Creating Resonance in Emptiness

with Puppet Theatre

How the metaphors created with puppets, objects and images in theatre resonate with the constructed nature of reality and the illusion of the self.

In this paper I will be considering the ways in which ‘resonance’ is created between the object in performance and the ‘reality’ or constructed worldview of the perceiver. In order to make my argument I will explore the nature of the constructed reality in which the perceiver perceives. I will do this from the philosophical perspective of Madhyamaka Buddhism. I will also explore the functioning of metaphor and the ways in which objects hold and carry meanings and sets of association that when 'staged' in particular ways, can provoke a conscious reflection on the illusory nature of an individual’s ‘reality’. In other words my paper looks at the kind of argument that is possible inside puppetry precisely because of the metaphorical potential of the object, and the kinds of resonance it establishes within an audience and the way this relates to the individual’s experience of his/her world.

Puppets are inanimate objects brought to life in performance. The life perceived in the puppet is not actually present and an adult audience is aware of this. The medium therefore becomes automatically metaphorical, representing something other than what it is. While this is true of most theatrical production, in puppet theatre the metaphorical nature of the form is particularly overt.

Metaphor exists in the relationship of what is perceived to an already established field of experience in the mind of the perceiver. The way in which the metaphor is interpreted by the mind of the perceiver is determined by the individual’s perception of reality. An exploration of the metaphorical potential of puppetry is therefore integrally related to the individual’s perception of reality.

Our perception of ‘reality’ is a constant process of using concepts to represent perceptions including emotions, images and dynamics. In theatre this process is amplified as the context is presented as constructed. Much of puppetry works with the tension between what is present and what we experience, between the construction of an illusion and being trapped in (driven by and unconscious of) this construction. As objects and images are used to convey aspects of the ‘self’ and its realities, they become obvious as representations through their imperfection. When these metaphorical tools are used consciously, they can provoke associations that relate to the subtle layering of the concept of self and the experience of being human.

While metaphor is an abstract concept residing in abstract realms, in artistic practice such as theatre the communication must be carried in a material form or medium. This paper looks at how Puppetry can capture and create individual meaning through the metaphorical potential of objects, puppets and visual images in a theatrical context.
RESONANCE IN THE ILLUSION OF REALITY

John Cage who has worked extensively in challenging the concept of reality in performance states:

You say: the real, the world as it is. But it is not, it becomes! It doesn’t wait for us to change...It is more mobile than you can imagine. You are getting closer to reality when you say that it ‘presents itself’; that means it is not there, existing as an object. It is a process.

(Cage and Charles, 1981 in Kaye, 1994: 3)

According to phenomenology reality is constituted by our perceptions. That a ‘reality’ exists ‘behind’ these perceptions is considered speculation (Simms, 2003: 10). In experiencing the world around us we use the filter of our senses to perceive the form of something. The individual’s collected perceptions are brought together to form a concept or a consciousness of the thing (Simms, 2003: 11). These collected concepts ‘conceal’ the original object and cloud the perceiver’s ability to experience its true nature (States 1984: 22).

Madhymaka, a Buddhist school of philosophy, refers to the concept of ‘reality’ in two ways: relative and ultimate. Relative reality is based on the illusion of an independently existing self. This is a dualistic (self and other, separation) illusion. Ultimate reality, on the other hand, is defined in contrast to the relative, and is non-dualistic.

Because ultimate reality is non-dualistic, it cannot be perceived by the mind that is operating within dualistic concepts. Madhymaka examines the conscious and unconscious processes of sensorial and conceptual experience as within the framework of relative existence. Relative experiences are relevant to the human experience of ‘self’ and reality. In both Madhymaka Buddhist and Phenomenological systems all concepts of reality are influenced by the mind which perceives them. According to the Madhymaka point of view, the idea of reality and the perception of independent existence are themselves illusory.

According to Madhyamaka, all things are empty of inherent existence. This does not mean that nothing exists but rather that nothing exists independently as an entity. The mind creates its relationship with all other phenomena and with itself. The mind and the object of perception are inseparable.

Look for the boundary between the mind and the body, and you will not find any difference between them. They are the same. You will not find any difference between the body and the mind because the body is an appearance of the mind.

(Thrangu, 2004: 112)

The mind, according to this view is not the intellect or intellectual functioning but should rather be thought of as consciousness or awareness. This mind creates concepts for the
appearance of body and becomes attached to these concepts as part of the ‘self’. So the mind defines the body and through this defines the self.

Resonance and the making of meaning

**Resonance** *(from the Latin echo)*...*the term refers to the magnetic effect of metaphor which organises the elements of a poem into a harmonic code...*(It can be used) to express a sense of thematic fullness.... *(Meyers & Simms, 1989:255)*

Artistic expression is effective when it touches the perceiver. This is achieved through a process of meaning making, both on the part of the creator and of the perceiver.

Resonance and the making of meaning can be understood through both semiology and phenomenology. Semiology, the study and science of signs, investigates the production of meaning by both theatre practitioners and perceiver based on analysis of the theatre product (text/performance etc.) *(Pavis, 1998: 326).*

As the sign itself has no independent existence of its creator(s) and perceiver(s) (from a Madhyamaka perspective) it manifests in a relationship between these two. The process of exchange established between the signifier or plane of expression and the signified or plane of content is one of semiosis (mutual co-dependence) *(Pavis, 1998: 328).* Correlation is established between the original impetus (and productive reading) of the director and the receptive reading (and resonance) of the spectator, resulting in a dynamism in the production of meaning *(Pavis, 1998: 328).* Phenomenology shifts the emphasis away from the reading of ‘signs’ and onto the perceptual experience. From this perspective what is important is not so much the referential significance of the sign but its power beyond concept *(States, 1985: 20).*

Recognition and the effect thereof can be important in the process of meaning exchange. It is through recognition of the aspects of the performance (ideological, psychological or literary) on the part of the spectator that the illusion required for fiction is developed *(Pavis,1998: 307).* Pavis says of this recognition that the spectator derives a certain pleasure from it as, in Psychoanalytic terms, it allows for an appropriation and affirmation of a repressed aspect of the self *(Pavis, 1998: 308).*

*Theatre allows us to re-see moments, quite simple moments sometimes, in a fresh way. ...That freshness is a heady experience. It is something that is intensely desirable to us.* *(Kohler and Jones, 2005)*

Resonance is the experience of the recognised and the unrecognised (subconscious, repressed, suppressed and associated material) being stimulated at the same time. It is the emotional charge attached to the recognised that provokes resonance. While recognition, understanding and empathy can be keys to stimulating resonance, the result of resonance is not necessarily that an individual reaches understanding. It is through the medium of expression (the sign, image, object or in this
case puppet) that concepts and sensations meet, individual realities are negotiated, and meaning is made and deconstructed.

Because artistic expression is not necessarily about defined cognitive interpretation, it can allow for a communicative experience beyond the conscious mind. As discussed, the individual perceiver is a mind containing conscious and unconscious constructs, built around an idea of self. This is the individual’s reality. In order to touch the individual, the artwork must resonate with these constructs. The theatre creator’s concern is to reach the reality of the perceiver. While it is important to consider the connotations associated with objects in theatre it is impossible to predict the precise metaphorical implications or meanings that may be created in an individual mind.

**Metaphor:** (from the Greek “to transfer, to carry across”) a rhetorical figurative expression of similarity or dissimilarity in which a direct, no literal substitution or identity is made between one thing and another...

(Meyers, J & Simms, M, 1989:178)

One of the most important human cognitive abilities is imagination (of which metaphor and metonymy are devices) involving the projection of concepts onto other concepts, formulated through language (Barcelona 2000: 3).

At the core of the metaphor is the experiential domain. Characterised by most cognitive linguists as ‘encyclopaedic’, the experiential domain contains all entrenched knowledge an individual has about that area of experience and as such is greatly varied from one individual to another (Barcelona 2000: 9).

Paul Ricoeur, in examining the functioning of metaphor, explores the reading of symbols into the world and reading the world as text. He suggests that the reading of the world as text and the reading of written texts is the access to self-understanding, as this textual reading provides a bridge between the subjectivity of the self and the objectivity of the world (Simms 2003: 43). The intention of the perceiver to perceive gives the results of perception and yet the results influence the intention of the perceiver. This is known as the hermeneutical circle.

Ricoeur’s examination of metaphor is largely based on this circle. Ricoeur describes the relationship of the perceiver to the metaphor as one in which the perceiver associates the form (metaphorical image) with its active context. He describes this as metaphor allowing mimesis (imitation, descriptive association, representation) in muthos (plot, action) to capture human experience and bring it to life for the perceiver.

The power of the metaphor lies in its capacity to provoke in the perceiver a process of conscious or subconscious interpretation. As Simms states:

*Metaphors are only valuable because they force the listener or reader to interpret them. This work of interpretation is itself an intrinsic part of the metaphorical process. As a process, it involves the linking of the word to the context of the whole sentence in which it is located, but also in the cultural...*
context of the discourse in which the sentence is located. This is what it means to be alive, to be an interpreting being and so it is the metaphorical dimension of language which is the most alive in language.

(Simms, 2003: 73)

The same is true of visual metaphors, and objects used metaphorically in theatre. Not only do they provoke, through interpretation, broader associations with the subject but they also reflect and provoke associations with the context both physical and cultural from which they originate or are created.

The reason for the provocation of interpretation by metaphors is that they allow for seeing as and not simply seeing. This seeing as relies on the intuition and imagination of the perceiver (Simms 2003: 74). The metaphor sets up tensions between the image and that which it represents. The perceiver is aware that the representation is not the same as that which it represents and yet is also aware of how they relate. Arriving at a metaphorical truth requires the perceiver to suspend judgement of the literal truth of the image (Simms 2003: 75). This relates closely to the willing suspension of disbelief that is important in theatre as a whole and in puppetry in particular.

Reading Metaphor in Puppet Theatre

As established above the perceiver’s reality is touched by her engagement with the images and their contextual positioning within the performance. Engagement happens on several different levels, or domains of experience. These are the physical/experiential; the emotional and the conceptual/intellectual. As these domains of experience are perceived they are mapped into the internal experience (pre-existing in the mind of the perceiver), creating metaphor. All the domains of experience perceived are mutually co-dependent. Without the experiential the emotional cannot arise and so on. However it is useful to examine them separately in the interests of understanding the complex response in the perceiver.

Physical/experiential engagement: Introducing physical objects and images to theatre creates a resonance with the physical world and our own physical bodies in relation to it. Because physical objects and bodies appear to have independent existence, their existence as real in our internal worlds is very powerful. They are strongly linked to associations of time, place and function. These associations become like keys into the minds of the perceivers. They may be re-formed there in relation to their newly revealed qualities and/or they can create an awareness of the narratives we create around our physical environment.

Emotional engagement: Because of the element of narrative the perceiver may become emotionally and/or intellectually involved in the play-off between created dynamics in theatre. Creating relationships between characters is a standard theatrical practice. Puppetry easily allows the theatre maker to create dynamics between people and aspects of themselves. This is not only about the complexity of emotional and intellectual response to circumstances but rather the complex response to the ‘self’ as a conceptual construct.
**Intellectual engagement:** Theatre, created to cause meanings and associations, may become a parallel experience to the narratives created in life. The process of creating associations, meanings and readings is continuous in the everyday world but mostly we are not consciously aware of it. Theatre positions elements in relationship to one another, with the intent that the perceiver should engage with these elements at some level. However, because the perceiver is always aware that the context is fictitious, there is a degree of conscious insight into the construction of these narratives. This awareness can create a consciousness in the perceiver of her subjectivity, not only in the moment but elsewhere in her experience of reality.

**PUPPETRY IN THEATRE AS A METAPHORICAL MEDIUM**

In order to examine the meaning created by puppets, object and images in theatre the mediums in themselves and their metaphorical connotations are explored.

**Theatre as an artistic medium**

Puppetry and Visual Theatre are mixed media which bring together expression through images and expression through performance. Theatre and performance have three specific qualities: live human presence, space and time.

**Live presence:** In theatre, some human presence is a given; the presence of the performer and the presence of the witness to the performance or perceiver. This live presence allows for a unique moment of communication. There is an ephemerality to the product in that it is never the same and it cannot, in its entirety, be preserved. It is the embodiment of this shared experience that is specific to theatre as an art form. From a phenomenological point of view, this shared experiential space provides opportunities for creating lived experience for the perceiver.

The newness of this apprehension relates to the phenomenological concept of ‘enhanced being’ that comes with a new experience of the actual (States, 1985:46). When the performance resonates for the perceiver, she becomes involved, projecting into the space. The perceiver knows that what she is perceiving is not real as part of her everyday world, yet the experience of it is real in that moment, as an experience. This creates a potential space for individuals to release emotion (some form of catharsis) and/or to become conscious of their projections. Kohler speaks about the experientially charged and potentially cathartic nature of lived experience in theatre:

*Theatres hold some kind of magic for me as spaces of potential. ...It’s the moment of performance when the live audience and live performers meet. When it works... I think the theatre can have the same kind of charged atmosphere of a church service, in that the audience believes... the emotions of the actors and the audience bond and pile one on top of the other until satisfaction is reached.*

(Kohler and Jones, 2005)

The performance is invested with this energy and affected by it.
Time: Because theatre involves a series of events that occur in succession there is a specific relationship to time. There is the potential for associations to be formed between what has been seen and the imagined outcome, between the illusions created in one moment and broken in the next. It is also in the association of one moment to the next that narrative is created. Phenomenologically, the element of time in theatre allows for the revelation of objects in a context that transforms and therefore loosens, the concepts formed around them. Gerhard Marx, whose work is grounded in a phenomenology, says of this:

As a sculptor, what one would do, in order to create or affect meaning in an object, is to sculpt the actual object .... What theatre enables us to do is to sculpt the meaning of the object without altering the object. The storyline and narration of the piece allows me to reveal the object in many ways.

(Marx, 2005)

Space: Spacial relationships between objects and between objects and performers on stage, create powerful visual indicators of dynamics and therefore meanings. The live relationship between performers, objects or puppets and perceivers within space and time, distinguishes puppet theatre from other forms of artistic expression.

Puppetry in Theatre

The puppet is an object. It may be an anthropomorphic figurative object or it may be a ‘found’ object. The ‘found’ object, becomes a puppet only in a certain context, handled in a certain way. The term ‘found’ in this context indicates an object that had a previous function outside the theatre.

When asked to define puppetry Basil Jones says:

Puppetry is form of performance in which an inanimate object is manipulated in front of an audience.

(Kohler and Jones, 2004)

To manipulate is, according to the Concise English Dictionary, “to treat with the hands; to handle; to operate upon so as to disguise.” In the context of puppetry it is precisely this. In puppet manipulation the way the object is moved or handled gives it the quality of being something other than what it is. When the found object is manipulated it becomes a puppet.

Theatre using objects in this way is referred to as Object Theatre. It is a sub-category of puppetry as is Shadow Theatre. In Shadow Theatre it is most often the projected image that is the agent of action (and not the silhouette from which it is projected). The agent has no material form and is not referred to as a puppet but has similar qualities in performance to a puppet. For this reason Shadow Theatre is referred to as puppetry. So in its broadest, contemporary use, the term puppetry indicates a theatre of animated
images and does not necessarily include any puppets. While all puppetry includes some form of manipulation, not all of it simulates life. Puppet theatre and puppetry involve the manipulation of objects and images, not simply the use of them.

**Puppet-objects and their associations in theatre**

The space of performance is one in which anything entering it serves the performance. As such, it is not a functional or natural environment but a constructed one. Any object or performer entering this space, for the purpose of the performance, represents a choice and therefore a construct. Whether constructed or found, all objects, used dynamically in performance, have metaphorical connotations. Because the form of these metaphors is visual, they are often not literally interpretable. Visual metaphors often rely on loose associations and therefore make multiple interpretations and resonances possible.

Our interaction with our environment happens at many different levels. Although we are not always aware of it happening, we are continuously responding to visual stimuli. Unless we have realised and conceptualised (formed in language) our response to a visual stimulus, we may not understand the logic of our own response. This doesn’t make the effect any less powerful but perhaps not as comfortable. A lack of comfort is often caused by an absence of certainty. This can be constructively used as the impact of objects and images is felt in the context of theatre.

Constructed images and objects contain information, selection, exaggeration and interpretation in their form. These qualities therefore become reference points for a metaphorical understanding of the subject. Marx comments:

> The object brings with it a lot more than just the visual, it brings the whole range of sensual experiences, sound, texture, etc., but also it brings with it associations, recollections, meanings etc. All of these are a rich field to draw on in breaking the fourth wall.

*(Marx, 2006)*

A functional, everyday object will be associated with the environment from which it originated as well as with its original function. These connotations can be exploited or ignored in the performance but they will be present in the object whatever the case. Found objects make reference to our experience in and of the ‘real world’. In bringing familiar objects into the heightened reality of theatre, attention is drawn to these things in a new way. This has the potential to expand the perceiver’s experience of these apparently familiar aspects of her reality.

A constructed object can fall into two categories, figurative and non-figurative. The non-figurative or abstract object is a form, made from materials, that does not contain direct reference to another object or being. This, like abstract art talks to our emotions and inner perceptions. Alternatively it is an attempt at a representation of nothing specific (art for art’s sake) and as such is a representation of art. With these
objects, it is the form itself that will evoke associations and emotions. These may not be defined and therefore limited, by recognition.

A figurative construction, on the other hand, will be associated with the thing that it represents. What it brings metaphorically are all the ways in which it is not similar. Figurative constructions are objects constructed from materials to look like something recognisable. A miniature house, for example, will bring a house to mind, before anything else. However if the house is small and made of paper, the experiential domains of paper, scale and whatever else this brings up, will be mapped onto the experiential domain of ‘house’ in the mind of the perceiver. This may bring connotations of fragility, dominance, impermanence and countless other connotations depending on the context of its appearance and on the associations for the perceiver.

The anthropomorphic object brings with it powerful associations with human life and also with death. The anthropomorphic qualities in the puppet are created simultaneously in the form and how it is used. The overall experience of reflected life can be both exciting and disturbing in its effect.

That which constitutes the theatrical effectiveness of the puppet is largely the exhibition of a derisive, sinister or worrying reflection of our humanity. Either they are too strangely similar, taking on the qualities of a double or mannequin or else they propose only a vague resemblance composed of found materials, the image that they throw back at us obliges us to recognize ourselves in that into which we would generally refuse to project ourselves: into figures of dislocation, reification, of alienation but also of degradation in the obscene, the similarity with discarded fragments, of the conflict in silence and in death.

(Plassard, 2002:15 my translation)

Dario Fo writes about anthropomorphic puppets always creating connotations of altered states of mind and reality:

The mannequin is always an alternative reality, representing a person without being human...it has a problematic double identity, established and unchangeable, a phantom outside time, a dream without a face.

(Fo in Cairns, 2000: 11)

The object-puppet’s autonomy and the illusion of life

The puppet is an object to which the puppeteer gives impetus, life or force. This is a transfer of energy. Simple movement in the object comes to represent motivation when in fact it is only movement given by the power of another body. The puppet object is inert and so vulnerable to the force and will of the puppeteer. The puppeteer transforms the inertia of the puppet into movement and thus transforms its energy. This is manipulation.
If the movement, given to the object by the performer, gives the object a quality of autonomy, the illusion is created that the object is moving and not being moved. A tea saucer can, in this way, appear to be a flying saucer. The ‘flying saucer’ appears to fly due to the rhythm of movement given to it by the performer. This rhythm will be related to the way something flies as opposed to the way a person holds and moves a saucer. It is this differentiation in rhythm of movement, which gives autonomy to the object. The more precisely the movement of the object reflects that of the thing it is imitating the more complete the illusion will be. It will then have a quality of movement which represents a force, which is not its own but gives the illusion of being so.

In addition to this, the performer can move the object in a way that indicates the presence of consciousness. When this is done, the object is given a movement pattern that corresponds to the movement of something that possesses motivation. This ‘consciousness’, combined often with an indication of the presence of breath, will give the object ‘life’. It is, in fact, an object being made to imitate the qualities of a living thing. Through moving the object as if it has a will (the object wants to move, to go somewhere or do something), senses (the object sees, hears, feels, smells etc) and/or perception (the object realizes something or experiences something emotionally), the object ‘comes to life’. In giving the object movements that the perceiver can identify as ‘signs of life’, the puppeteer creates an illusion of the object being alive.

In order to sustain the credibility of the ‘independently moving’ or ‘living’ object a rhythm of movement particular to that object must be convincingly established. This movement, once established, must be maintained or broken only inside of what we can relate to as possible for that thing or character. This is tightly related to the perceived possible magnitude of movement within the given universe or reality of the illusion. This is a plausible illusion that operates according to an established set of rules.

Once these illusions have been established, the perceiver may become involved in the fate of the puppet character. The perceiver will follow the narrative into a world in which objects are characters and will believe in this world as ‘reality’ for the character. All the while, most adult perceivers will remain conscious intellectually that the puppet character is just an object. If the illusions created are convincing or arresting, people will chose to believe in them even though they know they are not reality. This is known as the suspension of disbelief.

When certain key visual elements are in place and when these are combined with some coherent movement, the perceiver will begin to invest energy of her own in the object. She will form her own connections and even begin to elaborate on the physical forms. Adrian Kohler talks about this in peoples’ response to the giraffe from Tall Horse (Handspring Puppet Co and Sogolon 2004):

*Because just an ear twitch, which is fairly mechanical, shows somehow the thought of the giraffe, in showing that the giraffe thinks, the perceiver can then think that there are other aspects which are not being shown. ...They embroider. As soon as they begin to trust you, that you have gone some of the way, they’ll believe in it.*
Jones adds:

*They’ll say ‘how did you make the eyes move’ really believing that they saw them move but it’s a glass bead.*

(Kohler and Jones, 2005)

The visible presence of the puppeteer acts as a reminder that the object is in fact an object. When the manipulator is not visible the tension between these two forces (the illusion of life and the constructed nature of this illusion), decreases. The life force established in the object is fragile. Its tension is held inside of the play between this illusion and the real independence of the object and manipulator. Any change in the quality of the life force of the object, which is out of the character of the life force which has been established, either in its rhythm or in the puppeteer’s relationship to it, becomes a contradiction to the illusion of the autonomy of the object.

The perceiver is constantly aware of this double force at play. There is a sense of fragility in the illusion as the life force seemed to have come from nowhere, can be easily destroyed and yet appears to exist. This is often captivating as the involved perceiver is aware of the illusion and wants it to survive. Whether or not the choice is made by the performers or director to break the illusion, the perceiver is aware that it can be broken.

Eileen Blumenthal looks at different ways in which illusion is created and broken in puppetry. She writes:

*All theatre engages its viewers in a double reality. ...This double vision...is part of the pleasure of live theatre. In puppet theatre this so-called “willing suspension of disbelief” becomes a high-wire act as the gap between normal reality and stage truth becomes a chasm.*

(Blumenthal, 2005:71)

Basil Jones talks about the moment when the perceiver is ‘linked in’ to the illusion of life created in the form and movement of a puppet:

*There is a form of mimesis happening, imitation, and the audience is seeing it happen. The audience is watching a...puppet become a person. There is a very elemental thing happening when we do that. It is absolutely fundamental to ourselves in that we are creating life and we are flattering ourselves also as humans, creating other humans on stage for us to look at.*

(Kohler and Jones 2005)

Valiere Novarina, considering the question of writing theatrically for puppets, points to his fascination with the essential ‘deadness’ of the puppet and its consequent potential to carry mortality within it even as it imitates life. His interest in the puppet is in its ability to capture that which we resist facing:

*It is to the dead that life must be given and not to do ‘living’ with the living, which
would be too easy…it amounts to a reproduction…Don’t reproduce that which we have in front but reproduce everything we have behind. Look behind the head. Everything that trembles behind the head, not the fixed block in front.

(Novarina, 2002:9, my translation)

Novarina is pointing to the puppet’s potential to make theatrical the uncomfortable, the dark and painful aspects of our humanity, a thinking strongly influenced by Artaud.

THE PUPPET-PERFORMER RELATIONSHIP

In the context of theatre and performance objects bring with them strong metaphorical associations. Many of these are related to the contemporary use of live performers in relationship with puppets.

Adding to the absorption of the puppeteer into this fictional universe, the variety of manipulation techniques…adds another level in the complexity of representation. It is thus that contemporary puppet theatre often appears as a field of simultaneous tensions between different levels of existence…

(Plassard, 2002:12, my translation)

In order to discuss the relationships between the object and the performer, it is necessary to define the different relationships between the two. What follows is a definition of five principal forms of manipulation: illusionist manipulation; neutral, visible manipulation; expressive, visible manipulation; characterised manipulation and interactive manipulation.

Illusionist manipulation: The first category is one where the performer is hidden and only the object is visible. This is typically accomplished through the use of a physical barrier of some kind (such as a miniature theatre or a screen) or through the use of light (objects appear in a tight corridor of light for ‘black theatre’ or using a Black Light to pick up only light objects). In this category, the controlling mechanisms such as rods, strings or even hands are disguised as far as possible. It is referred to as illusionist manipulation as there is an attempt to create a complete illusion that the object is moving independently of any outside force.

Neutral, visible manipulation: here, the performer is visible but remains a neutral force behind the object. The performer moves with the object and maintains physical calm while giving the object all the vitality of the character. The performer will maintain relatively discreet facial expressions.

Expressive, visible manipulation: In this form the manipulator is expressively involved. The performer allows her body to reflect expressions related to what the object is doing. For example, the performer may speak the puppet character’s lines and if the puppet is angry the performer’s face will express anger.
**Characterised manipulation:** Here, the performer plays a separate role to the object. The performer takes on a character, independent of the object, which is related to, or continuous with, her role as manipulator. The performer plays a character who is manipulating objects or puppets.

**Interactive manipulation:** In this form, the performer develops a relationship with the object and the two interact. The performer plays an independent role to the object, either as puppeteer or as another character. This is similar to *characterised manipulation*, the principal difference being that here the performer and the object’s actions act on and affect one another. The puppet or object character becomes conscious of the performer’s character.

**The metaphorical connotations of puppet-performer relationships**

In each form of relationship and performance with objects there are several possible connotations and levels of implied meaning. Which one comes to the fore will depend on how the form is used, in what context and what the general content of the performance is.

**Connotations of illusionist manipulation:** When the *illusionist manipulation* technique is used, the object is given the illusion of life; set up as ‘alive’. The perceiver will rarely be conscious of the performer with *illusionist manipulation*, as the performer is not seen.

If the illusion is convincing, the spectator will suspend her critical mind and follow the progression of the illusion. The rules of the physical world will not be expected to apply in the same way to the performing objects. As the spectator watches and is drawn into the illusion so she allows her mind to play in a non-concrete reality and will enter a world where anything is possible. This associates strongly with the subconscious aspects of our selves and our non-physical perceptions of reality.

The images may therefore have connotations of dream states, hallucinations, nightmares, imaginings, projections and fantasy. Depending on the content and type of image, this form can also speak strongly of allegorical and mythological interpretations of reality.

If *illusionist manipulation* is used (intentionally) without creating a seamless illusion, the perceiver will be aware of the presence of the performer and is unlikely to enter into the illusion completely. In this case, the performance may have connotations of the frailty of human effort, the constructed nature of the reality we live in (as the puppets ‘believe’ in their own reality) or our limited world-view.

**Connotations of neutral, visible manipulation:**

In all of the *visible manipulation* techniques, by definition, the method of manipulation is exposed. This allows for two principal power relationships: either the performer is controlling the object, or the object is seen to control the performer.
In the case of neutral, visible manipulation, the performer is a presence or force behind the object. The performer appears to follow the object, at one with it and yet separate. Where the objects imitate life, this may have the effect of a visible invisible presence, a guide, a shadow or a life-force. There is a clear sense that the puppets and therefore by extension humans, are controlled by something undefined of which they are unaware.

Kohler speaks about the unexpected metaphoric meaning created in this show where the manipulators (using Neutral, visible manipulation) were exposed for the first time:

*We expected the audience to simply blank them out. The accident that happened there was that the audience didn’t blank them out, they took on a different kind of meaning. They became guardians of the characters, part of their destiny, an outer force.*

(Kohler and Jones, 2005)

**Connotations of expressive, visible manipulation:** Here the human qualities of the object are developed through the performer. While the emotion may become more real for the perceiver, there is also an acknowledgement of the limited nature of the object in this form.

**Connotations of characterised manipulation:** The sense of humans being controlled is developed in characterised manipulation as the controlling force becomes defined. This brings in intent. Something or someone specific is controlling something or someone else. Why this is taking place can be developed as part of the plot.

**Connotations of interactive manipulation:** Here the puppet interacts with the controlling force and can even become ‘aware’ that it is being controlled. This will bring to mind changing states of consciousness, the human capacity to realize how we function and our dependence on ‘forces’ that control us.

Where the controlling force appears to be the object, the internal logic of the relationship is reversed. This is complex to establish. If the object is given certain characteristic ways of moving, an illusion may be created that it is controlling the performer. If the manipulator maintains the illusion that has been created in the object, certain rhythms, reactions and behaviours become necessary in the object’s movement. These are established as a pattern and the manipulator is forced (through the choice to protect the illusion) to maintain these behaviours. As this falls into place the manipulator may be perceived as being controlled by the object or by the rules of movement that the object has come to represent. If the performer is seen to struggle to do what has become necessary, the perceiver will become aware of this reversal in control. Depending on these factors and the scale of the objects, the perceived vulnerability of the performer can be established.

If the performer(s) are seen to be uncomfortable, unhappy or distressed, their apparent loss of control will bring to mind effort, the human struggle to keep a grip on things. Where the ‘controlling’ objects are clearly objects, the situation will speak of a
de-humanized world, the machine age, object-dominated realities and the individual’s ingestion into ‘the system’ (often talked about as a machine). In other words, these power relationships, in which the objects dominate and are seen to be objects, will usually speak of negative human relationships with a dominant external reality.

The Puppet and the idea of Self

The puppet mirrors the doubling of my own corporeal existence: the own and the other are interwoven in indispensable and necessary phenomenological interplay. The puppet is at once material and animated being, and both modes of being depend on its performance. The splitting of the human self is concealed by identifying strategies and images which construct the evidence of coherence. However, it can be and is dismantled by the puppet’s performative potential. (Wagner, 2006:136)

When we consider the ‘self’ there are always several dimensions of experience at play. The body and mind are most often articulated as ‘self’ but looking further there are different aspects of personality which are often in conflict with one another, conscious and unconscious motivating complexes, the life force itself, dream, intuition, inspiration and many more.

A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms, defines self as follows:

Self: The new sense of self no longer suggests the unified, autonomous individual of traditional humanism, or even the divided self later conceived in existentialism. In contemporary theory, self has given way to the term subject to suggest being “constructed” by our language-determined, culturally driven modes of thinking. Among the illusions entertained by the “subject” is that he or she possesses an inner, autonomous “self”.

(Quinn, 1999: 196)

The body is often conceived as the anchor for all of these forces and dynamics, aspects of the self. Where the body represented on stage is a puppet, the viewer is taken out of the realm of the habitual physical form of the human body. This makes it easier to accept a plausible relationship between this body and and other aspects of the self that the creator may choose to represent in a material form.

A single character may have several heads, or several bodies. Replica physical forms, capable of different actions or possessing different intentions, may represent other selves. The body may not prove to be as solid as it appears, disintegrating and re-assembling itself. Other aspects of the character may manifest in a different physical form but still created from the same material thus bringing the two aspects of the same character into the same visual an textural plane. Even very different media can still seem closely related to each other depending on how they are treated.

The Puppet’s ability to represent multiple aspects of the self is not dependant on the
material form, this is simply one tool which may be used. Of course the puppet-performer relationship is one of the key areas where puppetry can play with the multiplicity of interior human dynamics. The manipulators of a given puppet may be in conflict with the puppet as discussed above or even with each other.

The key element in the puppet that gives it this capacity is its plausible dissimilarity. It is close to our feeling of being human in that it appears to have intentions, will and all the other aspects of life force. At the same time it is physically capable of representing humanity in many different ways, materials and forms (ranging from the distorted to the caricatured to the form of anthropomorphized animals and even abstract bodies).

Within the limits of it's own established rules of movement, the puppet is capable of many physical feats which a physical human may only dream of doing. So the puppet on the one hand maintains it’s proximity to the self through the life force and can push away from the familiar physical limitations of the body through its material form and manipulation. Where it pushes away from the familiar and if the form and movement remain plausible to the audience for the dynamic it represents, the puppet can capture the imagination of the audience. It can give physical form to dynamics that often remain abstract or half explored. These forms can be used in contrast to, and in interaction with, physical performers to further extend the dynamics at play. This allows audiences to project less familiar aspects of their human experience into the theatre space. When puppetry represents these abstract dynamics, it gives a different weighting to the different aspects of self. Our inclination to see the self as a fixed unit can be destabilized by emotional involvement in these representations of aspects of the self we may otherwise choose to ignore.

**CONCLUSION**

*Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things...Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object, the object is not important.*

*(Shklovsky in States, 1985: 21)*

For human beings, sensation and feeling exist in and through many different aspects of ourselves. There is the direct physical, sensorial aspect, the emotional aspect and the conceptual and intellectual aspect of ourselves. No one of these aspects is more or less important in our experience of the sensation of life. Art is an expression of the human experience of life, whether this be internal or in relation to the world as we perceive it.

Semiology holds that the access understanding of art and life is through interpretation of the signs we create to communicate. For the semiologist, the human mind is constantly interpreting signs. To understand these codes of interpretation gives one access to the meanings being created and read by others.

Phenomenology asserts that the only truth or reality lies in perceived sensation that exists before the formation of concept. It thus promotes a deferral of interpretation
in favour of a response of the senses. It is for the creation of this sensation that phenomenologically-based artists work, and from this perspective that they read and interpret it.

From a Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophical perspective, all perception, sensation and conception are illusory, existing only in the mind of the perceiver. The ultimate truth, a state of objective non-dualism lies outside the experience of the subjective mind and cannot be conceptualised or sensed by it. Inside the relative (subjective) state of existence, all perception, cognition and experience of existence are valid within dualistic (self-other) perspective. The function of artistic expression, from this point of view, is to work with relative truths to reveal their relativity. Thus the relative aim of artistic expression form a Buddhist perspective may hold within it both the semiological and the phenomenological. It is through both perceiving things in a new way and through an understanding of the symbols of interpretation, that the illusion of life can be revealed and therefore deconstructed.

The function of artistic expression through theatre can be understood from a Madhyamaka perspective as a parallel to the function of dream. In western psychoanalysis the symbols represented in a dream are important access points to the unconscious and through them repressed experiential and emotional material can be released and integrated. While the Madhyamaka Buddhist sees this, once again, as a valuable process (in relative experience) for stabilising the mind, it is not ultimately important, as it remains dualistic in its basis in the concept of self. While the stable mind is more likely to be able to recognise its true nature (non-dualism and the inherent non-existence of the self) the stability is not, in itself, the aim. Life is considered to be like an ongoing dream of illusions from which the mind can awake through the recognition of its (the mind’s) nature. This should not be understood as a conceptual recognition but as an experiencing of the non-dualistic state in which the sense of self is no longer present.

From the Madhyamaka perspective, dream is an alternative state of mind in which one can become fully conscious (while still asleep) and recognise the vivid illusion (lucid dreaming). Theatre can be seen to be a similar forum, an alternative space for the mind from the everyday reality. In this alternative space, closely associated with illusion, the mind can more readily recognise its own constructions, illusions, projections and sensations. Because theatre is a recognisably constructed experience and environment concerned with human sensation, it is full of potential for the recognition of constructs for all concerned.

Resonance, a term used here to indicate the effect in the perceiver touched by artistic expression, is seen to be provoked through three key access points to an individual’s reality: through lived experience (the sensorial perception of objects and dynamics); through conception (the formation of conscious and unconscious constructs around experience); and through metaphor (the mapping of one experiential domain onto another). These access points are not separate but mutually co-dependent and form part of one process. Metaphors are able to resonate beyond the conscious mind. Image-based theatre such as puppet theatre cannot be entirely literal, as the image is
not linguistically based. This allows for a wide range of perceptive and interpretive experience, which can, and often does, go beyond conscious constructs. As the perceptive experience in puppet theatre is mapped onto internal and personal domains of experience, the process becomes metaphorical. Not all metaphorical connotations of theatrical images and/or object and visual images in theatre are consciously constructed. It is more often in a provocation of response that they are used, leaving room for interpretation and experience by the perceiver.

Manipulation is defined here as movement of objects so as to create illusory identity in the object. In the case of puppets this is most often the illusion of life. There are clearly strong parallels here to the illusory nature of human life. Some of the basic metaphorical qualities of objects, puppets and visual images in theatre can be developed consciously, or reside in ambiguous images and unarticulated metaphor. Which of these is more effective in reaching the perceiver has not been the subject of this paper but either way, these connotations come with the medium.

Coming from the viewpoint that reality is an illusion, the ‘self’ and self-concept are equally illusory. Where the performer and puppet are both seen, relationships between these two forces of life are set up. These relationships can be more or less intentionally exploited however even where the relationship is subtle there is an evident double vision set up before the audience. The fact that the live performer is giving life to the object quickly brings to mind questions of control. Who or what is controlling or giving life to the body that is walking around, thinking it is independent? Is the body aware that it is not independent? Where does the essence of life lie, in the body that acts as if it is alive or in the active agent? These questions, which arise naturally with the medium of puppetry, make it an ideal medium for an exploration of the different, sometimes conflicting, aspects of the self. This becomes the material from which a relationship with the constructed self can be powerfully fabricated and deconstructed.

Puppetry plays in the territory of the evidently make-believe. It is an illusion that is created and broken simultaneously. This play between living and inanimate, between life and death, and between existence and non-existence are at the heart of the medium. The innately metaphorical and unique nature of this medium of theatre allows it to play in the realms of illusion and perception, of the layered concept of the self and the complex experience of being human.
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