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Our Puppets, Our Selves: Puppetry's Changing Paradigms

Claudia Orenstein
CUNY Hunter College

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Edward Gordon Craig's 1908 essay, "The Actor and the Über-marionette," which has become foundational to critical discussions of puppetry, as well as an important reference in the field of theater studies, famously sets up the essential qualities of the puppet in contrast to those of the human actor. In the historically small, but now growing, field of puppetry scholarship, Craig's views have helped elucidate a universal idea of the puppet and spawned a stream of writings that attempt to define the unique qualities the puppet offers to the stage. Craig's essay, however, grows out of a specific historical moment when an unprecedented number of artists, especially in Europe, were enthralled with the puppet (Posner 130). Harold B. Segel's *Pinocchio's Progeny* (1995), which reads like a catalogue of modernist playwrights exploring puppets and related figures—as dramatic metaphors and actual performance elements—amply attests to the excitement around the form at that time. Visual artists of the period also engaged with puppetry in their quest to invigorate artistic styles. Paul Klee, for example, crafted around fifty hand puppets for his son Felix. These have recently received critical attention as artworks in their own right and for their role in illuminating Klee's oeuvre (Hopfengart, et al.). Why were Craig and his contemporaries so engaged with and captivated by the puppet? We might further refine this question by asking how the puppet, and particular views of it, addressed the needs and concerns of that moment, searching more for historically unique uses, ideas, definitions of, and engagements with the puppet, over Craig's universals.

Investigating historically specific understandings of the puppet and its prevalence in the modernist period highlights the renewed enthusiasm for puppetry in our own time. Puppets and performing objects of all types appear prolifically and prominently today in a range of performance contexts. Productions like *The Lion King* (1997), *Avenue Q* (2003), *War Horse* (2007), and *Hand to God* (2015) have been smash hits on Broadway. Avant-garde venues such as HERE Arts Center and St. Ann's Warehouse in New York and Automata in Los Angeles support the development and presentation of experimental puppetry aimed at adult audiences. "Puppet slams" have sprung up across the country, offering "contemporary short-form puppet and object theater for adult audiences, often late at night in small venues, nightclubs, and art spaces," lending puppetry a hipper social profile (Puppet Slam Network). Blockbuster movies including *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002) and *Avatar* (2009), through their use of CGI and motion capture, draw on the skills and techniques of puppeteers, intermingling the work of screen actors and the capabilities of new technologies (Searls 294). As in Craig's time, contemporary visual artists are also venturing into puppet territory with kinetic sculptures, animations, and other puppet-like forms, crossing the boundaries between arts. South African artist William Kentridge, perhaps the most prominent among them, spans the gamut of performing and visual arts, from his "drawings for projection," to black box installations, to the design and direction of operas like *The Magic Flute* (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 2005) and *The Nose* (Metropolitan Opera, 2010), and mixed-media stage performances

including *Woyzeck on the Highveld* (1992) and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997) created with South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company, the artists behind the international success *War Horse* (Kohler 69).

This flourishing field of puppetry performance motivates a comparison between the contemporary context and the modernist period. What similarities or differences exist in the motivations for artists turning to puppetry as well as in the actual manifestation of performing objects onstage, then and now? What do new uses and expressions of the puppet reveal about our times and the cultural and conceptual roads traveled since the modernist period? How might the insights puppetry offers and the needs it now fulfills differ from those at play at the turn of the last century?

Puppets and related figures, combining anthropomorphic elements with craftsmanship and engineering, serve as useful metaphors and tangible expressions of our continually changing understanding of what it means to be human. They can emerge as fruitful artistic elements at moments when we question and reconceive longstanding paradigms about human beings and our relationship to the inanimate world, offering concrete means of playing with new embodiments of humanity (Orenstein 2). Analyzing puppetry at moments when an engagement with puppet forms abounds can offer unique insights into the cultural concerns, anxieties, and conceptualizations of humanity in a particular period. Puppetry reflects how these preoccupations manifest and express themselves in concrete material terms, and frequently, though not exclusively, through figurative human forms.

The views and uses of the puppet prevalent when Craig was writing his essay speak of the promises and the anxieties brought on by major transformative forces in Europe and the United States at the time, notably the growth of industrialization, the advent of Freudian psychology, and new encounters between East and West. Artists of the period articulate an approach to these issues animated by binary thinking—human versus machine, mind versus body, East versus West, low art versus high art, actor versus puppet. The dominance of dualistic models seems present even in instances when opposites are brought together; for example, when a character merges human and machine elements, the contrast of the organic and the mechanical dominates. Such unions exude tension, discomfort, even the terror of the uncanny, or they attempt to re-craft the organic into mechanical shape, rather than celebrating a harmonious connection, a give-and-take relationship between animate and inanimate matter. By contrast, current approaches to understanding and conceptualizing similar themes emphasize interconnections over binaries and oppositions—humans connected to machines, the mind integrated with the body, a breakdown in divisions of artistic disciplines, and globalization as the interconnection of cultures, nations, and economies. Critical discourses on object-oriented ontologies, the post-human, and globalization echo this overall ontological shift through new theoretical paradigms. Artists and scholars in puppetry have, likewise, replaced Craig's model—which configures the actor in contrast to the puppet—with performances and theories that instead negotiate the interconnection of the human and the inanimate through a diverse array of performing objects.

Puppets in the Modernist Period

Puppeteers use various means to animate inanimate objects, strings and rods, and today even animatronics and computers. Stephen Kaplin addresses the dynamic relationship that exists between performers and their performing objects in this way: "As the physical distance between the performer and the object widens, the amount of technology needed to bridge the gap increases" (Kaplin 33). In so doing, he puts the relatively simple technology of rods and strings on a continuum with more complex technologies, drawing parallels between their uses within puppetry. Both the crafting of puppet figures and the mechanisms used to manipulate them have always placed puppetry in conversation with the technological possibilities and advancements of a given historical moment. As much as they might attempt to mimic the human, puppets are also kin to machines and partake in the changing history and deployment of technology.

In the modernist period, technological developments were quickly and forcefully transforming daily life for every class of society and so were necessarily at the center of mainstream discourse and experience. In 1908, the year Craig wrote "The Actor and the Über-marionette," Henry Ford produced the first Model T. By 1913, Ford had introduced the assembly line as a method of mass manufacturing. The

mingling of new machines and their actions with organic lives and human practices offered new challenges both to those wealthy enough to afford Ford's automobiles and the working classes who produced them. Factory workers were particularly impinged upon when "Taylorism" became popular in the 1910s. Frederick Taylor's method for crafting efficient industrial work environments, by eliminating excess physical movements, effectively choreographed human actions to fit the functions of machines. Such new technologies and interventions in human behavior forced questions about the relationship of human beings to mechanization, disparate entities brought together, becoming highly interdependent. Moreover, turn-of-the-century technologies were large and imposing, resisting easy solutions to how human beings fit in an industrialized world. The puppet, poised between man and machine, a figurative, anthropomorphic character, but operated by technological means—whether rod, string, or something more—provided an artistic site through which to explore new potentials and anxieties around these developments.

The Italian Futurists, embracing the machine and the fast-paced urban environment, were particularly prominent in proposing machine-like puppets for the stage. F. T. Marinetti, founder of the Futurist movement, wrote the play *Electric Puppets (Poupées Électriques)* in 1909, the same year he published his "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism." In the early play John, a maker of *fantoches* or dolls, keeps life-size and lifelike puppets operated by electricity at home, and uses them to enhance his sex life with his wife by pretending to "deceive the puppets by kissing and embracing behind their backs," in spite of his wife's disinterest in the practice (Segel 264). Mary says, "I know … it aroused you to kiss me behind the back of Mrs. Prunelle and under the nose of Mr. Prudent"[1] (Marinetti 132, translation mine). John explains his predilections, saying,

> I'm not complicated at all … I only want, when I kiss you, to have next to me, very precise images of the ugliness of life in order to escape into a full dream with you … Before, leaving the balcony, you also let yourself be taken in by the stupid seriousness of those two dolls, no? … And you jumped, they seemed so real. (*A silence*.) Really, don't you find that their odious presence lends a fascinating beauty to the sea, the clouds, the ships, the birds, and those stars sinking in the horizon. (Marinetti 136, translation mine; ellipses in original)[2]

The constructed dolls, in reflecting the "ugliness of life," serve as an invigorating contrast to the beauty of the natural environment.

Paul Menard claims that *Electric Puppets* is "the first onstage manifestation of manufactured mechanical people" (Menard 123). While the early play centers on exposing the jealousies of its main characters, Menard notes that the later, revised version, *Sexual Electricity* (*Electricittà Sessuale*), written "after Marinetti had more fully defined the Futurist aesthetic" foregrounds "the interactions between mechanized beings and humans" (Menard 124). Further examples of the many Futurist translations of puppet-like figures to the stage include the works of Luciano Folgore. Katia Pizzi describes the puppet figure Pinocchio as uniting Folgore's diverse interests:

> In fact, in combining Folgore's early mechanical leanings, early interest in the puppet theatre, polemical intent and anticonventional nonsense and parody, Pinocchio appears to channel together the manifold interests and inclinations of Folgore's overall production. (Pizzi 139)

Folgore's *Ombre+Fantocci+Uomini (Shadows+Puppets+Humans*, 1920) sets humans in contrast to shadows and puppets, who comment on human action. As Segel interprets the piece, "While awake, the humans

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1 "Je sais … Ça t'émoustiller de m'embrasser derrière le dos de Madame Prunelle et sous le nez de Monsieur Prudent."

2 "Je ne suis pas compliqué du tout … Je veux simplement avoir près de moi, quand je t'embrasse, des tableaux très précis de la laideur de la vie, pour filer en plain rêve avec toi … Tout à l'heure, en quittant le balcon, tu t'es laissée prendre, toi aussi, par la stupide gravité de ces deux fantoches, n'est-ce pas? … Et tu as sursauté, tant ils avaient l'air vivants. (*Un silence*.) Vraiment, tu ne trouves pas que leur odieuse présence donne une beauté fascinante à la mer, aux nuages, aux navires, aux oiseaux et à ces étoiles qui plongent a l'horizon?"

mouth insincere platitudes like manipulated marionettes. Their true natures reveal themselves in sleep and emerge as both shadows and marionettes to mock their alter egos" (Segel 268). In another more concrete Futurist example of figure construction, Fortunato Depero and Gilbert Clavel developed machine-like puppets for their 1918 Futurist ballet, *Balli Plastici.*

Dadaists also found invigorating artistic possibilities in the puppet. Notable among them is Sophie Taeuber-Arp, a visual artist and dancer, married to Jean (Hans) Arp, who was also involved with the Zurich Dada movement, especially in its seminal days at the Cabaret Voltaire. She crafted masks and other figurative forms and, famously, in 1918, a cast of marionettes for Carlo Gozzi's eighteenth-century play, *The King Stag*. These marionettes re-describe human form in geometrical terms: one character's body is a series of stacked cones; another is crafted from oval cylinders. They echo Russian constructivist costume design of the period, as seen in Vsevolod Meyerhold's productions of *Mystery-Bouffe* (1918) and *The Death of Tarelkin* (1922) as well as Oskar Schlemmer's 1920s experiments in costume design at the Bauhaus. In puppetry, however, the geometrical structures are themselves the bodies of the characters, not designs superimposed on human forms—anthropomorphism embedded in geometrical material construction. Taeuber-Arp's fellow Dadaists and sometime collaborators Emmy Hennings and Hannah Höch also made Dada puppets (Bay-Cheng 180; Scott 690).

The Čapek brothers' 1920 play *R.U.R.* (*Rossum's Universal Robots),* which infamously gives us our word "robot," offers another model of the human-machine set in opposition to the human. Here workers are enraged at being replaced by robots, as robots plan to take over the world. In the end, the play offers a vision of a new race of robots procreating and replacing people. Olga Taxidou says of this ending, "This technophobic use of puppets, marionettes, and robots can be read as a direct descendant of the Romantic even Gothic tradition of the monstrous machine" (Taxidou 13). In these examples, the human is reimagined as machine, and set against and in contrast to human models. Machines propose something that is akin to but *other* than human, or the machine Other forces a transformation of the human body and human action. The organic takes on inorganic form.

While the physical landscape was shifting to accommodate automobiles, factories, and airplanes, views of the human inner landscape were also transforming, supported by work in the burgeoning field of psychology. Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* was published in 1900, and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* in 1905. Freud's views of human psychology, in which repressed memories and desires unconsciously motivate human behavior, while offering paths for treating mental illness, also evoke the disturbing vision of individuals not fully in control of or understanding the deep motivations behind their own actions. Again, the puppet, for its human qualities, its ability to appear alive and independently animate, sometimes believed to have a spirit of its own, while also being manipulated by a performer, an Other, offered a useful means for coming to terms artistically with a new vision of human psychology and action.

For symbolist artists, the unseen forces influencing human action and experience were both psychological and spiritual. As Daniel Gerould puts it:

> Thus, on the one hand, the symbolist vision was cosmic, rather than social and collective. On the other hand, it was deeply subjective, located in the inner recesses of the psyche. And the two—macrocosm and microcosm—mirrored one another. The deep structure of the human mind corresponds to the deep structure of the universe. (Gerould 81)

Speaking of Aleksander Benois and Igor Stravinski's 1911 adaptation of *Petrushka* for the Ballets Russes, Segel remarks,

> Moreover, the puppet figure became the perfect embodiment of the turn-of-the-century metaphysical outlook that saw humans as tragically helpless playthings of Fate, of occult, supernatural powers that they had no more ability to control than a marionette the strings and wires animating it. (Segel 235)

The presence of unseen forces was an important theme for Swedish symbolist playwright Hjalmar Bergman, especially in his *Marionette Plays* (1916). Evert Sprinchorn suggests:

> All his life Bergman felt surrounded by unknown terrors … . In his imagination the world became a shadowy, almost dreamlike place ruled by irrational forces and inhabited by two kinds of people, the willful and the weak. The former set the play or action going, while the latter are controlled by invisible strings. Soon, however, even the strong and willful ones are caught up in the puppet show, not knowing where or when the next jerk of the string will come. In Bergman's universe fear is the prime mover. (Sprinchorn 118)

Bergman himself explains the nature of the characters in his *Marionette Plays* as puppets, precisely for their inability to understand the forces leading to their own actions:

> I look upon my characters here as marionettes since they are driven by latent forces of which they themselves are unaware. In one case it is their own past which decides their fate; in another, the force of circumstances; or it may have been a strong man who set the scene going according to his own will, until finally the greatest authority, Death itself, makes his appearance. (Quoted in Sprinchorn 119)

Whether described in Freudian terms as the unconscious, or in occult terms, or as Fate, in much symbolist drama there is an expression of anxiety of other forces, beyond human control, in charge of human destiny; the human being "puppeted" by some Other. Notably, the puppeteer at the turn of the twentieth century is predominantly an invisible force, hidden behind a curtain, reinforcing this idea of an invisible controller in the materiality of performance. More often artists propose the metaphor of the puppet, the idea of a play for "marionettes," rather than real marionettes onstage.

The binary of low or popular art set in opposition to notions of high art was also at issue in this period. The fascination with the fairground booth that Meyerhold, Aleksandr Blok, and other artists expressed in their appropriation of the puppet looked to the Other of folk art as a source for new artistic inspiration. These artists turned to robust popular traditions, which bourgeois culture had generally shunned, to enrich their avant-garde experiments, seeking to unite sophisticated artistic values with popular artistic practices. In relation to the views above, one could read Alfred Jarry's use of the grotesque, Guignol-inspired, puppet-like figure of Père Ubu in *Ubu Roi* (1896) as showing bourgeois society transformed into an Other, estranged from their own humanity.

While Craig's proposal to replace the actor with the "Über-marionette" is now legendary in theater circles, theater artists rarely dwell on the specific vision Craig offers of the puppet in that essay. In hieratic speech, Craig gives what we might today call an Orientalist ideal of the puppet: a puppet from Asia, exotic and mysterious, summoned to provide a cure for the ills of the West:

> In Asia lay his first kingdom. On the banks of the Ganges they built him his home … Surrounded by gardens spread warm and rich with flowers and cooled by fountains … And then, one day, the ceremony. In the ceremony he took part; a celebration once more in praise of the Creation; the old thanksgiving, the hurrah for existence, and with it the sterner hurrah for the privilege of the existence to come, which is veiled by the word Death. And during this ceremony there appeared before the eyes of the brown worshippers the symbols of all things on earth and in Nirvana … and here he comes, the figure, the Puppet at whom you all laugh so much. You laugh at him today because none but his weaknesses are left to him. He reflects these from you; but you would not have laughed had you seen him in his prime, in the age when he was called upon to be the symbol of man in the great ceremony, and, stepping forward was the beautiful figure of our heart's delight … . (Craig 14, ellipses in original)

He goes on to explain how two women "who are not strong enough to look upon the symbol of godhead without desiring to tamper with it" parody it, so that fifty or one hundred years later the proliferation of these parodies give birth to "the modern theatre." He recounts this as "the first record in the East of the actor" (Craig 14).

Craig's description of the puppet in the East certainly evokes the connection of many Asian puppet forms with religious ritual and the accepted history in several Asian traditions of human actor performance techniques developing in imitation of puppet movement—for example, Burmese dance deriving from the movements of Burmese marionettes, or Indonesian *wayang wong* masked dance coming from *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry). However, it is not clear where Craig derives this particular "first record in the East of the actor," and it is certainly not prevalent in Asian performance or puppetry studies. Moreover, Craig expresses this view in a highly romanticized tone. Here he is reflecting the Orientalist tendencies of Westerners of the time, delineated by Edward Said in his foundational study *Orientalism*, to codify an opposition between East and West, seeing the East, among other things, as a magical and strange realm available to serve the needs of the West. As Said defines Orientalism, the term designates "that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line" (Said 73). In further clarifying the proprietary construction of the Orient by Western scholars, he writes, "The Orient existed for the West, or so it seemed to countless Orientalists, whose attitude to what they worked on was either paternalistic or candidly condescending" (Said 204). Craig's mythologizing views of Asian puppetry were completely in line with the Orientalist images and vocabularies of the time, reifying distinctions between the Orient and the Occident.

Other puppet artists of the period who evinced a fascination with the East include Richard Techner with his Javanese inspired rod puppets, Henri Rivière and Caran d'Ache with their Ombres Chinoise performed at the Chat Noir Cabaret (1898), the very name reflecting their interest in borrowing from China, and Lotte Reinenger with her film, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926), constructed from animated shadow puppet-like cut-outs. The ubiquity of puppets in Asia, and their frequent association with religion in Asian contexts, offered European artists a model of puppetry that connected with the symbolist desire to reach out to a mysterious world beyond clear, immediate knowledge from the senses. Asian puppets offered a sense of fairytale, adventure, and mystery to art. Stories transmitted exclusively by these magical puppets in a circumscribed puppet world, again with hidden puppeteers, could reinforce the magical, otherworldliness of theatrical tales.

In the modernist period, the engagement of artists with the puppet and related figures reflected the prevalent themes and concerns of the times: the encroachment of new technologies, the changing view of the human psyche, and the relationship of Eastern and Western cultures. These themes were expressed primarily in binary models through the metaphor or idea of the puppet, doll, or mechanical person and all it could represent.

New Puppetry

In contrast to these earlier models of the puppet, what I call today's "New Puppetry" and the views about it predominantly express interrelationships rather than binaries and oppositions, and reflect our contemporary struggle to understand our now deep involvement with technology, embedded as we are in it, and the new technologies that have also made us more globally interconnected. Furthermore, the new generation of technologies that have the most direct impact on and are quickly transforming daily lives are no longer the hulking skyscrapers, jets, industrial factories, and flashy automobiles, to which we are now well accustomed, but rather the smart phones, tablets, and domestic robots that enlist us to connect with objects in a more intimate and personal way. These "user-friendly," often handheld objects, fit snugly into a pocket, while offering access to the world and seemingly infinite amounts of information. Companies market them seductively, claiming that they can adapt to us and our individual needs, even as they transform our daily practices. In the United States, we regularly use these technologies to express ourselves, projecting ourselves through social media, apps, icons, and photos on personal computing devices, or through constructed characters and gaming avatars. In so doing, we are becoming very at home with the idea of projecting character through objects that we see and use as extensions of ourselves. Prevalent technological anxieties

today revolve less around the idea of technology overtaking humans, and more around issues such as what aspects of ourselves, or our personal data, we share and who has access to it. Like many of today's puppeteers in the US and Europe, who are often visible on stage during their performances, we do not assume that we are hidden, but seek to control what we reveal, how, and when.

Stephen Kaplin's 1999 essay, "A Puppet Tree," contrasts with Craig's 1908 essay in its understanding of the relationship of puppets to human actors, and in so doing articulates the paradigm shift that has taken place in the intervening years between these two publications. Kaplin puts the puppet-performer dynamic at the center of his system, placing the work of the actor on a continuum with that of the puppeteer and puppet rather than setting puppet and actor in contrast to one another. He illustrates these connections in his *Diagram of Interrelated Performing Object Forms* [Figure 1].
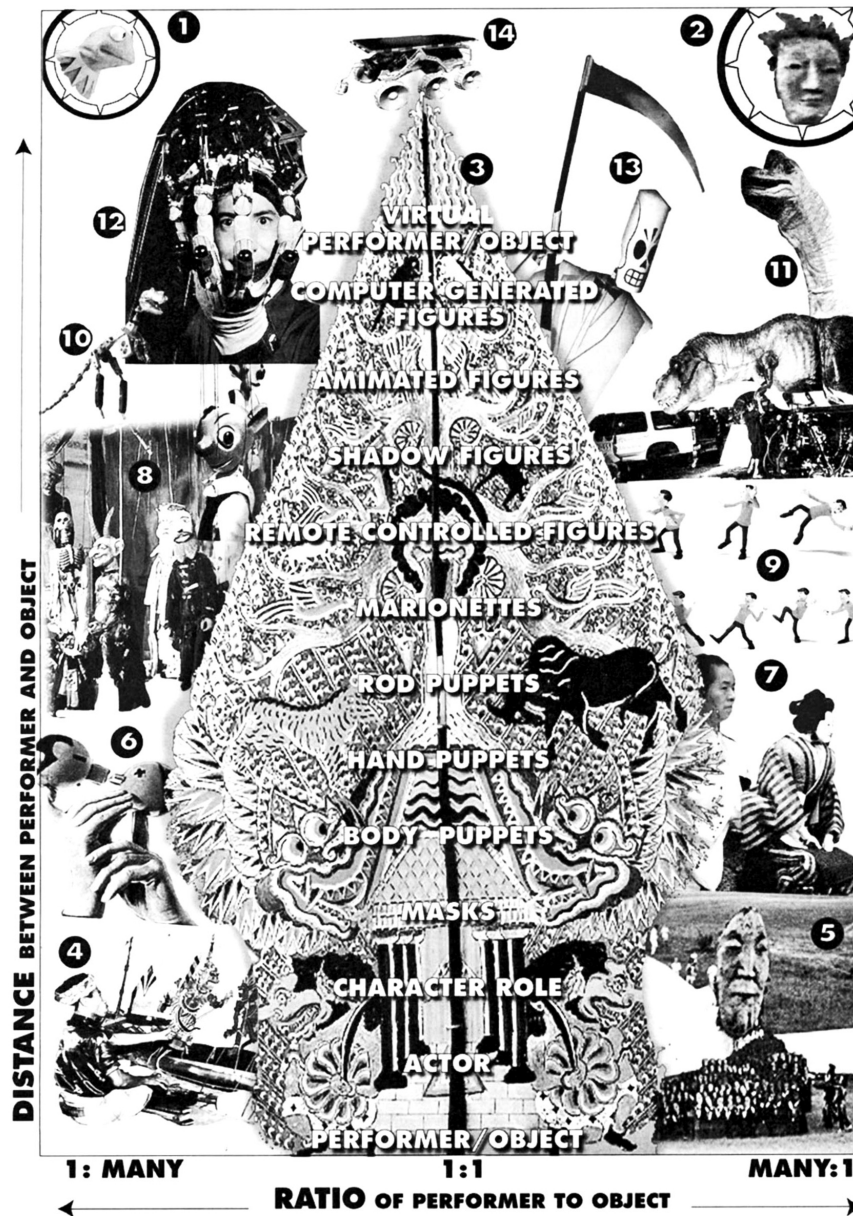

Figure 1. Stephen Kaplin's *Diagram of Interrelated Performing Object Forms*.
Key to images in Notes, pages 109–110 below. Computer imaging by Najma Harisiades. Reproduced courtesy of Stephen Kaplin.

For Kaplin, actors and puppeteers do the same job of projecting character. Actors project character through body, voice, and action, aided by costume elements and props. The actor may then put on a mask, projecting character through that now fully crafted object, still attached to the performer. From there, the mask may become a performing object, like a puppet, independent of the actor, removed from the body of the actor, operated through direct manipulation or some technological means—rod, string, animatronic device, etc. The farther the distance between the object and the actor, the more, or more complex technological means needed to manipulate it. The top of Kaplin's chart shows the Mars Range Rover as an object operated at great distance through highly complex technology, performing on cameras throughout the world to spectators who read personality into its actions. On the opposing axis is the relationship of the number of puppeteers to the number of puppets. One puppeteer might perform a whole cast of characters, as is the case with the Balinese *dhalang*, who, as a solo puppeteer, brings to life all the characters from the Hindu epics, or a group of performers might manipulate a single, large processional figure, as is common in Bread and Puppet Theater's outdoor performances, which call on a community of performers to maneuver the company's enormous characters through the streets or open landscapes.

With this model, Kaplin sums up a view of puppetry that is dominant in the work of puppeteers in the US and elsewhere today, one interested in the connection of actor and puppet, rather than in pitting one against the other. A prime example of this model is found in Julie Taymor's direction of Disney's *The Lion King*. In the award-winning Broadway production, which brought a wide-range of performing objects to the attention of the general public, spectators are steeped in a world of image and constructed characters, where each object is intricately connected to the performer wearing and/or operating it, and both are visible simultaneously. Actors have not become übermarionettes, nor have they been wiped from the stage in favor of the puppet; rather, actor and object work in a symbiotic relationship. Animal heads, legs, tails, appear as extensions of the actors' bodies. We see the puppeteer as hybrid performer creating character through constructed appendages. Puppeteers are no longer strictly invisible entities hidden behind a curtain, but appear in full view, alongside or intertwined with their objects.

Jane Bennett has expressed in philosophical terms the new paradigm of inter-relatedness of humans with the inanimate world, which we see in puppetry, and which echoes our daily practices with technology. Her view of a new model for understanding our ontological status begins with acknowledging what she calls "thing power." She says,

> *Thing-power* perhaps has the rhetorical advantage of calling to mind a childhood sense of the world as filled with all sorts of animate beings, some human, some not, some organic, some not. It draws attention to an efficacy of objects in excess of the human meanings, designs, or purposes they express or serve. Thing-power may thus be a good starting point for thinking beyond the life-matter binary, the dominant organizational principle for adult experience. (Bennett 20)

For Bennett, all matter, for example food or the electricity grid, has its own animate nature, even without invoking any spiritual, religious, or animist views. Using the example of the East Coast blackouts of August 2003, she shows that human beings do not dominate or control inanimate matter, even that which we create. But we are not merely at its mercy either, but rather part of *assemblages* of human and inhuman elements that act together and on each other. The results of these interactions are not uniquely under human control. "Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of sorts— living, throbbing confederations able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within" (Bennett 23-24). Bennett's goal in offering this ontological perspective is to engender new political policies and practices that reflect our interconnections with nature and other aspects of the material world. If we can understand that we do not dominate the inanimate world and nature, we can learn a measure of humility in our relationship to other things, a humility that is necessary for redirecting our ecological future: "Humanity and nonhumanity have always performed an intricate dance with each

other. There was never a time when human agency was anything other than an interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity; today this mingling has become harder to ignore" (Bennett 31).

Bennett's idea of the assemblage, and its focus on the give and take between humans and the non-human, echoes the view Kathy Foley provides on Asian puppetry in her essay "The Dancer and the Danced: Approaches Toward the Puppeteer's Art." Foley argues that in the West puppeteers have traditionally approached puppetry on the model of a machine, seeing "the puppet *qua* object obediently carrying out the intention of the puppeteer." Asian theater, by contrast, "sees the puppet as having a life, law, and logic of its own, which it imposes on the manipulator." The puppeteer discovers that "the visual form of the object has a rhythm and energy that the puppeteer cannot deny. It has nothing to do with him, so he goes out to meet it" (Foley 14-16). As both Foley and Victoria Nelson in *The Secret Life of Puppets* point out, seeing the object as a machine, under the control of an operator, leads to fear that the object will reject that control, take on a life of its own, and dominate its master. This is a fear that hovered over Craig's era. Asian views, by contrast, allow for a communion between object and operator. They place puppeteers, and therefore people, in harmony with the objects around them. This view draws on shamanic and animist religious practices in many Asian communities, and this Asian model is becoming more prevalent among Western puppeteers through frequent intercultural collaborations, which are just one sign of how East-West dichotomies have transformed. The more ubiquitous presence on Western stages of so-called "*bunraku*-style" puppets is another outgrowth of these connections. In this form, drawn from the Japanese *bunraku* puppet tradition, three puppeteers, in full view of the audience, work together to manipulate a single figure through direct control, the artists' hands fully on the puppet. The UK puppet company Blind Summit, for example, uses a *bunraku*-style puppet as the centerpiece of its metatheatrical (or perhaps meta-puppetrical?) show *The Table* (2011). A simple cloth figure with a cardboard head, Moses, describes the *bunraku*-style technique with which he is being manipulated as three puppeteers move him across the tabletop that serves as his empty, restricted, Beckettian world. Puppet artists Tom Lee and Dan Hurlin, discussed below, have also mastered this form in their work, and writer-director Lee Breuer used the technique in several of his shows, including *La Divina Caricatura* (2013) and *Peter and Wendy* (1996).

With Said's deconstruction of Western Orientalist views of the East, with new technologies making international connections instantaneous and frequent, and with the rapid economic growth of Asian powers like China and India, the relationship between East and West, and even that distinction itself, has shifted since Craig's day and given way to notions of interdependence, hybridity, and globalization. In terms of puppetry, there are today more and more international artistic collaborations and cultural borrowings and exchanges taking place in every direction.

The work of the following puppeteers and companies, based in or performing in the US, illustrates the tendencies in New Puppetry I have outlined above. We can see the move towards interconnection in the materiality of these artists' performance practices and frequently in the themes of their shows as well. Larry Reed, Tom Lee, Dan Hurlin, and Handspring Puppet Company's Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler, along with many others, reflect a dominant new model of puppetry today, vastly different from Craig's conception of the puppet and übermarionette and the contrast he defined between actor and puppet.

Larry Reed

Larry Reed, based in San Francisco, founded ShadowLight Productions in 1972. Drawing on his background in film, Reed transformed shadow puppet performance, from the tradition he learned studying to be a *dhalang* puppeteer in Bali, into a large-scale, highly cinematic form. Using human actors with masked faces and a combination of objects and figures projecting dynamic shadows on a huge screen, along with intricate lighting effects, his shows feel like films, but performed live and crafted in the real time of the performance. In their projected shadows, Reed's human actors blend seamlessly into the masks they wear and the fantastical settings they seem to inhabit through a blending of shadow projections on the screen [Figure 2].
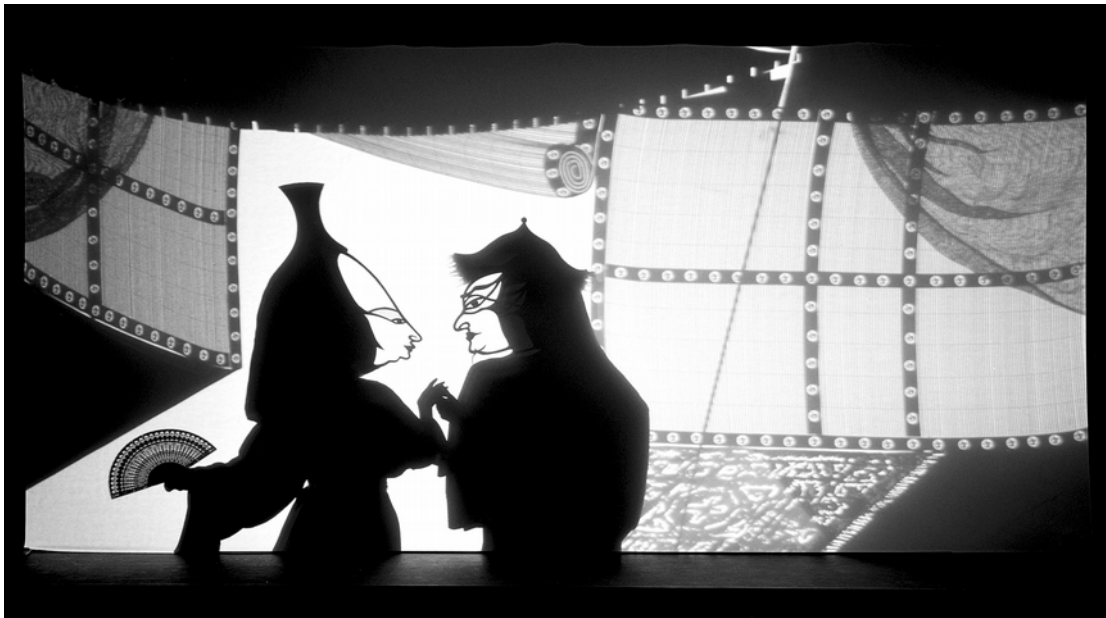

Figure 2. Larry Reed and ShadowLight Production's *In Xanadu* 1997.
Photo: Luis Delgado. Courtesy of Larry Reed.

While Reed uses new technologies in his lighting techniques, he simultaneously undercuts the dominance of digital and film media by creating live events. The images created in real time in the theater by the sometimes chaotic manipulation of bodies, objects, and lights behind the large screen, are ephemeral, projections that seem cinematic but leave no trace behind once they fly from the screen after the moment of performance. Other companies, like Manual Cinema in Chicago and Nana Project in Baltimore, have followed in Reed's footsteps, creating their own cinematic-style shadow techniques. While they may subsequently make filmed documents of their works, which appear on YouTube to promote the companies, the performances are to be experienced primarily as live events. Both these companies exploit overhead projectors as useful tools for easily creating, manipulating, and playing with projected images in front of an audience.

Reed's cross-cultural themes and subjects echo the cultural blending taking place in his artistic practices. Collaborating with Indonesian and Taiwanese artists, among others, he has addressed a range of international themes from Balinese tales in *Sidha Karya* (1994), which incorporated Balinese masked dancers, to the Mongolian story of Kublai Kahn in *In Xanadu* (1993/1994/1997), to Native American trickster tales in *Coyote's Journey* (2000) [Figure 3], to legends from the 16th Century Chinese epic *Journey to the West* in M*onkey King at Spider Cave* (2007), to Joseph Moncure March's 1928 poem in *The Wild Party* (1995), a show that added film noir aesthetics to the shadow puppetry [Figure 4]. Balinese puppeteers have in turn brought Reed's experiments with a large screen format back to Indonesia engendering new explorations in Balinese arts.

Figure 3. Larry Reed and ShadowLight Productions' *Coyote's Journey* 2000.
Photo: Luis Delgado. Courtesy of Larry Reed.

Figure 4. Larry Reed and ShadowLight Production's *The Wild Party* 1996.
Photo: Luis Delgado. Courtesy of Larry Reed.

Dan Hurlin

Working out of New York, Dan Hurlin, who is also Director of Graduate Theatre at Sarah Lawrence College, combines dance choreography with puppetry to create a vigorous performance style that fully integrates objects and performers on wide, open stages. His major, large-scale productions, *Hiroshima Maiden* (2004) and *Disfarmer* (2009), also reflect his training with traditional Japanese *bunraku* puppeteers, in both the crafting and manipulation of his beautifully articulated puppet figures. In *Hiroshima Maiden*, Hurlin's choice of themes also addresses global interconnections: The production is based on the true story of women who were disfigured by the Hiroshima bomb coming to the US where, in a presumed gesture of reconciliation, they were offered plastic surgery. The performance follows the traumatic journey of one of these women while a young American boy also offers his perspective on these events and how they influenced his own life.

Hiroshima Maiden blows open all preconceptions of an enclosed, tightly circumscribed puppet platform, by setting puppets on a large stage with a company of dancer-puppeteers who activate the performance area with their forceful movements and presence. The company members manipulate the characters and objects in intricate coordination, sometimes in *bunraku*-style groups of three, and sometimes in larger choreographic configurations. [Figure 5] These dancer-puppeteers continually transform the performance area, re-arranging the tables and other set elements on top of which the puppet figures move [Figure 6 and 7]. Puppets are not confined to their table tops either, but fly off the tables, hoisted through the air by their dancing manipulators. In *Disfarmer*, based on the life of the reclusive photographer Mike Disfarmer, Hurlin's actor-puppeteers come in and out of roles alongside the puppets they manipulate. Human actors and the *bunraku*-style Disfarmer puppet interact in spite of their different ontological natures.

Figure 5. Dan Hurlin's *Hiroshima Maiden*. L-R Lake Simons, Yoko Myoi, Matt Acheson, Kazu Nakamura, Eric Wright, Tom Lee.
Photo: Richard Termine. Courtesy of Dan Hurlin.

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Figure 6. Dan Hurlin's *Hiroshima Maiden.* L-R Kazu Nakamura, Nami Yamamoto, Yoko Myoi, Tom Lee, Lake Simons, Matt Acheson.
Photo: Richard Termine. Courtesy of Dan Hurlin.

Figure 7. Dan Hurlin's *Hiroshima Maiden.* L-R Lake Simons, Eric Wright.
Photo: Richard Termine. Courtesy of Dan Hurlin.

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Tom Lee

New York based puppeteer Tom Lee also works cross-culturally and embraces a stage mix of technology, actors, and objects, as seen in the productions *Ko'olau* (2008) and *Shank's Mare* (2014). *Shank's Mare,* about an old man's journey toward death, is a collaboration between Lee and Nishikawa Koryu V, a Japanese traditional performer of *kuruma ningyo,* literally "cart puppet," a form of puppetry in which a single puppeteer manipulates a large, *bunraku*-style figure. He does this by sitting on a small cart, his feet connected to those of his figure, which allows him to move the puppet as he rolls about the space. (The puppeteer's hands control the puppet's arms and head.) This freedom of movement differentiates the form from *bunraku,* where the puppets and their movements are confined to the horizontal playing field of the puppet stage. *Shank's Mare* is Lee's attempt to mix this traditional Japanese puppet form with his own style of puppetry, creating a piece that speaks about the value of preserving tradition and knowledge passed down through generations. [Figs. 8 and 9]

The collaboration challenged Nishikawa Koryu V by asking him to try new moves with his traditional puppets, including having them leave the ground, requiring the puppeteer to leave his cart. [Figs. 10 and 11] In both *Shanks's Mare* and *Ko'olau,* (based on events in Hawaii in the 1890s, when people with leprosy were banished to the island of Molokai) [Figure 12], Lee uses live video feed as well as pre-recorded images and animations to create backdrops, settings, and other visual elements for the production and to simultaneously put objects that are live on stage into a digital, visual world. Human figures bleed into these live/recorded hybrid constructs. Lee's aesthetic blends actors, live puppetry, and accessible technologies, to create full and engrossing stage images. The use of live-feed and other digital technologies is popular in puppetry performance today. Laura Heit, for example, based on the West Coast, uses live feed to allow large audiences to witness her miniature matchbox shows. In these shows, all the elements of each story she performs fit into a small matchbox, and she uses matchsticks to manipulate her tiny figures and the painted matchboxes provide her sets.

Figure 8. Tom Lee's *Shank's Mare* at La MaMa Experimental Theatre, NYC, November 2015.
Puppeteers L to R, CB Goodman and Josh Rice. Photo: Ayumi Sakamoto. Courtesy of Tom Lee.

Figure 9. *Kuruma ningyo* puppeteer Nishikawa Koryu V in Tom Lee's *Shanks Mare* at La MaMa Experimental Theatre, NYC, November 2015.
Photo: Ayumi Sakamoto. Courtesy of Tom Lee.

Figure 10. Tom Lee's *Shanks Mare* at La MaMa Experimental Theatre, NYC, November 2015.
Puppeteers, hooded L to R, Justin Perkins, Josh Rice, Leah Ogawa, Takemi Kitamura, CB Goodman. Photo: Ayumi Sakamoto. Courtesy of Tom Lee.

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Figure 11. Tom Lee's *Shank's Mare* at La MaMa Experimental Theatre, NYC, November 2015.
Live Feed Puppeteer Chris Carcione, with Lake Simons, CB Goodman, Justin Perkins (Stag). Photo: Ayumi Sakamoto. Courtesy of Tom Lee.

Figure 12. Tom Lee's *Ko'olau* 2008 (puppet with rifle and 2 puppeteers) at La MaMa Experimental Theatre, NYC.
Puppeteers Marina Celander and Frankie Cordero. Shadow Actor Matt Acheson. Photo: Wayne Takenaka. Courtesy of Tom Lee.

War Horse

War Horse, the international theatrical success, developed at London's National Theatre in collaboration with Jones and Kohler of the Handspring Puppet Company, and performed at New York's Lincoln Center (among other international venues), expresses the relationship of humans to the natural world through the connection of performing objects and actors onstage. The main character, a horse named Joey, and his equine companions, are each intricately crafted mechanisms operated by three puppeteers working together from inside the body of the horse figure. The puppeteers must breathe in unison to bring the breadth of life to the body of the horse. This grouping of animate beings and inanimate constructs is an excellent example of Bennett's notion of "assemblage." Speaking in 2011, Jones, one of the horses' creators, expressed his deep interest in how these horse puppets help connect spectators and performers to the emotional lives of animals (Jones). These figures, therefore, unite human, animal, and inanimate material in a single theatrical manifestation. The production goes further in making interconnections: throughout the show, the horse figures perform alongside actors and projections in a full and diverse theatrical landscape that goes beyond any simple notion of puppetry or view of puppetry as set against the actor's theater. The artistic worlds of puppetry, human acting, and visual projections here are fully intertwined.

Contemporary New Puppetry is more usefully thought of through the eclectic notion of performing objects rather than the more reified idea of puppet. It offers assemblages on stage of object, human performer, and projection. It unites Western practices with Asian methods popularizing the visible *bunraku*-style puppeteer and the Asian model of give and take between performer and object that Foley discusses. The multifaceted theatrical world it creates on stage is not a random or confrontational postmodern pastiche. Through the collection of elements on stage, collaborative practices, and themes that often deal with connecting the past to the present, Western and non-Western etc., New Puppetry strives to find and understand integration and interconnection. The predominant use and vision of the puppet today does not represent a machine newly imposed from the outside set to overtake us, but rather something with which we are deeply connected, and through which we strive to express, understand, and negotiate our interrelationship with each other and with the non-human world.

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NOTES

Figure 1: Stephen Kaplin's *Diagram Of Interrelated Performing Object Forms*. The following are descriptions of the individual components of the diagram.

1. "Kermit the Frog"— star of Jim Henson's Muppets and arguably the most widely recognized puppet character on the planet. (Photographer unknown. From *The Art of the Muppets*.)

2. "The God face"— by Peter Schumann. The arrival and setting up of this 25" tall rod puppet marks the beginning of Bread and Puppet's annual Domestic Resurrection Pageant performance. It requires eight performers to operate. (Photo: Ron Simon)

[Figures 1) and 2) represent the two most influential purveyors of late 20th century American puppet theater.]

3. Kayan shadow figure from Indonesian *wayang* performances representing the Tree of Life. Used to indicate act divisions and the start and end of performances. Also used to represent scenic elements, such as mountains, forests or palaces. The Kayan is the Cosmic ground on which the shadow play is enacted, hence its use here as the body of the "Puppet Tree." (Photo: John Koopman)

4. A Malaysian *dalang* or puppet master, singlehandedly operates all the characters from the complex narratives, drawn from classical Hindu sources such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. (Photo: Leonard Bezzola)

5. "Mother Earth"— another giant rod figure mounted on a wheeled carriage, from the Bread and Puppet Pageant. This figure engulfs the entire cast of hundreds of performers at the end of the performance, lights the fire that consumes the representation of evil, and then exits the field with everybody in its skirts and arms. (Photo: Ron Simon)

[Figures 4) and 5) represent the extremes of the dimension of ratio of performer to object.]

6. Sergei Obratzov's love duet strips down the hand puppet to its most essential elements. (Photographer: unknown. From Obratzov, *My Profession*.)

7. A Japanese *bunraku* puppet and performer, from the highly refined tradition of puppetry. (Photo: Harri Peccinotti)

8. Antique Czech marionettes from Faust, from the collection of Vit Horej and "Hurvinek," the famed co-star of Josef Skupa's Marionette theater in Prague. (Photo: David Schmidlapp)

9. Stop action "Claymation" figure from the Aardman Studios (makers of *Wallace and Gromit*) are manipulated in the temporal space between blinks of the film camera's eye. (Photo: Richard Lang)

10. Stop action dinosaur armature built by Jim Danforth for the movie *Caveman*. Puppet figures such as these have been staples of movie special effects until being superseded by computer animation figures. (Photo: Jim Danforth)

11. Two mechanical dinosaurs from the movie Jurassic Park. The T-Rex operated via a 1/4 scale waldo, which encoded the movements into a computer that then translated them into motion for the full scale puppet. The whole rig could be operated by four puppeteers. (Photographer unknown. From *Cinefex*, 55, August 1993)

12. Virtual puppetry requires new ways of interfacing with the computer generated environment. These motion sensor gloves, on the hands of their inventor, James Kramer, allow their wearer to perceive the shape and firmness of virtual objects. (Photo: Thomas Heinser)

13. "Manny Calavera," the star of LucasArts computer adventure game, *Grim Fandango*, represents the digitalized future of the performing object. (Image: LucasArts)

14. NASA's Martian Sojourner represents the furthest extreme of remote control manipulation of objects possible with today's technology. (Image: Don Foley)

Claudia Orenstein is Chair of the Theatre Department at Hunter College with an appointment at the Graduate Center, CUNY. Her publications include *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (co-editor), *The World of Theatre: Tradition and Innovation* (with Mira Felner), and *Festive Revolutions: The Politics of Popular Theatre and the San Francisco Mime Troupe* as well as articles on Asian theatre, puppetry, and political theatre. She is Associate Editor for *Asian Theatre Journal* and was dramaturg for Stephen Earnhart's *Wind Up Bird Chronicle* and Tom Lee's *Shank's Mare*.

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