

The Puppet, the Cinematic and Contemporary Visual Theatre: Principles, Practices, Logos.

This thesis finds inspiration in practitioner academics such as Craig and Meyerhold, and is conceived as a practice-informed research degree, consisting of a written element and a practical element that draw on and inspire each other. That there is value in both practising and analysing an art form is argued, and 'case studies' are made of practitioner/theorists at either end of the genealogy traced in the research: both those at the beginning of the 20th century and those at the beginning of the 21st. A case is made for judging the work of artists such as Robert Lepage, Robert Wilson, Complicité, and Faulty Optic as exemplars of contemporary Visual Theatre practice, combining and being inspired by the twin modes of puppetness and the cinematic. Alongside case studies of these practitioners sits analysis of the practical element of the thesis: a work-in-progress piece of auteur-led Visual Theatre practice that questions and illuminates the written component of the thesis.

The research takes the form of a historical survey followed by contemporary case studies, identifying the first adoption in Europe of the figure of the puppet (both literal and metaphorical) as a serious dramatic trope (as distinct from the puppet's long history in religion, ritual and entertainment). The thesis agrees with the many writers on puppetry who cite Kleist's *On the Marionette Theatre* (1810) as the turning point for the shift in the perception of puppets: from folk art or children's theatre, to modes and devices rich in metaphor and suitable for the practice of a new generation of writers, artists and theatre-makers. While the lineage of ideas traced starts with Kleist, it gains critical mass with the championing of the figure of the puppet found in the Modernist theatre practice of the fin-de-siècle and early 20th century; in the works of practitioners such as Edward Gordon Craig and Meyerhold, and then in the theories and practice of artists that moved from theatre into early film such as Méliès and Eisenstein. The thesis argues that Modernist theatre and film practice both drew greatly on the figure of the puppet, and that although it was often the case that literal puppets were featured, equally or more important was the puppet as metaphor: central to these Modernist plays and films was *puppetness*. The thesis introduces, defines and defends notions of *puppetness* and *close-control*, and the connected concept of *the cinematic*, examining their relationship to a stage and screen that treats each of its elements as an equal and integrated part of its overall 'vision', and 'animates' both the figures and objects that occupy it.

This thesis draws a constellation between three distinct though related practices and modes of production: looking at a period spanning roughly the last hundred years, it focuses on the emergence, trajectory and cross-pollination of avant-garde puppet, film and theatre art, and brings a fresh perspective to the study of this still emergent theatrical form. By exploring shared theoretical insights and practical modes, the thesis identifies a shared *logos*: an impelling, defining force that unites practices and sensibilities central to puppetry and cinema, in the genre of Visual Theatre.

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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated

Introduction

This thesis grew from my work as a practitioner of what I go on to define as Visual Theatre, and my spectatorship of performances by a number of contemporary British and international theatre companies that seemed to share common practices and ideals. As the research progressed, links between the practices, companies, histories and ideas became clearer, and more material emerged that did some of the work of linking older modes of practice to contemporary work; still there remained gaps in the explication of what Visual Theatre was, what constituted its essential elements and what came before that directly or indirectly inspired it. What Visual Theatre needed was a genealogical investigation, a discovery of a lineage that traced its influences and illuminated its nature.

That cinema (both contemporary and historical) is a factor in the conception of contemporary Visual Theatre work is not a contentious claim, but this thesis looks beyond the many examples of filmic recreations on the contemporary stage¹ and establishes a key notion of Visual Theatre as being what I term here *the cinematic*. This term specifies not just a way of creating and presenting cinematic visions on stage, but relates to a particular history, which is traced in the first section of the thesis.

The second element that this thesis links to Visual Theatre and its antecedents is the figure of the puppet, and the notion of *puppetness*. A detailed argument is made concerning the meaning and scope of puppetness, and the application of the (metaphorical) figure of the puppet to theatre and film production and analysis. The evolution of thinking concerning puppetry and puppets is traced, and related to the contemporaneous emergence of Modernism and its adoption of the figure of the puppet, both as a literal and metaphorical device. Much of my

¹ These recreations exist for a number of reasons, from a Post-Modern idea of the interest or value in 'pastiche', to commercial theatre's attempt to compete with the cinema for an audience: or if not compete, then to pander to a multi-media sophistication on the part of its audience, who 'need' filmic close-ups or *Matrix*-like choreography and trick camera work.

own theatre practice has involved puppets in one form or another, and I have variously conceived, built, operated and directed them. From this experience as a practitioner came a sense of the wider influence of puppets and puppetness on experimental, avant-garde theatre. While good work has been done on the history of Modernism and puppets, by writers such as Segel (1995), Bell (2008) and Shershow (1995), there has been relatively little that connects these researches to the wider fields of theatre and cinema, and this thesis breaks new ground in its inter-disciplinary approach to creating a genealogy for Visual Theatre. Central to this project are the notions of puppetness and the cinematic, and the hitherto little recognised connections between the two.

The first section of the thesis takes the form of a historical survey and analysis.

1.1, *From Kleist's Marionettentheater to Schlemmer's Schaubühne: The Resurgence of the Puppet and the Visual in Modernist Avant-Garde Theatre and Cabaret* analyses the emergence of a theatre made both by established theatre artists such as Edward Gordon Craig, and by collectives (mostly in the form of avant-garde Cabarets) of visual artists, musicians, writers and performers; the chapter explores the reasons and methods through which the figure of the puppet became a kind of talisman for these Modernist theatre makers.

1.2, *The 'Cinematified' Theatre and the Puppetised Film: Meyerhold, Méliès and Eisenstein's Stage and Screen of Attractions* traces the movement of Modernist theatre practitioners into cinema, looking at the early mixed-media work (film and theatre) of Sergei Eisenstein, Winsor MacKay and Georges Méliès. The chapter examines the puppet aesthetic that accompanied these and other theatre artists into early film, and the effect of this on the fledgling art form.

1.3, *Visual Theatre's 'First Harbinger': the Auteur and the Übermarionette in Edward Gordon Craig's 'Stage Visions'* makes a claim for Craig to be judged the father (or perhaps grandfather) of Visual Theatre, and finds in his writing and theatre practice the seeds of much of what was to come, both with regard to the figure of the puppet and with the notion of the auteur, which was to have such an impact on the creation of film art.

2.1, *Modernist Puppet Logos in the Cinema: Puppetness, Close-Control and the Rise of the Auteur* makes a detailed study of the interconnection of a cinematic and

puppet-centred approach to creating performance pieces, looking at the work of early filmmakers such as Vertov and Eisenstein, and then later auteurs such as Chaplin and Hitchcock, and identifying an implicit or explicit puppetness in their work.

2.2, *What is Visual Theatre?*, looks at the immediate precursors of the movement – Performance Art, Total Theatre, Physical Theatre, and places its emergence in the context of the theatrical, cinematic and puppet scene of the early 1990s. Based on the historical survey of the earlier chapters and my outlining and connecting of ideas of puppetness and the cinematic, a new definition is made for Visual Theatre, and a morphology of this mode of practice described.

2.3, *Visual Theatre as a Modern or Post-Modern Mode of Practice?*, looks at the place of the lineage traced in the thesis as part of the wider sweep of 20th century thought. The chapter analyses Post-Modern tropes that find expression in much Visual Theatre work, but also posits that a great deal of what has come to be seen as a Visual Theatre ethos has come down relatively unfiltered from a Modernist ideal.

2.4, *The Animated Screen and the Animated Stage: Puppetness from Kunstfigur to Media Figure in the Manipulated, Mediated Image* examines the relation of Visual Theatre practice to (filmed) Animation, discovering shared histories as an outgrowth of Modernist avant-garde cinema, similarly difficult journeys through the 20th century as both strove to shed the classification of ‘children’s entertainment’, and both forms’ eventual resurgence as plastic, transformational genres fit for a 21st century audience.

The final section of the thesis examines contemporary Visual Theatre using a series of case studies made of exemplary modern practitioners and companies, and makes a reflexive case study of the practical work of this research project.

3.1, *Analysing the Process: a Methodology for Visual Theatre-Making Observed and Questioned in my own Practice*, analyses the practice that grew out of, and alongside, the written research and intertwined with it: a work-in-progress piece, part of a longer eventual production that takes the form of an auteur-led piece of Visual Theatre practice using puppets and film. The case study of my own practice balances and contrasts with the other case studies; whereas they focus

primarily on the performance while also looking at the working methods of the creators, the case study of my practice, while also discussing the work-in-progress outcome, focuses on the process of creating the piece.

3.2, *The Animated Stage of Complicité's The Street of Crocodiles: Object Performance and Metaphor at Play in Early Visual Theatre*. This chapter looks at an exemplary work by one of Britain's key producers of Visual Theatre.² Close reference is made to the structure of the show, and several key sequences are examined in the light of the claims made in this thesis concerning a Visual Theatre aesthetic or sensibility. The structure of the company, as a collaborative devising group, and an auteur-led ensemble is investigated.

3.3, *Kleinkunst on the Visual Theatre Stage: Shockheaded Peter as fin-de-millennium Artist's Cabaret* takes another key moment in the evolution of Visual Theatre and makes a case study of its use of puppets and puppetness, and its debt to Modernist cabaret. It is also examined as turning point in commercial theatre's adoption of a Visual Theatre sensibility.

3.4, *Cynosure of the Visual Theatre Stage: Puppetness and the Cinematic in the Solo Theatre Practice of Robert Lepage*, focuses on the solo work of Robert Lepage (though even these solo shows rely a great deal on the expertise of his company Ex Machina). The chapter looks in particular at *The Far Side of the Moon* (2001) examining Lepage's transcendent use of Visual Theatre tropes, and the level of integration of cinematic and puppet influences in his work. Similar to the singling out of Craig in the first section of the thesis, a particular case is made for Lepage to be judged as being of special importance to a definition of contemporary Visual Theatre.

My conclusion considers the arguments set out in the thesis and sets them against recent developments in both the practice and the analysis of Visual Theatre. It outlines the way in which the research contributes to several discourses in performing arts study: principally, the understanding of Visual Theatre and its antecedents, but also more generally to the study of Modernism and Post-Modernism (it is argued that Visual Theatre exhibits traits of both), and to the connections of cinema, theatre and puppetry. The conclusion also points to

² Though their director, Simon McBurney, reputedly despises the term.

areas that the thesis has shown would merit further research, above and beyond the dialogue regarding the nature of Visual Theatre that this work aims to stimulate.

Definitions

Though the meanings of many of the particular terms used in this thesis will be elucidated in the body of the text, through unpacking of the meaning as I understand it, and through examples that illustrate a given meaning, there are a few key terms that appear in this work for which it would be useful for the reader to have some advance definition.

Puppetness – Not ‘pertaining to puppets’, or ‘to do with puppets’, but a descriptive word that characterises what is particular about puppets among other stage objects and actors. Obraztsov is credited with the Russian coinage ‘Kukolnost’, literally ‘puppet-ness’ from the Russian ‘kukla’ – puppet or doll. In this thesis the term is used both in relation to puppets themselves (things constructed with the intention of using them as puppets), but also, and perhaps more importantly, in relation to the ‘puppetisation’ of props, staging and human actors. This is explored in examples of both Modernist and contemporary theatre and film makers’ utilisation of the puppet-like use of the human form through styles of movement and manipulation of body, stage or filmed image.

The Cinematic – This again refers to more than simply ‘something produced for the cinema’: like *puppetness*, it is used in this thesis predominantly as a way of characterising a particular aesthetic and sensibility, and critically, it refers most often to when this filmic sensibility is carried over into a separate though related art form, in this case theatre. In the case study of Robert Lepage, it is argued that his theatre work is emblematic of a new style of theatre that is profoundly influenced by the visual language of cinema – camera angles and close-ups, jump cuts and montage. The lineage of this cinematic *mise-en-scène*³ is traceable back

³ There are of course many understandings of this term: Bordwell and Thompson make the link between its initial referent of stage direction and then its move from theatre to film – “In controlling the *mise-en-scène*, the director *stages the event* for the camera” (Bordwell and

to Méliès, and later Meyerhold and Eisenstein: and behind this growth of ideas lie not just puppets but puppetness. Both *puppetness* and *the cinematic* are analysed with the use of several terms to which I ascribe meanings specific to this thesis, primary among them *close-control*.

Close-Control – The characterisations of art forms and techniques undertaken here required a term that encapsulated several related ideas: the way in which puppetness is often put into effect – the manipulation not just of puppets but of all the elements of the stage; the way in which a film director at both the filming and editing stages exercises control, with particular reference the practice of the *auteur*; the control, the manipulation of what is often called choreography, but the practice analysed here required both a stronger and a more nuanced term. Close-control therefore refers to what is applied when a production conforms to the modes of working associated with this thesis' definition of Visual Theatre: the implementation of a Craigean 'stage vision', where each aspect of the 'frame' is, as Veltrusky has it (referring to the puppet) an "intentional sign" (quoted in Proshan, 1983:15).

Visual Theatre, and *Modernism* or *the Modernist era*, are not wholly uncontentious terms: I devote a chapter to describing what Visual Theatre is, and when I cite its emergence; Modernism and the Modernist era I situate roughly 1890 – 1945, with the caveat that in some important senses it has not yet truly ended.

Logos - a word that has several historically diverse meanings. I realise that the choice of it as an element of this thesis' title could be seen as mischievous, though that is not my intention: in its later, Biblical rather than Hellenic, sense, Logos is often translated as 'the Word', whereas this thesis is predominantly about a visual ethos reasserting itself after a protracted dominance of the text in performance. The usage of Logos that this thesis draws on is that of Heraclitus

Thompson, 1980:75). I relate the 'staging of the event' in front of one or more cameras to the stage visions of Craig, and other examples of the puppet and 'puppetised' stage. The cinematic *mise-en-scène* I discuss is essentially concerned with a closely controlled, intentional and integrated stage image. These ideas are outlined and developed more in chapter 1.2.

and Pre-Socratic philosophy. In this form, it has the meaning of “creator and sustaining presence” (Geldard, 2000:34), both a source and a fundamental order. Knowledge is a difficult thing to assert, for a philosopher, and the same is true for a writer making the case for a particular thesis in an arts and humanities research project. There are facts about one’s subject, and one uncovers and assembles these as ‘evidence’ for one’s thesis. But the original contribution to knowledge, the revelation of previously un-thought-of connections, relations and meanings, is not of the same order as the ‘facts’ which have contributed to the accumulation of evidence that is the foundation of the thesis. Heraclitus says “although the Logos is universal, most people act as though they had a private understanding” (Geldard, 2000:156).

This thesis originates in my own private understanding of Visual Theatre, as a spectator and as a practitioner: this research, this exegesis of Visual Theatre, however, goes beyond a ‘private understanding’ and offers compelling grounds for claiming that the logos of Visual Theatre is discoverable. There is a ‘source’ of Visual Theatre (analysed in Section 1: Antecedents), and a fundamental order, a set of principles that are integral to a definition of Visual Theatre (discussed in Sections 2, Theory, and 3, Practice).

A Practice/Theory Methodology

The starting point for the research was a sense that there was more going on in the practice of Visual Theatre – both in its production and spectatorship – than was commonly acknowledged. Theatre makers with whom I worked seemed unconsciously to conform to a discernible mode of practice – one which was increasingly coming to be characterised as ‘Visual Theatre’, yet could verbalise very little of what led them to this style of work, and what the movement’s antecedents might be. Film art and practices, the notion of ‘the cinematic’⁴, to give one example, seemed to feature very highly in the theatrical sensibility of these practitioners, and yet many of them had very little knowledge of cinema history, did not own televisions, would not recognise a reference to *Citizen Kane*. There was a disjunction between what was being created, and what was being thought and said about what was being created.

My research grew from a desire to look at what was behind the work that I was collaborating on as a practitioner and enjoying as a spectator. It also came from a sense that there was a history, or more accurately a lineage to the work that was going unacknowledged. This idea was crystallised upon reading *Pinocchio’s Progeny* (Segel, 1995): the aims, practices and sensibilities of the Modernist theatre practitioners seemed eerily similar to those of the leading companies whose work I was viewing. What would a spectator of Eisenstein’s play *The Wiseman* (1923) make of Lepage’s *The Far Side of the Moon* (2001) and its similar fascination with the intersection of film and theatre? And indeed, much of the theatre I viewed seemed to have almost more in common with a cinematic aesthetic than a traditionally theatrical one: yet this was, in the writing on theatre I was reading, only just beginning to be discussed. Within the work I was viewing, there seemed to be a category emerging, distinct from a generalised description of experimental or avant-garde theatre, distinct from Physical Theatre. And from my perspective, backed up by the theatre and film history I

⁴ A basic sense of how I use this word appears in ‘Definitions’: a fuller exploration of the concept is conducted in sections 1.2 and 2.1.

was reading, there seemed to be a definite lineage: features and inspirations that kept recurring. First amongst these was the figure of the puppet. Initially in the form of literal puppets, but then increasingly, as Modernist theatre's sensibility matured, towards the puppet as a metaphor, towards what I define as 'puppetness'⁵. Second was the growing influence of film. In the Modernist era this was a reciprocal flow of talent and ideas, with German Expressionist theatre informing Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1920), and theatre makers like Eisenstein moving from their tutelage under Meyerhold into the world of cinema. Puppets and puppetness also featured in this still young art form, both literally, as in the films of Méliès, and metaphorically, such as the character of the somnambulist in *Caligari*. In Sections 1.2 and 2.1 I show how puppetness came to influence not just the metaphors cinema employed, but the very form and practices of the medium.

The methodology of this research is primarily that of Naturalistic inquiry and Case study, in accordance with the paradigms of the form as set out by Lincoln and Guba (1985) – the “legitimation of tacit (intuitive, felt) knowledge in addition to propositional knowledge”, qualitative methods, purposive sampling, and a preference for the case study reporting mode (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 40).

Naturalistic inquiry presents some problems, in that it seems to shy away from making generalisations: “because knowledge and data is seen to be relative and tacit, and because uniqueness is emphasised, the generalisation of findings and application to other settings remains tentative” (Barber, 2006:70).

This research straddles several methodologies: qualitative and quantitative, in some aspects phenomenological, in some positivist, some Modern, some Post-Modern. McNiff comments on the problem of trying to fit arts research into established methodologies

“As I work together with students in an environment characterised by a commitment to artistic expression, a tradition of inquiry has emerged and I do not feel that what we do fits completely into any of the existing typologies of research that exist today” (McNiff, 2000:14).

⁵ As with ‘the cinematic’, my sense of ‘puppetness’ is described in ‘Definitions’, and explored further in 1.2 and 2.1.

Instead, he suggests, we need to “create new ways of conceptualising research”: a methodology for arts and practice-based theses is “...defined by its use of the arts as objects of inquiry as well as modes of investigation...the subject matter of my investigations will always determine how I proceed” (McNiff, 2000:15).

The research methodology my thesis takes is weighted more towards the practice as an object of inquiry rather than as a mode of investigation. I make a ‘case study’ of my own practice, analysing the process of the practical work: critical exegesis of this process then follows. In this way, the combination of practice, and critical reflection on that practice, functions as a mode of investigation, while allowing the creative process to proceed in a non-directive (and therefore ‘authentic’) way.

The relative youth of this area of research has meant that at this point in the reportage and analysis of Visual Theatre an unduly large number of the responses that are cited in this research must come from reviews in newspapers and journals.⁶ In the future, as the subject area matures, the balance will no doubt shift and researchers will be able to draw upon readily available academic and journalistic responses to Visual Theatre: for this thesis, at least in terms of quantitative appraisal of sources on the subject, it is necessary to understand the cultural, artistic and academic reasons for the occasional unusual weighting towards the journalistic.⁷

Analysis and documentation of contemporary experimental theatre exists in a number of (often disconnected) arenas: finding texts relating to the shows discussed in the historical section of this research has often been near impossible. Looking just at puppet performance, historically productions have frequently

⁶ To give one example: *Total Theatre Magazine* defines itself as “an informed and intelligent voice, written in a journalistic rather than academic style” (2008), yet it contains perhaps the most consistently relevant (to this thesis) reviews of performances: whereas *Contemporary Theatre Review* is a much more august (and equally relevant) publication that states in its Aims and Scope “Topical material is very welcome but we don’t publish reviews” (2008). Contributors to the journal do regularly cite theatre critics’ reviews in their essays, which suggests that though lacking in comparison with academic analyses, journalistic reviews still have some merit in such a forum.

⁷ That said, much of the journalism that reviews Visual Theatre work is of a very high standard: the understanding of the form exhibited by someone such as Lyn Gardner, writing in the *Guardian*, *Total Theatre Magazine* and elsewhere, is arguably very near academic quality: the intelligence and authority of the writing should be recognised, whilst acknowledging the limitations of its scope.

suffered the fate of not being recorded in any contemporaneous written form; when they are, the description is often too vague to be of much use to anyone who wants an insight into the form or aesthetic of the piece.⁸ As this thesis argues, it was part of the resurgence of the puppet as a theatrical trope under the auspices of Modernist theatre makers, that writing about the puppet matured alongside the theatre that valued it so highly. Even so, the practice of writing about a theatre that was experimental, multi-disciplinary and often non-verbal, or at least not necessarily led by a text, was still in its infancy. To the modern reader looking at reports or critiques of these works it is sometimes unclear, for example, whether the writers are describing actual puppets, or actors behaving like puppets. For the purposes of this thesis, that is often not a wholly negative thing, for it suggests that in some senses actors and puppets were interchangeable, and the salient feature was not necessarily puppet or actor, but *puppetness*. However, in terms of a methodology of picking and examining texts relating to the type of shows I discuss, it is problematic, at least on the surface, that the terminology, and indeed even the accuracy (of some very basic things such as pieces of movement on stage, or whether, as has already been mentioned, the actor is a human or a puppet, etc) of some of these pieces of writing is not as strict as one would expect of a similar piece of writing today. Ultimately, one has got to work with what is there, and while I have endeavoured to find at least two references to or reviews of performances that I cite, often that has not been possible. Much of the work in this area is covered in great detail by Harold Segel's *Pinocchio's Progeny* (1995), and to a much lesser extent Shershow's *Puppets and 'Popular' Culture* (1995).

Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896) was sometimes performed with puppets, sometimes with actors: it is known that his first mounting of it (as a schoolboy) was with puppets, but from then on it is not entirely clear, in many of the productions that are known about, which mode was chosen each time⁹. The records that are kept of

⁸ A good example of this is Pepys' 1662 description of a puppet show he observed: "*Thence to see an Italian puppet play, that is within the rayles there, which is very pretty, the best that ever I saw, and great resort of gallants*" (Pepys, 1923:219). Indeed, this is the earliest mention (in English) of a Punch and Judy puppet show.

⁹ This of course is not a new problem for theatre: it is often noted, for instance, that Shakespeare's stage directions are minimal, and it has been suggested that in fact most if not all of them were

plays are, by their nature, incomplete: though one can be more assured of the text, as it is published, the whole visual aspect of the piece, in its initial and subsequent incarnations, is very poorly served by any media.¹⁰

If records for plays now a century old are hard to track down and verify, then it might be imagined that finding material concerning plays of the past twenty years would be more straightforward. Though this is more often the case, analysis of theatre is still more or less hampered by the ephemeral nature of the performance, the event. The information about some of the plays cited comes, necessarily, from secondary sources, though for the main case studies in the thesis I have used performances that were viewed live, and in one case on a video recording. There are various reasons why it has not been feasible for each performance discussed to have been viewed: first, as previously mentioned, because of the transitory nature of theatre, and though much Visual Theatre has emerged in my theatre-going lifetime, there are for instance a number of the early works of Robert Lepage that are inaccessible, both chronologically and geographically.¹¹ Secondly, geography must, for most researchers, be pertinent in constructing their methodology: ideally one would travel all over the world, to wherever the theatre that constituted one's research area was being performed –

added by the actors of his company when they collaboratively reconstituted his works for the quartos and folios (Spevak, 1996-7:82).

¹⁰ There exist, of course, photographs of some of the cabaret and avant-garde shows described here; drawings and models by theorists and practitioners such as Edward Gordon Craig; even some artefacts like the puppets of Paul Klee. But the movement, the sound, the lighting, the visceral liveness of these theatrical performances is for the most part lost to us. One very interesting exception to this is the work of the Viennese *puppenspieler* Richard Teschner. His puppets have been preserved by the Vienna Theatre Museum; there are several films of his puppet shows in existence, though I have only been able to track down three of these to date; and most interestingly, in terms of this discussion of media artefacts of theatrical events, his plays are still performed at the Theatre Museum, with the same puppets, sets, lighting and music, the knowledge of how the pieces should be performed handed down from puppeteer to puppeteer.

¹¹ 'Chronologically' because the shows no longer exist in the present, and geographically because any video recordings of them that do exist are lodged at Ex Machina's headquarters in Quebec. There are other avenues for getting to see recordings of Visual Theatre work: theatres often keep a video-recording of shows that have played there, and can be prevailed upon to let those interested view them. The V&A holds an archive of shows from London venues, with a number of Visual Theatre shows available such as *Shockheaded Peter* and *The Street of Crocodiles*, but it is by no means complete. The British Library runs a Theatre Archives Project (Dorney, 2008), but this refers only to scripts, a copy for each new play performed since 1968 is supposed to be lodged there; their poetry archive contains many multimedia clips, so it is baffling that they have chosen to illustrate modern British theatre solely through a purely text-based archive.

in practice though this not achievable for the vast majority of students. The scope of this thesis is a movement or style of theatre that I have defined as, at least in its roots, Western European. The case studies I have undertaken have concerned companies and individuals from the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. The reason for this limited scope is twofold: in writing about theatre, one of the most important elements seemed to be to refer to primary sources as much as possible – that is, it is preferable to see a show live than to see a recording of it, and (it is even) less preferable only to read others' accounts of the performance. My experience of contemporary Visual Theatre comes for the most part from my direct experience of it in British venues whose programmes reflect an interest in this work. Therefore I suggest it is methodologically sound to write about the work one has seen oneself, providing it spans enough of the performance (that it is possible to view) within that genre. It is also the case that Visual Theatre, as I define it, is primarily a Western European/North American, English-speaking mode of practice, though as the style grows in popularity it spreads to other countries and cultural contexts. This of course is a generalisation, and there are exceptions: a key aspect of Lepage's work, for instance, is its bilingualism. There are companies from other parts of the world that could justifiably be described as conforming to a Visual Theatre mode of practice – for instance South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company, or Germany's Figurenspiegel Wilde & Vogel. However, for the reasons described above, as well as the fact of the academic and journalistic analysis I have access to being for the most part written in English and discussing productions that have either originated in or visited the U.K., I concentrate for the most part on shows which fit that criterion. Further argument for the English-speaking emphasis is made in chapter 2.2, 'What is Visual Theatre?'.

In seeking to establish the existence of a movement, outlining specific traits and influences that will feed into its definition, one must employ some form of measuring instances that confirm or deny the tenets of the thesis, a quantitative and qualitative appraisal of the work that is being produced. Mapping instances that confirm one's hypothesis, almost to the extent of making a graph that displays clusters of similarly constructed pieces of theatre, across an axis of time can establish what could be called a 'critical mass'. This critical mass, I suggest,

is necessary to posit a fully blown 'movement', or a mode of practice and presentation that can be discerned and positively identified as distinctively 'visual' theatre. In this sense, of simply enumerating instances that conform to a set of criteria, the methodology is very much quantitative. Yet equally important is the qualitative assessment – the decision of what constitutes a piece identifiable as 'Visual Theatre'. Here the definition becomes trickier, because there is not necessarily a 'formula' that one can apply to make (or read) a piece of theatre as "Visual Theatre": but there are a number of modes of practice, performance styles, artistic tropes and techniques that both separately and (more often) together, are indicators of Visual Theatre. So in this reading of performance elements, there is a certain level of quantitative analysis going on: a piece that uses video projection, or puppetry is not necessarily "Visual Theatre"; a piece that uses video projection and puppets may well be; a piece that integrates these performance elements and moves to a level where there is not just 'film and puppets' but 'the cinematic' and 'puppetness', this thesis argues, cannot be anything else. This combination of quantitative and qualitative evaluation provides a firm footing for the choice of case studies made.

The decision to structure much of the later part of the thesis as a sequence of case studies reflects two assessments: that case studies are the best form for testing my thesis concerning what Visual Theatre owes its antecedents, and the clearest way to convey to the reader the nature of the theatre discussed. Having set out a definition and argued for a specific artistic and cultural lineage for Visual Theatre, it seemed right to test this against some key pieces of avant-garde, experimental theatre of the era in which I site the emergence of Visual Theatre. The pieces chosen have a number of dissimilarities: in whether they are 'written' or devised, whether they are the product more of a group process or an auteur, whether and to what extent they use puppets, video and multi-media projection and any of the other techniques commonly associated with experimental theatre of the 1990s/2000s. But beyond these dissimilarities, the pieces chosen are bound together by a deeper similitude: they each elucidate practices and sensibilities at the heart of Visual Theatre, and reinforce the notion as they define it. The methodology here closely conforms to Naturalistic inquiry: behind the selection of pieces is purposive sampling. Seen together, the pieces

share a cluster of ideals and impelling forces: a *logos*. Speaking platonically, one might say they are exemplary in partaking in the form of Visual Theatre. The choice to undertake case studies is also based on an assessment of the best way to write about theatre: there is a continual problem in academic writing concerning how to 'convey' the theatrical experience, as one analyses it. James Hoffman suggests one can never re-create theatre in writing

"But you must try, and I think that's the important difference in our line of work, perhaps, that you must attempt to somehow replicate 'being there'. And that means you have to find creative means to reinact what happened in that very elusive field called performance. It's extremely hard to capture, impossible to capture, an original performance, even if you were there, but you try. And I think that's what separates us from other disciplines, is that attempt to find a parallel situation or a metaphor or a description, enactment, that participates in the original event." (Hoffman. 2008).

This is a field which is slowly evolving, aided by the realisation (relatively recent, in Western theatre at least) that writing about text is not the same as writing about theatre. Traditionally, a 'play' was analysed equally comfortably by departments of Theatre Studies and departments of English. Even for 'traditional' theatre, such analysis still omitted a large part of the work – how it looked. For experimental theatre of various kinds, but particularly Visual Theatre and its antecedents, a new language of description and analysis is required. That a suitable academic mode for examining this new style of work is perhaps several years behind the work itself is not surprising.

For the case studies in this thesis, the principal resource is not a text, something that is conceived before a performance happens: it is the performance itself, and/or a video recording made of it. This in some respects mirrors the process of practitioners such as Lepage, for whom the 'text' of the show is constantly evolving, changing from night to night, and is only 'finished' in any sense, he has said, when the run draws to a close (Lepage and Charest, 1998:173).

This thesis has practice at its heart: the practice of contemporary theatre-makers identified in this research as exemplary of a Visual Theatre sensibility; the practice of Modernist avant-garde theatre and film makers; and, to a lesser extent, but still importantly, my own performance practice. The question of

‘accessibility’ is relevant here, and affects the way in which each of these practices features in the thesis. In some ways, the practice of the Modernist avant-garde artists is the most ‘remote’: one is separated from it by almost a hundred years, and except in a few instances¹², it is not observable in the form intended, as a piece of live theatre. This therefore impacts on the way the practice can be written about: one’s sense of it is filtered through the reportage and analysis of other writers, and the few photographs or drawings which survive as documentary evidence of the productions. Cinema of that era does not have quite the same difficulties: the record of the production *is* the production. But for both Modernist theatre and film, knowledge concerning the mode of production is necessarily second-hand.

The practice of the Visual Theatre companies and artists I examine in the third section of the thesis is more accessible, in one sense: except for Complicité’s *The Street of Crocodiles*, all the productions I discuss have been viewed both live and in recorded form. So the practice, from the point of view of the spectator, is more accessible, immediate in a way that Modernist avant-garde practice cannot be. But still the mode of production that led to the performance outcome is at one remove, and as such the production can be analysed with an immediacy that is denied the practice.

My own practice is the most immediate, the most accessible, and I posit that this is where a great deal of the value of a practice-informed research project lies. There are questions surrounding the specific way in which doctoral study that includes practice describes itself: two of the most common terms are practice-based and practice-led. My research exists in the form it does, to a large extent, because I am a practitioner of the type of theatre I investigate. However the practice that accompanies this written piece does not hold the same relationship to it as is the case in many practice-based research projects. The writing is not necessarily centred around the practice, or consistently led by it: the two elements have grown together, and informed each other. As such, the project,

¹² One exception to this, to which I refer in greater detail later, is the work of Richard Teschner, a fin-de-siècle Viennese puppet artist, whose shows are regularly performed in the Austrian Theatre Museum, as he performed them.

though within the sphere of practice-based or practice-led work is perhaps more accurately described as practice-informed.

The case study I make of my own theatrical practice differs from the other case studies in that it is conducted from inside the process of making a piece of theatre. As such, it has seemed methodologically sound to privilege the study of process in this case study, over and above that of product.

Edward Gordon Craig's journal *The Mask* (1908) was subheaded with the motto "After the practise the theory". This in many ways characterises a starting point for my research: prior to commencing it, and during the writing of it, I have been a spectator of and participant in theatre practice. It is also the case, however, that the theory has fed into the practice as well as vice versa: a successful practice-based research project, it is argued, is one where there is cross-pollination between the two modes of enquiry, while the differences and strengths of each are also recognised.

I expand on some aspects of the methodology I have followed, in section 3.1, specifically as they involve my own practice and the way in which I analyse it.

1.1 From Kleist's *Marionettentheater* to Schlemmer's *Schaubühne*: The Resurgence of the Puppet and the Visual in Modernist Avant-Garde Theatre and Cabaret.

Puppetry existed long before Modernism, and had gone through several notable flowerings as an art form before becoming a touchstone of Modernist Theatre practice. Why pinpoint this new mode of thought and practice that emerged at the turn of the 20th century as the birthplace of present day Visual Theatre?

It is partly a question of momentum and synchronicity. Heinrich von Kleist published his essay *Über das Marionettentheater* (*On the Marionette Theatre*) in 1810: its advocacy of the puppet drew upon a number of the fascinations of the Romantics, of which Kleist was a key figure. Segel describes the essay as evidencing "... the Romantic belief in the cognitive and creative superiority of the unconscious over the conscious, of spontaneity over reason" (Segel, 1995:15). The ontological grouping that puppets belong to includes masks, dolls, mannequins, automata and robots (a word coined by Karel Capek in *R.U.R.* (1921)). It is not known to what extent Kleist's essay influenced others in the Romantic and Symbolist movements, though his suggestion of the meanings of the puppet mirrors a growing trend in poetic and artistic thought. Works by writers such as E.T.A Hoffmann, Rilke and Goethe¹³ evidence an early exposure to and interest in puppets (in particular, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* (1796)), and in wider culture there was a fascination with the automata that represented the height of technology: chess-playing, writing, organ-playing puppets were exhibited all over Europe.

Speaking metaphorically, it could be said that in the era of the Romantics a number of seeds were planted, but it was not to be until the fin-de-siècle that any

¹³ Goethe was one of the many authors and theatre practitioners of the era who had been influenced by exposure to puppet and toy theatres as children. Carlson, writing about Goethe's time as a director of the Weimar Court Theatre (from 1791 to 1817), describes him as a "puppet master", for whom the actors were "automata of the ideal and the beautiful" (Carlson, 1978:307).

real growth appeared. To be more exact, growth was occurring, but at an almost imperceptible rate: just as the ideas of Edward Gordon Craig took many years to reach maturation in the wider theatrical world, so the impact of Kleist's essay would take decades to be felt. In this sense, Kleist could almost be said to be part of the Modernist puppet renaissance and Craig could be said to be the first Visual Theatre practitioner. But our definitions must be stricter than that. A movement must be defined by the acceleration of momentum until it reaches a kind of critical mass, and must be recognised as an existent cultural and/or artistic phenomenon. We take it as an indication that an interest has reached this 'critical mass' and become a fully fledged 'movement' when there is an increase in the appearance of thematically related texts and performances, and a movement from the fringes of the world of practitioners and academics into the psyche of mainstream culture (however small an impression on that psyche it might be). This 'critical mass' can be gauged quantitatively: one can count numbers of what one takes to be indicators. But of equal or greater importance is the influence that is realised intuitively (more in line with a qualitative approach). So the Modernist theatre movement and its fascination with puppets is defined by its 'flowering' at the turn of the century, while at the same time recognising that it has its 'roots' in the Romantic era.

The dominant theatrical form of the turn of the 20th century was a new movement that sought to overthrow what it saw as the failings of the theatre up to that point, and though it shared some of the same concerns as the Modernist movement (of authenticity, social reform and the contemplation of serious ideas as key objectives for the theatre of the age) it existed as the polar opposite to the emergent, radical theatre that championed the use of puppets and masks, abstract and expressionist sets and symbolic, stylised movement. This (dominant form) was the theatre of Realism¹⁴, led by Ibsen, Chekhov, and Stanislavski, related to Naturalism but, says Taylor (1993), essentially a less extreme form, with both of the movements aiming to

"... rid the theatre of histrionics in acting and the too-evident artifice of the sub-Sardou well-made play, replacing them with a more natural-seeming acting

¹⁴ Theatrical Realism also found a parallel in the world of visual art, with the work of Courbet (1819-1877) and others in the Realist movement. Courbet is credited with coining the term.

style and with plays which, while still carefully constructed, depended less on contrived *coups de théâtre* and a mechanical snapping of pieces into place.” (Taylor, 1993:261).

This Realist theatre could not truly be said to be experimental, certainly not in the way normally applied to theatre-making, though it was in a sense avant-garde, in that it did spearhead a new movement and was considered very subversive¹⁵. Across Europe, a much more easily recognisable avant-garde was growing, and was taking its inspiration from environments far removed from the comfortable drawing rooms and parlours portrayed in the Realists’ social commentary plays. In Spain, respected playwrights such as Benavente, Sierra, Rusiñol and Lorca were creating plays that drew on the *commedia dell’ arte* as well as the puppet tradition of Catalunya. Hartnoll (1989) suggests Benavente in particular represents one of the first steps towards a more symbolic, rather than realist, mode of theatre: his best known play *The Bonds of Interest*, along with “... the works of the Quintero brothers, and a widespread revival of the old art of puppetry, provided further examples of the flight from reality” (Hartnoll, 1989:224). Whether featuring live actors, masked actors, puppets or a mixture of all three, the most important element was that an ethos or sensibility of puppetry suffused the work: Segel’s analysis of the text reveals its author’s desire for his audience to see the world again as through a child’s eyes -

“... Benavente’s intention [was] - through his farcical *commedia*-type play, presented as an unsophisticated puppet entertainment unworthy of a sophisticated audience, to enable that audience, through art, to rejuvenate its collective spirit and hence overcome the age of the world. Only such

¹⁵ Though drawing inspiration mostly from the more ‘respectable’ groups within society (unlike the favoured subjects of a more recognisably Modernist practitioner such as Brecht – e.g. those too poor to ‘afford’ morals), it often tackled issues that were considered taboo at the time, particularly when raised in relation to the lifestyles of the bourgeoisie whom it portrayed. I make this point to illustrate that the distinctions between various contemporaneous (and sometimes rival) movements in theatre are often not as clear-cut as one might assume, and in this case though quite clearly different with regard to most aspects of production ethos and style, interestingly these two movements often shared a similar social and political conscience. Brecht stands as an avatar of the later avant-garde, and his famous (and famously intemperate) savaging of the earlier avant-garde found typical expression in the Brecht-Lukács debate, which revolved around notions of Realism. Jameson gives a good account and interesting analysis of this seminal Modernist and Marxist intersection in *The Ideologies of Theory* (2009).

rejuvenation could eventually accomplish the abandonment of antiquated and ossified forms, not just in the drama but in culture and society as a whole” (Segel, 1995:131).

From its beginnings, puppets found a foothold in Modernist theatre practice, in part because they represented some of the key ideas of the age concerning what was truly important: Bell suggests that the resurgence of puppets and puppet theatre came about as part of the

“... search for and idealization of traces of the non-rational, the non-realistic, the non-western and pre-industrial as a kind of spiritual salve for the inexorable hardness of the approaching machine age” (Bell, 2000:53)¹⁶.

The split between early and late Modernism is evident in this assessment, and interestingly puppets managed to bridge this gap and remain icons of both manifestations of the movement. Early Modernism made obvious its roots in Romantic and Symbolist thought, with its interest in puppetry more as it related to folk art, nostalgia for childhood and innocence, and its fear of the coming machine age. For late Modernism, most notably Futurists like Marinetti, the puppet was a harbinger of the machine age, and again (in a quite different way) embodied Modernism’s aspirations.

Puppets often represented a link to childhood (notably in the works of Rilke and Goethe). The Victorians fetishised childhood, and seemingly tried to keep their children’s minds free from the horrors of the world¹⁷. Yet Victorian children’s literature, while indeed letting children be children, also often seemed very aware of the dark underbelly of society, and was full of peril, darkness and disturbing images. The work of writers such as Lewis Carroll, L. Frank Baum, and later J.M. Barrie equated a child’s view of the world with that of a view freed from assumptions and inhibitions (often confused in Carroll’s case with a drug-induced hallucinatory view): a world where material and philosophical constants were challenged, where the distinction between fantasy and reality began to break down. It is not surprising that so many Modernist artists should have been

¹⁶ Surrealism and Dadaism contemporaneously grew from similar impulses.

¹⁷ This has later been viewed as problematic, symbolising the artifice of Victorian society that thought itself so sophisticated and civilised, yet created so many of the problems it tried to turn its back on - the plight of the poor in their own society and the abuses perpetrated under the Empire, to name but two.

inspired by this view, and for it to become, for them, a touchstone for the transformation of art and society. Another great work of turn of the 20th century children's literature, that has also since been reappraised as a work for both adults and children is Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1883). For Segel, the book and the character are a sort of talisman, a point that crystallises so many of the underlying themes of the era -

"If we look at *Pinocchio*, then, from the viewpoint of the transformation of values characteristic of modernism, the work is remarkably compatible with its time... the book is a celebration of puppetry, childhood, and the artistic potential of popular and folk culture" (Segel, 1995:40).

Popular arts and entertainments, such as the fairground, the puppet show, the circus (and, soon, the newer mechanical modes, such as the cinématographe – this is explored in chapter 1.2) were integral to the Modernist vision of how theatre was to be revolutionised: the puppet found itself present in many of the rediscovered modes of performance, among which Bell (writing from an American perspective) lists

"... a newfound valuation of the traditionally low-culture art of European puppet theater; an appreciation of Asian, African, and Native American puppet performance as models for western artists; a renewed sense of puppet theater not only as commercial entertainment but as a cultural, spiritual, and educational element; and a sense that these older practices and purposes of puppet theater could be pragmatically combined with any machine age innovations yet to come" (Bell, 2000:54).

The effect of African and Native American puppet traditions on Modernist theatre practitioners of Central Europe is not well documented and more likely had greater influence on North American practitioners such as McPharlin and Baird: Shershow does quote the Italian Futurist Marinetti's first theatrical manifesto that strove to incorporate "the 'gymnastics and acrobatics of the Japanese' and the 'muscular frenzy of the Negroes'" (Shershow, 1995:203), though how much this represents an aim based on genuine understanding of the respective traditions rather than a desire to sound exciting, exotic and revolutionary is not clear. Setting this aside, Bell's list stands as a good overview of what the puppet came to mean at the turn of the 20th century. The Asian

influence on the Modernists should not be underrated: in the wider art world, painters such as Van Gogh were being inspired by Japanese prints (Hammacher, 1974), puppet practitioners such as Richard Teschner were creating works inspired by and utilising Javanese aesthetics and techniques (Currell, 1985), and in the more mainstream theatre Hartnoll states that

“... directors and designers saw in the elaborate symbolism and apparent simplicity of the Far Eastern stage a way out of the dead end in which they found themselves. Interesting additions to the European theatre were made by their efforts - the revolving stage (introduced in 1896), the ‘flowery way’ through the audience, the use of masks, and the relevance of incidental music” (Hartnoll, 1989:229).

Ironically, devices and techniques from some of the most strict and mannered performance traditions freed up many of the Modernist practitioners working in theatre, making as big an impact surely as Inigo Jones’ introduction of the proscenium arch had three hundred-odd years before. Indeed, taken together, Hartnoll’s list of Eastern additions to theatre of the turn of the 20th century forms a rudimentary description of many of the key components of avant-garde, experimental theatre in its progression of forms through the 20th century, from Modernist theatre practice to Total Theatre and performance art, and all the movements that assumed the ideological mantle of the Modernist theatre practitioners, ultimately feeding into the creation of Visual Theatre. Just as Kleist was the inaugurator of a mode of thought that came into its own more than fifty years after he first articulated it, so Wagner stands as the father of an ethos of art-making that champions the synthesis of the arts, an integration of elements in the total work of art, the *gesamtkunstwerk*¹⁸.

So Asian influences figured highly in the Modernist’s refashioning of the theatre, but the primary influence came from closer to home. All over Europe this new style of theatre was finding its feet in the Cabarets that were proliferating. The work presented as part of the cabaret did not immediately

¹⁸ Wagner’s *Outlines of the Artwork of the Future* (1849) articulated his concept of *gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art. This synthesis of the arts, based on ideas of classical Greek drama, was to have great influence on a generation of artists across Europe. Wagner is perhaps an early instance of the type of practitioner-theorist studied in this thesis: in 1876, he founded the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, putting his theories into practice.

imagine itself to be 'high art': it had its roots in popular culture, in the melee of the fairground and the circus, and was populated by singers, jugglers, mime artists, comedians, freaks, strippers and puppets. As Segel (1995) points out, while cabarets had always been home to these sorts of entertainers, the cabaret of the end of the 19th century was a new cabaret that "... emerged as an expression of a changing sensibility. It was antibourgeois, antitraditional, antiacademic, and oriented toward the symbiosis of 'high' and 'low' cultures" (Segel, 1995:57). It was, essentially, an old form reinvented, that took traditional genres and devices and used them as a resource for creating experimental theatre.

Among the first of these cabarets of the new era was *Le Chat Noir* (1881 – 1897) in Paris, a city which, as Carlson (1974) notes, already had a puppet and automata tradition in the form of the *Ombres Chinoises* (Chinese Shadows) and Vaucanson's and Thevenelin's automata, the latter a popular attraction that consisted of "group of mechanical figures that were reported to move in a surprisingly realistic manner" (Carlson, 1974:28). *Le Chat Noir* featured a flourishing shadow puppet theatre that took the traditional art of silhouette manipulation and injected it with the Modernist's ethos of experimentation: the Guignol (hand puppet) theatre was transformed by artists such as Henri Rivière and Caran d'Ache who took the tradition and "evolved" it with innovative vigour (Philpott, 1969:50). Similarly, in Barcelona the *Quatre Gats* (1897 – 1903) cabaret was initiated by a group of Catalan painters, among them a young Picasso, presenting popular shows which drew on the Catalan puppet tradition, though expanding the repertoire of scenarios according to modernist sensibilities. It is also interesting to note that the impetus often came from practitioners with a diverse range of backgrounds (this would be echoed decades later in the free-for-all of performance art and happenings that sought to break down the hierarchy concerning who was 'qualified' to create theatre). Coming from, in many cases, non-theatrical backgrounds, the instigators of these cabarets brought a fresh vision to the shows they produced: importantly, it was not necessarily a 'text-based' viewpoint - indeed, as painters and sculptors they brought an important, and ultimately very influential, *visual* sense to Modernist theatre. The shows were collaborative, another important element, and also, perhaps unexpectedly (puppet and cabaret involvement not being a conventional route into writing)

produced writers such as Rusiñol, who as Segel points out “... sought to breathe new life into the long-dormant Catalan drama by drawing on the techniques of the indigenous puppet tradition, with which he already had ample experience in the Quatre Gats cabaret” (Segel, 1995:135). Cabarets offering puppet shows gained in popularity across Europe, notably in Berlin, Cracow, Moscow, Munich, St Petersburg, Vienna and Zurich, as well as the examples already given in Paris and Barcelona. Slowly, the influence of producing puppet theatre spread, both within the cabaret and without. Plays began to be written and performed by the cabarets that were all about puppets, or *puppetness*, but were performed by humans, such as Kokoschka’s (another painter/theatre maker) *Sphinx und Strohmann* (1907), subtitled a “comedy for automaton” (Segel, 1995:60), and Schnitzler’s *Der tapfere Kassian* (1909) in which, as Segel notes, “the puppet/marionette motif operates primarily metaphorically” (Segel, 1995:60). This notion is discussed in greater depth in chapters 1.2 and 2.1. It was not just in text that the puppet was exerting its influence: “living doll” shows became popular, where human actors behaved in a stilted, mechanical, ‘puppet-like’ way (this question of different senses of puppet-like-ness and how this thesis relates those interpretations to its key notion of ‘puppetness’ is also explored in 2.1). Pioneered by the *Letuchaya Mysh* cabaret¹⁹ in Moscow, the “living-doll” shows were a mode of performance that developed from the practice of puppet manipulation, but became a distinct entertainment in their own right, marvelled at by audiences in Russia, France (where the cabaret moved after the Russian revolution) and later touring Europe and the United States. So the influence of the puppet had both symbolic and visual outcomes for Modernist theatre as it progressed.

Kaplin criticises both Segel and Shershow for concentrating too much on the puppet as a metaphorical rather than literal device (Kaplin, 2001) but this seems an unfair criticism: as Segel’s work in particular makes clear, this movement from physical object to “leitmotif” or “literary trope” (Kaplin, 2001:19) seems

¹⁹ Literally ‘Flying Mouse’ (Bat) in Russian, it was instigated by Nikita Baliev in 1908, drawing its name from the *Kabarett Fledermaus* (1907-1913) in Vienna. The *Fledermaus* stands as one of the pinnacles of the Viennese Secessionist ideal of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, where theatre, music, visual art and architecture came together to form a harmonious whole.

almost inexorable, and when the free-spirited age of the cabaret burnt itself out, it was in the works of those who had been inspired by the puppet as a metaphor that puppetry sustained its existence in the theatre for much of the next hundred years (examined in 1.2, 1.3). Part of the rationale of Modernism was that art and culture progressed, and in the same way that Symbolist artists like Klimt soon found their work passed over in favour of Expressionists like Schiele, so the more visual nature of the cabaret puppet theatre was absorbed into the performance theories and writings of practitioners such as Meyerhold, Maeterlinck and later figures like Artaud.

Shershow contends that “The premiere of Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* on December 11th, 1896, is still commonly viewed as the inaugural event of the modern avant-garde theater” (Shershow, 1995:187): the piece was a knockabout comedy, a satire, peopled by grotesque and absurd characters that was originally conceived as a work for puppets (and performed as such by Jarry in his schooldays) but premiered as a piece using live actors instructed to act like puppets²⁰. In this respect, as well as in its use of grotesque situations and ‘obscene’ language, it was shocking to its bourgeois audiences, and ultimately “... came to be regarded as a turning point in the history of the modern French stage” (Segel, 1995:92).

Another practitioner who sought to overthrow the realist conventions of mainstream theatre was the playwright Maurice Maeterlinck: though their respective styles of writing were quite dissimilar, Shershow suggests Maeterlinck was an important influence on Jarry, who along with “... Gordon Craig in England, Meyerhold in Russia, and other theatrical reformers throughout Europe would later claim Maeterlinck as an inspiration or artistic ally” (Shershow, 1995:188). Segel points to one element that unites them, beyond the desire to stage a revolution in French theatre:

“...[in] the centrality of the puppet or marionette figure in the design of their

²⁰ Allain and Harvie suggest that “Anticipating Vsevolod Meyerhold, the roots of Jarry’s imaginative vision were clearly in *visual theatre* and *popular theatre* forms and figures” [their italics] (Allain and Harvie, 2006:120). Here ‘Visual Theatre’ appears as a discrete entity, and linked to practitioners such as Jarry, Meyerhold, Piscator and Kantor, which seems to closely mirror my understanding of the term. Yet Allain and Harvie seem to be suggesting that some strand of theatre, identifiable as ‘visual theatre’ predated the Modernist practitioners I cite as being progenitors of present day Visual Theatre. In section 2.2, I discuss these various usages, and demonstrate what is distinctive about ‘Visual Theatre’.

plays, overt in Jarry, whose *Ubu Roi* was conceived as a grand *guignol*, or Punch and Judy show; oblique in Maeterlinck, for whom the marionette served as both metaphor of the human condition and model of the new stylized movement of actors regarded as appropriate to the new static drama of the spirit” (Segel, 1995:89).

For both Jarry and Maeterlinck (and later on, for Brecht), the ‘emblem’ is much more powerful than an attempt at presenting ‘reality’ - as Huxley and Witts paraphrase Jarry “... the curse of the theatre is its bogus theatricality” (Huxley and Witts, 2000:215). Like Jarry, Maeterlinck prefaced a number of his early plays with the instruction “for marionettes” and it is generally held that this is intended metaphorically, though cabaret puppet companies did stage his work: perhaps the most important point to draw from this is that whether his intention was literal or metaphorical, his instruction illustrates his desire to step beyond the real, and he saw the emblematic, iconic nature of the puppet as a way to achieve this.

European playwrights for whom the puppet became an important symbol and device are too numerous to mention here: Segel’s *Pinocchio’s Progeny* (1995) is extremely comprehensive. There were some, such as Ramón de Valle-Inclán, whose whole oeuvre revolved around puppet themes: some such as Edmond Rostand (most famous for *Cyrano de Bergerac*) who only ventured in that direction once, with his final play *The Last Night of Don Juan*. It was not just the dramatists who were inspired by the figure of the puppet, but also (and ultimately, historically more importantly) many of the directors and theorists of the Modernist era. Chief among these was Edward Gordon Craig, to whom I devote chapter 1.3: not just because he merits it, but also because he sits somewhat apart from the Modernist director-theorists of continental Europe. His primary counterpart on the continent was Vsevolod Meyerhold, who, like Craig, came from a traditional, mainstream theatre background, but sought for something more, something beyond the traditional text-based theatre - “... some new means of expressing the ineffable, of revealing that which is concealed” (Meyerhold, 2000:270). He found this in the theory of stage movement and presentation he developed, called Bio-Mechanics, a regime of “... acrobatic physical exercise and a detailed study of all the body’s mimetic possibilities”

(Taylor, 1993:208) and was much inspired by the notion of the fairground, popular theatre and puppetry -

“The fairground booth is eternal. Even though its principles have been banished temporarily from within the walls of the theater, we know that they remain firmly embedded in the lines of all true theatrical writers” (Meyerhold, in Philpott, 1969:135).

In the puppet, Meyerhold saw a figure which

“...created a world of enchantment with its incomparable movements, its expressive gestures achieved by some magic known to it alone, its angularity which teaches the heights of true plasticity” (Meyerhold, in Taxidou 1998:170).

Taxidou makes the interesting point that though Craig and Meyerhold shared many of the same aspirations for theatre, their attitude to the puppet showed a subtle but important difference:

“Where Craig and Kleist negate the human form, they [the Russian Constructivists and the Bauhaus theatre] celebrate it... instead of replacing the human actor by the puppet-idol, the goal is to *puppetize* the human form itself. Its materiality was no longer an obstacle but the very substance of creative art” (Taxidou, 1998:170).

A second contemporary of Craig's, who also claimed his allegiance, was the head of the Bauhaus Stage Workshop, Oskar Schlemmer. His work is not as well recognised as that of Meyerhold, yet he made an equally important contribution to the furthering of thought about the application of a puppet theatre ethos to a human populated stage. His essay *Man and Art Figure* begins “The history of the theater is the history of the transfiguration of the human form” (Schlemmer, 2000:327), and he believed this transfiguration could be effected by “... substituting for the organism the mechanical human figure (*Kunstfigur*): the *automaton* and the *marionette*. E.T.A. Hoffmann extolled the first of these, Heinrich von Kleist the second” (Schlemmer, 2000:337). Schlemmer draws together the Bio-mechanics of Meyerhold and the *Übermarionette* of Craig, and envisages the theatre achieving

“... the *absolute* visual stage (*Schaubühne*). Man, the animated being, would be banned from view in this mechanistic organism. He would stand as ‘the perfect engineer’ at the central switchboard, from where he would direct this feast for

our eyes" (Schlemmer, 2000:331).

Schlemmer's essay stands as a kind of fulcrum between the first stirrings of a fascination with puppets in Kleist's *On the Marionette Theatre* and the resurgence of puppetness in Visual Theatre of the end of the 20th century. It exemplifies both the high point and the low point of the Modernist engagement with puppetry; as Segel suggests, the final fling, in the form of the Bauhaus, and the Italian Futurists, advocacy of mechanisation -

"... carried the preoccupation with inanimate human likenesses to their logical extremes. From the exploration of the various ramifications of the human-as-puppet metaphor to the celebration of the puppet or marionette as model of animated perfection, the avant-garde grafted the culture of the machine age onto the inanimate figure and then animated it with all its anxieties, exhilarations, and disillusionments. Once art had worked its way through the reduction of human to machine or, as in the case of Karel Capek's *R.U.R.*, from human being to robot and robot back to human being, the modernist and avant-garde obsession with puppetry had run much of its course" (Segel, 1995:322).

What to many seemed the logical conclusion of the machine age, the rise of Fascism and the Second World War, also saw the end of the cabarets (as Modernist entities), and many of the key Modernist theatre practitioners themselves. Marinetti and Prampolini's championing of 'electric puppets', though echoing and building on the work of Meyerhold, Craig and later Schlemmer, is fundamentally different in outlook. One strand of fascination with puppets and their visual and metaphorical application to theatre ended with the Second World War, but the movement gave birth to more strands that would work themselves in to other highly influential art forms during the course of the 20th century: it is this which the next chapter details.

1.2 The 'Cinematified' Theatre and the Puppetised Film: Meyerhold, Méliès and Eisenstein's Stage and Screen of Attractions.

The preceding chapter traced the movement of a particular ethos of theatre making: practitioners whose work utilised a range of modes and styles in its creation, but was linked by a shared locus of interests. This chapter demonstrates how the performance sensibility previously identified leapt from the dying embers of avant-garde Modernist theatre to ignite early cinema.

There is some contention as to how forcefully cinema took the reins of Modernist performance from the theatre: Walter Benjamin expressed mixed emotions about how cinema was adapting the 'aura' of performance, going so far as to say "Any thorough study proves that there is indeed no greater contrast than that of the stage play to a work of art that is completely subject to or, like the film, founded in, mechanical reproduction" (Benjamin, 1999:223). Vladimir Mayakovsky, a Futurist (as noted earlier, a group profoundly influenced by the puppet, the constructed being) believed that the theatre would inevitably be replaced by the cinema, "the application of the machine in the field of art" (Taylor and Christie, 1994:34). There were those, however, who saw the situation not as a dichotomy, but as an instance of complementary art-forms, with film offering new ways to explore what they had begun in the theatre.

Foremost among these multi-disciplinary practitioners was Sergei Eisenstein. Gordon and Law (1979) suggest that contrary to the belief of many film historians, there is a very strong through-line from Eisenstein's experiments on stage to his experiments in cinema: central to this was a fascination with a number of the classic Modernist puppet-derived themes and modes. Most notable were those he inherited from Meyerhold, his teacher and later collaborator, one of the many Modernist, Constructivist theatre practitioners who championed the

"... quickened, colorful, acrobatic techniques of acting borrowed from popular forms, such as the circus, vaudeville, melodrama and commedia ... [and] attempted to marry these comic forms with precision machine-like

movements” (Gordon and Law, 1979:26).

Eisenstein trained at Meyerhold’s Workshop, later researching and teaching Meyerhold’s theory of Biomechanics, a technique of stylised stage movement that drew heavily on the puppet tradition of the fairground (Segel, 1995:228) and sought to overthrow the theatre of the day’s tendencies towards naturalism. It is interesting to note that Eisenstein did not reject naturalism entirely: indeed, he saw that there were parts of the Biomechanics technique that were unsatisfactory, and in rebelling against the dominant form were missing out on a natural expressiveness. What is most interesting is that he sought to fill this gap by invoking the puppet. In the essay ‘Expressive Movement’, written by Eisenstein and his dramaturg Sergei Tretyakov, the work of German movement theorist Rudolph Bode is cited, but the ideas that so inspired Eisenstein are traced right back to Heinrich Kleist’s *On the Marionette Theatre*, the piece so profoundly influential in allowing the puppet to be treated as a serious pursuit for artists.

1922, the year that Eisenstein prepared to move into film, saw the culmination of Modernism’s infatuation with the fairground and the circus, and the pinnacle of the inventiveness in Soviet theatre brought about by the cross-pollination of art-forms. Grigori Kozintsev and Sergei Yutkevich put on their adaptation of Gogol’s *Marriage*, which Kozintsev described as “an amalgam of circus, cabaret, and cinema” (Kozintsev, cited in Gerould, 1974:71). Meyerhold staged *The Magnificent Cuckold* and *The Death of Tarelkin*, both centred in Biomechanics, acrobatics and puppetry and described by Bell as “the two most influential theatre works of Russian Constructivism” (Bell, 2008:108).

During that year, Eisenstein worked on *The Wiseman*, and presented it in 1923. The production could stand as the first Visual Theatre performance, being distinct from that movement only in the fact that it predates it by seventy-odd years. It certainly carries a number of the hallmarks that characterise Visual Theatre: based on Alexander Ostrovsky’s 1898 play, Eisenstein’s production shocked spectators by deviating from the original, and incorporating themes and performance modes that Eisenstein saw not as desecrating the work, but recasting it in a radical, vital new style. The reflection of this style of adaptation,

with the Visual Theatre conception of a text being a 'resource', is inescapable²¹. The production also marked Eisenstein's first use of film, and of montage; that film was integrated into the live performance was revolutionary enough: what is breathtaking is that he should take a device (montage) and use it not just in his first work in film, but in his live performance as well. Gerould (1974) describes how Eisenstein took scenes 8 and 9 from Act II of the play and 'intercut' them, thereby creating a startling new perspective on the action of each scene, the juxtaposition elucidating and amplifying what was already in the text. He cleverly incorporated the filmed sequences into the live performance: a character would 'enter' the film through a window on stage, and later be seen on various modes of transport, making their way back to the theatre, before appearing live before the audience again. Within the filmed sequence, Eisenstein played with the human form through montage, manipulating it through this new technology, to all intents and purposes, like a puppet. As Gerould describes, the montage "transformed the chameleon-like Glumov into whatever his companion of the moment most wanted him to be: a dutiful donkey with his cousin Mamaev, a military cannon with General Joffre-Krutitsky, and an infant with his doting aunt Mamaeva" (Gerould, 1974:75).

The production spurred Eisenstein to write the essay *The Montage of Attractions*, which appeared in *Lef*, a magazine run by Mayakovsky. This essay sets out many of the tenets that Eisenstein would follow in his career as a film director, principally, a mode of working that attempted to discern exactly what it was in a production that would reach out and grab the audience. In this respect, the ideas seem very modern as well as very Modernist: they would not be out of place in a consideration of the *modi operandi* of television advertising, pop videos, and many other forms of multimedia: Eisenstein defined his 'attractions' as "any aggressive moment in theatre, i.e. any element of it that subjects the

²¹ The idea of a text being a 'resource' is judged to be a quintessentially Post-Modern one, part of Post-Modernism's set of practices along with hybridising, fragmenting, ironically 'quoting' et al. The fact that Modernists had already pioneered a lot of these techniques – in the Eisenstein work described here, in Karl Kraus' *The Last Days of Mankind* (1919-26) – suggests Post-Modernism's claiming of them is slightly suspect. For Visual Theatre, the idea of text as a resource most directly derives from the R.S.V.P. cycles, described in detail in sections 2.1 'Visual Theatre as a Modern or Post-Modern mode of Practice', 2.3 'What is Visual Theatre?' and in the case study of Robert Lepage.

audience to emotional or psychological influence, verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole. These shocks provide the only opportunity of perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown, the final ideological conclusion" (Eisenstein, 1995:88).

There is undoubtedly something Brechtian in his stance, the determination for the audience to grasp the ideology of the piece, but his sense of how best to achieve that is tempered by an aesthetic understanding that comes from the same place as the impulse that moved him away from the over-mechanistic ethos of Meyerhold's Biomechanics and towards the more Kleistian Rudolph Bode. The defining point of his essay, in relation to what came next - in cinema, and, as this thesis will argue, in the development of Visual Theatre - is the insistence on the *equality* of the theatrical elements that are to create these attractions -

"The instrument of this process consists of all the parts that constitute the apparatus of theatre (Ostuzhev's 'chatter' no more than the color of the prima donna's tights, a role on the drums just as much as Romeo's soliloquy, the cricket on the hearth no less than a salvo under the seats of the auditorium)" (Eisenstein, 1995:88).

Yet the theatre would remain dominated by the playwright's text and the spoken word for the next half century, remaining more an auditorium (a place to hear) than a theatre (a place to see). Like Craig, Eisenstein envisaged a style of theatre-making that would not fully come to fruition until the advent of Visual Theatre at the end of the 20th century. It was in cinema that he was to have his most immediate, and continuing effect: like many artists he has been categorised, 'put in a box', and it is only the adventurous student or creator of theatre that would imagine Eisenstein might have anything to say about their craft in particular. The fact that they are now watching or creating works that use montage, typage, or 'attractions' does not mean they can trace a line back through their practice to someone who brought, to early film, the Modernist fascination with puppets, as icons of movement, as examples of close-control of a scene, as metaphors for archetypal states.

Of course Eisenstein is not the only practitioner through whom we can trace the path of Modernist theatre and puppetry into film. Before Eisenstein, Lev

Kuleshov had been formulating his theory of montage, and drawing on the work of Meyerhold when he put forward his idea of *naturshchik*, the model player

“In view of the fact that cinema must be based on a purely external (i.e. visual) artistic influence on the public the cinema artiste must learn to create the required impression not just by acting with the face but by acting with the whole body: by an expressiveness of lines” (Kuleshov, 1918, cited in Gillespie, 2000)

Dziga Vertov, whose film-maker’s manifesto appeared in the same issue of *Lef* as Eisenstein’s *Montage of Attractions*, set out the possibilities of film (as the pinnacle of mechanised, closely controlled art) as a superior form to theatre. Whatever he thought of Eisenstein’s experiment with theatre and film, he nurtured the same sensibility towards presentation of the film as puppet-master to its subjects, in *Kino-Eye*, released the following year. Ostensibly a documentary, the film plays with time, motion, points of view: time is reversed as a piece of meat is restored to its former existence as a cow, bread unbakes itself into dough and ultimately returns to being grain in a field. Whatever ideologies informed these filmmakers and their work, an aesthetic, a distinct sensibility about how figures and scenes are manipulated and presented to the audience was created, and when the political movement which these pieces and their techniques were at the service of died away, the sensibility remained and inspired many others.

Before any of these practitioners appeared on the scene as film or theatre directors, films that shared much of the same fascination with manipulation of people, objects and scenes were being created by someone inspired by many of the same forms as Meyerhold and his peers: Georges Méliès.

Méliès began his career in the theatre: not the avant-garde, like Meyerhold, Schlemmer or Eisenstein, or mainstream, like Craig, but in the popular theatre of vaudeville and magic that these practitioners drew such inspiration from. In 1888 Méliès took over the running of the Theatre Robert-Houdin, with its cast of automata, trick sets and magic lanterns, and soon added the new technology of projected film to his repertoire: in doing so he created a form that “made film as well as theatre history” (Barnouw, 1981:12). His films played with reality, fantasy, space, and time in a way that related directly to his use in theatre of moving tableaux created by multiple magic lanterns: like the artists at the *Quatre*

Gats or *Le Chat Noir* cabarets, or practitioners like Teschner in Vienna, Méliès brought to his work a desire for the elevation of the visual in theatre, and the accompanying ethos of its close control. He was an expert in theatrical mise-en-scène, and, suggest Bordwell and Thompson (1980:76), “cinema’s first master of the technique”. As they note, mise-en-scène

“was first applied to the practice of stage direction ... as you would expect from the term’s theatrical origins, mise-en-scène includes those aspects that overlap with the art of theater: setting, lighting, costume, and the behaviour of the figures. In controlling the mise-en-scène, the director *stages the event* for the camera” (Bordwell and Thompson, 1980:75).

Gunning (2005) links Méliès’ cinematic sensibility to that later theorised by Eisenstein, signalling Méliès as one of the foremost directors in the mode of early film he characterises as “cinema of attractions” which he describes as a form distinct from the later narrative cinema in that it is

“a cinema that bases itself on the quality that Leger celebrated: its ability to *show* something. Contrasted to the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema analysed by Christian Metz, this is an exhibitionist cinema” (Gunning, 2005:39).

Susan Sontag struggles to see a through-line, from theatre to cinema, for Méliès: though she admits a link between his fixed camera angle, and the relation (in his mind) of the rectangle of the screen and the proscenium arch, she describes his work as a “paradigmatic non-theatrical use of film”, suggesting that “In their treatment of persons as things (physical objects) and in their disjunctive presentation of time and space, Méliès’ films are quintessentially ‘cinematic’ ” (Sontag, 2005:136). This is true if one takes a very narrow view of what theatre is, based upon mainstream productions, though it would not seem to hold up with regard to the present day theatre of Robert Lepage or Complicité, for instance. Her summation appeared in the journal *Drama Review* in 1966, when the performance culture of the day was just beginning to respond to the radical ideas of Craig and other Modernist theorists: mainstream theatre, however, seemed to have lost, almost entirely, the ethos of the Modernists. A counter-example to her claims, one she was obviously unaware of, is that there was at one time a form of theatre (detailed in this and the previous chapter) that co-existed, and shared many key practices and sensibilities, with cinema.

For Gaby Wood, it is both the mode of production and the content of Méliès' films that confirm him as the cinematic heir to the Modernists' fascination with the puppet and the robot:

"By repeatedly filming stories of dolls coming to life, by endlessly reproducing mechanical tricks, Méliès transferred the quest of earlier android-makers to a new virtual reality. He made the human body do impossible things, and proved how mechanical or puppet-like our celluloid selves could be" (Wood, 2003:168).

She suggests that

"If the cinema, for Méliès, was an extension of the automata he repaired and set in motion in his foyer, then people on film could be seen as androids too - mechanized men, distributed into tiny frames of celluloid, their movements broken down into mechanical functions" (Wood, 2003:182).

This, no doubt, is the sort of view Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno anticipated with ambivalence and trepidation respectively: *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) charts the loss of the 'aura' in the move of performance from stage to screen. The Visual Theatre practice of today must surely stand as a refutation of this ambiguous or even negative appraisal, its practitioners the beneficiaries of those such as Meyerhold who set in motion the move towards a

"reconstructed theatre, using every technical means at its disposal, [that] will work with film, so that scenes played by an actor on stage can alternate with scenes he has played on screen ... let us 'cinematify' the theatre, let us use in the theatre all the technical means of the screen - but not just in the sense that we shall install a screen in the theatre. We must move into theatre spectacle - and we shall stage productions attracting audiences as large as those in the movie theatres. The revolution to 'reconstruct' contemporary theatre in form and content has come to a halt only for lack of the means to re-equip stage and auditorium" (Meyerhold, 2005:22).

This section's principal aim has been to indicate the level to which a puppet-influenced theatre inspired many early filmmakers, both those working independently, such as Méliès, and those who were part of a longer lineage of influence such as Eisenstein and his mentors. A deeper look at the semiotics of the puppet figure, and puppetness, in cinema theory, continues in chapter 2.1.

1.3 Visual Theatre's 'First Harbinger': the Auteur and the Übermarionette in Edward Gordon Craig's 'Stage Visions'.

Edward Gordon Craig is now best known as a 'philosopher of theatre', a figure akin to that of Peter Brook, but without the benefit (that Brook enjoys) of being highly regarded as a practitioner. Though Craig lived until 1966, his thirty-five year career in theatre as a designer and director ended in 1928.

What one is left with are contemporary reports and reviews of productions he contributed to, a great number of sketches and models for settings and scenes, and the many pieces of writing on which his current reputation rests. His reputation though, and the picture that is painted of him, is often severely unbalanced. Admittedly his writing is erratic: he is known for advocating seemingly contradictory positions, sometimes even within the same article. His writing is alternately very modern (ahead of its time when it was published) and very antiquated, a 19th century mannered, didactic style, and his arguments emerge more often from an emotional rather than a logical position.

At the outset, one must face his critics head on and admit that though he is, for instance, famous for advocating the Übermarionette above the actor, there are articles where he seems to disparage the puppet's virtues in favour of the mask (Craig, 1999:17) or to side with actor over the puppet (Craig, 1999:66). Even if we acknowledge the inconsistencies and contradictions in his writings, there is undoubtedly an ultimate unity in his thought, and an originality of dramatic and critical theory, the reverberations of which are still being felt in theatre today.

So, having apologised for Craig's inadequacies, what is it about his theories that was so contentious at the time he first voiced them, and is still so compelling and influential today?

It may seem surprising to some that Craig's ideas are still being debated and drawn on by theatrical practitioners and theorists, and in a different way than those of other writers of his time. It must be remembered that at the turn of the 20th century Craig was just as anachronistic a figure as he is today, and

anachronistic in both directions, so to speak²². It is to this point – his departure from acting - that we can trace the beginnings of his radical approaches to theatre making. In 1897 he was working as an illustrator for London papers and designing bookplates, and the next year he began publishing a magazine of his own, *The Page*. By 1900 his first major production as director and designer was under way, and over the next fifteen years he worked on productions with some of the leading names of the era, among them Martin Shaw, Otto Brahm, Max Reinhardt, Eleanora Duse, Beerbohm Tree and Stanislavsky. By 1928 his work as a practitioner in the theatre was over, and he was now principally a writer and theoretician again (his first book, *The Art of the Theatre*, having been published in 1905).

So why should it be the case that someone from as traditional a theatrical background as Craig could grow into a more radical icon than any of his contemporaries? He was raised in a theatre that was dominated by words, by the text of the piece, with the role of the lead actor being the most important: indeed, many of the aspects of the role that we now call ‘director’ were undertaken by the principal actor. Craig’s mentors and heroes, the Irving company and in particular Irving himself certainly fit into this mould²³. Walton describes Craig as the kind of “special talent’ that can bridge the gulf “between ‘old’ movements and ‘new’...” (Craig, 1999:73).

The Modernist theatre makers sought to create a new style of theatre practice and production that mixed the ‘high’ art of the old theatre and ‘low’ culture of

²² Unlike the Modernist theatre makers with whom he was contemporary, his route into theatre was not politically motivated, nor possessed initially of a particularly Modernist sensibility. He was the son of the actress Ellen Terry, one of the leading lights of the Victorian stage, and as part of a theatrical dynasty that was later to include John Gielgud, it was natural for Craig to venture on stage, which he did aged twelve as part of the Henry Irving Company, to which his mother also belonged. His tenure with Irving (and other independent companies) lasted approximately ten years, during which time he played a number of high profile parts - he had a leading man’s good looks, suitable for Hamlet and the other obligatory classical parts for a young actor. By the age of twenty-five, he had given up acting and moved in to another sphere of the theatrical world.

²³ Craig continued to be devoted to Irving, and to classical texts even through the most radical of his proposed shifts in theatrical practice. In his later writings, Craig focuses a great deal on the physicality of Irving’s performances, the mannerisms and movements that apparently irritated critics of the time (Craig, 1999:72): though he had been brought up in a classical mode of performance, there are undoubtedly signs that Craig was taking in more from a performance than most observers, that he had a powerful sense of the visual.

popular entertainment, and a key part of this was the reintroduction of 'spectacle' to theatre. Craig had no interest in returning to other periods of theatre - in *Scene* (Craig, 1999:51) he reasons that "The tradition once lost ... has never quite recovered its original force" - but rather in reminding audiences of "the perennial theatrical values" (Craig, 1999:3), the archetypes of representation. Craig was, in some ways, running parallel to the Modernist reinvention of theatre, but his sensibility was always that of 'high art'.

Craig over- or under- played his affinity with 'the actor' depending upon what stance he decided to take for a particular article, but his experience in the old style of theatre was undoubtedly the foundation for much of his thought about the practice of theatre making: contrary to the caricature of Craig (as a tyrant who wanted to replace the actor with the Übermarionette), it was not jettisoned when his career and thought took a new direction.

This thesis argues that the time he spent as an engraver of bookplates and newspaper illustrator should be judged to have had a profound effect on his later practice. His understanding of the movement, images and overall visual power of a performance was consolidated by this mid-period era of two-dimensional visual representation and simplification of visual stimuli. Craig declared that its 'slow ways' helped him "to design scenes and how to delineate characters ... it is a work which I found allowed one to listen, if not to speak, while practising it" (Craig, 1999:12). It was a kind of sabbatical, a sojourn on a different plane of thought where he could search his nature and plan "how to wake up the old theatre" (Craig, 1999:12). In this way, Craig stood as

"a rallying point for all those new voices in France, Germany, Russia and elsewhere for whom the rejection of naturalism was the necessary prelude to dragging the theatre grumbling and creaking into the twentieth century", and, importantly, "It took a visual artist to do this" (Taxidou, 1998:xiv).

His later advocacy of masks and puppets can also be traced to this period. A similar movement of thought and motivation can be seen in the career of the present day Visual Theatre practitioner Robert Wilson, who moved from the role of solely set designer to that of director and set designer, and indeed a very Craigian *generalissimo* role, as a kind of Über-designer of the whole piece. A parallel example from the cinema is the trajectory of Alfred Hitchcock's career,

from working as an intertitle designer and art director in silent films to directing his own work with a bold and distinctive visual style (Jacobs, 2007:16). Hitchcock stands as one of the film directors characterised as an *auteur* in a mould very similar to the one Craig envisaged for theatre. In British theatre, the precise demarcations of the roles of director and producer come most immediately from the Hollywood film-making model, though it is interesting to note how similar this is to what Craig argued for as an effective means of managing a production on stage²⁴.

Walton suggests that “every generation needs reminding that the word theatre comes from the Greek for ‘to see’ not ‘to hear’” (Walton, 1999: 3) and that Craig emerged as the chosen conduit for this message, in his era and arguably a hundred years thence. Craig advocated, in his writing, and with the example of his own practice, that a theatre maker should have an over-arching sensibility that encompassed each element of the piece: the new theatre he proposed could no longer be dominated by the text, that the art of theatre and the art of literature were two separate things which, when accepted as such, could begin to work together again (Craig, 1999).

Craig searched for a term to encapsulate the sensibility he wished to bring to theatre making and to describe how his scope differed from that of the current practice. Like later attempts to characterise a more holistic mode of working, ‘Total Theatre’ from the 1940s, ‘Visual Theatre’ in the 1990s and beyond, Craig introduced new terminology to fit with his ideas for a new theatre, ultimately describing his project as ‘Stage Visions’. He detailed the mode of production principally in *Scene* (Craig, 1999) and elaborated on it in other articles, as well, of course, as in his copious sketches and stage designs, which Walton notes were not exclusively “... settings devised for a production on which he was engaged...” but often simply more abstract “... illustrations of ideas, some of stage directions, some of contrasts in background and light, some of pure emotion or arrested movement, some of the flexibility of a geometric stage geography” (Craig, 1999:102). Simple descriptions are often inadequate when it comes to giving a fair representation of what they refer to - more often than not, they more accurately

²⁴ These terms – director and producer – came to be used, as they are in their current sense, in the 1950s, after Craig was active. Craig’s term for the *auteur* of the piece was ‘artist of the theatre’.

represent what their referent is *not* trying to be: just as Feminism is not necessarily 'anti-men', Visual Theatre is not anti-text, but argues for a greater acknowledgement of the importance of the visual in theatre. Similarly, it would be a grave underestimation of Craig's work to imagine that his Stage Visions were purely aesthetic, or would lead to productions that were all form and no content. Perhaps ascribing importance to the word 'Visions' can also be misleading. Certainly it captures that element of Craig's thought that decreed there should be a 'stage director', whom Craig likened to the captain of a ship (Craig, 1999:66), a guiding vision for the production. But 'vision' also implies viewing an object from without, and Craig's understanding of objects and their symbolic power went much deeper than a surface reading. In *The Steps* (Craig, 1999:108) he describes the affinity of his thought with that of Maeterlinck, whose view was that drama does not only concern things such as the staples of melodrama and much other staged drama besides - "murder, jealousy and the other first passions" (Craig, 1999:108) but also another, more overlooked drama: that of the world around us, the natural and the architectural, that remains to most people, and indeed theatre makers, of secondary importance to the supposedly 'real' action. He characterises Maeterlinck's thought as dividing these two types of drama into what "... I would call the drama of speech and the drama of silence, and I think that his trees, his fountains, his streams, and the rest come under the heading of the drama of silence - that is to say, dramas where speech becomes paltry and inadequate" (Craig, 1999:108). In his quest to rejuvenate the theatre practice of his day, Craig looked for inspiration in many places - for instance, the stylised presentation of Greek tragedy appealed to him. He also looked to the East (like many of the visual artists of his era - Van Gogh, Klimt), writing of reports he had heard of actors on the Indian sub-continent being the closest thing to his theory of the Übermarionette (Craig, 1999:87). Craig's thinking on the use of mask and puppet was certainly aligned to that of such societies, and to whatever extent their practice influenced and inspired him, his intention for a stage (actors and objects/setting) to be 'alive' was in tune with the (to the West) fresh ideas of Eastern thought: Craig attempted to relate his sense of the dramatic importance of objects and his drive to make the stage 'animated' to reflect the animation of the world around him in *Scene*:

"I saw as I progressed that things can, and therefore should, play their parts as well as people: that they combine with the actor and plead for the actor to use them, as the chairs in Moliere's plays testify. Not merely are they three or four dead chairs which he placed on the centre of the stage. Yet writers call on us to regard the emptiness of his stage - merely three chairs, they say. Are they mad, these men? Don't they know how Moliere made these chairs act - how they are *alive*, and working in combination with the actors?" (Craig, 1999:49).

Craig wrote much on 'animating' the stage, of his process being not a return to any particular thing, not a rejection of any particular thing, but simply a process that seemed to order itself according to its *logos*, which he merely followed: "I wished to reduce scene to its essentials and found it reduced itself. I have but done as ordered. *I then added mobility to it*" (Craig, 1999:123). He pioneered the use of screens that could move and tilt according to the needs of the piece, for changes between and *during* the scenes and for alterations to be made on the spot during the creation and rehearsal of a production: the ideal set being "a room or place being movable at all parts" (Craig, 1999:103). The story famously goes that his screens for *Hamlet* at the Moscow Arts Theatre collapsed the day of the first performance²⁵, though as Walton notes, this was more a case of the technology of the day not being equal to Craig's vision. His critics took this as an indictment of his radical ideas, but similar screens (based on Craig's designs) were used to great effect in the following years, which must have provided at least some vindication.

Craig's best known and most contentious theory - that of the Übermarionette - could be seen as an extension of his thought about scenery. The Übermarionette was the ideal for an actor (Craig's highest compliment to Irving was that his performance was the closest thing he had seen to the Übermarionette): a presence stripped to its essentials, fluid and flexible like the rest of the stage vision, and trusting its manipulation to the director, whose over-arching sense of the piece would be his compass. Craig knew of Kleist's *On the Marionette*

²⁵ There is a question as to whether this story is apocryphal: Craig's son claimed it never happened, or at least not on the first night. Walton seems to think they did collapse, as evidenced by his comment that the technology was simply not up to Craig's designs. Whatever the case about the first night, it is also said that for the rest of the show's run, the screens operated without a hitch.

*Theatre*²⁶: the two writers shared a love of dance and dancers, sought a mode for the perfection of movement and representation, and found it in the marionette. But whereas Kleist's essay ultimately finds that, in Segel's words "the living actor can never achieve the spontaneity of the marionette; thus the grace of the inanimate figure remains ever elusive" (Segel, 1995:15), Craig believed that actors can and must aim for the perfection of, as Kleist has it, "that bodily form that has either no consciousness at all or an infinite one; that is to say, in the puppet or in the god" (Kleist, 1989). Just as Kleist writes of the natural gravity of a puppet, Craig sees a puppet, like his visions for scenes, in touch with its *logos* "Born of wood, of ivory, of metal or what you will, he is content to obey his nature" (Craig, 1999:25). Craig called the Übermarionette "The actor plus fire, minus egoism" (Craig, 1999:2) and in his most famous essay, *The Actor and the Übermarionette* (1907), he argues that the puppet embodies the spirit of what it is representing, and refers again to the puppet's roots in ancient religion and ritual. Interestingly, the Übermarionette refers to both what the actor must become and to the new image of the puppet itself, where it can be given the serious consideration it deserves: we must, says Craig, "... remake these images - no longer content with a puppet, we must create an Übermarionette. The Übermarionette will not compete with life - rather will it go beyond it" (Craig, 1999:86). Taxidou sees much common ground between the two: "Both men see the role of the puppet-master as crucial. He represents that totalising power of the artistic genius" (Taxidou, 1998:168).

The idea of the director (Artist of the Theatre) as captain of the ship, and holder of the 'Stage Vision' for the company, his advocacy of a flexible and responsive stage design, and his vision of such a stage being populated by Übermarionettes seem to be Craig's most enduring gifts to theatre practitioners and theorists. Walton suggests that Craig's greatness might perhaps lie in his power to inspire others (Craig, 1999:3), and it is true that his writings seem to arouse as much controversy today as they did when first published. One might be challenged as

²⁶ Indeed, the first English translation of Kleist's essay was printed, for the first time, in Craig's journal *The Marionette* (No.4, 1918). Even without definite proof that Craig knew of Kleist before he set out his vision of the Übermarionette in 1907-8, Taxidou cites Kleist as "a definite influence on Craig; their intertextual relationship cannot be doubted" (Taxidou, 1998:166).

to how it can be that issues first raised nearly a hundred years ago are still being questioned and fought over, in theory and in practice - has theatre not moved on in this time?

Modernist avant-garde theatre practice could be said to have followed a cyclical process, and burnt itself out by the time of the Second World War, with the rise of Fascism standing as the conclusion to the Modernist, then Futurist, search for perfection. In many ways the project of Craig and his avant-garde contemporaries was cut short, and lay dormant for much of the 20th century: but the core concepts, sensibilities and inspirations remained, waiting for a new generation of artists to 'pick up the baton' and continue the exploration and innovation that had been curtailed.

Though Craig was always controversial, and theatre's 'forgetting' of his ideas for much of the 20th century seems not quite accidental, there were those whose work evidenced some quite direct links to his. There was mutual admiration between Craig and Brecht, who could be said to have transcended the Modernist movement from which he emerged. Brecht's thought carried much from that of Craig - the insistence on simplicity, on finding the essentials of a piece: Walton notes that Craig's

"... argument that the actor should have his 'brain commanding his nature' ... is as clear an exposition of the Brechtian principle as one could hope to find, and pre-dates Brecht by twenty years" (Craig, 1999:73).

Like Craig, Brecht disliked the Stanislavskian principle of actors and audiences getting too engaged in the 'naturalistic' playing, and felt that the actor should not try to copy through empathy but to *represent*. Peter Brook makes an interesting point about the connections between Craig and Brecht: Brecht's slimmed down approach to staging obviously owed much to Craig, but Brook suggests that even more so, " ... the visual revolution of Craig relates to an acting revolution through Brecht" (Brook, 1989:43).

Brook stands as another pivotal figure, who draws on the work of Craig and Brecht, having met and spoken with both, in 1959 and 1950 respectively (Brook, 1989). Walton traces the similarity between Craig's theory of the Perishable Theatre and what Peter Brook would later describe in *The Empty Space* as 'the rough theatre' (Craig, 1999:13). As I argue in section 2.1, Modernist sensibilities

fed into early film, as well as influencing theatre-makers such as Brecht and Brook - Walter Benjamin remarks that the very Craigian concept of treating actors like objects (in the new mechanically reproduced medium of film) has no greater contrast than to the stage play, and points towards the reason, he says, there is a crisis in theatre (Benjamin, 1999:223). So one can map the immediate influences of Craig, those practitioners and media that carried his ideas (or aspects of them) forward, knowing that those who were then influenced by Brecht, Brook and others, will have parts of their practice that indirectly owe a great deal to Craig's perceptions.

But what of Visual Theatre, and the fin-de-millennium fascination with simulacra, spectacle, and representation in all its Post-Modern and technologically achievable forms? Is Craig a key figure in the birth of Visual Theatre, and in his unmediated form, rather than handed down through the practice and theory of the Modernists at the beginning of the 20th century and the Experimental and Total Theatre practitioners at its fulcrum? This thesis makes a case that at all levels of practice in Visual Theatre, Craig's influence can be found. The renewed interest in puppetry and object manipulation, as evidenced in the work of companies across the globe - Improbable Theatre, Faulty Optic, Complicité, Figurentheater Wilde & Vogel - is bringing to fruition Craig's hopes for the future of theatre. Leading Visual Theatre practitioners such as Julie Taymor, Robert Wilson and Robert Lepage all employ an innovative use of staging which as simple and essential (such as the Expressionist minimalism of Wilson) and as flexible and transformative (Lepage's *Ex Machina* work) as Craig wished for his own productions, and for a greater visual language for theatre. What better figurehead for Craig's hopes for the theatre could there be than the work of Robert Lepage, which, in the words of Peter Brook, represents

"... the incomprehensible reality of our time ... inseparably linked to the insignificant detail of our everyday lives... experimenting with a theatrical language where today's technology can both serve and sustain the humanity of a live performance" (Brook, in Lepage and Charest, 1998:13).

This is very close to the Stage Visions outlined by Craig, described by Walton as an

"admiration for simple theatricality ... [and] an affinity with high artifice.

Combined, they worked to the heart of things. Electric light was still a new toy in the theatre ... Craig was certainly among the first to recognise that its overriding potential lay in close control ... dependent less on a dimming-down of the maximum than on a fading-up of the minimum" (Craig, 1999:14).

Craig is, in some senses, both a precursor and at the same time a central figure of the Visual Theatre movement: Craig himself asserted in 1908 that his work "would not come into its own until the years between 1960 and 2000" (Craig, 1999:2). Kenneth Tynan's assessment of Craig after an interview with him in 1956 reiterated this: "When the theatrical millennium arrives, he will be its first harbinger and surest witness." (Tynan, 1964:285).

2.1 Modernist Puppet *Logos* in the Cinema: Puppetness, Close-Control, and the Rise of the Auteur.

As outlined in chapters 1.1 and 1.2, the use of puppets as literal and metaphorical objects in theatre reached its peak in the fin-de-siècle and the first years of the 20th century: I gauge this from a number of factors, including the quantity and frequency of texts and shows produced, the level of critical discourse concerning the figure of the puppet, and, in my reading, the power of it to inspire the theatre practitioners of the day – essentially, the period when it was truly Modernist in its ‘newness’. By the mid-1920s, the puppet was still a central figure in avant-garde theatre making, but it was undergoing some changes: some which expanded its influence into whole new art-forms and audiences, and some which, at least in part, led to its exclusion from ‘serious’ (‘high’ art rather than ‘low’ culture) theatre for the next fifty years.

The principal change the puppet went through was that it became increasingly associated with mechanisation. This was part of a wider cultural and artistic fascination with (and eventually fear of) the rise of machines and robots, as replacements for, or uneasy additions to, human beings. But the literal and metaphorical puppet was not just an instance of an art form in thrall to the mechanised figure: in many ways it was a harbinger of it.

Just as the puppet as concept could accommodate two seemingly contradictory ideas – that of the controlled being and that of the being freed of the constraints of human corporeality – so it also, in this period, represented many things to many people. One could not claim that it was one of the instigators of a cultural and artistic focus on ‘the machine’ and ‘the mechanised’, without also recognising that for many artists and writers, it represented what in many senses was the polar opposite: small scale, rural, folk-based art, emphasised in the Romantic idyll of writers like Rilke or the inspirational qualities that folk-art showcased at the fairground held for Eisenstein and Meyerhold. What is so interesting is that the figure of the puppet can hold all these associations and definitions and still remain a powerful, coherent concept. I posit that this is

because, for the most part, the seeming contradictions are more apparent than real. Whether one sees the puppet as coming from a background of folk art or as an emblem of mass production and mechanisation, whether it derives its power from its past use in religion and ritual or from our early association with animating human simulacra (in the form of dolls), whether, as Kleist puts it “either none at all or else infinite consciousness” (Kleist, 1989:420), these seemingly diverse origins all conform to a distinct notion of ‘puppetness’. The only aspect of the definition which needs clarifying, I would argue, is the question of ‘freedom’ as it relates to the figure of the puppet. There is a misunderstanding about the nature of the supposed Kleistian freedom of the puppet when it is also so commonly represented as, essentially, a slave.

First, some delimiting of the scope of the claims I am going to make. I am not aiming to overturn views traditionally held about the development of film as an art-form and its most important precedents: for instance, I broadly agree with Vardac’s contention that the predominant visual aesthetic of early film was directly influenced by the spectacle theatre of the 19th century (Vardac, 1949). In the main, I do not wish to dispute, but to add to and refine: to show that the figure of the puppet was present in a number of the strands that fed into early cinema, and had a discernible influence on the aesthetic and sensibility of later film production. To do this, I will concentrate on some key directors, productions (both theatre and film), and techniques that I argue exemplify a puppet-influenced sensibility.

Vardac was certainly moving in the right direction when describing early film as being a pictorial riposte to a mainstream theatre mired in its devotion to the text, and gives some fascinating examples of the moves some theatre practitioners were making towards presenting a “picture-play” (Vardac, 1949:24), such as Alexander Black’s *Miss Jerry* (1894), whose style he cites as an undoubted precursor of film:

“Current staging methods were apparently failing to satisfy the full pictorial preference of the late nineteenth-century audience. The play itself had now become less important than the realism of its pictorial aspects, for it was read by Black in a darkened hall. On a screen at one end were projected more than three hundred photographs taken from life. These pictures, shown in about two

hours at a rate somewhat above two per minute, imparted life, vitality, and probably even imaginative motion to the play” (Vardac, 1949: 24)²⁷.

A more refined sense of the pictorial as the precursor to film (and ultimately in the re-emergence of this aesthetic in the Visual Theatre of the 1990s) can be found in Hollander’s (1991) application of Fried’s art criticism to notions in film and theatre: principally, the concept of *tableau* as a focussing and framing device, outlined further by Brewster and Jacobs as something that

“... came to indicate a relationship between the viewer and the painting, the way the viewer was captivated by the self-contained unity of what he saw on the canvas (hence the term quickly came to be used metaphorically to denote particular kinds of viewing experience independently of whether what was seen was in fact a painted flat surface” (Brewster and Jacobs, 2003:10).

This ‘self-contained unity’ relates very closely to the concept of *mise-en-scène*, as examined in chapter 1.2, particularly with regard to Eisenstein’s groundbreaking 1923 production *The Wiseman*, and the work of a number of other puppet-influenced practitioners, and noting, as Bordwell and Thompson do, its “overlap with the art of theater” (Bordwell and Thompson, 1980:75). But how did the techniques of the ‘cinema of attractions’ fare in the age of ‘classical narrative cinema’ and beyond? Did the figure of the puppet lose its influence once again when the experimentation of Méliès, Soviet Montage, German Expressionism et al were no longer in the ascendant?

Gunning is right, I think, to point out that while the ‘talkies’, narrative-based (rather than ‘spectacle’) cinema and films that owed more to the well-made play than the fairground did supersede early experimental cinema, the two modes should not be judged to be necessarily in opposition to one another: to do so, he says, is

“... too sentimental and too ahistorical. A film like *The Great Train Robbery*

²⁷ Of course, as Brewster and Jacobs (2003) (amongst others) make clear, Vardac’s linking of ‘pictorial’ with ‘realism’, and indeed his definition of ‘realism’ are now considered not entirely clear or even inconsistent – at some points he uses the word to refer to a mode engaged with social, political and psychological ‘realities’ of the day, at others as referring to the representation being ‘lifelike’. As Brewster and Jacobs point out, the second is the one he holds to most, but it by no means implies the first, and indeed his call to realism is in fact “a demand for illusion” (Brewster and Jacobs, 2003:6).

(1903) does point in both directions, towards a direct assault on the spectator (the spectacularly enlarged outlaw unloading his pistol in our faces), and towards a linear narrative continuity” (Gunning, 2005:44).

For the purposes of this thesis, I have been associating the puppet with spectacle rather than with narrative, but like Gunning we might ask – is there really such a neat dichotomy? Of course puppets have been associated with narrative drama for as long as we have records of their use, and one might argue that their appearances have been as much in (narrative) fireside story-telling, myth enacting and latterly children’s shows as they have been in (spectacular) religious ritual, wordless knockabout action and the experimental theatre of the turn of both this century and the last. I would make two claims about the characterisation of puppets as a spectacular, over and above narrative, device. First, while they are undoubtedly linked to the narrative tradition in many ways, they are elementally visual in nature. So, like cave paintings, drawings in the sand and book illustrations, they have long been part of narrative tradition, but have also stood apart from it. They are an element of the narrative that brings something new to the voice, to the actor, to the text. Secondly, the frame of reference for this thesis sits in roughly the last one hundred and fifty years, and the role puppets have taken on in the minds of artists in this time period. As discussed earlier, the experimental theatre and cabarets of Paris, Moscow, Barcelona, *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Berlin and all over Europe at the turn of the 20th century were concerned with the puppet as a constructed, plastic, visual figure, spectacular not only in its appearance but in its existence, and its tacit questioning of ours²⁸. Certainly in terms of the practitioners whom I discuss particularly in relation to a move from experimental theatre to early film

²⁸ Puppets are often understood to have a ‘distancing’ effect, akin perhaps to Brecht’s concept of *verfremdungseffekt* (alienation): they are allowed to encounter and confront many taboos because they are not *us*. It is true that there may often be this distancing – as evidenced by, for instance, the horrific violence enacted by and upon puppet characters that would be beyond the pale in a human theatre piece. At the same time, it must always be recognised, whether consciously or unconsciously, that puppets *are* us. They are ‘ciphers’ for humans, or at least analogues to us: seeming conscious, thinking agents, made up of dead matter but animated by a life force (be it ‘internal’ or ‘external’ in its source). In this way, puppets’ dealings with difficult or taboo questions are often a way for humans to confront uncomfortable subjects: the mode in which these things are dealt with may have elements of alienation or distancing, but the subject matter is actually very close to our hearts.

(principally Eisenstein, and his mentor Meyerhold), there is enough academic discourse and agreement on the linking of the puppet, the 'fairground booth' and the notion of 'the spectacular' for me to assert that the figure of the puppet should be linked more to spectacle than to narrative.²⁹

Another interesting point to note is, for the most part, a technical one (and the nature of the puppet is often tied up with technical progress or impediment). The connection between puppet and voice is much looser than that of actor and voice (though as we shall see, sound film production was to change that). Puppets are much better demonstrators, mimes, and dancers than they are orators. Where a puppet or a mask speaks, the creative, critical (and, it might be argued, alienating, in a Brechtian sense) imagination of the audience is called in to use. The 'naturalism' of the piece is broken, for the audience is presented with an initially incongruous picture of sound and image that don't match up in the way we normally expect them to. Of course the audience does soon accept the voice as being that of the puppet or mask, though at the same time knowing that in some way (in reality, not artistically) it is not. The overall picture (one might say the *mise-en-scène*) is an amalgam of elements, and the collusion of the audience's engaged imagination with the tools of the stage is, incidentally, exactly what Brecht envisioned in his practice of *verfremdungseffekt*. So for much of its history, and particularly in the period I am examining, the essence of the puppet has lived decidedly in the visual realm of the production.³⁰

²⁹ Bell (2008), Segel (1995), Shershow (1995) and many others convincingly plot a course for the use of puppets and performing objects that begins in wordless (or non-narrative) spectacle performances such as religious ritual and folk pageants, and ends up in the renewal of interest, on the part of Modernist theatre practitioners, in 'low' cultural forms and 'primitive' performance figures and aesthetics.

³⁰ I would argue that the puppet continued to hold this position well in to the 20th century, and even during the popularity (in vaudeville, and later on television and, improbably, radio) of ventriloquists and their dummies. The dummies, though lifelike to some degree, and often ornately constructed with all manner of moving features, still represented the opposite of the Kleistian ideal: they were puppets like Pinocchio who were essentially failed humans, their attempts at mimicry of us botched and amusing. It would not be until the 1960s, and the arrival of Jim Henson and the Muppets that a puppet would be soft, malleable, and in a sense organic in a way it had not been before. Even then, some might argue that the same old dislocation of body and voice occurred, though I would point to an example such as Jim Henson's interview with Michael Parkinson in the 1970s, where Henson sat with Kermit the frog on his knee, speaking through him, but not as a ventriloquist: in the event, the voice seemed to come from Kermit, and it was only mildly distracting that Jim Henson's lips were moving also.

So the transition from early experimental film to mainstream, and from silent to sound film did not herald the end of the ‘puppetness’ of actors, sets, lighting and sound; but technical and artistic progress did introduce new possibilities for further nuancing of the final product, and close-control of all the elements of a production. Literal puppets perhaps featured less than they had (in the special-effects-driven cinema of Méliès, for example), but metaphorically and symbolically, puppets and puppetry were still key parts of film production. This is most noticeable in the performances of actors in silent film, which draw heavily upon acting skills learnt in vaudeville, and the more gestural style of acting advanced by many of the Modernist theatre practitioners investigated in this thesis, most notably Meyerhold’s theory of ‘bio-mechanics’. A prime example would be the style of acting that developed in German Expressionist cinema, and most markedly in a film such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920). Of course, as I remarked earlier, this was in part a product of technical necessity: the creators of silent-era films did not want to rely on excessive use of intertitles (placards that showed dialogue or narrated events in the film), nor could they count on the audience to lip read what the actors were saying. Indeed, two points arise from this – first, a silent film would often not have a script so much as what would now be referred to in Visual Theatre production as a ‘score’³¹ – a setting out of, principally, the movement of the piece, so the director would not necessarily want actor’s improvised lines to be lip read and taken as a definitive ‘script’ of the film; secondly, the international, intercultural and egalitarian aspect of silent film production was seen as an asset by directors like Chaplin³², who even in ‘sound’ films like *Modern Times*, kept the dialogue to a minimum. So in silent films of the silent era, and ‘silent’ films of the sound era (I refer mostly to

³¹ Eliot Stannard, an early collaborator on Hitchcock’s silent films described the screenwriter’s role in that era not as ‘script writer’ but as ‘Scenario Writer’, which required an individual who was, he said, “thoroughly experienced in each technical branch of Kinematography; possessed of dramatic training and a sense of Theatre; conversant with the laws of literary construction; a student of psychology and character; and alive to the atmospheric value of costume, furniture, architecture and scenery.” (Stannard, 1920, quoted in Eaton, 2005).

³² Chaplin commented that the advent of the talkies came at just the wrong moment for silent cinema, which was, in his estimation “... beginning to improve. Murnau, the German director, had used the medium effectively, and some of our American directors were beginning to do the same. A good silent picture had universal appeal both to the intellectual and the rank and file” (Chaplin, 1964:351).

Chaplin), the dominance of the visual and the gestural over the written and the spoken was not only a necessity, but indeed a virtue, and it is not hard to trace a line back to the Modernist puppet-influenced theatre practice, cabaret and vaudeville that spawned the creators of these films. *Modern Times* is also a fascinating example of a 'silent' film that deserves to be called such because it adheres so stringently to these virtues of silent cinema: the comedy is centred in the visual – in Chaplin's movement, his interactions with other actors and his interactions with intricate and beautifully imagined sets. In a mode reminiscent of the characterization of inanimate objects which Craig suggested took place in Moliere's *The Chairs*, in the first few set pieces of *Modern Times* the machine's role is just as important as that of the live actors. And similarly, the dislocation between picture and sound I remarked upon previously is present in the film: as Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne (2003) note, whenever a voice is used in the film, it is mediated by a machine – the boss of the factory speaks through his intercom, the makers of the ridiculous worker-feeding contraption introduce their device through the playing of a phonograph record. Where there is an unmediated voice (Chaplin's own), it comes in the form of a song with nonsensical lyrics.

Chaplin's background (like so many of the Modernist film makers) was that of the music hall, spectacle theatre and acrobatic shows, and this is obvious not only in the quality of his physical performance but in the theatrical nature of the set pieces that make up his films. Buster Keaton came from a similar background, but the way he expressed his stage skills in his film making was in many ways more experimental, and while being narrative-based also owed a lot to the inventiveness and trick photography of Méliès. *Sherlock Jr* (1924) includes a sequence that is uncannily like that of Eisenstein's stage production *The Wiseman*: Keaton, as a movie projectionist, dreams that he enters the film and proceeds to move back and forth between shots/realities of different environments.³³ This is

³³ Keaton and Eisenstein were not alone in this cross-genre work: Winsor McCay was doing similar things with his live, interactive performances/showings of his *Gertie the Dinosaur* films (1914 – 21), experimenting with framing and the interaction of the live and the projected (in his case, animated) film. Animation, of course, gives its creator the ultimate level of control – though I do not cover it in depth here, save for its appearance in Méliès' work. In chapter 2.4, I examine the question of animation as one of several possible influences on Visual Theatre. In terms of puppets and puppetness, aside from 3D puppet stop-motion techniques, most animation does not

just one example of Keaton's fascination with manipulation: of the mise-en-scène, the limits of the frame, and of course his own body. In contrast to Chaplin, Keaton draws much more heavily on a stylized, bio-mechanical acting and movement tradition, and the puppet aesthetic which accompanies it. With all the turmoil and excitement that regularly goes on around him, Keaton keeps an utterly straight face. The deadpan expression is used primarily for comic effect, but beyond the immediate humorous incongruity there is a deeper ontological joke. It could be argued that Keaton is making himself intentionally puppet-like, not just bodily in the freedom of movement and with a certain passivity to the whirlwind going on around him (literally, in a film like *Steamboat Bill Jr* (1928)), but in the receptivity of his features to audience interpretation.³⁴

The performance of the human players was not the only aspect of film production that drew upon the puppet-infused stage background of this new breed of film directors. As Wood notes, the possibilities that film offered, particularly in terms of mise-en-scène and editing, showed how "... puppet-like our celluloid selves could be" (Wood, 2003:168). Méliès use of these techniques was seminal, and I would argue, has not been surpassed, as regards the level of manipulation, if nothing else. But later, more narrative based cinema used the same tricks, only in a more subtle way. Walter Benjamin, in his hugely influential essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (in Benjamin, 1999), highlighted some of the very basic ways in which editing was being and would increasingly be used to make the actor's performance just one of a number of constituent parts of the narrative, rather than putting it at the forefront as used to

fit the generally accepted criteria of what it is to be a puppet – I discuss this later in the work, making particular reference to Steve Tillis' (1992) definitions of puppets/puppetness.

³⁴ Arguably, a similar technique is employed in 'The Method' (Lee Strasberg's acting style, foundation of the performances of Brando, De Niro, and Pacino, among others). Pacino has been particularly singled out for his use of it, and seemingly praised and lampooned in equal measure for giving the audience a thoroughly blank stare, which they interpret as the appropriate deep emotion, based upon the context of the scene. Lepage gives an interesting description of Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*, that suggests 'The Method' is in some respects close to the puppeteer's practice, yet differs from it also: 'Emotion in an actor' he says, 'provides him with tears, not understanding, nor a mastery of this very complex art that consists in moving the audience. An actor must find the energy that will produce an emotion in his audience, not feel it himself. This is what is poorly understood in the principle of alienation in Bertolt Brecht's work' (Lepage and Charest, 1998:153).

be the case. He gives an example of an actor whose role necessitates their response to an unexpected knock at the door, and suggests that the director could, say, fire a shot behind the actor, and include their genuine startled reaction as the take used in the final cut. This, he suggests, is all part of a movement that takes the power away from the actor, and their vision of the performance, and puts it in the hands of the director – effectively a puppetisation of the actor's process. Benjamin's suggestion that we no longer identify with the actor but with the camera is interesting: I would agree that we do not necessarily identify with the actor in the same way, but I do not think that is to the detriment of the actor or the film. The actor might feel they are a puppet in the sense Segel (1995) often implies – that they are no longer masters of their own fate, that there is now a puppet-master, in the form of the director, and more specifically the *auteur* (a term, as Hayward notes, often associated with art film from the 1950s onwards, but actually dating from avant-garde cinema of the 1920s (Hayward, 1997:12)).

If we agree with Benjamin, that our identification is with the camera rather than the actor, then this puppet-influenced sensibility has, and I argue, must, have been good for the overall strength of vision in film: for the prevalence of a *mise-en-scène* where the actor, the lighting, the set, environment and camera positioning are equal players in the finished work of art. Part of what, with this argument, I wish to achieve, is to remove some of the negative connotations surrounding the notions of actor and director as puppet and puppet-master. To return to the example of *Modern Times*, here we see an *auteur* who is at once puppet and puppet-master: Chaplin's performance exists as a depiction (mediated by the camera) of his actual movements and gestures; it also exists as a performance mediated by the techniques of framing and later editing. At a further level of mediation, Chaplin sometimes plays with the speed of the film, though in a much subtler way than in many of the early silent comedies. In the scene where he roller-skates blindfolded perilously near a sheer drop on the partially constructed floor of the department store where he is working, he performs at a slower speed than normal to match up with the slower frame rate he has instructed that the scene be shot at – 18fps as opposed to 24fps (Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, 2003). So when the scene is speeded up to match the frame

rate of the rest of the film, the jeopardy his character appears to face is increased. As the auteur he manipulates his performance, both at the point of delivery and later in its mediated form, and here the puppet/control dynamic must be seen to be a positive mode: a complicity between the actor's performance and the manipulation of the director, all in the service of the final product, the film.

Benjamin quotes Rudolf Arnheim on the new status of the actor "... as a stage prop chosen for its characteristics and ... inserted at the proper place" (Benjamin, 1999:223). We might compare this with Bordwell and Thompson's sense of the word 'prop' as applied to its cinematic usage

"The manipulation of a shot's setting for narrative functions also implies that the setting may create "props" – another term indicating the overlap between cinematic and theatrical mise-en-scène. When part of the setting is motivated to operate actively within the ongoing action, we are justified in calling it a prop" (Bordwell and Thompson, 1980:80).

We may justifiably call an animated prop a puppet: that, I think, is the sense behind both these descriptions of film modes and phenomena. That Bordwell and Thompson do not use the word 'puppet' points perhaps to the marginalization (for much of the 20th century) of the strand of thought, put forward by the Modernist theatre/film practitioners whom I have been investigating.³⁵

Throughout the 20th century there have been calls for a more actor-centred film-making process, and it is understandable that some actors should be unnerved by practices such as that used by many directors, of shouting direction, character motivation or new versions of dialogue while the film is running, knowing that the actor's voices will be overdubbed later. Famously, Fellini (caring, presumably, more about the attitude and appearance of the actor in the scene, than the 'naturalism') would often make his actors simply count from one to ten, knowing that if he got the visual aspect of the shot right, the dialogue could be

³⁵ Andrew Sofer's fascinating *The Stage Life of Props* (2003) provides an excellent insight into the use of props in the history of text-based theatre, but its conclusion is depressingly familiar as one belonging to an academic whose background is in English and traditional text-based drama: the props have importance, but are always secondary to the actors. John Bell, in conversation during a masterclass in May 2009, commented that to him, it is obvious that Sofer is writing about puppets and performing objects, though he never names the object of his study as such.

recorded later and added in post-dubbing (Van Watson, 2002:72).³⁶ Farber lamented the actor's enforced distancing (as he saw it) from their roles, through being given less space, metaphorically, to work in and being sidelined from their previous position as the main component of the film (Farber, 1998). More recently, David Bordwell's essay 'Intensified Continuity' (2002) took a similar if more balanced position, suggesting that modern American film acting was, to some extent, being hampered by excessive use of close-ups and rapid cutting, and placing

“...a greater constraint on actors' performances. The contemporary stress on close-ups is not that, say, of the Russian montage filmmakers, who filled their films with hands, feet, and props in dynamic relation to the actors. In intensified continuity, the face is privileged, especially the mouth and eyes... gestures which earlier filmmakers would have considered flagrantly self-conscious - arcing camera, big close-ups, the flourishes of a Welles or Hitchcock have become default values in ordinary scenes and minor movies” (Bordwell, 2002:25)

Welles and Hitchcock both fit the classic description of the *auteur*, the individual who leads the work and gives meaning to it: this thesis makes a further claim relating to the central characteristics of the *auteur*, drawing on the theatre / film genealogy previously traced. For the practitioners highlighted in this research, manipulation of actor, performance and image are key. It is in this sense that I use the term *close-control* here, and link it to the dynamic of Puppet-master – Puppet – Puppetness that moved from theatre into early film. Hitchcock appreciated the importance of his actors' performances, and to some extent went about creating them in a 'traditional' actor-led way: conversely, much of his technique and sensibility approached actors as 'puppets' in a metaphorical sense, primarily as instruments for his vision. Even if his “I never said all actors are

³⁶ Interestingly there seems to be a culture in Italian cinema of not minding if the sound and picture (recorded speech and the movement of actors' mouths, specifically) aren't perfectly synchronised: how much this relates to examples given in my earlier discussion of dislocation of sound and image (silent film, Brecht, puppet and mask tradition) I cannot say – it may date back to the *Commedia dell' Arte*. Van Watson comments that in Fellini's case it was not just a disregard for synchronisation, but often a purposeful tampering whose aim was a kind of “verbal sabotage” (Van Watson, 2002:72) as evidenced in, for example, *Fellini-Satyricon* (1969). Japanese animation also traditionally shows little interest in lip-sync.

cattle; what I said was all actors should be treated like cattle” quote is apocryphal³⁷, his attitude undoubtedly leant in that direction. His films display a sensibility similar to that eloquently outlined by Bazin:

“The human being is all-important in the theatre. The drama on the screen can exist without actors. A banging door, a leaf in the wind, waves beating on the shore can heighten the dramatic effect. Some film masterpieces use man only as an accessory, like an extra, or in counterpoint to nature, which is the true leading character” (Bordwell and Thompson, 1980:78)

Hitchcock is certainly not alone in his re-positioning of the role of the actor, and fascination with the possibilities of *mise-en-scène* as a dramatic tool on an equal footing with the performances of the human protagonists.

The concept of actors as ‘cattle’ has transmuted into “... the concept of the actor as ‘meat-puppet’ ” (Green, 2004) and the desire from the director or the auteur for this level of close-control of performance, shooting and editing remains unabated. Among actors there are varying responses to being a puppet of one kind or another: perhaps unsurprisingly, there is a greater tolerance of this requirement in sci-fi and fantasy films. As Kevin Bacon admitted, working on Paul Verhoeven’s *Hollow Man* (2000), “Basically I’m a puppet” (Parkinson, 2005) – describing the task of playing an updated version of the Invisible Man, and having his performance mediated directly through a lot of blue screen work and prosthetics, as well as the subsequent digital manipulation that would be added to his performance. Verhoeven also memorably directed an actor who is arguably the greatest meat-puppet of them all, Arnold Schwarzenegger. In Verhoeven’s *Total Recall* (1990), as in the *Terminator* films, and many others, Schwarzenegger makes copious use of not only stand-ins and stunt doubles, but puppets and prosthetics, and as he has admitted, it can be tricky telling him from a prosthetic or a puppet: speaking of the sequence with the crane in *Terminator 3* (2003), he said “I would say it’s about 50 per cent to 70 per cent me. To be honest

³⁷ His daughter, Pat Hitchcock, goes some way to clearing this up “But he didn’t say actors were cattle -- he said actors should be treated like cattle. That all started on a movie he made called ‘Mr. and Mrs. Smith,’ with Carole Lombard and Robert Montgomery. He happened to say to Carole, who had a great sense of humor, ‘Actors should be treated like cattle.’ The next day she brought three calves on the set, one named Carole, one named Bob and one named Hitch. And that’s how it started -- because he loved Carole Lombard’s sense of humor.” (Sragow, 1999)

with you, sometimes I don't know" (Parkinson, 2004). To classical actors this may sound a horrifying admission, but I would argue that his interchangeability with puppets and prosthetic devices is a virtue in his oeuvre: in the age of film, Schwarzenegger does not need to worry about his performance being spliced up: the splicing between the actor and the effects is intrinsic to the performance, and his Keaton-esque impassivity has served him well in his playing of robots and cyborgs, who are, ontologically, the progeny of the puppet.

This section has shown how the practices of Modernist avant-garde theatre were conveyed into the new medium of film, both with those artists who moved from theatre to cinema, and through the influence of the animated, Expressionist, puppetised stage on those already making films. With this move to cinema came the intensification of key practices and sensibilities of the Modernist stage: most notably, puppetness and its associated notion, close-control. Close-control, as I define it, originated in theatre; a justification for its implementation (and for replacing the human actor with the *Übermarionette*) is eloquently set out by Craig:

"Acting is not an art. It is therefore incorrect to speak of the actor as an artist. For accident is the enemy of the artistic. Art is the exact antithesis of Pandemonium (sic), and Pandemonium is created by the tumbling together of many accidents; Art arrives only by design. Therefore in order to make any work of art it is clear we may work in those materials with which we can calculate. Man is not one of these materials. (Craig, in Taxidou, 1998:166).

The scope for puppetness and close-control grew with the advent of theories of film art. The lineage, to which so many of those experimenting with and defining what cinema could be, belonged, was such that the new medium acted as an incubator for many of the Modernist avant-garde ideals of performance. While their expression in theatre subsided and lay dormant for much of the 20th century, cinema, and particularly the cinema of the auteur, acted as the conduit for these ideals. In the next part, using these first four sections on its antecedents as a foundation, I explore the emergence of and critical reaction to contemporary Visual Theatre; in the section that follows it, I examine how it evidences its Modernist inheritance, or whether it might in fact exhibit a primarily Post-Modern mode of practice.

2.2 What is Visual Theatre?

This thesis takes it as evident that there is such an entity as 'Visual Theatre'. What exactly the term refers to, what it might encompass, is still an open question, to which this research aims to provide some insight, and some answers, based upon an analysis of the form and some of its important antecedents. It might be argued that all theatre is fundamentally visual in nature, or at least that the visual is always an important element: in which case, might a term like Visual Theatre be tautologous, and therefore essentially meaningless? For the tag 'Visual Theatre' to have meaning, we need it to tell us something new about the world, to describe a movement or mode of practice suitably distinct enough from those which came before it, to warrant a new moniker being applied.

To start with a philosophical approach, it is perhaps easier to begin to define Visual Theatre by stating what it is not: that is to say, the context in which it emerged, and the dominant form(s) against which it rebelled. Though even this may be problematic, because the status of Visual Theatre is changing: whilst this makes it ripe for an evaluation it also means that statements one could have made just a few years ago such as "Visual Theatre is not mainstream theatre" or "Visual Theatre is what is not on in the West End" are no longer completely accurate.

Modernist avant-garde theatre practice was in part a reaction to the high-art, text-driven theatre of the end of the 19th century. A similar movement can be seen in the culture of theatre making at the end of the 20th century³⁸. At every turn, theatre seemed to be losing out to other media, be it the revived cinema (which was recovering from its own mass audience drop-off in the 1980s), the internet and computer gaming, or television broadcasting. The initial reaction of West End theatre producers and programmers to a slump in audience numbers and critical acclaim was to seek out new playwrights, or stage revivals with imported

³⁸ Richard Schechner suggests, provocatively, that "The fact is that theatre as we have known and practiced it – the staging of written dramas – will be the string quartet of the twenty-first century: a beloved but extremely limited genre, a subdivision of performance" (Schechner, 1992:8).

Hollywood stars in leading roles³⁹.

What is surprising is that these stage producers and directors who were trying so hard to ape the success of film by bringing in elements that they thought made the movies successful ignored the very aspects of their own plays that were most popular with audiences. A large proportion of which, both domestic and international, surely did not go to the theatre to be enlightened, but to be entertained; they did not go to be sworn at, as the supposedly 'alternative' playwrights would have it; they didn't even go just because the production had some star-power attached to it: the most resilient and successful West End shows were those that employed the use of spectacle, and the people who steered the course of what was produced didn't even seem to realise it. This was, in part, because the mainstream had tried quietly to forget the message and mode of the Modernist theatre practitioners, and to relegate the spectacle, brashness and anti-naturalism of these productions once again to the status of 'low culture', as opposed to the 'high art' of the well-made plays they were producing. The highlight of much of what the West End produced was evidenced in what audiences left the theatre discussing - the revolving stage of "Les Miserables", the helicopter at the end of "Miss Saigon" - these were what justified the extortionately high ticket prices and what compelled them to recommend the shows to their friends. Richard Eyre grudgingly describes "Les Mis" as "a dazzling fusion of classical and experimental theatre" (Eyre, 2000:343) while bemoaning the musical and spectacle theatre that dominated the West End in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet it was in these 'spectacular' productions that Modernist theatre seemed to have had its most lasting influence: and it was in these shows

³⁹ New sensations from overseas like Yasmina Reza's *Art* were given much fanfare. The establishment turned its eye to playwrights on the mainstream edge of the Fringe, such as Royal Court alumnus Mark Ravenhill whose Trainspottingesque *Shopping and Fucking* unleashed a slew of similar plays that were supposed to shock theatre out of its despondency. Theatre producers and directors, observing how they continued to lose audiences to the cinemas showing Hollywood films tried injecting a bit of transatlantic glamour into the English stage: among the first being Raquel Welch in *The Millionairess*; a succession of Hollywood's leading ladies played in a stage adaptation of *The Graduate* that ran for several years; Kevin Spacey appeared in *The Iceman Cometh* and ended by staying on and becoming the Artistic Director of the Old Vic. The trend for American movie actors to gain some kudos by appearing on the London stage continues unabated to this day.

and their distant cousin, the Opera⁴⁰, that mainstream theatre in the last decades of the millennium retained the most life.

Against this backdrop there grew a true 'alternative' theatre. Visual Theatre is one of a number of contemporary avant-garde theatrical movements, the respective boundaries of which become more defined with the passage of time, but are still being debated and often fall short of satisfactory delineation. This thesis does not seek to impose artificial boundaries, or needlessly subdivide the range of current performance practice strands. A work such as Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006) is, like this research, a new reading of contemporary avant-garde theatre, which invokes the historical avant-garde. Lehmann's book, rightly or wrongly, finds a need to invent new terms to accompany its new reading. My thesis, while positing a previously little-recognised theatrical lineage for the type of theatre it discusses, is not instigating or attempting to force new terminology onto an already full roster of terms used to try and describe the variations of contemporary performance practice. This research responds to an already extant usage: in reviews, event scheduling and promotion, the term is being used to a purpose, but without much reflection as to why or how the performances which are commonly linked to it conform to some set of ideals or practices.

I have mentioned the forums in which 'Visual Theatre' appears as a description of a form of practice or type of show: predominantly in the reviews, event programming and promotional materials of theatrical performances taking place within the English-speaking world, and with most examples coming from the United Kingdom. Therefore, this thesis situates the emergence of Visual Theatre

⁴⁰ Of course not all opera includes the use of lavish spectacle in its staging, but for much of its history that has been the predominant mode. The form is thought to have grown out of a Renaissance desire to revive classical Greek drama, and elevate the musical aspect of theatre by having the words of the piece sung, in a similar way to the Greek chorus' singing or chanting of lines. The fact that it originated in Italy, land of Commedia dell' Arte and Carnival, two highly 'spectacular' practices, is indicative. Yet again, the visual aspect is too often neglected in writing about the form: opera is seen primarily as a type of theatre that combines libretto and music, and the third aspect, the particularly spectacular staging of so much classic opera, is relegated. Bell (2009) comments on the widespread diminishing or simple lack of understanding of the visual aspect of theatre in so much theatre teaching and criticism, giving the example that one can study Greek tragedy in college (as he did), and never talk about the fact that it was a drama with masks: to him, this makes about as much sense as discussing Commedia dell' Arte and only talking about the scenarios.

primarily in the United Kingdom, and around the beginning of the 1990s. This is not to say that it is an exclusively British style: with Lepage as a prime exponent, and important antecedents such as Meyerhold and Schlemmer coming from the European avant-garde, it would be foolish to suggest its influences, genesis and practice are limited to these islands. But, crucially, its emergence, recognition and refinement as an idea, are linked to this time and place. This thesis demonstrates the way in which Visual Theatre, as a distinct idea and mode of practice, came about in large part as a rebellion to the dominance of the text in English-speaking, and in particular U.K., theatre. Therefore this thesis concentrates for the most part on productions that grew from, or became part of, the ferment of Visual Theatre's emergence in this country. There may well be theatre in Europe, and elsewhere in the world, that conforms to many of the traits of Visual Theatre as identified in this research – I identify companies such as South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company as producing Visual Theatre work – but the emphasis of this thesis is on the U.K.'s specific context as the place that spawned and gestated the idea of Visual Theatre, a reaction to a particular theatrical landscape in which the text had for so long been central to the idea of performance.

Schechner (2000) suggests there could be five avant-gardes – the 'historical'; the 'current' avant-garde, of which there are many strands, among them activist political theatre practitioners, descended from the 'guerrilla and street-theatre movements of the 1960s' (Schechner, 2000:312), of whom Augusto Boal is the most famous exponent, but also including what Schechner calls a 'classical' (Schechner, 2000:311) avant-gardism: that of Peter Brook, Robert Wilson and Pina Bausch amongst others, for whom Schechner claims avant-garde as a style rather than a reaction to the mainstream as it was originally conceived. Finally, he identifies the 'tradition-seeking' avant-garde exemplified by figures such as Grotowski and Barba, and the 'forward-looking' avant-garde who prize 'artistic innovation and originality': they are a group who are

“... heir to the historical avant-garde, on the lookout for new ideas and techniques - multimedia, video hookups and interactive telecommunications, megasound, laser light shows, cybernetics and hyper or virtual time/space.

The works of Robert Lepage, Laurie Anderson, John Jesurun and the Wooster

Group spring to mind.” (Schechner, 2000:314).

So where does that place a definition of ‘Visual Theatre’? Certainly the last group Schechner describes fits the understanding posited in this thesis, and his assertion that their style of avant-gardism is the natural heir to the ‘historical avant-garde’ is in agreement with my argument that a direct line can be traced from a Modernist Theatre sensibility through to Visual Theatre sensibility. But what of practitioners such as Robert Wilson? He is often mentioned in the same breath as Robert Lepage, as an exemplar of Visual Theatre style, yet for the British company Forced Entertainment, Wilson, Pina Bausch and the Wooster Group stood as icons of political theatre (Etchells, 1999:10), which contradicts or at least re-orders Schechner’s classification. Part of the problem is that it could be argued that trying to arrive at a definition of a particular style or movement in theatre is better arrived at by consensus rather than by any one individual.⁴¹

Such is the newness of many of the terms and descriptions being used in the practical and academic analysis of theatre today that even relatively recent books whose task it is to offer standard definitions of theatrical terms are struggling to keep up. *The Penguin Dictionary of the Theatre* seemingly does not attempt to cover any term relating to theatre created since approximately the mid-1960s⁴². The nearest it gets is to Visual Theatre’s most recent ancestor - Theatre Total: a

⁴¹ Both Foucault and Eco cite Borges’ excellent *Other Inquisitions* (1964) as a text that points towards the “arbitrary and conjectural” nature of classifications (Eco, 2000:122) that we use to try and “tame the wild profusion of existing things” (Foucault, 2001:16). Borges parodies hopes of some kind of natural classification that might be discovered through the study of semantics in his description of the *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Recognitions*, a Chinese encyclopaedia that gives a definitive list of classifications of animals, dividing them into:

“(a) those that belong to the Emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they were mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel’s hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a flower vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance” (Borges, 1964:103).

It is also the case that many historical, cultural and artistic movements are defined with the benefit of hindsight, and there is risk in ‘calling’ something too early: no cultural commentator wants to be like the American news channels in the 2000 presidential election who prematurely ‘called for’ first one nominee and then the other, the very act of which may have skewed the eventual result, a sort of Copenhagen interpretation writ large.

⁴² Its understanding of ‘dramaturg’ is “... as a sort of reader-cum-literary editor” and suggests it “... resists determined attempts at acclimatisation”[from its native Germany] (Taylor, 1993:90). This alone is indicative of its rather tradition-bound approach.

“concept of theatre as above all a director’s medium, using the text only as one relatively minor part of an overall theatrical experience of lights, music, movement of all sorts, sets and costumes” (Taylor, 1993:315).

Total Theatre (in its English-language formulation) stems from Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, via his collaborator Jean-Louis Barrault, but has come to act as a banner for much of the alternative, experimental theatre that grew out of the happenings, performance art and experimental theatre of the 1960s. Taylor’s description here also bears considerable similarities to the theatre Craig envisaged. The British theatre company The People Show could be said to work in a Total Theatre mode, as could The Wooster Group, Robert Wilson and other American practitioners whose careers took off in the 1970s. In Britain Peter Brook represents an example of the Total Theatre practitioner, though, in a spectrum so broad that it encompasses the visually lush Wilson and the visually austere Brook, it can sometimes seem that the practitioners are more dissimilar than alike. Of considerable importance is the influence of theatre/mime school École Jacques Lecoq, at its peak in the 1970s, which turned out a number of students who would go on to be some of the key practitioners of Visual Theatre: companies such as Théâtre de Complicité (now Complicité) and The Right Size were born of Lecoq’s training, as well as individuals such as Steven Berkoff, Ariane Mnouchkine (Theatre du Soleil), Phelim McDermott of Improbable Theatre and the film, theatre and puppet director Julie Taymor.

So there is a direct link (via practitioners and their mentors) between Total Theatre and Visual Theatre. In which case, when did these practitioners start making ‘Visual Theatre’, as distinct from Total Theatre or Physical Theatre or Experimental Theatre? By the 1970s Total Theatre had announced itself - but has Visual Theatre yet done the same?

Within academic discourse on contemporary experimental theatre, ‘Visual Theatre’ does not always carry the same meaning. Indeed, the initial letters still appear, for the most part, in lower case: Physical Theatre gets capitals with much greater frequency. Visual Theatre also often appears as part of ‘visual and physical theatre’ or even ‘visual and Physical theatre’, which is surely semantically quite revealing. Of course there are instances where upper case Visual Theatre does not hold the same meaning as the one I give: Kiefer’s

Shakespeare's Visual Theatre (2003) does not suggest that one should include Shakespeare in the same tight lineage as Craig, Meyerhold, Lecoq and Complicité.⁴³ Whereas Wilson and Milne's *The Space Between: The Art of Visual Theatre and Puppetry in Australia* (2004) is an upper case use of the term that very closely mirrors this thesis' definition. The use of the term that most closely matches my definition of it appears in *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (Huxley & Witts, 1996), where it emerges (in lower case, still) in the notes after an essay by Adolphe Appia, as a suggested cross-reference "Wilson and Lepage – late twentieth-century examples of visual theatre" (Huxley & Witts, 2000: 24). This lower case usage also appears in Kershaw's *The Radical in Performance* (2005), where he suggests visual theatre is one of a number of strands of performance practice grouped around underground, fringe or alternative theatre⁴⁴. Allain and Harvie also use the lower case when referring to the theatre of Kantor, claiming him as a practitioner working within "visual theatre in the second half of the twentieth century" (Allain and Harvie, 2006:47). Meyerhold appears as a key figure in their definition, with his show *The Government Inspector* (1926) "an influential precursor of physical and visual theatre" (2006:96). They also suggest there are "post-modern forms of visual theatre" (2006:174). Their linking of practitioners to the term broadly agrees with the one set out in this thesis, but their time frame for the use of it seems to span sixty or more years. There is a question over how intentional this is: my sense of their usage is that it is intentionally vague, but searching for a definition by suggesting practitioners who seem to them to share an ethos. If this is the case, my research adds to the academic and practical search for a less tentative use of the term, by arguing for a

⁴³ Though it does bear some relation to my discussion of puppetness in its exploration of Shakespeare's novel use of personified abstractions (Spring, Winter, Rumour etc) a visual theatrical trope in an age that Kiefer argues was otherwise resolutely textural and aural.

⁴⁴ He also says that "a common mistake has been to link some or all of the new theatre movements too forcefully to the historical avant-garde of the twentieth century" (Kershaw, 2005:60). He may be right about many of the theatre movements he describes: Kershaw also seems to have an axe to grind about political and radical theatres and their influence and scope. As this thesis outlines, while there was a radical (in the political sense) element to some of the performance which I cite as an antecedent to contemporary Visual Theatre, the predominant sensibility was not a political one but an aesthetic and philosophical one.

Visual Theatre genealogy and positing a set of key principles and practices, through which a Visual Theatre logos is discoverable.

Such a definition is only just beginning to emerge in the pages of academic texts: the forums for discussion about Visual and the various other alternative theatres are still, predominantly, print journalism and the internet. Yet all too often, even here, it appears in the form 'physical/visual theatre'. A number of online guides and FAQs list it as a type (Clay, 2004) or aspect (PeoplePlayUK, 2005) of Physical Theatre. Judith Rudakoff goes some way to making a distinction between the Physical and Visual theatre she sees at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival: "physical-visual theatre" is broken down into "visual imagery" and "physical vocabulary" (Rudakoff, 2001). There is undoubtedly a link, but there is also a difference, the understanding of which is still at an early stage. People Play UK seems to suggest that the Physical Theatre of the 1980s produced a desire for a greater engagement with the visual in theatre: this fits with my understanding of Visual Theatre as being in some senses an offshoot of Physical Theatre. It is important to determine whether this is actually the case or not, as it would surely impact on any consensus definition or genealogy of the idea of Visual Theatre.

This thesis argues for a distinct definition of Visual Theatre, and one that is arrived at through analysis of its key traits and tropes, conventions and practices, coupled with a new – and illuminating – genealogy. These tropes, these practices, this sensibility as I term it, are a direct (and admittedly sometimes indirect) result of this genealogy. As suggested previously, there are direct links: between mentors and students (such as Meyerhold and Eisenstein); there are less direct links, where the work of one practitioner or mode of practice has been a credited influence (such as Craig and Welles); and there are what at first glance might seem to be quite indirect (and often unacknowledged, indeed unknown) links, which can take the form of an ethos, a sensibility, or an affinity with some particular aspect of performance. This thesis traces all three types: the direct student to teacher genealogy where it exists, though part of my argument is that there is not a direct, unbroken line. Many of the practitioners and movements discussed here died with no obvious immediate theatrical offspring. A question then arises – how can contemporary Visual Theatre be related to Modernist avant-garde theatre practice, as claimed in this research? The thesis recognises

that in theatre at least, there was a 'break', where much of what was accumulated by Modernist avant-garde theatre practice was seemingly 'lost'. However, this is where the genealogy of ideas, of sensibilities, comes into play. It is not argued that all those practitioners, both of the mainstream and of the avant-garde, that came between the two periods given particular attention in this research – the turns of the 20th and 21st centuries respectively – had *no* impact on contemporary Visual Theatre: just that the history of 20th century performance is not as linear and regular a progression as is often supposed. That is to say, Brook may well have had a direct or indirect influence on Lepage: but not as much as Jarry or Craig or Eisenstein.

In this sense, whether a practitioner or movement immediately preceded Visual Theatre is less important, in the terms outlined here, than to the extent which they share a common theatrical 'DNA'. Visual Theatre shares a lot of its 'DNA' with Physical Theatre, but the two terms are not interchangeable, and the latter is by no means the sole progenitor of the former. Many important traits were transmitted, but Physical Theatre was just one conduit for these.

Currently, the definitions are very much in the hands of the practitioners, with the result that many companies' websites and promotional materials do not differentiate between Physical and Visual theatre partly because they do not feel the need to trouble themselves with separate definitions and partly, no doubt, because they are pragmatically trying to interest the greatest possible audience. It is often up to commissioning bodies or venues to supply stronger messages about the state of the art, as the Battersea Arts Centre and Young Vic did with their British Festival of Visual Theatre (inaugurated in 1995). Clare Bayley, in her reporting of the festival suggests:

"The term "visual theatre" used to be a sneaky euphemism for mime when you didn't want to put people off. Now, though, it has evolved into a genuine branch of theatre, judging by the British Festival of Visual Theatre at BAC. It is made and enjoyed by people who like their stage pictures memorable but still want a story and acting along the way. Practitioners are often in the thrall of cinema, their brains respond more eagerly to the syntax of images than the linearity of language and conventional literature, but live theatre is their chosen medium. (Bayley, 1995).

One method of defining Visual Theatre that seems to be much favoured by those who are involved in it is to point towards companies whose mode of devising and performance outcomes seem to offer a shared sensibility about the visual and a collaborative approach to theatre-making, whether the companies explicitly state that they are engaged in Visual Theatre production or not. By looking at these companies, one should at least have a sense of what is being put forward as a definition of Visual Theatre, even if a consensus has not yet been reached. There are, as I have mentioned, many small-scale companies working in a Visual Theatre mode (I have belonged to at least four or five), but to concentrate on the mid- and top-level groups, an incomplete list would have to include: Complicité, Improbable Theatre, Indefinite Articles, The Right Size, Faulty Optic, Forkbeard Fantasy, Trestle, Horse and Bamboo, Robert Wilson, Julie Taymor - and of course Robert Lepage and his company Ex Machina⁴⁵.

Looking at the methods and outcomes of the companies listed, one can begin to get a better sense of what it means to be a Visual Theatre practitioner. This thesis is accompanied by a piece of work-in-progress Visual Theatre practice: this is discussed in greater depth in the sections on Methodology and Practice; one key point is that it finds value in the practice of the author, and the practice of others, leading the research, where it can. If academia and print media theatre criticism cannot yet give a satisfactory definition of what constitutes a Visual Theatre piece or practitioner, then it is surely relevant and useful to gauge practical work that draws on or points to others for its inspiration: to map and read these 'clusters', and from this, assemble a list of key productions, companies and practitioners whose similarities and dissimilarities can be collated and judged, to

⁴⁵ All but the last three are British companies, which bears some exploration. Robert Lepage is well supported in Quebecois Canada, but is little known in the rest of the country, while Robert Wilson is well known in certain circles in the US. Both are as well known in Britain (and indeed parts of Europe, in countries whose festivals fund and invite their productions, such as the Wiener Festwochen, which regularly hosts Lepage's work) as in their home countries, which suggests that this country not only produces many Visual Theatre companies, but attracts them as well. Once again, the evidence is indicative that Britain, and London specifically, are key locations globally in the development of Visual Theatre, if not its hub, however more research needs to be done, both on the work produced in and brought to other countries, and on its critical and academic reception there. Again, this is research which is beyond the scope of this thesis, but which would be valuable for an understanding of the wider context.

reveal shared practices, tropes and sensibilities. The case studies that make up the final part of this thesis go into more depth about why some of these pieces, companies and practitioners should be judged to be operating within the mode of practice of Visual Theatre.

The feature common to all of them is an attempt to fuse together the elements that make theatre, and to proceed through collaboration. Within this of course there is a broad spectrum: Robert Wilson

“collaborates with performers (often amateur), writers and composers ... nevertheless, he’s an undiluted autocrat and auteur, barely crediting his writers ... and using designers as mere marionettes to execute his designs”(Eyre and Wright, 2000:368)

Whereas Lepage is still very much the director of his work, but utilises a dramaturg and is open to the suggestions of everyone in his company: his vision is achieved through a sense of shared responsibility with the company. Lepage comments -

“We don’t lead our production to a given place. We let the production guide us there. We try not to force our ideas, our concepts, on to it; the show has its own logic, poetry, rhythms, that we have to discover”(Lepage, 1998:95).

Complicité describe themselves as

“Always changing and moving forward to incorporate new stimuli, the principles of the work have remained close to the original impulses: seeking what is most alive, integrating text, music, image and action to create surprising, disruptive theatre” (Complicité, 2005).

Acknowledging their beginnings as a group of collaborators, which, to some extent, they still are, they are now led by Simon McBurney as their Artistic Director. The companies on the list all work in variations of this form and ethos, and though they might at their outer limits occupy quite different regions of theatre, the essential aspect of integration of all the elements of a piece informs their practice in each case.

As well as sharing an ethos of creating collaborative, devised, integrated theatre, these practitioners also share a number of key interests which find expression practically or symbolically in their work. Foremost amongst these is a fascination with puppets and object manipulation, and with the cinematic - the animation of

the stage. This thesis makes the claim that there is nothing accidental about this. This fascination with puppet and object performance has not sprung fully-formed into the consciousness of contemporary Visual Theatre practitioners: it is the product of the 'journey' of puppets and puppetness through 20th century performance practice. Dedicated puppet companies such as Faulty Optic and Steven Mottram's Animata of course use puppets in all of their pieces, but in fact every one of the companies mentioned has repeatedly used puppets in their work - Julie Taymor uses them in both stage and film work, Lepage (who worked in puppet theatre early in his career) and Wilson use traditional (in the sense of figure-based) puppetry in their shows as well as more abstract object theatre and animated sets of the kind Craig championed. Complicité use puppetry in their wholly devised pieces as well as working it into adaptations such as their production of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Improbable's cabaret/expressionist influenced piece *Shockheaded Peter* made great use of puppets and animated sets and many of their subsequent shows continue this trend. The case studies presented in the third section of this thesis closely examine key works of Complicité, Improbable and Lepage in the light of these central claims concerning the importance of puppets and puppetness to the form of Visual Theatre.

Allied to the central importance of puppets and puppetness is a belief in the *close control* of the image that is being presented to the audience. Visual Theatre, like Physical Theatre before it, is very much concerned with the control and direction of bodies, which in Physical Theatre, as in Dance, is most commonly referred to as the choreography of the piece. This thesis shows how what is happening in a Visual Theatre piece goes beyond this definition of choreography as applied to previous forms of theatre, for several important reasons. Though there are undoubtedly more differences between Physical and Visual Theatre than I will go into here, for the purposes of this thesis the most important one has to do with how the piece is received, and the director's understanding of this. In discussing Physical Theatre, I mentioned the aspect of choreography of bodies: Visual Theatre also choreographs bodies, but it does much more besides, and most importantly it 'choreographs' both bodies and set, indeed, the whole stage 'image' (Craig would have used the phrase 'stage vision'). Physical Theatre, like

Dance, is, I argue, received differently by an audience than Visual Theatre is. In Physical Theatre, the 'embodiment' of the actor is prime, and the audience's sense of this embodiment. By this I mean there is a particular identification with the physicality of the performer's body on the part of the audience, and it is of particular focus, in the same way that in a text-based piece the quality of the performer's delivery of the text is of special importance. With Visual Theatre, this is not the case, at least not to the same extent. In Visual Theatre, the audience is watching the actor's physical performance – and as in Physical Theatre, arguably with a closer focus than is the case in most text-based theatre – but the physical performance of the actor is not the single most important element. One key difference is that whereas in Physical Theatre the prime focus is simply on the performer's body, either on its own or amongst things (set, props, lighting, puppets etc), in Visual Theatre the focus is more on the performer's body *and* things. That is to say, where the Physical Theatre stage is primarily about watching animated bodies, the Visual Theatre stage is primarily about watching animated bodies and animated things, and their interaction and integration in the overall *image* given to the audience.

This thesis argues that two ideas are central to Visual Theatre practice: *puppetness*, and *the cinematic*. These ideas can be examined as discrete phenomena, but are better seen as existing on the same continuum, and as part of the same sensibility. Both are discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter, but it is useful to make reference to them again in the context of an analysis about where Visual Theatre diverges from, or adds to, the avant-garde forms that preceded it. This is particularly the case with Physical Theatre, where further work will be needed to differentiate between the two.

Visual Theatre is a theatre which deals in images, manipulated, controlled, (puppetised) moving images. As such, while one can discuss it in Physical Theatre and Dance terms such as choreography, it makes more sense to use terms more commonly associated with images, both still and moving. The influence of the cinematic in Visual Theatre practice can be seen both in the sensibility at play in the creation of the work, and from the image received by the audience. Visual Theatre revels in the liveness of what it presents, but it also plays with notions of the recorded, of cutting, splicing, montage and mise-en-

scène. It speaks the language of theatre, yet it also speaks the language of film with its meticulously planned shots and camera angles, and integration of elements such as light, sound and music with the image presented on screen. As I have previously argued, Visual Theatre could be seen at least in part as a theatrical response to audiences' greater cinematic literacy and appetite for the techniques of film and multimedia. That Visual Theatre has learned this language, and can speak to the audience with it, while remaining 'theatrical' is surely one of its greatest strengths, and one of the most rewarding aspects for the audience.

Visual Theatre might also be characterised as an advocate of new technologies: a video projector, for instance, is not obligatory, but is certainly a recurring element, one of a number of technological tools with which to better manipulate the image and finesse the message. Of all Visual Theatre practitioners, Robert Lepage is hailed as the master of integrating new technologies like video projection into the more traditional elements of theatre making. Representatives of the 'old guard' like Richard Eyre see Lepage's innovation as a cause for hopefulness about the future of theatre (Eyre, 2000), and Peter Brook is effusive in his praise for Lepage's endeavour in "... experimenting with a theatrical language where today's technology can both serve and sustain the humanity of a live performance" (Lepage and Charest, 1998:13). Forkbeard Fantasy have spent their career exploring "the comic dynamic between film and live performance" (PeoplePlayUK, 2005) as have Faulty Optic who describe themselves as a "Theatre of Animation" known for their "... visual theatre, automated sets, strange animated figures, cronked [sic] inventions and macabre humour" (Faulty Optic, 2005). All theatre is becoming increasingly comfortable with the integration of technology like video projection, and the mixing of the manipulated moving image and live action, as Visual Theatre influences and penetrates the mainstream. The triumph of productions such as *War Horse* (2007), a production that mixes live action, puppets and projected animations, at the National Theatre, is but one recent example.

Beyond the definitions, or at least defining factors I have suggested here, there is without a doubt much more to say about what Visual Theatre is: the academic and theatre-making worlds are just beginning to find the words in which to say

it, which is an exciting place to be. The plethora of uses of the term – both lower-case and upper-case – and the linking of them to a recurring roster of artists is indicative of there being such a thing as ‘Visual Theatre’, in the minds of practitioners, producers, venues and reviewers alike. This thesis proposes a definition which is not rigid, but responsive to the cues given by the representative works chosen and their critical reception. As I point out, a more rigid definition may appear in the future – but if it does so, it will be as the result of a collective conversation between theatre makers and viewers, a consensus to which this research adds one perspective. The primary hope of this thesis concerning its reception is that the key elements of Visual Theatre practice it posits, backed up by concrete examples, will stimulate debate on the state of the art. Visual Theatre could be looked at as merely an emphasis or dominance of certain elements within the range of existing theatre practice, but this surely would be a retrogressive step – just as Physical Theatre made the transition from lower-case to upper-case, so Visual Theatre is on the cusp of its own maturation as a term and cluster of key ideas.

2.3 Visual Theatre as a Modern or Post-Modern Mode of Practice?

Visual Theatre is undoubtedly a new medium: it came into existence (as an upper case term, suggestive of a movement or a mode of practice) in the mid-1990s, one of at least two new terms and perhaps movements - along with 'Physical Theatre' - used to try and describe the radical overhaul of the practice of theatre-making at the end of the 20th century. This chapter questions how much of Visual Theatre can be claimed as a Post-Modern mode of practice, and to what extent the shape of its roots is mirrored in its current growth.

When looking at a phenomenon and trying to illuminate its most important or influential precursors, the question of how far back one starts can become almost arbitrary: the idea of 'the visual' as the starting point for an event goes back to humanity's earliest rituals, ceremonies and dramas. In cultures untouched by the three 'great' monotheisms we still see remnants of the uniting of the spiritual and the spectacle: in the use of masks and puppets in the rituals of the Native North Americans (Macnair, Hoover, Neary, 1980), in the power and importance of sacred images and idols to the Ancient Egyptians and Continental Africa as a whole. Currell (1985) locates the origins of this practice of a spectacle physically embodying a spiritual force, in India 2000 years BC. Whatever the truth of the matter, and as Currell notes, 'because of its ephemeral nature its history must be largely a matter of conjecture' (Currell 1985:1), we can say that at some point the idea of narrative became more interesting than spectacle to practitioners and audiences alike, as it became the guiding force of (Western) theatre for centuries to come.

The middle of the 16th Century saw another flowering of the animated object and the visual in theatre: in the East, *Ningyo Joruri* graduated from being part of religious practice to being a recognised dramatic form, manifesting itself in the late 18th century as *Bunraku* (Oga and Mimura, 1984), while contemporaneously in Europe practitioners such as Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones pioneered the *masque* and the 17th century saw the emergence of Baroque theatre in France and Spain.

It was at the turn of the 20th century, however, that the most important

antecedent of Visual Theatre emerged. Modernist avant-garde practitioners sought to shake up the established mode of theatre practice and its bourgeois audience, and a primary instrument with which to achieve this presented itself in the form of the 'low culture' of puppetry. Taylor recognises the advocacy of puppets by Modernist intellectuals and theatre makers as a catalyst for the renaissance in the 20th century of the spectacle as dramatic form⁴⁶.

It is an open question as to where Visual Theatre, or indeed the other present day forms of experimental theatre, place themselves on the spectrum of Modernism and Post-Modernism (and some commentators would argue that it takes the form of a dichotomy, not a spectrum: cf John Summerson on the 'death' of Modernism (Jencks, 1996:16)). One could argue that an artistic movement untroubled so far by any such label should be kindly left to its own devices: not to fear, says Jencks, " 'post-modern' has already chosen us" (Jencks, 1996:13). Admittedly, the birth of the Post-Modern coincided with that of Visual Theatre's most immediate forebear - the experimental theatre of the 1960s and its prime philosopher, Peter Brook: but how different was his project from that of the Modernists? How different is it from the Post-Modern approach? Can (or must) the ethos of Visual Theatre be satisfactorily located in any one movement?

According to some theorists of the Post-Modern, Visual Theatre could not help but be a product of its era, and therefore a predominantly Post-Modern art form⁴⁷. A useful way in might be to look at practitioners who are generally

⁴⁶ He also suggests a link to the previous flowering of the form, with the Modernists being '... spurred at least partly by the newly fashionable influence of Japanese art, where puppets had long had an honoured place' (Taylor, 1993:255). Shershow contends that "The symbolist theater of the fin de siècle ... also represents the first stage in the development of a modernist theatrical aesthetic" (Shershow, 1995:186).

⁴⁷ Post-Modernism undoubtedly has an aggressive side: from its ordinary congregation to its fundamentalists (who can often be identified, says Jencks (1992) by the dropping of the hyphen) there is a sense that it is pointless to try and locate oneself outside some form or other of the movement. Jameson (1996) assesses it as being the Cultural Dominant of our time, though his justifications for positing this are not necessarily persuasive, and the radical anti-realism that is a feature of Post-Modernism works both for and against the Post-Modernists: as noted before, Jencks claims Post-Modernism chose us, a statement which in its lack of connection to any justification is irrefutable on its own terms. Jameson argues that

'If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable'

recognised to be working in a Post-Modern style, or define themselves as such. Auslander (1997) gives Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman and the Wooster Group as examples of major American practitioners who exemplify a Post-Modern approach to theatre, and more precisely, performance. These are practitioners whose creative journey began in the first flush of Post-Modernism, in the age of early performance art, Happenings and with what Copeland (1989) describes as the anti-theatrical bias of the conceptual artists involved. Auslander is more positive about the influx of conceptual artists with a Post-Modern approach pointing out that “artists from non-theatrical backgrounds have brought divergent sensibilities to bear on the act of performance” (Auslander, 1997:1). This recognition describes the ethos of the theatrical collective The People Show who emerged in Britain in 1965 at a Happening with Pink Floyd, and whose approach, in the words of founder member Jeff Nuttall, is not to

“... excel in irrelevant pre-established techniques and/or methods. Art is making patterns for effect... we’re all concerned with different things and trying to make room in the general collage for every member of the show to do their thing” (Nuttall, 1967:10).

Their Post-Modern fusion of styles and approaches to theatre has sustained them for over one hundred shows, and places them today as one of Britain’s foremost Visual Theatre companies, though like Robert Wilson, also seen as one of the exemplars of Visual Theatre practice, their origins are in the experimental theatre and performance of the 1960s⁴⁸. It is interesting to note that while the practitioners and companies mentioned conform to some of the characteristics of

(Jameson, 1996:57).

With a typical anti-realist flourish Jameson nullifies the possibility of a present day mode of practice belonging to any other cultural strand, on the basis seemingly of ‘decidability’. Norris (1992) rails against this alleged pervasiveness and the sense of Post-Modernism being ‘... a cultural climate whose progress may be charted and whose prospects forecast to more or less useful effect, but whose current disposition has nothing to do with our likings or wishes in the matter’ (Norris, 1992:160). How effectively he refutes it is questionable (he tries to use a realist argument to defeat an anti-realist one) but he characterises Post-Modernism’s unattractive implacability very well.

⁴⁸ The People Show share a performance sensibility with the Wooster Group, a meta-theatrical and self-referential approach that Auslander describes, with regard to Post-Modern performance as a whole, as “a progressive redefinition of theatrical mimesis away from ‘character’ toward ‘performance persona’, with consequent redefinitions of the function of the performer’s self in relation to performance” (Auslander, 1997:6).

the Post-Modern approach - quotation, hybridity, self-referentiality being typical of the Wooster Group⁴⁹ and the People Show, fragmentation, repetition, style and spectacle being hallmarks of Robert Wilson - implicit within their work are also some typically Modernist ideals. Taking the counter-culture of the 1960s as a starting point for these companies and individuals, one can see that, though that decade saw the initial growth of the Post-Modern, there was an almost equal balance of Modernist art and cultural practices: there was genuine (as opposed to Post-Modern ironic, cynical or disengaged) feeling for experimentation and belief in innovation and resistance. Bell (2000) observes that Miró was making Modernist puppet theatre in Catalunya in 1978, when he was in his eighties, in the same mode as in his youth in the Paris avant-garde. So an art-form that is made or theorised about in a certain era does not necessarily have to conform to the rules of that era, and is not, simply by being made in that time a representative product of it. Its status as an emblem of its time must be argued for, must be justified. The practice of theatre-makers such as Robert Wilson, The People Show and the Wooster Group does follow a Post-Modern aesthetic, exemplifies some practices of Post-Modernism, yet at the same time evinces an undoubtedly Modernist ethos.

I have been discussing Visual Theatre in terms of a movement, though for the most part it exists in the critical and artistic sphere as a style or sensibility that is applied to the practice of a select group of theatre-makers, and it is only recently that practitioners (mostly small-scale, fringe artists and companies) have been applying it to themselves, using it as a statement of intent. Jencks (1992) points out that Post-Modernism is both a condition and a movement, and I think this

⁴⁹ Kershaw comments on the Wooster Group's exemplification of Schechner's notion of 'restored behaviour' in their show *L.S.D. (...Just the High Points...)* (1984), with its "living behaviour treated like a director treats strips of film" (Kershaw, 2005:174). This bears a great resemblance to Dundjerovic's description of the cinema-influenced theatrical process of Lepage:

"As a theatre director, Lepage borrows from film directing, a way of making narrative by 'editing' and putting together already existing material. In theatre, he uses the actors' improvisations: in film he uses a montage of shot material. Thus, Lepage as a creator of narrative, either performed or filmed, is in the position of a 'montager' of various individual or group scores" (Dundjerovic, 2003:103).

recognition applies equally to Visual Theatre.

Visual Theatre is in no small part a response to the multi-media, Post-Modern age, an age which, in Jameson's estimation, has "essentially a visual culture" (Jameson, 1996:299). It employs an intensely Post-Modern approach, hybridising the worlds of cinema, visual art and the stage, and creating something new in the process: as Robert Lepage points out, theatre "changes when it bumps into other mediums" (Shewey, 2001). So what is to stop us from claiming that Visual Theatre is an entirely Post-Modern practice, if we accept the definition of Post-Modernism that Jencks and others give us, as being 'the continuation of modernity and its transcendence' (Jencks, 1996:15)?

I said before that practitioners such as the Wooster Group, The People Show and Robert Wilson are often held up as exemplars of companies working with the Visual Theatre approach: they also explore a number of pre-occupations that Fuchs describes as being central to Post-Modern theatre

"a stage turned curiously in upon itself, blurring the old distinctions between self and world, being and thing; and doing so not through a representation of the outside world but through the development of a performance art 'about' performance itself" (Fuchs, 1983, cited in Auslander 1997).

This motivation is certainly part of what compels Visual Theatre, but it does not reach its essence. I would contend, from my own experience of working with The People Show on a site-specific project, and alongside them in cabaret evenings, that for them 'the visual' constitutes one of many elements that make a show - their interest lies more with the people and the interaction than with the aesthetic or the play of signifiers, and it is that element of Post-Modern practice that is their starting point. Robert Wilson is renowned for his use of light on stage, and his deep involvement with staging: he very much fits the mould of the *auteur*. In his work there is a very even balance between the visual and the text: the text in particular is subjected to Post-Modern approaches, particularly in Wilson's love of repetition. His debt to Modernism, particularly German Expressionism is obvious, and one must ask whether his devotion to this aesthetic is simply a case of him conforming to the Post-Modern mindset of nostalgia and pastiche, or whether he lacks the accompanying Post-Modern absence of sincerity, and his work is predominantly Modernist. Again it seems that the era of one's birth is

ascribed undue importance by cultural commentators.

Robert Wilson and Robert Lepage are both hailed as Post-Modern practitioners, and both have had immense influence on the theatre that is practised today - both have revolutionised the 'visual' in theatre. But though they both work in, to a greater or lesser extent, Post-Modern styles, and both draw on Modernist influences, their work shares very little of the same space. I would contend that whereas, with some effort, one can draw out the Modern and Post-Modern threads in the work of Robert Wilson, in the theatre of Robert Lepage they are more tightly interwoven.

Robert Lepage's theatrical career began in the late 1970s: leaving drama school a Jack-of-all-trades (Lepage and Charest, 1998), he worked in opera, collaborative pieces, and as an actor and director in puppet theatre. By the early 1980s he was a key player in Quebec's Théâtre Repère, and it was here alongside Jacques Lessard that Lepage first adopted the RSVP Cycles. In a very Post-Modern move, the Cycles were adapted by Lessard from a system originated by Lawrence Halprin, an architect, for use in urban planning. RSVP stands for:

R: *Resources*, which are what you have to work with. These include human and physical resources *and* their motivation and aims.

S: *Scores*, which describe the process leading to the performance.

V: *Valuation*, which analyses the results of action and possible selectivity and decisions. The term "valuation" is one coined to suggest the action-oriented aspects of V in the cycle.

P: *Performance*, which is the resultant of scores and is the style of the process. (Halprin, 1969, cited in Bunzli, 1999).

The idea of starting with a 'resource' is something that has stayed with Lepage, though his method is no longer bound by these rules. Whereas Lessard was keener on re-quoting, "... recycling already existing texts by authors" (Lepage, 1996), Lepage believed in the free expression of the company members involved: he has often stated that the 'writing' of a show comes after its creation by the company - it normally starts on the first night of a production, and it is only when the run comes to an end "that the shape and the subject matter have stopped evolving" (Lepage and Charest, 1998). Text generated by the company is used as a resource, sound and music are used as resources, but a special interest

is devoted to *objects* as a source of inspiration: Lepage has a powerful sense of the significance of *things*, and in this way practises a theatrical art that is descended from the object theatre of early human ritual and ceremony. The starting point is not a pre-established narrative, but an enticing, involving image: to use “very interesting” objects, having a “richness of signification” (Bunzli, 1999:88). This understanding of the importance of image and signification obviously refers to the ancient traditions of theatre, but also relates to Post-Modern practice.

Jameson describes a feature of the Post-Modern being “a whole new culture of the image, or the simulacrum” (Jameson, 1996:58) and relates to this Warhol’s Campbell’s Soup Can and his portrait of Marilyn Monroe: under the command of Post-Modern practitioners, the object world has “now become a set of texts or simulacra” (Jameson, 1996:60) - the Post-Modern pedigree of Lepage’s use of ‘texts’ (in a not exclusively literary sense) is not in doubt. But whereas Jameson sees a “flatness or depthlessness” in the use of simulacra by Warhol and more recent artists such as Duane Hanson (Jameson, 1996), Lepage finds depth in the signification of the object, in the connections it intimates and inspires. This mediation and transformation of images is a key aspect of Lepage’s practice: like Warhol, his mediation has a kind of distilling effect, the ‘commodification’ that Jameson describes, whereby stars like Marilyn Monroe are “commodified and transformed into their own images” (Jameson, 1996:61)⁵⁰.

Other aspects of Lepage’s work that are frequently characterised as Post-Modern are his focus on the ‘global village’, self-referentiality and intertextuality of theatre/film, the ‘denial’ of chronology, and eclecticism of approach (McKinnon, 2002). To what degree the interest in chronology / temporality / memory is particular to Post-Modernism is not clear: Jameson (1996) claims it is “high-modernist”, while Jencks (1996) argues that the reverse is true. Certainly the challenges thrown up by the diversity of a global village inform his theatre: Armistead describes his work as mixing “languages

⁵⁰ A connection may be made between this aspect of Post-Modernism and the British satirical television show *Spitting Image* (1984-96). I have long held that the mediated images (simulacra) of politicians and celebrities created by Fluck and Law represented very well the commodification Jameson describes, with the puppet version often seeming to capture the essence of its subject almost better than the subject itself (and in the ‘aggressive’ mediation of its sculpting outshone other attempts at representation, such as the waxworks at Madame Tussauds).

and cultures, creating a sense of a constitutional outsider who regards everywhere as equally foreign" (Armistead, 1994:10), and Lepage himself cites his identity as a Quebecois, a resident of one country with two cultures, as facilitating his outsider's point of view (Lepage and Charest, 1998).

The eclecticism of approach is one of the most recognisable features of Lepage's work, and the lack of fear in mixing media and styles. Peter Brook, writing about Lepage's show *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, praised the pioneering spirit of the production, and its use of technology to 'serve and sustain the humanity of a live performance' (Brook, in Lepage and Charest, 1998:13): Brook is normally averse to the use of technology on stage, but Lepage's deftness in integrating it and thus enhancing the piece elicited his approval. Lepage's belief in the cross-pollination of art forms, his extensive use of puppets and object theatre, and his dexterity with the juxtaposition of media marks him out as a leading light of Visual Theatre. Is he also the exemplar of a Post-Modern practitioner? Like Brook and Wilson much of his work can be seen as embodying many Post-Modern ideals, yet his zeal and his innovation, his freshness, is redolent of the Modernist ethos. I am sure that he, like many other Visual Theatre practitioners, would reject much of the hard-line Post-Modernism of Lyotard and Jameson, the resigned nihilism of exercising one's creative abilities under the yoke of 'the already said' (Eco, 1984:67-8), while also recognising, as Ecclesiastes did some time ago, that 'there is no new thing under the sun'.

2.4 The Animated Screen and the Animated Stage: Puppetness from *Kunstfigur* to *Media Figure* in the Manipulated, Mediated Image.

Puppets, puppetry and puppetness share a great deal with filmed animation. They share a similar background, admirers and critical responses, and perhaps most importantly, they share an ethos. There are also significant differences, and to tease these out is not only necessary, but extremely useful in finessing our definition of what a puppet is.

This thesis argues that a genealogy of Visual Theatre finds its ancestors in avant-garde theatre-makers of the Modernist era, and that from the advent of cinema this puppet-centred sensibility and mode of practice leapt from the medium of theatre into the medium of film, along with many practitioners who did the same. For a while, it looked as if the distinction between animated film and live-action film might not be so obvious: while much early cinema was documentary in nature (e.g. the Lumière Brothers), there was an equally significant strand in film-making that took magic/trick photography and puppets/animation to be intrinsic to the practice of cinema (Méliès being the foremost example of this). Shklovsky suggested that the future of cinema might lie in the animated film being “combined with the photographed film” (Shklovsky, quoted in Taylor and Christie, 1994:99).

As it turned out, the two modes of filmmaking did, for the most part, go their own ways eventually. The lineage of Visual Theatre that is traced in this thesis refers not only to the notion of ‘puppetness’ as a *logos* of Visual Theatre, but also the idea of ‘the cinematic’. Central to this definition of ‘the cinematic’ has been the figure of the *auteur*, which is ultimately a cipher for ‘puppetmaster’ (as outlined by Craig). The relation of animation to mainstream film practice is relevant to the notion of ‘the cinematic’ as I use the term, with regard to Visual Theatre. It is relevant in several ways: while there is little crossover of practitioners (though a number of early animators included live-action sequences

in their films)⁵¹, both sets of filmmakers were exposed to and inspired by the same *fin-de-siècle* performance culture of theatrical events of one form or another, and both early live-action and early animated cinema influenced later film practice. So though for much of the 20th century the two modes operated to some extent in tandem, at their inception they were intertwined, as they have become once again in contemporary cinema. Perhaps the most important relation between animated cinema and the notion of ‘the cinematic’ as it refers to Visual Theatre is in the auteur/puppetmaster dynamic, with its manipulation of characters, scenery, objects: indeed, the entire frame (or *mise-en-scène*). It is also in this area that there are some subtle distinctions between puppets/puppetness/animation that I argue are more significant in defining each of these practices than has previously been thought.

Surprisingly little has been written about the relation of animated puppets in film to theatrical puppets. Basgier (2003) attempts a definition that distinguishes one from the other, ontologically, but his arguments are less than persuasive. He suggests that puppets in animation are not decorative (as if to say that this is, on the other hand, a significant feature of puppets in theatre), but gives no reason or example to back up this claim. He goes on to suggest, of puppets in animation, that

“They feel uneasy in children’s hands, becoming supple in artist’s hands. Their life expectancy is usually quite brief because they are commodities. They are a means to an end and after work is done, they tend to end up in the trash. It’s not the puppet that counts but its cinematic image” (Basgier, 2003:97).

What is striking is that this list of attributes is meant to suggest a dichotomy between cinematic puppets and their theatrical cousins, and yet there is nothing in the list that is distinctively true of one and not the other. His final contention, that it is the puppet’s image and not the puppet itself that is important is as meaningless as saying that in Visual Theatre it is the image on the spectator’s retina that is important, not the puppet itself. He is perhaps alluding to the unique existence puppets in cinema have, given life by a trick of perception, and yet he patently believes there is more to it than that, later contradicting his

⁵¹ And indeed, the separation between the two roles is beginning to be reduced again with the advent of digital technology that blurs the boundaries of live action and animation.

reductive flourish by citing the corporeality of animated puppets as being ontologically significant.⁵² What Basgier is trying to express, in thinking about the puppet and its image in cinema, is what he later refers to as “the actor’s suitability for the camera” (2003:98). Implicit in this is the idea of the constructed being: that is, the protagonist of the film is in some sense ‘constructed’, just as the set, lighting, camera angle etc are. This is undoubtedly a feature of animated puppet films: it is also a feature of the cinema as a whole, in particular the type created by the *auteur*: it is also a feature of contemporary Visual Theatre. What Basgier seems to be aiming at is better summed up by Wood (2003) who explicitly links the mechanical, technological nature of film with the similar aspiration of puppetry, giving, as it does, all figures (human-puppetesque and literal puppet) that appeared in the new medium a “puppet-like” (2003:168) quality, and ability.

So while Basgier goes some way towards a definition of the puppet in animation, there is still a great deal lacking. Tillis (2001) gives a more rigorous appraisal of the differences between puppet animation (three-dimensional) and cel animation, and indeed all ‘drawn’ animation (two dimensional); he also finds a place for computer-generated animation in his definition. He suggests that we treat as a puppet anything that is an animated, manipulated, simulation of life: “If the signification of life can be created by people, then the site of that signification is to be considered a puppet” (Tillis, 2001: 175). However he qualifies this definition, suggesting three types of signification that should be considered ‘puppets’: ‘tangible’ puppets – that is, literal, three-dimensional forms or figures; ‘virtual’ puppets – computer-generated figures that are built around a wireframe and are jointed and manipulatable in a similar way to tangible three dimensional objects; and finally ‘stop-action’ puppets (the three dimensional

⁵² That a performing arts writer contradicts himself is nothing new: Craig is perhaps the original and best in this regard, though his contradictions tended not to emerge within the same piece of writing, and whatever he wrote, one senses that he truly believed it at the time. Elsewhere within performing arts criticism, substance is often sacrificed to style, or to a poetic turn of phrase that pleases its author. The difficulty comes when it is necessary to make academic reference to such writings, and they are found to be lacking in philosophical or even logical rigour. Basgier obviously knows a lot about cinematic puppetry, but very little about its theatrical antecedents. It is also open to question how seriously one should treat the writings of someone who believes that a rule is proven by its exceptions (Basgier 2003:97).

models used in stop-frame animation). His definition takes the salient point in establishing puppetness to be that they are 'media figures' (a term reminiscent of Schlemmer's *Kunstfigur*, a closely-controlled, mediated figure) that exist within some kind of reality (be it real or virtual) and conform to its rules: he is therefore able to draw a line between the manipulation of a puppet in these media and the manipulation of line in cel animation.

So if Tillis has established a closer connection between theatrical puppets and puppets in animation than had previously been accepted, a definition that rests not on tangibility or 'real-time'⁵³ manipulation, does this mean that only the types of animation Tillis has described can exhibit puppetness as it is defined in this thesis? Buchan suggests that the secret lies in the 'world' created in the 3-D puppet animation of practitioners such as the Quay Brothers: though we know that the final product is 'manipulated', the puppets and sets still have a physical reality to which we can relate⁵⁴. In much the same way, a live action film is manipulated by editing, sound design, and so on, though in the case of animation the manipulation is more profound: we know it has happened between every frame. Like live action cinema, puppet animation provokes "the spectator to engage with the imaginative cinematic realms it creates that include material, three dimensional elements from the lived world" (Buchan, 2003:108). These elements from the 'lived world' have such power over our imaginations because they make 'real' the childhood fantasy of the inanimate becoming animate.

As a means of refining our understanding of the various forms of puppets and puppetness, Tillis' suggestions are very useful. Puppetness in Visual Theatre can

⁵³ This was previously a stipulation suggested by UNIMA-USA (Union Internationale de la Marionette): "Technology must not be used to create the puppetry, only to record it. That means that the performance must be at all times under the control of a live, human puppeteer, performing in what computer folks call 'real-time.' This performance is recorded and the recording may be manipulated (i.e., edited) prior to presentation to the audience" (Levenson, Mark (1992), quoted in Tillis: 2001:174).

⁵⁴ Buchan's suggestion here compares interestingly with my assertion in chapter 2.2, *What is Visual Theatre?*, that Physical Theatre centres around 'embodiment' more than Visual Theatre does. Visual Theatre, I argue, is more like cinema (and, included in that, animation) in that the *image* is key: that said, the theatricality of Visual Theatre has much to do with the physicality, the materiality, of the objects that are manipulated, and the playing with notions of 'live things' and 'dead things' which is inherent in this theatrical animation of objects.

easily cope with Tillis' dispensing with 'real-time' manipulation as a prerequisite: Robert Lepage (amongst others) regularly mixes video projection of a live video feed and video projection of previously recorded material, and neither the 'liveness' nor the puppetness are compromised. But does Visual Theatre have a particular link to the (3-D) puppet animation described by Tillis, over and above (2-D) line animation? Certainly Visual Theatre seems to have more in common with 3-D animation: the films of Jan Svankmajer, the Quay Brothers, Jiri Trnka and many others seem to share a sensibility, a fascination with the animation of objects and sets, as well as figures, in much the same way as the exemplary Visual Theatre practitioners do. Put simply, the output of these animator auteurs 'looks' very much like the practice of Lepage, Wilson, Complicité et al. Svankmajer's *The Flat* (1968), with its story of a man trapped in a room that has a life of its own, molested by a bowl of soup, a chair, even the walls of the flat itself, portrays the kind of 'animated' stage which Visual Theatre would later strive to create.

Visual Theatre perhaps has more in common with 3-D animation ideologically, though in practice it operates just as well with 2-D. It is after all a theatre that embraces the multimedia, the cinematic and all that goes with that. Craig was an early advocate of screens and projection, and though puppets do not exist in 2-D in the same way they do in 3-D, puppetness is seemingly unaffected. Looking back at the precursors of Visual Theatre, one finds two of the most significant Modernist multimedia shows using a mixture of live action and projected film or (2-D) animation. Eisenstein's *The Wiseman* (1923) and Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) both have live performers interacting with projected two-dimensional images. Similarly in Visual Theatre practice, shows like *The Andersen Project* (2006) and *Needles and Opium* (1994) have made much use of projected sequences which the actors perform with. So in practice both 2-D and 3-D animation, as they are used in Visual Theatre, exhibit traits of puppetness: they conform to the notion of close-control (which I make a case for judging as inherent to a definition of puppetness) to perhaps the greatest possible extent, as each frame is designed and manipulated with a specific end product in mind, interacting with live actors and objects, one element among many that is manipulated, puppetised, at the point of delivery.

It has been established that Visual Theatre and animation share a number of common ancestors, ideologically speaking, but what can this tell us about the extent to which animation as a practice has influenced the development of Visual Theatre practice?

In many ways the influence of animation on the ideas of those who would go on to become key practitioners of Visual Theatre is harder to quantify than the influence of 'mainstream' live-action cinema. One can see the influence of film practice as developed by Méliès, Vertov, Eisenstein and many others on the staging practices of Visual Theatre. One can also see a link between filmmakers like Svankmajer and Visual Theatre practice. But whereas a direct line from Eisenstein to Lepage is comparatively easy to trace, the line from Svankmajer to Lepage is less clear: what makes it less clear is that much of what is distinctive about both media has come from earlier thought and practice. The animated chair in Svankmajer's *The Flat* (1968) may be the ancestor of the sofa that swallows Hamish McColl and Sean Foley in *Bewilderness* (2001), and the chair that transforms into exercise equipment and numerous other things in *The Far Side of the Moon* (2001); though that honour might also go to the chairs as Craig describes them in the work of Moliere "Don't they know how Moliere made these chairs act – how they are alive, and working in combination with the actors?" (Craig, 1999:49).

The problem in teasing out threads of influence lies in the fact that Visual Theatre and animation share a common ancestor - Modernist avant-garde theatre practice - and in these circumstances distinguishing animation's particular influence is made less easy. We can however say that it embodies much of what Visual Theatre would later aspire to, and as a constituent and influential part of film practice continued a tradition of the auteur in film, indeed becoming "a cinematic form that itself is ultimately perhaps the most *auteurist* of all" (Buchan, 2003:122). Like other offshoots of Modernist theatre practice, puppetness has been central to the practice of animation: while puppetness existed in live-action cinema in other forms, in animation it expressed itself to a great extent in the literal use of puppets. And while theatre for a long time shunned the use of puppets in 'serious' work, animators continued to believe in their importance

and power. It was not until the advent of Visual Theatre that puppets and puppetness could once again create and inhabit the animated stage.

3.1 Analysing the Process: a Methodology for Visual Theatre-Making Observed and Questioned in my own Practice.

My research deals with the history of a performance culture that is focused on the visual and animated stage, and the current incarnation of this culture, Visual Theatre. The practical element of the research takes the form of a work-in-progress piece of theatre created by someone (myself) who considers their work to be part of a Visual Theatre continuum, as evidenced in its modes and sensibilities. The 'testing' that is going on is not as direct as the assertion that I make a case for in the written part of the thesis: that contemporary Visual Theatre has its roots in the Modernist and Avant-garde theatre of the *fin-de-siècle*, and that puppetness and the cinematic are two key conduits of the practices and sensibilities that were transmitted. If the practice that forms part of this research were to be as direct (or directed) in its message as the writing, then it would not be an accurate representation of a Visual Theatre process and outcome. It would not be authentic.

The practice comes from the same place as the writing: my thoughts, questions and feelings about Visual Theatre, its key elements, and its antecedents. But while the practical and written parts of the research start from the same place, they do not make the same kind of journey, and do not necessarily reach the same conclusions. This is surely one of the valuable aspects of practice-based or practice-informed research: that it provides more than one way of analysing and reflecting on a subject. But it would be a mistake to believe that both of the outcomes (the written and the practical) can be 'read' in the same way. My practice does not 'test' my thesis, and nor should it, in the way that the written research does: the test could too easily be manipulated to provide the desired results (bearing out the claims made in the writing). Instead, whereas the written research to a large extent *analyses*, the practice to a large extent *creatively reflects*. It is the place of writing to dissect and analyse the practices and ideas with which this thesis is concerned. It is the place of practice to ingest and re-constitute these practices and ideas, and produce its own 'document' of its engagement with and

reflection of them. Aston comments on the tendency in practice-as-research to concentrate on the end result, whereas in fact the most important part of the research, for the practitioner, should be the process. She describes her students' all too easy "...return to an untheorised mode of practice in which they aim to produce a professional-looking product, rather than progress through a conceptualized and theorised artistic process" (Aston, 2002:29). White argues that such a move negates much of the benefit of practice as research, because

"... to demonstrate a theory in performance suggests a lecture and not a piece of performance art or a creative process. Such expectations about the form created by students or by academics changes the notion of performance into a demonstration of theory" (White, 2002:114).

Somers suggests that in practice-based research, the process is where we learn "...about the form and the material explored within it" (Somers, 2002:100), and that the outcome, the performance, is "...the true research output/report" (Somers, 2002:101). Somers is right, I think, in characterising the outcome as something which stands on its own, and should be 'read' as a report. The performance is the product of the "conceptualized process" as Aston has it, and should be seen as such rather than as "demonstration of theory" (White). The value then, is in the practitioner's questioning and assessment of their process, over and above its outcome. In this way, I here make a 'case study' of the practical element of my research, a work-in-progress piece of Visual Theatre, though it differs from the other case studies made in this section. Where those come from the point of view of a spectator, analysing primarily the performance (the outcome) while commenting on the process, the case study made of my own work reflects on the process, examining how a piece of Visual Theatre comes together, from the point of view of the creator of the work.

When creating a piece of theatre, or any work of art, the genesis is not always clear in one's mind, and much is done by intuition. There is often a reluctance among theatre-makers, as there is among many artists, to examine the process or the outcome of their work too closely: that to do this will somehow 'kill' it. This is a worry I understand, but for the most part do not share. Just as it is said that analysing what is funny drains all the humour out of it, there is a related fear that dissecting a work of art (and perhaps, in particular, theatre) is akin to pulling

back the curtain to reveal the Wizard of Oz: without his special effects, a much less impressive proposition. Without the magic and the illusion, and all those other ineffable things that are required for a truly theatrical experience – the sense of liveness perhaps, or the suspension of disbelief – what appears in the analysis is a pale shadow of the original. Indeed this reductionism can be perceived as not only unhelpful in characterising the ‘experience’ of theatre, but as somehow diminishing the creative act by attempting to analyse it. In the section on the methodology of this thesis I discuss the problems inherent in analysing theatre, an art-form that for the most part does not produce ‘artefacts’. While recognising that there are issues concerning the ineffability of performance, I believe that this shouldn’t be reason not to try to describe and examine it. I also dispute the notion that analysis damages or ‘breaks the spell’. Exegesis of these productions has the capacity not only to reveal key themes and influences, as this thesis shows: it can also lead to a greater appreciation of the work on the part of the spectator. Somers points out how beneficial this exegesis is as part of the practice-as-research process, where “... there is an interpenetrative characteristic between practice and its related study” (2002:98). He highlights particularly historical research: “Often the history of a practice can only be properly understood by a practitioner, or at least someone who has sustained, detailed experience of performance. Likewise, historical knowledge enriches one’s approach to practice” (2002:98).

Before starting, I knew that my research into Modernist theatre and film practice, and present day Visual Theatre practice, would inform my work, though I was wary of forcing these aspects on to my work: both because of the adverse effect it could have on the work, and because the practice was in some sense a ‘staging ground’ for the ideas and themes explored in the written part of the thesis, and to press these ideas into service too forcefully would make a mockery of the practical work being any kind of ‘experiment’. This section displays the methodology of my practice in the form of a generally chronological discussion of the gestation and influences on the piece, drawing on notes I kept during the making of it and bringing in appropriate references from the case studies I have made of the work of other companies working in this field.

My work in theatre has encompassed a number of roles: actor, director, musician, dramaturg, puppet maker and puppeteer. For the piece of theatre that accompanies this written research, I had no preconceptions about what media I would use for the performance, and whether the figures on stage would be humans, puppets, or a mixture of both. As it turned out, the piece is entirely performed by puppets. That is to say, none of the actors is human: as I have argued previously, as a piece of Visual Theatre, the show is *performed* not just by the puppets, but by the stage, set, and props, the music and the video projection, and by all these elements working in concert. It is an animated stage, a puppetised stage.

My initial idea for the piece was to stage an adaptation of, or a play inspired by, Villiers de L'Isle Adam's *L'Ève Future* (*Tomorrow's Eve*) (1886), which I had been reading. The novel explores notions of what it is to be 'alive', with a fictional Edison creating an android that is then animated by a ghost (in many ways anticipating Ryle's (1949) famous example of the 'ghost in the machine'). The figure of Hadaly, the android, seemed to fit very closely with Kleist's description of the superior qualities of the puppet (in *Über das Marionettentheater*). This figure finds later expression in the character of the *Maschinenmensch*, the 'false-Maria' in Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). Though the mid 19th century was an inspiring time in terms of the theatrical possibilities for a Visual Theatre piece, I was drawn more to the era where the subject of my research had its strongest early flowering: in the popular and avant-garde theatres and cinemas of the *fin-de-siècle*.

This could be described as the first part of the process of creating the piece: there was an antecedent – my reading of Villiers de L'Isle Adam and Kleist, and about the beginnings of a fascination with puppets, automatons and robots in the 19th century. Then there was the outcome, or progression of that fascination: looking back at it, I can see how the process of my piece of theatre mirrored the progression of ideas I had been researching. To give a tangible example: I knew I wanted to carry through from my first inspiration a strong female figure, and one who was in some sense more than human. So I started making a puppet of a Sphinx.

Going to Vienna was initially of interest to me because of its significance as the birthplace of Klimt, Schiele and the Secessionist movement, and also because it

afforded me the chance to see Richard Teschner's puppets and stage, the *Figurenspiegel*⁵⁵. The Österreichisches Theatermuseum is unique in allowing these exhibits, many of which are over a hundred years old, to be used as intended: one is able to view a show which is fundamentally unchanged from its Modernist avant-garde beginnings.

Walking around Vienna, one begins to realise that the city is full of Sphinxes. Of course there is a great deal of statuary and ornamentation on the buildings, much of it classically influenced: there are griffins, mythical creatures, Greek gods and goddesses but a particular recurrence of sphinxes. It should not seem so strange that Freud, taking his customary afternoon walk around the *Ringstrasse*, developed the idea of the Oedipus complex, when he was continually, consciously or unconsciously, being bombarded by sphinx imagery. They also formed a significant part of his collection of antiquities, to which he frequently added. As Frank Tallis, the writer and clinical psychologist notes, the sphinxes' presence "...suggests that Vienna is a city of secrets" (Tallis, 2008). Secrets of the psyche, soon to be unlocked by Freud, and darker secrets "conspirators, cabals and secret societies" (Tallis, 2008), such as the Armanenschaft, a mystical pan-german group that emerged around the turn of the 20th century, and planted a number ideas in the mind of a young Adolf Hitler, who also called Vienna home at this time. The sphinx is a hybrid figure: in some senses the first cyborg, part woman part beast. From this perspective, it is not hard to see why it is such a totemic figure for turn of the century Vienna: it embodies male fears of a woman's intellect and sexuality unleashed, an image both provocative and unsettling for a society that was still very bourgeois, even though it also nurtured a fierce avant-garde.

The history of Vienna, both theatrical and world history, made it a very compelling choice for a setting for the piece I was embarking upon, with the

⁵⁵ Segel's *Pinocchio's Progeny* (1995) was one of the foundational texts for this research, and it was there that I first saw Teschner's work discussed. He was a founding member of the Wiener Werkstätte, and a close friend of Klimt in particular, as well as Hoffman, Moser and the other Secessionists. He worked in many fields: as a painter, a sculptor, a ceramicist, a maker of musical instruments and bookplates. He brought all this to his theatre, the *Figurenspiegel*, which fused Javanese-style rod puppets with technologically advanced staging. Seeing his puppets displayed, and being lucky enough to witness two performances using them, was a revelation to me.

avant-garde theatre of Teschner in many ways a model for how I wanted to start – if not how I wanted to finish. Having performed in cabarets and what I now realise were essentially present-day forms of *Kleinkunst* (a term discussed in the chapter on *Shockheaded Peter*) I was also interested in the particular ethos of what I have come to view as the pre-war pinnacle of the form, the *Kabarett Fledermaus*, Vienna's acclaimed Artist's Cabaret.

From the start I envisaged a show that knew where it began, but not where it would end, very much at odds with traditional text-based drama. This is not necessarily a hallmark of Visual Theatre, but it is notable that the shows of practitioners and companies such as Complicité and Ex Machina often change dramatically over the course of a run, and will then be reworked again at a later date. While slightly resistant to ideas of 'best practice' in theatre making, I found myself following, to a greater or lesser degree, the R.S.V.P. cycles as practiced by Théâtre Repère and its followers, most notably Robert Lepage. I go in to some detail about the R.S.V.P. cycles elsewhere in this thesis, so will not repeat myself here, but it is instructive in terms of examining the methodology of this piece to look at how my process differed from R.S.V.P. The 'R', Resource, for my work took the form of the literature I was reading around the subject and my own experience of the city of Vienna and its art. The literary background to the work is not necessarily unusual for a piece of Visual Theatre, though I did aim to work the research into the piece more fully than is often managed by collaborative devising companies. That this does not commonly happen, or is not particularly evident in the final outcome of the show is often due to insufficient interest from most of the company concerning all the fascinating things the dramaturg has discovered and wants to bring to the piece, or a director who is quite willing to jettison meaning in favour of spectacle. This was another incentive for keeping the company small in this case and assuming more the role of auteur than dramaturg.

In a tangible sense, the Resources are the materials one has to work with, and while the puppet aspect of the piece was constructed from scratch, the projected video that makes up a large part of the work was for the most part 'found' and then edited together to make a narrative that became evident when combined with the live manipulation of puppets and objects. In the scene on the

accompanying DVD I have referred to as 'Vienna Day/Vienna Night', the projected backgrounds are a montage from a number of sources ranging from archival film of Vienna from the websites of the Austrian Cultural Forum and the Internet Archive, to paintings and drawings of Vienna by Adolf Hitler when he lived in the city as a struggling artist.

The 'S', Score, is a mode very well suited to Visual Theatre: in some ways, it is what would previously (in text-based work) have been called the text, but R.S.V.P. employs a musical term which describes the movement of a piece of this type so much more accurately. The score for my work-in-progress tended to take two forms, both 'imported' from other arts: when a sequence was first planned, I would often make a storyboard that outlined the key progression from one image to the next, and which conveyed a sense of the atmosphere I was aiming for. The 'finished' scene bore a greater or lesser resemblance to the initial storyboard, but it was a useful tool. The scene I refer to as 'Tell Me About Your Dreams' (on the accompanying DVD), is an instance where the finished product ends up very close to the initial conception. A scene like 'Vienna Day/Vienna Night' is necessarily different: the inspiration comes from the assembling of the material at hand, and the Score in that case was a part of the 'Geschichten von Strauss' by Korngold. Having begun a rough assembling of the film clips, I chose a sequence from the Korngold: this in turn dictated more precisely how the action of the scene was going to play out, and its tempo.

In seeking to describe the process of my piece of theatre, I would like to draw even more on musical analogies, in particular making reference to the musical processes of Brian Wilson. The way I started to build up scenes (pieces of movement, text, plot development) could be described as vignettes, or fragments, but the recurring image I had was a description by Brian Wilson of the song-writing process, which for him almost always started at the piano with "feels" (Wilson, quoted in Wegman, 2005):

"I go to the piano and play "feels." "Feels" are specific rhythm patterns, fragments of ideas. Once they're out of my head and into the open air, I can see them and touch them firmly. Then the song starts to blossom and become a real thing."

A “feel” could be simply a rendering of a chord, or the movement from one chord to another, or a whole sequence of chord progressions: in theatrical terms it might be something as simple as the movement of an arm, the juxtaposition of two images or a whole sequence of events that flow into one another. Again, this is not a completely novel approach in devised theatre, but it is one that is often abused, or used at the beginning of a process and then forgotten about. My practice grew out of, and together with, my research and writing of this thesis, and certainly draws upon distinctive puppetesque Visual Theatre traits I have examined here, such as the puppet/cinema/visual theatre notion of ‘close-control’. A part of this, arguably, is a sensitivity to the implications and nuances of a movement, image or juxtaposition. The greatest works of cinema do not clutter the frame with extraneous detail, but work towards an integrity of the image presented: the greatest exponents of Visual Theatre employ a similarly discerning eye to the stage-image that is presented. Puppet theatre, as I have argued previously, particularly in its Modernist avant-garde incarnation, was central to the journey of this ethos through the 20th century.

Wegman (2005) makes an interesting distinction between fragments and modules: the pieces that go to make up Wilson’s lost masterpiece *Smile* (recorded 1966-67) are often described as fragments, though Wegman argues they should more properly be described as modules:

“‘Module’ literally means “little measure,” and the word carries at least the implication that it stands for a self-contained unit or entity, not merely a fragment. If that is the case, and if Brian’s approach was indeed modular, then yes, it makes sense to assume that those units could be configured in any number of potentially satisfying ways—and it follows that we could all have a go at editing an album out of them.” (Wegman, 2005).

Smile has, in this way, served as a model for my work: I have created some fully blown scenes, some moments that need to be expanded upon and some juxtapositions that need a scene or narrative built around them. But so far – and as this piece is presented as a work-in-progress - all the scenes are ‘modular’, which at this point is where I want them to be. Looking at the piece from an audience’s perspective, there is a question of narrative: most of what this thesis describes as Visual Theatre still has some kind of story or through line to it,

though there are notable exceptions such as Stephen Mottram's *The Seed Carriers* (1995), or *The Seas of Organillo* (2004), both wordless, visually arresting pieces. Mottram's work has been an inspiration to me in the creation of this practical element of the research, and it shares much of Teschner's ethos and style: stately, meditative manipulation, wordless but accompanied by hand-built mechanical organs, and depicting often other-worldly or dream-like scenarios.

In creating this piece I have been reluctant to find a narrative too early in the process, and indeed the modular nature of the show as it stands suggests that it could be a portmanteau piece that echoes the collections of short stories and vignettes that were so popular in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. Though it might also be the case that a strong narrative emerges, and it is then required of the scenes to either fit in with that narrative or be shed from this piece and filed away for a later date. In the appendices, I include, as well as five storyboards for completed or in-progress scenes, a partially realised zoetrope sequence showing a transformation from a Sphinx to a woman (and back again). This is one of a number of sequences and ideas that exist at different stages of completion. Thematically this zoetrope sequence seems very fitting, containing ideas relating to metamorphosis of images and to early image animation technologies, amongst others. But from my point of view it is not yet clear how it will (or might) relate to the other thematic and narrative strands. As the various sequences that comprised the work-in-progress began to take shape, certain characters, elements and ideas began to dominate and link more easily to each other. In particular the character of the tramp has assumed a prominence which was not intended at the beginning of the process – consequently a number of the filmed scenes and storyboards presented feature him. This openness to the piece leading the way in its own conception requires an element of faith, in the inspiration, the material and the process: that if one can follow Plotinus' advice in his analogy of the sculptor and "cut away all that is excessive" (Plotinus, 1918:9) then what is left will be true to the subject.

I have used music as a model for describing the flow of the piece, its score. In *Connecting Flights*, Lepage describes the use of music in his theatre: "Bergman said that film is a three-dimensional thing: sound is the first dimension, image the second, and the meeting of the two creates the third" (Lepage and Charest,

1998:123). Ex Machina's work often starts with a piece of music, rather than a piece of text; from very early on in my process, I knew that there were certain pieces that would inspire the show but would not end up in the final outcome, some that would, and that there were others that would appear along the way and turn out to be precisely what was needed. I made a conscious decision not to be too anachronistic in choosing what went in to the piece: or if there was some anachronism, then it should still be bound to the piece by location. Jon Brion's rendition of 'Voices' on *Meaningless* (2001) captured a mood I wanted to convey, but would never end up in the final piece; Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead* relates directly to themes and motifs in the play and fits perfectly in the chronology⁵⁶.

The question of music is perhaps simpler than the question of voices, when working with puppets: again, I look to the work of Teschner as a model for this work. Klaus Behrendt, until recently the curator/performer of Teschner's work suggests that, for Teschner

"...puppet theatre was never supposed to be a miniature imitation of human theatre. Rather than giving human voices to his puppets, his creations acted in silence, accompanied by exotic music, in a mysterious, grotesque and unreal world. (Behrendt, in Rubin and Solorzano, (1996: 72).

Live voices with puppets can present an issue, in that they often do not 'gel' with recorded soundtrack, and as I argue in section 2.1, there is often an unsettling disjunction between the look of a puppet and its voice, particularly if it is not a muppet-style lip-sync puppet: companies such as Faulty Optic and Mottram's Animata sometimes use live or recorded vocalisations, but generally do not have the puppets speaking. In making this piece, I did not set out to manufacture answers for questions I have raised in the research, or for the process to necessarily conveniently follow Visual Theatre companies' processes I have described. However in the making of it, I have found much of what I

⁵⁶ Pragmatically, there is always an issue with copyright concerning recordings, otherwise I would probably have chosen to use Rachmaninoff's own recording of *Isle of the Dead*, with the Philadelphia Orchestra, treating the recording as an artefact, a resource, and indeed using recorded sound as the only sound in the piece. Given that is not possible, I engaged the help of two pianists and previous collaborators, Tim Sidford and Eleanor Gussman, and together we have created a musical score that is in part copyright-free archival ambient sound recordings and part new recordings of pieces by Beethoven, Rachmaninoff and Korngold.

postulated about the antecedents of, and influences on Visual Theatre validated. One of the very strong influences on my work has been the silent cinema of Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin. In section 2.1 I discuss the sense of puppetness so many of these films exude – Keaton’s deadpan expression, requiring the audience to supply the requisite emotion, Chaplin’s superb physical control, even when (or particularly when) he seems most out of control (bringing to mind Hannaham’s equivocal comment about Lepage, that “he is his own puppet” (Hannaham, 2000)).

Of particular influence on my practice has been Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1933), arguably the swansong of silent cinema, and particularly exciting in that respect as it also stands, in a number of ways, as an artistic and thematic culmination of Modernist responses to the human beings relation to the industrial age and growing automation. Chaplin’s use of sound in *Modern Times* is fascinating: at once a personal response to the new dominant mode of film production (talkies), a witty subversion of that mode, and a whimsical trope that amplifies his theme of humanity overwhelmed by automation. In *Modern Times*, all the voices we hear (bar the little tramp’s nonsense song at the end) are mediated in some form: on a phonograph record, over a tannoy, through a loudspeaker. The discussion, in previous sections, of this usage of sound led directly to its influence on my practical work, and suggested to me a way to deal with my reluctance to use live voices in the show. My piece uses only recordings of voices, and not necessarily as the voices of specific characters, but more as ambient sounds. Where one character does have to address another, or a monologue is needed, the voice should be mediated and distorted. In many of the scenes, no dialogue is necessary, but if and as a narrative emerges then the need might arise. Though presented as a work-in-progress, and therefore subject to change if required, currently all the dialogue takes the form of intertitles or subtitles. The seeds of this idea come from several sources: first and foremost silent cinema, where the intertitles are sometimes mundane or say no more than one can intuit from the disposition of the characters, but sometimes add a great deal both textually and stylistically, such as in Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1921), where pages from old books and letters from the characters are used alongside the more traditional form. Another influence has been present day multimedia use in Visual Theatre

productions, such as the ‘opening titles’ in Lepage’s *The Far Side of the Moon* (2001) and *The Andersen Project* (2006) that mix projected text with stage movement, or Complicité’s use of a handheld camera to project live an image of a letter being read by one of the characters in *A Disappearing Number* (2007). Of course both Lepage and Complicité’s mise-en-scène has strong cinematic influences. Some of the intertitles in my show are simple uses of text where a piece of dialogue is more succinct than a mime, but the intention has been for the majority of them to be (in a mode similar to the way Murnau presents his documents in *Nosferatu*) ‘found’ pieces of text: that is, text taken from documents of (or describing) the era that the show inhabits, whether that be Brecht lyrics, or aphorisms of Kraus. In the filmed sequence ‘Vienna Day / Vienna Night’ I use some passages from the otherwise odious and propagandising ‘Mein Kampf’, in which Hitler expresses quite honestly the excitement of being a youth in the Vienna of 1908. In a way the intertitles, the multimedia on stage are, again, best described using R.S.V.P. terminology: as a Resource, something which is changed by the one presenting it only by the fact of it being presented in that chosen context.

That “there is no new thing under the sun” is a recurring realisation. The process of observation, thought, research and practice throws up examples of techniques or ideas on stage or film that seem novel and innovative: my research traces them back through time and different media, and in the process uncovers precedents that are amazingly similar to the present day work I am writing about, links like the interaction of projected film and live actors in Eisenstein’s *The Wiseman* (1923) and Lepage’s *The Far Side of the Moon* (2001). Similarly, in the practical work that accompanies this thesis, I have noted ideas or techniques in the theatre I have observed and thought of a way I could adapt them or take the practice a step further, only to find that the technique I imagined was so novel only seems that way because no one since the Modernist era has used it: but almost invariably a Modernist has already had the idea. That this is the case is no detriment to my overall thesis, as each newly discovered example strengthens the bonds I contend exist between Modernist theatre practice, puppetness, cinema and Visual Theatre. My idea of intertitles (instead of speech) using ‘found’ rather than ‘written’ text fits well with the notion of Visual Theatre as a

Post-Modern mode of practice, full of fragmentation, of text as artefact, of quotation rather than original writing: but of course, during my research, I find that to all intents and purposes Karl Kraus did it first with *The Last Days of Mankind* (1919), the text of which is made up largely of overheard conversations, official bulletins and citations from newspapers – described by Kraus as “fragmented and without heroes” and “the most glaring inventions are quotations” (Kraus, quoted in Karpf, 1999).

This thesis has asserted that contemporary Visual Theatre is distinctive, a relation of Modernist Avant-garde theatre and other movements which followed, but also a progression – that it is something new. Yet looking at specific performance practices and motifs, as the fact of having an interrelated practical element to one’s research forces one to do, one finds that on the surface at least contemporary Visual Theatre practice often bears great resemblance to its ancestor Modernist Avant-garde theatre practice. So what is different and distinctive about Visual Theatre? This is a question where a research project that involves practice as well as theory can give particular insight. There are two immediately obvious differences: that of technology and that of culture.

Eisenstein achieved a great deal with his mixing of projected film and live action in *The Wiseman*, but the palette that was available to him pales in comparison with the level of technology at the fingertips of a company such as Ex Machina. Lepage is partly able to create such exciting and nuanced work integrating new technologies because of their ease of use and accessibility. The ‘spray-painted’ opening titles of *The Andersen Project* come from an environment where the idea and initial implementation can be put into practice within minutes in the rehearsal room. In my own practice, locating still images, film clips and pieces of music on the internet is a vital part of building the ‘resources’ of a piece; the speed and power of computers also enables me to digitally manipulate these resources before they have any physical presence on my stage. In this way, the process of creating a piece, finding and adapting elements that feed into it, and amalgamating these elements is much more subject to *close-control* than it could be a hundred years ago. In the ease of accessing and adapting images, the level of puppetness and the cinematic is heightened in Visual Theatre production: there is more to play with, and greater control in doing so.

The impact of cultural differences between Modernist Avant-garde theatre and contemporary Visual Theatre is harder to quantify. Visual Theatre is very much 'of its time': it is in many ways a response to the multimedia age we live in, both of its own volition, so to speak, and because it is forced to compete with multimedia techniques (which for the most part grew out of cinematic techniques) that woo the audience's attention. As discussed previously, theatre increasingly co-opts these multimedia practices as a response to a more media-literate spectator: this was not the case to the same extent for Modernist Avant-garde theatre. While it may be argued that a society that responds more and more to images rather than to words is in some senses 'infantilised', culturally the shift from text to image is indicative of a movement away from the certainties (moral and otherwise) of the Victorians and towards a more pluralistic and (it is hoped) tolerant mindset. This pluralism of interpretation inherent in a theatre that increasingly presents its meaning in images is claimed as a distinctively Post-Modern trait, and it is certainly evident in the practice of icons of Post-Modernism such as Lepage. But as I have argued previously (particularly in section 2.3), Visual Theatre is at once Modern and Post-Modern, and I agree with the proposition that there is not so much a break between one movement and the next, but more of a bleed from one to the other. Thus the practice in this research demonstrates a key trait of Visual Theatre, being presented using Post-Modern tools and necessarily being part of that continuum of practice, but with Modernist themes and concerns at its heart.

Bush-Bailey suggests that contemporary theatre which draws on a historical movement should in some way 'reconstruct' the historical performance. Writing about her own practice, looking at feminist theatre history, she argues that "...the main purpose of practical research on historically distant texts and performances is twofold: to explore past theatre practice in order to enrich our understanding of both what *has been* and what *is now* distinctly female about our theatre practice" (Bush-Bailey, 2002:92). She draws on Sarlos' suggestion that the scholar, in their reconstruction, should "...traverse the road followed by the original group of artists" (Sarlos, in Postlethwait and McConachie, 1989:201). My practice is not a 'reconstruction', but it does 'traverse the road' taken by the Modernist Avant-garde theatre practitioners invoked in this research. Bush Bailey points to

a quotation from Virginia Woolf as something that she suggests could stand as a maxim for anyone undertaking practical research:

“We cannot understand the present if we isolate it from the past. If we want to understand what it is that [we] are doing now... [w]e must forget that we are, for the moment, ourselves. We must become the people that we were two or three generations ago. Let us be our great grandmothers” (Woolf, in Gale and Gardner, 2000:1).

Undertaking this research has changed me as a practitioner: it has illuminated the history, and the key elements of the mode of practice my work best fits into. Through this kind of imaginative embodiment suggested in the Woolf quote, through the written and practical research, I feel a great kinship with the Modernist theatre practitioners I have discovered along the way.

The mode of practice for my work-in-progress piece bears a great resemblance not only to ethos of the cinematic and puppetness in the work of Lepage, a “...creator of narrative, either performed or filmed, [who] is in the position of a ‘montager’ of various individual or group scores” (Dundjerovic, 2003:103), but to those before him such as the Wooster Group and their process where “living behaviour [is] treated like a director treats strips of film” (Kershaw, 2005:174); yet it also finds common ground with the avant-garde puppet theatre of Teschner and the *Kleinkunst* of the Kabarett Fledermaus, and the technologically-enabled creativity of Eisenstein and Méliès. As a spectator of my own work, standing outside it as much as I can, I can clearly see the ways in which it reinforces the arguments I have made in the written part of the thesis concerning the strong but hitherto often unexplored and untheorised links between the practices of the Modernist avant-garde and those of present-day Visual Theatre. One fear had been that the subject matter (even though it arose ‘naturally’ as part of the creative process) would in some senses be a ‘smokescreen’: I was doing a piece that took place in the Modernist era, but would the process and the outcome, the important parts, link with my central thesis in the way the subject matter did? On reflection, this seems to have been a healthy fear to have – in some ways it channelled the conscious ‘manipulation’ of the piece (to fit its aims) into the subject matter rather than the mode of practice, which meant that the mode of

practice was able to come to exemplify the arguments made in the thesis without any 'coercion'.

The scenes I present on the DVD which accompanies the written part of this thesis, together with the storyboards and sketches included as appendices provide an insight into the process by which a piece of contemporary Visual Theatre is created. These elements on their own stand as an illustration of the arguments made in this research: together with the written part of the thesis they should be understood as part of a reflexive system of research – the practice has changed the writing and the writing has influenced the practice. The value of approaching a topic from both a theoretical and practical standpoint is gaining greater recognition, and it is my hope that theses in this mode will demonstrate a way forward in terms of the integration of theatrical scholarship and practice. Drawing on themes and ideas that were important to Modernist avant-garde practitioners, the notion of the *gesamtkunstwerk* has particular relevance and application here. Wagner's coinage went on to become a founding principle for artists across Vienna of the *fin-de-siècle*. Vidler's example of *gesamtkunstwerk* as "...a performance of a Schoenberg composition in a house designed by Adolf Loos" (Vidler, 1991:248) highlights the aspect of the idea that embraces the interdisciplinary, that marries two (or more) practices toward a greater end. A thesis in this mould, one that combines written research and a practical element, which is also understood to be a form of research, should be judged as a form of *gesamtkunstwerk*, exemplifying, as it does, the links between knowledge, discovery and art, and the interconnectedness of these aspects in practice-informed research.

3.2 The Animated Stage of Complicité's *The Street of Crocodiles*: Object Performance and Metaphor at Play in Early Visual Theatre.

This case study examines Complicité's (or Théâtre de Complicité, as they were known at the time of staging) *The Street of Crocodiles* (1992) as an early instance of the emerging form of Visual Theatre, and highlights the particular traits, modes and sensibilities that mark it out as such. The distinctive use of images and materials is analysed, and the creative process of the piece is measured against notions of the auteur and collaborative devising.

The show is based on the writings of Bruno Schulz, a Galician Jew who lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century, and died at the hands of the Nazis in 1943. In particular the show draws its narrative from Schulz's collection of short stories *Cinnamon Shops* (1934), known in its English translation as *The Street of Crocodiles*⁵⁷. Interspersed with scenes drawn directly from the book are pieces of text and ideas from other sources such as his private correspondence, and a sense of the man himself that the company got from speaking to his nephew. These other elements add to the already biographical nature of the book, and we immediately find a similarity with the work of Lepage and other collaborative, devising practitioners: the work is thoroughly researched by the company, and though it is not text -'based', the text is an important element in the creation of the show. It could be described as a 'resource', to use the terminology of Théâtre Repère⁵⁸. Particular recognition should be given to the fact that the company drew inspiration not only from Schulz's writing, but also from his drawings. While not unique to Visual Theatre,

⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that the Quay Brothers produced a 3D animated film based on this same collection of stories, in 1986. The form seems particularly fitting for the subject matter of the book, concerned as it is with the animation of the inanimate, and puppets/puppetness. Victoria Nelson's *The Secret Life of Puppets* (2001) suggests that this championing of Schulz is part of a wider fin-de-millennium fascination with puppets and their associated tropes.

⁵⁸ The ideas of Théâtre Repère, in particular the relevance of the R.S.V.P. cycles to Visual Theatre practice, are discussed in section 2.3 *What is Visual Theatre?* and the concluding case study, section 3.4, on the work of Robert Lepage.

it is argued that such an approach is indicative of a key sensibility behind Visual Theatre production, where the sights and the sounds are created in concert.

The show opens with Josef (the protagonist, and a cipher for Schulz), alone on stage, thinking, and sorting through books. We are told (or we discover that) he had been designated a 'useful Jew' and had been put to work in the local library sorting books into those the Germans would steal, and those that would be burnt. He opens one book and finds a feather. He picks it up, looks at it, and lets it gently float to the ground. A sound effect fades up and moves behind the audience: the sound of marching. Josef stands rigid, listening and following the sound. It passes and he sits down again in relief. This opening image does several things for us. First, it prefigures, in a very cinematic way, a later theme of birds and flight, which will come to be linked to the character of Josef's father. It is cinematic in several, connected, senses, as used throughout this thesis: there is a very closely-controlled *mise-en-scène*, which in cinema would most likely be achieved by an extreme close-up or tracking shot that established the feather as an emblem of something, the carrier of some meaning⁵⁹.

In *Complicité's* *mise-en-scène*, this focus is created by the stillness of the actor who drops the feather, contrasted with the movement of the feather as it falls. The feather is not a puppet in the traditional sense⁶⁰ but it is *object theatre*, and it does display *puppetness*. While it is not a directly manipulated thing, a puppet, it is a manipulated stage object, and a thing upon which signification is placed: it is animated, endowed both by the performer's release of it, and the audience's gaze, with a character – it plays a feather and communicates to us featherness⁶¹

⁵⁹ It is a theatrical and cinematic metaphor: or more accurately metonymy or even synecdoche, a part of a thing that stands for the thing itself.

⁶⁰ Or perhaps even in a non-traditional one. I have given a definition of puppets, puppetry and puppetness as I understand them and use them in this thesis: this definition is greatly indebted to the very closely-argued chapters Tillis devotes to questions of definition in his *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet* (1992). This thesis broadly posits that a puppet can most properly be called a puppet when it is under human control (and not even direct control – the connection can be mediated by a prosthetic animatronic device or a computer or some other means). An automaton, while ontologically related, is not a puppet. However, it can display puppetness, as I argue it.

⁶¹ This raises a number of fascinating questions about puppetry and its limitations. Is the feather both a feather and (as it is used in this piece) a puppet of a feather? Can a thing be a puppet of itself? One might suggest that a puppet of a feather should be a *constructed* representation of a feather: conceptual art tells us that the intention, the act of presentation, is enough to transform

and more besides. It is a metaphor, imbued with significance, standing as an emblem of freedom, which is then contrasted with the sound of German boots marching by, a sound of crushing totalitarianism. The feather also represents the sudden joy of a lost thing found, and sets the mode in which the play will unfold – stories of lightness and freedom leaping from the pages of a book. This opening sequence with the feather is a distinctively Visual Theatre moment, in its inception and execution, and the playful, intelligent and moving way in which it transmits its themes and concerns through nuanced visual metaphor.

It is distinguishable from a similar bit of stage business that might occur in a text-based piece by virtue of this significance, and in many ways, its standing in for words. It is as carefully thought out as any corresponding pieces of dialogue might be, and does the job with a poetry and succinctness that is unavailable to text. Indeed, as an audience, we realise that where we have seen this level of object and set significance before is not in the theatre, but in the cinema, where a building or a city or a landscape or a feather can play such an important role in the meaning imparted. And with the cinematic in this image comes the puppetness of the significant object. When Josef drops the feather, he is imbuing it with significance, puppetising it, and letting it speak for him. The feather is an animated object, and this is not accidental: *Complicité*'s mode of presentation mirrors Schulz's fascination with the animation of the inanimate⁶².

There then follows one of *Complicité*'s most famous *coups de théâtre*: as Josef reads, we get a theatrical version of cinema's split screen technique. In the centre of the stage, Josef is lit from above, when behind him on stage left a vertical shaft

the thing from a thing in itself to an emblem, a signifier of the particularity of that thing's thingness. Similar ontological problems, such as "Is the puppet in shadow puppetry the thing making the shadow, or the shadow itself" continue to intrigue puppeteers. Such questions are only tackled in this thesis as they apply to communicating to the reader the sense of puppet and puppetness as discussed here as it relates to Visual Theatre.

⁶² Schulz's work is very obviously a product of its era and geography. Unlike many of the leading Modernist avant-garde writers and theatre-makers who were for the most part urban dwelling and part of a dialogue that stretched across Central Europe, Schulz's existence was primarily rural and independent. However, he exists within the same cultural context, of the dying days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as so many of the writers I analyse in this research, as well as other novelists and short story writers such as Joseph Roth and Stefan Zweig. These Modernist preoccupations with puppets, control, the animation of dead matter and related ideas are examined principally in the first section of this research; I also approach these issues and their cultural context in the practical element, which brings its own exegesis of the material.

of light appears from the floor and illuminates a man walking down (and at right angles to) the wall at the back of the stage. Of course we are meant to be thrilled by the acrobatics and magic of it, but in terms of being spectators of an event, we are watching the scene with the eyes of a spectator of cinema. Our minds are now used to the filmic convention of observing a character from an almost unlimited array of angles, as it suits the vision of the filmmaker.⁶³

Brewer's dictionary defines a *coup de théâtre* as "An unforeseen or unexpected turn in a drama to produce a sensational effect" (Evans, 1988:279) and in Visual Theatre it achieves its full potential: sensation and spectacle are in its 'DNA', from the magic of Meyerhold's 'fairground booth' and the Modernist cabarets to the spectacle of practitioners like Eisenstein (with his 'montage of attractions') who moved from theatre into film. Where Visual Theatre, and in particular a company such as Complicité elaborate the idea further and make it a central mode of Visual Theatre practice is in the 'turn': in transformation and metamorphosis. This is something film, from its earliest incarnations, has always had a flair for: both in 'live action' - the work of Méliès and later film-makers such as Vertov – and most notably animation, transformation as a visual 'coup de théâtre' has been a stock in trade.

Puppets, and the accompanying aesthetic of close-control and transformation have been part of Complicité's theatrical palette for some time. In their production of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1997), the play is peopled by human actors, except for the character of the baby which is a life-sized puppet that the actors manipulate. Later in the play, a toddler-sized puppet replaces the baby as the child grows, and this is manipulated by two members of the company. Near the end of the play, the child has grown even more, and is now manipulated by two or three members of the company. In a later scene they hold its arms and legs and make it walk across the stage. When they let go, the 'puppet' walks and moves unaided, and then runs offstage. A sleight of hand/persistence of vision has been worked on the audience, and in the final

⁶³ One might specifically mention *Citizen Kane* (1941) as an example (one of Hollywood's first and most effective) of a film that used closely controlled camera angles as a means of imparting another layer of meaning to the shot, and expanding film's close relationship with the architectural.

scene with the child it is not a puppet at all but a real child whose costume and mask perfectly matches that of the preceding puppets. The coup de théâtre of the performer's walk down the back wall in *The Street of Crocodiles* is an excellent example of Complicité's cinematic mise-en-scène, but also of their embracing of an aesthetic of puppetness. The performance of the actor who takes the walk is subjected to a kind of close-control: he is giving a performance, in a 'traditional' way – he is acting the part of a man walking. But his performance is manipulated, and re-presented: it is in effect turned ninety degrees and (while remaining a physical performance that has liveness and presence) made into an image, and the actor a puppetised object. There is, so to speak, a mental or conceptual camera between the audience's perception of the actor, and his performance, with the result that the audience, by being presented with these cinematic tropes (of a split-screen and expressionist 'camera angle') is doing the mediating, objectifying and image making as it perceives the action⁶⁴.

Puppets play an important part in *The Street of Crocodiles* too, though not in such a traditional form as in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*: the puppets in Josef's world are more abstract and transitory. A coat will be animated by the members of the company, becoming an attractive woman who engages Josef in conversation, until it suddenly loses definition and falls to the floor, just a coat again: the "semblance of life" which stands as one of several key phrases repeated throughout the play, has drifted away from the puppet, like the memory in Josef's mind that triggered it. Later in the show, Josef's mind/memory conflates the figure of his father with his memory of having to teach woodwork to an unruly class. His father is 'assembled' in front of the audience by the class, who

⁶⁴ As I have suggested previously in this thesis, when we watch Visual Theatre we are watching it not so much in the way we watch dance, as in the way we watch film. Visual Theatre's reaction to and assimilation of the techniques of cinema, television and the multi-media age we live in, work not only on the way a show is created and performed, but also on the way it is experienced. Though there is still identification with the performer's body there is an equal or greater identification with the mise-en-scène, the entire 'image' we are receiving. For a Visual Theatre audience, as for a cinema audience, the human actor is one element among many that are deftly manipulated to produce an overall impression. As Craig envisaged, the fluid scenography, lighting, props, puppets, music and human performance work in concert to produce the 'stage vision'.

proceed to animate him: “Wood is alive” is one of his father’s sayings. This figure also drifts away, but reappears towards the end when it is brutally sawn up in front of Josef.

Wood is one of the ‘resources’ of the play: to use terminology more usually associated with text, we can say it is one of the themes. Wood, cloth, birds and books are key signifiers in the visual language of the show and can rightly be called themes, because their regular appearances and transmogrifications are central to expounding the show’s ideas. The cloth in his father’s shop is given the status of a character in the drama that accompanies Josef on many of his dreams/nightmares/memories of his life: sometimes it is the canvas on which his father expounds his theories about the nature of matter and energy “The migration of forms is the essence of life” is his father’s mantra. Sometimes the cloth is the tablecloth, witness to interminable family gatherings. On a picnic, the cloth first represents the rug, and is then wrapped around the father and made into wings: with the addition of two forks as antlers he becomes a wasp that disrupts the picnic. The metamorphosis of books into birds is another metaphor which permeates the show. When Josef is introduced, we see that though he is confined to the library, the books stand as companions, conduits to memories of happier times. This metaphor is amplified several times during the show, when the books take flight – are puppetised by the cast, and flock or scatter between one scene and the next.

Beyond using the inanimate matter of the show – the props and set – as puppets, animating and changing their forms and their meaning, the company also animate and ‘manipulate’ themselves and each other. Many Complicité members and collaborators trained at the École Jacques Lecoq in Paris, and the influence of Lecoq’s mastery of mime and mask work is obvious in their shows. The question of whether Complicité is more a Visual Theatre company or a Physical Theatre company arises here. Although the difference between Physical and Visual Theatre is analysed in greater depth in sections 2.2 and 2.3, it is useful to apply the question to this case study.

Complicité stand as a very interesting example of the distinction between these two types of theatre, because (in many ways) they straddle the two. *The Street of Crocodiles* bears an abundance of Visual Theatre hallmarks and practices: the

proliferation of puppets and puppetised objects and performances; the cinematic framing and angling of images; the trope of transformation of objects and their significance. But there are also a number of distinctively Physical Theatre aspects of the production. The company revel in synchronised movement and speech, and they are justly famed for it: the level of integration with each other's performances that the actors achieve is remarkable and compelling, and the company lives up to its name – we watch their complicity of movement as we would watch a carefully choreographed dance. The issue of close-control is fascinating in this context, because (as is the case with much Physical and Visual Theatre) the action is devised by the company, yet it is also controlled and manipulated by a director with a strong 'vision'. And here is one way in which, arguably, the work of Complicité is not as purely in the mode of Visual Theatre as that of *Ex Machina* (Lepage's company): the meaning imparted by the visual is not always given privileged status over the lure and rhythm of the physical. In many cases there is an exciting synthesis of scenography and significance/sense, such as when Josef, standing alone in the library, picks up a book and suddenly finds that this act has instigated a kind of Proustian flashback, drawing into the space a collection of unruly pupils, their desks and woodwork projects, to which he finds he must respond. There are other transformational moments where the scenography seems to dictate the sense, such as when the context around a ringing bell changes, from that of the schoolroom to that of Josef's father's shop, and he has to struggle to keep pace with the movement of scenes which assemble themselves around him. But there are also scenes where the improvisational, devised nature of their creation shines through too brightly, and one senses that their inclusion has more to do with a feeling for a particular bit of mime, or movement, or creation of an image than with a mind to the semiotics of the piece. After a scene where the various family members sitting around the table slowly turn into birds (mirroring the father's collection in the attic, and foreshadowing the future disarray of the family), the maid Adela also makes her own transformation into a bird, in an excellent piece of mime which adds nothing to the sense of the piece. There are a number of instances like this in the play, which, as someone who has participated in collaborative, devised mime work, I can vouch come from games, exercises and structured improvisations that the

company will have done during the rehearsal period. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the inclusion of these moments in a piece of Physical Theatre, where much of the meaning relates to the body and its ability: but in Visual Theatre, a closer reading of the symbolism and metaphors that the image transmits is called for, and this does not leave room for a piece of movement that works on its own terms but fails to support the overall mise-en-scène. A moment like the transformation of Adela might seem close to the movement and mime employed in Visual Theatre, but where it deviates from the sense of the scene, it is as superfluous as the stage business deployed by actors in text-based theatre to fill the gaps between lines.

I do not want to overstate this possible criticism of Complicité: overall, they function in a number of very similar ways to Ex Machina, as a creative, exciting, physically adept group of devisers under the watchful eye of a director with a vision. Taylor explicitly links the directors of the two companies (McBurney and Lepage respectively) as examples of the rare breed of theatrical auteur who, he says,

“...may often direct the works of others, but the crucial characteristic of this kind of artist is the creation of pieces which are so personal in their take on the universal (regarding sensibility, subject matter and working methods) that their shows could only with enormous difficulty be revived by other hands. It would be a brave company that tried to give a different lease of life to, say, Mnemonic, McBurney's recent synaptic- sizzler about our moral duty to the past and to memory”. (Taylor, 2002).

In Complicité, as in Ex Machina, there is a culture of respect for research and learnedness within the group, so they avoid many of the pitfalls of much Physical/Visual Theatre, namely creating work which is visually interesting but intellectually empty. In *The Street of Crocodiles*, the ‘writing’ comes from the company’s devising based on an adaptation of Schulz’s work by their director and assistant director, Simon McBurney and Mark Wheatley. It is a characteristic of the best Visual Theatre that the writing is of the same standard as the visuals: Craig’s sense that it takes a strong director or dramaturg to focus all the elements of the piece is borne out in the practice of these exemplary Visual Theatre artists.

Complicité's *The Street of Crocodiles* stands as an icon of early Visual Theatre production, both because of the background and working methods of the company, and because of Bruno Schulz's inspiration to them to re-member – to recall and reconstitute - the fin-de-siècle fascination with puppetness, the animating of the inanimate, and the culmination and decline of Modernist ideals with the rise of fascism and the plunge into cruelty and war. Visual Theatre, as I have argued previously, can be seen as a Post-Modern form of theatre, but it never seems to forget its Modernist roots.

3.3 Kleinkunst on the Visual Theatre Stage: *Shockheaded Peter* as fin-de-millennium Artist's Cabaret.

If *The Street of Crocodiles* (1992) stands as an early example of Visual Theatre practice, its sensibility influenced by a cinematic mise-en-scène and practices and a Meyerholdian understanding of movement and puppetness, then *Shockheaded Peter* (1997) represents more the 'low culture' rather than 'high art' aspect of Modernist avant-garde theatre practice that contemporary Visual Theatre consciously or unconsciously draws so much on.

Shockheaded Peter is arguably the first mainstream Visual Theatre show. That is not to say it was the first mainstream work to co-opt Visual Theatre practices: video projection, puppetry, animated sets and other hallmarks of Visual Theatre were beginning, at the time of its conception, to appear more frequently in non-fringe productions. But it was the first Visual Theatre production to garner wide scale acclaim from critics and audiences, and appeal to a substantial new audience who would normally shy away from anything even faintly avant-garde.

This case study identifies *Shockheaded Peter* as a prime example of Visual Theatre practice's links to Modernist performance, and examines how the show's 'Artist's Cabaret' process and aesthetic, and the puppetness of its staging, are integral to defining it as an exemplary piece of Visual Theatre.

Shockheaded Peter is a collaborative production between two members of Improbable Theatre - Phelim McDermott, who directs, and Julian Crouch, who designs; The Tiger Lillies, led by Martyn Jacques, who provides the music and lyrics; the cast of the show; and Michael Morris, Artistic Director of Cultural Industry, who produced it. It adapts Heinrich Hoffman's *Struwwelpeter* (1844), a parody of straight-laced Victorian morality tales for children.

The show opens with the melodramatic entrance of the MC (master of ceremonies). The tone for the piece is set by his outrageous opening line "I am the greatest actor that has ever existed". He then somewhat undermines this claim by apologising and deciding to start again on the other side of the stage.

The play is subtitled *A Junk Opera*: knowingly or unknowingly, this harks back to a performance tradition that is closely related to contemporary Visual Theatre. Svich (2004) has it that Victorian music hall, cabaret, fairground sideshows and Viennese operetta all feed into the pre-history of a piece such as *Shockheaded Peter*. She concentrates particularly on the operettas of Offenbach, and then Strauss, as being of special importance, leading as they do to the genre of the American stage musical, which she cites as clearly a precursor of a show such as *Shockheaded Peter*. I would add to this an example such as Berg's cabaret-influenced opera *Lulu* (1935), based on the plays of Wedekind. As Albright notes, "...the influence of cabaret (and cabaret-like informal performance) on opera was strong: ...Wedekind was the mentor of the young Berthold Brecht, who developed a similar performance style... [t]he whole performance style of Brecht and Weill was saturated with cabaret" (Albright, 2004:349).

Shockheaded Peter employs a 'distancing' or framing technique that could come from Brecht or from music hall: both Martyn Jacques and the MC take the role of a character who for much of the show stands outside the action, commenting on what is happening – as Svich describes it, to "... frame events for the audience, or in some cases, 'unframe' them in disquietness" (Svich, 2004:43). This mode of presentation is also reminiscent of numerous indigenous puppet traditions, such as a number from South East Asia, that involve puppets or a mixture of puppets and humans, and a human interlocutor who stands apart from the action of the show, sometimes commenting on it, sometimes joining in⁶⁵.

Shockheaded Peter quickly establishes a mood of intimacy and collusion on the audience's part, in its strange, thrown-together, Post-Modern presentation of Modernist spectacle. Some of the intimacy comes from the comedy: the audience is being asked to share in the enjoyment of the grisly deaths that befall the children in the stories; some from the intentionally unpolished feel of the production (though the flow and pacing of the show are such that we realise below the chaotic surface it is very tightly plotted and rehearsed). Presented in

⁶⁵ Korean puppet theatre is particularly notable in this respect: the *sanbach'i*, a combination of musician and narrator helps tie the performance together, singing and telling jokes between acts while the next scene is being prepared, and also acts as a 'go-between' for the puppets and the audience who "talk[s] with the puppet in response to prompting from the crowd" (Kim, 1997:127).

the style of fin-de-siècle cabaret/ vaudeville, producer Michael Morris describes the show as “an advent calendar crossed with a late 19th century pop video.” (Morris, 1998). This suggests something of the meta-theatricality of the piece: it is a knowing Post-Modern celebration of Modernist performance aesthetics, playfully ‘riffing’ on that style in much the same way as Hoffmann approached the morality tales from which *Struwwelpeter* is drawn⁶⁶.

The MC stands in front of the set, which does indeed resemble an advent calendar (though surely its most immediate inspiration is a Victorian toy theatre), made up as it is of doors and windows on various levels surrounding a mini proscenium arch, and advertises what the audience is about to witness. His spiel is that of the fairground huckster, promising stories and images that are not for the faint of heart, and with the grisly hyperbole of the Grand Guignol⁶⁷, or Victorian melodramas like *Maria Marten*. His opening monologue also functions as a kind of overture to the sequences which will follow, reinforcing the idea of the show as being in the mode of an opera, however loosely. Having metaphorically set the stage for what will follow, he then opens the first door/hatch that will let us in to the performance and Martyn Jacques rises into view. The MC appears to draw him up from beneath the stage, and manipulates him in to his starting position, facing the audience with his fingers on the keyboard of his accordion. In moments such as these the show plays with the puppet/puppet-master dynamic that so fascinated Modernist theatre makers: arguably, it also makes a more specific reference to the ‘living doll’⁶⁸ shows that grew from the puppet renaissance of the turn of the 19th century. Similar to a progression that has taken place in Visual Theatre as it matures, the ‘living doll’

⁶⁶ Hoffmann’s book belongs to the same tradition as Hilaire Belloc’s *Cautionary Tales for Children* (1907), satirizing the genre of ‘morality tales’ that was in vogue as children’s literature. Hoffmann’s work however, as Belloc’s would later, exaggerated the punishments that awaited children who transgressed.

⁶⁷ Guignol, of course, has a number of direct connections with puppets: the *Grand Guignol* was a theatre in Paris of the Belle Époque that specialised in plays about horror and insanity, and the term later came to be used generically to signify any performance that invoked the fascination with gore, horror, madness and the uncanny. The name comes from a French puppet character similar to Punch and Kasperl (in Great Britain and Germany respectively). Shershow describes the guignol shows as “crude and farcical” (Shershow, 1995:188): essentially the character is a troublemaker, and a humorous figure among puppets.

⁶⁸ Discussed in greater depth in chapter 1.1.

routines grew from an interest in literal puppets to an interest in the puppet as a symbol and stage metaphor: from 'puppet' to 'puppetness' as I have characterised it.

Jacques sings, and his song is illustrated: when he begins to describe the scene into which Shockheaded Peter's parents will be introduced - the winter season which mirrors the barrenness of their existence without a child - snow falls from a spot above his head. We are led to understand from the start that the stage and the performances will be tightly integrated, that closely-concerted aural, visual and musical elements will be a feature of the production, and that the visual will be, if not privileged, then of equal importance to all the other elements. With Shockheaded Peter's parents and their situation introduced, the MC reappears and returns Jacques to his box under the stage, like an automaton or mechanical toy being put away. The central proscenium arch space opens, and members of the company bring on the set, which represents a 19th century middle-class drawing room. The items of set would not be out of place in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), except that they are two-dimensional 'flats', with drawing room furniture printed on, with the look of a Victorian illustration. This fulfils several criteria that I suggest should be particularly associated with the practice of Visual Theatre. First, it is a non-naturalistic set. This alone is not unusual in contemporary theatre. But the way in which it is non-naturalistic is distinctive. In much theatre where the set rejects a realistic or naturalistic approach, the environments it represents and the uses it is put to are at the service of the actors' performances. The previously naturalistic stage has been de-cluttered of elements that are seen as extraneous, and what is left is minimalist and utilitarian. In the theatre of Peter Brook, a rug can stand as a room or an island, a box can be a horse, a chair or anything that fits the actor's use of it. The sets I have described in *Shockheaded Peter* represent a distinctively Visual Theatre approach to staging: they are more than backdrops, naturalistic or non-naturalistic – they are *animated*, imbued with life. The way the sets (mostly painted or printed flats/screens) are moved in and out of the action is not simple pragmatic set-moving, but pure object performance. Flats emerge from concealed slits on the side of the proscenium arch, or grow up from underneath the stage

between floorboards, echoing the menace of Shockheaded Peter's fingernails which also occasionally protrude from a void.

In chapter 2.4, I posit the depiction of chairs in Svankmajer's *The Flat* (1968), The Right Size's *Bewilderness* (2001) and Lepage's *The Far Side of the Moon* (2001) as all belonging to a continuum that begins with Craig's quote "Don't they know how Moliere made these chairs act – how they are alive, and working in combination with the actors?" (Craig, 1999:49). The chairs in Shockheaded Peter fit into this continuum: they exhibit puppetness, both in their movement – they are manipulated performance objects – and in their appearance – they are drawings of chairs, in some sense 'caricatures' of chairs. In Post-Modern parlance, they are re-mediated, and inter-textualised, printed to have that particular look of a 19th century engraving or book illustration: the use of line reminiscent of Gustave Doré or John Tenniel. Visual Theatre is very much a theatre of images, and these are both chairs (the actors mime sitting on them) and images of chairs. They also act as playful reminders that the play *Shockheaded Peter* is an adaptation of a children's book, a genre where the illustrations and the text are often of equal importance. The text has made its way on to the stage, and the illustrations are trying to do the same thing. The visual character of the set establishes what kind of non-naturalistic world the play inhabits: that of the imaginative fantasy of fin-de-siècle subversive children's literature.

Cinema and naturalistic theatre have often been compared with each other, and a criticism has been that both are hampered by having to represent too literally, whereas alternative theatre has the freedom to play and transform⁶⁹. I do not wholly disagree with this, but I think part of what cinema does has been misrepresented: it is true to say that everything that fills the screen must conform to the film's chosen ethos and aesthetic, and this is indeed often naturalism/realism. But in rejecting a cinematic mode of presentation on stage

⁶⁹ Peter Brook's theatre has become more pared-down and elemental as his career progresses: and while he shares some of the ethos of Visual Theatre, his work is also in some aspects the antithesis of it. I discuss his suggestions of the differences between stage and screen in greater detail in my case study of Robert Lepage, comparing my notion of the cinematic with the account he gives in a quote from *There Are No Secrets* (1993).

because it is associated with the limiting factors of naturalism and is seen as un-theatrical, non-mainstream theatre denied itself, until the advent of Visual Theatre, the pleasure and artistic possibilities of the unified aesthetic that film also excels at. We need only look at examples of Modernist cinema to see how Visual Theatre has co-opted some of the most experimental traits of cinema practice. In films such as *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1920), the visual aesthetic is intimately tied up with the actor's performances: the mood is created by the sets and the performances working in concert. *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, like much of the early cinema previously examined in this thesis, from Méliès to Vertov and Eisenstein, deals with worlds that are to a greater or lesser extent removed from realism/naturalism. Both the sets and the performances in these films reflect this cinematic mode that is representing a heightened reality, and indeed often not the 'external' reality, but the psychological reality of the protagonists. *Caligari* is an excellent example of this. This thesis does not claim that this aesthetic was the sole invention of film: as Robinson suggests

"The design of *Caligari* clearly found its inspiration in theatrical precedents... [such as]... in Berlin, Reinhardt's productions of Hasenclever's *Der Sohn* (1918) and of Kaiser's *Von Morgen bis Mitternachts* (January 1919), Heinrich George's production of Kaiser's *Hölle, Weg, Erde, ...* Comparison of designs and photographs from these productions with the images of *Caligari* suggests that the film's designers had studied these stage productions in arriving at the 'Expressionist' style of their decors" (Robinson, 2005: 35-37).

What the thesis does claim is that the primary mode for transmitting the aesthetic, the sensibility that shows such as *Shockheaded Peter*, or Robert Wilson's *The Black Rider* (1990) draw inspiration from, is cinema rather than theatre. In sections 1.1 and 1.2, I trace a genealogy of Visual Theatre, and look at its antecedents at the turn of the 20th century. Part of the conclusion I reach is that there is not an unbroken theatrical lineage that ultimately results in contemporary Visual Theatre. In the theatre of the 20th century, something was lost for a long time, when Modernism went into decline. Text-based and naturalistic theatres reasserted themselves, and the establishment again rejected 'low culture' tropes (the puppet, the fairground booth, spectacle) that might intrude on the 'high art' of the theatre. What this thesis argues is that though

there was a broken theatrical lineage, there was not a broken *performance* lineage: it is just that that performance (of spectacle, puppetness, *gesamtkunstwerk*) was happening in the cinema rather than on the stage.

Having been introduced to the childless couple who long for a baby, we then see their wishes being granted – the stork delivers what should be a bundle of joy. A large stork puppet appears, manipulated by members of the company, in its classic incarnation carrying a triangle of cloth with a baby in it. It might appear as if this moment in the production hardly merits mentioning, but if this work is, in some senses, the first ‘mainstream’ Visual Theatre piece, what is extraordinary is that this (the appearance of a puppet representing a popular image or archetype) should be so unusual on the British stage. But the fact is that despite Craig’s championing of the puppet (both literal and metaphorical) over a hundred years ago, mainstream British theatre has largely retained a stagnant opinion of puppets as a form suited only for children. This scene with the stork also encapsulates a key Visual Theatre imperative: if you are going to include an interesting development or piece of action that affects the story, why not show it? This may sound obvious, but it is incredible how much mainstream theatre is produced where the most interesting parts of the play happen offstage. Indeed it seems as if they only happen so the characters can discuss them.⁷⁰ There are two obvious reasons for this: first, the question of which elements it is most prudent to spend a limited budget on. Theatre on the whole no longer concerns itself with the elaborate, ‘realistic’ sets it once relished, perhaps having in some way ceded a particular type of realism to cinema.⁷¹ Secondly, theatre has for much of its

⁷⁰ It may seem that I am attacking ‘text based’ theatre in my advocacy of Visual Theatre but this is not the impression I want to give. I would argue that ‘newness’ and in some senses ‘the way forward’ currently lie with Visual Theatre, and have done since the early 1990s, but that is not to disparage the great works of theatre, most of which have been text-based. Shakespeare needs no added visuals to work, nor do more recent playwrights such as Wilde or Stoppard. Much of the ‘action’ of *Henry V*, say, happens offstage, and as the Chorus encourages us, we must imagine the scenes that are described or alluded to: “...can this cockpit hold/The vasty fields of France? or may we cram/ Within this wooden O the very casques/ That did affright the air at Agincourt?... let us, ciphers to this great accompt,/ On your imaginary forces work.” (King Henry V, Prologue. Shakespeare, 1923: 531).

⁷¹ It might be argued there is at least one exception to this: the spectacle of the big budget musicals that predominate in the West End. There is undoubtedly still a fascination with ‘realism’ here, though it is very far removed from the ‘realism’ of film. Shows like *Miss Saigon*, with the dramatic appearance of a full sized helicopter in the last act are practising a kind of bombastic

history, been a medium whose sense is imparted by auditory rather than visual means. Theatre makers and audiences seem to have been more interested in the characters' response to things rather than the things themselves: text-based theatre is more akin to the novel than the painting, with monologue and dialogue being the principal modes of imparting the characters' psychologies and the ideas of the piece to the audience. In cinema, there has for a long time been a credo 'Don't *say* something if you can *show* it', so the lingering close-up and cuts between an event and the characters' reaction have often taken the place of monologue / dialogue. Exposition is often redundant when a character's back story can be established with a few meaningful glances at a photo or object, or a lengthier flashback sequence. As I have argued previously, while text is still important for Visual Theatre (and certainly a well written script makes the difference between something good and something great), equally or more important have been visual modes of storytelling developed by film. So, when the stork delivers a child to the couple, as Martin Jacques narrates the proceedings in song, we are given the corresponding image.

There are dedicated puppeteers in *Shockheaded Peter*, and they manipulate the stork, amongst other things, but the whole company is skilled in manipulation. When the stork delivers the baby, the parents take and animate it, and as the swaddling is unfurled a shocking sight is revealed: a child with freakishly long fingernails and hair, the eponymous Shockheaded Peter. Normally one might feel a certain incongruity in a show that not only mixes large puppet storks with human beings, but then asks the audience to accept a puppet as the child of two human actors. However the overall aesthetic of the show is such that as both human and non-human actors conform to it, we are willing to accept the shared reality of the various characters and objects that populate this fantastical world.

realism, stretching the boundaries of what the audience expects is possible on stage. This links it to the renewed appreciation of spectacle that is part of Visual Theatre: the object (the helicopter) is brought on and manipulated, and the thrill is in the encroachment of this 'real' object, as opposed to a painted flat or whatever else might have been used to simulate a helicopter. But its use is only semi realistic/naturalistic – we are still not in the world of film where we might encounter it as we fly over the jungles of Vietnam. Techniques, objects and expensive sets such as those featured in *Miss Saigon* are also there because the production has a massive budget, and wants to give the audience the impression that they have got their money's worth.

The show takes its format from the book: after our introduction to Shockheaded Peter and his parents, the MC draws the curtains of the proscenium arch and leads us on to the next 'chapter' – the story of Augustus, who would not have any soup, and wasted away to nothing. The show covers most of the stories in Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*, and as well as following the style of the chapters in the book, this mode also references the theatrical style it most heavily draws on, that of Modernist Artist's Cabarets and puppet booths. Between these self-contained stories, the show has a narrative thread concerning Shockheaded Peter's parents, who have buried him under the floorboards in shame and disgust. Martin Jacques adapted the lyrics from Hoffmann as well as writing the music, and each segment is witty and concise, introducing a character and their quirks, and the fate they inevitably suffer. The stories alternate between using puppets, human actors and a mixture of both. Harriet, who plays with matches, dies a grisly death as she is consumed in flames, her dress slowly reversing, revealing red, orange and yellow strips of fabric, and creeping up her body to simulate the fire. The set and costumes work particularly well in concert here, with cardboard-cutout flames licking up from beneath the floorboards. Later on in the show, we see again the image of something malignant lurking beneath the stage as fingernails belonging to a now grown Shockheaded Peter reach out to his parents. The play draws on that Grand Guignol sense of dread and horror, with the monster under the floor in many ways standing for an idea in the unconscious that will not go away, and keeps reappearing to torment the conscious mind. Shockheaded Peter's parents think they have disposed of him by shutting him down in the depths, but the guilt, fear and knowledge of what they have done is just as horrific to them as their child's appearance.

Most of the stories concern children who do something they ought not to and end up paying with their lives, but one of the most popular sequences, judging by audience reaction, is the story of the man who went out hunting. Performed entirely with puppets, it takes place in the rectangular window above the proscenium arch, and exists in a smaller scale than the rest of the action, with the puppets being about a foot tall. A hunter goes out shooting hare, but his gun falls in the hands of his quarry, and an orgy of violence follows. Martin Jacques chorus, the words of the hunter, consists purely of "Help! Help help! Help! Help

help!” sung with sadistic glee, and having killed the hunter and his family the hare turns the gun on herself and flapping her ears, ascends to heaven. The backdrop of clouds rolls downwards, giving a crude but effective storybook representation of the hare flying upwards.

It might be said that the puppets serve to diminish, in some ways, the force of what we are watching, though I would argue that paradoxically they also heighten the horror. In the story of Conrad suck-a-thumb, Conrad is a puppet who will not stop his thumb-sucking and is warned by his mother that if he continues, the Scissor man will come and cut off his thumbs. Of course he pays her no heed, and the resulting carnage is horrible, as the performers appear and grab the puppet, who tries to resist. They hold his thumbs and the MC, with a large pair of scissors, snips them off. Conrad falls to the ground, silently shrieking at the loss of his thumbs, and red cloth is drawn from the stumps, representing blood pooling on the ground. There is here perhaps an echo of the puppet/puppetmaster dynamic I have analysed at points throughout the thesis: in this case, the character of Conrad has added pathos due to the fact that he is a puppet. He can appear to struggle against those restraining him as his thumbs are cut off, but we know that as a puppet he has no volition: the way he was conceived and manufactured means he is fated to suffer the attentions of the Scissor man.

After a while, the audience knows what the *dénouement* of each scene will be, and Jacques plays on this, appearing to forget in one of his songs how the character ends up – “Dead!” shouts the audience enthusiastically. There are also recurring visual themes – the scissors that are used on Conrad’s thumbs return to snip Shockheaded Peter’s fingernails, and there is a continuing game played with the audience concerning how the MC will make his entrance: a cat watches Harriet ignite herself, and when the scene ends it removes its mask to reveal the MC; he sometimes appears by climbing down a rope on to the stage, or emerging from one of the stories in which he has taken a part. Similarly, at the end of the play, we see that Shockheaded Peter’s parents have been reduced to the grotesques that they distanced themselves from at the beginning of the show. They get their comeuppance with the reappearance of their son, who has grown to adult size beneath the floorboards. As Jacques sings, reflecting on the moral of

the story, Shockheaded Peter, who at first appeared to be a puppet manipulated from beneath the stage, climbs out and removes his head, which turns out to be a mask, beneath which is the MC⁷². This use of coups de théâtre also points to the status of the show as piece exemplary of Visual Theatre practice. In an art-form so influenced by the cinematic and the figure of the puppet (both, I have argued, ideas that have close-control as a key aspect), there is a drive to juxtapose these influences with the unique feature of theatre, its liveness. Tricks that are impressive on screen are doubly so when they are presented live⁷³.

Jacques sings a final refrain of the stories in the show, and as he does so, children's gravestones rise from between the floorboards; there is a sense of resolution – not only of the ideological themes within the play, but also the visual ones – the animated stage, the sheer puppetness of the aesthetic. A giant puppet of Shockheaded Peter emerges from the window above the proscenium arch, symbolically proclaiming himself as the star of the show, and again playing with the idea of scale as the play has done so interestingly all the way through.

The title of this chapter makes reference to two related Modernist performance strands, *Kleinkunst* and *Artist's Cabaret*. *Shockheaded Peter* does not make a claim to be resurrecting these particular Modernist theatre practices: the argument of this thesis is that because of the pre-history of the show, the lineage of Visual Theatre, it cannot help but display its links to these genres. Beyond the spirit of

⁷² There are undoubted shades of the oeuvre of Méliès here, though it is hard to say whether that is intentional or not. The very fact of which reinforces the contention of this thesis that an ethos, a sensibility, was transmitted to Visual Theatre practice from its Modernist avant-garde antecedents, without the present day theatre-makers necessarily knowing much or any of the work that has so much in common with their own.

⁷³ Stephen Hopkins' film *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* (2004) plays quite interestingly with coups-de-théâtre, in a way that is almost the inverse of those discussed here in relation to theatre. Though the film centres on Sellers, and the scenes from his life are presented mostly in a naturalistic way, occasionally it will break off and follow one of the supporting characters as they leave the scene and give a monologue to camera. The most inventive aspect of this is that the film employs a coup-de-theatre effect when it makes this transition: as the character breaks out of the scene, they cease to be played by the actor who was representing them, and through a very theatrical 'sleight of hand' are hijacked by Geoffrey Rush (playing Peter Sellers). The characterisation by Rush, of Sellers, playing Miriam Margolyes, playing Sellers' mother is astounding, with something of the quality of Lepage's characterisations. Lepage (like the MC in *Shockheaded Peter*) plays with similar 'substitution' coups-de-theatre in *The Andersen Project*; Complicité also employ this to great effect in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and more recently *Shun-Kin*.

the Victorian music hall which it invokes, beyond the Modernist aesthetic, there is a Modernist *process* at work. Svich looks for the antecedents of *Shockheaded Peter* and references “English music hall, minstrel shows, Jewish vaudeville, extravagant spectacle inspired by the Folies Bergère of Paris” (Svich, 2004:42), as well as Viennese operettas and the fairground booth, as inspirations for the American stage musical, which she argues is its closest precursor. To this I would add *Kleinkunst*, and *Artist’s Cabarets*: *Kleinkunst* as a descriptive term that shifts the locus of influence from Svich’s examples in the U.K., U.S. and France and more towards the cabarets of Central Europe, where, as I analyse primarily in sections 1.1 and 1.2, the puppet’s resurgence in Modernism found its clearest expression. *Kleinkunst* literally translates as ‘small art’, and across Europe was used to denote shows that were intimate, combined the ‘low’ arts of puppetry, humour and song, and were, like cabaret, often created by those outside the theatrical mainstream. I use the term *Artist’s Cabarets* to reflect the particular form that cabaret often took under Modernism: like puppetry, cabaret was a ‘low’ form that was championed by the new generation of Modernist artists who moved into it. Cabarets like *Le Chat Noir* in Paris and the *Quatre Gats* in Barcelona developed their own successful puppet repertoires, instigated by artists such as Picasso, Miró, Henri Riviere and Caran d’Ache. Artist’s Cabarets gained in popularity across Europe, most notably in Berlin, Cracow, Moscow, Munich, St Petersburg, Vienna and Zurich, injecting the old forms of puppetry and cabaret performance with the Modernist’s ethos of experimentation. *Shockheaded Peter* shares with these cabarets not just an aesthetic that relates to the finished product, but a similar mode of practice: created by artists from both theatrical and non-theatrical backgrounds, and created collaboratively. As Michael Morris, who is also the director of Cultural Industry, which commissions a great deal of work exemplifying Visual Theatre practices, puts it:

“Shockheaded Peter is really about a group of hybrid outsiders coming together to make something that none of them could have made on their own” (Morris, quoted in Svich, 2004:43).

‘Hybrid outsiders’ is surely a Post-Modern way of describing the movement of artists from different spheres into the theatre, in a way very similar to the Modernist artists who colonized the cabaret at the turn of the 20th century.

Shockheaded Peter succeeded in introducing mainstream audiences to work that referenced very particular theatrical oeuvres - Modernist avant-garde theatre and film, Grand Guignol, cabaret, puppet plays and melodrama - but wore its influences very lightly. It also managed to suggest that puppets were perfectly acceptable devices in theatre for both children and adults. Since *Shockheaded Peter* (and without a doubt, in large part because of it), there has been an explosion of puppet use in mainstream theatre pieces. It stands as perhaps the most (in commercial and critical terms) successful piece of Visual Theatre produced to date.

3.4 Cynosure of the Visual Theatre Stage: Puppetness and the Cinematic in the Solo Theatre Practice of Robert Lepage.

This chapter examines recent solo productions by Robert Lepage⁷⁴, in particular *The Far Side of the Moon* (2001), and posits that Lepage's oeuvre is especially remarkable in the way that it combines so many of the aspects that, this thesis claims, have their roots in Modernist avant-garde theatre practice, and are now central to contemporary Visual Theatre practice. The case study analyses Lepage's work in the light of notions of puppetness and the cinematic, and also as the product of an individual and a company that have the dual dynamic of collaborative and auteurist work. It is argued that Lepage stands as a cynosure for Visual Theatre practice: his process and output a site of special theatrical interest, and a guiding light to others in the field.

It might be instructive to start by offering an example of what this style of theatre is not: what it is in part reacting against, distinguishing itself from –

“... we're used to the traditional hierarchy of the author, and then the script being put into the hands of the director who re-shapes it, or re-moulds it, or tries to squeeze or apply his concepts onto it. Then the actors, who have their own way of interpreting it, squeeze their feelings, emotions and intuitions into the script. And once the guillotine of the opening night happens, all the creativity stops on that evening. Everything's supposed to be frozen, wrapped, sealed and delivered to the audience which has paid, and wants to have its money's worth” (Lepage, in Delgado & Heritage, 1996:135).

There are many different aspects and interpretations of the way Lepage's work embodies the opposite of this 'traditional' mode of theatre: the principal difference, which Lepage is referring to in this quote, is that his work is not 'text-based' – a text is not necessarily the beginning of the process, indeed for Lepage,

⁷⁴ 'Solo' is used here to refer to shows where Lepage is the sole performer. In other ways it could seem a bit misleading in his case, backed up as he is by a phalanx of set, lighting and sound designers in the rehearsal room, as well as other members of his company, Ex Machina, and external collaborators. The shows examined here are described as 'solo' works, but even on stage Lepage is aided by puppeteers and others who remain invisible.

the 'text' (as it refers to the 'finished' play) is something that is written "on the day after the closing of the show" (1996:135). But the text can only go so far in telling one about the nature of a Lepage show: the written text is a useful document, but its importance to the company is superseded by that of the visual document of the performance. Andy Lavender gives a good example of this, from his observation of Lepage and his company Ex Machina remounting the show *Needles and Opium*:

"The audience watches a shadow play of hands and objects. The company can't quite remember the sequence. Nor can Lepage, so everyone gathers round the video of Lepage's production. The visual document (the video cassette), not the literary one (the script), is the final authority for restaging. We *watch* theatre." (Lavender, 2001:135).

We return to Edward Gordon Craig's sense of theatre as a primarily visual art, with the director as 'author of the spectacle' (Walton, 1999:33). Walton suggests that Craig, as the champion of 'the visual' in theatre, was in some sense the interlocutor necessary in each generation to issue the reminder that "the word theatre comes from the Greek for 'to see' not 'to hear'." (Walton, 1999:3). Lepage has made the same point on several occasions, interestingly relating it to his Quebecois background, and making the distinction between a *theatre* (French/French Canadian) and an *auditorium* (English/English Canadian):

"There's an English-speaking culture that calls the public an audience. They go there to hear stories, and you go there to tell stories. However visual you are, it goes through the ears, people are there to listen to the words, to the music. And you have a part of the world that call the public spectators, like in France. People go to see a story, to see a show, and things come through what they've seen. When they describe shows they've seen, they talk about the story visually, even if they have heard the words. For me that is a division and it makes a difference when we go through borders: some cultures seem to be based more on an oral tradition, and others more on a visual one." (Lepage, in Delgado & Heritage, 1996:148).

As discussed previously, 'Visual Theatre' is still in its infancy as a term: that is to say, there have been practitioners and spectators using it for some years, but it is still relatively unacknowledged as a term referring to a contemporary theatre

movement by mainstream theatre or press; and, as I suggest in section 2.3, where it is used, it is still used in an inexact way, and without common referents. Indeed, there are those working in contemporary experimental, avant-garde theatre who still dislike the term, or feel it does not express the essence of what they are doing (among these, reputedly, Simon McBurney, director of *Complicité*⁷⁵). In putting forward arguments for the use of this term, one has to contend with its seeming limitations – is it ‘mostly’ about the visual? Does it replace one hierarchy (that of the written and the spoken) with another (that of the visual)? I posit that, predominantly, the term points towards a desire, on the part of its practitioners, to re-evaluate what is important in theatre, in the same way that a term like ‘feminism’ does not necessarily imply female dominance, but a re-evaluation of women’s status, leading to a greater equality⁷⁶. Lepage’s work differs from the example of traditional theatre given at the beginning of this piece not only by reversing the way a text is normally created, and elevating the visual to an equal position, but by rejecting the hierarchical, fractured process of traditional play production.

Detailed accounts of the process of Lepage and *Ex Machina* exist elsewhere, so I shall not outline it at this point, but shall refer to it in the context of the influence of the twin notions of ‘cinematic’ and ‘puppetness’ that I argue are defining characteristics of Lepage’s work, and indeed, of Visual Theatre as a whole.

Lepage’s work has been described variously as ‘cinematographic’ (Schmitt, quoted in Tessier, 2000:240), ‘cinematic’ (Dundjerovic, 2003:1), and ‘Theaterfilm’ (Kager, quoted in Defraeye, 2000:87) among many other similar epithets. But what does this really mean, and how does it manifest itself in Lepage’s work?

⁷⁵ Heather Neill addresses this in a 2004 interview with McBurney: “They [*Complicité*] are intellectually daring, yet the adjectives most frequently attached to their work are “physical” and “visual”. “The only people who think of me as ‘visual,’” says McBurney patiently, “are the English, and that is because they have an under-developed sense of it, despite a highly developed sense of irony and language. Whereas here we talk of ‘audiences’ - listeners - in France attenders at a play are ‘les spectateurs’ - watchers. I treat the visual with as much respect as the spoken word.” In any case, he says, “everything begins with a text of some sort”” (Neill, 2004).

⁷⁶ Keefe and Murray, in their definition of Physical Theatre, counsel against overly delimiting theatre categories: “...we would wish to play with the notion of ‘blurred genres’ or categories. By its very nature, theatres are blurred: at the centre, at the edges and in their processes... It is in this sense that we would consider theatre to have always been ‘total’ as well as ‘blurred’ as well as ‘physical’.” (Keefe and Murray, 2007:6).

Watching *The Far Side of the Moon* (2001), one is immediately struck by the dimensions of the stage: the first impression is that we are watching theatre in widescreen, the ratio evokes a 16:9 or 'letterbox' film print. As the lights come up and music drifts in, onto the left hand side of the as yet un-peopled set are projected the opening titles. And it feels so natural, yet one realises that the pleasure of anticipation, of visual and semiotic multi-layering one gets from seeing an opening vista with titles superimposed is one that has heretofore been a solely cinematic pleasure, and at once one realises that barriers are being broken down. The opening of *The Andersen Project* (2005) is at once more explicitly cinematic and at the same time more theatrical, through its use of a kind of surprise that has its locus in liveness, and coups de théâtre: in the middle of the stage, we are presented with a cinema screen, and again the opening titles are projected on to it, but Lepage subverts our expectation of both the fixed, un-live quality of video, and the two-dimensionality of the screen. Lepage's character of a disaffected French-Arab youth leaps 'into' the screen, and proceeds to 'spray-paint' (again by means of video projection) his own slogans and graffiti on the titles. Lepage is a master of many forms of visual presentation, but these openings evidence his fascination with the different 'languages' of visual presentation:

"The very technological allows me to invite film and/or television into the theatre and I think that's a very, very important step to take for theatre, because theatre cannot survive on itself if it doesn't take into account all the different narrative languages that are around. The audience we are telling stories to in the theatre nowadays have a different narrative education than we had, or the generations before us. They, you know they're, they're being told stories through rock videos and commercials in a narrative way that we didn't, you know we, we never had access to that twenty or thirty years ago, so people know what a jump cut is, what a flash forward is, they know what a completely discursive montage can be, so I think you have to embrace all of these narrative rules and try to impose them to the theatre" (Lepage, in Tusa, 2006).

A number of impulses lie behind Lepage's extensive use of video and filmic techniques in his productions: one theme that runs through his work is that of the inter-cultural meeting, and the variation in use and meaning of language. As

he suggests above, a modern audience has grown up with the language of film and television, and just as Lepage's theatre is unafraid of staging productions like *The Dragon's Trilogy* that are performed in a mixture of French, English and Chinese, so he does not turn his back on the new (visual) 'language' of film and television, as so much mainstream theatre has. As Lavender notes, on observing the creation of another Lepage solo show, *Elsinore*, "We experience his theatre with the eyes and ears of cinemagoers in a video age, even as it trades in showmanship reminiscent of previous kinds of theatre" (Lavender, 2001:143).

Another reason for his use of filmic techniques is, this thesis posits, the level of close-control that this affords. Lepage rejects the traditional hierarchy of theatre production outlined at the beginning of this section not only because it was weighted more towards text than visuals, but because that mode of production is disjointed and 'schizophrenic' in the multitude of voices that contribute to the work at each of its stages of production. In a traditional, hierarchical, text-based piece, the 'meaning' or 'spirit' of the show originates with the writer: when the script is delivered to the company, the director then takes charge of this 'meaning', and tries to impart it to the actors. In another room, and most likely another building, a set designer and builder, lighting technicians and sound designers are all working separately on the 'visual side' of the piece. These elements are eventually brought together, and it is expected that a well made play, with the 'meaning', intended by the writer, intact, will result from this process of disconnected parts.

In *Ex Machina's* work, whether it is a solo show or a large cast production, Lepage is a master of finding and keeping the focus of the piece, through a truly integrated theatrical process: the actors improvise, research, play with the ideas in a space that also includes the technical crew, and the focus of the work benefits from this collaborative process.

But does this relative freedom that the actors have then stand as a counter-example to the notion of Lepage as an auteur, with all the accoutrements of cinematic close-control that this term implies? While his method as an auteur respects his performers' contribution to the creation of the piece and indeed their eventual sense of (shared) ownership of it, one should not confuse ownership with control. Looking at the idea of close-control in terms of a puppet/puppet-

master relationship, which I am concerned to advance here, Lepage is a puppet-master in the more Kleistian sense – he is enamoured with the freedom and movement, the possibilities of the puppet, but he is still the director of stage visions, the Artist of the Theatre (to invoke Craig), and his dramaturgy is what fuses the disparate elements into a coherent whole. And though he is more sympathetic to actors and their private journey to the creation of their performance than many to whom the appellation *auteur* has been applied, he is undoubtedly closer to Craig's vision of the director: actors who sit in on Lepage's rehearsal often don't watch *the show*, he says, "They watch one of the actors performing. They tell me he's good, whereas I'll find his work worthless because he's out of place in the context of the show, or moving awkwardly, or his rhythm is off" (Lepage and Charest, 1998:162).

Dundjerovic makes a very good argument for the elementally cinematic dramaturgy of Lepage:

"As a theatre director, Lepage borrows from film directing, a way of making narrative by 'editing' and putting together already existing material. In theatre, he uses the actors' improvisations: in film he uses a montage of shot material. Thus, Lepage as a creator of narrative, either performed or filmed, is in the position of a 'montager' of various individual or group scores" (Dundjerovic, 2003:103).

Lepage's method, as described here, of course bears a great resemblance to the Modernist practitioners of film art and specifically montage, Eisenstein and Kuleshov: his practice is also surely Post-Modern in its application of a film technique to theatre production. This Post-Modern appropriation of a Modernist practice and sensibility is key to an understanding of Visual Theatre's emergence and trajectory. Lepage, in his role as 'montager' makes a 'material' of his performers, puppetises them and applies a close-control to the puppetised images and scenes.

Lepage's theatrical background has a considerable bearing on his later film and theatre practice. I have discussed the work of Théâtre Repère (the company where Lepage served much of his 'apprenticeship') earlier in this text (in section 2.1), and in particular their most famous mode of working, the RSVP cycles:

Resources, Score, eValuation, and Presentation. Lepage gives a brief explanation of how RSVP can be used to create a piece of theatre:

“... we begin with any resource - our conversation about my high-school days, for instance. Then we make a score with them; we say, 'We'll use this and that, in this or that order.' Then we evaluate, we say what we feel about the score. We could talk about how the learning of certain art languages wouldn't work for me in school, and how I reacted with shyness. Then we present it. And the little scene that might come from all this can - and usually does - become in itself a new resource, a new point of departure.” (Manguel, 2006).

The key component of this technique is the ability to view what one brings to the process as a ‘resource’: this leads Lepage to a more filmic handling of writing and scenes, with the definitive version (or the best chance of one) being the point the play is at on the last night, or when it is filmed. But it is not only text and worked and re-worked scenes that are resources to be drawn upon for a cinematic rendering and editing: the physical nature of the stage and props is an equally important resource. Lepage’s stage settings are, as Julie Taymor notes, an interesting mixture of the real and the surreal: the general cinematic trend towards naturalism of setting doesn’t extend to limiting the possibilities of his stage. Taymor expands on this theatrically exciting mixture:

“I don’t like to see theater that television could do better... You go to a play that might have a very realistic, elaborate set of a front porch and right way you think – or, as a theater artist, *I think* - “Oh Hell”, because you know you’re going to be sitting on that front porch for the next two to three hours, stuck in a certain kind of reality... When I walk into a theater to see a live production I want to be transported to a world that is thoroughly surprising and illuminating” (Taymor, in Weber, 2006:52).

For Peter Brook, the great difference between cinema and theatre is that with cinema

‘... because of the realistic nature of photography, the person is always in a context... In the theatre, one can imagine, for example, an actor in his everyday clothes indicating that he is playing the pope by wearing a white ski hat. One word would be sufficient to conjure up the Vatican. In cinema this would be impossible. One would need a specific explanation in the story, such as its

taking place in an asylum and the patient with the white hat having delusions about the church, without which the image could not make sense. In the theatre, the imagination fills the space, whereas the cinema screen represents the whole, demanding that everything in the frame be linked in a logically coherent manner' (Brook, 1993:26-27).

Lepage has an impressive ability to straddle the gap Brook perceives⁷⁷. To take another example from *The Far Side of the Moon*: Lepage's dual performance as twin brothers is very subtle and naturalistic in style – he is, among other things, a master of the one-sided phone call.⁷⁸ While his dialogue often has a filmic naturalism to it, his sets are more ambiguous. There is undoubtedly a certain naturalism at play: shelves of books, ironing boards, phones and many other objects filling the dead mother's house are realistically portrayed. His fascination with presenting the thing-in-itself, with its "peculiar perfection" as Williams (1970:18) has it, is coupled with his comfort with technology on stage, resulting in moments such as his voice, when speaking on the telephone, being miked and fed through a filter that gives it a small, faraway, crackly sound that is not narratively important but is there because of Lepage's enjoyment of the particularity of objects, processes and their characteristics. Hannaham, though, sees this as a deficiency on Lepage's part "... in his quest to create a theatrical

⁷⁷ Brook describes two ways in which he himself works: one consists in searching for beauty, 'as if' he says, 'through the purity of detail, one were trying to go towards the sacred' (Brook, 1993:46). The other, which he says is diametrically opposed, has to do with creating a link between the actor's imagination and the imagination of the audience through a kind of alchemy of representation: 'This alchemy is possible if the object is so neutral and ordinary that it can reflect the image that the actor gives to it. It could be called an 'empty object'' (Brook, 1993:46). Brook bears an interesting relationship to the group of practitioners this thesis characterises as being part of the Visual Theatre movement: on the one hand, many of his insights about constructing an image and a world on stage fit very neatly into the Visual Theatre ethos; on the other, he has stated how he hates masks, that they are for him inherently deadly, and his emphasis on simplicity, and what he defines as theatricality, is often at odds with the complexity and cinematic sensibility of Visual Theatre.

⁷⁸ One could relate this naturalism of performance to his affinity for cinema, but I would argue that it has as much in common with his interest in different cultures and modes of culture/language, and the promotion of these *as they are*, rather than presented through the prism of caricature from someone outside that culture – which of course also relates to the Quebecois struggle for recognition of a unique identity within Canada. This leads to a piece like *The Dragon's Trilogy* being performed in three languages, though ironically he was later criticised for not presenting the Chinese characters *as they are*, but as a metaphor for the situation of Quebec – a nation within a nation.

equivalent of cinematic language, the director takes on film's worst quality, its fetishization of the banal" (Hannaham, 2000). Lepage is often mentioned in the same breath as Peter Brook and Robert Wilson, but his affection for and fascination with the nature – the character, even – of objects is a million miles away from their (in this instance) more Craigeian aim of making "...a token shadow... take the place of a complete painted forest" (Brook, 1990:84). But from this cinematic attention to detail, this attention to the materiality, the 'thingness' of the things on stage, comes a more theatrical approach to props, and, crucially, a more puppet influenced one. In one memorable sequence in *The Far Side of the Moon*, the ironing board from the mother's house becomes a series of exercise machines at a local gym where Philippe goes to let off steam. Lepage's ability to interact with the pieces of his set, and in so doing animate and transform the audience's perception of them, relates to the aspect of film practice and theory I analyse in section 2.4. The animated quality that the objects in Philippe's mother's house take on relates closely to a core 'theme' in 3-D stop-motion animation: the animating of the inanimate, and the discovery of a 'character' in objects. In section 2.4, I discuss this with reference to Svankmajer's *The Flat* (1968), and Craig's quote on Moliere's use of chairs. In the sequence where the furniture in the mother's flat metamorphoses into various gym machines, Lepage's inventiveness, effortless physicality and interaction with set and props comes to the fore, and one can trace this ease with manipulation of inanimate objects not only to his time with Théâtre Repère and the RSVP cycles, but, as Charest (Lepage and Charest, 1998) notes, to his early work as an actor and director with a puppet company. In his close-control of the stage and props, and in his seamless integration with them, he fulfils the Craigeian ideal of the infinitely adaptive set, and within it the performance of the Übermarionette: Hannaham suggests of Lepage's performance in *The Far Side of the Moon* that "...he is his own puppet" (Hannaham, 2000), though Hannaham might not intend this to be taken as a positive aspect of the piece. This thesis makes the claim that it is in this collision of puppetness and the cinematic that Lepage excels himself, standing out as an exemplary practitioner of Visual Theatre. In the *Far Side of the Moon*, the windows along the back of the stage, reminiscent of those in a lunar module, fulfil many purposes and take on many meanings

(this layering of meaning is a hallmark of Lepage's theatre practice). At one point one of the windows is a washing machine in a launderette, at another the 'porthole' through which we see a small puppet of a Soviet cosmonaut floating: the window opens and the cosmonaut floats into the stage space, where another transformation is effected – it is handed to Lepage, who is at this point playing the mother, and at once the image becomes one of the birth of a child, with the portal becoming the womb and the cosmonaut's air supply tube the umbilical cord. This is in one sense simply playing with metamorphosis again, but beyond that it is creating subtle but powerful metaphors, achieved by this 'layering of meaning'. Later on, Lepage lies on a table by the window, and with remarkable physical control, makes himself appear to be sucked out into space. Defraeye describes this shared stage/prop/body sensibility as Robert Lepage's "architecturalization of the human body" (Defraeye, 2000:89), and his explanation of his sourcing of this term, from Birringer, is reminiscent not only of Craig, but of other Modernist theatre practitioners like Meyerhold:

"Johannes Birringer uses this term in reference to a postmodern aesthetic that works, plays, and flirts with a model body that, through various performative simulations, becomes a [sic] automatized form that transcends traditional limitations and categories of the body in performance" (Defraeye, 2000:93)⁷⁹. Meyerhold's theory of bio-mechanics sought to do something similar with the human body: Birringer's term also has something of Kleist's aspirations in *On the Marionette Theatre* about it, and substantiates this thesis' notion of puppetness as manifest in Lepage's work. Lepage is in a league of his own when it comes to this level of control over the image presented, the mise-en-scène, and in the puppetness of his own physical performance and its integration with the set and props. The closing image/sequence of *The Far Side of the Moon* is a bravura demonstration of these talents: the Craigian set lifts and turns smoothly (as Craig envisaged for his moving screens, but seldom saw achieved) to reveal a great mirror that spans the width of the stage. Lepage twists and turns on the

⁷⁹ The idea of puppetness, as articulated here, in the work of Lepage and other Visual Theatre practitioners and companies also relates interestingly to Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, though this is a link beyond the remit of the current investigation. Victoria Nelson's *The Secret Life of Puppets* (2001) provides some fascinating insights into the ontological relation between puppets, automata, robots and cyborgs.

floor, gradually moving across the stage, but this movement is only fully meaningful when we see it mediated by the mirror – in the reality of the stage environment, Philippe is dying of a bubble on the brain: in the reality of the mirror, he is making a graceful spacewalk.

The cinematic nature of Lepage's work is interestingly characterised by Reinhard Kager, who describes it as 'Theaterfilm':

"It has neither to do with traditional theater nor with conventional film, but filmic techniques such as reverse scenes and scene cuts that are used theatrically so the spontaneity of the stage is preserved" (Kager, in Defraeye, 2000:87).

Defraeye suggests that Kager is wrong to use the word spontaneity, pointing out that in many of Lepage's productions, the space left for human spontaneity when acting with a mechanically controlled stage is very small: Morlaud echoes this in his review of *Elsinore*, rehearsing the old lament of the traditionalist "But what will become of the actor? A being whose movement is limited by the service of machines that can break down at any moment" (Morlaud, in Tessier, 2000:246). He is referring to the staging of *Elsinore* at the Edinburgh Festival in 1996, when a single bolt sheared, forcing the entire production to close because the complicated mechanical set could not be fixed in time.⁸⁰ Lepage has actually commented that he does not mind when technical things go wrong, it is part of the 'liveness' (Eyre, 1997). I think this is more accurately what Kager is referring to: Lepage occupies a space between theatre and film – a space that holds so much of what is enjoyable and artistically inspiring about film, but retaining the wonder of theatre that its liveness and non-linear nature have blessed it with. It is slightly disheartening that Lepage should attract the same criticism that was levelled at Craig and the other Modernist practitioners: we accept that Craig was ahead of his time, but it seems that some Modernist ideals are still so 'modern' as to remain provocative to contemporary mainstream theatre makers and critics. Christopher Innes defends Lepage's stagecraft just as he has defended Craig's, and he argues, as this thesis does, that Lepage is the natural inheritor of Craig's legacy, right down to the criticism – if it can be called criticism - drawn by being

⁸⁰ The echoes of Craig's initial disappointment (and his critics' glee) with his screens in Stanislavsky's production of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Arts Theatre are uncanny.

ahead of one's time. Innes is also more open to the puppet element in Lepage's work, both as a literal and a metaphorical device:

"Being a 'puppet' offers in fact a liberation from gravity and time, expanding the conventional two-dimensional movement of performance into new spatial possibilities. Craig imagined vertical movement through endless flights of steps: Lepage achieves it without the constraint of static stage constructs" (Innes, 2006).

Though Innes identifies Robert Wilson's very controlled performances as being perhaps closer to Craig's concept of the Übermarionette in that one respect, Lepage fulfils the most important definition of a Craigean theatre-maker:

"four elements -- the main pillars of Craig's theory: a single autonomous creator; the actor as Übermarionette; a flexible mechanized stage; physical, non-verbal performance -- that are reflected in much contemporary avant-garde performance, and are particularly clearly echoed in Lepage's work... Lepage qualifies as a completely self-sufficient Craigean auteur -- perhaps the one and only -- in combining the functions of producer, director, scenic and lighting designer, engineer, lead actor, and even dramatist for his shows." (Innes, 2006).

Innes rightly perceives that Lepage's solo shows are the best examples of the cinematic and puppet influences running through his work. In part the motivation for this is purely practical: in *Elsinore*, Lepage's vision was of the drama of Hamlet being played out in the protagonist's head, while the other characters can be read as psychological manifestations of his inner turmoil, so that practically this necessitated Lepage playing all the roles. It is in a show such as this, as well as later solo works such as *The Far Side of the Moon* and *The Andersen Project*, that Lepage as the puppet-master is most in evidence: when asked whether *Elsinore* was in any way a 'live film', he replied:

"I deal with both worlds. I do some films, some plays, and I work with a lot of technicians. I deal with all these different artists who are all storytellers, basically, all using different means. I think we're moving more and more towards a clashing of these ways of telling stories. Whether we want it or not, I think theatre is more influenced by film. Film at the start was frozen theatre, in a way, and you can't do a *Hamlet* today without taking into account that an

audience has a televisual way of listening to stories. It's a new vocabulary and you have to take that into account. All these things converge, so they either clash or merge. I think there is a way for these different areas of storytelling to merge. This show, for some people, is pure theatre. Others say "That's not theatre, that's film" or an installation. Whatever you call it, it's inviting different ways of telling stories to try to live together. I'm happy about the meeting of these different mediums, and particularly in one specific moment in this show, a very simple moment, when Hamlet talks to Horatio about how he feels about him. There's one camera back there and a projector in front. There's no wizardry, but it presents a meeting point of a live actor and a video image of him. The live actor has nothing to do with the video image, he's a different character, even if I am performing them both, because the video image is two-dimensional, he's bigger, he's made of electricity and light, he's a completely different being. For me it's the only moment in this show where I really feel there's a pivot between theatre and electronic mediums, that these two types of storytelling can actually make dialogue" (Eyre, 1997).

Lepage's work exemplifies the argument put forward in sections 2.1 and 2.3, that Visual Theatre is a Post-Modern practice with a Modernist sensibility and roots. It embraces the cinematic, and all the possibilities of manipulation and expression that multi-media technologies afford, yet its ethos, the logos it follows, stretches back to the innovations of the Modernist avant-garde, and its fascination with puppets and puppetness. Innes (2006) suggests Lepage might be the only true 'Craigian auteur': the case studies made in this thesis demonstrate that while there have been key productions that stand as exemplars of Visual Theatre practice, Lepage's practice as a whole is emblematic of Visual Theatre's modes and sensibilities: it is the quintessence of the form.

Conclusion

This research has had a broad scope, but a narrow focus. Its time frame spans the 20th century, and some years either side of it. It covers some ground that has been gone over by others in greater detail, but in its particular focus it has searched for and uncovered things that few others had looked for; it also aims to provide a direction to more “virgin soil awaiting its plowman” as Bogatyrev has it (Bogatyrev, 1971: 105). Svich suggests that

“The art of ‘the dig’ is one of the strongest aspects of late 20th century art. Artists began to see themselves more and more as archaeologists, excavating the lost remains of old forms lying dormant in the culture’s imagination, or misinterpreted over the span of time” (Svich, 2004:43).

Both the practice and theory elements of this research could be seen as being part of this tendency. My initial impulse was a sense that Visual Theatre had a lineage that stretched back further than the Physical Theatre of the 1980s, or the Total Theatre of the 1940s onwards. In particular, the resurgence of puppets and puppetness, and a cinematic aesthetic in the performances I was watching suggested that the key influences of Visual Theatre were much further back. To construct a proper lineage for Visual Theatre, and in doing so illuminate its identity, would mean digging deeper into its antecedents, and making a new claim concerning its genealogy, and its key traits.

The thesis argues for and exemplifies an interdisciplinary approach, both in terms of the different disciplines of practice and theory informing each other, and also with regard to the three main academic and critical discourses on which it draws – theatre studies, film studies and puppet studies.⁸¹ Though this cross-discipline interest and discussion is gaining traction in the wider academic world there is still a dearth of theorists and critics comfortably able to embrace two or

⁸¹ During the course of this research, academic preference seems to have made more significant moves towards a more interdisciplinary approach, and slowly a small group of publishers is emerging, such as Palgrave Macmillan, Wallflower and Routledge, that support academic writing straddling one or more performance practices.

more forms: while the exploration of the relationship of puppetry to theatre or animation to film (practices that are sometimes regarded as ‘smaller’ forms of their parent, in some sense) is more common, an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses all the forms – theatre, puppetry, and cinema – has fewer templates in academe. In this respect, practitioners are leading the way: most obviously those such as Robert Lepage, who move between directing theatre and directing film – and indeed, not only theatre and film, but opera, rock concerts and dance.⁸²

He is an actor, a puppeteer, a director, an author, a dramaturg: this understanding of and involvement in all the constituent parts of a production differentiate both his outcomes and his approach to work from other interdisciplinary practitioners⁸³. His approach, the action that he takes in the rehearsal room, is based on his character, his interests, his influences, and his sensibilities. Lepage does not just bring ‘the theatrical’ to the films he makes, or just ‘the cinematic’ to his stage work (though this, as I have argued earlier, is an important aspect of his style). What he brings to all his work is his interdisciplinary, multimedia *sensibility*. Where the starting point for a scene in mainstream theatre or film would be the written word, for Lepage working on stage or screen the starting point might be a film, such as Hitchcock’s *I Confess* (1953) in Lepage’s *Le Confessionnel* (1995), or a rock song – the music of Pink Floyd in *The Far Side of the Moon* (2001). When making drama, he has not only a theatre-maker’s eye, but a cinematographer’s eye and a puppeteer’s eye. A sensibility

⁸² Even within ‘mainstream’ theatre, there has been a greater movement between the two forms, with directors such as Sam Mendes carving out a prestigious career for himself at the Donmar Warehouse and then moving on to become an acclaimed Hollywood director, while continuing to direct stage productions. Mendes, Lepage and others like them (one might also mention the late Anthony Minghella in this context) who move between both forms are rare, of course, partly because film is an expensive endeavour and a lack of success is rarely rewarded with a second chance, and both are fortunate in securing funding for their theatre work, which in turn enhances their reputations to the point where funders are willing to risk a film budget on them.

⁸³ Robert Lepage and Sam Mendes to some extent signify different routes from one form to the other: the mainstream route often tends to be seen in terms of adapting a theatrical production to fit it for the screen, and the ‘anchor’ for the piece is the text, the script that is written before rehearsals start; Mendes has talked about his attraction to theatre stemming in part from his enjoyment of the visual aspect, but he remains primarily attached to the text as the backbone of a production. Lepage is exemplary of the theatre-maker/auteur model analysed in this thesis because his approach is, in many ways, one without boundaries: he is (on the surface much like Mendes) a theatre director who has moved into film, but this description does not properly characterise what he brings to a production’s process.

could act as both an active and a passive thing: it is brought to bear on something – it is active, but it is also passive in the sense that it is acquired by absorbing others' contributions to art and culture. This sensibility, for theatre, for cinema, for music, visual art and popular culture, and the resonances of all these things, is strong in Lepage. This is what he brings to his work – an appreciation and knowledge of 'high' art and 'low' culture (just the combination of elements that for Segel (1995) and Shershow (1995) define the Modernist avant-garde theatre practitioners), multiple and diverse media and techniques, and the belief in the equality of these, both in the process and in the performance.

Theatre studies and film studies then, have a small but increasing overlap of interest and academic research. The study of puppets has always been more of a niche activity, and significant writing on them seems to come in waves. The first important text of course is Kleist's *On the Marionette Theatre* (1810), which in turn was followed by the Modernist avant-garde's puppet-influenced ideas. After the decline of Modernism⁸⁴ (whenever one sites that – perhaps at the time of the First World War, definitely by the time of the Second), puppetry's place in adult theatre and academic discourse similarly seemed less assured, and its early advocacy by cinema (in the work of practitioners such as Méliès and Eisenstein – both as literal puppets and a puppetness that suffused the work) also seemed to have dissipated. The first signs of a renewed focus on the puppet as an element of wider drama came with work on the semiotics of the puppet by Henryk Jurkowski (whose analysis of the figure of the puppet started in 1966), and then a renewed engagement with puppets as serious figures in theatre, film and multimedia in the early-to-mid 1990s with writers such as Segel and Shershow, and practitioner-scholars, such as Steve Tillis and John Bell. This resurgence of interest and scholarly activity during the 1990s was not accidental.⁸⁵ The renewed

⁸⁴ Though of course there is disagreement about what this means, and when, or if, it happened: I have argued in this thesis that though seemingly superseded by Post-Modernism, Modernism survives in some forms and arenas, including Visual Theatre practice. However, I suggest that the decline of the first flush of Modernism was inextricably linked to the two World Wars and their effects: in 1918, the loss of artists such as Klimt, Schiele and Moser, and in the Second World War, the torture and imprisonment of Meyerhold by the Russians, the killing of Bruno Schulz by the Nazis and the suicides of Walter Benjamin and Stefan Zweig, to give but a few examples.

⁸⁵ Victoria Nelson captures the fin-de-millennium fascination with puppets and puppetised beings best in her description of the gain in momentum of their depiction in the 20th century: "...for a

focus on puppet scholarship and the renewed enthusiasm for their use in theatre seemed to herald a new age of puppet theatre for adults and of the integration of puppets and a puppet aesthetic in mainstream theatre.⁸⁶

A key aim of this thesis has been to bridge these three media of performance and areas of study – theatre, cinema and puppetry – and make a new claim about their shared history and interconnectedness: this ‘constellation’ as I have termed it, is central to the understanding that this thesis brings to the notion of Visual Theatre. That there is a thing called ‘Visual Theatre’ is not a new claim, but writing about it has, up to this point, neglected to give sufficient analysis to the essential nature of the practice, and to its historical antecedents, which in some cases should be considered direct progenitors. This thesis posits a direct link with the innovations and fascinations of Modernist theatre practitioners and theorists, and from these fascinations draws two key tropes that carried the *logos* of the Modernist avant-garde through the 20th century to contemporary Visual Theatre. These two tropes I have called *puppetness* and *the cinematic*: my research finds them in the work of the Modernist theatre and film makers analysed herein, and then as elements in film making as it progressed through the 20th century – most notably in cinema to which the tag *auteur* was linked. This connection is discussed using another term to which I assign meaning specific to its use in this thesis: *close-control*. With this combination of art-forms – theatre, cinema and puppetry – and the notions introduced as key to understanding the links made in this research – puppetness, the cinematic and close-control – I

hundred years or so as androids, for seventy-five as robots, for thirty-odd as cyborgs, and for a mere decade as the virtual-reality constructs or “avatars” that might best be described as ethereal Neoplatonic daemons.” (Nelson, 2001:249). Nelson highlights also the change in attitude, the embracing of this figure as suggested by its portrayal in James Cameron’s *Terminator* films: “The fact that the same actor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, moves from demonic to benign simulacrum between the first film and its sequel dramatizes the significant shift in the depiction of the artificial human during the decade of the 1990s” (Nelson, 2001:267).

⁸⁶ *Shockheaded Peter* (1997) seemed to presage this new era, yet ten years later *War Horse* (2007) at the National Theatre looks to be achieving the same levels of acclaim and influence – influence that failed to materialise in quite the way it was expected to after *Shockheaded Peter*. What looked like a mainstream genre shift that would continue to gain momentum has turned out to be something that comes in fits and starts, and if puppets are treated with more respect as a theatrical form than they were ten years ago, it is still not to the level that the developments of the late-1990s seemed to promise.

analyse contemporary Visual Theatre practice, and in the light of the history and ideas set out in the research propose a new understanding of the form.

As previously stated, there has been overlap between theatre studies and film studies, and between puppet studies and 'mainstream' theatre studies, and to a lesser extent puppets and film. But the joining of the three is, if not unique, surprisingly rare. That they were linked seemed self-evident to me at the outset of this course of study: the research threw up so many implicit and explicit connections and influences that the fact that the links had not been more thoroughly explored previously was startling. The question of whether one has or does not have insights into certain connections between things is at least partially reliant on the prism through which one sees them. In this respect the practice-informed nature of this research has been enormously important, because it is as a practitioner of Visual Theatre (as well as an observer and student of it) that I have viewed theatre, cinema and puppetry, and it is in Visual Theatre practice that I have seen them converge and unite.

In the course of the research it has become apparent that in many ways the present theatrical milieu is a mirror of the past; the productions analysed here conform closely to the notion of Post-Modern theatre practice, but the specific practices, and the sensibilities of the practitioners reflect much more strongly a Modernist inspiration. The case studies set out in this thesis demonstrate not only the key principles and practices of Visual Theatre, but also illuminate its links to a theatrical era now past. Complicité's *The Street of Crocodiles* (1992) is an excellent example of the company's Lecoq-inspired movement and collaborative devising style; these alone fit it for a Visual Theatre case study. But it also exemplifies the Modernist fascinations and influences that are still at play, in that movement's modern-day theatrical progeny. Bruno Schulz is a classic Modernist author, a cultured Jewish Central European, whose imagination lives in a similar magical, transformative realm to that of contemporaries such as Kafka and Meyrink. Schulz's characters can turn into ringing doorbells, lengths of rubber tubing or cockroaches (echoing Kafka) in what Nelson describes as his "cultic animism of everyday objects" (Nelson, 2001:87). In Complicité's show, the father continually exhorts his family "There is no dead matter: lifelessness is only a disguise behind which hide unknown forms of life": the stage the company

creates similarly has no dead matter, being manipulated and animated by the actors, full of images and transformations that continue to inhabit Complicité's work to the present day: the sequence in *Street of Crocodiles* in which books and papers start fluttering in the wind before seeming to gain consciousness and fly away like birds was recently recycled in *Shun-Kin* (2008).⁸⁷ The techniques used and themes drawn on in these two Complicité shows exemplify the arguments made in this thesis: not only do (in this case) puppets and puppetness stand as inspirations from theatrical antecedents, they form both the central metaphor and technique for transmitting the events of the play.

Impossible's *Shockheaded Peter* (1997) similarly draws on a Modernist sensibility, not just in its subject matter or appearance (a Victorian style toy-theatre set peopled by music hall / freak show / fairground booth characters) but in its fin-de-siècle artist's cabaret mix of live action, puppetry, music and spectacle, and, importantly, the equality of these elements and their visual integration. The subject matter of the Lepage solo shows discussed in detail, in particular *The Far Side of the Moon* (2001), is the most Post-Modern of the case studies given, but the Modernist influences remain obvious: the puppetised objects and stage sets, the multi-media, cinematic inventiveness, the Craigan Übermarionette performance and 'stage vision'.

There exists a need for the new definition of Visual Theatre this thesis offers: the term is increasingly used to describe a strand of present day avant-garde theatre practice, but is still contentious and strangely undefined. The thesis offers a definition, in the form of a genealogy, a lineage, and a nucleus of key ideas, influences and practices that are central to its being. It is hoped that this definition will be inspirational and illuminating to practitioners of this style of theatre who make it with little knowledge of its antecedents, and to scholars and critics of this work who struggle to distinguish between Physical Theatre and

⁸⁷ This is Complicité's most recent (at the time of writing) show, a collaboration with actors from Setagaya Public Theatre, Tokyo and puppets by Blind Summit. The production uses a mixture of humans, puppets and performing (puppetised) objects: the protagonist is played first by a puppet then ultimately by a human actor, the seamless change between them (a great coup de théâtre also employed in Complicité's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*) and the later manipulation of the human actor, in 'puppet' mode, exemplifying the notion of puppetness in Visual Theatre, as it is argued in this thesis.

Visual Theatre, or decide whether it is 'visual theatre' or 'Visual Theatre'. Whatever the response, it will at least be controversial, for there are those who believe there is no such thing as Visual Theatre, or at least that it is an unhelpful and misleading term – among them, Simon McBurney, director of Complicité, whose opinion should carry weight. The thesis makes its genealogy in two ways: claiming a lineage of ideas, which on its own might seem somewhat nebulous, and detailing concrete ways in which those ideas have been transmitted; to give one example, the influence of two key figures in this thesis, Meyerhold and Méliès, on a third, Eisenstein – Meyerhold as his mentor and Méliès as the creator of the first film Eisenstein ever saw and a lasting inspiration to him, informing sequences both in his stage work (*The Wiseman* (1923)) and his films (amongst others, *Strike* (1925)).⁸⁸

The thesis does not claim that the influence is always necessarily as clear cut, or as readily acknowledged by the practitioners discussed. Indeed, part of the challenge of the work has been to show how the theatre of present day practitioners working in a Visual Theatre style is informed by the work of theorists and theatre-makers practising over a hundred years before them. In many cases, the transmission of ethos and ideas is not a conscious one: even if present day theatre-makers have studied theatre history, they do not necessarily link their work to the ideas of Craig, Meyerhold or Schlemmer, though their work might directly or indirectly reflect or reference these antecedents. Many theatre-makers operate like magpies: their eye is attracted to things they like, and these then stand as influences or are incorporated directly into their next piece. This nucleus of ideas, this set of inspirations, this sensibility I have termed the *logos* of Visual Theatre. It might be helpful to describe it in terms of a culture. The common assumption about culture is that it refers to what is, to a state of affairs.

⁸⁸ Then of course there are the imagined or wished-for mentor and pupil relationships: in truth, I can find only one of these so far, as told to Kenneth Tynan by Edward Gordon Craig: “... I’ll tell you a thing about [Orson] Well-ess,” he said ‘A Paris paper published an interview with him, in which he said that one day he was standing in the American Express in Paris when the door *flew* open to reveal a cloaked figure in a funny hat. *Me!* He threw himself to the ground in veneration. I gathered him up and took him to my studio and spent six months teaching him the art of the theatre.’ Craig was now shaking with glee. ‘Magnificent, isn’t it? *Because I’ve never met the fellow in my life!*” (Tynan, 1964: 284). It could just be an example of Orson Welles’ penchant for exaggeration and mythologising, though the impulse to make the story up is suggestive.

This is one sense, but does not tell the whole story. If one thinks of human, artistic culture as more like a yoghurt culture or sourdough bread culture, then this suggests something of the way a pattern or model or idea could be transmitted. Each new loaf of bread starts with almost entirely new components, which do not share an obvious history with the similar components of earlier loaves. But the catalyst, the piece of dough from an earlier batch that is kneaded into the mix, is what tells the loaves what kind of bread they are going to be. A culture in this sense is something that is not static, but holds within it a pattern, a link to what has come before. The logos is a pattern, a catalyst: in this sense the cultural and artistic 'DNA' of Craig, Méliès, Eisenstein and the other Modernist avant-garde theatre and film makers is present in the work of Complicité, Improbable, Wilson, Lepage and all those whose work exhibits qualities that are discernibly those of Visual Theatre. This research traces that 'DNA' and presents it in as tangible a form as possible: through both direct transmission – from mentor to student, or acknowledged influence to practitioner's work – and through the appearance and reappearance of key tropes, techniques and sensibilities: puppets and puppetness, the cinematic and close-control.

This thesis seeks to position itself as a continuation, expansion and development of several discourses: principally in discussion of the key features and descriptions of present day avant-garde theatre practice (though as Visual Theatre practices and sensibilities become more accepted and utilised by the mainstream, the question of whether it can still be called 'avant-garde' may be posed). This research also contributes to the historical perspective of theatre studies, in particular the study and understanding of Modernist avant-garde cabarets and multimedia shows, through the exploration of the nature of their theatrical descendants. Writers such as John Bell, Scott Cutler Shershow and in particular Harold B. Segel, in works such as *Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret* (1990), *Pinocchio's Progeny* (1995) and *Body Ascendant: Modernism and the Physical Imperative* (1998), have explored the mindset of Modernist theatre culture, and this thesis situates itself in research of that mould. The new insights it brings to this strand of study concerns the linking of cinema theory and practice to the established link of theatre and puppetry, and of the notion of puppetness being a recurring trope in these works. The thesis also in some senses continues the

‘narrative’ started by these texts on Modernist theatre practice. It can seem as if the dreams and fascinations of the Modernists died an early death, as the theories and aesthetic appeared to turn sour and evolve into the proto-fascism of Marinetti or Riefenstahl. This research charts the afterlife of these ideas and its findings are hopeful: the product of that era was not nullified, merely dormant. For Segel and the others who have contributed so much to the understanding we have of Modernist theatre practice, the story tends to end with the tragedy in Europe, and indeed cabaret and avant-garde performance did not, could not, continue in the form they had before the war. What the thesis brings to this strand of academic enquiry is a knowledge of contemporary avant-garde theatre, in this sense adding to the story of Modernist theatre practice by reflecting (back) on it.

This thesis also contributes to the sphere of practice-based, or practice-informed research, and situates itself alongside other practitioner-scholars of theatre, and in particular puppetry: of these, two stand out: John Bell and Steve Tillis. Both have carved out successful and interesting niches for themselves as historians, essayists and theorists of puppetry, and their work is enhanced by the added dimension of their practical experience in the field. I write as a practitioner of Visual Theatre and puppetry as well as a keen spectator of it. This thesis has used the practical element, scenes from a work-in-progress Visual Theatre show using puppets, video projection and animation, as a testing ground in some senses, for the ideas set out in the text. If there is a reticence about the description, it is only because the process of an arts-based research project can only go so far in resembling that of a science-based one, and to talk of a ‘testing ground’ is perhaps to unduly raise hopes of the artwork strongly analysing questions raised in the text, and providing concrete answers. That is not to say that such things cannot happen, but it is preferable to talk of two different though connected realms, and the answers they give to each other not always being easily decipherable.

In this research, the writing has taken the form of the conscious mind, so to speak, and the practice the unconscious. Where the creation of the written element is more formalised and linear, the practical element is free-form, instinctual and interpretive. The practice that has emerged has mirrored the

direction and flow of the writing, though that has not always been immediately obvious: often the practice has got there first. The insight about present day Visual Theatre practice not only being influenced by but actively 'holding' and deploying the aesthetic and subject matter of Modernist avant-garde theatre practice came when making the case study of my own work and comparing and contrasting it with the case studies of established companies and practitioners. The subject matter of my piece, the artistic and cultural ferment of fin-de-siècle Vienna, was inspired by the research but not a direct development of it – and in terms of a process, it was not trying to 'mimic' anything. But having made puppets, found archival film backgrounds and sketched and tried out possible sequences, the relevancy revealed itself. *Complicité* were not actively aiming for a dissertation on the inspirations and antecedents of Visual Theatre when they made *The Street of Crocodiles*, but that is one way of reading the piece. The outcome of the practical element is in some ways the least important place to try and draw a conclusion from: my focus has been much more on what the process reveals.

Though an end in itself, this research should also be seen as a starting point: having given a definition of Visual Theatre, its important antecedents and its key concepts, it is now for others to accept, reject or modify this characterisation. Perhaps the most controversial element is the extent to which, I argue, puppetry and puppetness suffuse the ethos, practice and outcomes of Visual Theatre. The puppet still has a long way to go before it is widely accepted as a serious form for theatre, with almost each new production that uses it effectively hailed as the one that will finally change audiences' (and for that matter, theatre-makers') perceptions. The cinematic is widely recognised as an element in much contemporary Visual Theatre, with film references and techniques increasingly popular with media-savvy audiences. Again, the sense in which I argue that the cinematic inhabits Visual Theatre practice might be contentious: not only as the importation of specific techniques, but as a semiotic system, a way in which the director (as the auteur of the piece) and the audience (the spectators) view the actors and the objects on stage, in a way that is quite different from naturalistic or text-based theatre. The notion of the cinematic as I introduce it to the

argument about Visual Theatre includes not only straight imports from cinema, but a melding of *the cinematic* and *puppetness*.

The state of Visual Theatre practice, production and commissioning is good. The companies most frequently associated with it have built up a mode of working and a theatrical vocabulary that is readily recognisable: a piece described as Lepagean carries the association in the spectator's mind of a cinematic sensibility applied to the stage. The association is there, but the articulation of it does not yet match what is sensed. Critical and academic response has not kept pace: there is still the hazy use of the term 'Visual Theatre', and the confusion with Physical Theatre or Dance. This is not necessarily a bad thing for the practice: it suggests Visual Theatre is still pushing its boundaries, discovering for itself what it is and is not. Conversely, the lack of a clear critical or scholarly characterisation of the practice also inhibits serious reflection on the art-form, from either its creators or its spectators. For it to be seen as a coherent and legitimate theatrical form requires a process of argument and counter-argument about the nature of what is being created. This thesis has not aimed to introduce boundaries, but to illuminate the path that has brought Visual Theatre to where it is now, and in so doing reveal some key aspects of its identity.

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Jarry, Alfred (Writer). (1896). *Ubu Roi*.

Jasienski, Bruno (Writer). (1931). *The Mannequin's Ball*.

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Music

Brion, Jon. (Singer, Producer). (2001). "Voices" on *Meaningless: Straight to Cut-Out Records*.

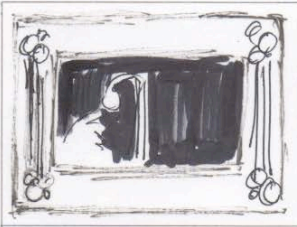
Korngold, Erich Wolfgang. (Composer, Arranger). (1927). *Geschichten von Strauss*. Op. 21.

Rachmaninoff, Sergei (Composer). (1908). *Isle of the Dead*

Wilson, Brian (Composer). (1967). *Smile*. (Unreleased).

Appendix 1: Work-in-Progress Storyboards

SOMNAMBULIST SEQUENCE



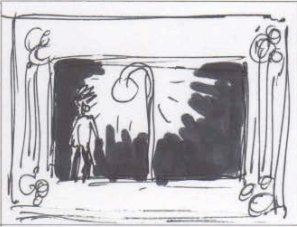
AMBIENT LIGHT



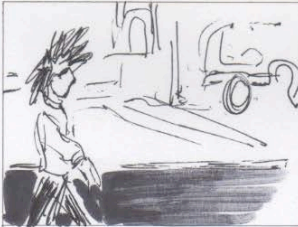
LIVE VIDEO PROJECTION?



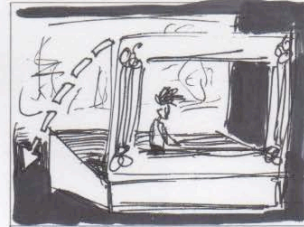
STREET LAMP IS LIT.
CLOSE-UP



TRAMP STANDS UP
BEGINNS TO MOVE RIGHT.
LAMP POST MOVES OFF
LEFT.



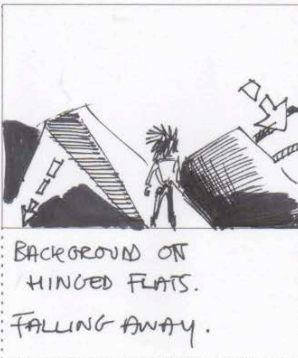
PROJECTED BACKDROP
CYCLING BY.



FRAME OF STAGE LOWERS
SLOWLY.
TRANSITION OF PROJECTED
BACKDROP.



CALGARY
BACKGROUND

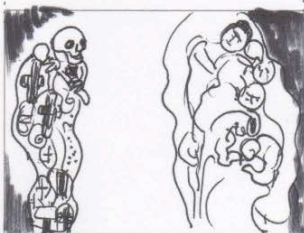


BACKGROUND ON
HINGED FLATS.
FALLING AWAY.

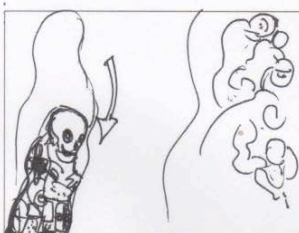


BARE STAGE .

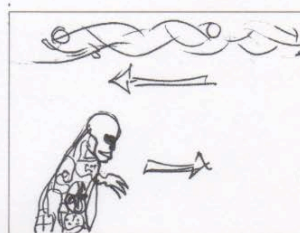
VISUAL ARTS SEQUENCE



DEATH AND LIFE.



TOTENKOPF MOVES DOWN
BEGINS WALKING--



WALKING TOTENKOPF
SCROLLING
BEETHOVEN FRIES



ANIMATED / PART ANIMATED
'HOSTILE FORCES'
SECTION OF
BEETHOVEN FRIES



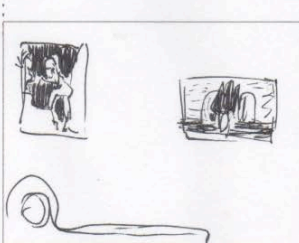
TOTENKOPF COMES TO
REST BENEATH PAW OF
'TYPHOEUS'



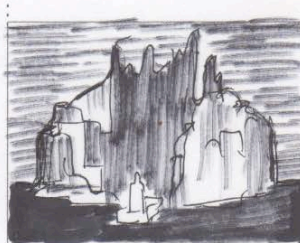
'MORPH' IN SOME FASHION
FROM PAW OF TYPHOEUS TO
PAW OF SPHINX.
ONE CHIMERA TO ANOTHER--



ZOOM OUT TO REVEAL
INGRÉS OEDIPUS AND THE
SPHINX.
TOTENKOPF LIES BELOW.

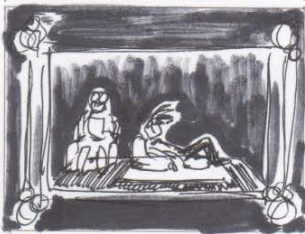


ZOOM OUT AND PAN ACROSS
IN FREUD'S CONSULTING ROOM.
PAN ACROSS TO



'THE ISLE OF
THE DEAD'.

"TELL ME ABOUT YOUR DREAMS"



FADE UP



"TELL ME ABOUT YOUR DREAMS..."

LIT FROM BELOW.



FILMED SEQUENCE
PROJECTED

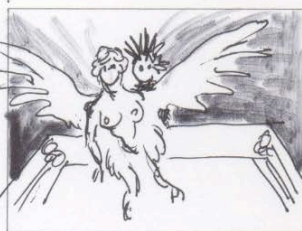
TRAMP IN SNOW



CUE FOR SPHINX
ON STAGE



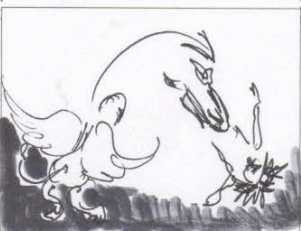
SPHINX LIFTS TRAMP



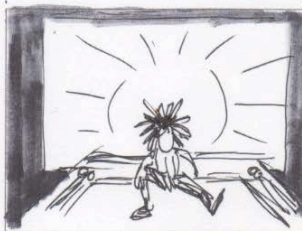
FRAME OF STAGE
LAWERS.



FLYING OVER
DIE TOTESTADT.



SPHINX FLIES UP
DROPS TRAMP
FLIES OFF STAGE

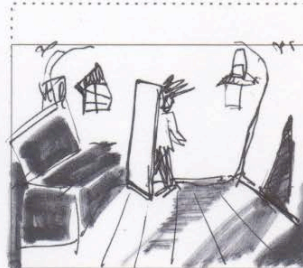


EMPTY STAGE
RED SUNSET IMAGE.

WALKING THE RING / PUPPENSPIELER ...



BOX OPENS.



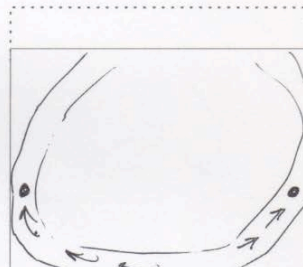
TURNS LIGHT OFF
DOOR IN SCREEN
PROJECTED BACKGROUND.



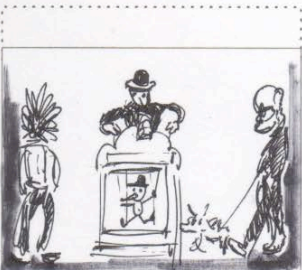
VIENNA 1908 MAP
DOT MOVES AROUND
THE RING



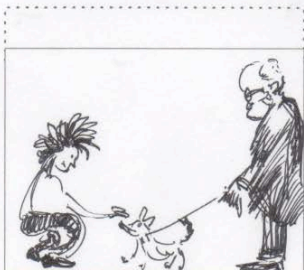
FREUD LEAVES HOUSE.
WALKING DOG



TWO SHAPES MOVED
ROUND RING...



TRAMP WATCHING
PUPPET SHOW
FREUD + DOG WATCH TOO



"I'M JUST WAITING FOR
MY FRIEND NEUMANN..."



"GOD GRACIOUS, ARE YOU
ILL?"
"I JUST NEED SOME COFFEE"

SHORT TRANSITIONS



BEEHIVEN FLEES
'STRONG LEADER FROM
ABOVE'



TRANSITION



'DER BANNERTRÄGER'



SEGMUND FREUD

OR...



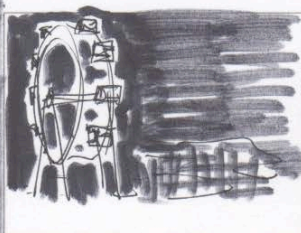
TRANSITION TO MEETING OF
TRAMP AND SPINK... ?



TRANSITION OF SPINK
IN VIENNA
BELVEDERE etc...



FINISHING ON KLINT'S
ACADEMY PAINTING
'PHILOSOPHY'

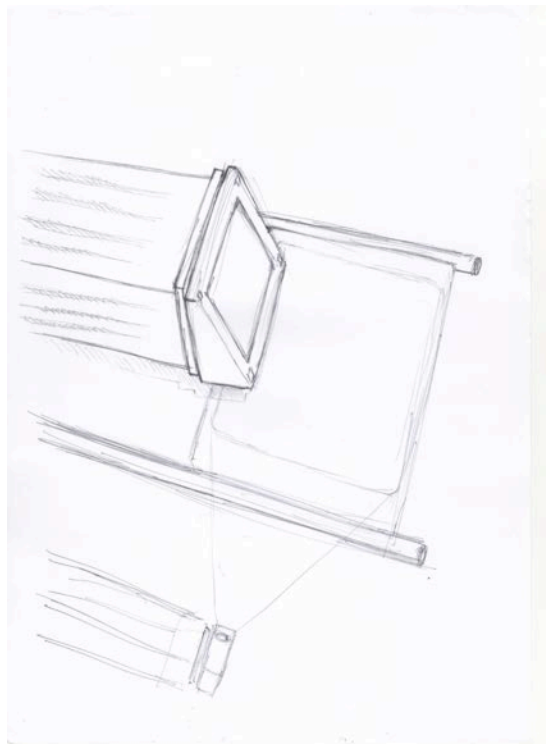
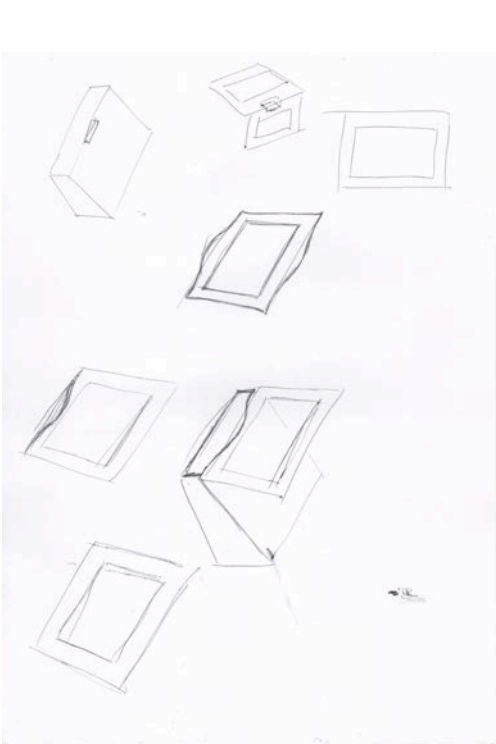
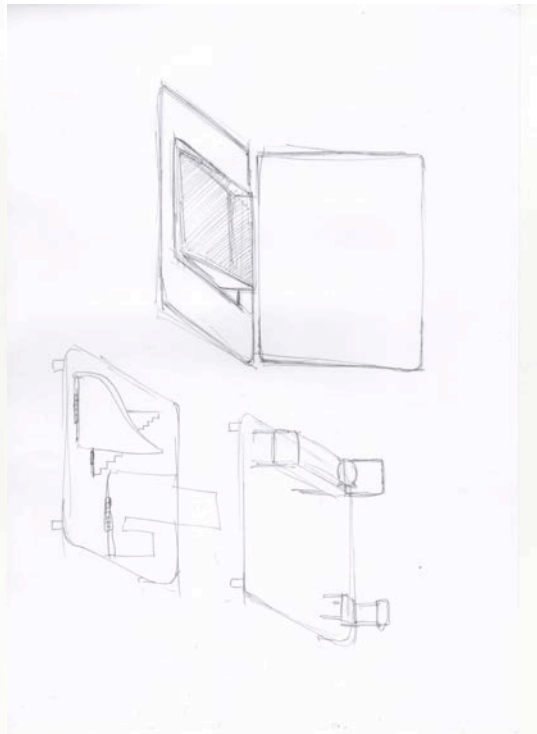
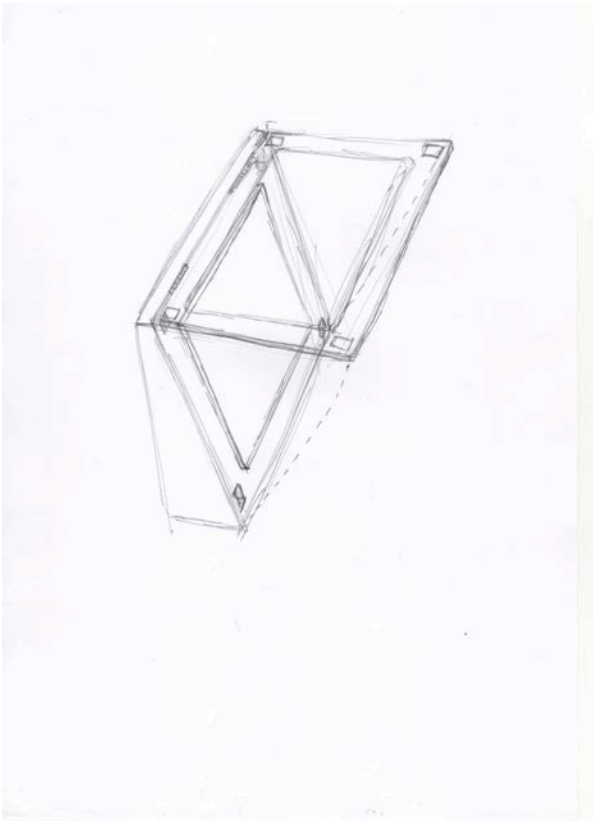


RIESEN RAD
TRANSITION INTO



ARCHIVE FILM OF
SCAVES OF WIEN (CUT
FROM ABOVE
TRAMP..TALSMANN?)

Appendix 2: Stage Design Sketches.



Appendix 3: Sphinx Zoetrope Sequence.

