

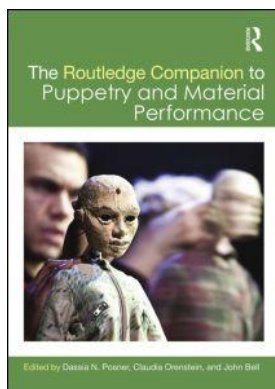
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Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance

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Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315850115.ch2>

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Published online on: 15 Jul 2014

How to cite :- Paul Piris. 15 Jul 2014, *The Co-Presence and Ontological Ambiguity of the Puppet from: The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* Routledge

Accessed on: 02 Oct 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315850115.ch2>

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The Co-Presence and Ontological Ambiguity of the Puppet

Paul Piris

The renewal of puppetry over the past decades is the result of an exploration of the dramaturgical meaning of the animated figure in theatre. Since the 1980s, artists and companies such as Stuffed Puppet Theatre and Duda Paiva in Holland, Ilka Schönbein in Germany, Compagnie Mossoux-Bonté in Belgium, Dondoro Theatre in Japan, Philippe Genty in France, and Blind Summit in Britain have developed an original form of performance where visible manipulators interact with their puppets. As French scholar Didier Plassard (2009) suggests, not only have the puppeteers entered the space of the puppets by stepping out of the puppet booth, but they have also entered their fictional world. In this particular form of performance, a co-presence takes place between the puppeteer and the puppet. This co-presence is particular because it establishes a relation of self to Other between two beings that are ontologically different: one is a subject (in other words, a being endowed with consciousness) and the other one an object (in other words, a thing). Yet, the particularity of the puppet is to present an ontological ambiguity because it is an object that appears in performance as a subject. Co-presence stresses this ontological ambiguity by confronting the puppet with a human protagonist.

This chapter examines the co-presence and the ontological ambiguity of the puppet through phenomenological aspects of thought developed by French philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and, to some extent, Emmanuel Levinas. The purpose is to understand why the puppet appears as a subject to the spectator's consciousness.

To answer this question, I will first discuss two productions that present two distinct forms of co-presence: *Cuniculus* (2008) by Stuffed Puppet Theatre and *Twin Houses* (1994) by Compagnie Mossoux-Bonté. I will then look at the Sartrean definition of consciousness and the Other in order to understand the fabrication of a co-presence between the puppeteer and the puppet on stage. The inquiry specifically addresses the argument developed by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, first published in 1943, that the relation of self to Other is the result of our presence in the world as

embodied consciousness. The representation of the Other by a puppet raises a contradiction, because a relation of self to Other can only exist between two subjects. This contradiction is tackled by examining the particular ontology of the puppet in regards to the theory of image developed by Sartre in *The Imaginary*, first published in 1940.

Defining co-presence

To achieve a co-presence with the puppet, performers use skills drawn from puppetry but also from acting. Although acting and puppetry can be considered as related forms of performance because they both aim at creating characters or personae on stage, they entail two different forms of body schema.

In acting, the body schema of the actor is characterized by his own body on stage interacting with other performers or props. In puppetry, as both French and American scholars Annie Gilles (1994) and Steve Tillis (1996) clearly describe, there is a split between the performer and the character. The experience of the world of the character is evoked through the puppet and requires the puppeteer's body to experience the world in another way than the actor's body. The body schema encompasses two bodies: the actual body of the puppeteer and the apparent body of the puppet.

Co-presence inherently supposes that the performer creates a character through the puppet but also appears as another character whose presence next to the puppet has a dramaturgical meaning. For this reason, co-presence is different from the simple visible presence of puppeteers on stage because, in this case, puppeteers do not bear any dramaturgical presence. Co-presence requires the hybridization of the two forms of body schema described above, which is a challenge because it supposes solving a contradiction. In acting, the actors' aim is to focus the audience's attention on their body, whereas the puppeteers' aim is to focus the audience's attention on the puppets. The co-presence of the puppeteer and the puppet requires that a double focus on both the performer and the puppet is achieved.

Cuniculus and *Twin Houses* establish a co-presence between the puppeteer and the puppet through very distinct method of practice. *Cuniculus* was written, designed, and performed by Neville Tranter, while *Twin Houses* has been initiated and performed by Nicole Mossoux and directed by Patrick Bonté. Using Hans-Thies Lehmann's study of postdramatic theatre (Lehmann 1999), I suggest that *Cuniculus* is a form of dramatic theatre, whereas *Twin Houses* belongs to postdramatic theatre. The representation of the puppet as a figure of the Other in *Cuniculus* is contingent on the training and the approach to theatre taken by Tranter, who initially trained in Method acting. Through his approach to text, characterization, and dramaturgy, his work can be categorized under what Lehmann describes as dramatic theatre. Mossoux and Bonté define their work as theatre-dance, which is a hybridization of theatre and dance, not a juxtaposition of one with the other. Dance is used as a tool that articulates their theatrical work. Mossoux initially trained in contemporary dance at Maurice Béjart's Mudra School in Brussels, while Bonté's theatre influences are Grotowski and Kantor. Their work can be labeled as postdramatic.

***Cuniculus*: A co-presence through speech**

Cuniculus is a piece about survivors living in a world ravaged by violence and chaos. It tells the story of a small group of starving rabbits embodied by puppets. They live confined to their warren in order to remain safe from a war happening above them. Amongst these rabbits lives a human character performed by Tranter. This character does not have a name. He wears a pair of red plastic rabbit ears and thinks he is a rabbit. The rabbits hate human beings but behave as if Tranter is one of them.

There are seven rabbits in *Cuniculus*, and Tranter sometimes manipulates two puppets at the same time. The relationship that Tranter's character establishes with the puppets is mainly based on verbal and gaze exchanges. Tranter's puppets are made in the image of the dramatic actor. They express emotions through text and intentions. Tranter defined the characters in *Cuniculus* as archetypes. They represent different examples of human behavior through psychological characteristics. It is important to specify that Tranter is not a ventriloquist. Spectators can see him producing the voices of all the puppets as well as that of his own character.

Tranter's puppets have a strong physical integrity, as they keep the same size and shape during the entire piece and have limited points of connection with Tranter's body. Most of the puppets share the same design principles. They are about 80 centimeters high. They can sit upright on their own without the intervention of Tranter to stabilize them because the trunk and the legs form one solid element. There are no joints for the torso, the legs, or the feet. This feature gives the puppet a low center of gravity. It frees Tranter's hand that is not in charge of moving the head



Figure 2.1 *Cuniculus*, Stuffed Puppet Theatre (2008): Neville Tranter and pal. Photo: © Michael Kneffel

of the puppet to manipulate one of its arms or another puppet. All the limbs of the puppet seem petrified in a dynamic tension. They do not hang freely even when not animated. The only movable parts of the puppet are the head and occasionally the arms. The skin of the puppets is made out of fake fur stuffed with cotton balls. This material gives some flexibility to the upper part of the torso and enables the shoulders to follow the movement of the head. The head makes similar movements to a human head. The puppets' mouths are articulated and twice as large as Tranter's. The puppets also have big long ears that shake whenever they speak or move their head. The result is an amplification of the movements of the head. Their eyes are the size of a golf ball and are protuberant. A glittering material that reflects light is used to indicate the pupil in order to reinforce its resemblance to a real eye. These elements support the impression of a visual agency that is read as a cognitive activity on the part of the puppet. Manipulation is by direct contact. Tranter places one of his hands inside the head of the puppet through the back in order to move the head as well as the mouth. His other hand can directly grip the wrist of the puppet to move the rabbit's arm. These puppets can stand on their own, speak, and look at the world around them but are not designed to grab objects or to move into space. When a puppet needs to go to a different point of the stage, Tranter simply lifts it in the air and places it in its new location.

To establish a co-presence with the puppet, Tranter is physically positioned next to the puppet he manipulates. In that setting, he becomes part of the surroundings of the puppet because the puppet can potentially "see" him. The character who is supposed to speak is the one who moves. Characters engaged in speech display their mouths and eyes to the audience. When Tranter makes the voice of one of the puppets, he positions his own head in such a way that it is less visible from the audience's point of view. His head is either tilted sideways and looking down or placed behind the puppet's body. He keeps the opening of his mouth to a minimum, and he occasionally uses the hand of the puppet to mask his own mouth. Moreover, the direction of the gaze also indicates to the audience which character is talking. When Tranter's character talks, he always looks at the face of the puppet, except when the puppet does not look at him. When a puppet talks, just before delivering the lines, it looks at Tranter's face for a very short moment but then faces the audience to speak. This coordination of the directions of the gazes between Tranter and his puppets contributes significantly to the construction of co-presence.

Tranter's manipulation is focused on moving the head, the mouth, and one arm of the puppet. The rest of the body remains still. At no moment throughout the whole piece does Tranter animate the legs or the torso of a puppet. This contrast between upper and lower parts of the body is found in Tranter's body itself. Only his head and arms actively play a role in the act of manipulation. The rest of his body is used as a support. There is a homogenized use of body, gaze, and speech between Tranter and his puppets, which is done by giving to the puppets human-like behaviors.

Twin Houses: A co-presence through body movements

Twin Houses consists of a series of situations separated by blackouts that invoke a woman surrounded by five puppets that resemble her. Original music by Christian

Genet is constantly played throughout the piece. A general feeling of oppression emerges from the performance. Most of the time, the puppets seem to control Nicole Mossoux. I refer to some of the puppets as the Androgyne, the Lady, the Double, and the Man. Unlike *Cuniculus*, there is no utterance in *Twin Houses*. Co-presence is based on the physical interactions taking place between Mossoux and her puppets.

Mossoux looks like her puppets, wearing makeup and a synthetic wig to enhance her resemblance to them. Her face remains still but not neutral. There is a strange mixture of sensuality, innocence, and surprise about her. Her movements are stylized in order to have a puppet-like quality. The heads of the puppets are made from a mold of Mossoux's face. Their construction varies depending on whether they are fastened to Mossoux's body or detached from it. To schematize their design, they can be described as a head with a neck prolonged by a piece of cloth, except for the Double, who has also been built with two arms and wears a long dress that hides the absence of legs. The Androgyne and the Lady are attached to Mossoux's body like conjoined twins. Their heads are strapped to one of Mossoux's shoulders, which creates an impression of unity and division: unity, because both the puppets and Mossoux share the same body, and division, because the puppets appear very autonomous. The head of the Man can be attached to Mossoux's right shoulder, held from the neck, or placed on top of Mossoux's head. The Double is detached from Mossoux, who controls it by a direct grip of her hand on its neck. The arms hang freely beside its body when not being manipulated. Most of the puppets have a large range of leg and arm movements, as these body parts actually belong to Mossoux, but they collapse on themselves without the support of Mossoux. Because of the realistic features of the face, the eyes are not made especially prominent and so do not reinforce the direction of the gaze.

Some of the puppets in *Twin Houses* do not have fixed shapes. They are fluid entities whose forms change according to the nature of their relationship with the character of Mossoux. This is particularly the case in a scene between Mossoux and the Man. As the scene unfolds, the growing power of the puppet over Mossoux's character is materialized by the fact that it absorbs more and more parts of her body, up to the moment that she completely disappears inside the puppet. Later, Mossoux operates a deconstruction of the Man by playing his life backwards, starting from a male adult and ending as a fetus inside her.

Co-presence between Mossoux and her puppets does not follow a unique schema of embodiment but varies significantly according to the type of puppet she manipulates. In the case of the conjoined twin puppets, the use of a dance technique called body-parts isolation allows Mossoux to create distinct rhythmic and movement qualities within her body, which give the impression that her body is split lengthways into two parts with a head at the top of each half. These two half bodies can move simultaneously but with distinct gestures.

The puppets attached on Mossoux's shoulders cannot look at her because Mossoux cannot turn her shoulders inward enough for the eyes of the puppet to meet her own eyes. Moreover, the shoulder does not allow fine movements. The result of this is the inability of the puppet to precisely focus its gaze on the objects that surround it. To counterbalance this issue, Mossoux has developed a particular strategy.



Figure 2.2 *Twin Houses*, Compagnie Mossoux-Bonté (1994): performer Nicole Mossoux. Photo: © Mikha Wajnrych

Instead of exchanging gazes, Mossoux and her puppets look at the same object, which appears as the center of the action. Moreover, Mossoux displays an unfocused gaze. For instance, in one scene with a conjoined twin puppet, Mossoux writes in a book without looking at what she is doing but instead slightly above the book. This is not normal human behavior when writing; people usually tend to look at what they are writing. The fact that there is no direct eye contact between Mossoux and the puppet but that their mutual gaze is mediated through an object of vision indicates that Mossoux has built a co-presence based on what the protagonists are physically doing together. Mossoux's ability to gaze is similar to that of the puppet because they seem to share the same limitation of movements. This choice allows Mossoux to balance her presence with that of the puppet. It seems that Mossoux loses parts of her human nature in order to share an equal mode of existence with the puppet. Mossoux establishes a co-presence through a "puppetization" of herself.

Two different Others

Although both productions establish a co-presence between puppeteers and puppets, different decisions have been made about what constitutes the puppet as an Other and how the self relates to it. Ultimately, Tranter and Mossoux do not refer to the same Other.

Tranter presents with brio the relationships between human beings by materializing different aspects of human nature, such as cruelty, fear, weakness, empathy, or love, through the different puppets of *Cuniculus*. The rabbits symbolize human society. The fact that they hate humans constitutes the character of Tranter as their ultimate Other. Dramaturgically speaking, Tranter is not a rabbit, and ontologically speaking, he is the only one not to be an object on stage. In Tranter's work, the Other is the one who is different, which one can be tempted to eliminate. In this production, the human being is the one rejected by the society of the rabbits. Tranter's work foregrounds the ethical commitment of the self towards the Other, as described by Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, first published in 1961. The rabbits have made the choice of abusing the Other and eventually destroying him if necessary in order to survive. Conversely, Tranter's character makes a different choice. He places the Other at a higher level than him. In *Cuniculus*, the puppet is an outer Other whose existence appears to be detached from that of the puppeteer.

In *Twin Houses* the puppets materialize different aspects of the character performed by Mossoux. She interacts with herself in the manner of a schizoid person confronting the different personalities that inhabit her, which explains the variations of shape of the Other. Unlike Tranter's character, who eventually separates from these Others when he leaves the warren, finally having accepted his human nature, Mossoux cannot escape them because they are inside her. When at the end of the piece there are no more puppets on stage, the relation of self to Other is still present but this time inscribed on her very own body, which seems to be split into different independent beings. Although the Other is autonomous, it is a part of the self that emerges from the body of Mossoux or appears next to her as her own double. This is an inner Other that deprives the self of its physical and psychological integrity.

Body and gaze in the relation of self to Other

Despite the distinct forms of co-presence developed by both practitioners, the relation of self to Other, between the puppeteer and the puppet, is achieved by giving the impression that the protagonists exist in apparently close ontological levels: Tranter's puppets are humanized to behave like him, while Mossoux reifies herself to appear like her puppets. These two examples suggest that it is necessary to balance the presence on stage of the puppeteer and the puppet in order to fabricate a co-presence.

Initially, their presence is unbalanced because the puppeteer appears more alive than the puppet on stage. The fabrication of co-presence in *Cuniculus* and *Twin Houses* shows that the puppeteer and the puppet have to appear distinct from one another. This distinction is materialized by the fact that they seem to have separate bodies on stage. When the distinction from the puppeteer is not clearly established, the puppet appears as an extension of the performer and, thus, is mostly present on stage as an object and not as a protagonist. The result is a weakened form of co-presence. To understand why such a distinction is necessary, I suggest looking at Sartre's definition of consciousness and of the Other.

For Sartre, as scholar Kathleen Wider (1997: 112) explains, the body is "the subject of human consciousness." The unity of the body shows the unity of the subject with

regard to the world. The body is actually consciousness and not a screen between consciousness and its objects. As scholar Monika Langer (1998: 112) writes, the existence of flesh is “a vehicle of an interworld in Sartre’s philosophy.” She argues that the existence of consciousness as body “spells an inevitable and eradicable alienation insofar as it engages consciousness in a world which it continually surpasses, and confers on it an eternally elusive ‘being-for-others’” (Langer 1998: 105). The distinction of bodies is a key element of the co-presence between the puppeteer and the puppet because it confers on the puppet its belonging to the world as a distinct embodied consciousness. The performer and the puppet seem to be present to one another because of their presence on stage as subjects. The distinction between the apparent body of the puppet and the real body of the manipulator contributes to the epiphany of an apparent consciousness in the puppet.

To operate a distinction between these two bodies, the physical presence of the puppet through its materiality is not enough. It is essential that the body of the puppet moves in such a way that it seems autonomous from the body of the performer and that it seems to deploy an apparent internal logic of movement. The uncanny feeling that spectators may experience when they watch Mossoux and the Man dancing together comes from the impression that two autonomous subjects are present to each other through the interactions of their bodies, despite the awareness that one of the protagonists is actually an object.

The gaze functions as a second key sign of consciousness of the puppet. In *Phenomenology of a Puppet Theatre*, Jan Mrázek suggests that the eyes of the Javanese *wayang kulit* puppet are its “power of vision. ... The eyes give the sensation of the puppet’s subjectivity and visual agency, as opposed to being an object of visual gaze” (Mrázek 2005: 35). The puppet is more than a thing that can be seen; it is also an apparent subject that can see. The gaze of the puppet reinforces the separateness from the puppeteer by stressing the dramaturgical presence of the latter. The visible presence of puppeteers on stage does not imply that they have a dramaturgical presence. However, if the puppet looks at its manipulator and the latter responds to this gaze, the human performer appears as part of the actuality of the puppet.

Discussing the question of the Other in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre suggests two ideas. First, the Other can only be apprehended by the self as a subject. For this reason, it is important that Mossoux and Tranter react to their puppets as if they were in the presence of human beings and not objects. Second, Sartre argues that the Other is the subject who mediates my relation to myself. In other words, the Other allows me to be aware of aspects of myself. Sartre specifically discusses the gaze of the Other in relation to the feeling of shame to highlight the fact that the Other is the subject who mediates my relation to myself. For instance, in one scene between Tranter and the puppet Sissy, Tranter’s character feels ashamed of what he has just said because Sissy abruptly stares at him. By her gaze, she makes him suddenly aware of the inappropriate tone of voice he had used when he previously addressed her. Tranter’s character is able to grasp a part of himself of which he was not aware – in this instance, his mocking attitude, because of the gaze of Sissy. The gaze allows the puppeteer and the puppet to acknowledge each other but also to distinguish from one another. The Other appears as the one that confirms and denies the selfness to the oneself but also as not being the oneself. Selfness is defined as

the individuality, the set of all the properties, unique or not, that characterize an individual.

To summarize, the puppeteer and the puppet appear co-present because spectators have the impression that they are witnessing two distinct subjects. This distinction results from the apparent presence of two bodies and two gazes on stage.

Contradiction of the puppet-as-Other

Nonetheless, the puppet is only an apparent subject with an apparent body and an apparent gaze and, surely, Sartre never intended his theory of the Other to be applied to puppets, as they are not subjects but objects. Moreover, describing the puppet as an Other raises a contradiction.

In *Totality and Infinity* (1961), Levinas exposes clearly why the relation of self to Other is different from the relation of the self with objects. He argues that to be an “I” consists of being identical to myself. Yet this identity is not static, as in the tautology “I am I,” but dynamic. As scholar Françoise Dastur explains, “for Levinas the world is not something different from the ‘I’ but a mode of existence for the ‘I’” (Dastur 2006: 37). Knowledge is only a mode of existence of the self that is part of the dynamic process of identification. The self takes possession of the world in order to “consolidate or extend its own identity” (Dastur 2006: 37). The subject does not find anything other than itself in the object. The self gives a meaning to the object, which Levinas refers to as its finality. Levinas argues that the relation of the subject with objects is a relation of knowledge, and for this reason an object cannot be an Other.

Conversely to the relation of the self with objects, Levinas contends that the Other is not another self. For Levinas, the Other escapes the self because, as Simon Critchley writes, “there is something about the other person, a dimension of separateness, interiority, secrecy or what Levinas calls ‘alterity’ that escapes my comprehension” (Critchley 2008: 26). The self is alone and has no power over the Other. The Other cannot be an object of knowledge because knowledge is an identification process. If this were the case, it would mean that the Other would be part of the identity of the self, which would be problematic for Levinas. In Levinasian phenomenology, there is an opposition between the relation of the subject with objects and the relation of the subject with other subjects.

If we agree with Levinas, how can we explain that the puppet appears as a figure of the Other despite being an object? I suggest that such a contradiction is possible because of the ontological ambiguity of the puppet. To solve this issue, it is necessary to understand what lies behind the apparent presence of the puppet as a subject. The next section examines the spectating experience of puppetry by looking at the role of perception and imagination.

Perception and imagination

The ontological ambiguity of the puppet pertains to the fact that it seems to share the same existence as subject with the puppeteer but nonetheless remains an object.

For instance, when I look at the puppet of Mutti, one of the rabbits in *Cuniculus*, I may see a piece of brown fur attached to a piece of rigid foam controlled by Tranter, but I also encounter an old and tired rabbit who treats Tranter's character as her own son. The objectness of Mutti – in other words, its quality or state of being an object – manifests itself through its materiality as a thing which includes its appearance, its design, its range of movement, and the type of manipulation used in order to animate it. These elements are perceived. The subjectness of the puppet – in other words, its quality or state of being a subject – appears when the puppet seems to escape its own materiality as an object and thus seems to act freely. I suggest that the subjectness of Mutti is not perceived but imagined. To understand the interplay between the perception of the objectness of the puppet and the imagination of its subjectness, I propose to look at it through the theory of image developed by Sartre.

Following the German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, Sartre posits that perception and imagination are two different ways for consciousness to be related to an identical object. In the case of perception, the object “is ‘encountered’ by consciousness” (Sartre 1940 [2004]: 7). In other words, the object is present to the viewer. In the case of imagination, the object is absent. Sartre argues that the image is not a thing but a relation. He defines the image as “an act that aims in its corporeality at an absent or non-existent object, through a physical or psychic content that is given not as itself but in the capacity of ‘analogical representative’ of the object aimed at” (Sartre 1940 [2004]: 20). What is imagined is an object that is not present but that we bring back to our consciousness. Therefore, between perception and imagination there is a difference of nature and not of degree.

Sartre draws attention to the fact that images can be psychic, such as the memory of someone, but also non-psychic, such as a photograph, a caricature, or an imitation. Sartre makes a distinction between non-psychic images that immediately bring to the consciousness of the viewer the absent object, such as portraits and realistic sculptures, for instance, and those that make use of few signs of the absent object, such as impersonator performances.

Discussing non-psychic images, Sartre argues the following:

These various cases all act to “make present” an object. This object is not there, and we know that it is not there. We therefore find, in the first place, an intention directed at an absent object. But this intention is not empty: it directs itself through a content, which is not just any content, but which, in itself, must present some analogy with the object in question.

(Sartre 1940 [2004]: 19)

Sartre calls this content an analogon. The analogon allows the absent object to acquire a kind of presence in our consciousness, similar to the way that a present object appears to consciousness through perception although it does not make real what it represents. As Sartre writes, “In the imaging attitude, in fact, we find ourselves in the presence of an object that is given as analogous to that which can appear to us in perception” (Sartre 1940 [2004]: 117). Sartre stresses the importance of a resemblance between the material content and the object that it represents.

Sartre argues that the perception of these particular material contents can lead viewers to imagine absent objects because memory and affectivity are attached to any perception. As Sartre contends, “... all perception is accompanied by an affective reaction. Every feeling is feeling about something, which is to say it aims at its object in a certain manner and projects onto it a certain quality. To like Pierre is to be conscious of Pierre as likeable” (Sartre 1940 [2004]: 28). The concept of a “pure” perception does not exist. As neuroscientist Antonio Damasio writes in *The Feeling of What Happens*, “The records we hold of the objects and events that we have once perceived include the motor adjustments we made to obtain the perception in the first place and also include the emotional reactions we had then” (Damasio 2000: 147).

I suggest that the puppet is an analogon because it allows the audience to imagine its absent subjectness through its present objectness. Mutti is not perceived as an old, tired, and loving character but imagined as such because her presence and reactions remind us of the emotions that we experienced in the past when we encountered similar persons, such as a grandmother, for instance. The subjectness of Mutti is the result of a double triangulation between the puppeteer, the puppet, and the audience. The first triangulation that takes place between these three entities is internal because the audience imagines the existence of the puppet as a subject by focusing on the puppet itself. This triangulation combines the physical appearance of the puppet and the quality of its manipulation by the puppeteer. For instance, Mutti appears old and tired because of her drooping whiskers and ears, her gray eyebrows, her thin body, and her sad eyes, combined with her way of moving. The second triangulation is external because the audience imagines the subjectness of the puppet by focusing on the interactions between Mutti and Tranter’s character. These interactions give a certain meaning or quality to the movements of the puppet, and thus they also contribute to the existence of the puppet as a subject. For instance, the interactions between Mutti and Tranter give to the former a maternal quality because of the tenderness present in their relationship. The sum of these elements is perceived as signs that refer not to the materiality of the puppet but to the character it represents.

Puppets appear more or less immediately as Others depending on their design and the quality of their manipulation but also in relation to the affective response of the audience. The visual similarities between puppets and the real subjects they are intended to depict can be slight. For instance, in object theatre the audience first has to recognize the few signs of subjectness before they may imagine a character. Conversely, realistic puppets, such as those used in *Twin Houses*, provoke a more immediate affective response because of their strong resemblance to human beings.

The puppet maintains a distancing effect because imagination never fully takes over perception. Perception confirms the puppet as a real object, while imagination displays the puppet as an apparent subject. This dual mode of existence of the puppet establishes a synthetic reality because the puppet belongs to two different levels of actuality: its objectness is real but its subjectness is not. The contradiction of a relation of self to Other between a human being and a puppet finds its resolution in the fact that spectators do not experience the puppet as an object, although they know that it actually is one, but as an imagined subject.

The two modes of being of the puppet exist simultaneously because the apparent consciousness of the puppet always refers back to its presence as an object. Nonetheless, there is an asymmetry between the real objectness and the imagined subjectness of the puppet. The objectness of the puppet exists through its presence in the world, while its subjectness only exists after the initial perception of the materiality of the puppet. Its objectness is prior to its subjectness. The subjectness of the puppet is bound to its objectness through an opposition. To appear as a subject, the perceived objectness of the puppet is annihilated in order to create a distance from its essence as an object. The distance enables the emergence of the imagined subjectness of the puppet within its materiality. The annihilation of the objectness of the puppet cannot be realized by the puppet but is the result of the joint actions of the puppeteer's manipulation and the spectator's perception and imagination. Spectators and performers annihilate the objectness of the puppet and constitute the imagined subjectness of the puppet.

Conclusion

The singularity of the co-presence established between a puppeteer and a puppet comes from the ontological ambiguity of the latter. By looking at Sartre's theory of the Other, I have suggested that the alterity of the puppet appears when the apparent body of the puppet seems to separate itself from the real body of the puppeteer in order to confront the latter through actions or dialogue. The puppet is apprehended as an Other because it seems to have an embodied consciousness. Gaze and, to a certain extent, speech complete the fabrication of the alterity of the puppet. The ambiguous relationship taking place between these two beings results from their ontological differences. When one watches such a form of co-presence, one often experiences an uncanny impression. Levinas helps us to identify the reason for this uncanny feeling when he contends that an object cannot be an Other. The Other is that particular being who escapes the self, while the object belongs to the identity of the self. There is an apparent contradiction between the impossibility raised by Levinas for an object to be an Other and the fact that the puppet appears as an Other by means of its manipulation. I have proposed to answer this by examining the theory of image developed by Sartre in *The Imaginary*. I have concluded that the puppet is not an Other but the image of an Other. Although this image is initiated by perception, it appears to consciousness as an imagined being because consciousness is directed towards an absence. The ambiguous co-presence taking place between the puppeteer and the puppet is the result of the encounter on stage of two beings who belong to two different modes of existence and actuality.

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