

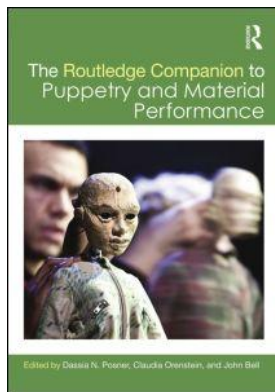
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The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance

Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, John Bell

From Props to Prosopopeia

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Part III

CONTEMPORARY INVESTIGATIONS AND HYBRIDIZATIONS

Edited and Introduced by Dassia N. Posner

Theatre generates a kind of double vision, a parallel experience on multiple planes as audiences are confronted simultaneously with the real and the fictional. As Bert States muses in *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, “If we think of semiotics and phenomenology as modes of seeing, we might say that they constitute a kind of binocular vision: one eye enables us to see the world phenomenally; the other eye enables us to see it significantly” (States 1985: 8). Thus, we have no difficulty in weeping at the plight of a character while turning to a neighboring audience member to complement the quality of the acting. As Joseph Roach has observed, “Theatrical performance is the simultaneous experience of mutually exclusive possibilities: truth and illusion, presence and absence, face and mask” (Roach 2004: 559).

One of the recurrent aims of representational theatre has been to merge the lenses of theatre’s metaphorical binoculars, to conflate these ways of viewing into a single image, a convincing illusion that real life is unfolding before an audience. Puppet theatre, which separates the actor from the character by including both a live performer (the puppeteer) and a conventionalized one (the puppet), does precisely the opposite. In fact, the co-presence of puppet and puppeteer is a physicalization of States’s binocular vision. Particularly in performance modes where the puppeteer is fully visible, such as *bunraku*, most of the pleasure in watching lies in the mind’s oscillations between remembering and forgetting that the puppeteer is there, between believing in and marveling at the fiction being created.

Puppetry excels at provoking binocular experiences of other kinds, too. Indeed, it assumes a kind of imaginative flexibility – even mental acrobatics – on the part of its viewers. The puppet is concomitantly alive and dead, serious and ironic, adult and childlike, mechanical and spontaneous, enthralling and uncanny. It is uniquely adept at simultaneity and fragmentation. Its voice can be separated from its body without

generating confusion. It can be rent into pieces without the audience fearing for its life or soul. The puppeteer can be equally chameleonic: an impartial observer, an aspect of the puppet's personality, or invisible altogether.

Analyses of performing-object theatre thus must consider not only dramatic structures or character development but also these multiple modes of experience that cross over, diverge, and harmonize in the mind of the viewer like the discrete but interweaving instrumental lines in a symphony. Puppet performance rarely develops from a written text, or at least from a text that is generated in advance or that claims to capture the majority of a production's meaning. Instead, it relies on these sophisticated systems of nonverbal, visceral communication that are generated by its design, its physical transformations, or its interactions with the human and material world.

How, then, do we articulate how such material performances function theatrically? On one hand, thinking of puppetry in terms of medium specificity encourages us to identify and articulate the unique aesthetic laws and modes of communication that distinguish it from the theatre of live actors. On the other, it cannot be limited to this; its shifting boundaries make it uniquely adept at transformation in new mediums. This section of the book is therefore divided into two interrelated parts. In the first, "Material Performances in Contemporary Theatre," authors explore how the performing object functions theatrically through close analyses of contemporary productions. In the second, "New Directions and Hybrid Forms," authors define the puppet anew by testing the elasticity of its boundaries and examining its hybridizations in physical and virtual venues.

The authors included in "Material Performances in Contemporary Theatre" use a variety of theoretical lenses to investigate puppetry's structures, aesthetics, and philosophical significance. Jane Taylor and Dawn Tracy Brandes both explore, in different ways, the puppet in relation to the bifurcated self. Taylor analyzes the creation and South African premiere of her play *After Cardenio*, her contribution to a cluster of international plays commissioned by Stephen Greenblatt that generate culturally specific responses to Shakespeare's "missing" play *Cardenio*. Through the interweaving co-presence of the play's main character, Anne Greene, played simultaneously by a puppet and a live actor, Taylor investigates larger philosophical questions about the body/soul, object/subject dialectic inherent to puppetry. Brandes analyzes "compiled character" in *Or You Could Kiss Me*, a coproduction by South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company and the National Theatre in London. She illuminates the dramaturgical significance of this production's consciously created character mosaics that alternate between puppets and live actors, as well as among puppets that depict different versions of the same self, generated by the passing of time. Robert Smythe views Theater am Wind's *Hermann* through the lens of narrative theory, applying familiar definitions of *fabula* and *sjužet* in a new context that prompts a nuanced reading of the production's innovative spatial and character dynamics. In Smythe's analysis, space itself becomes a form of embodied *sjužet* that the puppeteer-auteur actively wields to construct the audience's experience. Mark Sussman analyzes two model theatre productions, Rimini Protokoll's *Mnemopark: A Model Train World* and Hotel Modern's *The Great War*, in conjunction with Walter Benjamin's essays on toys and the "mimetic faculty" of the child, to redefine the

parameters and significance of model theatre. Sussman focuses on oscillations between miniature and vast, live and mediated, child and adult, to demonstrate the necessary, revolutionary potential of child's play in the adult world.

The authors included in "New Directions and Hybrid Forms" probe expanding definitions of puppetry and the new realms into which the puppet is moving. As articulated here, these shifting boundaries range from new technologies that reimagine the human through robotics and motion capture, to a project that replaces not the puppet but the puppeteer with an intelligent machine, to performance events that view the environment itself from a puppet perspective. Cody Poulton focuses on collaborations between two specialists in theatre and robot engineering: playwright and director Hirata Oriza and roboticist Ishiguro Hiroshi, specifically their productions that juxtapose human actors with robots and androids. Investigating these machine-populated theatre productions in the context of Mori Masahiro's "uncanny valley" and Chikamatsu Monzaemon's "slender margin between the real and the unreal," Poulton asks what it means to be human, whether a machine can attain consciousness, and what can be learned from examining the often uncomfortable boundaries between the illusion of life and life itself. Colette Searls explores how computer animation and puppetry are entering new realms through fusions of the two, using examples from contemporary live and recorded media that include the animated Magic Mirror in *Shrek the Musical*, the Wild Things with puppet bodies and animated faces in Spike Jonze's *Where the Wild Things Are*, and the eerie humans who populate Robert Zemeckis's performance-capture films. Searls both defines the boundaries of puppet theatre and productively challenges her own definition, arguing that a thorough awareness of the fundamental aesthetic laws of puppetry and animation is a necessary prerequisite to successful hybridizations. Elizabeth Ann Jochum and Todd Murphey discuss the *Pygmalion Project*, a collaboration between Northwestern University and Disney that aims to develop an automated robotic marionette play using traditional marionettes and a robotic puppeteer, or "actuator." They analyze how the *Pygmalion Project* has led to new understandings of motion planning and control by testing the limitations of engineering technology and the centrality of the human puppeteer.

The complementary conversations of these two sections intersect productively in Eleanor Margolies's chapter, with which this book concludes. Margolies analyzes specific performances – *Ubu Roi* by Nada Théâtre, *Claytime* by Indefinite Articles, and a participatory food-cycle event in London, *Feast on the Bridge* – to rethink the parameters of material performance. While the other chapters in this section redefine the puppet in the context of new technologies, Margolies instead ponders how performers interact with the Earth's most basic materials – clay, food, and compost – to understand our ethical responsibility to future generations.

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Section V

Material Performances in Contemporary Theatre

21

From Props to Prosopopeia

Making *After Cardenio*

Jane Taylor

Mainly theoretical: “From Props to Prosopopeia”

Let me begin with the pairing of terms in my chapter title: I start with “props.” In theatrical terms, the prop is something that makes no claims to agency. We get some good sense of what props are from Philip Henslowe, the Elizabethan theatrical entrepreneur, who lists the following props amongst his company’s assets on March 10, 1598:

1 rock, 1 cage, 1 tomb, 1 hell mouth, 1 bedstead, 8 lances, 1 pair of stairs for Phaeton, 1 globe and golden scepter, 3 clubs, 1 golden fleece, 2 racquets, 1 bay tree, 1 lion’s skin, 1 bear’s skin, Phaeton’s chariot, the city of Rome, Neptune fork and garland, one pot for the Jew, one boar’s head and Cerberus’ three heads.¹

(Henslow 1845: 273)

A workable definition of the prop is that it is an object used on stage by actors to further the plot or storyline. Although for all the passivity implied by this definition, the prop can also be at times *that without which the plot cannot advance*. (Let us think of the letter that Hamlet discovers and then rewrites in order to contrive the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.)²

“Motion is the prop’s defining feature,” is the observation made by Andrew Sofer in his thoughtful introduction to *The Stage Life of Props* (Sofer 2003: iv). It is useful to consider Arjun Appadurai’s suggestion that, while from a theoretical point of view human agents encode things with meaning, methodologically it is the “things in motion” which provide insight into social structure (Appadurai 1988: 5). Thus, for all of the object’s ostensible “agentlessness,” the study of how, where, and when things move on stage provides a set of traces for otherwise invisible interactions. Objects become bearers of affect, and so social, erotic, and economic relations that might be masked or opaque to characters on stage can be made legible via the ways in which things are transacted.

So much for the prop.

Of prosopopeia, then.

Prosopopeia is generally conceived of as a rhetorical device through which the speaker projects him or herself into the being of a second person or thing in order to communicate obliquely to a third term. The puppet, which can be anything from a sock to a bundle of sticks and cloth, is in some ways akin to the prop but rather radically veers toward personhood, becoming a materialization of the rhetorical device, prosopopeia. It thus provides an object-based site for the projection from a speaking subject. The puppet is that “other being or thing” onto which a speaking/thinking being is projected. Yet the puppet is a particular kind of illusionist, wedded to maintaining the fiction of its autonomy. A puppet would rather die than admit that it is not alive. As Basil Jones of Handspring Puppet Company has asserted, every puppet show has an *Ur*-narrative that can be framed by the question, “Will the puppet manage to hold onto its illusory existence for the duration of the show?” (B. Jones, pers. comm., 2011).

In this it differs distinctly from the ventriloquist’s dummy. Within the conventions of ventriloquism, the dummy constantly draws attention to its captive status, abusing the manipulator, berating the man (!) who has a hand up its ass.³ The puppet claims its own personhood, while the ventriloquist’s doll in some uncanny way acknowledges, often acrimoniously, its status as prop. Most often a scene of ventriloquism entails the doll furiously battling to wrestle its agency from the manipulator, who is co-present in the performance. That performer is somehow rather poignantly usually the real substance of the narrative arc of the show, often trying to free himself (!) from the tyranny of the prop, as if in an extraordinary inversion of power, the manipulator is the dummy’s puppet. There are enormous psychic and political implications to such scenes, which may account for the powerful feelings of anxious excitement and nausea we experience. It is, in ways, the enactment of an Oedipal inversion, with the parent being trounced by an ungovernable infant.⁴

Largely historical

After: “Succeeding, following on, not prior, not the first;” or, (after) “in imitation of, mimicking, in the style of;” or (after) “in pursuit of [as a detective is ‘after a criminal’], hunting down.”

This section is about the problem of writing a play that has already been written.

Some three years ago I was approached by Renaissance scholar Stephen Greenblatt to write a version of a so-called “missing” Shakespeare play, a work titled *Cardenio* that has come down through tradition as a play by the Bard, though no copy of the original play’s text has ever come to light. The strongest clue to the play’s possible plot arises from the fact that the title refers to a character, Cardenio, the name given to a melancholy hero from Miguel de Cervantes’s celebrated novel *Don Quixote*. In the novel, Cardenio has lost his mind because he believes that his beloved has been seduced by the local overlord, and lives disguised as a shepherd in the mountains.

I did not immediately conceive of making a puppet play, although I am interested in the puppet text as both a theoretical idea and as a practical project. (I have written both a play-text and an opera libretto for puppets, working with Handspring Puppet

Company and artist/director William Kentridge.) When I received the commission to write a “*Cardenio*,” my instinct was that I couldn’t engage in making a pastiche of a Shakespeare play nor could I avoid wanting to engage with the force of his imagination. I had to locate an intellectual question that would assert its distinct validity within my work. How or why might Shakespeare have written in response to Cervantes? What in the vast, various novel *Don Quixote*, full of chivalric idealism, wild buffoonery, and irony, could be reconciled with Shakespeare’s psychological portraiture, his wordplay, his scrutiny of statecraft and power? Was there real common terrain explored by both writers despite the vast differences in procedure, sensibility, ideology, and form? What would the book and the stage tell us about one another? And how does seventeenth-century Spanish Catholicism inform us about emergent Protestantism? These were the historical and literary questions.

The two extraordinary writers seem linked by more than chance. Both, curiously, are recorded as having died on the same date, though not the same day. Spain and England were on different calendars in 1613; the dates of deaths are somewhat unstable in this early modern period, and so it is perhaps by convention (and invention) that Cervantes died on April 23, some ten days before Shakespeare died on the same date, ten days later.

I began to undertake research, looking for ways into the project. Greenblatt and playwright Charles Mee had written a lighthearted comedy based on the motif of the sexual wager: one man challenges his friend to test the virtue of his wife. My response on reading that play was that, writing from South Africa in the twenty-first century, it was very difficult to perceive sexual infidelity as quite the same reckless riot that they were imagining. The context of AIDS, sexual violence, and infant mortality cast a particular kind of pall over the sport as so imagined. I was interested in the tough questions around the *droit de seigneur*: power, sexual domination, and betrayal.

In Cervantes’s novel, *Cardenio*’s love Luscinda escapes the enforced marriage being urged upon her by fainting at the altar. The plot device produced a readerly skepticism in me. “Possibly that swoon arose from a feigned circumstance,” I thought; but even as I formulated that query, it struck me that my resistance to the text was informed at least in part by the patriarchal inclination not to believe the testimony of a woman’s bodily performance.

I shifted procedures, trying to understand this trope of “fainting at the altar” not for its ostensible truth content but for its dramatic potential. Was there possibly a pregnancy concealed inside the plot that I was devising? That would locate a biological cause of the “vapors” and yet could carry narrative intrigue. The Luscinda I was imagining was perhaps more complex than suggested by the narrative of her as a one-dimensional feminine piety. The puppet is in a strange relation to transparency. There is a tradition of reception that more or less affirms that the puppet is without guile. (The ventriloquist’s doll, by contrast, is notoriously deceptive.) I began to undertake research into early modern sexuality and the law, considering how I might work my theatre piece toward a dramatic situation concordant with Shakespeare’s perennial investigations in the late plays.

My first imaginative journey was to consider the social and literary history in order to establish a store of historical fact that could inform, one way or another,

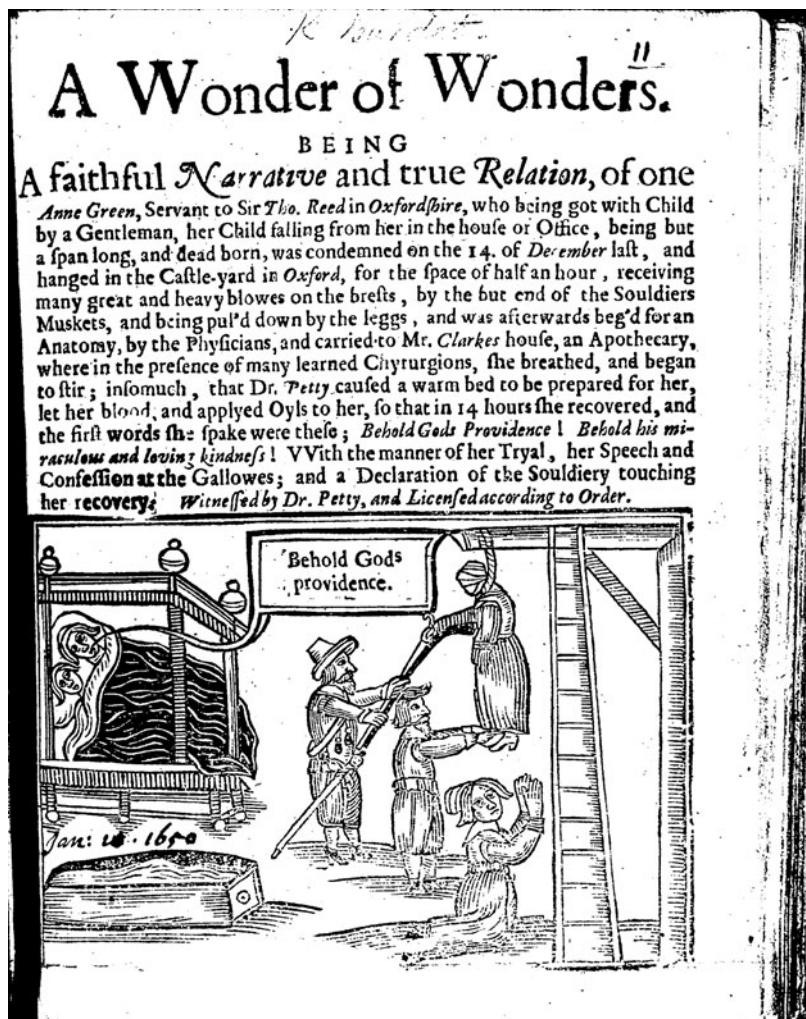


Figure 21.1 "A Wonder of Wonders ...," 1651 broadsheet recounting the story of Anne Green © The British Library Board General Reference Collection E.621(11). Image published with permission of ProQuest. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission. Image produced by ProQuest as part of *Early English Books Online*. www.proquest.com

the dramatic arc that I would establish. I was seeking a complex relation between history, literary precedent, and fresh invention.

So as a beginning, I turned to EEOB (Early English Books Online). Luck has something to do with it – and so does art history. I was drawn to an early modern text because it was illustrated. Any researcher will understand the hold that a vivid woodcut can have when one is sifting through endless textual accounts. The image is something of a rarity. That was how I settled upon the broadsheet recounting the story of Anne Green, who in 1650 was hanged for infanticide (Burdet 1651: 1).

Anne is not just a melancholy fact of history; rather, she becomes an unlikely *cause célèbre*. Because she lived and died in Oxford, England, her body was handed over to the university for an anatomy, a common practice with the corpses of the executed.⁵ However, to the awe and shock of everyone attending, she regained consciousness on the anatomy table. When she was gathered enough to speak, her first words were allegedly “Behold God’s Providence!” (Burdet 1651: 5). Her survival was, she claimed, testimony to her innocence.

What the broadsheet hints at is a bitter saga involving a young working girl, Anne Green, who was impregnated by the young Jeffrey Read while she was in service in the great house of his grandfather, Sir Thomas Read. Her unhappy situation was disclosed when a fellow servant heard moans coming from an adjacent room and discovered Anne with a little corpse. The sometime friend immediately ran (one imagines the hollow shrieking of outraged piety) to the master and mistress of the house, disclosing Anne’s misery and her alleged crime. Anne was found guilty of murdering her infant and sentenced to be hanged. This sad story is ordinary enough and would have had small interest. Her case becomes extraordinary to history when she revives on the anatomy table. Her notoriety is such that there are over 30 poems about her by young Oxford fellows (one of whom is Christopher Wren, who would later become the architect of London’s own resurrection).⁶

The incredible Anne Green story was reminiscent for me of the late Shakespeare plays, with their haunting explorations of the possibility of renewal, resurrection, rebirth. The puzzle of a return from death to life is there even in his early plays: Juliet’s feigned death is followed by her regaining consciousness, though tragically too late for Romeo, who kills himself in grief.

However, there is a quality of self-delusional hope in the face of despair that characterizes several of the mature plays. Here I have in mind the enigmatic structure of *The Winter’s Tale*, in which Leontes accuses his wife, Hermione, of infidelity and banishes her, only to learn of Hermione’s blamelessness after her death. Years pass, and the melancholy king has a statue made in commemoration of his wronged wife. The play concludes, implausibly, with Hermione’s statue coming to life, and hope is restored. A comparable logic is implicit in the ending of *King Lear*. The old king, distraught and deluded at the end of the play, has his loving daughter Cordelia cut down from where she has been hanged. She is laid at the feet of Lear, who deceives himself that she still lives and breathes. At this point of wretchedness, he dies from shock and heartbreak, and so never has to come to terms with the fact that his daughter is irrecoverably dead and that he was the effective cause of her death.

Anne Green’s story is substantially different in its detail, but it does allow for the apparently miraculous transformation from death to life of a hanged girl. Patriarchy is the cause of her death, much as it had been mortal for Cordelia. When I came across the broadsheet giving an account of the “miracle” of Anne’s resurrection, I was attracted by what seemed to me an irresistible theatrical opening – the ostensible corpse of a woman “coming back to life” on an anatomy table. As I began to consider the theoretical and philosophical potential of this profoundly visual episode, it seemed to me that the incident could figure (in the sense of “embody”) many of the major inquiries of the seventeenth century. Where did identity locate itself? In the body or some indefinable nonmaterial essence? The year of Anne Green’s death,

1650, was coincidentally the year in which René Descartes died. The inquiry that had preoccupied the philosopher for much of his career was to set in place a dualistic model of the human being as partaking of both a metaphysical entity (the soul) and a physical one (the body). This model has defined subsequent Western metaphysics. Descartes went on to write extensively about the puzzle of how these realms interacted. How could an immaterial soul impel or interact with matter?

The philosophical quandary provided a set of metaphors, as well as theatrical possibilities, for staging an event from the historical records of 1650. The tale also spoke of the seventeenth-century intersection of story and science.

After months of writing and thinking and deleting, I managed to compel the Anne Green story and the Cervantes plot to find common cause with social history. Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, as outlined earlier, provides a strong study of patriarchal absolutism and its consequences, and in some ways this Shakespearean plot began to inform my thinking about Anne Green and her "Wonder of Wonders."

This led my research into early modern attitudes to the fetus, the infant, and conception. It has been asserted that during the seventeenth century between one quarter and one third of children died in their first year. I have no way of assessing the extent to which this is the result of urbanization and social transformation. Anne Green's story is a rather traditional one: a working girl who falls pregnant while in service in the house of the local gentry, Sir Thomas Read, whose grandson has impregnated her. The old man was a vociferous advocate that Anne be hanged again after her failed reckoning with the rope. It is the recorded irony that Read died three days after Anne was acquitted.

The status and meaning of "the infant" is obviously shifting in the seventeenth century, and new constraints and controls are instituted. In 1624 Parliament passed an act to "prevent the murdering of bastard children" (Williams 2004: 37). William Walsh by the end of the century asserts in *A Dialogue Concerning Women*, "Go but one Circuit with the Judges here in England; observe how many women are condemned for killing their Bastard children ... " (Walsh 1691: 45)

The law intervened awkwardly and unevenly in such matters, and so it signaled its purposes through a decree that any birth kept secret could be inferred to signal danger and that the failure to disclose was itself criminal. The stories are grim and the circumstances hard to imagine.

Jane Lockwood confessed that she bore a stillborn child alone and that she left it on her bed, intending to bury it, but that her father's dogs pulled it off: "She was much to blame," she admitted, "she did not acquaint her mother and neighbours therewith" (cited in Gowing 1997: 111).

These were just some of the ideas percolating in the back of my mind as I began to imagine a viable play. But what was foremost was a visual event: that opening scene with a girl on an anatomy table, about to be dissected, who comes back to life. Nonetheless, I also wanted the work to be philosophical, about the relationship between the stage and the book, and about the seventeenth century. And what of quixotic idealism as a plot possibility? I was tantalized by the Don's religious chivalric zealotry and what it means now that we are again in an unlikely moment of commitment to sublime self-immolation for politico-religious causes.

Shakespeare, by contrast, is chock-a-block full of political cynicism, with persons who are climbing diverse ladders in the pursuit of self-aggrandizement or for revenge

or out of rage, and Quixote's outlandish idealism looks rather like folly from outside of the system of its own delusions. What would Shakespeare make of the inquiry? Would this have interested him?

Substantially practical

The show was staged in the old anatomy theatre of the University of Cape Town, a space that was transformed into a performance venue for this production. The seating is at a high angle to allow for observation from above, down into the body. This would have allowed medical students proximity to the corpse, but also, in our situation, it facilitated focused and detailed observation of the puppetry.

I have for some years been interested in exploring what the arts of puppetry tell us about our disquiet at the uneasy dialogue between body and soul, spirit and matter.⁷ These arts raise fundamental questions about the performance of the passions through the body in relation to a feeling or a thought that arises elsewhere. I am always struck at our investment in self-deception, such as puppetry allows. The story of Anne Green provided me with an opportunity to activate the archive in an uncanny mode that implicitly engages questions about substance and being. Puppetry necessarily always provides a set of metaphors through which to consider the passage between life and death. The puppet is an instrument that keeps in mind our double consciousness of the quick and the dead. Pinocchio's aspiration to live thematizes that yearning toward the metaphysical. Curiously, though, while Pinocchio's translation into a human boy gives him subjecthood through entry into consciousness, it also precipitates him into the flesh. He becomes captive to our time, our mortality, no longer within that curiously extended and ambiguous temporality of the world of things, which though they are subject to decay, might exceed our three-score years and ten. Pinocchio's consciousness becomes, in Yeats's unambiguous formulation, "fastened to a dying animal" (Yeats 1928: 2).

The technology of voice is part of the illusionism of the puppet. We know that the voice is not "coming from" the doll, yet we delight in believing that it is. The experiment in *After Cardenio* was also to test the limits, and the possibilities, arising from working with different puppeteers speaking Anne Green's voice at distinct points in the production. Would the character still hold?

The theatre is simultaneously a three-dimensional signifying space (say, Drury Lane) and a three-dimensional signified site (say, first-century Rome). Because our theatre was also an old anatomy theatre, it had a surplus of meaning deriving from that particularity. At any point in the performance, audience members would be unevenly aware of the complexities of the site-specific situation of the production. We had painted the back wall of the theater with blackboard paint, and Penny Siopis, a visual artist who had worked with me making several short experimental films, raised the question of how we might handle the projections. I was not keen on a screen, which would break the illusion for which the play text was reaching – namely, that the visual events were, at some level, actually dreams or thoughts and ideas. After Siopis engaged in a few experiments, the decision ultimately was to fill in a large chalk square to create a

soft and rather diffuse block of white on the black wall. The mica from the chalk added good luminosity to the wall for bright projection, without foregrounding the projections as technologically derived. The white chalk cube was a kind of empty canvas upon which film and images were projected. The uneven chalk texture gave the projections a mark of the maker, with drawn ground and digital image supplanting each other, straddling ancient and modern art practices. As a way of acknowledging the relationship between the medical anatomy and the visual arts traditions, Siopis began a cycle of drawings that she generated live each evening at the start of the performance, in front of the arriving audience. Her works drew from the iconographies of the mythologies of medical history, as well as archaic notorious women narratives.

At the start of the show, we are in darkness, with a voice meditating on Time. Eventually the light picks up a figure lying in the darkness; she continues to speak and gives a brief account of the body's duel with the soul:

My story was written and then was printed. Anne Green.
 Three times written down. Being one, yet three stories.
 Three in one. There was me who died.
 (My self was hang'd, and given over as dead.) She was first.
 And there was also me, the resurrection, just like our Lord.
 That second was all eternity.
 Then also the babe, so small, and still. "Is it breathing?"
 The little mouth as blue as water.
 Who can tell my guilt or my innocence?
 If you care to find evidence
 Watch my play, "Behold God's Providence!"

(Taylor 2011)

As she says these words, the lights come up to reveal a group of doctors, one of whom, Dr. Petty, looks uncannily like the young Rembrandt, whose painting "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp" informs all such scenes.

The puppet of Anne Green/Dorotea⁸ is a life-sized sculpture by South African artist Gavin Younge, who has in recent years been making persons, animals, and objects from molded vellum. They are simple but profound beings because of the luminous glow of the skin from which they are made. Of course, because the figure is vellum, she is both object and book. Younge sourced prosthetic eyes for her, so her gaze has a particular kind of focused intensity.

As the figure revives, she establishes a complex relation with the actress, Jemma Kahn, who is as much a body-double as a puppeteer, and who is a projective field of empathetic meaning. Much of the affective intensity of the puppet actually arises in the curious dialectical reciprocity between the actress and the puppet. The third figure in the triangular relation is puppeteer Marty Kintu, who occupies the more traditional role of the puppeteer for much of the performance. His performance is generally unvoiced, as he allows the figure to be "possessed" by Kahn; Kintu has a high order of physical dexterity and is a subtle and skilled manipulator. The puppet thus has a double set of competencies through which to express herself, the vocal



Figure 21.2 *After Cardenio*, University of Cape Town, South Africa (2011): Dylan Esbach as Cardenio; vellum puppet made by Gavin Young; Marty Kintu as primary puppeteer. Photo: © Ant Strack 2011, www.antstrack.com



Figure 21.3 Puppet by Gavin Young; Marty Kintu as primary puppeteer. Photo: © Ant Strack 2011, www.antstrack.com

and facial expressive sophistication of Kahn and the physical nuance and gestural language of Kintu. It was remarkable to observe how easily audiences embrace this complex triangular relation as embodying a single “person.” In itself the visual field was superseding the Cartesian model of a dual subject.

The actress and the puppet are at times bound to one another as they might be in a *bunraku* performance, but on occasion it is as if the puppet is manipulating the actress, while on other occasions they prowl around the stage, as if they are body and soul searching for one another.

The interchange between them is volatile, and the question we repeatedly ask, undermining traditional Cartesian dualism, is “Is the body the technology for the soul, or is the soul a technology for the body?” As the play progresses, it is at times the puppet that consoles and comforts the actress; at other times, the actress who is defending the puppet. What is most astonishing is that the puppet and the girl can be at opposite sides of the stage and we still read the two as a single being.

The interrogation of Anne by the Church during the play turns on the question of the death of the child. Here is a fragment of the dialogue as the two wrestle with the resuscitated girl:

DOCTOR PETTY (*as if studying a case, he observes*): Her eyes are open.

Is this a scene that knows it is watched?

I have heard it said that one life is not sufficient;

And we enact through our dreams those things

That we do not perform in life.

ASSISTANT: Some have written that our dreams are prophecies.

DOCTOR PETTY: Yet another thinking on these matters has suggested

That when we sleep, the outward senses, as hearing,

Seeing and smell, retreat from their ordinary activities,



Figure 21.4 Dylan Esbach as Doctor Petty; Marty Kintu as primary puppeteer; puppet by Gavin Younge; and Jemma Kahn as Ann Green. Photo: © Ant Strack 2011, www.antstrack.com

And the inward powers, as memory and phantasy are enhanced.

Perhaps the Soul does at such times inspect its self?

ASSISTANT: I did dream once that I was the devil

And the devil I was, did dream of me.

(Taylor 2011)

The theological drama turns on whether Anne is guilty of infanticide, or whether, as she keeps asserting, there had been a spontaneous abortion:

ASSISTANT: A mother is advised to be not dark;

not to conceal the birth of a babe.

There's a taint of secrecy that is unlovely to the law's desire.

For this we know, a child undisclosed is a child in danger.

It is surely damned, having died without Church.

(*Anne looks distressed, her gaze darts across the ceiling.*)

ASSISTANT: See the child? Look you

It stands outside the door. Its hand too small to make a fist,

And cannot even knock at heaven to ask for entry.

See, it helpless pats the door. Pat, pat.

ANNE GREEN/DOROTEA: I never did dispatch the child. I'd have loved the boy,

For a memento of his father.

(Taylor 2011)

The tormented girl is left alone, and we enter a curious dream state that is structured to complicate the sketch of Anne as either victim or vicious because we do not entirely understand the status of what we watch or its claim as truth:

The light changes to an unnatural dead white. Puppet and actress are seated side by side. The actress in a somnambulistic state gets up, wanders to the back of the room where there are instruments from the doctor's supplies, and takes a square of red cloth and two brass tankards. She wraps the mugs together in the rag, which becomes a kind of metaphoric swaddling cloth; she begins to rock the strange little bundle, making nurturing shushing noises. The puppet watches the make-believe event, amazed. The actress carefully and deliberately gives the bundle to the puppet, who, in turn, begins to rock and shush the swaddled package. At some point the puppet realizes that the poppet she holds will not quicken, and she flings it from her, violating the dream, as the mugs clatter onto the floor. The strange conceit of the puppet as mimic of the live is foregrounded here, and it is as if there is a tacit recognition that the offspring of the puppet cannot be anything but unnatural.

The puppet figure rises and urinates on the castaway trinkets. In what is at one level an innocent moment, but which could also be a bit of collusive play, the two figures, actress and puppet, dress one another in Puritan-style

costumes and assemble themselves to challenge the church. We as audience members have been witness to an incomprehensible piece of playacting; as the actress and the puppet are caught in an activity that cannot be read as either guilt or innocence.⁹

(Taylor 2011)

For dramatic energy there is a wild disruption with the entry of the town crier (played by Jeroen Kranenberg), who has something of the freak show about him. (Anne was, after her release, allowed to exhibit herself for a small fee. The girl showed herself sitting beside her coffin. This is surely an early episode in the long history of entrepreneurial exhibitionism.)

This sequence is followed by a meta-critical scene in which the actress, the puppeteer, and the puppet all engage in a discussion about puppetry, the soul, and the body. One of the instructive revelations of this production was the extent to which the audience allowed for ambiguity about the site of intelligence in the figure, with the manufactured figure at times apparently following the actress, and the actress at times, it seems, following her. All the while we are subliminally aware of a kind of agency that facilitates the illusion through the silent figure of the master puppeteer. The illusion is broken in this, the so-called “philosophy scene,” in which Marty Kintu performs alone on stage with the puppet. Here, there is an exploration of motives and desires, and Kintu speaks the voice of Anne Green, interrogating herself about her agency and her sexual drives. Ultimately, she asks whether she herself precipitated the liaison. Because Kintu has hitherto been the “unseen presence” behind the nuanced movement of Anne Green, the audience allows the shift in vocalizations without unease. So while for much of the production Jemma Kahn speaks for Anne, here in this segment, Kintu was able to be the puppet’s ventriloquist, as it were.

This scene disrupts the action, but for many young adult audience members, this is what they engaged with most strongly.

The play ends with a dramatic shift in genre: the old Knight, a quixotic figure, arrives to save Anne, who has at this point in my drama been threatened with immolation. Here the performance aesthetic is very much within the idiom of Cervantes, whose character Cardenio somehow had prompted Shakespeare’s play.

The Don dresses himself in battle regalia and equips himself to defend the threatened young woman. He wages a great battle to save her, but his sole warrior is a small Sardinian puppet made in traditional style and (rather ironically) wearing Moorish costume. The fight, as we know, is waged against windmills, and our piece makes marvelous use of very simple shadow puppetry with a wild piece of music, with marching bands and snorting horses. It is an ungovernable riot, and the Don (of course) succumbs in battle, slain in his defense of female virtue.

After Cardenio, then, is interested in the late Shakespeare; it is interested in Cervantes; and, oh, it is so interested in the languages of puppetry.

Afterword

When I first started working on the piece it occurred to me that John Locke, who was himself a student of philosophy and anatomy in the decade after Anne Green’s

death, must surely have known about this event – must have had her in his mind when he wrote in his famous chapter on identity and person that consciousness is what makes identity in persons. At the time of writing the play, I asserted as an act of faith that surely if 30 fellows had written doggerel about Anne Green, such as the following: “Strange metamorphosis this *dead-live* Woman, / Now differs from her self; and are such *Common?*” (Watkins 1651: 11), then her case was surely challenging assumptions about personhood and identity?

I began to investigate whether I could make a strong claim that Locke would have known about Anne Green, that she would have informed his thinking. The first document that began to confirm my speculation was a publication by Kenneth Dewhurst (1980) that provides an overview of the lectures by the seventeenth-century Oxford anatomist Thomas Willis. Such lecture notes are a fascinating rarity and show us the thinking and the theoretical practice of a man deemed now to be the originator of neuroscience in its earliest form. Willis was one of the anatomists involved in the resuscitation of Anne Green. The facts in the case survive because Willis’s lectures have been recorded in summary form in the notes of two students of anatomy at Oxford: Richard Lower, a pioneer in cardiology, and Locke, philosopher.

This was to me a striking find. Here was evidence of an intellectual circuit of inquiry between the anatomist who resuscitated Anne Green and the foremost empirical philosopher of Europe. In my play, Anne herself suggests that Locke would have been interested in her, and she quotes him on resurrections:

And thus we may be able, without any difficulty, to conceive the same Person at the Resurrection, though in a Body not exactly in make or parts the same which he had here, the same consciousness going along with the Soul that inhabits it.

(Locke 1689: 229)

My interest in Locke, though, had preceded the production of *After Cardenio*. It is his wrestling with the question of identity and person that persistently provokes me. There is a rather remarkable series of thought experiments in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Here’s his question:

Could we suppose two distinct incommunicable consciousnesses acting the same Body, the one constantly by Day, the other by Night; and on the other side the same consciousness acting by Intervals two distinct Bodies: I ask in the first case, Whether the *Day* and the *Night-man* would not be two as distinct Persons, as *Socrates* and *Plato*; and whether in the second case, there would not be one Person in two distinct Bodies; as much as one Man is the same in two distinct clothings.

(Locke 1689: 233)

Locke’s puzzle in the famous chapter on “Identity and Diversity” (Book II, Chapter XXVII) is this: in what does Personhood consist? The challenge he poses is to the commonsense presumption that body and consciousness are unified and co-extensive.

He writes in metaphor, and his remarkable trope of the body as “clothing for the Person” strikes us as a philosophical conundrum.

The discussion comes to us via the traditions of intellectual history. There is, though, another way of interpreting Locke’s reverie, because his was no abstract conception of being, for he had a physician’s understanding of the body. Recent research has revealed how extensive his medical library was, as well as the depth of his commitment to medical pursuits.¹⁰ By 1667 Locke had become Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper’s physician.¹¹

Locke’s philosophical inquiries are distinctly inflected by his familiarity with medical investigation at Oxford, and hence his challenge to an easy understanding of the relationship between the body and consciousness is provocative. Locke has us first imagine two consciousnesses inhabiting one body, alternately by day and by night; then he wants us to turn to the idea of one consciousness inhabiting two bodies. This is, at some level, a thinking-through of the continuum from the prop to prosopopeia and from the thing to the person. Psychoanalysis has gestured always to this as a dialectic and refers to anything which is not the subject (be it a thing or person) as the object. Through this modeling of the problem, he resolves (as he has clearly set out to do) that Personhood resides in consciousness.¹² Locke’s influential thinking about being and number in all likelihood arises in some measure from the story of Anne Green. Philosophy and the natural sciences were co-emerging.

Notes

- 1 I have assembled this list from Henslow, selecting items for their interest.
- 2 A prop can certainly also function, as a costume or set might, to define context, conjure mood, or describe character. I would suggest that until recently it primarily was generally understood as *passively* facilitating *action*. Object theatre and puppetry challenge that presumed traditional quietism of the prop.
- 3 There are female ventriloquists, although they are so rare that the phenomenon is worth noting. Nina Conti is just such a noteworthy instance. Puppetry, by contrast, has many female professionals; the gender asymmetry between ventriloquists and puppeteers is suggestive of the signifying differences between the two art forms.
- 4 *Time* is obviously the manipulator here. As the riddle of the sphinx makes plain, positions of power are inverted as the human goes through the progress from infantile vulnerability on four legs, to adult autonomy on two, and to aged feebleness on three legs (the walking stick here as an early figure of the prosthetic limb).
- 5 In many European contexts, anyone hanged for a criminal offense might gain the right to be buried in hallowed ground if their corpse were handed over for an anatomy.
- 6 Wren, a student of Thomas Willis, one of Anne Green’s anatomists, illustrated Willis’s remarkable *Cerebri Anatomi* (1664), which would stand for 200 years as the definitive description of the brain.
- 7 I first worked with Handspring Puppet Company in 1996 when I wrote *Ubu and the Truth Commission*.
- 8 The protagonist is a composite of the historical figure of Anne Green and Dorotea, the literary love of Don Quixote. She thus had a double, or variable, appellation throughout the staging.
- 9 I was prompted in this by the protagonist in Daniel Defoe’s *Roxana*. Roxana, a prostitute, dresses as a Quaker to escape her history. Quaker principles, of course, are antithetical to the idea of contrived performance.

- 10 See, for example, Meynell (1997).
- 11 This rather gives the lie to Meynell's comment that "for all his intelligence and interest in the subject, Locke appears to have remained an educated amateur in medicine" (Meynell 1997: 473). Or, at any rate, it provokes us to reconsider our contemporary understanding of "amateur" and "professional" as binaries.
- 12 He is also in dialogue with Descartes, who visited anatomies in the hope of finding some way of locating the site of intersection of material and nonmaterial being. For further discussion of Descartes's engagement with medical practice, see Carter (1983).

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