

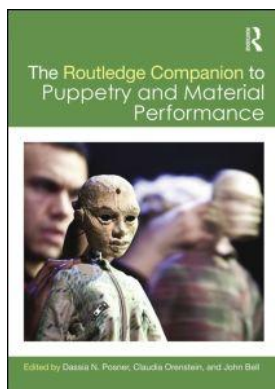
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Reading a Puppet Show

Understanding the Three-Dimensional Narrative

Robert Smythe

How do we read a puppet show? Are we looking at the same thing when we see Punch and Judy at a carnival or *War Horse* at Lincoln Center? What should we be thinking about? The design of the puppets? Whether the manipulation is lifelike? At present, while there is a growing body of knowledge about the history, techniques, and cultural uses and importance of the performing object, as exemplified by the excellent work of Blumenthal (2005), Bell (2008), and others, there are fewer guides to help in understanding, interpreting, or analyzing how performing objects and techniques communicate to audiences. Artists who tell stories and audiences who receive them need additional tools to interpret the content of performances created with puppets, a process of reading the relevant narrative features of nonverbal communication that the literary and film critic Seymour Chatman has called “reading out”: “From the surface or manifestation level of reading, one works through to the deeper narrative level” (Chatman 1978: 41). In writing of film and literature, Chatman restricts reading out to the interpretation of a specific set of signs: words and film frames. Reading out from theatre performance is more complicated because of what Roland Barthes, the French literary theorist, philosopher, critic, and semiotician, has called its “real informational polyphony” and “density of signs” (Barthes 1964 [1972]: 262).

Sorting through material on stage, many modern-day theatre semioticians have been considerably influenced by the theories of the Prague School of the 1930s and 1940s, which analyzed the interrelationships of the communication systems at work in theatre, concluding that “theatre does not rely on a single system of signs, like the system of natural language for verbal narratives, but offers a polyphony of competing and overlapping signs that belong to many systems: verbal, paralinguistic, gestural, clothing, proxemic, color, and sound, and so forth” (Alter 1990: 93).¹ The Prague School’s philosophy was perhaps best summed up by member Jiří Veltruský who wrote, “All that is on the stage is a sign” (Veltruský 1940 [1964]: 84).

The Prague School was heavily influenced by the Russian Formalists who preceded them² and for whom literary texts “resemble machines: they are the result of an intentional human activity in which a specific skill transforms raw material into a complex mechanism suitable for a particular purpose” (Steiner 1995: 18). Early film

theorists used these ideas to recognize that movies could be seen as texts, in that cinema's mechanical arrangement of edited representations of reality (film clips) could result in the manipulation of time and space.

Performances with puppets are also edited representations of reality,³ albeit in three dimensions. Given that puppetry and film have these similarities, existing modes of understanding the "reading out" of film, specifically narrative theory, may provide an additional methodology for analyzing puppet performance. Narrative theory provides a useful framework for analyzing puppetry because it posits that narratives are the creation of a single author – director, writer, or, perhaps, puppeteer – who alone controls the reader's access to the story.⁴ Narrative theory's analysis of storytelling is related to semiotics, the study of how basic symbolic units combine to create language, whether verbal or visual, and therefore create meaning.⁵ To understand how to read out puppetry, then, it is useful to understand how its language works.

Readers construct meaning by decoding the sequencing of basic units, each of which represents an idea or concept in the real world (McCloud 1994: 25–58). In written texts, the basic units are words, which are set into sequences of sentences. In cinema, the basic units are individual, visually composed frames of film set into sequences of clips. In comics, framed panels of hand-drawn art are sequenced in pages. In puppetry, the puppet itself is the basic semiotic unit of meaning (Jurkowski 1988: 55–61). Clearly, then, if a puppet is an abstracted, semiotic tool representing an idea in the real world, it is not the same as an actor interpreting a text or a design deriving from a text, because the puppet *is* the text. Moreover, like a word printed on a page, the puppet is infinitely reproducible and malleable: multiple copies of the same puppet are signifiers of the same meaning, one that can be continually shaped by context; yet, the puppet is unlike text – because puppets are also real objects, they can be destroyed and lost forever.

This idea of permanent loss can be seen as one of the central points in *Hermann*, a puppet show produced in 1982 by Theater im Wind of Braunschweig, Germany, written by Enno Podelhl and performed by him and his wife Anne. *Hermann* gained notice for its exploration of the Holocaust using disturbing imagery of concentration camp victims, depicted by "a pile of false teeth and eyeglasses, perhaps the most haunting image of the death camps ... shovel[ed] into a box using a coal shovel" (Zucker 1987: 85). *Hermann* was performed throughout Europe, the United States, and Israel until the late 1990s and was described by Mitchell Zucker as being "among the best of the new, small, adult puppet theatre productions in Europe" (Zucker 1987: 79).⁶ I would additionally suggest that examining *Hermann* through the lens of narrative theory allows us to view it as an exemplar of puppetry's potential for creating a unique narrative logic through its manipulation of space and time.

Enno Podelhl's use of puppets as his basic units of meaning enable him to edit representations of reality, removing what is unnecessary for his story, in the way that literature does.⁷ Podelhl's puppets are spare evocations of the reality they represent: they are abstracted and painted in dull earth tones, with clothes to match. They consist of the barest minimum needed to suggest a human being: no real faces, no legs, no hands, only empty sleeves, through which the puppeteers sometimes slip their own hands. Podelhl, like all puppeteers, creates three-dimensional edited

representations of reality that cause the audience to fill in the blanks, creating meaning from any specifics they perceive, such as the bright red hair of a Roma woman, Johanna the Gypsy, the show's sole spot of bright color, startling and vividly memorable against the puppets' otherwise dull coloring. Details like this are the modifiers in the language of the puppet, and in the grammar of *Hermann*, Johanna's hair is a powerful adjective. Since Johanna is a performing object, Podehl can make her constantly twirl and play with her hair, alerting the reader that this information should be noticed, though its significance is not revealed until the end of the show. What appears to be a straightforward puppet show is, in fact, a precise arrangement of events designed to lead the audience on a journey of discovery and self-revelation.

Narrative theory posits that all storytelling embraces a duality: the plot of a story and how it is told are two separate things. Narrative theory carefully differentiates the "what" (events, characters, time and location, referred to as the *fabula*) from how the author reveals that information to the reader (the *sjužet*).^{8,9} According to film theorist David Bordwell, authors create *sjužet* when they edit and arrange the events and facts of a story in a specific sequence of "cues prompting us to infer and assemble story information" (Bordwell 1985: 52). I suggest that, more than from the novelty and audacity of its images, the impact of *Hermann* comes from its organization, its *sjužet*.

When creators of narratives use words, film frames, puppets, or other edited representations of reality, they are not bound by the laws of physics, as film historian Rudolf Arnheim recognized in the early days of film theory:

Time and space are continuous. Not so in film. The period of time that is being [represented] may be interrupted at any point. One scene may be immediately followed by another that takes place at a totally different time. And the continuity of space may be broken in the same manner.

(Arnheim 1933 [1957]: 20–21)

When authors juxtapose scenes without either showing how a character got from one place to another or accounting for the passage of time, they force readers to use personal experience and creative thought to fill in that missing information.

Readers of a narrative are not idle spectators – they construct meaning through supposition and deduction, increasing their connection to the story because they have to fill in these missing bits. This happens at the beginning of *Hermann*, when Podehl manipulates a naked puppet of Hermann for seven minutes in a wordless, abstract ballet, causing the audience to question what is going on until Podehl looks directly at them and supplies the missing information with the play's first spoken line: "Hermann did his exercises every morning. Naked." The audience laughs: the joke contextualizes what they have been watching – it is their reward for trying to construct meaning out of abstraction. Podehl immediately switches the naked puppet for its fully clothed duplicate, a foreshortening of time that the audience can immediately understand: time has clearly passed in the narrative because Hermann is now dressed, though the events are simultaneous in the real world of the performance. The reader immediately accounts for the missing events: in order to get dressed in the morning, this character must have bought clothes and stored them in



Figure 23.1 Enno Podehl with Hermann performing his morning gymnastics.
Photo: © Sharon Baronofsky

his house. Bordwell notes that the reader's interpretation of the *sjuzet* and subsequent creation of the accompanying *fabula* is automatic: "Presented with two narrative events, we look for causal, or spatial or temporal links. The imaginary construct we create, progressively and retroactively [is] the *fabula*" (Bordwell 1985: 49). A puppeteer's process of building a narrative, then, is one of shifting away from using such devices as sculpted puppets to simply reproduce the details of the real world and toward using them to make readers invest in constructing *fabula*. This process, because it draws on an audience's imagination and personal experience, is more powerful than presenting a straightforward, chronological telling of events.

Podehl appears to tell his story in just this manner. An old German man, Hermann, meets Johanna during the early days of World War II. She is taken away by the Nazis, who put her into a concentration camp, leaving Hermann to bring up her daughter, Rosa. Decades later, Podehl, a young college student, rents a room from Hermann. While he lives with him, the old man tells him about Johanna, and Podehl then decides to build a puppet show, with disastrous results, as we shall see. However, Podehl's *sjuzet* intersperses these past events with his present-time telling of his story to an audience, compelling readers to make perceptive leaps of imagination and empathy to construct a *fabula* that includes those past events and Podehl's present-time storytelling.

Podehl's *sjuzet* indicates that while the live aspect of the show makes it appear that all events are happening now, the story he is telling happened in the past, and no one, including him, can really know what happened then. To make this clear, Podehl establishes the relationship between the past and the present by mapping out a precise, three-dimensional *sjuzet* where clearly defined stage spaces equal specific periods

of time. Therefore, his location at any given moment in three-dimensional space indicates exactly where the narrative is in time.

Podehl carefully delineates three different kinds of time in his story by using these specific areas of his stage: an open space hung with black masking curtains and a waist-high table set in the center. The table is about 2 meters wide and less than 1 meter deep, covered in black fabric that hangs to the floor. On the floor in front of it sits a metal washbasin and a pitcher of water; stage left of it is a small table holding the lighting controls that the performers operate for themselves during the show. There is a meter or two of space on either side of the table and a few meters behind it, giving the performers, simply dressed in black, room to cross from one side to the other or to stand to directly address the audience. Each of Podehl's three main areas of the stage – downstage, the center table, and the space upstage of it – represent, respectively, a different period of time: the present, the past, and a place where time does not exist.

The downstage area represents *now*. It is the place where Podehl is not performing but rather shares the same space and breathes the same air as the audience. When he stands there, talking about the past from the perspective of the present, he and the audience are simply fellow humans and they, as a group, are included and implicated in his actions. He makes this clear from the beginning of the show as he stands and watches the audience enter the auditorium and sit, waiting for them so he can start his story.

The puppet table in the center of the stage represents the past, a fantasized period from the 1930s to 1944. Here Enno and Anne Podehl perform in full view of the audience as they operate the puppets in scenes from Hermann's life (as Podehl imagines it): Hermann performs morning exercises, talks to old woodstoves while hauling them in his cart, and meets Johanna. While the actions are sometimes fanciful (Hermann does a backflip to get into his cart; he floats into the air after suckling at Johanna's breast), the puppeteers are scrupulously precise in their manipulation; their focus never leaves the puppet stage, and there is never any indication that a world outside this invented one exists. The only exception is when Podehl himself leans or kneels on the stage table, sometimes sitting on it or even climbing up onto it.

When Podehl is physically on the puppet stage, he alerts readers that he is literally inserting himself into the story, supplying his point of view on details that he cannot know because he was not present. While describing how Hermann raised Johanna's daughter, Rosa, he uses the scarf that wrapped the baby Rosa to suggest Hermann's nurturing of her. Podehl wants us to understand exactly who is telling this part of the story; therefore, instead of clearing away the puppet of Hermann, he has it sit motionless and lifeless at his side, unneeded, while he uses the scarf as a swing, a folded fortune-telling cootie-catcher, and a blindfold to suggest how Hermann might have played with Rosa.¹⁰ While telling this part of the story, Podehl supports himself with one foot on the stage and the other on the floor behind it, bridging the worlds of the author and his narrative. Podehl shows readers that they can literally gauge how much of the past he is inventing according to how much of the puppet stage he physically invades from his position just upstage of it.

This area behind the puppet table is a metaphorically infinite space where nothing exists until it is needed for the story. This area, similar to Harry Potter's Room of



Figure 23.2 Anne Podehl, Rosa, Hermann, and Enno Podehl. Photo: © Sharon Baronofsky

Requirement or a blank page in a typewriter, is what I call “puppetland”: a space that is found in most forms of puppetry but that the audience rarely sees. It is the place below the puppet booth’s playboard and behind its curtains or behind the shadow screen just before or after the *wayang kulit* touches it. Everything necessary for the puppet show’s narrative already exists in puppetland; it is the container for the puppeteer’s prearranged *sjuzet* in the form of the objects that will be used in the show. Puppetland’s curtains and screens normally hide the puppeteer, but in *Hermann* he is indelibly visible behind the table, controlling the existence of the ideas represented by his objects.

The ability to literally tear characters from a story fully demonstrates the power of using editable representations of reality. After Hermann and Johanna meet and start to live together, the puppet of Johanna sleeps while Hermann strokes her cheek and exits, leaving Podehl to walk around to the front of the puppet table, his movement through three-dimensional space moving the narrative forward in time. Downstage, he tells the audience, “It was a time when people like Johanna – wayfarers, Gypsies, homeless people – were persecuted.” He then pulls a black leather glove onto his hand, jumps onto the puppet table, and grabs the Johanna puppet by the throat, “now” bursting backward into the past. He carries the puppet upstage into the void of puppetland and lets it fall to the floor, her wooden head making a sickening thud as she disappears from view. In semiotic terms, Podehl’s removal of a puppet from the narrative is akin to removing a word from a language, making Johanna’s loss more than a symbolic death because, without the puppet, the ideas it represents can never be directly referenced again. This is made clear in the scenes that follow, while Hermann sits on the train platform through the progression of seasons, waiting for a sign of her. It is at this moment that the wagonloads of teeth and eyeglasses appear.

The power of these prosthetics comes from their indirect references to living people, a causal relation that has been set up by Podehl's *sjužet*. Shocking as these images are, Podehl's greatest achievement with *Hermann* is that his *sjužet* compels the reader to make a huge perceptive jump that vaults over the surface of these images and work to find personal meaning on a deeper narrative level. He does this with narrative logic.

Narrative logic is when the reader assumes that an event is "a consequence of another event, of a character trait, or of some general law" (Bordwell 1985: 51). The reader then constructs "causal networks that represent the relationships between the causes and consequences of events in a story" (Gerrig and Egidi 2003: 44). This form of logic enables readers to understand the chain of events that unfolds when Johanna, after having been taken by the black glove, eventually returns to Hermann's house, and he puts a real teakettle on the stove. While they wait for it to boil, there is a pounding on the door and the lights go out. In the pitch-dark auditorium, a flashlight isolates parts of the room: the closet, the teakettle boiling on the stove, Johanna sitting motionless at the table with no puppeteer to manipulate her. The flashlight stays on her face long enough to show a black-gloved hand grabbing her. The flashlight goes off. When the stage lights come back on, the Johanna puppet is gone and Hermann's kitchen table is turned over. In this sequence, specific signifiers (black gloves represent Nazis; Nazis searched houses) provide the necessary logical links between the events (the table was knocked over → they seized Johanna → they took her away).

While Podehl's choice of objects compels the reader to make connections between signifiers and their referents (black gloves = Nazis), his use of the stage space forces the audience to make causal connections between events within the show and to use them to evaluate the veracity of what they see – to realize they are watching fiction. For example, after the black glove grabs Johanna, Podehl stands upstage of the puppet table and says, "This much Hermann had always told me. But I could never get out of him where he actually was when it all happened." He then kneels on the puppet stage and picks up the fallen table to reveal the Hermann puppet lying inanimate behind it. Podehl quietly and deliberately looks the audience over, as if to ask, "Do you understand what I'm telling you?" Such causal connections between story events suggest that Hermann didn't try to save Johanna because he was a coward. However, the three-dimensional *sjužet* reveals that, by kneeling on the puppet stage, Podehl is again literally inserting himself into the story, clearly indicating that this indictment of Hermann's apparent cowardice is Podehl's version of what happened.

Podehl inveigles the audience to believe in Hermann's guilt because his ultimate goal is to have them join him in forgiving Hermann for his imagined trespasses. Through his arrangement of the story's events in space, Podehl indicates that he is an unreliable narrator and that the audience should not rush to judgment. His three-dimensional *sjužet* counteracts the "truthiness" of his story. Since Podehl plays himself in the show and is, therefore, simultaneously a sign and its own referent, he can be interpreted as reliable because he is what he appears to be; likewise, his puppet of Hermann is a sign for a real Hermann who once existed and who is also alive onstage, so his actions must refer to real events. However, as the *sjužet* makes clear,

Podehl's – and the audience's – indictments of Herman are actually self-criticisms, because Hermann only exists as a literal extension of Podehl, his creator.

When the fully dressed Hermann first appears, he is a small puppet with a blank face, a cheerful disposition, and Podehl's comically oversized human hand inserted through the puppet's sleeve. Hermann's first action after his morning exercises is to cook his breakfast. Podehl, manipulating Hermann, has him strike a real match to light a real gas stove, then crack open and fry a real egg, wiping his (Podehl's real) hand on his (Hermann's) scarf. Finally, when the puppet realizes that, without a mouth, he cannot eat what he has made, Podehl leans down to eat the egg from Hermann's fork, saying, "We had a special relationship." The audience responds with a laugh of recognition at this reference to the obvious point that, despite the disguise of the puppet, Podehl and Hermann are one and the same. Following this punch line, Podehl carefully removes the Hermann puppet and all the cooking paraphernalia from the stage, giving the audience time to read out from the surface level of the joke to its deeper narrative implications: Hermann exists in the "now" only because Podehl and the audience have constructed him.

Podehl's *sjuzet* leads the audience to realize that *Hermann* is a carefully created narrative, designed to reveal something deeper than its brilliant tour de force of a puppet who lights matches. As Jorge Luis Borges said of *Citizen Kane*, which constructs its *sjuzet* in a similar way:

... the theme (at once metaphysical and detective-fictional, at once psychological and allegorical) is the investigation of the secret soul of a man. ... Overwhelmingly, infinitely, [the author] ... shows fragments of the life of the man ... and invites us to combine them and to reconstruct them.

(Borges 1941 [1980]: 12–13)



Figure 23.3 Enno Podehl and Hermann light a match. Photo: © Franz Kramer

As Podehl's *sjužet* continuously indicates, the man being examined here is not Hermann but Podehl, and the experience of what we learn, when we learn it, and how we learn it is what *Hermann* is ultimately about: a man who confronts his ignorance and learns to forgive.

Just after Podehl reveals the Hermann puppet hiding under the table, he stretches a clothesline across the stage, saying, "Then came the time that I was living with [Hermann] twenty years later. I was building a puppet and used a piece of hemp rope for its hair. I put it over the stove to let it dry and went upstairs to my room." As he relates this information he casually pulls a bit of frayed rope from his pocket and pins it to the clothesline. Though he does not describe it, the rope is bright red.

Until now, the only bright red in the muted palette of the entire narrative has been a signifier for Johanna; filling in details from this fragment, the reader understands that the puppet the young Podehl is building must be of her.¹¹ Similarly, the reader can make other causal relations from all the information presented to this point, leading to the understanding that, as a college student living with Hermann in post-war Germany, Podehl intended to make a show that would expose the cowardice of an old man who didn't stand up to the Nazis when they took away his Gypsy lover.

However, this plan is thwarted, as shown in horrifying detail when Podehl manipulates Hermann to again light a real match and accidentally set Johanna's drying hair ablaze. As real fire consumes the dyed rope and leaps across the puppet stage, Podehl confirms what the audience infers from the real fire they see: "Everything was in flames. The table. The chairs. The ceiling. The walls." He strikes the Hermann puppet below the stage, saying: "We had to leave the house." Podehl, now alone on stage, surveys the puppet table: the fire has left nothing behind. He speaks what must be seen as truth because there are no edited representations of reality in sight: "My God! I thought, 'he's ninety years old! He'll never survive this.'" Clearing the stage of debris, he brings up the puppet of Hermann, letting it dangle from his hand as he continues: "In that moment Hermann stood very quiet, looked at me and said, 'All right now, [my house is] gone, the firemen will come, there is nothing more to do.'" Since Podehl is not manipulating his edited version of Hermann, Podehl is quoting the real person here, reminding us that Hermann is not Podehl's invention but a man who truly lived, loved and, apparently, forgave Podehl for the loss of his house. This moment of truth suggests the reason behind Podehl's narrative: his guilt as he replays and relives his actions in every performance.

The last few minutes of *Hermann* are as quietly intense as the black-gloved Nazi scenes are loud and powerful. The Hermann puppet surveys the ashes of his house and then asks Podehl to help him. Podehl lifts him off the stage table, ostensibly so Hermann can whisper in his ear, "Now I'd like a bath. My boy, will you wash me?" but actually to show the true relationship between them. The moment is shocking because it reminds us that the Hermann we thought we knew has always been just a small and insignificant puppet, a product of Podehl's imagination. Importantly, this is the last time Podehl speaks for him; Podehl removes him from sight to below the stage table and, like Johanna before him, Hermann disappears.

The scene that follows is so different in style that it can be read as a coda to what has come before. Podehl moves from his upstage narrator position in puppetland to the downstage position that indicates he is in the same physical and temporal space

as the audience. Here he picks up the galvanized tub and pitcher of water from the floor in front of the table where they have been – and where we have forgotten about them – for the entire performance. He carries them upstage, his three-dimensional map of time indicating that these present-time articles play a role in the past and that, once again, he is acting as the audience's proxy. Reaching below the stage, he lifts the puppet of the naked Hermann out of puppetland and places the tiny, naked, vulnerable puppet into the tub. He pours water over him while a recording of Hermann's (Podehl's) voice is heard: a two-minute nonsensical monologue relating how he confounded the insurance company that investigated the fire. While this plays, Podehl ritualistically dips a sponge into the water and squeezes it over the inanimate Hermann, all the while watching the audience as he did before, again inviting them to join him in his treatment of Hermann. As the story ends, Podehl squeezes the sponge one last time and simply says, "Hermann." The lights fade to black.

This coda separates the events of the past from the present. Everything Podehl has presented to that point could have been part of the puppet show he had been planning as the college student who blamed Hermann (and his generation) for being weak. Had the house not burned down (and who is at fault is not entirely clear), Podehl would have had his puppets finished and could have produced a show in 1964. But, instead, he waited 18 years, until 1982, to create *Hermann*.

Throughout his show, Podehl has taught his audience that the narrative derives from his relationship to it as the author of the material. The coda's shift in style and tone, then, signal to the reader that Podehl's attitude toward his subject has changed: for the first time Podehl lets Hermann speak for himself. This is a crucial moment, and there is a causal link between it and Hermann's act of forgiving Podehl for burning down the house. It is possible to deduce that this absolution changed Podehl's mind in regards to creating a show about Hermann's failure to save Johanna because, 18 years later, Podehl bathes Hermann in a ritual of forgiveness. We, like Podehl, realize that we were not present during the events in Hermann's life and, therefore, cannot judge him. Ultimately, then, *Hermann* is the story of Podehl's journey toward forgiveness, a journey he has crafted as a narrative assembled to compel the reader to not only judge him, but also to judge themselves, to ask what they would do when a knock on the door comes in the middle of the night. It is an invitation to join him as he washes away his own lack of understanding.

The genius of *Hermann* is that Podehl's use of signs and narrative structure makes the audience supply information from their lives and experiences to fill in the gaps in the "fabula": they become complicit in the telling of the story, in the blaming of its characters, and in its celebration of the human capacity for forgiveness. Podehl's artistic aims are to create a specific relationship with his audience, to start a dialogue with them after they see the work. He says in an interview,

I don't know how I would have reacted at that moment in history if I were as socially unaware of what was taking place as Hermann. So, this is a question for me, and I hope for you too. I know there are many people who reacted like Hermann during the war. I ask you why and you ask me why.

And I hope if we talk about it together, something will happen and we will both become more responsible

(Zucker 1987: 83).

Narrative theory, with its emphasis on structure, is a useful tool for the analysis of puppetry performance because it recognizes that puppets, edited representations of reality, enable authors to manipulate space and time. Additionally, because puppets limit the quantity of sign systems in a performance, they give authors great control over the referents available to an audience, and, therefore, to its meaning. Most importantly, using narrative theory to delineate a three-dimensional *sjuzet* in a puppet show creates the possibility of using time as a referent system on stage. Analyzing puppet shows with this conceptual framework can help us to explore the essence of puppetry, providing an understanding of its relationship to other systems of performance analysis.

Notes

- 1 Analysis of theatrical signs began in the 1930s, when a former member of the Russian Formalists, Petr Bogatyrev, charted the basics of theatrical semiotics (Elam 2002: 7).
- 2 “The close genealogical link between Russian Formalism and the Prague School is undeniable. The two not only had common members (Bogatyrev and Jakobson), but the Prague group consciously named themselves after the Moscow branch of the Formal school – the Moscow Linguistic Circle. Also, several leading Formalists (Tomashevsky, Tynyanov, and Vinokur) delivered in the 1920s lectures at the Prague Circle, and thus familiarized Czech scholars with the results of their research” (Steiner 1995: 14–15).
- 3 While human actors and puppets are both signs that refer to outside characters and events, the puppet is a product of specific choices as to what to include and exclude, therefore controlling an audience’s access to referents by reducing the number of signs in use. According to Veltruský (1940 [1964]: 84–85), “The actor’s body, on the other hand, enters into the dramatic situation with all of its properties. A living human being can understandably not take off some of them and keep on only those he needs for the given situation.” For instance, even as he imitates a wild animal, the actor playing the tiger in Rajiv Joseph’s *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* necessarily references his existence as a human, including the fact that he is alive and, therefore, subject to the laws of time and space.
- 4 Chatman (1978: 41) uses the term “reader” to include “not only readers in their armchairs, but also audiences at movie houses, ballets, puppet shows, and so on.” Use of the term throughout supposes such inclusion.
- 5 Most importantly, for narrative theory, through the work of Barthes.
- 6 *Hermann* was performed in German and simultaneously orally interpreted into the language of the country where it was performed. Quotations from the production used here are from the English translation used in the September 18, 1992, performance at the Joseph Papp Public Theater in New York for the Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater.
- 7 Chatman (1978: 30) assesses verbal narratives as being “imprecise” in their representations of the real world because they “may elect not to present some visual aspect, say, [of] a character’s clothes. It remains totally *unbestimmt* [(unstated, undetermined)] about them, or describes them in a general way: ‘He was dressed in street clothes.’” At the same time, cinema “cannot ‘say,’ simply, ‘A man came into the room.’ He must be dressed in a certain way. In other words, clothing, *unbestimmt* in verbal narrative, must be *bestimmt* in a film.” Puppetry straddles both modes of representation: certain things can simply be witnessed, as in cinema or theatre; they can also be *unbestimmt* (gender, features, etc.) because they can be edited from a puppet; a puppet can even have non-clothing, indistinguishable from its being.

- 8 Chatman delineates “resolved plots” that unravel events and “revealed plots” that tend to be “strongly character-oriented”: where the:

... function of the [*sjužet*] is not to answer [the question of what happened] nor even to pose it. Early on we gather that things will stay pretty much the same. It is not that events are resolved (happily or tragically), but rather that a state of affairs is revealed. (Chatman 1978: 48)

- 9 The terms *fabula* and *sjužet* were first used in the 1920s: “Various technical terms were introduced and used by [early Russian Formalists Viktor] Šklovskij, [Boris] Ejchenbaum, [Jurij] Tynjanov, and others in order to distinguish the main constructive factors in a literary work” (Fokkema and Ibsch 1978: 18–19).

Disjunction was the key logical principle by which mechanistic Formalism organized its basic notions. This principle split art decisively from non-art and expressed their mutual exclusivity in terms of polar opposition. The now famous pair, story and plot (*fabula* and *sjužet* [sic]) is an application of this binarism to artistic prose. Story is a sequence of events unfolding as it would in reality, according to temporal succession and causality. This series serves the writer as a pretext for the plot construction, the liberation of events from their quotidian context and their teleological distribution within the text. The devices of repetition, parallelism, gradation and retardation scramble the natural order of happenings in literature and render its form artistic. The events depicted are relegated to an ancillary position and deprived of any emotional, cognitive, or social significance. Their only value rests in how they contribute to the technique of the work itself.

(Steiner 1995: 18).

- 10 Veltruský states that it is possible for the human actor to have action that falls to the “zero” level (1940 [1964]: 86). Keir Elam describes an actor’s role in this state as “analogous to that of the prop” (2002: 14). This is, of course, completely different for a puppet, where the inaction or stillness that results from the loss of the manipulator does not change its role in the play but, instead, can suggest that time has stood still for that character. Inactivity for the puppet, then, becomes a sign referring to time rather than a transformation from one state to another.
- 11 Studies of psychological cognition support the idea that authors can rely on readers’ memory structures to fill in details. “To understand narrative, readers retrieve information from memory. The author can provide the fragments that are critical to her story, with the strong expectation that readers will fill in the rest” (Gerrig and Egidi 2003: 40).

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