as *Or a Fish …* (*Albo rybka …*), *The Abstractionist Exhibition* (*Wystawa abstrakcjonistów*, both 1958),

86.

86.
The Shadow of Time, 1964, dir. Jerzy Kotowski, stage design: Kazimierz Mikulski, Se-Ma-For Studio of Small Film Forms in Łódź, photo: National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute

or the aforementioned *Attention, Devil!* What is characteristic for the production of the era is that it enjoyed the privilege of public funding, but in return was obliged to serve educational functions, imitate traditional, conventional forms, shun improvised, ad-hoc narratives, and works towards constructing a socialist imagination. It was due perhaps to these restrictive conditions that it contained virtually no references to puppet theory and metaphysics, which were quite frequent in other Eastern-bloc countries.

The Self-Reflective Puppet

Philosophical reflection on the essence of the puppet, missing from the puppet animation of the period, was pursued, paradoxically, in cartoon and cut-out animation. It has been defined as surrealistic because it was the Surrealists who frequently showed the human body as a mechanism. Made in this spirit, Jan Lenica and Walerian Borowczyk's *There Was Once* (*Był sobie raz*, 1957) raised the question of the mechanics of the onscreen protagonist, and their successive productions called into question the unity of the puppet lookalike's identity. The protagonist of Lenica's *Mister Head* (*Monsieur Tête*), a 1959 French production, turns into a mindless mannequin that is 'no longer a master of its own head' and, as its appreciation grows, eventually loses its face. Borowczyk's *Concert of Mr and Mrs Kabal* (*Le concert de Monsieur et Madame Kabal*, 1962), also made in France, tackled the theme of a changing and dismembered body that is being reintegrated, even if it is as a piece of furniture or a musical instrument. The subject returned in his full-length *Theatre of Mr and Mrs Kabal* (*Théâtre de Monsieur et Madame Kabal*, 1967), but found its fullest expression in Mirosław Kijowicz's *Wicker Basket* (*Wiklinowy kosz*) from the same year, one of the most brilliant animations in the history of Polish film, not least because of extremely successful collaboration between Bohdan Mazurek of the Polish Radio Experimental Studio and the jazz pianist and composer, Krzysztof Komeda. The plot of this miniature unfolds slowly and sparingly, and tension grows with a mounting sense of the inevitability of events. In the middle of an empty field, an old man throws dismembered puppet-body parts out of a basket and assembles them into automatons. He trains them, ordering them to reach an indicated destination, which is not shown. The mechanical crowd revolts, dismembering its maker, and goes in the opposite direction, where an imaginary destination looms.

Kijowicz's mannequins also play a life-feigning game to finally seize power. The theme of their collective defiance was used as a metaphor of the history of political ideas, like in other Polish animations that foregrounded political commentary, such as Stefan Schabenbeck's excellent *Stairs* (*Schody*, 1969). The image of an individual lost in an endless labyrinth who, climbing the (seemingly) last step, dies of exhaustion, his body forming the next step, is a delirious vision reminiscent of Piranesi's *Prisons*. But the film's reception has nonetheless focused on the context of the critique of an inhumane system that exploits people and sets them impossible tasks. Edward Sturlis's superb *The Uniform* (*Mundur*, 1965) has largely been forgotten, which is a pity. A general's uniform flying off a gallows-like drying rack and detected by a radar serves as an apt metaphor of a control state where the nuclear button is used to shoot down an accidental target. Nor is Kotowski's *Music Box* (*Pozytywka*, 1960) remembered, a film, with scenography by Jerzy Krawczyk, that delivers a satire

on the domestic political system by pretending to portray Tsarist Russia. A clocksmith pulls the mechanism out of the malfunctioning head of a local governor in order to select another from a stock of stem-winding heads and repair the defect because 'it's only so long you can live without a government'. Polish animation of the era is full of political-puppet metaphors, but the theory of the mannequin, puppet, human lookalike wasn't worked through because other disciplines had earlier asked about the nature of animated matter.

While the resolutions of the 1949 filmmakers' congress in Wisła, where the puppet's subversive potential was recognised and animation was duly obliged to be both morally instructive and aesthetically traditional, had by then become obsolete, state studios such as the Se-Ma-For in Łódź or, slightly later, the Studio of Film Miniatures (Studio Miniatur Filmowych) in Warsaw were still more heavily politicised than the 'Kadr' Film Studio where Borowczyk and Lenica made their films. Puppet animations required larger crews and larger budgets, and were subject to greater scrutiny by the qualifying committees and artistic councils. Puppet-film animators were left to plough the field of positivistic education, and a return to more avant-garde ideas, hearkening back to Starewicz's era, seemed impossible.

Dangerous Potential

There were exceptions, though. Films that have retained a connection with the theatre of small forms demonstrate the metaphorical potential of modest, unimpressive puppets in small-scale settings, or even objects. One example is *The Bag* (*Worek*, 1967) by Tadeusz Wilkosz, a macabresque on a deadly space hidden among ordinary objects. Similar

87.

87.
Basilisk, 1961, dir. Wojciech Wieczorkiewicz, Leokadia Serafinowicz, stage design: Leokadia Serafinowicz, Studio of Film Miniatures in Warsaw, photo: National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute

88.
The Vendor of Fantasies, 1969, dir. Lidia Hornicka, stage design: Henri Poulain, Se-Ma-For Studio of Small Film Forms in Łódź, photo: National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute

88.

89.
The Abstractionist Exhibition, 1958, dir. Jerzy Kotowski, stage design: Kazimierz Mikulski, Se-Ma-For Studio of Small Film Forms in Łódź

89.

90.
Jacek's Name Day, 1962, dir. and stage design: Edward Sturlis, Se-Ma-For Studio of Small Film Forms in Łódź, photo: National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute

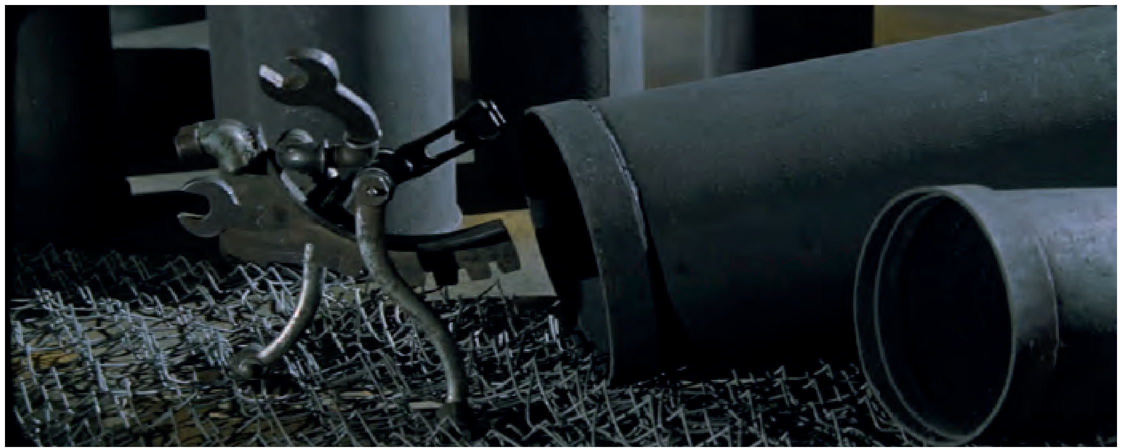
to a black hole, it assumes the shape of a toothed bag that, on a tiny stage resembling a cupboard shelf, devours its victims: clocks, coffee grinders, clothes, an umbrella. At first, the bag simply wants to impress a pair of women's gloves, but, its appetite growing with time, they too end up in its mouth, and the other objects declare a war on it. Pierced with a spike, it snaps not its jaws but a metal box. It crushes its victims as a mace, seems to die when cut up with scissors, but quickly changes into an octopus and, ever more cunning, grows to an enormous size. One feels like looking inside it because it has almost completely destroyed the onscreen world and entropy must be progressing inside it, but the author just offers the politico-historical commentary that violence has no bottom and fighting it is a hopeless task. Interpreted more universally, however, the bag embodies a primal force of disintegration, and the film ushers in a new perspective, which, alas, the author of *The Adventures of Colargol the Bear* (*Przygody misia Colargola*, 1968–1974) and *Three Bears* (*Trzy misie*, 1982–1986) will not return to. *The Bag* remains his most truculent work, and one closest to the visual-arts idiom, using ready-mades only a few years after Tadeusz Kantor, who incorporated everyday items in his canvas paintings, preserving the 'reality of lower rank'. A graduate of the FAMU in Prague, Wilkosz introduced to Polish animation the Czech surrealist tradition with its use of ready-made objects.

Those objects were combined with live actors, as in *Flea the Swindler* (*Pchła Szachrajka*, 1967) by Zofia Ołdak, and before that in *The Shoe* (*But*, 1959) by the outstanding animators, Halina Bielińska and Włodzimierz Haupe, who made their first animated film in 1949 in Switzerland. Their matchstick *The Changing of the Guard* (*Zmiana warty*) won (tied) the Short Film Prize at Cannes in 1959. 'We speak through the play of objects, endowing them with an imaginary inner life, suggesting that every thing is individual, something that can impact on our life',[17] they said, even if *The Shoe* shows an infantile rather than metaphysical game with the object. When the object disappears, the protagonist (played by Haupe)

90.

91–93.
The Horizon, 1970, dir. Jerzy Kotowski, stage design: Maciej Szańkowski, Se-Ma-For Studio of Small Film Forms in Łódź

91.



92.

93.

laves the playroom wearing socks only and walks into a rainy world with a looming abstract landscape reminiscent of the scenery of another film by the duo, *Or a Fish* … The latter was slammed by the critics despite its cutting-edge aesthetics, where geometric forms and Włodzimierz Kotoński's electronic music were combined with the image of a smoked fish, as if offering a choice: 'Either we go in art for a synthesis of shapes, colours, sounds — or we choose a naturalistic fish.'[18] The message was significant insofar that the authorities had just reinstated a policy of suppressing formal experimentation in cinematography.

At this stage, Polish live-action animated film hadn't achieved the quality of Jan Švankmajer's works, nor was it on a par with Saul Steinberg's famous *Masquerade* (1959–1963), photographed by Inge Morath. And Kotowski, even when employed pure-nonsensical humour in his Green Goose (Zielona Gęś) films — *Love, Envy, Intolerance* (*Miłość, zazdrość, nietolerancja*, 1969) and *If Adam Were a Pole* (*Gdyby Adam był Polakiem*, 1976), testing various styles and techniques during his long career, he never ventured beyond genre anecdote.

A title that instilled a new mood and new meaning in a hybrid of live-actor and puppet theatre was *The Vendor of Fantasies* (*Sprzedawca fantazji*, 1969) by Lidia Hornicka, with scenography by Henri Poulain, a French designer working with the Pinokio Theatre of Łódź, which featured everyday objects, origami, puppets, and realistic photography. His woeful theatre puppets, with faces marred by suffering, with heavy-lidded eyes, could have redefined the Polish animation style if such aesthetics were allowed in cinematography at the time.

Puppet-o-Portrait

Lidia Minticz, an outstanding theatre and film scenographer (who later worked with her husband, Jerzy Skarżyński), and Kazimierz Mikulski, a surrealising painter, co-founder of Cricot 2, were a duo whose work proved inspiring for Polish puppet animation. After their first project together, Lechosław Marszałek's *The Ass in the Lion's Skin* (1956), they designed sets for Kotowski's films, such as *Caution* (*Ostrożność*, 1957), *The Abstractionist Exhibition*, *The Story of the Corsair Palemon* (1959), or *The Black King* (*Czarny król*, 1961). Their puppets are caricatures and at the same time they are highly evocative masks. Puppets were humanised and humans were puppetised on stage by Mikulski, who was a painter and the art director of the 'Groteska' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre (Teatr Lalek i Aktora Groteska) in Kraków. His works have an elegant, decorative style marked by shallow spaces and pastel colours.

More sparing in its expression was his design for *The Shadow of Time* (*Cień czasu*, 1964) by Kotowski. Skeleton hands, suggestive of the drawings of Edward Gorey or Tim Burton, crawl out from under an SS-man's helmet on the bottom of a lake. It is not surprising that the author of the highly surreal film was a graduate of the same school as Wilkosz, that he also worked at the state-of-the-art studios at Barrandov and drew on the intellectual traditions of Prague.

Grotesque as a mixture of humour and tragedy is a trademark of the author of set designs for several dozen animated films, Adam Kilian, whose domain were expressive colour combinations and the anchoring of visual motifs in ethnography and art history. His designs for *The Adventures of Knight Scatterbrain* (*Przygody rycerza Szaławiły*, 1956, dir. Edward Sturlis), placed the film

94.
Orpheus and Euridice, 1961, dir. Edward Sturlis, stage design: Adam Kilian, Zofia Stanisławska-Howurkowa, Se-Ma-For Studio of Small Film Forms in Łódź, photo: National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute

within the literary tradition, with the puppets quoting visually from Don Quixote, Švejk, and Baron Munchausen. He used wonderful Oriental motifs in Sturlis's *The Adventures of Sindbad the Sailor* (*Przygody Sindbada Żeglarza*, 1957). With games of scale, diverse textures, the glitter of gold, glass, and china, and especially quotations from South Asian art, the film took the viewer on a mysterious, fantastic voyage.

But it was films for the youngest audiences that Kilian was usually recruited for. He demonstrated in them the potential of ordinary toys, as in Teresa Badzian's didactic *Building Blocks* (*Klocki*, 1967) where he breathed life into those childhood heroes by contrasting them with a huge inflatable elephant. Kilian treated art as a game, with all the seriousness of a child. His motto was: 'You can carve the joy of life out of a simple twig'. Having found himself in Almaty in 1942, he went to the Mosfilm, where his idol, Sergey Eisenstein, was then employed. Kilian was tasked with lathing some wooden puppets, so he used banisters from the elegant staircase. He thus became a student of Alexander Ptushko's and co-designed sets and props for the first part of *Ivan the Terrible* (1944).

94.

Another film artist with links to the Russian tradition was Edward Sturlis, one of the most original authors of folktale and mythology animations, who worked in a duo with his wife, Teresa. For Sturlis, animation was an image gallery and a storytelling space. His mythological films — *Damon* (1958), *Bellerophon* (1959), and especially *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1961) — are striking in presenting a great variety of puppets in an aesthetically coherent world. They have immobile faces with an expressive look, some resembling totems or voodoo dolls. The lighting in the depths of Hades and camera movement imitate feature-film conventions, notably film noir.

In discussing, for the conclusion of this essay, the subject of film stills in puppet animation, which usually followed zero-style poetics with a static camera and the puppet in the centre of the frame, in long or mid shot, one needs to mention the names of Leszek Nartowski or Eugeniusz Ignaciuk. Exceptions from 'transparent' photography are few, and one notable example are Aleksander Lipowski's stills for *Basilisk* (*Bazyliszek*, 1961). The legend becomes terrifying here thanks to the dark, flickery image, suffocating space, and Krzysztof Penderecki's music. In the stills, darkness clings to wet cobblestones. Owl eyes glint, sculpted reliefs come alive, a bell face roars,

and the basilisk makes ominous movements, breathing real fire. Despite the fact that plot-wise this is but a story about innocent kids fleeing from a funny monster, the flickery, shaky image contributed to a fine horror-film quality.

Far from average is the cinematography for Teresa Badzian's *The Merry Louise* (*Wesoła Ludwika*, 1968), thanks likely to two debuting cinematography artists, Sławomir Idziak and Zbigniew Rybczyński, who experimented with focus, camera and puppet movement, or water reflections. They filmed the puppets through flickering candle flames, reversed directions, placed hardly identifiable shapes in the centre of the frame — for them it was a testing ground, including in terms of editing, on which they must have had their say. Rybczyński animated the puppets not frame-by-frame, in jerky movements, as if in a haste. The result was a motion picture that one the one hand imitated human vision and on the other was theatrical and highly stylised.

Also highly original is the cinema technique of Kotowski's *The Horizon* (*Horyzont*, 1970), where shapes resembling a mechanical insect emerge from a tangle of junk. The protagonist frees itself from its constitutive matter to pass through the cast-iron gate of reality into a world of geometric forms. The photography by Józef Robakowski, who at the time was completing his degree in Cinematography at the Łódź Film School, highlights instability and lack of reference points, emphasising the tactile dimension of the animated substance in a manner reminiscent of art of matter; Zdzisław Beksiński's metal reliefs or Jerzy Rosołowicz's neutronicons come to mind here. *The Horizon* is also one of few puppet animations that question the nature of the object itself. 'A thing is just a thing', the film perversely proclaims. The dangerous potential of animation, which the communist authorities sought to contain through strict anti-experimental creative control, shows that the puppet can take us to regions we never imagined were possible. Obviously the puppet is not just a puppet, as we were led to believe.

95.
Manguar, 1961, dir. and stage design: Edward Sturlis, Se-Ma-For Studio of Small Film Forms in Łódź, photo: National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute

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1

Notably in the publications of Marcin Giżycki, which were my primary source on Kuczkowski: *Nie tylko Disney. Rzecz o filmie animowanym*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000; idem, 'Przed 1945: prekursorzy i pionierzy', in *Polski film animowany*, ed. Marcin Giżycki and Bogusław Żmudziński, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Audiowizualne, 2008; idem, *Kino — Media — Sztuka — Twórcy. Szkice*, Warsaw: Polsko-Japońska Akademia Technik Komputerowych, 2016.

2

Karol Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta Muza oraz pomniejsze pisma filmowe*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1982, pp. 255–262.

3

This and the following facts about Pawłowski from Juliusz Garztecki's interview with the artist, *Ty i Ja*, no. 6, 1963, pp. 4–7.

4

Ibid.

5

Kamil Kopania, 'Teatr lalek, Bauhaus, Richard Teschner, Kineformy. Kilka uwag na temat wczesnej twórczości Andrzeja Pawłowskiego', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, no. 39/40, 2002, p. 256.

6

Juliusz Garztecki's interview with the artist.

7

Ibid.

8

The Pharmacy (*Apteka*, 1930), *Melodic Miniature* (*Drobiazg melodyjny*, 1933), *Eye and Ear* (*Oko i ucho*, 1944–1945).

9

In fact, this painstaking effort, duly remembered on the occasion of every new genre film to this day, is part of the mythology of animated cinematography, which is commonly viewed as somewhat less important than feature and documentary film.

10

It is worth mentioning the 'spectral' role of women at the side of male directors: Wasilewski's sister, Irene, Teresa Puchowska-Sturlis, who worked with her husband on his films, Irena Zitzman, also her husband's assistant, or Teresa Byszewska, who co-designed the films of Jan Lenica. At that time, the only women to direct on their own were Teresa Badzian, Janina Hartwig, and Krystyna Dobrowolska; later also Alina Kotowska, Maria Krüger, Zofia Ołdak, Alina Maliszewska, Zofia Oraczewska, and Katarzyna Latałło, and they too found it hard to go beyond young-audience themes.

11

Ülo Pikkov, *Anti-animation. Textures of Eastern European Animated Film*, Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2018, pp. 83–101.

12

Jan Lenica, *Odrodzenie*, no. 20, 1948, quoted in Marcin Giżycki, 'Z kogo się śmialiście. 30 lat', *Szpilki*, 9 June 1974.

13

Andrzej Kossakowski, 'Zenon Wasilewski, pionier filmu animowanego w Polsce', *Ekran*, no. 6, 1986, pp. 2–3.

14

E.g., in *2D or not 2D* (2003) by Paul Driessen, *Flatland: The Movie* (2007) by Dano Johnson, or a 2013 *Futurama* episode by Matt Groening.

15

Kossakowski.

16

Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 151.

17

Stanisław Janicki, 'O rzeczywistym i tzw. eksperymencie oraz o sytuacji w artystycznym krótkim metrażu', *Film*, no. 10, 1960, pp. 10–11.

18

Tadeusz Kowalski, 'Wieloznaczny eksperyment', *Film*, no. 36, 1959, p. 4.

96.
Ubu Roi, 1972, dir. Michael Meschke,
stage design: Franciszka Themerson,
SVT, Sweden

96.

Quasi-sonic Worlds. On Contemporary Music in Polish Puppet Film and Theatre

Jan Topolski

Puppet cinema is an alchemical genre. It shows, like in a laboratory, the very essence of filmic creation: the animation of inanimate objects and still images. This aspect of its magic was already present in Władysław Starewicz's pioneering attempts involving stag beetles. The sight of males fighting for a female made him want to film them, but when he turned on the lights, the insects, alarmed, stopped moving. The author of *The Beautiful Lucanid* (*Piękna Lukanida*) (1912) resolved, therefore, to combine his entomological and photographic interests, killing and taxidermying the stag beetles and then filming them, frame after frame, in various poses. Although the insects had to sacrifice their

lives on the altar of art, they were eventually revived, as it were, in order to fight battles and experience passions in human attire. Their afterlife was reconstructed by the Polish-Russian animator so superbly that even without a soundtrack it is very convincing, even though in many cases it is precisely music that the alchemical transformation of freeze-frames and jumpy movement into fluent gestures and narratives owes its credibility to. The French theoretician and composer, Michel Chion, aptly calls the much-studied relationship between the two an 'audiovisual contract'.[1] The properties of one — here continuity, texture, dynamics — pass on to the other, shaping its perception. This is by no means to suggest that sound and image have to follow the same aesthetic; quite the contrary — often the filmmaker searches for new worlds while the composer is chained by slavish convention (or the other way round).

Watching and listening to Polish puppet films from the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, we frequently encounter a chasm between the two layers, where the aforementioned audiovisual contract seems to have been written on poor-quality paper. One example are Zbigniew Turski's numerous musical illustrations, neoclassical in style and orchestral in format, written for leading Polish animators.[2] In this essay, however, I will discuss selected and available exceptions, where experimental visuals meet like sounds. Originally, the term 'experimental music' gained currency in connection with John Cage and the New York School, where the very process of trials, hypotheses, and experiments mattered more than their uncertain (and not always successful) results. Similar achievements in the fields of sound art, conceptual art, or those accomplished at the legendary Polish Radio Experimental Studio are usually cited in the Polish context. The Studio was founded in 1957 with the intention of producing innovative jingles and musical illustrations for film, radio theatre, and other formats, as well as for conducting experiments in acoustics or electronics.

Close liaisons between the Experimental Studio and cinema began with the very cornerstone of Polish electronic music. In 1958, Włodzimierz Kotoński recorded a musical illustration for Halina Bielińska and Włodzimierz Haupe's puppet film, *Or a Fish …* (*Albo rybka …*). In the same year, he edited the unused fragments into the groundbreaking *Study on One Cymbal Stroke* (*Etiuda na jedno uderzenie w talerz*) considered the first Polish piece of electroacoustic music. The sound of a percussion instrument is transformed here using various studio procedures in the spirit of French *musique concrète* — cut and pasted, filtered (spectrum), and reversed (envelope). *Or a Fish …*, a puppet film by a duo of renowned animation artists, told the story of several animated objects vying for each other's attention in an abstract space. All objects were constructed with everyday materials such as wood, metal, or wire, as if they had

97.

97–98.
Or a Fish . . . , 1958, dir. Halina Bielińska, Włodzimierz Haupe, Studio of Film Miniatures in Warsaw, photo: National Film Archive — Audiovisual Institute

98.

been recycled. This caused Zofia Lissa — an eminent Marxist musicologist, endowed with a keen sense of the contemporary — to make some far-fetched analogies. It is worth quoting a lengthy fragment, especially that a witness of an era speaks through it, and from a very close distance:

> Here the prepared soundtrack serves as an equivalent of the completely unrealistic, also 'prepared' in a sense, layer of the represented objects, with their quasi-human relationships and quasi-human 'emotions' … Underscoring those, the music only heightens the monstrosity, let alone the monstrosity of the film's 'moral thesis' itself (a beloved sold for a fish). All the objects represented here have been artificially constructed, so it is no wonder that the soundtrack belongs to the same category of phenomena … a prepared material, it is completely unlike traditional film music. Its uniform sound and homogeneous function contribute greatly to the integration of the whole. Out of the many possible ways of functionally connecting sound with image, only one has been used here, but consistently throughout the entire film: the musical illustration of movement. And only the colouristic modifications of the prepared sound material are meant to emphasise the quasi-human relationships between the freak characters and their quasi-human emotional processes. … With the extraordinariness of its material and colour, electronic/concrete music enhances the effects and it actually the only 'natural' correlate of this unnatural little world. It is also a quasi-sonic world.[3]

It is worth appreciating the fact that Bielińska and Haupe, both sought-after animators at the time, chose Kotoński — who was critically much less acclaimed — to work with, having recently made *Change of Guard* (*Zmiana warty*) and *The Shoe* (*But*) with the aforementioned Turski. Writing about the latter title, the harsh Lissa immediately picked at the inadequacy of the (conventional) soundtrack to the (experimental) image. *Or a Fish …* was a different case altogether, offering plenty of dynamic/motoric analogies as well as — on a higher level of abstraction — material ones. Some of the sound effects onomatopoetically imitate the character of the objectual protagonists, e.g., springs, but when the fish comes into play in the finale, Kotoński eschews any water-sound routines, which would have all too easy to apply. But the congruity between animated film and concrete music, based, as it is, on recorded and processed everyday sounds, goes further than that. Collage or mixed-media techniques come to mind here; indeed, simultaneously with *Or a Fish …* Kotoński was working on Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Lenica's famous film *The House* (*Dom*) (1958), and not much later did the soundtrack for Lenica's *New Janko the Musician* (*Nowy Janko Muzykant*, 1960). In both works, the sounds are far better recognisable (some are even quotations or stylisations), but the role of music as an editing technique and binding agent remains unchanged.

If, however, we were to focus exclusively on experiments in the strict sense, we wouldn't find that many in puppet cinema. It is therefore necessary to expand the research field by including other styles of contemporary music, such as orchestral sonorism, i.e., compositions that sound radical, even if they are sometimes traditional in form. The first to come to mind here is Krzysztof Penderecki, who did a lot of early work for film and theatre. Everything supposedly began in 1957, when Artur Malawski, his health gravely deteriorated, recommended his most talented student to carry out the task of writing music for two theatre

shows he had been contracted to compose.[4] Parallel to composing the groundbreaking *Emanations* and *Psalms of David*, Penderecki illustrated a number of shows at the 'Banialuka' Puppet Theatre (Teatr Lalek Banialuka) in Bielsko-Biała: *The Magic Pot* (*Czarodziejski garnek*) (1957), *Tom Thumb* (*Tomcio Paluch*) and *The Swineherd* (*Świniopas*) (both 1958), and finally *The Bravest of Knights* (*Najdzielniejszy z rycerzy*) (1959). The latter in particular was a lot of work; he later created an extended version of the piece for the Poznań-based 'Marcinek' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre (Teatr Lalki i Aktora Marcinek), and adapted it for a radio opera. Penderecki also wrote music for a number of children's shows at various theatres around the country, including for *Shoemaker Twine* (*Szewczyk Dratewka*) at the 'Groteska' Puppet-and-Actor Theatre (Teatr Lalek i Aktora Groteska) in Kraków (1958), *The Adventures of a Warsaw Teddy Bear* (*Przygody warszawskiego misia*) at the 'Arlekin' theatre in Łódź (1959), *The Story of the Miner Bulandra* (*Baśń o górniku Bulandrze*) at the 'Ateneum' theatre in Katowice (1960), *The Fox Song* (*Pieśń o lisie*) at the 'Marcinek' theatre in Poznań (1961), and over thirty other titles. In terms of the choice of the literary material, two 'Arlekin' productions stand out: *The Sampo Grinder and a Magic Lute* (1960), based on the Finnish epic poem *Kalevala*, and *Damyanthi* (1962), an adaptation of the *Mahabharata*. The greatest success was the music for *The Story of Zwyrtała the Musician, or, How an Old Highlander Got to Heaven* (*O Zwyrtale muzykancie, czyli jak się stary góral dostał do nieba*), staged, for example, at the 'Lalka' Theatre in Warsaw, 1958, or at the Puppet-and-Actor Theatre (Teatr Lalki i Aktora) in Lublin, 1963, based on a text by Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer. The show was directed by Jan Wilkowski and designed by Adam Kilian, both masters of the art, and the music was styled after the folklore of Podhale (Zbigniew Penherski was among other composers who would later write music for *The Story of Zwyrtała the Musician* themselves).

Deserving a special mention among Penderecki's theatre-music works is *Ubu Roi*, an adaptation of Alfred Jarry's 1888 play, staged at Stockholm's Marionetteatern in 1964, later shown in many countries and eventually filmed in 1972. Directed by Michael Meschke and designed by Franciszka Themerson, Jarry's text must have made quite an impression on the Polish composer, enough to make him return to the subject nearly three decades later in the postmodern *Ubu Rex: Opera Buffa* (1991). In the puppet version, already the overture introduces one of the leitmotifs — a plunderphonic variation on Beethoven's 5th Symphony, with the tape slowed-down and micro-looped. Overlapping with this significant quotation is another, taken from the Prussian *Hohenfriedberger Marsch*, composed for Frederick the Great. The snare drums and the flute with the other wind instruments will return for the parade and the subsequent battle, and the combination of march and symphony will be reused in the enthronement scene. Penderecki plays with symbols here: the famous cautionary 'fate motif' screeches with bombastic optimism, followed by some wild percussions. The composer frequently uses this kind of short interludes, also using concrete sounds treated with delay and other effects, such as in the scene at the Kremlin (double bass) or the nightmare scene (voices), which brings to mind the music accompanying the gallows scenes in Wojciech Jerzy Has's *The Saragossa Manuscript*.

All the above mentioned musical illustrations were written concurrently with Penderecki's increasingly well-known autonomous works — *Dimensions of Time and Silence*, *Fluorescence*, and *St Luke Passion* — but unlike in those

99.
Royal Ship, dir. Krzysztof Rau, stage design: Wiesław Jurkowski, Białystok Puppet Theatre, 1970, photo: Waldemar Grzegorczyk, archive of Białystok Puppet Theatre

100.
Ubu Roi, 1972, dir. Michael Meschke, stage design: Franciszka Themerson, SVT, Sweden

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the scores and recordings are often missing. According to the composer's biographer, Mieczysław Tomaszewski, the instrumental parts were sometimes attached to invoices as proof of performance and sent to bookkeeping. Some unknown recordings have, however, been recovered from the archive of the Białystok Puppet Theatre (Białostocki Teatr Lalek) puppet theatre as part of research undertaken for the purpose of this exhibition, e.g., that for Joanna Piekarska's *Tom Thumb* (1961). Here, Penderecki uses characteristic instruments, exploiting their associations, be it comical (tuba, piccolo, trumpet) or sonoristic (prepared piano), allowing himself to parody the text. He stopped writing illustration music around 1966, but other artists were later keen to reuse his earlier works. One example from the field of puppet theatre was *The Bird* (*Ptak*) (1975), directed by Zygmunt Smandzik at the Puppet Theatre of the Opole Region Theatre (Teatr Lalek przy Teatrze Ziemi Opolskiej), where industrial stage design and expressionistic music underscored a story about man's confrontation with technology.

But before the author of *St Luke Passion* gave up the applied arts, he had composed several dozen film soundtracks, including several for the genre in question. The most avant-garde of those was doubtless *The Basilisk* (*Bazyliszek*) (1961), directed by the seasoned duo of Leokadia Serafinowicz and Wojciech Wieczorkiewicz. The title itself suggests we are in for a rather bleak story, and the sight of black-and-white puppets in a plasticine world confirms the pessimistic assumption. The soundtrack features virtually obsessive repetitions, high-pitched whistling, rhythmic chirping, percussive cascades, and noisy crescendos. The young characters gad about town at night, encountering all kinds of bogeys: wall carvings that come alive, signposts that fly, and secret passages that open, all that illuminated with spotlights and accompanied by a soundtrack full of intense dissonances and frenetic irregular rhythms. Given that it was a children's film, the young composer with a devilish beard was hardly being timid here. Shortly after the end of that chapter in Penderecki's oeuvre, musicologist Andrzej Chłopecki so commented on the subject:

> The choice of music is always informed by a film's visuals. Here we have cut-out films: *The Harlequin* (*Arlekin*), *Mr Trumpet* (*Pan Trąba*), puppet films: *The Cactus* (*Kaktus*), *The Basilisk*, hand-drawn animations: *The Penknife* (*Scyzoryk*), *The Adventure of the Little Frog* (*Przygoda żabki*), *The Trap* (*Pułapka*), but also mixed-media films: *The General and the Fly* (*Generał i mucha*), *The Balloons* (*Balony*), *Sweet Rhythms* (*Słodkie rytmy*), or *The Glass Enemy* (*Szklany wróg*). The soundtracks are as different as the films themselves, ranging from electronics to traditional instruments and voices; from sonorism, with its focus on timbre as the sole means of expression, to impressionistic stylisations that may utilise older formal elements rooted in functional

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> music. But what makes the films different musically matters less than what they have in common. … A penchant for programmatic music is bound up with another aspect of Penderecki's work, one that comes very handy in film: the way his music follows the principle of dramatic composition.[5]

In other illustrations for film or theatre, Penderecki was extremely ingenious, even if those were often neoclassical rather than sonoristic ideas. One example was the opera *The Bravest of Knights*, based on a story by Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, which has recently been staged again. Tomasz Cyz's adaptation for Wrocław Opera (2018) uses live actors instead of puppets and comes in a gender-correct, double version. The near-reprise of the first act, this time with the Scarecrow as a girl, brings out the various repetitions present already in the original score, co-written by Marek Stachowski. Echoes and imitations occur between the solo part and the children's choir as well as between the other actors: the poppies and the sparrows. Corresponding with numerous brilliances of timbre (percussions, woodwinds) are the highly original costumes by Natalia Kitamikado and some great lighting from Katarzyna Łuszczyk. Their work means that despite the nearly literal musical repetition there is impossible to get bored here: the first part is replete with earthly yellows and reds, the second one with cosmic purples. Everything seems to be leading towards a serious conflict over power and resources, with alterity derided, but a positive moral is, of course, forthcoming.

A similar motif will be present in a slightly later work, the score for Lucjan Dembiński's postimpressionist *King Midas* (1963), with flutes and harps in the lead role. Włodzimierz Kotoński wasn't averse to such stylisation either in *The Story of the Corsair Palemon* (*Baśń o korsarzu Palemonie*) (1959), directed by Jerzy Kotowski, based on a story by Jan Brzechwa. Even if the pirate-chasing scene features some snatches of trumpet beyond key and metre, the whole thing is still closer to neoclassicism, like in *The Bravest of Knights*. A critically-acclaimed author of puppet films, Kotowski had earlier and would later work with the jazzman Jerzy Matuszkiewicz, as in *Caution* (*Ostrożność*) (1957), based on Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński and his Green Goose Theatre (Teatrzyk Zielona Gęś). Matuszkiewicz's friend, the vibraphonist Jerzy Milian, in turn, had a brief affair with the Białystok Puppet Theatre (Białostocki Teatr Lalek), for which he composed a medley of swinging tunes in *Jean's Little Theatre* (*Teatrzyk Jeana*) (1969, dir. Stanisław Słomka-Rakowski). Jerzy Maksymiuk, later a famous composer, who from time to time fancied a jazz harmony, or even a big-beat one, developed a more lasting relationship with the north-eastern region of Podlasie, leaving a considerable number of light musical illustrations for the Białystok Puppet Theatre — be it for a café piano in *What a Day* (*Co za dzień*) (1967) or for a swinging big band in *Woman Sowed Poppy Seeds* (*Siała baba mak*) (1969) — but at least once he avoided going the easy way. In *The Lark* (1966), strong dissonances and sonoristic effects (tone clusters, flutter-tonguing, glissandos) of brasses and percussions emerge repeatedly from behind the lullaby flute motif.

Fine and highly original music can sometimes hide beneath a seemingly trivial style, as in Zenon Wasilewski's zesty and brilliant illustration for *Attention, Devil!* (*Uwaga diabeł!*) (1959). Shown at the Cannes competition, the film's music for a Hammond organ was written by the little-known Hungarian composer, András Viski. While seldom going beyond simple dynamic-motoric analogies

(the so called Mickey-Mousing), he indulges in unexpected harmonic passages and witty quotations and variations. This audiovisual plaything about a magician and his little devil getting out of control has an irresistible charm, but it also serves as a commentary on the magical power of animated film, and puppet film in particular, as already mentioned earlier in this essay. Zbigniew Penherski's illustration for an adaptation of Tadeusz Różewicz's *The Card Index*, staged by the Białystok Puppet Theatre in 1972, sounds very fresh too, featuring numerous abrupt, nearly pointillist motifs or signals, with a lot of trumpet or trombone, dry-sounding percussions (xylophone, snare drum), or strings played pizzicato. This is adult music for an adult show. In the early 1970s, Penherski did several more accompaniments for the Białystok Puppet Theatre, such as *The Royal Ship* with Oriental motifs or a remake of *Zwyrtała the Musician*, with transpositions of highlander folk music; the instrumentation in both is very well thought-out and highly original.

In conclusion, let me mention a film by a leading author of puppet films, which is seldom mentioned in the musical context. This is Tadeusz Wilkosz's *The Bag* (*Worek*) (1967), with a soundtrack by composer and painter Zbigniew Bujarski, who is also considered a sonorist. The soundtrack is extraordinarily ambitious and rich, sparkling with orchestral colours, modifications of rhythms and motifs, and splendid dancing and marching stylisations. This multifaceted, varied, and dynamic music corresponds with the film's theme of a struggle for survival fought by domestic items against a voracious bag. There's no helping it: even the self-confident umbrella and the much-adored medallion end up in the gurgling mouth of the red monster. Its unbridled appetite and vanity, kindled by the stroking gloves (round string sounds), encounter resistance only with the equally amorphous handkerchief, which mobilises the few survivors. Bujarski doesn't shy away from apt onomatopoeias (leaps and moves), concrete sounds (the reckless charge of the scissors), and Mickey-Mousing, but the music, multilayered, with an innovative sound, significantly pushes the limits of convention. It is a magnificent display of mature sonorism and animation with incredible transformations of everyday items and orchestral timbre combinations.

Can we speak of a single, distinct contemporary musical aesthetic in Polish puppet cinema? With all due respect for Zofia Lissa's remarks about concrete quasi-sounds accompanying quasi-characters and about concrete music as an equivalent of animated objects, the period saw few similar examples. Even if some of Penderecki's illustrations seem to have been irreversibly lost, the preserved ones suggest that the composer was saving his experimental muscle for the philharmonic stage (though he may have safely tested many ideas beforehand). Of course, such greats films as *The Basilisk*, *The Bag*, or *Or a Fish ...*, or theatre shows like *The Card Index* or *Ubu Roi* demonstrate that sometimes the audiovisual contract was made between parties conscious of their rights and duties, considering themselves partners. In puppet theatre, we can mention productions such as *Ubu Roi*, *Zwyrtała the Musician*, or *The Card Index*, which to this day show that music can do more than provide lively rhythms or match the actions on screen — it can evoke horror in a nocturnal landscape and unusual articulation, it can animate objects and make the orchestra vibrate, it can make the world unreal and inspire true empathy. Let us hope that various archives — both public ones, being reconstructed, and those in private collections — bring us more such discoveries.

[1] Michael Chion, *Audio-Vision. Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

[2] Examples include Maria Krüger, *Lajkonik* (1960); Lidia Hornecka, *The Story of Janek who Made Shoes for Dogs* (*O Janku, co psom szył buty*) (1961); Tadeusz Wilkosz, (*Forest Adventure*) (*Leśna przygoda*) (1961), or *Dick and His Cat* (*Dick i jego kot*) (1963).

[3] Zofia Lissa, 'Muzyka w polskich filmach eksperymentalnych', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, no. 2, 1961, pp. 15–16.

[4] Iwona Lindstedt, *Muzyka dla polskiego teatru lalkowego*, https://ninateka.pl/kolekcje/trzej-kompozytorzy/penderecki/audio/muzyka-dla-teatru-lalkowego (accessed 26 November 2018).

[5] Andrzej Chłopecki, 'Penderecki i film', in *Muzyka wzwodzi. Diagnozy i portrety*, ed. Jan Topolski, Sławomir Wieczorek, Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 2015, pp. 315–316.

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‘Puppets are not cute, like muppets.
Puppets are effigies and gods
and meaningful creatures.’

Peter Schumann, Manifest Bread and Puppet Theatre, in Stefan Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, London: Methuen Drama, 1988, p. 67

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