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Applied Puppetry: Communities, Identities, Transgressions [editorial]

In May 2017, a network of puppetry and applied drama practitioners and scholars, including the editors of this special issue, convened in Cape Town, South Africa for a week-long series of workshops, panels and discussions around the emerging field of Applied Puppetry. This event was the first stage of Objects with Objectives, an Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) international research network led by David Grant of Queen's University, Belfast.[1] The network sought to investigate and articulate the role of the puppet and performing object in applied drama settings - a role that has long been widespread across the spaces of education, community art and socially engaged practices, but that has only recently begun to be examined through the lenses of performance theory. This special issue is one of the outcomes of this project, and we are pleased to contribute to a growing network of scholarship and practice that situates the puppet or performing object as a unique entity within applied theatre and drama.

This special issue aims to provide insights and interrogations into the wide range of practices that use puppetry in applied contexts. Puppetry is emerging in the UK and US as a recognised component of mainstream theatre cultures, in part through the influences of *War Horse* and *The Lion King*. Alongside this increased recognition of the potential of the artform is a significant growth in scholarly interest in puppetry, as evidenced in recent publications focused on the subject (e.g. Bell, Posner and Orenstein 2014, Foley 2016, Goodlander 2018, Purcell-Gates and Fisher 2017, Mello, Orenstein and Astles 2019, Smith 2018 and 2014), international puppetry conferences and symposia, and the 2017-18 international AHRC research network on applied puppetry mentioned above, Objects with Objectives.

In part inspired by this increasing acceptance of puppetry as a vibrant theatrical artform worthy of scholarly investigation, its practices have expanded and developed in significance internationally over the last decade. During this time puppetry has increasingly been utilized around the world in community settings including work with prisoners, elder care groups and refugees. Puppetry and applied theatre practitioners have developed practices in these

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[1] Network members included Hector Aristizábal, ImaginAction; Cariad Astles, Central School of Speech and Drama, London and Exeter University; David Grant, Queen's University, Belfast; Dr Matthew Jennings, Ulster University; Tamara Lynn, Living Stages, Portland, Oregon; Dr Elliott Leffler, University of Toronto; Dr Kat Low, Central School of Speech and Drama, London; Dr Aja Marneweck, University of Cape Town; Dr Sara Matchett, University of Cape Town and The Mothertongue Project; Dr Caoimhe McAvinchey, Queen Mary University of London; Dr David Morton and Nicholas Paine, Dead Puppet Society, Brisbane, Australia; Dr Laura Purcell-Gates, Bath Spa University, UK; Dr Matt Smith, University of Portsmouth, UK; Professor Jane Taylor, University of the Western Cape; Karen Torley, Banyan Theatre Company, Northern Ireland.

settings in conjunction with Boalian techniques, somatic practices and breath work. While the scholarly discourse on puppetry is developing, and there has been some attention to the application of puppetry in certain therapeutic and educational settings (Desmond et al 2015, Bernier et al 2005, Gerity 1999, Aronoff 1996), there remains a persistent gap in knowledge and analysis around the diverse applications of puppetry in applied community settings.

This issue addresses this lack of academic publications in regards to applied puppetry, and brings together scholars and practitioners representing a range of practices in communities across the globe in order to acknowledge applied puppetry as an international practice. The focus of this edition is the practices, and particularly the objects themselves in practice. Through rigorous interrogation and analysis of these moments of performance the articles open up how puppets and performing objects negotiate complex communications, explorations and discoveries, and facilitate the emergence of relevant stories and issues.

The articles and artistic reflections in this special edition represent one aspect of the burgeoning publications that are currently being produced involving performing objects and puppets applied to specific communities. This year *The Journal of Applied Arts and Health* is publishing works about the application of puppetry to the arts and health setting. Alongside this development of scholarship about relational puppet practices there is an epoch-defining interest in the cultures of non-human, post human, trans human, and more than human. Puppets have always navigated this peculiar terrain of the more than human, and as unusual objects are well placed in relation to current debates about humanity and its relation to the object world (Bennett 2010, Harman 2018, Morton 2018). The 'object turn' is certainly influential in many of the articles in this edition, and the discussions and arguments contained here are networked with each other but also interface in the lively debates about race, representation and ecologies of practice.

Developing a robust scholarly approach to puppetry as a social practice is a key aim of this issue. To reflect this exciting and varied terrain of knowledge and experience, the contributions represent diverse modes of writing about and analysing the various applied applications of puppetry - from theory to practice-based research to artistic reflection - with a thematic thread of issues of communities, identities and transgressions as refracted through puppetry. Specifically, contributors to the issue reflect on and theorise the myriad roles and functions of puppetry within community settings, both as a unique mode of engagement with community and, as articulated by both Aja Marneweck and Dafa Puppet Theatre, as tools for enacting community. Pieces also engage with the role of puppetry regarding issues of

identity, in terms of enabling expressions of identity within community practice, as well as (re)constructing traumatised identities as in Karim Dakroub's account of puppetry work with Syrian refugees and Paulette Richards's artist reflection on the crafting puppet bodies to heal racial trauma. The final theme of transgressions refers to the anarchic quality of puppets as hybrid bodies capable of transgressing multiple boundaries through simultaneously occupying opposing binary positions: subject/object, figure/material, alive/dead. These transgressions appear in each of the contributions to this issue, and are particularly highlighted by Karl Tizzerd-Kleister and Matt Jennings in their analysis of animating artificial bodies in nursing training, and by Tobi Poster-Su as he grapples with the ethics of using puppetry to represent and ventriloquise the dead.

The aim of this special edition is to widen the way that applied puppetry is debated and considered as an emergent and definable set of practices. It is also a challenge to the well-established field of applied theatre to take objects and puppets in practice much more seriously. As we struggle in the twenty-first century to understand the role humanity serves within the hyperobject of our shared environments, the pressing questions about what objects do in our practice becomes more and more prescient. Hughes and Nicholson (2016: 9) have emphasised that applied theatre must consider the power of the material world amongst applied performance practices. Puppets shape our identities as well as representing them, and analysis of this network of power and practice is an important theme in this edition.

The term 'applied puppetry' was proposed by Matt Smith in 2014 at the *Hands On* symposium at London's Little Angel theatre led by Slavka Jovanovic. The intention behind adopting this term was to provide a general terminology to capture the myriad practices and scholarly engagements that fall under this umbrella field.By this point applied theatre had developed a robust academic profile and the intention was to use the burgeoning critical mass of the field to influence thinking about engaged puppetry. At the time it was emphasised that anyone is free to name their practices what they like, but the way of thinking about puppetry used in workshops and communities should be more focused and rigorous. Since 2014 the term has become part of the discourse of UNIMA, Puppet Power conferences in Canada and Broken Puppet Symposia. This was developed in the intensive environment of David Grant's research network Objects with Objectives where the critical thinking of applied theatre was brought to bear on the puppet practices of a global gathering of practitioners and academics.

In 'Conducting, Distancing, Double Vision and Metaxis: theorising Applied Puppetry', David Grant draws together key discussions and theories developed through Objects with Objectives and related projects to construct theoretical underpinnings for the emerging field of applied puppetry. Grant traces theatrical theories of distancing and bridging, including Brecht's *V-Effekt*, Meyerhold's formula N=A1+A2, and Tillis's concept of *double vision* as drawn on by Matthew Reason in his 2008 study of children's perceptions of puppetry. Noting the common perception of puppetry's efficacy when dealing with sensitive or traumatic stories as based in the ability for puppetry to create a distancing effect for participants and spectators, Grant suggests that the more nuanced concept of Boal's *metaxis* - 'the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality [the aesthetic] and the reality of the image [the social]' (1995: 13) - can aid us in unpacking the blurred relationship between puppet and puppeteer, as well as in approaching questions of the spectator's complex and layered experience of puppetry. Applying this approach to a range of case studies, Grant illustrates the ways in which a deeper understanding of how puppetry functions allows both for a fruitful theoretical exchange between the fields of applied drama and puppetry, and opens up rich possibilities for intervention and engagement with applied puppetry.

Aja Marneweck contributes a reflection on South African community puppetry by examining the *Barrydale Giant Puppet Parade*, an annual community puppetry event that began in 2010 in Barrydale, South Africa as a collaboration between Handspring Trust for Puppetry Arts, the local organisation *Net vir Pret* and other partners. Marneweck leads the reader through the development of what has become a major annual community event for residents of Barrydale that brings together the 'white' and 'coloured' sides of the racially and economically divided town. She analyses the role of puppets in community reconciliation, situating the event within the wider context of radical aesthetic, political and cultural transformations in Sub-Saharan Africa, and drawing on theories of radical political performance to argue that the annual Barrydale performance 'raises a complex ambiguity of form, meaning, politics and aesthetics around celebration and imagination amidst social realism and economic disparity'. Marneweck links puppetry's unique capacity here to Jane Taylor's (2016) argument that magical thinking allow for the possibility of a reciprocal sustainability. The second part of the article delves into the world of the Barrydale Parade itself through a conversation between Creative Directors Marneweck and Donna Kouter. Kouter reflects on community reconciliation and the particular abilities of puppets in storytelling to create a 'magical link', which Kouter envisions as a golden thread, between

puppeteer, puppet, and spectator; on puppets providing a 'whole experience' for participants; and on puppetry as a vehicle for experiencing the non-human world.

Academic and theatre maker Tobi Poster-Su challenges the puppeteer to reconsider their ethical relation to others in regards to how we can apply this relational viewpoint to practice. He draws on the literal and metaphorical acts of ventriloquism that were part of the production of *The Depraved Appetite of Tarrare the Freak,* a chamber opera for puppets by Wattle and Daub. Poster-Su explores how the creative team attempted to represent the dead through puppets, and uses the framing of documentary theatre in order to raise and grapple with ethical concerns around representing the dead on stage. This performance is considered within a network of intersectional concerns including race. Giving voice to others through the form of a puppet opera, this production is critically considered in relation to the wider frame of how 'voicing' is an ethical act. Poster-Su concludes that puppetry destabilises the construction of subjectivity on the stage and opens up a space in which artifice is performed. This provocative reading of an important production delves into the knotty issues that puppetry often involves when it is 'presenting the pretence' (Arden 1977) of drama to a public audience.

Karim Dakroub produces a compelling case for the use of puppetry in relation to trauma in the context of the Syrian crisis and this article brings us close to the way that puppetry can provide a bridging mechanism for people suffering very powerful bodily effects. It crosses the terrain of how puppetry can be used in a therapeutic and community based method. The way the puppet is an interface between the body and the trauma is explored through scenes, events and in the very clear structures the author provides. The use of puppetry is presented as a format through which positive changes can affect the lives of displaced people. As much as a medium of expression the article presents puppetry as a way through embodied traumas like sleep desperation. The puppet becomes a site for projected anxieties that can be explored in a distanced manner developing new discoveries for participants. Overall this article as well as discussing applications of practice offers practical approaches towards puppetry with vulnerable groups. It is a very powerful account of how puppetry is engaged in the most volatile and uncertain contexts.

Karl Tizzard-Kleister and Matt Jennings draw on Deleuzian theory in their discussion of puppetry and nursing students in order to understand the issues of animating artificial bodies and the interface between human and non-human. The provocation to apply the concept of

the 'body without organs' to puppetry provides a rich source with which to theorise applied puppetry. These ideas make us reconsider agency and complex personhood and how they are connected inexorably to human and non-human rights. In this article the context of simulation training of nurses in how to respect agency and consider empathy are presented. This ongoing project indicates how adaptable puppetry can be in non-theatrical contexts. Animating already anthropomorphised medical mannequins appears to bring a whole new exciting and innovative quality to these objects. The authors explore the way that the performance of the mannequins enables students and academics to learn about the way people can learn from performing objects. This is an example of how universities can deploy interdisciplinary approaches that use puppetry to augment new ways of thinking and learning.

Persephone Sextou presents an in-depth study of the challenges facing practitioners using applied theatre techniques and puppetry. She discusses the data gathered from an important network grown out of the Broken Puppet Symposia, considering the labour of practitioners in relation to emotional toil and resilience. She investigates the way that practitioners can take account of emotional labour safely and responsibly in regards to the challenging environment and contexts, calling for a responsiveness to the issues of emotional resilience and an integrated approach to the skills necessary for best practice. This builds on Sextou's already important contribution to approaching art in the context of health. The innovation of this article is the focus on the practitioner as a site for knowledge making; Sextou defines the process of emotional professionalism by suggesting that 'Training on emotional awareness and self-care is not to be confused with self-therapy but rather a process of empowering the artist to perform to patients as audiences and feel emotionally secure in performing through this empowerment in a demanding environment.'

Riku Laakkonen discusses experiences and data within the palliative context in Finland. This article is both poignant in the way it approaches the subject of end of life and sensitive in the way it describes an account of delicate co-construction and interchange using object theatre. Laakkonen provides a powerful account of the exchange between Laakkonen and patients and the way he uses objects to elicit narratives and dialogues. The account of practice is framed by relevant theories that provoke consideration of how this type of intimate practice can affect the lives of people who are very vulnerable, including a novel reworking of Augusto Boal's spect-actor (2008) into Laakkonen's idea of the spect-animator, a relationship elicited when he plays with objects and the patients in a one to one performance

experience. This article treads the path between applied puppetry as therapy mixed with respecting the agency of the participant.

One of our intentions in this edition is to include the voices of practitioners as unique producers of knowledge within the growing field of applied puppetry. We therefore conclude the special edition with a section devoted to artist reflections. Dafa Puppet Theatre reflects on their use of puppetry with refugee and other communities, positioning puppetry and performing objects as sites of both expression and enactment of community and identity, allowing us to 'break out of time', re-imagine histories, and create new and layered memories for objects.

Paulette Richards provides a compelling account of her turn to puppetry to address racial trauma and the Black Lives Matter movement in the US. She explores her process of 'memory, performance and substitution' as inspired by Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead* (1996) to frame her process of 'cultural magic', drawing on cross-cultural performance and memorial practices to 'retrieve the missing bodies from the realm of effigies and re-animate them with spiritual force as fetishes' in an intensely personal ritual of healing.

The final reflections presented here are snapshots of artists' puppetry practices in community settings through short artist statements. Joanne Oussoren provides us with a statement about how the use of shadow puppetry enhances the experience of older people in the Dutch care system. This way of working is presented as an effective way to open up new experiences for old people who are often isolated and vulnerable. Oussoren offers the reader some key points to consider in relation to using puppetry with this type of group in the community.

Karen Torley describes how she conducts her professional practice in communities and a variety of settings using the puppet as a 'bridge' and imaginative device. She describes several powerful events and moments of practice, including the moment when one of her puppets was adopted by children in a South African township during the Objects with Objectives network gathering. Torley represents how professional puppeteers embed community practices into their work as an integral and vital part of their work as artists.

We conclude the edition with an artist statement that encapsulates the triad of community, identity, and transgression in relation to puppetry and performing objects. Daniel Loyola

offers a compelling and rich account of his company Trazmallo Ixinti's puppetry and mask work with communities in Mexico, which employs ethno-theatrical research alongside close collaboration with community members. He highlights the company's recent work with the Indigenous Community of Santa María de Ostula, Michoacán in which they engaged with masks and jester figures known as Bartolos through community ritual and performance to interrupt and subvert colonising narratives within playful ritual space. Loyola highlights the close collaboration with community members in exploring, constructing and enacting these ritual figures, and foregrounds the human need to 'make sense of the fascination and magic of living objects'.

This special issue presents work that is not only produced by the scholars and practitioners; it is formed by the magnificent performing objects that impress our minds and bodies through workshops, interventions and performances. The words are here not because of how we have moved puppets and performing objects, but because of how they have moved us. This humble positionality towards scholarship is a vibrant landscape to explore and consider. We hope you enjoy the ways in which this knowledge produces shifts in thinking away from the anthropocentric to the thrilling world of objecthood in performance cultures. Stuff matters in unique ways and in a fantastic and particular way in the specific environments and communities within which it is found.

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