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Puppet Life and the Phenomenology of Consciousness

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers how best to define the imagined "life" of the puppet, and how that "life" offers new meaning to narrative puppet productions. In my first chapter, begin with the observation that puppeteers, scholars, and audiences often describe the puppet as an object that appears to "have life," and I argue that puppet "life" can be best understood in terms of phenomenological consciousness. Following the definition of consciousness offered by the father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, I suggest that a puppet appears to be "alive" when it can be imagined to have a consciousness that is embodied and relational: embodied, because the puppet's imagined consciousness can not be conceived as separate from its puppet body, and relational, because the puppet's consciousness reveals itself in the ways the puppet interacts with and gives meaning to the world around it.

In the subsequent three chapters, I investigate how this phenomenological understanding of puppet "life" might open up a conversation between the philosophical understanding of phenomenological consciousness and the narratives told in the puppet theatre. In each chapter, I explore one of puppetry scholar Steve Tillis's three characteristics of puppet life – design, movement, and speech – alongside theories of phenomenological consciousness espoused by Husserl's successors: Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Emmanuel Levinas. Each chapter considers the intersection of phenomenological consciousness and puppet "life" as it finds expression in one contemporary puppet performance: Neville Tranter's *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Handspring Puppet Company's *Or You Could Kiss Me*, and Redmoon Theater's *The Cabinet*.

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Puppet Performance and the Ur-narrative of Puppet Life

Moses has a cloth body and a three-dimensional cardboard head (Fig. 1).[1] He is

manipulated by direct contact: three puppeteers, all of whom are dressed in black, control him by

directly grasping parts of his body and head. He stands on an otherwise bare, nondescript table

with a thin wooden top and metal legs. As the star of British puppet company Blind Summit's

touring show *The Table,* Moses promises his audience two apparently contradictory things: first,

he points out that the whole show will include only him on the table, "so if you weren't

expecting puppetry, and you're not a table enthusiast, this is going to be a very long evening"

(10:27). On the other hand, he promises that the play will encompass "epic Biblical themes"

(10:44); specifically, under the tutelage of London's Jewish Community Centre, Moses will be

performing "in real time, the last 12 hours of Moses's life, on a table" (19:48). Indeed, in the

course of the performance, the audience will get a short lesson about the biblical Moses, though

this takes up only a fraction of the run time. Much more than the story of Moses, *The Table* is a

story about puppetry itself. Moses is frequently distracted from the task at hand by his urge to tell

the audience what it means to be a puppet, and the evening devolves into a description of

foundational puppetry techniques before Moses ends the night prematurely by "accidentally"

turning off the stage lights, plunging the theatre into darkness and effectively putting an end to

his ostentatious plan to portray Moses for twelve hours.

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[1] The production of *The Table* that I will refer to throughout is a November 2014 performance in Toulouse, France.

Fig. 1: Promotional photo of Moses, puppet star of Blind Summit's *The Table*

Moses makes explicit a quality that Handspring Puppet Company co-founder Basil Jones claims is implicit in all puppetry. In his essay "Puppetry and Authorship" in Jane Taylor's edited collection *Handspring Puppet Company* (2009),[2] Jones writes that narrative puppet theatre always tells two stories. First, there is the play in which the puppet has been cast as a character; in the case of *The Table*, this would be the story of Moses's last day on earth. Second is what Jones calls the story of the puppet's "life" (254). A puppet is an object, but one that the audience is asked to imagine as alive, and this performance of life is so engrossing, Jones implies, that it

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[2] This essay can be found in both Jane Taylor's edited collection *Handspring Puppet Company* (2009) and *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, edited by Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell. The page numbers I refer to in this dissertation correspond to Taylor's collection.

threatens to eclipse the story that the puppet has been employed to tell. He writes that "[t]he puppet's work, then—more fundamental than the interpretation of written text or directorial vision—is to strive towards life" (254). In other words, Jones sees two narratives constantly competing in the puppet theatre: the one created by the author, and the one that is intrinsic to the very definition of the puppet: its performed "life." This second narrative is what Jones refers to as the "Ur-narrative" of all puppetry.

Moses brings this underlying tension to the surface: he literally interrupts the Biblical narrative to draw attention to this provisional "life," teaching the audience about how the puppeteers make him, an object, seem like a living, breathing performer. He introduces his puppeteers, demonstrates puppetry techniques, and draws attention to the audience's desire to imagine him as alive. For instance, when he instructs the puppeteers to remove their hands from him, he turns to the audience to assure them "It's alright, I'll be OK. I'm a professional" (33:31). The implication here is that the audience might be worried about destruction of Moses's imagined life; in other words, that the audience has a stake in the puppet's ability to continue to appear "alive." As Jones predicts, the "Ur-narrative" of Moses's imagined life does derail the narrative Moses has been employed to tell. After a brief account of the Biblical Moses's final day on earth, Moses the puppet seems to get distracted from the narrative he has promised to perform for the audience (i.e.: the story of Moses's death), leaving it behind in favour of a narrative that has been present the whole time, but not explicitly discussed (the Ur-narrative of his imagined life).

In a sense, then, *The Table* is about this implicit tension identified by Jones between the act of puppetry itself – making the object appear alive – and the narrative that the puppet performs as a character. However, this is too simple a division. The story of the Biblical Moses's

life and death are not merely pretexts for puppet Moses's exegesis on the art of puppetry.

Early on in the performance, Moses tells the audience that "Tonight's show is about what's real, and what's not real" (15:50-15:53). Although it sounds like Moses is prepared to offer a clear summary of the real and the not-real, he soon clarifies that this is not so simple, particularly when dealing with religion. Moses points out that there are three "different" Moseses – the Moses of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions – and that the actual, historical Moses is of lesser consequence than the stories told about him. In fact, says puppet Moses, the fact that "historical Moses" is impossible to pin down contributes to the message that he offers in all of the traditions of which he is a part. Puppet Moses summarizes that "The point is that a non-existent man makes you believe in an invisible God." (28:37-28:40)

Describing the figure of Moses as a "non-existent man" alludes to a connection between the story Blind Summit is telling and the form through which they are telling it. Puppet Moses is, in fact, a non-existent man – he is an object manipulated by puppeteers. The historical Moses, puppet Moses seems to imply, blurs the line between real and not-real in the same way that puppetry does. As if to emphasize this connection, Moses turns immediately from this discussion of the historical Moses and the invisible God to a discussion of puppetry: "Now I want to get into that [story of Biblical Moses] more, obviously," he says, "but before I do I have to tell you a little more about how this puppetry works" (29:19). While this may seem like a digression, in fact this turn to puppetry suggests the symbiosis between the art of puppetry and the story of Moses. To put it differently, the particular ways in which puppet Moses is brought to life are not parasitic upon or in competition with the story of Moses that he wants to tell, but fundamentally connected to the notion of collectively believing in a non-existent man, which is thematically at the heart of the story of Moses and God.

My goal in what follows is to suggest that the connection that Moses makes explicit—

between the Ur-narrative of the puppet's imagined life and the story that the puppet has been

tasked with telling—deserves further attention in puppet theatre more generally. Rather than

competing with one another, the Ur-narrative of puppet "life" and the play's narrative can work

in tandem, each one fortifying the other. In order to describe this interdependence, however, one

must have a firm grasp on the idea of puppet "life," a concept that remains ambiguous in

puppetry scholarship. I will argue that puppet "life" can be most fruitfully understood as a

performance of "phenomenological consciousness," as defined by philosopher Edmund Husserl

and variously inflected by his followers. As I will show, phenomenology suits the performed

"life" of the puppet by emphasizing the embodied and relational nature of consciousness. In this

chapter, I will explain the reasoning behind my choice to equate puppet "life" and

phenomenological consciousness, as well as the implications of that equation to the project as a

whole.

Existing Definitions of the Puppet

Before I begin to explore the question of puppet "life," I must explain what I mean when

I speak of a puppet. In her recent book *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (2012), Penny

Francis describes puppetry as

> the act of bringing to imagined life inert figures and forms (representational or
>
> abstract) for a ritual or theatrical purpose—for a *performance.* The perceived
>
> investment of the inanimate with anima or spirit is effected through the convincing
>
> transference of a performer's energy to one or more of these figures and forms,

endowing them with motion (normally), voice (if necessary) and presence

(always). (5)

There is much to recommend this definition, particularly in its emphasis on "imagined life,"

the term at the center of my argument. However, the definition has two important

limitations. First, the category of "presence" is much more difficult to define than her other

categories of movement or voice, requiring further analysis in order to make the definition

useful. Second, Francis collapses ritual and theatrical objects, claiming that both are

invested with "anima or spirit" that finds its source in the puppeteer. In fact, while

audiences of theatrical puppetry see the puppeteer as the source of the puppet's life force,

ritual objects are often understood by participants as being imbued with life by

otherworldly spirits. In these cases, the puppeteers may act as shamans or intermediaries,

but they are not the "source" of the puppet's life.[3] Similarly, ritual participants may not

characterize the puppet's life as "imagined" in the same way theatre audiences are willing

to do.[4]

Thus, while Francis's definition includes the crucial language of imagined life, I

prefer to rely on an earlier definition from Steve Tillis's 1992 book *Toward an Aesthetics of*

the Puppet. Drawing on the definitions of Bil Baird, Paul MacPharlin, Henryk Jurkowski, Otakar

Zich and others, Tillis proposes that

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[3] For examples of ritual puppetry from the Japanese Awaji tradition, see Jane Marie Law,
Puppets of Nostalgia: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of the Japanese "Awaji Ningyo" Tradition,
Princeton University Press, 1997: 31-5.
[4] For a description of the transition from a ritualistic audience to a theatrical one in the Wayang
Kulit Tradition, see John Pemberton, "Their Own," *The Puppet Show*, Philadelphia: Institute of
Contemporary Art, 2008: 20.

the puppet is a theatrical figure, perceived by an audience to be an object, that is given

design, movement, and frequently, speech, so that it fulfills the audience's desire to

imagine it as having life; by creating a double-vision of perception and imagination, the

puppet pleasurably challenges the audience's understanding of the relationship between

objects and life. (*Toward* 65)

Unlike Francis, Tillis claims that puppets are distinctly theatrical rather than ritualistic. He also

includes "design," rather than Francis's "presence," as the third requirement of puppet "life," a

change that focuses more concretely on an observable contribution to the puppet by the designer,

rather than the less concrete outcome of human intervention that Francis emphasizes. These

alterations are what make Tillis's definition my preferred choice.

Like Francis, Tillis draws together a number of threads present in other well-known

definitions of the puppet, all of which need to be further explored. First, I will consider the

details of how the puppet may be imbued with "life" by the puppeteer. Tillis lists three

components of this process: movement, voice, and design. These categories offer a particularly

useful foundation for this dissertation, and in subsequent chapters I will explore each of these

elements in turn. For now, I simply wish to reiterate that these elements are "given" to the object

by human hands. That is, although the materials of the puppet inevitably dictate its character (as I

shall demonstrate), the "life" of the puppet does not here refer to any kind of latent animism or

ritual significance. Rather, crucially, the "life" described here is always a *mimetic* life, one

created by the puppet designer(s) and/or puppeteer(s) in conjunction with its audiences. Not all

puppetry shares these characteristics equally—found object puppetry often eschews conventional

approaches to design, while many puppet productions avoid voice altogether—but I agree with

Tillis that one or more of these categories are essential to all forms of puppetry, and in fact all

three are present in each of my case studies.[5] Through these three elements, puppeteers and designers encourage audiences to imagine the object as having "life," evoking a kind of double vision in the spectator. Tillis was not the first to make claims about the tension between the puppet's status as object and its imagined life, but Tillis qualifies other definitions by claiming that a) this double vision is part of the definition of all puppets, not merely an historically or culturally situated attribute of certain puppet traditions, and b) that the process of watching puppet theatre is not a constant choice between seeing the puppet as an object or as a living thing, but a "double vision" of both at once (Tillis, *Toward* 58-66). This, Tillis points out, is the joy of the puppet theatre—the spectators are furnished with the raw materials needed to imbue an object with imagined life.

Thus, the audience is integral to Tillis's definition. But who constitutes an audience? If a puppet is manipulated by a puppeteer, and no one is around to see it, is it still a puppet? In his *Dictionary of Puppetry*, A. R. Philpott distinguishes dolls from puppets by suggesting that "[d]olls are for personal play; puppets are essentially theatrical in function" (209). By "essentially theatrical," Philpott seems to imply that, even when practicing with her puppet alone, the puppeteer understands the puppet as meant for performance. In other words, puppeteering alone is practice, not an end in itself, while playing with a doll suggests no future performance. The puppet becomes something other than a doll when there is an intention or expectation of theatrical performance, not simply private play.

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[5] I have chosen not to include a taxonomy of puppetry styles, but rather to focus on the styles my case studies employ. For details about the various techniques used by puppeteers, see Francis, *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice,* 49-74. For a discussion of the limits of taxonomies of puppet styles, see Tillis, *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet*, 89-112.

The same logic can be applied to puppets that are not in the act of performance. A strict reading of Tillis's definition might imply that a puppet is a puppet *only* when it performs before an audience, but puppet museums and retailers would beg to differ. I would argue that the marionette's strings or the placement of a found object in a puppetry exhibit signifies that these are not mere objects, but objects capable of "fulfill[ing] the audience's desire to imagine it as having life" (Tillis, *Toward* 65). In other words, the distinction between a puppet and an object is wholly tied up in the audience's perception for Tillis, but once the spectator perceives the object as a puppet, it remains a puppet even when it is neither moving nor performing. A puppet is an object recognized as having *actual* or *potential* imagined life.

Now that I have distinguished a puppet from a doll, I must consider its relation to other similar figures, such as robots, automata, CGI animation, and motion capture technology. To begin, Tillis distinguishes automata from puppets because once the design of an automaton is complete, there is no flexibility in its manipulation; as Tillis writes elsewhere, "the distinguishing characteristic of the automaton is that its movement possibilities are 'closed', making the automaton a 'kinetic sculpture' rather than a puppet" ("Media Production" 182-3).[6] However, Tillis is much more expansive and inclusive when considering the other descendants of the traditional puppet. Tillis presents three distinct categories—tangible puppets (when the puppets are physically present), virtual puppets (when the puppet is created on a computer screen, as with Andy Serkis' award-winning performances of Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003) and Caesar in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011)), and stop-action puppets (when the puppets are tangible, but their ability to move fluidly requires technological

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[6] A.R. Philpott offers a similar definition: "Mechanically operated figures which continue independently once set in motion, as distinct from the puppet which remains (or should) under the control of its human operator throughout the performance" (23).

intervention, as in the work of Czech filmmaker Jan Svenkmeyer or, more recently, Charlie

Kaufman's *Amomalisa* (2015)). While Tillis notes the differences between these categories, he

sees a consistency in the relationship between the objects and their manipulators absent from the

automaton example: that is, the manipulators in each of these cases directly move the virtual or

real objects, either consistently or intermittently, whereas the automaton is constructed by human

hands and then left to perform without intervention. Stephen Kaplin offers a similarly expansive

continuum of puppetry; in his article "A Puppet Tree: A Model for the Field of Puppet Theatre,"

Kaplin includes Virtual Performer/Object, Computer Generated Figures, Animated Figures, and

Remote Controlled Figures on the same continuum as Marionettes, Rod Puppets, and Hand

Puppets (21). While I am convinced by these arguments that the differences between these styles

do not preclude their inclusion in the definition of puppetry, my own work focuses on Tillis's

tangible puppets because I would argue that virtual puppetry does not inevitably lead to the

double vision Tillis describes in his definition, and which (as I shall explore below) is

fundamental to the phenomenological perspective puppetry encourages. This crucial element of

the puppet theatre is lost in virtual puppetry: it is easier to forget the man behind Gollum than it

is ignore the object-ness of a tangible puppet, since Serkis literally disappears inside the virtual

puppet on the screen.

Robots provide a unique challenge, since they are "tangible," as Tillis defines it, and are

starting to make their marks in the theatre.[7] Since robots are operated from a distance, they lack

the immediate relationality (between puppet and puppeteer) that I will argue is crucial to my

understanding of puppetry. This ability to operate at a distance also allows robots to "pass" as

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[7] See Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre*, 54-58 and Cody Poulton, "From Puppet to Robot: Technology and the Human in Japanese Theatre," *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, 280-293.

humans in a way that puppets rarely do. Describing a 2010 play entitled *Sayónara*, which

staged an interaction between a realistic female geminoid (that is, a kind of robot constructed to

look exactly like a human) and a human actress, Cody Poulton writes that "Depending upon the

lighting and the spectator's proximity to the stage, it is difficult for audiences to determine

initially which actor is human…[an] uncertainty confirmed by surveys taken of audiences who

have seen the play" (286). I would argue that performances like this treat the object/life

dichotomy very differently from traditional puppetry, eliding the pleasurable double vision Tillis

describes in favour of a genuine attempt at illusory life. Thus I do not want to exclude theatrical

robots from the implications of this dissertation, but I have yet to encounter examples that would

allow this kind of exploration to be useful.

While I have taken pains to distinguish puppets from the various other performing figures

listed above, they might just as easily be classified alongside robots, automata, and CGI images

as "performing objects." In an oft-cited article, American puppetry scholar Frank Proschan

defines performing objects as "material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created,

displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance. While puppetry is at the center

of this definition, it is not alone" (Proschan 4). Here, Proschan situates the puppet within the

broader category of performing object. Performing objects, according to Proschan, must take the

shape of humans, animals, or spirits in order to qualify, but this definition seems to downplay the

role of imagined life, allowing instead that the material images may simply be "displayed" in

order to qualify. This broadened definition allows Proschan to include "bards who use scroll-

paintings" and "storytellers who trace images in the snow or sand" (Proschan 4) under the rubric

of the performing object.

John Bell takes up Proschan's definition in *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance* in order to make, as one of his subheadings proclaims, "outrageous claims for the scope of puppetry" (2). Bell points out that Proschan's definition allows "the stuff, junk, puppets, masks, detritus, machines, bones, and molded plastic things that people use to tell stories or represent ideas" (2) to be considered under the same umbrella, which he refers to interchangeably as "performing objects" and "puppetry." It is worth noting, perhaps, that Bell seems to slightly extend Proschan's definition in his rearticulation of it—now performing objects need not simply tell stories, but may also "represent ideas." This seems to me an important update, allowing for the plethora of non-narrative post-dramatic[8] performances of puppetry in the last few decades, and one that does not undermine the parameters of Proschan's original definition. Regardless, why is "performing object" a useful term for puppetry scholars, and, conversely, why is Bell so eager to make "puppetry" a synonym to "performing object," going beyond the scope of Proschan's original intention? Expanding the definition of puppetry does have an obvious appeal: it emphasizes clear links between the oftentimes esoteric or minor art of puppetry and more familiar object performances from the world around us. For instance, Bell includes as performing objects "Al Gore performing a PowerPoint[©] presentation on global warming" and "images of beautiful machines moving through a landscape, projected on a plasma television screen in an advertisement for the Honda CD-V automobile" (Bell, *American* 3)—each of these is an example of a displayed image that tells a story. In other words, using the word "puppetry" to describe performances like these opens up new ways of thinking about objects like cars and Powerpoint slides using the vocabulary of puppet studies. At the same time,

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[8] For the definition of post-dramatic theatre, see Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge 2006.

applying the terminology of the performing object to familiar objects like these has the potential to open up fascinating interdisciplinary discussions that reinvigorate the conversation about puppetry and bring it out of its perceived relegation.

Despite Bell's broadening definition, there is a qualitative difference between Al Gore's Powerpoint presentation and the puppetry discussed in this dissertation. Following Proschan's definition, I would mark that distinction in terms of imagined life: the Powerpoint performs ideas and/or tells a story, but the spectator does not imagine it to have life in the way that she might in the case of Moses the puppet in *The Table*. And yet, even though Bell does not address Tillis's definition directly, it is clear that he *does* see performing objects as conforming to Tillis's dictum of imagined life. The point of his book, Bell writes, is to uncover "the reason *why* we like to imagine object performance as a process of bringing to life the dead objects…and why we are proud of our ability to bring life to them" (*American* 6). Proschan, too, refers to "the urge to give life to nonliving things" as a quality which binds the various kinds of object performance (Proschan 3). Why are the distinctions of the kind that I am suggesting necessary, if both puppets and performing objects are characterized by an imagined life?

Existing Definitions of Puppet Life

The problem lies in the slipperiness of the term "life." While it is perhaps one of the most important words for scholars and practitioners of object performance of all stripes, "life" seems to mean many different things at once. Many scholars of objects seem compelled to attribute to those objects a kind of "life," but the range of definitions is extensive. In this section, I will offer a representative (though not by any means complete) catalogue of the various ways in which the term "life" is currently used by puppet and object scholars.

In Andrew Sofer's 2003 book *The Stage Life of Props*, the author puts the question of object "life" in performance at the center of his inquiry. When Sofer speaks of the "life" of a prop, he is referring specifically to the ability of "stage objects to take on a life of their own in performance" (Sofer, *Stage* 2). To take a "life of their own," stage objects must "transcend their usual, 'transparent function and draw the spectator's attention in their own right" (Sofer, *Stage* 20). Sofer gives several examples of this kind of object "life": props that serve a metonymic or metaphoric function within the narrative, like the eponymous seagull in Chekhov's play; props that move along the action, like the handkerchief in *Othello*; props that act surprisingly, like the coin that always comes up heads in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*; props that seem to possess meaning separate from authorial intention, as in the work of Richard Foreman or Robert Wilson (Sofer, *Stage* 20-5). In these and Sofer's other examples, what marks the prop as "alive" is its refusal to fade into the background as a so-called meaningless object— its insistence that it is more than just a dead bird, or a coin, or a bit of string.

This refusal to fade into the background, and a propensity for acting against audience expectation, holds true for the puppet as well. That is, puppet life is characterized by an object (the puppet) made to behave in a way that makes it appear to have an agency that an object should not possess. Sofer does gesture to the use of the word "life" in puppet and performing object scholarship, but the way he sees it mirroring his own usage is surprising. He writes that

> Even those anthropomorphic figures defined by Frank Proschan as 'performing objects,' such as puppets and marionettes, are only figuratively alive, since they must be manipulated by a human presence either on or offstage…We must therefore acknowledge the metaphor of the prop with a life of its own as a suggestive figure of speech and seek to unpack its figurative applications. (Sofer, *Stage* 20)

What Sofer emphasizes here is that both puppet and prop life is figurative, not literal. This is perfectly in keeping with Tillis's definition. However, by placing his emphasis on the similarities between props and puppets, Sofer elides the crucial difference between the two. When scholars, artists, and audience members refer to the puppet as appearing to have "life," they are suggesting that the puppet recognizably mimics attributes normally associated with living things. The manuscript in Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* may be said to "take on a life of [its] own" insofar as its fiery end serves as a critical plot point, but it does not mimic a living thing. When Sofer claims that "props remain objects, not subjects" (Sofer, *Stage* 20), he overlooks the fact that puppets pretend to be subjects as well. Tellingly, when Sofer does mention puppets under his rubric of prop "life," his example does not conform to Tillis's definition of a puppet: he claims that one way for objects to become "alive" is for them to be "transformational puppets" (Sofer, *Stage* 23), but his example is a scarf worn various ways by a performer in order to transform the performer into different characters. The scarf does not "transform" into an object that the audiences imagines to be alive, but rather assists the actor in her own transformations from one character to the next by becoming first a scarf, then a shawl, then a doll. While puppets and props both appear to conform to Sofer's much broader definition of "life," there is a narrower understanding which excludes props from the equation. In other words, a puppet can be called a prop under Sofer's rubric, but a prop cannot be a puppet under Tillis's.[9]

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[9] Sofer also overlooks the nuance between his definition of "life" and Tillis's. He begins by rightly pointing out that Tillis "freezes props at the bottom of the subject-object continuum" (Sofer, *Stage* 207) because, according to Tillis, props do not move "according to the pretense of moving or speaking for itself" (Tillis in Sofer 207 n. 24). Next, Sofer surmises that "As soon as a prop is perceived to have 'a life of its own,' it becomes a puppet; for Tillis, an animated prop is thus a contradiction in terms" (207). This claim assumes that Tillis and Sofer mean the same thing when they say "a life of its own" – that the object draws attention in its own right. On the contrary, Tillis is referring to mimetic puppet "life," wherein the puppet is manipulated in a way

Sofer's definition of prop "life" runs counter to performer and author Tina Bicat's, who defines performing objects in direct opposition to props, precisely because of their different relationships to "life." She writes that

[t]he distinction between

"props" and "[performing] objects" is in the way they are used. The object in object

theatre has a life outside the use for which its non-theatrical inventor intended and it does

not have to obey the rules of physics and gravity. (11)

On its surface, Bicat's definition of object "life" sounds similar to Sofer's—it situates "life" in the ability of the object to transcend its everyday, offstage reality and become something more. However, Bicat's "object theatre" refers to only a particular subsection of Sofer's categories of props with a "life of its own." For Bicat, it is not enough that the object onstage takes on metaphoric significance (like Chekhov's seagull), or motivates the action onstage (like the handkerchief in *Othello*). These she would designate as props, but she resists the claim that a prop could have "life;" indeed, "life" is the term she uses to *distinguish* between props and performing objects. An object transcends its ordinary function for Bicat when it eschews its ordinary function entirely, to the point of rejecting "the rules of physics and gravity" (11). Sofer's "transitional puppets," like the scarf that is used by an actor first as a shawl, then as a doll, in order to suggest the transition from one character to the next, are closer to Bicat's performing objects, because the object becomes something it is not (i.e.: a doll). One of Bicat's own examples of a performing object appears in a photo in her book: a car is constructed onstage

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that allows the audience to imagine it to be alive. Tillis would not, as Sofer claims, call all props that are animated or moved puppets – his definition of "life" is much more specific. The slippage in the term "life" here in Sofer's usage provides a perfect example of the problematic fluidity of the term, which can be used to gloss over obvious differences within a taxonomy of performing objects.

out of four tires, a clock steering wheel, teacup rearview mirrors, and what appears to be a

toilet as the driver's seat (Bicat 24).

Whereas Sofer and Bicat work with props and performing objects respectively, Kenneth

Gross considers puppet "life" in particular in his book *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*. While

"life" is part of Gross's title, he never offers a single definition of puppet life; rather, he uses the

word in multiple ways. Gross speaks throughout of the soul, particularly in connection with the

puppeteer's hand, which "can make itself into the animating impulse, the intelligence or soul, of

an inanimate object" (1). I am taking "intelligence or soul" here to be synonymous with "life,"

and this description seems in keeping with Tillis's; the puppeteer animates the object in such a

way that it seems to possess qualities that are typically associated with human beings rather than

objects. What exactly this "soul" entails is more difficult to discern. Elsewhere, Gross connects

"life" to the objects themselves, separate from any intention on the part of the manipulator of the

object: "Suddenly a thing you hold, that lies useless or useful in front of you, seems to have a

face, a will of its own" (Gross 164). This sudden willfulness can arise from anything, Gross says,

"provoked by setting one object beside another, by an idle glance or touch," or from a sudden

change in the relation of the object to oneself, as when "the knife which cuts you suddenly feels

malicious" (Gross 164). In Gross's description of the puppet's soul, then, the hand is the source

of the object's life; in this later version of object life, the objects themselves appear to possess a

kind of autonomy or agency. "Life" comes to mean different things, but Gross does not offer a

sustained analysis of what the puppet's imagined "life" might entail.

In another wonderful but misleadingly-titled work, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (2001),

Victoria Nelson sees puppets (and related figures) as the final bastions to the transcendental

realm that contemporary Western society has all but forgotten, capable of standing in for

religious impulses that have been abandoned in the wake of post-Enlightenment, rationalist

materialism. While she never defines the "life" of her title, she does claim that "[i]n the history

of puppets and other human simulacra after the decline of religion we can read—in a backward

image, like a reflection in a mirror—the underground history of the soul excluded from its

religious context in Western culture" (31). This "underground history" is one of the supernatural

and otherworldly, which Nelson argues has been relegated to the realms of fiction and art in an

increasingly rationalistic world. Puppets and their brethren—cyborgs, robots, and other artificial

humans—thus become "simulacra" for the irrational "soul" in Nelson's work, but only on a

metaphorical plane. Nelson situates puppets in tandem with cyborgs, robots, and "other artificial

humans in literature and film" (20). She is, in fact, much more interested in the theme of the

supernatural as a final vestige for a warped transcendentalism than she is in puppetry as such.

The "life" of these figures has more to do with the larger themes they access than with their

perceived "life" on the stage. In fact, Nelson is largely uninterested in puppets on stages in

general; she asks "Why look at discourses *about* puppets and other human simulacra rather than

at puppets in performance? Because even as puppet shows retain their timeless theatrical charm,

imagined puppets carry a stronger charge of the 'uncanny' or suppressed holy" (60). In other

words, the themes that Nelson addresses are actually a product of literary depictions of puppets,

automata, robots, and so on, rather than their material counterparts. A figure like Olympia, the

automaton in E. T. A. Hoffman's 1816 short story "The Sandman," is of more use to Nelson's

study than an actual automaton.

Nelson's preference here for the *idea* of the puppet over the *reality* of the puppet

epitomizes a significant problem with existing puppet scholarship. If the symbolic weight of a

puppet's "life" is in tension with actual puppetry – that is, if puppetry's most fruitful narrative,

metaphoric, and philosophical contributions are scuttled by the presence of actual puppets –
then Basil Jones's claim that puppet performance sometimes eclipses the story they have been
employed to tell seems likely. Since puppets in fictional narratives and puppets onstage have
little to do with each other in this reading, it is difficult to imagine the relationship between
puppet performance and puppet narrative as anything other than antagonistic.

In addition to these book-length studies of puppet and object "life," there are several
tantalizingly short essays by puppet scholars and puppeteers who broach the topic of puppet
"life". In these texts, a few common themes emerge. First, the question of puppet "life" is often
tied up with puppet death. In *Puppetry: A World History*, Eileen Blumenthal devotes a chapter to
examples of puppets and performing objects navigate what she calls the "alive/dead bi-valence"
(209) of the puppet, able to cross between and/or simultaneously inhabit the worlds of the living
or the dead. Blumenthal describes many relevant examples from literature, performance, and
ritual, but the focus of this text is to catalogue examples around a theme, rather than to flesh out
distinctions between the kinds of life and death she describes: for example, objects used in
funerary rituals versus a trick skeleton puppet in a theatrical performance capable of collapsing
into a pile of bones and then reassembling into a skeleton again with a pull of its strings. In the
first case, the "puppet" object offers some otherworldly contact with the afterlife; in the second,
the object simply performs "death" and then is revived. Blumenthal provocatively implies that
"alive/dead bi-valence" of the puppet is present in both cases, and further that puppet's ability to
transgress between living and non-living is often experienced as dangerous, uneasy, or
metaphysical (213).

In "Playing with the Eternal Uncanny: The Persistent Life of Lifeless Objects," John Bell
also considers puppetry's unsettling situatedness between life and death by zeroing in on an idea

that Blumenthal briefly cites – namely, the notion of the uncanny. The term was coined by Ernst Jentsch in his 1906 paper "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," and later modified by Sigmund Freud in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny." At its core, the uncanny describes one's feeling that objects possess autonomy of their own. Bell argues that the discomfort associated with the uncanny for both Jentsch and Freud arises from the way in which the uncanny overrides rational modern thinking about the world and harkens back to an earlier, animistic vision of the material world as enchanted, teaming with a life of its own (49). Bell writes that "Puppet performance reveals to us that the results of those negotiations are not at all preordained and that human superiority over the material world is not something to count on, especially since *we* all eventually end up as lifeless objects" (50). In other words, puppetry blurs distinctions between subjects and objects, as well as between life and death. Bell seems to mark a distinction between the performance of life in puppetry and the animistic thinking that it reinforces, but since his focus is on the viewer's uncanny sensation, he has little to say about the performance of puppet "life" itself.

Other puppet scholars and puppeteers writing about puppet "life" focus on the question of the production of "life." In "The Dancer and the Danced," for instance, Kathy Foley describes the puppeteer's relationship to the puppet as twofold: on one hand, the puppet "obediently carr[ies] out the intentions of the puppeteer" and on the other "the puppet [has] life, law, and logic of its own which it imposes on the manipulator" (14). Foley describes a crucial dynamic between puppet and puppeteer, correcting the simply hierarchical description of the puppeteer's control over the puppet, which I will discuss momentarily. When Foley refers to "life" in this quotation, it belongs to the puppet itself: the object's "life" is that which resists the simple imposition of the puppeteer's will upon the material. Later, however, she employs the word

"life" again to a slightly different aim: she writes that puppet life does not simply replicate human life, but rather is "bigger or smaller, louder or softer, scarier or sweeter than humans actually are" (14). Here, she is referring not to the "life" of the object itself, which can resist the puppeteer's manipulation and assert its own material will, but the imagined "life" that Tillis refers to, which is created by the puppeteer's manipulation of an object before an audience. There are two different kinds of puppet "life" in this short essay: the latent "life" of the puppet object, and the created "life" that results from the interaction between puppet and puppeteer.

For Basil Jones, "life" refers specifically to the imitation of life carried out by the puppet under the control of the puppeteer. Jones writes that "by its very nature the puppet is an object and therefore by definition, lifeless. The object which we call a puppet lives and breathes only because the puppeteer takes great care, for however long the performance lasts and at every moment during that performance, to make the puppet appear to be alive" (254). Jones later argues that the puppet designer/maker is also "partially responsible for the life the puppet possesses in performance" (254) insofar as he or she creates the conditions for the puppet's lifelike movement in performance. I take this to be a slightly different argument than Foley's: for Foley, the object's resistance of the puppeteer's control is an assertion of the object's own "life;" for Jones, "life" or "liveliness" is reserved for the imitative life of the puppet in performance, whereas the object's capacity for movement is important insofar as it adds to or detracts from that life. As Jones later writes, "The life and credibility of the puppet depend entirely on the vigilance of the puppeteer" (254). When Jones talks of animism, it is in the context of the

audience's *desire* to believe in the life of an object, but he continues to place the source of

puppet life in the hands of the puppeteers.[10]

Margaret Williams also writes about the puppet/puppeteer relationship in her essay "The

Death of 'The Puppet.'" Returning to the theme of puppet death, Williams argues that the

puppet's "death" onstage reveals the contingency of its "life" on the "puppeteer's control" (18)

and/or the spectator's imagination (23). She likens puppeteers to magicians, and continues "Like

puppets, the magician's objects can seem to be transformed in defiance of everyday logic, and at

times to have a capriciousness, even a will, all their own" (25). This agency is created in

puppetry for Williams through a combination of the object "acting, acting-on, and [being] acted-

upon" (26). This formulation is similar to Foley's: the puppet is both acted upon (when the

puppeteer manipulates it), acting on (the puppeteer), and acting (in the performance).[11]

As this survey of the literature on puppet and object "life" reveals, there are some

limitations to the existing scholarship. Most notably, the word "life" is used to refer to a variety

of things related to puppets and performing objects. While all of these usages name important

elements of puppet and object theatre, collapsing them all into the same term can sometimes

cause confusion, as in the case of Sofer's use of puppet theory above. Extended studies of "life"

often deal with literary depictions of puppets rather than actual puppets in performance, while

scholarship about puppet performance in particular tends towards short essays rather than full-

length analyses.

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[10] For Jones's descriptions of precisely how puppeteers imbue objects with "life," see Chapter 3.

[11] Williams also makes room here for the puppet's ability to "act on" other props, objects, and puppets in its world. This kind of meaningful interaction with the world around it will be crucial to my phenomenologically-inspired definition of puppet "life."

I propose that scholars need an explanation of "puppet life" that conforms to the specific definitions of puppetry proposed by Tillis and Francis, ideally one that is capable of accommodating the kind of thematic or symbolic weight that writers like Nelson attribute to the mere *idea* of the puppet. Put differently, to draw together the two sides of imagined life and narrative, scholars and critics need a more robust definition of life, one capable of properly describing the actual puppet onstage while simultaneously working *with* the narratives of individual puppet performances in order to bring out new ideas about life itself.

To get a sense of what such a definition might look like, I will turn now to one description—not of puppet life per se, but of the puppet-puppeteer relationship—that comes close to fulfilling my criteria. As far back as antiquity, the puppet has been employed in literature and philosophy as a metaphor of hierarchical power. As Aristotle writes of his Lord of All, "All that is necessary is an act of his will—the same as that which controls the marionettes by pulling a string to move the heads or the hands of these little beings, then their shoulders, their eyes, and sometimes all the parts of their bodies, which respond with grace" (qtd. in Baird 38). Here, the universe itself is the "puppet" to the Lord of All's "puppeteer," a cosmos controlled by a power beyond itself. This iteration allows for a benevolent dictator, but many others invoke the opposite. Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* provides an example of this in her harrowing description of prisoners in German concentration camps: "Nothing then remains but ghastly marionettes with human faces, which all behave like the dog in Pavlov's experiments, which all react with perfect reliability even when going to their own death, and which do nothing but react. This is the real triumph of the system" (455). Prisoners have been systematically stripped of their human spontaneity, reduced to animals or objects capable of being controlled to a startling degree. Even biological functions, as in the case of Pavlov's dog's salivation, are not a

matter of free will, but rather of conditioning. Far from imitating human life, the marionette in this example is an emblem of autonomy subjugated and humanity hollowed out or rejected. It is a metaphor of one-sided domination, of the subject turned object.

Unlike Nelson's interpretation of puppet life, which holds more true for figurative puppets than literal ones, this metaphor of authoritarian control—which I will henceforth refer to as the "domination metaphor" of puppetry—offers rich thematic material for the puppet theatre. Many puppeteers actively engage with this visual metaphor, using the puppet theatre to tell stories of oppression precisely because of this association. In *KAMP* (2005) by Dutch company Hotel Modern, puppeteers enact the story of life in the concentration camps using a miniature scale model of Auschwitz, thousands of 8-centimeter-tall puppets, and closed-circuit cameras to make the miniature actions visible by projecting them on a screen. This production literalizes Arendt's metaphor about the objectification of Auschwitz prisoners: the puppet captives are faceless, nameless, and moved at the whim of their much larger and more powerful puppeteers. Rather than competing with the narrative, the puppet life in this piece – that is, a powerless and tenuous subjectivity utterly controlled by a force beyond itself – is utterly tied up with the story being told.

While this description of the puppet as controlled object offers a way for the puppet's particularities *as* a puppet to complement the narrative, it has its limitations. First, the metaphor is specific, pertaining only to narratives interested in themes of dominance and submission. In its most extreme cases, as with *Kamp*, the "life" of the puppet is downplayed and its "objectness" emphasized – the puppet becomes a dominated pseudo-subject, making the human characters seem more like objects rather than making the objects seem more human. If, as Tillis argues following Henryk Jurkowski and Otakar Zich, the experience of watching puppet theatre requires

a "double vision" that recognizes the puppet as both object and living thing, a show like *Kamp*

leans heavily on the "object" side of the object/life bivalence.

Perhaps even more problematically, this vision of the puppet-puppeteer relationship

offers a vastly oversimplified description of what is really going on in puppet theatre, one that

puppeteers generally challenge. As John Bell points out,

> Puppeteers repeatedly describe a process of figuring out 'what the puppet wants to do.'
>
> This is not a coy allusion to a mysterious power of the inanimate object, but a pragmatic
>
> challenge the puppeteer meets in order to make the puppets work successfully. It means
>
> that the puppeteer is playing with a certain *lack* of control, and experimenting with the
>
> different possibilities of the puppet while constantly being aware of how the puppet's
>
> structure determines movement. (*American* 7)

Like Nelson's reading of the puppet figure as one of the final vestiges of transcendence, the

domination metaphor does not quite hold true for actual puppets and puppeteers, and therefore

works better as a literary metaphor than a staged one.[12] Indeed, while puppeteers often invoke

this metaphor, they tend to resist embracing it entirely. The reoccurring motif of the

ventriloquist's dummy that turns on its master provides an obvious example: the supposed

dominance of the puppeteer over the puppet is immediately thrown into question. Neville

Tranter's *The Seven Deadly Sins*, explored in Chapter 2, presents another instance of this

dynamic. These performances work in part because of the persistence of the domination

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[12] There are exceptions to this rule. In *Laws*, for instance, Plato invokes the puppet power analogy in a more human realm, arguing that citizens should relinquish control to their government. As Scott Shershow points out, Plato's conception is one of "authority" rather than "domination," in which the subject chooses to follow the leader's control, rather than obeying out of mere necessity (22). This formulation at least hints at a reciprocity between puppet and puppeteer, resisting the urge to reduce the puppet to a mere object. Indeed, there seems to be an implicit acknowledgement here that the object in some way consents to being manipulated.

metaphor in puppet theatre. The spectator laughs when the puppet rebels against its master because it challenges a dynamic she thought she knew, even as it represents the relationship between puppet and puppeteer in perhaps a more accurate way.

With the domination metaphor, I have offered an example of a dialogue between puppet narrative and performance, albeit an imperfect one. This example provides a model for the ways in which narrative and performance might communicate with and enrich one another. However, while the domination metaphor used in performance may shed some light on the political or spiritual life of human beings, it has not yet addressed the fundamental quality of "life" itself in the puppet theatre. The domination metaphor might be evoked in the puppet theatre, in other words, but it is not essential to its existence, nor is it appropriate in all narrative settings.

The Puppet as Imagined Subject: The Cartesian Cogito

As I have argued above, the vision of the puppet as the puppeteer's plaything emphasizes the objectness of the puppet, downplaying its imagined "life" by foregrounding its lack of autonomy. In order to understand the puppet's imagined "life," I must identify that which makes the puppet *more than* an object. That is, I must shift my focus from the puppet-as-object to the puppet-as-subject.

To grasp what it means to imitate subjectivity, it is logical to begin with father of modern subjectivity, French philosopher René Descartes.[13] In his famous 1641 text *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes undertook to discover a rational and indisputable foundation for his knowledge by first doubting everything, and then rebuilding his knowledge based solely on clear

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[13] For a study of the influence of Descartes' understanding of subjectivity on the theatre of his day, see R. Darren Gobert, *The Mind-Body Stage: Passion and Interaction in the Cartesian Theatre*, Stanford University Press: 2013.

and distinct ideas that could not be refuted. In the second of six meditations, Descartes

discovers that, while he is capable of doubting the reality of all of his perceptions and

assumptions, he cannot logically doubt his own existence, since his very doubt affirms his

presence as a doubting agent. He concludes that he is fundamentally a "thing that thinks. What is

that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and that also imagines and

senses" (20).

Thus, Descartes situates his self or subjectivity – the essence of the individual that is

Descartes – within his mind. It is *consciousness* that distinguishes the human subject from the

rest of the world, characterized by Descartes as the ability to think, doubt, imagine, etc. As for

the body, Descartes maintains a relatively low opinion of this appendage to the thinking self. As

he writes in Meditation Six:

> My essence consists entirely in my being a thinking thing. And although perhaps (or
>
> rather, as I shall soon say, assuredly) I have a body that is very closely joined to me,
>
> nevertheless, because on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, insofar
>
> as I am merely a thinking thing and not an extended thing, and because on the other hand
>
> I have a distinct idea of a body, insofar as it is merely an extended thing and not a
>
> thinking thing, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without
>
> it. (51)

Descartes makes this claim as an argument for the immortality of the soul, but it also serves to

highlight the division between body and subject or self, popularly termed "Cartesian dualism."

For some, puppetry is particularly well-suited to enact this dualism onstage. As Jane Taylor

posits, "Performance traditions that animate the mask, the puppet, and the ventriloquist's dummy

are foregrounding one of the core questions of philosophy: What is the relationship between the

material and the ideal, or in more classical terms, between the Body and the Soul?" ("As-If"

56). Elsewhere, Taylor writes about Cartesian dualism in relation to *After Cardenio*, a puppet

play written by Taylor which draws inspiration from Shakespeare, Cervantes, and real-life 17th

century broadsheets celebrity Anne Green, a mother hanged for killing her baby and then

miraculously reviving on the anatomy table ("From Props" 234). The life-sized Anne puppet was

molded from vellum and manipulated via direct contact by puppeteer Marty Kintu and actress

Jemma Kahn, the later providing Anne's voice and acting "as much a body-double as a

puppeteer" ("From Props" 237). Taylor sees the relationship between Kahn and the puppet as an

exploration of Cartesian dualism that unsettles Descartes's hierarchy of mind over body; from

Taylor's point of view, the production's staging poses the question "'Is the body the technology

for the soul, or is the soul the technology for the body?'" ("From Props" 239). Thus, while

Taylor complicates the mind/body relationship in Descartes, she continues to cast the

puppet/puppeteer relationship in somewhat Cartesian terms, where the puppet represents the

body and the the performer Kahn (and perhaps Kintu as well) represent the mind or soul of the

character. Carin Kuoni similarly embraces the Cartesian model of subjectivity when she writes

that the puppet theatre allows us to access a particularly "disembodied sense of self or

consciousness" (Kuoni 50). For Kuoni, as for Taylor, the visible puppeteer represents the

consciousness of the subject, and the physical puppet stands in for his or her body, but unlike

Taylor, Kuoni seems to retain Descartes's mind/body hierarchy: the consciousness can exist fully

without the puppet, whereas the puppet needs the consciousness/puppeteer to "live."

This connection between Descartes's dualism and puppetry is one that Descartes himself

would perhaps have endorsed. As Kara Reilly points out, Descartes's conception of the human

body, and its subsequent relationship to the mind, grew out of his fascination with the automata.

Like the automaton, Descartes recognized the human body as basically mechanical. Just as the artist sets the automaton in motion, God sets the human being into motion, then leaves it to run out its course like a watch that eventually stops working. Similarly, as the designer of the automata controls its functions, so too does the cogito—the thinking self—control the body. Reilly suggests that Descartes's familiarity with the moving statues in the royal gardens of Saint-Germain-en-laye, France, designed by hydraulic engineers Tomasso and Alessandro Francini, provided the foundation for "the very concept of the rational soul and the *cogito*" (66).

Reading puppetry in this way is incredibly seductive and, as with the domination metaphor, it has its place in a nuanced understanding of puppetry, as I shall show in Chapter 4. However, while the domination metaphor overemphasized the objectness of the puppet, Cartesian dualism seems to problematically devalue it. A dogged privileging of the puppeteer over and above the puppet body is in many ways antithetical to the art of puppetry as such: Descartes may say that the truth of the human being is his/her *cogito*, and that the body is merely an unfortunate worldly vehicle, but the claim that the truth of the puppet is the puppeteer seems to dissolve puppet theatre altogether, for what is puppet theatre without the puppet? Thus, while Taylor may be correct that the relationship between transcendence and immanence, or body and soul, lies at the heart of the puppet's symbolic potential, Cartesian dualism is an insufficient theoretical principle through which to explore this relationship.

The Puppet as Imagined Subject: Phenomenological Intentionality

Opposition to the Cartesian model has recently been gaining traction, both in the world of philosophy and the world of puppet studies. Increasingly, authors trouble the distinction between subject and object by restoring a degree of animism or vitality to the matter which is usually

conceived of as passive. Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010)

provides a recent contribution to this trend. Bennett uses affect theory to posit that things can act

as a "quasi-agents," carving out trajectories of their own that belie their definition as merely

dumb matter (viii). Bennett's project is self-consciously a political one, aimed at reconfiguring

her readers' relationship to the world around them by complicating the hierarchical approach

people tend to take to the things in their environment, divesting objects of agencies of their own.

To push back against the view of the non-agential object, Bennett ignores the question of

subjectivity altogether, concerned that any discussion of the self in this context reifies the

problematic "us and them" vocabulary of human beings' relation to objects. In her book, in fact,

Bennett claims to be looking for an affect that "is not transpersonal or intersubjective but

impersonal, an affect intrinsic to forms that cannot be imagined (even ideally) as persons" (xii).

In other words, affect does not belong to subjects alone.

Graham Harman undertakes a similar project in his quest for what he calls an "object-

oriented philosophy."[14] In *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (2002), Haram

calls for a new reading of Heidegger's oft-cited distinction between objects that are present-at-

hand and those that are ready-to-hand. In the traditional reading of this distinction, Heidegger

distinguishes between objects that merely exist without having been integrated into a relationship

with humans (present-at-hand) and those that have gained an "ontological depth" through human

usage (ready-to-hand) (Harman 16). A hammer, in other words, gains its meaning insofar as it is

used instrumentally by a human being; its ontological status is contingent on its usage. Harman's

reading is opposed to this simple distinction; for him, "*objects themselves* are already more than

---

[14] While Harman is considered the founder of the object-oriented ontology movement, it was
Levi Bryant who replaced Harman's choice of the word "philosophy" with "ontology," giving
the movement its currently accepted nomenclature.

present-at-hand," even without the engagement of human beings (16). The implications of this

small shift are enormous. Matter can no longer be conceived as merely waiting to be imbued

with meaning from without. Rather, its very being *contains* the potential for its meaning. This is

not to say that meaning it ultimately present in the object in its totality; relationality is still

crucial to the meaning of the object. However, the relation need not be between the object and a

human being (29). Harman writes that

> We are finally in a position to oppose the long dictatorship of human beings in
>
> philosophy. What emerges in its place is a ghostly cosmos in which humans, dogs, oak
>
> trees, and tobacco are on *precisely the same footing* as glass bottles, pitchforks,
>
> windmills, comets, ice cubes, magnets, and atoms. (2; emphasis mine)

While Bennett claims to "bracket out" (viii) the question of human subjectivity in order to focus

on the vibrancy of matter itself, Harman even more explicitly collapses the traditional

philosophical hierarchy of humans and things.

Works like these are appealing to puppetry and object scholars; both Bennett and Harman

are, for instance, cited in the introductions to Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy's *Performing*

Objects and Theatrical Things (2014) and in Dassia Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell's

The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance (2014). The impulse to offer

objects a certain agency remedies longstanding confusion about puppetry: most strikingly, it

overcomes the mistaken view that the puppet succumbs wholly to the puppeteer's control, which

I identified earlier as a fallacy at the heart of the popular but limited domination metaphor.

However, as with the turn towards an inclusive definition of performing objects and away from

the specificity of the puppet proper, this approach threatens to devour useful distinctions even as

it challenges spurious ones. Bracketing out subjectivity or collapsing the hierarchy of humans

and things opens a new world of object theatre intent on tapping into the vitality of the objects

themselves, and even offers a way of thinking about the materiality of more conventional

puppets (the very wood from which the puppet is carved, for instance, in its ecologically-

complicated richness). On the other hand, works like Bennett's and Harman's once again focus

so intently on one half of the object/life dichotomy present in traditional definitions of the puppet

that in many ways they conceal the mimetic function of the representational puppet. Focusing on

the object-ness of the puppet at the expense of its mimetic subjectivity ignores the ability of

performance to show us what it means to be human. Dassia Posner hints at the limitations of

object oriented ontologies in her introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and*

Material Performance. She begins her section by defining puppetry as "the human infusion of

independent life into lifeless, but not agentless, objects in performance" (Posner 5). This

definition borrows Bennett's language of agency (and, later, her Bruno Latour-inspired language

of actants), but continues to carve out a place for "the human infusion of independent life." In

other words, Posner's definition offers a way to consider object agency on one hand, and "life"

of the puppet (that is, an imagined subjectivity enabled by the puppeteer that exceeds Bennett's

discussion of objects as such) on the other.[15]

    Still, following Posner's definition, I am no closer to a clear description of what "life" or

subjectivity can mean without recourse to the Cartesian dualism of the mind/body divide. In

order to remedy the problem introduced by Cartesian dualism while retaining the focus on

modern subjectivity introduced by Descartes, I must turn to a twentieth-century philosopher

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[15] Despite this thoughtful definition, Posner later suggests that we should follow Bennett's approach to objects by "begin[ning] with the assumption that objects contain *life*, will, and intent by virtue of their design and inherent nature" (6, my emphasis). Here, she aligns "life" with the agency described by Bennett, though earlier she appears to separate the two. This makes clear once again precisely how multivalent "life" has become in puppet studies.

sometimes called "the last of the great Cartesians" (Smith and Woodruff 2) and the philosophical system he created. I am referring to the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, founder of phenomenology.

Though the word is used as early as the eighteenth-century (Moran, *Introduction* 6), Husserl is credited with introducing phenomenology as a study unto itself. Like Descartes, Husserl was interested in the ways in which the thinking self experiences the world around her. Unlike Descartes, he did not treat his discoveries about the world of phenomena as an epistemological quest towards certainty. Whereas Descartes concerned himself with decisive *proofs* in his Meditations – first of the cogito, then of God, and finally of the physical world of the senses – Husserl placed his emphasis on the experience of the perceiver, focusing on the ways in which phenomena *appeared to* consciousness. As Smith and Woodruff write, Husserl's work "is not the quest for absolute certainty, but the working out of a phenomenology of one's experience of one's self or ego… of the natural world around one, and of other human beings and their egos. The driving issue is how we experience these things" (35).

Descartes' famous example of one's perception of a piece of wax provides a clear distinction between Cartesianism and phenomenology. In Meditation Two, Descartes describes the physical properties of a piece of wax: it is hard and cold to the touch, smells of flowers, tastes of honey, makes a sound when he taps it with his knuckles (Descartes 21). And yet, once he holds the wax over a flame, all of its physical properties change: its smell and taste dissipate, and it becomes a liquid that is hot to the touch and cannot be rapped upon with a knuckle. Descartes presents this wax example as evidence both of the limitations of the physical senses and the power of the rational mind. If one were to attempt to define the wax through sensual data alone,

it would be impossible to accurately describe the various changing states the wax transitions

through as it melts.

And yet, writes Descartes, he is able to recognize the solid wax and the melted wax as the

same object, not through his sensual observation, but through his rational process of deduction.

As Descartes puts it, "I perceive it [the wax] through my mind alone" (22). The truth of the wax,

for Descartes, is accessible *only* through the rational ponderings of the thinking self, while the

sensual experience of the wax as it changes states serves only to potentially confuse the fact that

both solid and melted wax is the same substance.

For Husserl, Descartes's claim that the mind alone can recognize the truth of the wax

would unfairly privilege the mind or consciousness over and apart from the object being

considered. For Descartes, understanding the "truth" of the wax involves a kind of retreat from

the world back into oneself. Husserl, on the other hand, sees consciousness as inherently

relational, always already wrapped up in the object to which it is directed. In other words,

Husserl would not seek to understand the object *empirically*, as an object in the world knowable

through sense experience, or *rationally* (like Descartes), as if the wax is knowable only through

the reasoning of his own mind. Rather, Husserl would approach the wax *phenomenologically*, as

an object that can only be understood in relation to the mind which experiences it. Thus, the

"truth" of the wax for Husserl is neither in the wax nor in the mind of the perceiver, but in the

relation between the two.

This relation between the object of consciousness (wax) and the thinking subject (mind)

is what Husserl refers to as *intentionality*. Since consciousness is always a consciousness *of*

something, Husserl conceives of consciousness as intentional – that is, just as the wax cannot be

studied as an object outside of the perception of the object, consciousness itself cannot be

conceived as wholly separate from the object of which it is conscious. Unlike Descartes's

thinking self, who turns *inward* for the truth, "Phenomenology shows that the mind is a public

thing, that it acts and manifests itself out in the open, not just inside its own confines"

(Sokolowski 12).

This description of consciousness as always reaching beyond itself into the world paves

the way for phenomenology to challenge Descartes's separation of mind from body. For

Descartes, the seat of the self was the mind, with the body acting as an instrument through which

the mind could act in the world. The soul was eternal, the body finite; the mind was autonomous,

the body needed the mind for animation (otherwise it was a corpse). While the body was needed

to serve the mind, it was the decidedly lesser of the two, and body and mind were linked only

tenuously, in the pineal gland (Taylor, "As If" 57). In the strict terms of Cartesian dualism, the

mind ran the show, and the body merely did as it was told, oftentimes falling short of the lofty

goals of the mind.

Phenomenology takes another tack in the relation between mind and body, and I want to

suggest that it is a more appropriate one when discussing puppet "life." For phenomenologists,

human experience is essentially *embodied*. While this is already true of Husserl's

phenomenology, it is even more evident in the work of Husserl's phenomenological successor,

Martin Heidegger. For Heidegger, whose own contributions to the study of phenomenology

rivaled those of Husserl, the language of "consciousness" and "intentionality" retained

uncomfortable associations with Cartesian dualism (Smith and Woodruff 10). Instead, Heidegger

introduced the term "Being-in-the-world" to name the relationality between human and object.

Heidegger privileged beings-in-the-world (that is, human beings) as those capable of making the

world appear meaningful through their relation to it. By using the word "being" rather than

"thinking," Heidegger resists the assumption that meaning-making is a purely mental act, conceiving of the human instead as wholly embodied, enmeshed in the world rather than separate from it. While I will generally refer to Husserl's terminology of consciousness and intentionality in this dissertation, Heidegger's introduction of the language of "being" is an important reminder that phenomenological consciousness is always worldly – that is, it cannot be located internally, within the self and divorced from the world outside of it. Bodies are crucially important for how they experience and intend, and therefore who they are. As Robert Sokolowski puts is, "Human beings are animated bodies, not enmattered spirits" (26).

It is easy to see, from Sokolowski's formulation, why phenomenology suits an analysis of puppetry, and vice versa. Puppets are precisely the artistic representation of "animated bodies" that Sokolowski describes; an icon or ritual object might more closely fit the definition of the "enmattered spirit." In other words, the theatrical puppet is not a spirit, character, or psyche, enlivened by and separable from the object. The puppet is exactly that body come to life; there is no soul separated from the one I see enacted by the body.[16] Without the "body" of the puppet, there is no puppetry; without the (imagined and performed) "mind" of the puppet, there is no puppetry either.[17]

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[16] My reading of this is certainly not universally shared. Kenneth Gross, for instance, amalgamates the two categories by claiming that "The story of puppets becomes the story of embodied souls and ensouled objects; it insists that our souls are never perfectly our own, as our bodies are never our own" (Gross 118-9). Gross does not clarify exactly how the puppet suggests a questionable ownership of our bodies and souls, but I would nonetheless suggest that his language implies a conflation of the puppet and the ritual object that I have attempted to avoid in this dissertation.

[17] In Blind Summit's *The Table*, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the need for a puppet body is challenged when protagonist puppet Moses orders the puppeteers to put his physical body aside to demonstrate how his "life" can continue even when the puppet has been literally dis-embodied. For a discussion of the ramifications of this moment, see Chapter 4.

This is obviously not to say that the body is mindless; that would propel me back into the realm of Jane Bennett's ecology, where consciousness and subjecthood have no place in the discussion. Rather, the body and consciousness are fundamentally wrapped up in one another. Again, Sokolowski is particularly illuminating on this point: "The spoken language, the intentional gestures, and the indeliberate body language all are more than just bodily motions; they signal intentional acts, and they also express a content of thought. They express to me how the world and the things in it seem to be to the one whose body it is" (154). By watching the animated body, in other words, one can learn something about the person, and that something is not divorceable from the body.

This description of consciousness—as both embodied and relational—offers a way of thinking about the "life" of the puppet that solves my earlier dilemma surrounding that term. It is not simply that the puppet appears to breathe that makes it "alive," but that the puppet also appears to think, explore, reason, and feel. If its breath draws us to it, as in the case of Handspring (explored in Chapter 3), it is because it suggests something beyond breath alone. It suggests that the puppet is performing a being-in-the-world, capable of *intending*, able to give meaning to its surroundings. It is not merely the puppet as agent of action that compels the audience, but also the capacity of the puppet to perform as a meaning-maker in a way that appears startlingly human.[18]

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[18] The question of animals and intentionality is up for debate, and beyond the scope of this project. It would be interesting to consider, in the case of a production like *War Horse* where the horse puppets strived for a level of verisimilitude that largely resisted the pull of cartoonish anthropomorphization, whether this same definition of "life" holds true. For Heidegger, being-in-the-world is exclusively the purview of human beings, as is ethics for Levinas, who has been criticized for his anthropocentrism (see Perpich, "Scarce Resources? Levinas Animals and the Environment" in *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, 150-176). For the purposes of this

The importance of relationality to phenomenology is likewise useful when considering the essential relation of any puppet production: that between the puppet and the puppeteer. In each of my case studies, the puppeteers remain visible, interacting with the puppets rather than simply providing their means of animation. As I shall demonstrate in the coming chapters, this pivotal interaction may cast light on the relationship between self and Other (Chapters 2 and 4) or between the various moments that comprise a single self (Chapter 3). Phenomenology's privileging of relationality is paralleled in puppetry, a form that cannot exist without the give and take between puppeteer and puppet, observed by the audience.[19]

I posit that when scholars and puppeteers speak of the imagined "life" of the puppet, that "life" may be fruitfully understood through the phenomenological tradition. Further, I claim that this characterization of puppet "life" as a quintessentially phenomenological enactment of consciousness offers an exciting way of engaging with the puppet theatre both during the performance and via the narrative. Unlike the domination metaphor, the phenomenological approach I propose responds to the central premise of puppetry's definition, and in fact illuminates something about puppetry itself. While the domination metaphor has led to fantastic artistic explorations within puppetry, they tell us little about puppetry as such, and even ignore crucial elements of actual puppetry in order to serve the metaphor—that is, the domination metaphor ignores the symbiotic relationship between puppet and puppeteer, in favour of a

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dissertation, I will be focusing on exclusively human or humanoid characters when discussing consciousness.

[19] This relationality is also, of course, highlighted in live actor theatre: between scene partners, between actor(s) and audience, and even between actors and their characters. The difference in puppetry is the degree of interdependence between puppet and puppeteer; whereas a live actor may or may not perform with another actor onstage, the puppet needs the puppeteer in order to perform the imagined life that allows it to be read as a puppet, and the puppeteer needs the puppet in order to be a puppeteer rather than an actor. This relationality, and not only that between audience and performers, is essential to the very definition of puppetry.

narrative in which dumb matter inevitably succumbs to the desires of the ruling puppeteer. On

the other hand, my phenomenological approach allows us to finally define the parameters of

puppet "life" with some preciseness, and to open that "life" up for analysis in conjunction with

the narrative. While puppeteers may make conscious choices to foreground phenomenological

consciousness (as can be seen, in particular, in the phenomenologically-inflected writings of

Handspring's Basil Jones), my claim here is that puppet "life" *is* imagined phenomenological

consciousness, and that it is therefore possible to bring the phenomenological metaphor to bear

on any works that conform to the definition of puppetry upon which I have settled.

Overview of Relevant Scholarship

Before turning my attention to the implications of the above claim about

phenomenological consciousness and puppetry, I want to situate my argument within the existing

literature. My work contributes to two areas of scholarship: theatre phenomenology and puppet

theory. In order to understand the place of my dissertation amid the various strains of

phenomenological theatre scholarship, I must begin with Bert O. States groundbreaking work on

theatre phenomenology, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On The Phenomenology of Theater*

(1985). States turns to phenomenology as a response to the growing popularity of semiotic

analysis that attempted to account for the world of the stage as a series of readable signs. In

contrast, States suggests that a phenomenological approach to theatre takes seriously "the

perceptual impression theater makes on the spectator" (7), resisting the disembodiment of the

semiotic viewer's sign-reading stance. That is not to say that States sees no room for semiotics in

his methodology; rather, he famously advocates a "binocular vision" of the theatre, taking into

account both the reading of theatrical signs and their conveyed meanings, *and* the lived,

perceptual experience of the spectator as dual poles of the critic's job (States 8).[20]

After introducing this binocular vision in the introductory chapter, States sets upon his

task of providing a "critical description that is phenomenological in the sense that it focuses on

the activity of theater making itself out of its essential materials: speech, sound, movement,

scenery, text, etc." (States 1). In other words, States is interested in the aspects of performance

that may be reducible to signs in a semiotic reading yet that he believes would benefit from the

addition of a phenomenological one.

Thus, while States cites Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, his interest is largely in the

phenomenological attitude as such in relation to performance, rather than the specific claims

made by these philosophers about things like consciousness, intentionality, or human relations.

Indeed, in clarifying the meaning of the phenomenological perspective, States turns not to

philosophy, but to art, citing a lengthy quotation of Russian Formalist writer Victor Shlovsky.

Shlovsky writes that

> Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to
>
> make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are
>
> perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects
>
> 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception
>
> because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art*

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[20] In fact, early Prague School semiotics of the 1930s and 40s had a good deal in common with States's binocular vision. As Ric Knowles points out, these early semioticians emphasized the inherent "thingness" of an object which was never erased by its simultaneous existence as a sign. They also made use of Viktor Shlovsky's concept of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization, cited below (Knowles 43-6). In other words, the phenomenological attitude propounded by scholars like States is not altogether foreign to semiotics itself.

is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important." (qtd.

in States 21)

It is true that Shlovsky's call for a reorienting perception that is bodily rather than intellectual

mirrors the goal of phenomenological philosophy; as French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty

suggests, "True philosophy consists in relearning to look at the world" (*Phenomenology* xxiii).

For Merleau-Ponty, as for all of the thinkers in the phenomenological tradition, this new way of

looking is a wholly embodied experience of a being-in-the-world able to consider phenomena as

the perceiver experiences them. It is this basic orientation that States seeks through his binocular

vision.

States's interest in phenomenology is largely methodological, and it has spawned a good

deal of scholarship that takes his definition of a binocular or phenomenological approach as a

methodological shorthand, a tool according to which the theatre may be approached as a lived

experience. Authors have since employed a phenomenological methodology in order to think

about, for instance, the relationship between the performance and the spectator (White 2013),

acting as embodied experience (Zarilli 2004), ways of analyzing the theatrical space (McAuley

2000), and even objects onstage or off (Sofer 2013). For these scholars, phenomenology is

understood as an approach to participating in the theatre, either as a performer or spectator/critic.

Their shared concern is with the phenomenological perspective or "attitude" itself; they urge

their readers to understand the critic/spectator/actor as embodied, and to acknowledge their

perceptual part in the meaning-making of the theatrical event.

While this methodological phenomenology has led to interesting scholarship in the field,

it does threaten to empty phenomenology of its more specific philosophical content. To put it

simply, it is entirely possible to employ phenomenological methodology in theatre scholarship

without ever reading Husserl, Heidegger, or any other foundational phenomenologist. While this is not a problem in itself, it does lead to a particularly unidirectional usage of phenomenology in theatre studies: scholars are able to use the basic premises of the phenomenological attitude in order to counteract a too-rigid semiotic approach, but say little or nothing about the impact of theatre scholarship on the philosophy of phenomenology.

Other scholars attempt a more reciprocal approach, often pointing out that philosophers who work in or are critical of the phenomenological tradition are explicit about theatre's significance to the field. Jacques Derrida, for instance, famously claims, "*the phenomenological reduction is a scene, a theatre stage*" (Derrida 86; emphasis in original). That is, Husserl's method of "bracketing out" the question of existence from perception, and focusing only on phenomena as it appears to consciousness, mimics the "suspension of disbelief" experienced in the theatre. Husserl himself makes this connection when he uses the image of the theatre in his text *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness* and elsewhere in order to further his claims about consciousness, perception, and imagination. Theatre scholar Pannill Camp takes up this Husserlian image of the phenomenological theatre in his study of Enlightenment theatre architecture "Theatre Optics: Enlightenment Theatre Architecture in France and the Architectonics of Husserl's Phenomenology." Camp argues that Husserl's understanding of consciousness is at the very least parallel to, or possibly even influenced by, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's Enlightenment-era theatre design. Camp's claim is not simply that scholars must consider theatre architecture as such from an embodied, perspectival position, but rather that Ledoux's designs echo distinctly Husserlian explanations of what consciousness is. Reading Husserl might shed light on Ledoux, and studying Ledoux might concretize Husserl.

Camp makes a similar link between Husserl and the theatre – this time, the process of watching theatre as an instance of Husserlian bracketing – in his contribution to the recent collection *Performance and Phenomenology: Traditions and Transformations* (2015). Camp's strategy fits well within the pages of this volume, since its editors – Maaike Bleeker, Jon Foley Sherman, and Eirini Nedelkopoulou – cite the exact Derrida quotation that I posited as one of the foundations of this approach to phenomenology (Bleeker 2). This approach can sound very similar to States's methodological approach – as these editors write, "Phenomenology has provided contemporary performers with a language for thinking about how bodies operate and create meaning between each other" (4). However, unlike those who use phenomenology as solely a methodological starting point, the authors in this collection do their due diligence to the philosophy that spawned it, claiming that phenomenology offers not only an attitude, but insights on relationality, bodies, consciousness, and imagination that might be useful to theatre studies.

My own project is indebted to both the binocular vision advocated by States and the bilateral, cross-pollinating theatre-phenomenology espoused by Bleeker et al. While my emphasis on voice, movement, and design are derived from Tillis's semiotically-inflected definition of the puppet, I suggest that an audience's experiences of the puppet theatre cannot be simply reduced to a reading of "signs of life." Indeed, the fact that Tillis's definition of the puppet rests on the concept of "imagined life" hints at the fact that merely "reading signs," as in the semiotic model, does not fully encapsulate the audience's lived experience of the puppet theatre. The audience's *perception*—a phenomenological concept—is crucially part of the puppet's definition. But in addition to this binocular vision, I am also committed to enhancing the interdisciplinary cross-pollination between theatre and phenomenology studies, as Camp and Bleeker et al. strive to do. Puppetry confronts its spectators with the strangeness of consciousness

by creating it in the unlikeliest of places, forcing audiences to interrogate their understanding

of the subject in ways that perhaps they would not do otherwise. I am suggesting that

phenomenology is not useful only as an explanation of the strangeness of puppetry, but also as a

way of investigating the consciousness and subjectivity that puppetry makes strange.

In addition to adopting a phenomenological attitude and a bilateral relationship between

phenomenology and theatre, I am interested in how phenomenology's ideas about embodiment,

relationality, and subjecthood sheds light on specific performances. In all of the examples above,

scholars have largely used phenomenology in order to consider theatrical categories like acting,

architecture, or audiences. In *Performance and Phenomenology*, for instance, Pannill Camp

writes about spectators, Philipa Rothfield about acting training, and Joslin McKinney about

props, but few attach their readings to specific narrative performances. In order to respond to the

problem of the divide between narrative and performance in puppet theatre set out by Basil Jones

at the beginning of this chapter, my own approach must make a space for phenomenology in

both the broader details of puppet performance and in the stories of specific performances. For

models of this approach, I turn now to the work of Amelia Jones and Stanton B. Garner.

In her book *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (1998), Amelia Jones uses phenomenology

as a means of challenging the Cartesian subject in the art world. For her, the subject up for

debate is the artist him or herself, absent from modernist art but very much present in the body

art that Jones examines. On the surface, Jones's approach may seem indistinguishable from

States's; her desire to "*re-embody* the subjects of making and viewing art" (11) sounds a lot like

the generalized plea for a phenomenological perspective in the theatre touted by States and his

followers. What makes Jones's approach different is that the re-embodiment of the artist is at the

very heart of body art, and has theoretical implications that Jones draws out: rather than viewing

the artist as transcendent (Cartesian) subject, a "heroic but disembodied genius" (Jones 37),

body art includes the body of the artist in the frame. This focus on the embodied artist, and

Jones's corresponding use of phenomenology as a theoretical framework, characterizes "the self

as embodied, performative, and intersubjective" (39). Like Jones's work, my dissertation strives

to illuminate the subject created in the puppetry I study, and to discuss that subject in relation to

pieces of theatre in which the puppetry is featured.

While Jones's interest in the relationship between Cartesian and phenomenological

subjectivity mirrors my work, there are two major ways in which our projects differ, aside from

their specific content of our work. First, though Jones makes use of Merleau-Ponty in particular,

she describes her theoretical allegiances as "phenomenologically-inflected feminist

poststructuralism" (11) rather than phenomenology proper. The inclusion of feminism is crucial

to Jones's argument, particularly Judith Butler's concept of performativity in relation to the

construction of the subject. However, the downplaying of the phenomenological influence

inherent in Jones's description also hints at a discomfort with phenomenology that Jennifer

Parker-Starbuck articulates in her book *Cyborg Theatre*: "For the most part phenomenology has

been ignored or critiqued in favor of a more urgent identity-driven focus that compelled much of

the (especially US based) performance theory in the late[-]twentieth century" (159).

Phenomenology is often accused of ignoring differences *between* bodies, even as it advocates an

embodied approach to being-in-the-world. However, while my chapters occasionally touch on

issues of gender and sexuality, they are not at the heart of my project. My own strictly

phenomenological focus does not preclude future investigations of puppetry with an eye to these

themes; rather, it is my hope that it may lay a groundwork for later explorations.

The second difference between Jones's work and my own is the distinctly non-narrative nature of her case studies. Body art might be understood as a postdramatic medium in Hans Thies-Lehman's use of the term—it eschews the dramatic narrative and structure of traditional drama in favour of visual, fragmented, and/or non-linear performance. My case studies are all more traditionally dramatic, in that they follow clear narrative structures with definable characters and visuals that complement the narratives.[21] I am interested in how a phenomenological understanding of the puppet might impact the audience's understanding of the narrative, an entity different from and sometimes in conflict with the puppet, as Basil Jones has pointed out.

For an example of a scholar using phenomenology to explore dramatic narrative *and* performance, I will draw on Stanton B. Garner's *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (1996). Garner uses the theories of Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Husserl and Heidegger to make claims about embodiment in both the performances and the texts of contemporary drama, from Beckett to Churchill. What makes Garner stand out is his implicit suggestion that these dramatic texts illustrate philosophical claims that themselves are further clarified in performance. Sartre's notion of the gaze, for instance (discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation), finds expression for Garner in both Pinter's prose and in the relationship between performer and audience (Garner 116). The specificity of the narrative provides a stable foundation for his analysis; as Garner writes, "To speak of theatrical props, for instance, is one thing; to explore this issue through the cluttered set of Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* (1960)

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[21] This is not to say that the plays do not contain postmodern or postdramatic elements. For a discussion of postmodern subjectivity in *Or You Could Kiss Me*, see my chapter "'A Total Spectacle but a Divided One': Redefining Character in Handspring Puppet Company's *Or You Could Kiss Me*" in *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, edited by Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell.

allows one to confront 'objectness' in terms of its specific theatrical and perceptual manifestations" (5). The narrative brings specificity to what might otherwise be difficultly abstract.

Thus Garner's approach, like my own, is committed to a reciprocity between philosophy, performance, and text. Phenomenology is, for Garner, neither a mere methodological approach nor a theoretical framework through which the theatre may be investigated. The philosophical texts he engages are themselves primary sources capable of dialoguing *with* the theatrical texts he has chosen: Beckett illuminates Merleau-Ponty as much as Merleau-Ponty illuminates Beckett (Garner 25). By understanding puppetry as capable of philosophical inquiry, I hope to suggest that the puppet productions I include in this dissertation can illuminate something about the philosophy with which I have paired them, just as the philosophy can shed new light on the productions.

The second category of scholarship which I hope to extend through my work is that of puppet theory. Although there has been a proliferation of puppet scholarship in the past five years, the field of puppet theory remains underrepresented within theatre scholarship. There are many excellent histories, including those of puppetry in general (Henryk Jurkowski, *A History of European Puppet Theatre Volumes 1 and 2*, 1996), puppetry of a particular period and/or culture (Donald Keene, *Bunraku, The Art of Japanese Puppet Theatre*, 1965; John McCormick, *The Victorian Marionette Theatre,* 2004 and *The Italian Puppet Theatre: A History*, 2010), and the work of particular companies (Stefan Brecht, *The Bread and Puppet Theatre Volumes 1 and 2*, 1988; Jane Taylor, *Handspring Puppet Company,* 2009). There are also a number of puppeteer-penned books about the art of puppetry that are, though not traditionally scholarly, exceptionally illuminating, and which must be considered as essential to any scholarly consideration of

puppetry. These include Nina Efimova's *The Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre*, 1935;

Michael Meschke's *In Search of Aesthetics for the Puppet Theatre*, 1992; Sergei Obraztsov's *My*

Profession (1950), and Bil Baird's *The Art of the Puppet* (1965). While my dissertation draws on

many of these texts, it is neither an historical exploration nor merely an analysis of the work of

particular artists.

Other books, such as Scott Shershow's *Puppets and "Popular" Culture* (1995), Harold

B. Segel's *Pinocchio's Progeny* (1995), and Victoria Nelson's *The Secret Life of Puppets* (2009)

offer fascinating insights into the puppetry as it may be understood metaphorically, but shy away

from actual puppet performances. Shershow is most interested in puppetry as a semiotic and

historical signifier, metaphorically linked to the historical relationship between authorship in

popular culture, but tends to rely on play scripts and literary metaphors that include puppets

rather than discussing actual puppets in performance. Segel focuses on the puppet in modernist

avant-garde drama, but like Shershow tends to emphasize references to puppets, automata, and

robots (i.e. the marionette in Kleist's "On the Marionette Theater," the robots in Karel Capek's

R.U.R.) rather than physical puppets on a stage. Nelson, as I have shown, goes farther, claiming

that "even as puppet shows retain their timeless theatrical charm, imagined puppets carry a

stronger charge of the 'uncanny' or suppressed holy" (60). In other words, Nelson's project holds

the metaphorical puppet apart from the actual puppet, labeling the latter as charming but,

presumably, less theoretically interesting for her purposes. I seek to maintain the metaphorical

richness of Nelson's, Segel's and Shershow's discussions while returning the physical,

performing puppet and the narrative it tells to the center of attention.

Scholarship dealing with puppets-qua-puppets in theoretical terms is a sparser field, but

the work belonging to it is exciting. An early flurry of theoretical interest in the puppet theatre

can be traced to the Prague School semioticians of the 1930s and 40s, notably Petr Bogatyrev

("Semiotics in the Folk Theatre" (1938)) and Jiri Veltrusky ("Man and Object in the Theater"

(1940), "Puppetry and Acting" (1983)). Their work offered useful interpretations of the sign

systems of the puppet theatre, including theories of the audience's relation to the puppet that

would have an enormous influence on many scholars to come, and many puppetry scholars

carried on this semiotic tradition. Frank Proschan's famous term "performing object," for

instance, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, originated in an introduction to a special issue

of the journal *Semiotica* which he edited in 1983. Henryk Jurkowski's *Aspects of the Puppet*

Theatre (1988), perhaps the most important book-length theoretical study of puppet theatre up to

the time, remained indebted to semiotics. Steve Tillis characterizes his *Toward an Aesthetics of*

the Puppet (1992), on which this dissertation heavily relies, as a semiotic project; his definition

of the puppet, which I have adopted in this dissertation, traces its lineage in part back to

Jurkowski. Thus, the foundations of theoretical puppetry scholarship are largely semiotic.

It is only in recent years, however, that theoretically ambitious puppet scholarship has

really begun to flourish. In 2001, John Bell wrote in the introduction to his edited collection

Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects that despite puppetry's ubiquity in folk theatre, popular

theatre, and religious ceremony, "they have rarely been the subjects of sustained systematic

academic attention in this century" (5). Bell's call for new scholarship that pays "attention to the

objects themselves in performance" (5) was met with a small upsurge of scholarly interest in the

puppet theatre in the early decades of the twenty-first century. While some of these texts still

owe a debt to the semiotic origins of puppet scholarship, many branch out along new lines,

incorporating a plethora of new theoretical and methodological approaches. Bell's own *American*

Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance (2008) takes up the challenge

of exploring actual objects in performance by focusing on puppets and performing objects

from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America, with an eye to how such

performances may have been intended and interpreted by artists and audiences. Kenneth Gross

employs the language of Freudian psychoanalysis in *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* (2011)

wherein he considers a vast array of puppet performances in order to describe and theorize about

what makes the puppet alternately approachable and mysterious, loveable and frightening; that

is, what makes the puppet "uncanny" in Freud's terminology.[22] He argues that "There is

something in the puppet that ties its dramatic life more to the shapes of dreams and fantasy, the

poetry of the unconscious, than to any realistic drama of human life" (2). Penny Francis's

Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice (2012) offers a primer for students of puppetry on

European puppetry since the 1990s, with particular attention paid to puppetry traditions,

techniques, companies, and history. Finally, *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and*

Material Performance (2014), edited by Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein and John Bell,

seeks to enliven puppet scholarship by bringing it together with contemporary theatre and object

theory such as Hans-Thies Lehmann's notion of postdramatic theatre, Bruno Latour's theory of

objects as actants, Jane Bennett's object ecology and Graham Harman's object-oriented

ontology, all mentioned earlier in this dissertation. This collection of essays by scholars and

practitioners sets the course for subsequent puppet and object research.

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[22] For more scholarship on puppetry from a psychoanalytic perspective, see Kenneth Gross's
reading of Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theatre* ("Love Among the Puppets," 1997); John Bell's take
on the uncanny and puppets ("Playing with the Eternal Uncanny: The Persistent Life of Lifeless
Objects," *Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, 2014), and Jane
Taylor's discussion of the Lacanian mirror stage while discussing the baby in Handspring's
Woyzeck on the Highveld (*Handspring Puppet Company*, 2009: 28-9).

Of the many puppetry studies that have been written in recent years, only a few explicitly take on a phenomenological approach, whether methodological or theoretical. The most obvious example is Jan Mrazek's *Phenomenology of a Puppet Theatre: Contemplations on the Art of Javanese Wayang Kulit* (2005). Mrazek's lengthy text employs phenomenological methodology in direct opposition to the semiotic tradition. The author focuses on the many elements of Javanese shadow puppetry and how their interactions shape the experience of the audience. Mrazek chooses a phenomenological methodology in order to highlight this interactive quality of the shadow puppet experience. However, the book does tends to approach phenomenology as a methodological attitude rather than a theoretical framework.[23] Although Mrazek offers a startlingly thorough chronicle of Wayang Kulit puppet theatre, many of his discoveries are specific to that form, and not necessarily transferable to puppetry in general.[24]

In a slightly different sense, Jane Taylor's edited collection *Handspring Puppet Company* (2009) engages with several of the philosophers present in this dissertation, all of whom have ties to the phenomenological tradition. Gerhard Marx's "A Matter of Life and Death: The Function of Malfunction in the Work of Handspring Puppet Company" is the most explicit about this approach, reading Handspring's puppets through Heidegger's distinction between the ready-to-hand and ready-at-hand object. Marx brings phenomenological insight to bear upon Handspring's work, but focuses on the puppet-as-object rather than its mimetic life—that is, he does not delve into the impact of his conclusions on the narratives being told. Basil Jones turns to phenomenology in "Puppetry and Authorship" in order to privilege the Ur-narrative of the

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[23] In other words, Mrazek's use of phenomenology is closer to States's than it is to Garner's. For my distinction between theatre scholars' use of phenomenology as a methodology vs. phenomenology as a philosophy, see pages 39-46 of this chapter.
[24] There are exceptions to this rule. For Mrazek's insights into the puppet gaze, see pg. 98-99 of this dissertation.

puppet – that is, its struggle to "live" - over the narrative of the performance. Citing dance scholar Maxine Sheets-Johnstone and personal communications with philosophy scholar Andrew Macklin, Jones argues, in a Merleau-Ponty-inflected passage, that movement is embodied thought, and that thought does not merely *precede* movement, but *is* the movement (266). Although Jones does not go into detail about how this analysis might be read back into the narrative of a performance, this observation about the phenomenological relation of mind and body as exemplified by the very art of puppetry is precisely the intervention I hope to make in this dissertation. Finally, Jane Taylor herself may be said to take this phenomenological analysis a step further in her introduction. She invokes Levinas's concept of the gaze between self and Other in order to describe the relationship between puppets and the multiple puppeteers operating each one. The interdependence between puppeteers and puppets suggest to Taylor that "In some sense then, puppetry is an ideal medium for exploring and challenging assumptions about labour, being, and subjectivity" (30). It is this call to which this dissertation attempts an answer.

In his essay "The Copresence and Ontological Ambiguity of the Puppet" found in *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance,* Paul Piris also cites Levinas, although he is more interested in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre in his discussion of puppetry and the Other. Piris's chapter explores the work of Neville Tranter using the writings of Sartre in a way very similar to my own, but with a focus on the relation between the puppet and puppeteer rather than the thematic implications within the narrative. Writing about Tranter's 2008 production *Cuniculus,* Piris argues that the co-presence of the puppeteer and puppet onstage offers a glimpse into the relation between self and Other, but with an added complication: the "ontological ambiguity" of the puppet, which is "an object that appears in performance as a

subject" (Piris 30). Piris does, at times, touch briefly on ways in which Sartre's notion of the Look might be brought to bear on the narrative of *Cuniculus*--for instance, he points to a particular instance of exchanged looks between Tranter and one of the rabbit puppets to illustrate Sartre's concept of shame before the Other (Piris 37), which I will discuss at greater length in Chapter 2—but this is not Piris's primary objective. Rather than focusing on the gaze within the narrative, Piris is principally interested in the *audience's* experience of the puppet and puppeteer as two "co-present" subjects rather than merely a subject and object. Thus, while Piris owes a debt to Sartre for the latter's description of the mutually constituting relationship of subject to Other, he does not describe in detail the antagonistic Master/Slave relationship that I situate at the heart of Tranter's puppetry.

Piris's essay is doubly significant to my review of relevant puppet scholarship, since in addition to his interest in puppetry and phenomenology, he focuses in this essay on one of my case studies: Neville Tranter of Stuffed Puppet Theatre. Although Tranter is mentioned in Francis's *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (2012), Eileen Blumenthal's *Puppetry: A World History* (2005), and Henryk Jurkowski's *History of European Puppetry: The Twentieth Century* (1998), extended scholarly attention on Tranter remains minimal. Alissa Mello's unpublished doctoral dissertation "Puppets, Presence and Memory: The Training Methods and Workshop Techniques of Compagnie Philippe Gentry, Stuffed Puppet, and Inkfish's *Three Good Wives*" (2014) is the only other study of Tranter's work of which I am aware.

The scholarly attention towards Redmoon Theater has been similarly meager. Redmoon cofounder Jim Lasko contributed an essay to the *Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, and Wanda Strukus's 2002 dissertation "Unidentified Performing Objects: Perception, Phenomenology, and the Object as Actor" includes formal analyses of

several Redmoon productions (though not my case study, *The Cabinet*). Jennifer Schlueter published a review of the original 2005 production of *The Cabinet* in *Theatre Journal*. Otherwise, the work on this essential company remains underdeveloped.

Predictably, given the international success of *War Horse* (2007), Handspring Puppet Company has generated the most scholarly attention. Handspring collaborators Jane Taylor and Mervyn Millar have both penned books on the company: Taylor's edited collection *Hanspring Puppet Company* (2009) and Millar's *The Horse's Mouth: Staging Morpurgo's "War Horse"* (2007) and *Journey of the Tall Horse: A Story of African Theatre* (2006). Other scholars have tended to focus on *War Horse* (Parker-Starbuck 2013), *Tall Horse* (Hutchison 2010), or *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Graham 2003 and 2009). No one other than myself, to my knowledge, has written about the production I have chosen to analyze, *Or You Could Kiss Me* (2010).

Dissertation Outline

In this dissertation, I will bring my definition of puppet "life" – a performance of phenomenological consciousness that is relational, intentional, and embodied – to bear on narrative puppet performances. As Tillis has already shown, puppet "life" is generated by the puppeteer/designer through a combination of design, movement, and voice. While Tillis's use of these categories is semiotic, they come to take on new meanings from a phenomenological perspective. But the three markers of "life" are not employed to the same extent in all puppet performances; some puppeteers emphasize movement as the primary conveyer of "life," while others focus their attention on elements of design or voice. This multiplicity within puppeteering techniques should remind us that even this relational, embodied, intentional "life" contains variations within it. After Husserl and Heidegger, philosophers took up the call of

phenomenology in a variety of ways, each one adding new conclusions, insights, and

variations to the theories put forth by phenomenology's founders. Just as the puppeteer's

particular technical emphases alter the kind of "life" exhibited by the puppet, so too do the

various interpretations of later phenomenologists like Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty,

and Emmanuel Levinas offer new and distinct implications for the relationality, embodiment,

and intentionality of consciousness.

I intend to bring these various threads together in order to offer phenomenologically-

inflected interpretations of three different puppet plays. In each chapter, I will focus on one of

Tillis's three markers of "life" – movement, design, and voice – as it is emphasized in a single

production. I will consider how each marker of "life" corresponds to the phenomenological

writings of one of the philosophers listed above, and in turn how those philosophical insights

may impact the narrative of the piece. In other words, each chapter will claim that the

puppeteer's technique, the narrative, and the philosophy of phenomenological consciousness

might be interpretatively interconnected, each one shedding new light on the others.

Since I have claimed that Tillis's definition applies to all puppet shows,[25] and that the

"life" of the puppet can be most productively understood in terms of intentionality and

phenomenology, any puppet show would seem to suffice as a potential case study. However, my

case studies were chosen based on a clear collection of criteria. They are:

1) Availability of the production. Given that puppetry is a visual medium, and that my

   readings of the productions rely on elements that may be absent from reviews or printed

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[25] In other words, I have claimed that Tillis's definition distinguishes puppetry from other
performing objects. Performances that do not contain objects that the audience is encouraged to
imagine as "alive" would still constitute an example of object performance, but not puppetry per
se.

scripts (i.e.: movement, eye-lines, etc.), it was imperative that I have access to the

production, on DVD and, when possible, as a live audience member. Since my definition

of puppet life, following Tillis, emphasizes the audience's role in imagining the puppet as

alive, my own discernment is key to my arguments about these productions. I attended

two of my case studies live (*The Cabinet* and *Or You Could Kiss Me*) and saw a different

production (*Punch and Judy in Afghanistan*) by my third puppeteer, Neville Tranter, as

well as attending a short workshop presented by him. I also attended an abbreviated

version of *The Table* at the British Library in 2013 as part of the public lecture "Inspiring

Science 2013: Your Creative Brain." I have access to all four productions on DVD for

reference.[26]

2) The presence of a narrative. There is certainly an abundance of abstract or non-narrative

object theatre that conforms, to varying degrees, to my definition of imagined life. These

performances are interesting insofar as they challenge the limits of imagined life. In Basil

Twist's famous *Symphonie Fantastique* (1998), for instance, the performer and his

assistants manipulated pieces of fabric and other materials in a large tank of water. While

some moments of this piece simply present objects moving beautifully, without the

addition of imagined life, I was surprised to discover, upon seeing a video of the original

production, how instinctively I separated those "decorative" pieces of fabric from the

ones that seemed to move intentionally, which I immediately saw as "dancers." There is

much more to be said on this topic, but since I am interested particularly in the

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relationship between puppet "life" and the story the puppet tells, dance pieces like this one fall outside the scope of my research.

3) Marriage of theme and form. As I have already pointed out, I will be focusing on a single, foregrounded "marker of life" in each chapter. In order to resolve the tension between the Ur-narrative of the puppet and the narrative of the piece, it is important that the *way* puppet "life" is performed is in some way significant to the *story* the play seeks to tell. This reciprocity between theme and form will be clear in the examples below.

4) Richness and depth of production. Each of these productions is complex enough to withstand in-depth analysis, and moreover to reward repeated viewing with new discoveries. They are not only exemplars of puppet life practices, or straightforward elucidations of philosophies of consciousness, but rather meaningful, engrossing, and subtle works in their own rights. In other words, these are productions that I believe can sustain a genuine dialogue with the philosophical questions that I am interested in, adding nuance to the theory rather than being subsumed by it.

My first case study is the earliest production in the dissertation: Neville Tranter's 1984 production *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Tranter is explicit about his belief that the gaze of the puppet, also called its eye-line, is the key feature of puppet life. For my purposes, although the gaze of the puppet requires a marriage of both design and movement, I have designated it predominantly a design concern for reasons that will become clear in the chapter. Thematically, Tranter has an ongoing interest in the relationship between the weak and the strong, which is evident even in this early piece. It tells the story of Faust's final hour on earth, before he must give his soul to the devil as promised, but the real protagonist of this retelling is Mephisto, who may be sent to hell along with Faust if it is decided that their relationship is closer than that of master and servant.

Both Tranter's thematic interest in power dynamics and his formal commitment to the puppet's gaze suggest a parallel between Tranter's puppetry and Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of the Look. Sartre's Look offers a bleak vision of the subject's phenomenological relationship to the world and to others that seems to mirror many of Tranter's plays, in which the weak are oppressed by the strong. But I will argue in this chapter that the very form of puppetry both exemplifies and subtly undercuts Sartre's pessimistic theories. I suggest that while the puppet/puppeteer relationship in Tranter's work reflects the Master/Slave dialectic that shapes for Sartre every relationship between self and other. And yet, I claim that the audience's relationship to the puppet models a very un-Sartrean vision of selfless love and care, allowing the production to gently critique Sartre's often-criticized theories of human relations. While many of Tranter's pieces might be used to argue this claim, *The Seven Deadly Sins* is perhaps the most explicit about its thematic interest in the Look, exemplified by the Faust puppet seated in the audience throughout, "watching" the proceedings onstage.

In Chapter 3, I focus on a 2010 collaboration between Handspring Puppet Company of South Africa and the National Theatre of London. *Or You Could Kiss Me*, created collectively by writer/director Neil Bartlett and the cast, follows the final days in the life of Old B, an 86-year-old South African man dying of emphysema. Two crises drive the action of the play. On the one hand, Old B's partner of 67 years, Old A, struggles to care for his ornery love and urges Old B to create a will leaving his assets to Old A, since the two have never married. Meanwhile, Old B is engrossed in his own failing memories, determined to remember the moment that he and Old A fell in love. For both men, these concerns are genuinely pressing as well as being distractions from the impending dissolution of their 67-year relationship.

This work, performed using large direct contact puppets representing old and young versions of A and B, explores aging, the limits of memory and the continuities and discontinuities in individuals over time. I will consider how the presence of several iterations of the same character on stage at once offers a way of thinking about memory as embodied rather than simply internal. I will rely on Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodied consciousness – an extreme anti-Carteseanism that denies any separation between body and consciousness – and investigate how this embodiment impacts the depictions of memory in this play, and how these themes are made explicit through movement, including what Jones calls the "micromovement" of breath. Ultimately, I will argue that the puppetry of *Or You Could Kiss Me* depicts both the fractured sense of self endemic in memory loss, and the potential for what Edward Casey calls "robust intactness" of embodied remembering, which brings together not only past and present iterations of the self, but even, at times, self and other.

Chapter 4 considers the most contentious of the three elements of Tillis's definition, and the one that Tillis himself sees as dispensable: the puppet voice. In this chapter, I explore the use of recorded voice in Redmoon Theater's 2005 *The Cabinet*, based on the German Expressionist film classic *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Subtitled "A Spectacle in Miniature," *The Cabinet* combines elements of nineteenth-century toy theatre, direct contact puppetry, and shadow puppetry in order to tell the narrative of a somnambulist manipulated by his doctor to commit murder against his will. The somnambulist is unconscious throughout the film, manipulated from without in a manner that conforms perfectly to the domination metaphor of the puppet. Playwright Mickle Maher and directors Frank Maugeri (2005) and Vanessa Stalling (2010 remount) chose to complicate this interpretation by introducing the disembodied voice of the somnambulist who narrates his nightmarish waking sleep. The choice to include narration from

the point of view of the somnambulist Cesare, and the use of an onstage gramophone from which the voice emanates, allows us to consider the mind/body connection in a fascinating light. I will use this chapter to return to the notion of Cartesian dualism. First, I will suggest that the separation of narrating voice and unspeaking puppet dramatizes the Cartesian division between Cesare's body and his mind. Next, I focus on a moment in the play when this division is undone, and Cesare's body and mind reunite in a recognizable articulation of phenomenological puppet "life" at the very moment when he makes a connection to another person. I will read this moment of interrelation through the work of Emmanuel Levinas, for whom an ethical relationship to the Other precedes the being of the self. Finally, I will suggest that this adaptation, and in particular its use of a narrating, pre-recorded voice, offers a commentary on the ethics of solipsism and relationality that is altogether lacking from the film.

In each of my chapters, I will present phenomenological puppet "life" in a different way, through a different philosopher. The theories of each philosopher will be brought to bear on both the puppet performance and the narrative being told. I will explore the questions: How might technique, narrative, and philosophy interrelate in the puppet theatre? What can phenomenology illuminate about narrative puppet performance, and vice versa?

CHAPTER 2:

THE LOOK, SARTRE, AND STUFFED PUPPET'S *THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS*

Introducing the Puppet Gaze

At the 2011 Out the Box Festival in Cape Town, South Africa, I was lucky enough to take a short puppet manipulation workshop with Australian master puppeteer Neville Tranter. Participants introduced ourselves to each other, then Tranter revealed a puppet named Zeno: a bald, rosy-cheeked, slightly forlorn-looking latex puppet, with the kind of Muppet-esque, hinged jaw manipulation that Tranter is known for, with large eyes with sparkling blue jewel-like pupils (Fig. 2). Zeno, constructed originally as a character in Tranter's 1993 production *The Nightclub,* had a compelling expression even when at rest, but in Tranter's hands he sprang to life, bobbing his head to music only he could hear, doing a double-take as he noticed something in the distance, cowering as the unseen threat closed in on him, and finally watching it recede into the distance. Tranter's right hand moved Zeno's head and mouth, while his left hand grasped the puppet's left wrist to manipulate his arm. Zeno's right hand lay motionless in the puppet's lap. Tranter's rendition of this brief vignette was flawless. Afterwards, he let us each try this simple sequence. (For the record: despite my eagerness, I forgot most of the steps in the sequence the moment Zeno was in my hands). Inevitably, as one of my classmates carried out the sequence, Zeno's right hand slipped from his knee and dangled lifelessly at his side. When the student hurriedly reached for the hand and tucked it back where it belonged, Tranter intervened. The arm doesn't matter, he told us. The life of the puppet comes from its eyes. With a committed gaze, all other mistakes will be forgiven. Tranter's priorities were clear: the intentionality of his puppets—that which allows the audience to imagine them as intentional or conscious subjects

rather than simple objects—originates in the puppet's gaze. In order to allow the audience to

see the object as intentional, the puppet itself must appear to "see."

Fig. 2. A student with Zeno from Neville Tranter's workshop "L'acteur dedouble," held in

Charleville-Mezieres at the Institut International de la Marionnette in 2005. Copyright

Christophe Loiseau, Institut International de la Marionnette / ENSAM.

The question of how to make a puppet "see" involves both the design of the puppet and the technique of the puppeteer, and it is not unique to Tranter. One of puppetry's key concerns is the puppet's eye-lines: the invisible lines connecting the puppet's eyes to an object. When the line is straight, the puppet appears alive; when the puppet's eye-line is slightly off, the puppet seems to be staring blankly and loses its claim to intentionality. By emphasizing its importance, Tranter is simply foregrounding a rule on which most puppeteers would immediately agree. However, Tranter's interest in looking and seeing goes beyond simply a technical concern. Tranter combines his technical commitment to the puppets' eye-lines with a thematic interest in the ways in which seeing and being seen work to construct the subject as observer or observed. This marriage of technique, performance, and theme supports my claim in Chapter 1 that the way in which the puppet's "life" is performed might be productively read alongside the story being told onstage. In this chapter, I will consider what I take to be Tranter's most overt example of this convergence of technique and theme: his 1984 *The Seven Deadly Sins*,[27] a play about watching and being watched, about the impossibility of hiding one's "true" self when subjected to the scrutiny of others. In particular, I will argue that Tranter's emphasis on the gaze in both technique and theme recalls phenomenologist Jean-Paul Sartre's work on the Look and the Other. I will assert that Sartre's analysis of human relationships sheds light on both the plot and the performance of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, while some of the particularities of puppetry performance itself subtly undercut Sartre's basic claims. In other words, by focusing on the

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[27] The performance to which I will be referring is the video archive of a 1985 performance at the International Marionette Festival in Charleville-Mezieres, France. This video is available in the archives of the Institut International de la Marionnette.

puppet's gaze as the primary site of its performed life, Tranter's work both invites and resists Sartrean interpretation.

The Gaze in Puppet Theatre

As I stated above, Tranter is far from the only puppeteer to acknowledge the importance of the puppet's eyes. Swedish puppeteer Michael Meschke also writes about the importance of the puppet's facial expression from a design perspective, singling out the eyes specifically as the greatest design challenge (Meschke 19). Recalling Steve Tillis's three potential contributors to the perception of puppet life—design, voice, and movement—the gaze of the puppet usually combines both design and movement, although the puppet's gaze can be predominantly a product of one or the other.

The immobile puppet behind the glass of a museum display offers an example of puppet gaze as design without movement. Even in the absence of its puppeteers, puppets in these circumstances can give the impression of sentience to onlookers. Observing a puppet in a dimly-lit museum case can produce a strange, uncanny sensation, and the accompanying shudder felt by the viewer attests to the difficulty of perceiving a puppet as a mere object, without ascribing to it a certain level of autonomy. Even without a puppeteer present, without any possibility of movement or voice, the puppet can still seem to be merely in repose; not *inanimate*, but *waiting to animate*. The puppet behind the glass seems to stare out at the viewer, who averts her gaze, out of a secret fear that the puppet will, in fact, meet her expectations; that it will move of its own accord.[28] In moments like this, when the puppeteer is absent and yet the puppet retains an

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[28] Certainly, this experience is not limited to puppets proper. A child's doll might produce a similar effect. For an outline of the differences between dolls and puppets, see Chapter 1, page 8.

element of ontological ambiguity, the marker of performative life can be found in the object itself; specifically, in its eyes.

In *The Seven Deadly Sins,* the possibility of a gaze without movement is exemplified by the Faust puppet, who "watches" from the audience for most of the show. While the video of the production never focuses on Faust in the audience, when the characters onstage address him, they treat him as though he looks back, performing for him. This puppet "life" is, perhaps, a tenuous or imperfect life, as with the puppet hanging in a museum that only "looks" at you when you place yourself directly in its line of sight, but it suggests that even without movement, the eyes of the puppet hold a particular kind of life-potential insofar as they offer a reciprocal relationship with the one the puppet looks at.

This is not to say that the gaze is achieved solely through the design of the puppet. Consider Tranter's Zeno exercise: the goal of that exercise was to learn how to accurately control the puppet's eye-lines in order to actively bring the puppet "to life." This suggests that the puppet's gaze cannot be understood as simply a passive element, divorced from the puppeteer's intervention. While a museum setting makes it possible to separate the puppet's gaze as an independent design element, it would be a mistake to divorce the puppet gaze from the puppeteer's manipulation of the puppet. A static puppet can appear to "look back," but the gaze often depends on the placement of the object; a puppet can seem to stare vacantly ahead or to look directly into one's eyes, depending on where the viewer stands. In performance, the puppet's gaze must constantly focus, shift, and refocus.[29] As Meschke asks, "How many figures

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[29] Performing objects, of course, need not be tied to this scruple, and object performances on the cusp between the two forms often do away with the gaze; Basil Twist's *Symphonie Fantastique* is an excellent example of an object performance that flirts with puppetry without concerning itself with the question of the gaze.

appear lifeless because their eyes are fixed in a downward gaze or stare out into the blue?"

(19). In the wonderful documentary *Bunraku,* written and directed by Tomoo Ueno and Hisashi

Miura, acclaimed Bunraku puppeteer Tamao Yoshida, in his eighties at the time of filming, tells

the interviewer that he knows he will have to retire when his fingers lack the strength to hold

down the hidden lever in the Bunraku puppet torso that prevents the chin from sagging, making

it impossible for the puppet to meet the eyes of its fellow puppet actors. Once the chin sags, says

Tamao, the puppet loses its ability to mimic life. Similarly, Handspring's Basil Jones emphasizes

the extremely subtle difference between correct and incorrect eye-lines when he points out, "We

as human beings are very fine observers of where someone else's eye is falling on our bodies"

("Authorship" 264). Handspring's commitment to eye-lines can be seen in the actors' scripts for

Or You Could Kiss Me, a production I will discuss at length in Chapter 3. These scripts, available

in Handspring's Cape Town archives, reveal several penciled-in notes reminding the performers

to watch the eye-lines of their five-sixth life-sized, Bunraku-inspired puppets.[30]

   In some cases, movement alone can convey the puppet's gaze, even when the puppet has

no discernable eyes at all. For one example of this, let me turn briefly to a moment from Julie

Atlas Muz and Mat Fraser's *Beauty and the Beast*, which I saw performed at Chicago's Museum

of Contemporary Art on December 3, 2016. This raucous, joyous retelling of the classic Beauty

and the Beast story was interspersed with the real-life love story of Muz, a burlesque dancer, and

Fraser, a performer whose shortened arms are a product of his mother's use of the infamous

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[30] Handspring's puppets draw inspiration from Japanese Bunraku in their need for three manipulators and their capacity for subtle, naturalistic movement. However, many elements of traditional Bunraku theatre do not apply to Handspring. For instance, all of Handspring's puppeteers remain unmasked while only the manipulator of the Bunraku head does not hide his face. The Bunraku chanter, or *tayu* and *shamisen* players are also absent from Handspring's aesthetic.

morning sickness medication Thalidomide when he was in utero. But while the production

deserves attention in its own right, I am interested here in its use of puppetry, performed by

Jonny Dixon and Jess Mabel Jones, of the puppet company Improbable Theatre. *Beauty and the*

Beast was created as part of the Improbable Associate Artist Project, and is directed by

Improbable's Artistic Director Phelim McDermott. While puppets and performing objects were

not omnipresent in the production, they emerged in a variety of scenes: overhead projector

puppets that told Beauty's backstory; a set of prosthetic arms for Beast manipulated by the two

puppeteers; and sheets of white tissue paper that turned into a variety of creatures before

Beauty's eyes outside of Beast's enchanted castle. These tissue paper puppets are the ones I want

to consider here, because one moment in particular crystalized for me the simplicity and power

of the puppet gaze.

　　In the hands of Jones and Dixon, scrunched white tissue paper was hastily moulded into

(and moved in imitation of) first a caterpillar inching up the side of the set, and then two bunnies

engaged in energetic coitus. Before these recognizable tissue paper animals, however, Beauty

was confronted by a more abstract tissue paper creature. As she sat at the head of Beast's long

table, Dixon and Jones brought together large sheets of white tissue paper into layers, each piece

of tissue held in one of the puppeteers' hands and lightly scrunched in the middle to give it a

vaguely round, but still angular and irregular, shape. The effect is a kind of extremely abstract

snowman, with sections to its "body" but no other distinguishing characteristics, and certainly no

face. The object glided towards Beauty, but to my eyes remained an object; that is, I did not

imagine it as phenomenologically "alive" in the way I have been describing. Without a face, it

was not clear that the object moved intentionally, rather than simply drifting towards Beauty as if

blown by a breeze. My perception shifted when the gliding object came to a stop in front of

Beauty, and the puppeteer holding the top section of the tissue paper subtly turned their wrist toward her, while also shifting their gaze from the puppet to Beauty. The effect of these two movements was that the tissue paper, which moments ago seemed to be only a mass of artistically crinkled paper, suddenly seemed capable of *looking* at Beauty; a corner of the paper that jutted out towards Beauty now seemed like the character's nose.

Here, design took a backseat to movement in the establishment of the puppet's gaze. The paper was not meticulously folded to look like a face, but rather was perceived as a face only when the puppeteer moved the object in a way that suggested the act of looking, and shifted their own gaze to further delineate the direction of the puppet's gaze. In this case, the gaze is a product of what Basil Jones calls a "micromovement," a term discussed at greater length in Chapter 4.

Stuffed Puppet: Aesthetic and Themes

Thus, consistent eye-lines are essential to the puppet's imitation of life. However, as the above examples attest, the puppet's eye-line is often addressed as an afterthought; an inconsistent eye-line can scuttle the performance, but a good one is rarely praised in the Western puppetry tradition. Tranter's prioritization of the puppet's gaze above all other life-imbuing techniques likely arises in part because of his particular performance style. Since founding his company, Stuffed Puppet, in 1978, Tranter has been essentially a one-man show. In the early years of Stuffed Puppet, he typically wrote his own plays, and though recently he has begun to collaborate with playwrights and directors, he still tends to perform alone onstage,[31] often enlivening large casts of puppet characters while also playing a character in the narrative

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[31] There are a couple of exceptions to this rule. Tranter shared the stage with actors Beppe Costa and Ria Marks in his 1994 production *Kaspar Hauser*, and the 1999 production *Re: Frankenstein* included a chorus of children and adults at the climactic ending.

himself. The puppets are Muppet-inspired hand puppets, crafted from latex and manipulated primarily by the puppeteer's right hand, which is inserted into the back of the puppet and grasps the hinged mouth of the puppet from the inside, enabling the puppeteer to move the puppet's mouth to mimic speech. The puppets vary in size, from the larger-than-life Frankenstein puppet (the creature, not the doctor) from Tranter's 1999 production of the same name, to the relatively small Beelzebub puppet cradled in Tranter's left arm in *The Seven Deadly Sins*, but most are about the length of Tranter's torso. Puppets are often legless, or, as in the case of Zeno, their legs are of a smaller scale, designed to hang limply from the torso; thus, the puppets tend to dangle from Tranter's right arm to imitate standing or walking, or sit on his knee or another level surface. Often, though not in *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Tranter manipulates two puppets at once. This dramatically diminishes the movements Tranter is able to coax out of his puppets; with a puppet on each hand, Tranter can move the heads and mouths of both characters, but he has practically no control over the arms. Though this is not the case with Zeno, the puppets' arms are often designed to hang in dynamic repose, bent at the elbows rather than dangling limply at the puppets' sides.

Given all of this, the head of the puppet becomes the part of the object over which Tranter has the most consistent and direct control, and thus the primary source of the puppet's "life." The influence of the Muppets on Tranter is evident here;[32] like Henson's creations, Tranter's puppets' mouths can be moved, enabling an impressive range of facial expressions based partially on the

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[32] There is one crucial design difference between Henson's creations and Tranter's: while Tranter moves his puppet's arms by directly grasping its wrist, Muppets' arms are usually controlled by rods connected to their wrists. The addition of rods allows the puppeteer to move both arms simultaneously with his one remaining hand while the other works the mouth and head of the puppet, as well as permitting the puppeteer to operate the puppet from below, so that no part of his own body enters into the television frame. Tranter rejects this invisibility of the puppeteer, making rods, for him, unnecessary.

wideness of the mouth and positioning and/or movement of the head. The moving mouth also allows Tranter to expertly synchronize the distinct voices he produces for each character with the movement of the puppet's lips. However, as I will explore in Chapter 4, the marriage of voice to puppet is always a tenuous one, since the words spoken tend not to match the shape made by the relatively unsophisticated hinged mouth. The puppet's gaze is much easier to mimic, especially when the puppeteer has perfect control over the positioning of the puppet's head.[33]

Not only has Tranter's aesthetic remained relatively consistent over the years, his plays contain a number of thematic similarities as well. On a basic level, many of his plays focus on well-known literary or historic figures, blown into grotesque and/or farcical proportions. He has created productions satirizing historic characters, including Moliere (*Moliere*, 1998), Hitler (*Schicklgruber alias Adolf Hitler,* 2003), and Osama Bin Laden (*Punch and Judy in Afghanistan*, 2009). He has also reimagined literary figures, such as Faust and Mephistopheles (*The Seven Deadly Sins*, 1984), Macbeth (*Macbeth*, 1990), Salome (*Salome,* 1996), and Dr. Frankenstein and his Creature (*Re: Frankenstein*, 1999). As these examples indicate, Tranter's work is regularly preoccupied with the complicated dynamics of power and control. Often, these dynamics include an Other to be feared: the gargantuan and looming Creature in *Re: Frankenstein*, the Vampires of *Vampyr* (2006), or the humans outside the rabbit hole in *Cuniculus* (2008) all threaten varying degrees of hostility. Tranter's worlds are rarely optimistic about relations between individuals; despite moments of real tenderness and care, characters are

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[33] The level of Tranter's control over the puppet gaze can be contrasted with that of a marionettist. Whereas Tranter holds the puppet's head directly from the inside, a marionettist controls the head of the puppet from a distance, through the intermediary of a string. Thus, while the marionettist will be equally concerned with his puppet's eye-lines, and a blankly staring marionette will appear just as lifeless as would a staring hand puppet, the marionettist will not be able to coax the kind of nuanced movements out of the puppet's head that Tranter can.

more often than not cruel and antagonistic, ultimately offering a rather bleak vision of

community. I pointed out in Chapter 1 that Tranter makes interesting use of the domination

metaphor of the puppet, in which the puppet is presented as an object controlled by a more

powerful external force. Specifically, Tranter often chooses to invert this metaphor. Tranter

himself always plays a character in the story's narrative, and in almost every case, Tranter is in a

subservient position to his puppets. He is a low-ranking Nazi in *Schicklgruber*, a servant in

Moliere, and, though he assumed the titular role in *Macbeth*, his production emphasized the

relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, highlighting Lady M's power over her

husband, her ability to figuratively 'pull his strings.'

The 1985 show *Manipulator* offers an explicit example of this dynamic. Tranter plays

Nero, a sadistic ringmaster, taunting his puppets with humiliating or cruel acts, such as literally

stealing a puppet's nose. But the tables turn at the end of the play, when hand puppet Florissa the

Frog begins to assume the role of seductress. "Listen, Frog," Nero tells her, "I am the puppeteer.

And you are nothing more than an object to be used."[34] Florissa seems to agree, daring him to

take her off his hand and discard her then and there. There is an acknowledgment here that Nero,

the puppeteer, has an agency that Florissa does not – literally, he is able to rob her of "life" by

simply taking his hands away. But Nero hesitates; the puppet's power, while not as tangible as

the puppeteer's, somehow supersedes it. She kisses him, violently pressing her face to his. When

the two finally break apart, Nero is left cross-eyed and vacant, and the final word of the play is a

throaty "ribbit" from Tranter. Nero's earlier insistence that "I am not a frog" is undone by

Florissa's kiss, and we see that she is decidedly not merely an object to be used, but an object

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[34] This scene with Florissa is available on Youtube:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZXmN6PNGwA.

capable of transforming Nero against his will. Far from the omnipotent, life-giving puppeteer, Tranter is here and elsewhere cowed by his puppets even as he animates them, complicating the relationship between creator and created in these performances.

Performing Sartre's Ontology in the Puppet Theatre

Tranter's interest in these power dynamics, combined with his focus on the gaze, suggests an affinity between Tranter's work and the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. For Sartre, "the Look" (or "*le regard*") became a kind of obsession—there are over 7000 references to "the Look" in Sartre's work, spanning his personal memoirs, his literary works, and his philosophy (Jay 276). For Sartre, the Look existed at the heart of interpersonal relationships, and formed the basis of both the construction and the subsequent dismantling of the self. In order to understand the significance of the Look to my larger project and to Tranter's work, we must first understand Sartre's place in the phenomenological tradition and his conception of consciousness.

Like the other philosophers discussed in this dissertation, Sartre sees his work as an extension of Husserl's phenomenology. He agrees, for instance, with Husserl's articulation of intentionality as consciousness *of* something, as he says in his 1939 essay "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology." However, Sartre diverges from Husserl in a number of important ways. Following Heidegger, Sartre rejects Husserl's method of "bracketing" the "natural attitude." For Husserl, the "natural attitude" is the common sense assumption that the objects of an individual's perception do, in fact, exist apart from that perception. To put it differently: the natural attitude presumes that the world really does exist in some discernable form. Husserl's famous insistence that the natural attitude should be "bracketed" means that he wants phenomenologists to set aside the question of the existence of

the world and focus instead on the objects of consciousness, or how the world appears. The

question of the existence of the world outside of consciousness – that is, the world as it "really

is" – was, to Husserl, a metaphysical rather than a phenomenological question. Sartre, following

Heidegger, rejects the claim that being might be so easily bracketed out, and he saw his own

work as "attempting to bridge an ontological gap [between consciousness and reality] which

Husserl was content to leave [as] a gap" (Rauch 3). In the simplest terms, Sartre argues that a

division between phenomenology and ontology is fundamentally impossible, since before one

can experience the world phenomenologically one must first exist. The subtitle of Sartre's

famous tome *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* speaks to this

impossibility of separating the two.

Since Sartre's phenomenology is also an ontology, it should come as no surprise that his

interpretation of Husserl's intentionality is framed in terms of "being" (Moran, *Introduction*,

360). In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre begins with a simple ontological division: being-in-itself

and being-for-itself.[35] The first describes the brute existence of an object, like a block of wood.

The block of wood simply "is;" it does not reflect on its own being. As Joseph S. Catalano

writes, the choice of the term "in-itself" is significant here, signaling "the absolute unity that

matter has with itself. An apple is an apple; it does not have the task of becoming what it should

be. The being of an apple is not in question for itself. The being of an apple is *in-itself* and thus

has no relation with itself" (43). Lacking consciousness, the in-itself is what it is. It does not

strive for unity; it is always already a perfect unity. Thus "the in-itself is full of itself, and no

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[35] This language of the in-itself and the for-itself is not unique to Sartre. It dates back to Hegel, and is subsequently adopted by many philosophers in the German tradition, including Husserl and Heidegger (Moran *Introduction* 357).

more total plenitude can be imagined, no more perfect equivalence of content to container"

(Sartre 120-1).

The for-itself is an altogether different expression of being. Just as the in-itself correlates

with brute matter, the for-itself is Sartre's term for consciousness. Thus, in Husserl's language of

intentionality, the for-itself is that which intends, the in-itself is the intended or intentional

object. But whereas the in-itself is a perfect unity of being, the for-itself is founded on a schism.

Intentionality claims that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something; consciousness

cannot simply "be," free from relation. Sartre describes the for-itself as "a being such that in its

being, its being is in question" (Sartre 120). The being of the for-itself is always in question

precisely because it is capable of the self-reflection that the in-itself lacks. Unlike the

indefatigable unity of the in-itself, the for-itself relies upon a break within itself in order to be

constituted as itself. This is perhaps clearest in the relationship of the for-itself *to* itself, or, as

Sartre characterizes it, self-reflection, a "presence to itself" (124). We might call this self-

reflection, or consciousness of consciousness; that is, one's ability to reflect upon oneself as a

reflecting being. Presence to self "supposes that an impalpable fissure has slipped into being. If

being is present to itself, it is because it is not wholly itself" (124).

This fissure is the space for Sartre's other titular term, Nothingness, to seep in.

Nothingness is "this hole in being, this fall of the in-itself toward the self, the fall by which the

for-itself is constituted. Nothingness is the putting into question of being by being—that is,

precisely consciousness or for-itself" (Sartre 126). The self (that is, the conscious self, Sartre's

for-itself) cannot exist without Nothingness, which ruptures the resolute wholeness of the in-

itself and offers the freedom of the for-itself to become something other than its current iteration.

Presence to itself represents the most striking instance of this.

In puppetry, Sartre's distinction between the in-itself and the for-itself bears a striking resemblance to elements of Heinrich von Kleist's famous 1810 essay "On the Marionette Theatre." Kleist's essay hinges upon an encounter between two friends: Herr C., an esteemed dancer at the opera house, and the unnamed narrator. The narrator expresses his surprise at Herr C.'s apparent respect for the local marionette theatre, and Herr C. responds by embarking on a complicated, oftentimes contradictory, explanation of value of the puppet, which "could perform a dance that neither [Herr C.] nor any other dancer of his time…could equal" (Kleist 23). Herr C. suggests that the puppet exceeds the human actor because of its capacity for grace, a characteristic that it shares in equal measure only with God. The true gift of the puppet lies not in its technical prowess, he argues, but in its ontology. In perhaps the most oft-quoted passage, particularly within theatre scholarship (Ridout 16), Kleist writes:

> Just as the intersection of two lines from the same side of a point after passing through the infinite suddenly finds itself again on the other side, or as the image of a concave mirror, after having gone off into the infinite, suddenly appears before us again—so grace returns after knowledge has gone through the world of the infinite, in that it appears to best advantage in that human bodily structure that has no consciousness at all—or has infinite consciousness—that is, in the mechanical puppet, or in the God. (Kleist 26)

Thus, Kleist attributes grace in the performer to a lack of consciousness, perfectly emulated by the puppet. Consciousness—what Kleist refers to self-consciousness—is similar to what Adam and Eve attain after eating the forbidden fruit. Non-consciousness, then, is an Edenic state of non-reflexivity. Kleist contends that it is the absence of self-reflection that allows the dancing marionette to achieve its gracefulness, in opposition Herr C.'s counter example the young man who, upon being told that his reflection in the mirror emulates a famous sculpture, is unable to

re-capture the pose. The young man's inability to reprise his graceful tableau could be articulated as the encroachment of Nothingness upon his being: the moment when his self-reflection separates himself from himself. The puppet, on the other hand, is Kleist's prime example of the in-itself: brute matter without the fissure of Nothingness to complicate its relation to gravity and, finally, to itself. This reading of the puppet is strictly true; materially, the puppet has more in common with the block of wood than with a conscious individual. Nothingness does not inhabit the puppet. At the same time, however, the audience's *perception* of Nothingness in the puppet is essential to the definition of the puppet I offered in Chapter 1. Contra Kleist, I suggest that the puppet is defined as brute material (in-itself) imbued with perceived consciousness by the puppeteer (a mimetic for-itself). How, then, does the puppeteer mimic Nothingness within the puppet in order to convey the presence of the for-itself?

The answer derives from the fundamentally unidirectional relationship between the in-itself and the for-itself. As Catalano writes, one of the defining characteristics of the for-itself is the "natural tendency to relate all being to its own purpose" (Catalano 43). The in-itself has no interest in imposing its own ordering principles on its environment; indeed, words like "interest" and "imposing" suggest an element of agency that is antithetical to the in-itself. Conversely, the world of the for-itself becomes organized in relation to the for-itself, advancing or receding depending on its immediate usefulness for the for-itself (Moran *Intro* 357). This activity of the for-itself is at the very heart of Sartre's inquiry. Sartre is interested in human freedom, which he defines as the ability to take up the given world into one's own projects (Sartre 620-1). In other words, the for-itself is free insofar as it is able to organize the world as if it exists for the individual. In concrete terms, when a person takes a seat on a chair, he categorizes the chair in relation to his own being, as that-upon-which-I-sit. The chair does not attempt a counter-

organization of the world in relation to itself; the chair merely *is*, possessing no capacity for interacting with the world on its own terms.[36] This dynamic often occurs in the puppet theatre. Without thinking about it, spectators perceive the objects onstage in relation to the puppet, thus imbuing the puppet with the power of the for-itself to organize its world in relation to itself. When the puppeteer manipulates the puppet to pick up a pen, for instance, I recognize the puppet as importantly different from the pen, rather than merely an object among objects. In performance, this mimetic organization of the world often originates in the way the puppet seems visually take in its surroundings. The puppet first "sees" the pen; the pen does not "see" the puppet in return. So powerful is the puppet's mimetic perception that it can seem to bring imaginary elements into existence, and then arrange them in relation to itself. Tranter's brief exercise with Zeno contains this moment; Zeno recognizes an unseen object in the distance, reacts to it, and then recovers once it has passed by him. Blind Summit's *The Table* includes a similar scene: when puppet Moses tells the audience that he can use focus—that is, where his eyes are directed—to "make you see things that aren't actually there," he demonstrates this performative power by gazing at the empty table on which he stands while describing the imaginary "garden" he sees there in detail (*The Table* 31:38). In the cases of both Zeno and Moses, the puppets make the audience imagine an in-itself in relation to the puppet for-itself.

Introducing the Other

The relationship between the in-itself and the for-itself is not particularly fraught, either in life or on the puppet stage: the in-itself does not resist the organizing activity of the for-itself. But

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[36] This is Sartre's claim; many would beg to differ. See my discussion of Jane Bennett and Graham Harman in Chapter 1 for counter arguments.

Sartre encounters a dilemma when he moves on to consider an interaction between two consciousnesses, between one for-itself and another. Sartre refers to these relationships as "being-for-others." Whereas the in-itself does not resist the self-centric ordering of the for-itself, writes Sartre, another for-itself cannot be so placid. Put differently: Sartre never conceives of being with other selves as a simple, uncomplicated co-presence; rather, the relationship between self and other is always defined, for Sartre, by a contest for one's freedom.

In crafting his own conclusions about the self/Other relationship, Sartre draws on Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic, in which the subject's relation to the Other is both competitive and inescapable. For Hegel, Sartre argues, being-for-the-Other is crucial for the creation of self-consciousness: "the road of interiority passes through the Other" (Sartre 320). In order to understand this relationship, I must introduce two new terms that both Hegel and Sartre make use of: subject and object. The for-itself, for Sartre, views itself as a subject: that is, as a being capable of organizing the world according to its own freedom, or taking up the world into its own projects. The for-itself and the subject, therefore, can be thought of as roughly synonymous. An object, on the other hand, describes those pieces of the world of which the subject can make use. An in-itself – this chair, that apple – makes for an ideal object, insofar as it does not resist incorporation into the subject's world. However, other people present a more complicated challenge. The subject still seeks to understand the Other as an object that might be taken up into the subject's own project. The Other, as subject, resists this simple objectification by turning the tables, seeking to view the subject as an object in its own project. The relationship, therefore, is reciprocal: both individuals strive to affirm themselves as subjects by objectifying the other. But that is not all. The subject also sees in the Other a reflection of herself as an object, and she thus seeks the recognition of the Other to constitute her own being. In other words, since the subject

attempts to see the Other as an object, the subject becomes aware that the Other sees *her* as an object, which prompts her to convince him to see her as a subject. Yet she also strives for domination over him, reasserting her own power by reducing him to "an Other who is only other—that is, [sic] a dependent consciousness whose essential characteristic is to exist only for another" (Sartre 321). In Hegel's estimation, the subject achieves this domination by risking her life, thus proving that she is not ruled by the sensible world of the body. But Sartre seems more ambivalent about the possibility of declaring an ultimate winner of the contest. The antagonism forms the very basis of one's being for Sartre: "I am…a being for-itself which is for-itself only through another. Therefore the Other penetrates me to the heart. I can not doubt him without doubting myself" (Sartre 321). Self and Other cannot exist in harmony with one another, but neither can they exist without each other.

The Hegelian terminology of the Master/Slave dialectic forms the foundation of Sartre's being-for-others, but Sartre expands on this antagonistic groundwork in his own philosophy. For my purposes, there are two distinct but interrelated ways in which the presence of the Other changes the subject. First, the Other changes the way the subject relates to the world around him. Sartre articulates this phenomenon with his famous example of the man in the park. If the man Sartre encounters at a distance in the park appears to him as a mere object (or, as Sartre states evocatively, "as being only a puppet" (341)),[37] Sartre understands this figure in relation to the other objects in front of him, as merely another object among objects. If the man in the park does not appear to Sartre as another human being, "no new relation would appear *through him*

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[37] Although Barnes chooses to translate the French word Sartre uses here – *poupée* – as marionette, it can also be translated as "doll." See Chapter 1, page 8 for a discussion of the differences and similarities between puppets and dolls. In any case, as I shall argue, Sartre's use of "puppet" in this example, as the Other-as-object, does not align with my own reading of the puppet: an imagined Other-as-subject.

between those things in my universe: grouped and synthesized *from my point of view* into instrumental complexes, they would *from his* disintegrate into multiplicities of indifferent relations" (Sartre 341). In other words, the man-as-object has no agency as an organizing principle within Sartre's world; he fits into the objectival relationality that Sartre manufactures, without imposing upon the world in any significant way.

If, on the other hand, Sartre recognizes this man in the park as a man, rather than as an object, his perception changes dramatically. Sartre characterizes this shift spatially: "instead of a grouping *toward me* of the objects, there is now an orientation *which flees from me*" (342). Once the man is recognized *as* a man, his own point of view competes with Sartre's, and the world that the two share threatens to slip out of Sartre's grasp towards this stranger's ordering. The park bench no longer exists in simple relation to Sartre himself; it is a park bench for Sartre, but simultaneously (and contentiously) a park bench for the man. There is a kind of violence in this action for Sartre, "[a] regrouping of all the objects which people my universe" (343).

It is not only Sartre's relationship to the other elements in his world that shifts when he encounters the man in the park, or the Other. Recognizing the Other as a man resists the classification of Other-as-object, and introduces the possibility of Other-as-subject. Sartre explains this as follows: "If the Other-as-object is defined in connection with the world as the object which sees what I see, then my fundamental connection with the Other-as-subject must be able to be referred back to my permanent possibility of *being seen* by the Other. It is in and through the revelation of my being-as-object for the Other that I must be able to apprehend the presence of his being-as-subject" (344). The subject, then, is explicitly formulated with reference not only to the presence of the Other, but the gaze of the Other, which challenges his own existence as a being-for-itself rather than a being-for-others.

Sartre clarifies this suggestion with recourse to a second famous example: that of being discovered while peering through a keyhole. As long as no one observes his spying, Sartre feels no sense of shame in his activity. Once he is caught, however, Sartre's position as orderer of the world is compromised. In fact, his very understanding *of himself* is thrown into question. He sees himself as the Other sees him, briefly becoming an object for the Other and, indeed, for himself. Just as the objects in the park flee from Sartre and towards the man, Sartre's own sense of self turns away from Sartre and towards the Other. That is, rather than Sartre confidently defining himself, it is now the Other who does the defining: Sartre is a sneak who secretively peers through keyholes. "I *am* this being," writes Sartre. "I do not for an instant think of denying it; my shame is a confession" (350). The language is pseudo-theological, an observation inflected by Sartre's follow-up assessment that "My original fall is the existence of the Other" (352). Like Adam and Eve in the garden, who do not recognize their nakedness until they eat from the tree of knowledge, Sartre feels shame only in the presence of the Other. Sartre's freedom to take up the world into his own projects is derailed by the Other's gaze, which fixes Sartre in the Other's interpretation of him.

The most famous theatrical instantiation of this phenomenon of shame in the presence of the Other is Sartre's 1944 existentialist play *No Exit*, originally performed at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in Paris and produced by fellow phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[38] Although Sartre staunchly denied that the play was a theatrical working out of his ideas in *Being and Nothingness*, it is widely considered to be an illuminating representation of Sartrean philosophy, particularly relating to the Look and the Other (Bernasconi 13). The play encounters

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[38] For a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's theories of consciousness in relation to the puppet theatre, see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

three recently-deceased characters—Garcin, Estelle, and Inez—in a drawing-room, awaiting

their introduction to the torments of hell. The gaze is introduced promptly in the action: the

Valet, who leads each damned soul to the room, has no eyelids, prompting Garcin to observe that

"there's something so beastly, so damn bad-mannered, in the way you stare at me" (*No Exit* 5).

Throughout the play, the three prisoners try to paint themselves in the best light to their fellow

captives, celebrating their own virtues and downplaying the sins that precipitated their falls. But

speedily they turn on one another, and their deepest fears of their own failings are reflected back

to them by the perceptions of the others. As Inez tells Garcin, "I'm watching you, everybody's

watching, I'm a crowd all by myself. Do you hear the crowd?...'Coward! Coward! Coward!

Coward!' –that's what they're saying…It's no use trying to escape, I'll never let you go" (*No

Exit* 45). Garcin cracks the code; it is not the threat of bodily harm that defines hell, but the

inescapability of Inez's penetrating gaze. "There's no need for red-hot pokers," he tells his

fellow captives. "Hell is—other people!" (*No Exit* 45). As in *Being and Nothingness*, the gaze of

the Other fixes the subject in a way the subject cannot control, forcing the subject to see himself

in ways he would otherwise avoid. Hell is other people because it is only through the figurative

gaze of others that one experiences one's shame.

Seeing and Being Seen in "The Seven Deadly Sins"

Like *No Exit*, Tranter's *The Seven Deadly Sins* presents itself (at least initially) as a

quintessentially Sartrean narrative, in which the protagonists are judged by their fellows and

condemned to hell. The plot of *The Seven Deadly Sins* is a familiar one. It is rooted in the Faust

myth, a story which has been famously canonized in the theatrical tradition by Christopher

Marlowe in *Doctor Faustus* (1604) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust: Part 1* (1806) and

Faust: Part 2 (1831), among others. It is also one of the most oft-repeated puppetry narratives; indeed, Goethe's *Faust* was inspired by the puppet theatre. He writes in "Wahrheit und Dichtung" that "The marionette fable of 'Faust' murmured with many voices in my soul" (Qtd. in Hedderwick xvi). Although the presence of the Seven Deadly Sins signals more of an affinity to Marlowe's text than Goethe's, Tranter's adaptation owes little else to Marlowe, instead focusing exclusively on the final hour of Faust's life on earth, in real time. Through early exposition, it is revealed that, with the help of black magic, Faustus summoned Mephisto twenty-four years ago and signed a contract in his own blood, binding Mephisto to him as his servant, and agreeing that in exchange for twenty-four years of "absolute power" (7:34), Beelzebub could have Faust's soul. As the play begins, Faust's time on earth has run out, and Beelzebub proposes a party in celebration, generously offering Faust an extra hour on earth so that he may celebrate with them. But Beelzebub has a second surprise: the Seven Deadly Sins will be joining the party. The Seven Deadly Sins, Beelzebub explains, believe Faust to be their father, since his power allowed them to be born again: "That contract between you and Mephisto was a kind of marriage contract. A contract that has grown into something far more than I had ever planned!" (10:45). As we will come to discover, Beelzebub has grown suspicious of the relationship between Faust and Mephisto, which he suspects may be closer than necessary. This evening is not merely Faust's last night on earth; it is a trial that will determine Mephisto's fate as well.

Structurally, *The Seven Deadly Sins* resembles a cabaret performance wherein five of the seven deadly sins[39] take to the stage, one at a time, for a brief scene with Mephisto. The stage is

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[39] The reason for the absence of two sins – Pride and Wrath – is never made explicit. It is tempting to see them represented by Faust and Mephisto respectively: Faust's prideful desire for immeasurable power is what has led him to this end, and Mephisto's anger is detectable in his treatment of the sins and his final, guttural cry of the play. It is also the case that Mephisto

bare but for a single tall stool and a red curtain backdrop. As Mephisto, Tranter wears a gold

mask that covers his whole face with a half moon hole stretching from his chin to his upper lip to

allow Tranter's voice to be heard. When Tranter tilts his head down, as he often does, the mask

obscures his eyes and his mouth in shadow, making Mephisto's face even more inscrutable. He

sometimes sits on the stool, holding the puppet on his lap. This is the case with Beelzebub, a

beast-like hand puppet constructed of grey latex for his wolfish face and a black furry body, with

cloven hooves for feet and claws for hands (Fig. 3). In other cases, Tranter stands, allowing the

puppet some limited movement around the small stage. One by one, the deadly sins have their

moment on the stage; in each case, the lights go down briefly, and when they come up, Tranter

holds a new puppet. The audience meets five of the seven sins in all; in each case, Tranter inserts

his right hand into the puppet's head to move its mouth and, in some cases, his left hand

supplements by manipulating the hands or feet. Greed comes first, a puppet with a vaguely

human-like head and a garbage bag for a body, with small black arms encircling the top of the

bag to allow him to open it periodically to peer inside or beg for money from the audience. Next

is Jealousy, a ghoulish woman with an appropriately green pallor and a semitransparent black

veil flowing from her head, who chews off her own finger and then asks an audience member if

she may nibble on her legs, since she has already eaten her own. Gluttony arrives next, a large

piggish head inside a domed platter, with velvet cloth draped around it. Mephisto removes the

cover to begin the scene, and replaces it at the end. Gluttony's head is a little larger than

Mephisto's, and Tranter holds her slightly higher than his head, allowing her to dominate the

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appears to interrupt the sins' parade before it has ended by, as I will explain, charging into the
audience to collect the Faust puppet. Lust's accusations strike a chord, and move Mephisto to
action that belies his role as a servant—the missing sins speak to a dramatic rupture in the
planned order of the evening.

scene. Fourth is Sloth, a furry version of its animal namesake with a latex face and long arms and legs that wrap around Mephisto as if he is a tree. To see the audience, Sloth extends towards them as far as his long arms will allow, and his narrow, sleepy eyes seem to squint in their direction. The fifth (and final) sin is Lust, a naked, hairless, latex puppet cradled in Tranter's arms like an infant. Unlike her fellow sins, whose mouths are reinforced with a stiff material like cardboard to keep their shape while they speak, Lust's mouth works more like that of a sock puppet, a gaping hole that contorts her whole small face when it is moved. She is anatomically correct, and her vagina is structurally similar to her mouth.[40] Her limbs, compared to the rest of her body, are tiny; Tranter manipulates her left arm with his left hand, grasping her wrist directly. Tranter changes his voice for each puppet, from the rasp of Beelzebub to the shrill, panting moans of Lust.

Fig. 3. Neville Tranter as Mephisto holding puppet Beelzebub in *The Seven Deadly Sins*.

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[40] It is impossible not to think of Freud's understanding of the look and its connection to the Oedipus complex during this scene (See Oliver, "The Look of Love," *Hypatia*, 58). A Freudian reading of the performance, however, belongs to another project.

Thus, Tranter's signature style of grotesque, Muppet-inspired puppets make up the majority of the cast in *The Seven Deadly Sins*. But there are two other styles that I must mention here briefly. First, it is important to note that, although not visible in the video of the performance or, indeed, to the majority of the audience, Faust himself is present for the entire play. He sits in the audience throughout, often serving as a point of focus for the characters to address. Faust is entirely constructed from latex, with simple joints at his hips and shoulders to allow for minimal movement of his appendages. This construction, combined with the puppet's nudity (excepting a black-rimmed hat), makes Faust resemble a blow-up doll rather than a puppet; his body is roughly hewn and not anatomically correct, representing only the broadest strokes of Faust's physique. It is his face, and especially his eyes, that suggest the life of this puppet; these features, of course, are hidden from the majority of the audience until the very end of the play, as we will see.

The third style of puppet appears only in the prologue, and given its centrality to the argument of this chapter, I will describe it in detail. A brief pantomime opens the show. To the tune of somber piano music, the lights come up on Tranter, whose masked face is hidden by two almost identical hand puppets, their backs turned to the audience. Unlike the latex creations populating the rest of the show, these simple puppets seem to owe more to Punch and Judy aesthetics than to the Muppets; their paper clay heads are nondescript, with frozen features and unmoving mouths. Their bodies are unadorned pieces of cloth—one black, one white—which form cones from the neck of each puppet to mask Tranter's hands beneath. While each puppet is distinct, they are not separate – halfway down the body, the two pieces of fabric join to form one large ring of fabric, attached to a cardboard base below. The shape of the puppets resembles conjoined pylons, the top of the pylons made of fabric and the bottom the cardboard base. Both

puppets sport black skullcaps, painted directly onto their heads. After a moment of stillness, the white puppet slowly turns to the audience, and surveys the spectators with its white, pupil-less eyes. Meanwhile, the black puppet turns as well, its own white eyes fixing on the white puppet. The white puppet turns, starts at the sight of its black-clad doppelganger, looking away and then back again. The black puppet does the same. The sequence ends when both puppets turn their backs to the audience once more, and at the crescendo of the music, Tranter subtly moves his hand inside the puppet to the cardboard base, and flips it up to reveal a surprise: a gaping fabric mouth, made of red cloth and hinged in the middle to allow it to open and close, with daunting white teeth lining the entire perimeter and pointing inward, towards a black abyss. The lights fade to black.

This brief prologue sets the tone for the rest of the play, and it highlights not only the centrality of looking and being looked at in this production, but also the ambiguity of the gaze in this production. On the one hand, this vignette exemplifies Tranter's argument that the puppet's look can bring it to life. These puppets *become* puppets—that is, they can be imagined to have life—as they turn to look at the audience and/or at one another, performing their consciousness of and reaction to another being in their world. On the other hand, while the hand puppets seem fascinated by each other, they cannot hold each other's gaze; one always looks away. As in the Master/Slave dialectic, one always has the upper hand over the other, forcing a kind of acquiescence from the one who looks away first, but neither is capable of maintaining his dominance. Ultimately, in fact, they do not seem capable of maintaining a connection, as they turn away both from each other and from the audience. The mouth that swallows both puppets whole is unambiguously threatening, and while there is a brief glimmer of recognition between

the two in the moment of the gaze, it is unable to be realized, and the ultimate result is destructive.

This basic structure of the Master/Slave dialectic as adopted by Sartre is also apparent in the first interactions between Beelzebub and Mephisto. Immediately after the prologue, before the lights go up on the stage, two small red lights appear. The way they dart around the auditorium, and the way they move in sync with a gravelly voice reciting some kind of Latin incantation, makes it immediately apparent that these are not only lights, but eyes. When the lights come up seconds later, the audience learns that the eyes belong to Beelzebub, a smallish hand puppet cradled by masked Mephisto. The introduction of Beelzebub's eyes before anything else sets the tone for his relationship to Mephisto, who is visible only as an afterthought when the lights illuminate the stage. Beelzebub is the primary Looker, the Master of the situation. When the lights come up, this dynamic is solidified. Beelzebub greets the audience and explains the entertainment for the evening; Mephisto, here and throughout, remains stoically silent. When Beelzebub tells us that the Seven Deadly Sins will be joining the festivities, however, Mephisto reacts, jerking Beelzebub towards him, so that their eyes meet in a tense, meaningful stare. The look is held for a moment, but Mephisto is the one to look away first, and Beelzebub continues his speech, still Master to the weaker-willed Mephisto. Tranter employs this particular sequence often; a similar battle of wills, predicated on who is the first to break the gaze, plays out between Tranter and his puppets in *Underdog* (1985), *Schicklgruber* (2003), and *Vampyr* (2006). This is a perfect iteration of the Master and the Slave: the Master retains his subjectivity by objectifying the Slave, even metaphorically "risking his life" by challenging the puppeteer who manipulates him. The Slave/puppeteer loses the audience's attention and recedes into the background.

In case the prologue did not sufficiently prepare the audience for the theme of looks and looking, Beelzebub tells the audience "What a party it's going to be tonight! A real feast for the eyes!" (11:45). This metaphor of visual feasting recalls both Garcin's description of the torturing look of the Others as "all those eyes intent on me. *Devouring me*" (*No Exit* 45, my emphasis) and the literally devoured glove puppets from the opening scene. The audience soon learns that this evening will also be a kind of trial for Mephisto, presided over by the Seven Deadly Sins. For the majority of the play, it is the Sins who most obviously fix Mephisto in their gazes. Like the Valet in *No Exit*, the Sin puppets are unblinking, and therefore seemingly all-seeing; there is no respite from their gazes. Mephisto's only escape from their shaming eyes is physical; he slams the lid of the dinner platter over Gluttony's head, beats Sloth, and drugs Lust. But Mephisto's physical assaults are of little use; each seemingly vanquished sin is followed by another, and the eyes of the audience follow him throughout. Examples abound of Beelzebub and the Sins fixing Mephisto with their gaze, and subsequently defining his character. Beelzebub asks, "Mephisto, do you really think the devil is so stupid? I know what kind of face you have under that mask. I also know that you cannot be without Faust. Therefore, the two of you shall suffer together in Hell" (41:11). Beelzebub makes two claims here. First, he claims to "know" Mephisto's interiority—his face "under the mask," or his inner self. We might compare this to Sartre's analogy of the Other who catches him peering through the keyhole: Beelzebub asserts that he knows what Mephisto really is, denying him his freedom as he fixes him with his gaze. Second, Beelzebub says that Mephisto "cannot be without Faust;" Mephisto is locked in this dangerous relationship, one that will ultimately damn both Mephisto and Faust to Hell. As in Sartre, Mephisto's Other destroys him, but Mephisto cannot escape him. Lust offers a similarly ocular-centric reading of the situation: "I can see it in front of me. I can see it. La Belle et la

Bete. Good and evil. But who is who? Who is who, and who is the strongest? Faust, or

Mephisto?" (47:20). Lust reduces the characters of Faust and Mephisto to qualities of Good and

Evil through her look, but she allows for some ambiguity, leaving the outcome of the final

contest between Faust and Mephisto an open question.

Thus, while Mephisto occasionally fights back against the Sins and Beelzebub, they

ultimately succeed in fixing his character and defining him as an object in the Sartrean sense of

the word. And yet, the relationship is not so simple. By casting the Master/Slave dialectic as a

battle between puppet and puppeteer, *The Seven Deadly Sins* offers a constant visual reminder of

the fundamental interrelation between the two, as well as the reliance of the Master on the

existence of the Slave, and vice versa. As Sartre writes, "[T]he Other is for me simultaneously

the one who has stolen my being from me and the one who causes 'there to be' a being which is

my being" (Sartre 475). Even as the Sins win the battle by objectifying Mephisto, the audience

knows that, as puppets, the Sins literally rely on puppeteer Tranter for their subjectivity. They

achieve their subjectivity by turning Mephisto into a figurative object, but if they were to attempt

to assert that subjectivity by liberating themselves from the puppeteer altogether, they would

become literal objects, their subjectivity utterly destroyed. This paradox is a common theme in

puppetry, one beautifully articulated in a short piece by master puppeteer Philippe Gentry, in

which his striking Pierrot marionette, upon discovering its reliance on Gentry's manipulation,

slowly detaches its strings one by one until he crumbles into an inanimate heap on the floor. The

price for autonomy for the puppet is always the return of the puppet to its literal object state, just

as the self cannot exist without the Other. Rather than destroying the Other, the Master strives for

a Slave "whose essential characteristic is to exist only for another" (Sartre 321), a description

that might well be applied to a puppeteer intent on bringing an object to life. Thus, Tranter's

reversing of the popular God/subject metaphor of puppetry—with the puppet now the ruler and the puppeteer the servant—beautifully captures the paradoxical reliance of the self on the Other in Sartre's philosophy.

The relationship between Mephisto and the Sins seems to conform nicely to the Sartrean dynamic of self and Other, or subject and object. The Sins need Mephisto/Tranter in order to assert their dominance over him, and thus solidify their own position as subjects. Over and over, Mephisto finds himself objectified in the gaze of the Sins, the slave to his puppet masters. Yet this depiction of being-for-others is too one-sided. The battle between Mephisto and the Sins is not an even one. The Sins seem able to get exactly what they need from Mephisto, stealing his freedom without risking their own. His gaze appears to be of little consequence to them, and while they do crucially rely on him as their puppeteer, there is little question of who is in control in the narrative. For a more nuanced view of the co-dependence between self and Other, we must turn to the central relationship of the play: Faust and Mephisto.

At the top of the show, Beezlebub tells Mephisto that his relationship with Faust has been called into question, and that the Seven Deadly Sins, born of this relationship, have been invited to the party to judge whether Mephisto deserves to follow Faust to hell. The language is ambiguous, but the birth of the Sins from the "union" of Faust and Mephisto suggests that their relationship is a sexual one. Lust confirms this suspicion when she tells Mephisto, "You and me, we both want the same thing: to…to…be smothered in hot naked flesh until we reach ultimate freedom and oneness" (48:26). When Mephisto does not respond to her advances, Lust says, "I understand. You want satisfaction, but not with me. With who then…Faust?" (45:25). Lust strikes a nerve, bringing the party to a premature end (since we see neither Wrath nor Pride in

this parade of Sins). Mephisto covers her mouth, but when she refuses to be silent, he injects her with a syringe, waits for her body to relax, and then tosses her aside.

Certainly, this would not be the first queer reading of the Faust myth.[41] However, rather than addressing sexual politics as such, Tranter's version seems to employ sexual union metaphorically as a stand-in for the unique relationship between Mephisto and Faust, one in which the participants actively strive for a closeness that escapes the antagonism of the other relationships depicted in the production. This becomes clear in the final moments of the play. When Lust finally falls silent, Mephisto looks directly at Faust for the first time, tosses Lust aside, and storms into the audience to retrieve Faust. With his back to the audience he holds Faust up to face him, revealing Faust's face to the audience. He rips off the brim of Faust's hat, revealing a black skullcap not unlike the ones worn by the hand puppets that opened the show. Mephisto returns to the stool with Faust, and three times roughly pulls Faust's head up by his chin, forcing him to look at the audience. Each time, as soon as his hand leaves, Faust's head sags towards his chest. Finally, Mephisto pulls Faust to face him, places Faust's hand on Mephisto's chest, and the two lock eyes. Faust's hand reaches towards Mephisto's mask, and although he resists, Faust pulls the mask from Mephisto's head, revealing Tranter's white painted face and black skullcap. Mephisto screams heavenward, turns back to look at Faustus, and then, slowly, tenderly, embraces him as the lights fade.

In this scene, which mirrors the opening vignette in some ways, Mephisto transforms from his role of Other (in relation to the Sin subjects) and becomes himself the subject (in relation to Faust's Other). When Mephisto charges into the audience to retrieve Faust and brings him

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[41] See Graham Hammill, "Faustus's Fortunes: Commodification, Exchange, and the Form of Literary Subjectivity," *ELH*, 63.2 (Summer 1996): 309-336.

onstage, it is immediately clear that Faust, unlike the other puppets to have graced the stage,

is more object than subject – that is, he does not seem to possess the autonomy of the other

puppets, or in Sartrean terms, the ability to organize the world according to himself. This is true

in part because his jointless body does not allow for realistic movements, but it is most apparent

in the fact that, unlike the Sins and Beelzebub, Faust has trouble looking at Mephisto at all – his

chin sags when Mephisto tries to make him focus his gaze. For the first time, Mephisto seems

truly to have the upper hand in the Sartean power dynamic; he fixes Faust with his gaze, hoists

him up as an object for all to see, even peels away one of the final vestiges of Faust's physical

concealment—the hat brim—leaving him naked and exposed to the eyes of the audience. Just as

Beelzebub earlier taunts Mephisto with the knowledge that he "know what you look like under

that mask," Mephisto tears away a layer of costume to reveal Faust's bare face beneath. And yet

Mephisto is unsatisfied. Faust's initial utter objecthood in this moment means that Faust cannot

"look back" at all, demoting him from objectified for-itself to a true in-itself, incapable of

looking out at the audience as Mephisto attempts to command or participating in the

Master/Slave dialectic at all.

This moment reveals a crucial component of Sartre's being-for-others. If the Other is such

a critical part of the formation of the subject, then simply objectifying the Other does not fully

achieve the goal of the self. A literal object cannot fix the Subject in a Look; it cannot reveal to

Sartre the being that he is. To simply "objectify" the Other, as Sartre seems to initially advocate,

would strip the Other of his most essential qualities vis a vis the subject. Rather, Sartre's project

must "leave the Other's nature intact", maintaining the Other's freedom while at the same time

"absorbing" the Other (Sartre 475), making the other's freedom *subject* to Sartre's freedom.

Consider the example of Sartre peering through the keyhole: the Look of the Other is what fixes

Sartre as he-who-spies-through-keyholes. The next step, says Sartre, is not to simply reject

that designation; he *is* someone who spies through keyholes, and denying it will do him no good.

Rather, Sartre says, he must "*lay claim to* this being which I am; that is, I wish to recover it, or,

more exactly, I am the project of the recovery of my being" (Sartre 475). Sartre regains his

freedom not by resisting the Other's sense of him, but by taking up that definition into his own

project. That is, Sartre makes the Other's recognition *of* him into his own recognition of himself.

This moment of recognition is what is missing from the relationship between Mephisto

and the Sins. The Sins rely on Tranter for their *existence* as puppets; in order to be puppets, or

objects that perform consciousness, the puppeteer is essential. But it is not clear that the

relationship between Mephisto and the Sins involves Mephisto's *recognition* of the Sins. When

Mephisto looks away from a Sin's gaze, it appears that the Sin triumphs; Mephisto has been put

in his place. The Sins "know" him, but there is no suggestion that he knows, or is required to

know, them. The subject (the Sins) requires only obedience from the Other (Mephisto).

In the relationship between Faust and Mephisto, on the other hand, the subject (Mephisto)

is not satisfied with an Other that does not "look back." When Mephisto's attempts to make

Faust "look" at the audience fail, he balances the puppet's head so that his gaze meets

Mephisto's, and instantly Faust regains his subjectivity. With his newfound autonomy (an

autonomy visibly imparted by Tranter/Mephisto), Faust removes Mephisto's mask, an action that

Mephisto appears to resist even as he guides Faust's hand to his own face. This interaction offers

a more accurate depiction of Sartre's being-for-others: Mephisto needs Faust's recognition, and

cannot be satisfied by a truly objectified "Other." When Faust's chin sags and he seems unable to

"look back," Mephisto takes control of Faust as a puppet, imbuing him with imagined life so that

Faust might "look back" at Mephisto. And yet, once Mephisto gets the look he craves, Faust is

able to strip away Mephisto's mask, an unwelcome and agential act judging from Mephisto's

scream. In order to gain the closeness he seeks – the interaction ends with an embrace –

Mephisto must open himself up to the pain elicited by the Other's gaze.

Thus far, my analysis of *Seven Deadly Sins* has treated the production as an articulation

of and expansion upon Sartre's depiction of the fundamentally antagonistic relationship between

self and Other. Within the narrative, Faust and Mephisto's relationship seems to be sustaining,

and to offer the only moment of real tenderness in the performance, but it also births the Deadly

Sins and leads to Mephisto and Faust's ultimate damnation. In the performance, I have argued,

this dynamic is reinforced in the relationship between puppet and puppeteer, wherein the

puppeteer, in Sartrean terms, potentially makes himself an object at the service of the puppet, an

Other on whom the puppet relies, but who willingly accepts a subservient role to the Master

puppet, relinquishing his freedom in the process. However, this Sartrean notion of the

relationship between self and Other has been widely criticized.[42] Marjorie Grene, for example,

accuses Sartre of overlooking particular instances when Sartre's antagonism does not properly

define a relationship, such as "the rare but still indubitable experience of mutual understanding,

of the reciprocal look of peers; or of the look of mother and infant, where the one protects and

the other is protected" (Grene 27). Although I have argued that this production in many ways

exemplifies a Sartrean worldview, I want to posit that it contains within it a critique of the

Master/Slave dialectic as well. Indeed, the very form of puppet theatre both reinforces and

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[42] In addition to Marjorie Grene, discussed above, see Gary Cox, *Sartre: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 46-7 and Gregory McCulloch, *Using Sartre: An Analytical Introduction to Using Early Sartrean Themes*, 139 for critiques of Sartre's pessimistic understanding of human community. For a dramatically different approach to understanding human relationships, see my discussion of Levinas and the Other in Chapter 4.

simultaneously resists Sartre's bleak version of being-for-others. For the site of this

resistance, we must turn now to the relationship between the audience and the puppet.

In his book *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary* Drama,

Stanton B. Garner writes about the Sartrean relationship between the audience and the performer

onstage. He suggests that

> [T]he authorizing power of the audience's spectatorship does not eliminate the disruptive
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> potential of the performer's own gaze, or its destabilizing operations within and upon the
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> field of performance. Even within the boundaries of dramatic illusion, this gaze retains
>
> elements of a Sartrean danger as it plays on its surroundings. (Garner 47)

In other words, despite our assumptions about the privileged position of the audience in the dark,

visually orienting the stage before them in terms of their own bodies, Sartre's discourse on the

Other still holds for Garner. The spectator's orientation is challenged not only by her fellow

spectators, but also by the performer(s)—that is, the performer "looks back" at the spectator,

refusing to become a Sartrean object in relation to the spectating subject. As in the case of

Sartre's "man in the park," the actor onstage can cause the world to flee from the spectator, to be

ordered around the body of the actor instead.

Thus, the human performer's body can never be fully objectified. As a fellow for-itself,

an Other, the performer "represents the permanent possibility of my being seen in turn; this

appearance establishes my own position as visual object in another individual's perceptual field"

(Garner 48). The dimmed lights of the auditorium offer an illusion of anonymity, says Garner,

but cannot erase "a general visibility of audience to performer that accompanies the being-

present of performance" (48). Unlike film, in which the performer and spectator are never co-

present and thus incapable of performing this reciprocal look, Garner argues that theatre always

implies the possibility that this Other the spectator regards may at any moment turn her look back on the spectator herself.

In *The Seven Deadly Sins*, the possibility that the performer may return the spectator's gaze is made explicit: each puppet begins by surveying the audience with its eyes, often before turning their attention to Mephisto. The "Sartrean danger" Garner refers to is most apparent in the few moments of minor audience participation, when the puppets speak directly to specific spectators. Greed, for instance, accuses the audience of inheriting Faust's money, and pleads with them to deposit their valuables in his bag, imploring silently with his eyes. Tranter allows the silence during which Greed stares out at the audience to stretch on long enough that the audience grows uneasy, unsure what their role might be in this exchange.[43] When someone coughs in the silence, Greed stretches his neck to locate the culprit while audience members titter uncomfortably. He then picks on a particular woman in the front row, asking her to deposit her valuables in his bag and seemingly waiting for a response. Finally, he concludes that "she's not only stupid, she hasn't got any money" (18:27) and returns his attention to Faust.

I see moments like these as perfect illustrations of Sartre's theories. The nervous laughter audible in the video of the performance is an expression of destabilization that the spectators feel now that they are being forced to regard themselves as spectators. The woman addressed by Greed finds herself unexpectedly part of the performance, coded by Greed's attention as one who watches, yet refuses to actively participate (i.e. give money to Greed). The simplicity of voyeurism is unsettled in this moment, and, as Garner points out, this overt example of

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[43] For a non-Sartrean account of the relationship between performer and spectator during participatory moments like these, see Gareth White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*, Palgrave-Macmillan: 2013.

reciprocity merely emphasizes the potential for such a destabilization throughout the theatrical performance.

The audience in this scenario can also be seen as masochistic, as I have argued above of the puppeteer: spectators accept the objectivity thrust upon them by the powerful puppet, embracing this challenge to their freedom and willingly relinquishing control. And yet, this articulation of the audience/puppet relationship misses a dynamic that is essential to the puppet theatre. In *Handspring Puppet Company*, Jane Taylor discusses an infant puppet in Handspring's *Woyzeck on the Highveld* (1992) as a metaphor for one of puppetry's key qualities. Taylor writes that "[every] puppet is an infant who relies on another's recognition of its humanity in order to survive. It cannot exist without us and, if it is to live, must manage to persuade us to believe in its potentiality" (Taylor 28). This language of recognition sounds initially Sartrean—as I have just shown, Sartre, too, claims that the for-itself craves recognition from the Other. But Taylor's specific description of puppets as infants recalls Grene's criticism of Sartre's Master/Slave dialectic: Sartre makes no allowances for relationships characterized by self-giving and love for the protection of another. Taylor implies that the bond between puppet and audience is just such a relationship.

While Taylor's use of the mother/infant metaphor is unique to her, this conception of the relationship between puppet and audience is common to many definitions of the puppet. American puppeteer Bil Baird writes, "When the puppet performs before an audience, he begins to create a kind of life. I say before an audience, because only in the imaginations of an audience does a puppet begin to exist" (15). Tillis, more concretely, defines the puppet as "a theatrical figure, perceived by an audience to be an object, that…fulfills the audience's desire to imagine it as having life" (Tillis 65). In both cases, as in Taylor, the audience's perceived/imagined

experience of the puppet is an essential part of its existence as a puppet. The audience and

the puppeteer co-create the life of the puppet with the puppeteer, furnishing the object with

subjectivity. That is, audience and puppeteer are essential in the formation of a performed for-

itself – an imagined consciousness – in the object that might otherwise be understood as an in-

itself.

In his book *Phenomenology of a Puppet Theatre: Contemplations on the Art of Javanese*

Wayang Kulit, Jan Mrázek beautifully describes this process of imagining life in the puppet. He

begins with the puppet's design, what he calls its "beauty" but which is not limited to only

visually attractive puppets. Rather, what Mrázek calls beauty refers back to the skill of the

designer in depicting a character with the potential for life, whether beautiful or grotesque. The

appeal of this skillful design is necessary in order to "first to attract the sight, then to seduce, to

charm the viewer, so that the viewer hopes to see the puppet alive, and looks with empathy 'into'

the puppet's eyes, and sees the hoped-for life in them" (Mrázek 36). As in Sartre, Mrázek

prioritizes the gaze between subject and object. Mrázek's implications are clear: as much as the

puppeteer, it is the audience's gaze that enlivens the puppet. But unlike Sartre, Mrázek

emphasizes empathy as the key to the relationship. The spectator is drawn to the puppet by the

beauty of the design—that is, its potential for life—as well as, presumably, the puppeteer's

skilled manipulation, so that by the time she focuses her attention on the puppet eyes, she already

hopes to find life there. Mrázek calls this interaction "something almost like love," and adds that

it is "a necessary condition for understanding puppet theatre, for seeing the life in the puppets,

for recognizing oneself in a puppet" (Mrázek 36). As in Taylor's description of the puppet as an

infant, Mrázek predicates the relation of puppet and audience on recognition and love. The

puppet Other is not merely a potential threat to the spectator's being, but an Other that wants to

live and needs the audience's help to do so. To objectify the puppet would be to rob it of its status *as* a puppet—rather, the audience seeks to *subjectify* the puppet. In fact, the relationship of human to puppet is always a direct inverse of Sartre's dictum, based on empathy rather than competition. Indeed, while the plot of Tranter's play offers a decidedly Sartrean narrative that is in some ways emphasized in its performance, the relationship experienced between spectator and puppet has the potential to undercut that narrative.

Thus, *The Seven Deadly Sins* offers three different models of relations between self and Other, each one growing out of Tranter's particular interest in the gaze. The relationships between Mephisto and the Sins display a straightforward Sartrean antagonism, wherein the puppets seek to objectify Mephisto in their gaze, and Mephisto/the puppeteer masochistically accepts this designation, placing his own existence in the service of the Sins/puppets. In the partnership of Mephisto and Faust, on the other hand, we see Sartre's more nuanced articulation of being-for-others, in which the individual recognizes his reliance on the Other *as* for-itself, and tries (ineffectively) to possess the Other's freedom as freedom. While this more subtle reading of being-for-others offers some potential for a relationship that does not simply seek to destroy the subjectivity of the Other, relations between individuals are still generative *and* destructive in this model, as exemplified by the embrace between Faust and Mephisto before the lights fade and they are dragged to hell. It is the third model of relation – that between the puppets and the audience – that offers a subtle critique of the grim Sartrean world otherwise at issue in this performance. Here, the audience willingly and lovingly enlivens the puppet as a subject; they give of themselves in the way a mother gives to a child according to Grene or Taylor. In my relation of care to even the most grotesque puppets, I am reminded that not all relationships can be reduced to Sartre's simple antagonisms.

CHAPTER 3:

MERLEAU-PONTY, MOVEMENT, AND HANDSPRING PUPPET COMPANY'S

OR YOU COULD KISS ME

Thinking Through Movement

As part of their marketing campaign for the 2010 National Theatre / Handspring Puppet Company co-production *Or You Could Kiss Me*, the National released a series of brief promotional videos detailing the process of creating the piece. These videos included interviews with director/writer Neil Bartlett and Handspring's Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler, as well as fascinating footage of the cast improvising with early incarnations of their puppets and discussing their approach to working with the puppets. In one such video, entitled "Thinking Puppets," puppeteers Craig Leo, Tommy Luther, Finn Caldwell, Mervyn Millar and Basil Jones take turns working together in alternating groups of three to operate a large Bunraku-style puppet. The puppeteers seamlessly pass off roles to each other: Luther, for instance, begins on the feet until Leo slides in to take his place, giving Luther a moment to stand back and watch the puppet's progress. As they slowly move the puppet (which will play the character of Old A in the final production) across the rehearsal room floor, Bartlett offers hints to the puppet character's motivations: "Let him be thinking, 'There's the door. It's all fine, just get through the door.'" The puppet walks forward, its movements slightly stiff and disjointed as the puppeteers struggle to work as a unit. Bartlett lets this continue a moment, then adds, "Let's use the thought of 'what if I don't get there?'…A bad thought starts to tap on his shoulder: What if…I'll say it, 'what if I go [die] first?'" The puppet's knees seem to weaken, and he bends at the waist, reaching to the left as if to steady himself, although there is nothing there to grasp. The movements are still not fluid,

as they will be in performance: the puppeteers are still learning how to work with each other

and with this heavy wooden puppet, standing at full height just below the puppeteers' shoulders.

And yet, despite the jerkiness of the puppet's movements, his hunched shoulders and wobbling

knees clearly convey the emotional turmoil that Bartlett narrates.

For Neville Tranter, as we have seen, the puppet's life—its intentionality—is conveyed

primarily through its gaze. Thus, a limp, swinging arm will not break the illusion of puppet

consciousness if the eyes of the puppet remain focused (not fixed) on its object. For

Handspring's Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler, by contrast, it is primarily the puppet's movements

that enliven the object. The puppet's gait, slumped shoulders, and searching hand all convey the

"thought" of the puppet, suggesting in Husserlian phenomenological terms that it is conscious of

something. This is not to say that eye lines are not important to Handspring's puppeteers, or that

the puppet's gaze does not require attention to movement, as the previous chapter can attest. But

there is a clear shift of emphasis in the priorities of the two companies, from the gaze in Stuffed

Puppet to movement—both small (micro) and large (macro)—in Handspring.

In shifting focus from design to movement, or from the eyes to the body, I must also

consider how to articulate the approach to puppet life implied in Handspring's priorities. Sartre's

gaze marked an antagonistic battle for subjecthood between two intentional subjects, each one

striving to turn the other into an Object, a slave to his master. In their interest in the movement of

the body, Handspring's work follows a different model of subjecthood. In an article for the 2009

edited collection on the company, Jones articulates the underlying principle of his own

fascination with the puppet's movement:

> The assertion [in Handspring's puppetry] is that the movement is the thought. Here we
>
> are talking about an *embodied* form of thinking, of thinking *incarnate*—well, in the case

of the puppet, thinking in and through wood. Here we assert that we refuse to make a

separation between mind and body; that is, the mind that thinks, and the body that moves.

(266)

Here, Jones explicitly attacks the Cartesian divide between mind and body – the same division

whose overcoming was one of the founding motives of phenomenology. Although Sartre, as a

phenomenologist, was also critical of Descartes's dualism, this claim that *movement is thought*

goes well beyond his own attempt to return consciousness to the material world of embodied

existence. In order to understand what exactly Jones's proposed reunification of mind and body

means, I want to return to the promotional video I described above. From Bartlett's prompts, the

puppeteers struggle to convey the puppet's private thoughts – "what if I go first?"—through the

motions of its wooden body. They make puppet's knees appear to weaken, its step become less

confident, and its hand reach out, physicalizing the thought narrated by Bartlett. But this image

of Bartlett narrating the puppet's inner thoughts from across the room, and the puppeteers

moving the body accordingly, is in fact a strikingly Cartesian one: the mind (Bartlett)

communicates through animal spirits (the puppeteers) in order to affect the body (the puppet).

This puppet conveys or signifies thoughts *through* movements, but it does not appear to be

thinking through movement, as Jones's anti-Cartesian language suggests, a kind of thinking that

would collapse the distinction between thinking mind and moving body altogether. But is this a

distinction worth making? What would embodied thought look like in puppetry? And if I take

Jones at his word and consider the movement itself not simply as a representation of thought, but

as the thought itself, how might this particular approach to the "life" of the puppet enrich the

narratives those puppets can convey?

In this chapter, I will argue that, while Handspring's rehearsal process might seem to suggest a lingering Cartesian mind/body divide, in performance they challenge this simple dualism and explore the possibility of embodied consciousness—"thinking incarnate"—as articulated by Jones. I will consider Maurice Merleau-Ponty's seminal study, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), as well as work that draw on that text like Edward Casey's *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, as a way of understanding the concept of a fully embodied consciousness that resists Descartes's dualism once and for all, and how that might be conveyed in a puppet performance with several puppeteers and puppets performing the same characters. Merleau-Ponty, a contemporary and friend of Sartre's, criticized what he perceived as Sartre's lingering dualism and situated intentionality squarely in the body itself, investing the body with the ability to think.[44] I will argue that Handspring's emphasis on movement as the key to puppet life allows their theatre to delve into the implications of Merleau-Ponty's embodied consciousness, and that a consideration of Merleau-Ponty's work might offer an enriched reading of Handspring's narratives. In particular, I will examine the treatment of illness and memory in *Or You Could Kiss Me.*

Phenomenology of Puppet Movement

Before turning back to the realistic human movement of Handspring's puppets, I want to first consider the phenomenological relationship between movement and life in puppet theatre in its simplest form. To do so, I am drawing an example from Manual Cinema's *The Electric Stage*, a shadow puppet production that debuted at the Art Institute of Chicago in December 2016. The

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[44] Indeed, Jones is referring to followers of Merleau-Ponty's work when he uses the terminology of the thinking body. The essay draws on Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's *Phenomenology of Dance,* which itself draws on Merleau-Ponty.

show was commissioned in conjunction with the Art Institute exhibit *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present.* The production used overhead projectors and video projectors to create an impressionistic film based on the work of the Bauhaus artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. The resulting images, projected on a large screen in the Art Institute's Rubloff Auditorium, gave the impression of a film, created live by four puppeteers standing stage left with three projectors and a video camera, with three live musicians scoring the piece in the pit.

I want to focus on a very specific moment in the piece that is emblematic of movement as a source of puppet "life." On the screen, a small black circle moved from left to right. Initially, the circle did not appear "alive" – as it glided across the screen, it sometimes seemed to adhere the laws of gravity and inertia, following the path set by some unseen catalyst, and at other times it appeared to dance across the screen according to the whims of its animator. This dynamic began to change when the black dot encountered other shadow shapes, which "blocked" its path from the left side of the screen to the right. The black dot paused, pulled back slightly as if to build up momentum, and then ran into the new shapes at full speed, sending them flying like bowling pins hit by a ball. Before continuing on its route, the dot made a small, joyful leap in the air.

It was at this moment that the dot became "alive" for me, as evidenced by my reading of the dot's little jump as "joyful." What was merely a moving object moments before had become an *intentional* object for me. But why?

Two important changes to the dot's movement led to my changed perception of the dot-as-object to the dot-as-alive. First, the dot seemed to acquire an agency separate from either the laws of physics or the intentions of its operators. When the dot simply moved from left to right unimpeded, I imagined it to be following Einstein's law of inertia, having been set in motion off-

screen and ceasing to stop until something stopped it. When the dot traced arcs over the screen without respecting the supposed gravity of the world of the screen, I saw it as an object moved by human intervention to aesthetic ends, like the ribbon in ribbon gymnastics. In neither case did the dot seem to move of its own volition. Once it encountered the objects in its path, however, the dot appeared to acquire an intentionality of its own. First, it stopped short of the objects in its path, rather than running into them as inertia would predict. Then, it appeared to start moving again on its own, ramming into the objects and "celebrating" when they flew away. Here, the dot related to the world around it in an intentional, meaning-giving way. The objects in its path became for it obstacles to be dealt with. The dot was no longer simply an object employed to make lovely pictures – it had a goal of its own, and the ability to follow through with it.

Of course, in reality, it was still the puppeteers who performed this agency for the dot. The subtle movements that conveyed intentionality – the dot's stopping, its gathering up speed and ramming the objects, its jump for joy – were all carefully orchestrated by puppeteers who moved the object under the projector light. But when the dot encountered the objects in its path, my focus shifted from the way the objects *were moved* to the way in which the dot in particular *seemed to move according to its own impulses*. It is this kind of movement that gives the puppet life: movement that emphasizes the intentionality of the object in relation to its world.

Merleau-Ponty, Motor Intentionality, and the Thinking Body

In approaching Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied intentionality, I must begin with his criticisms of Sartre's project. Like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty saw himself as responding to Husserl's phenomenological challenge to go "back to the 'things themselves'" (Husserl,

"Introduction," 65)—that is, the objects of consciousness. However, the two men took up dramatically different postures in relation to Husserl on a number of fronts including, most usefully for my purposes, Husserl's own treatment of Cartesianism. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Husserl has been called "the last of the great Cartesians" (Smith and Woodruff 2), owing to his interest, like Descartes, in objects of consciousness, rather than the empirical world. However, while Husserl begins with Descartes, he is critical of Descartes's rationalism. In *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl challenges Descartes's claim that consciousness can be utterly divorced from the world. Descartes's cogito is self-enclosed, existing for Descartes even before (and as the foundation of) his proof for the existence of the rest of the world. Husserl, on the other hand, emphasizes consciousness's intentionality, defining consciousness as a directedness towards something else. To put it another way, Descartes is quite capable of conceiving of consciousness on its own, wholly contained within itself, and contained within the mind of the subject. For Husserl, on the other hand, consciousness is fundamentally relational; it must always have an object, must always be consciousness "of" something, and therefore must always have some relationship to the world.

At the same time, Husserl retains many characteristics of Cartesianism in his definition of the thinking subject. Like Descartes' cogito, for instance, Husserl's Transcendental Ego (or consciousness) exists outside of the world towards which it turns, able to give meaning to the world without being dependent on the world (Romdehn-Romluc 8). And, like Descartes, Husserl upholds the Cartesian distinction "between consciousness and knowing, between the knowing act and the object known" (Rauch 2). That is to say that Husserl's central concern is with the way in which the subject turns towards the world, rather than any attempt at an objective investigation

of the world itself. The question of whether or not the world actually exists, for instance, is simply "bracketed out" of his inquiry.

For Sartre, as I discussed in Chapter 2, this bracketing is problematic. The idea that the Transcendental Ego exists apart from the world, and as such that the world's "reality" might be bracketed out from our consideration of consciousness, strikes Sartre as an unfortunate slip into the idealism of Kant. According to Sartre, Husserl's own approach makes this other-worldly Transcendental Ego unnecessary. In order to do justice to 'the thing itself', Sartre argues, consciousness must be re-situated in the world, in the worldly experience of the conscious "I". Sartre writes that, "the phenomenological conception of consciousness renders the unifying and individualizing role of the [transcendental] *I* totally useless. It is consciousness, on the contrary, which makes possible the unity and the personality of my [situated] *I*. The transcendental *I*, therefore, has no *raison d'etre*" (Sartre, "Transcendence" 387). Indeed, "If it existed it would tear consciousness from itself; it would divide consciousness" (Sartre, "Transcendence" 387). Sartre's consciousness, the for-itself, is part of the world that it perceives, moving away from Husserl's transcendentalism and towards what he sees as a less Cartesian form of phenomenology.

In another sense, however, Sartre can be construed as an even more Cartesian figure than Husserl. As Dermot Moran argues, Sartre's well-known distinction between the for-itself and the in-itself, discussed at length in Chapter 2, paints them as "incommunicable regions," a division that mimics Descartes's controversial dualism between mind and body (*Introduction* 358). For

Moran, despite Sartre's critiques of elements of Husserl's work, Sartre is "a Cartesian at

heart" (*Introduction* 358).[45]

Merleau-Ponty takes an altogether different approach to Husserl. Rather than adopting

elements of Husserl's Cartesianism as Sartre had done, Merleau-Ponty resolutely rejects it. He

detects in Sartre's in-itself/for-itself distinction an unnecessary dualism, and claims that

Husserl's later work—his introduction of the *Lebenswelt*, or lifeworld, in *The Crisis of European*

Sciences—implies a transition away from Cartesianism that Merleau-Ponty sees his own work as

fulfilling (Romdehn-Romluc 15). Whether readers should accept Merleau-Ponty's claim that he

is merely following through on Husserl's own theoretical trajectory away from Cartesianism is

beyond the scope of this project, but regardless of its relationship to Husserl, it is significant that

Merleau-Ponty breaks definitively from the lingering Cartesianism of his phenomenological

predecessors and introduces a conception of consciousness which fully rejects the mind/body

divide and, as I shall show, the subject/object divide as well.

Merleau-Ponty achieves this renunciation of Descartes and the Cartesian tradition by

championing a radical intersubjectivity between consciousness and world, and by blurring the

distinction between mind and body. First, allow me to consider the relation between the subject

and the world according to Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty tells us that "The world is inseparable

from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is

inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects" (Merleau-Ponty

499-500). This might initially seem self-contradictory: how can the subject be "*nothing but*" a

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[45] Critics are divided on the extent of Sartre's Cartesianism, since the author himself was critical
of Descartes. For a less rigid interpretation of Sartre's distinction between the in-itself and for-
itself, see Moreland, "For-itself and In-itself in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty," *The Debate Between
Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*, 1998.

project of the world, and at the same time *project* that world? Which comes first: the subject which projects the world, or the world which constitutes the subject as part of its own project?

The apparent contradiction here is deliberate. Neither the world nor the subject is privileged in Merleau-Ponty. I cannot say simply (following the early Husserl) that the subject constitutes the world, as if the world is essentially meaningless until I arrive on the scene to impose my project upon it. But that is not to say, as an empirically-minded realist might, that the world exists in itself apart from my consciousness, essentially unaffected by my presence or absence. Rather, Merleau-Ponty sees consciousness and world as always already mutually dependent. As Eric Matthews summarizes, "We do not, for Merleau-Ponty, impose meaning on the phenomena of 'our world'; rather, the world comes into being as 'meaningful', and we come into being as 'subjects' standing in meaningful relation to it, in the same interchange between ourselves as beings in the world and the world in which we have our being" (Matthews 38). I give meaning to the world at the same time as the world is shaping me as a subject.

An example should help to clarify this mutual act of meaning-making between me and the world. Consider the computer on which I am typing this dissertation. It is meaningful to me as a tool through which I am able to convey my ideas in writing. After a particularly long session of writing, I may look upon it with dread or disgust, or go to great lengths to avoid it. Or, I may assign a new meaning to it—as conveyer of Netflix movies, for instance. In these cases, I use the computer in a particular way based on my own wants or needs. I relate to it through my actions – typing words on its keyboard – and affectively – feeling despair or elation towards it depending on the relative success or failure of my productivity that day.

In another way, however, the computer acts upon and shapes me. I sit slightly hunched over it, with my wrists resting on its keyboard, a posture that feels natural but that I would never

assume without the computer before me. When I want a word to appear on the screen, my fingers find the appropriate letters without me consciously directing them to do so. Since its battery died, its fraying cord restricts my movements, requiring that I am within a few feet of an electrical outlet. When I do decide that I need a change of venue, its perceived delicacy, the cost of replacing it, and the importance to me of the documents stored on it prompts me to carry my purse with some special care.

Thus, I ascribe meaning to the computer—dissertation-writing tool, Netflix conveyer—but *at the same time* it ascribes a kind of meaning to me—that is, it shapes my body and my actions. I recognize the computer as available to my dissertation-writing needs because of a capability communicated to me by the computer itself, and the claims of the computer act upon my body (for instance, my posture) as I pursue that task. This is what it means to be a "being-in-the-world" in Merleau-Ponty's sense – to be constantly in relation to the world around me, living in it and susceptible to it.

Let me return to Sartre's example of the man on the bench in order to see how Merleau-Ponty's description of the subject-object relationship differs from Sartre's. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre introduces the figure of a man sitting on a bench in the park**.** If I were to identify the man as mere mannequin or puppet, lacking an active conscious life, I would recognize no resistance and have no compunction in gathering this object into my own meaning-making project—the bench, man, and park are all *for* me in my project of, for example, enjoying my lunch break outside. Upon discovering that the man is, in fact, a man, and not a mannequin or a puppet, I am thrown into conflict, since I realize that the man is gathering up the world into his own project, and the world is not simply and straightforwardly susceptible to my interpretation

of it. Notice that the two options presented by Sartre are tidily opposed: either I collect the world into my project or it resists and scuttles this effort.

This simple binary opposition is precisely what Merleau-Ponty rejects. For him, the bench and the man certainly exert different pulls upon me, since I still recognize the man as a being like myself and the bench as something unlike myself. Nevertheless, the bench is experienced as making a certain appeal to me: it *invites* me to sit when it is perceived by me as an object to be sat upon, an invitation which I perceive immediately as the very nature of the bench. This manner of engaging with the world, through a reciprocal exchange in which meaning arises from the interaction between myself and the world, is what Merleau-Ponty's being-in-the-world entails.[46] Whereas Sartre sees the world as a site and occasion into which I am thrown without choice, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the constant interchange, invitation and reception, between subject and world.

In addition to his commitment to the bilateral intersubjectivity of subject and world, Merleau-Ponty also staunchly rejected Cartesian dualism more completely than any phenomenologist before him. Remember that Cartesian dualism posits a clear distinction between the rational mind and the material body: the first is immortal, the second, mortal; the first allows access to truths, the second is often deceptive; the first is not bound to worldly appearances, the second is reliant upon them; the first is primary, the second, a distant runner-up. For Merleau-Ponty, the body cannot be conceived as an addendum to consciousness; it is, rather, "my point of view upon the world" (Merleau-Ponty 81). The Cartesian idea that I reflect upon

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[46] The term "being-in-the-world" comes from Heidegger, and both authors employ it to restore meaning to the world itself, rather than suggest that meaning is simply imposed by the human being from without. For more on the differences between this terminology in the work of these two authors, see Matthews, *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*, 54-5.

my interactions with the world before actualizing them through my body implies an inner

world (my mind) in which I reflect, consider, decide, etc., and an outer world (my body) that

carries out the desires of the first. This division is untenable for Merleau-Ponty. If Cartesian

dualism is suspect, Merleau-Ponty says, then this division between an inner consciousness and

an outer bodily existence must be eradicated once and for all.

For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not simply a conveyor of the information and desires of

the mind, or consciousness. Rather, the "body *is* a form of consciousness" (Romdehn-Romluc 3),

and it is through movement that this consciousness is often expressed. Merleau-Ponty describes

two broad categories of movements: concrete and abstract. In concrete movement, the body

responds to an actual situation that it confronts. When I sit at my sewing machine, I am able to

thread the needle not because I am able to conjure up a needle-threading diagram in my head that

I then follow the instructions of that mental representation with my body. Rather, my body

responds correctly and directly to the object at hand, in this case based on habitual practice built

up over many previous encounters with the machine. Merleau-Ponty calls this response "motor

intentionality," and he says that it is neither the ability to move nor to think, but "something

between movement as a third person process and thought as a representation of movement—

something which is an anticipation of, or arrival at, the objective and is ensured by the body

itself as a motor power, a 'motor project'" (Merleau-Ponty 126-7). Put simply, motor

intentionality names the subject's ability to respond appropriately with his body to an objective

presented by his relation to his actual world.

Abstract movement, on the other hand, responds to an environment that is not

immediately given. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls "reckoning with the possible" or

"projection" (Merleau-Ponty 129). Such movement requires an imaginative leap, like

Stanislavski's "magic if." It requires the subject to imagine a potentiality that is not yet present. Again, however, this "imagining" is itself embodied: rather than an "interior representation" of a future reality, it is an imaginative projection of my body towards some futural circumstance. Merleau-Ponty offers an example of faulty projection with the case of war veteran and head trauma sufferer Schneider, whose case Merleau-Ponty uses extensively. Although Schneider was capable of sexual climax, he never initiated contact. Schneider's inability to initiate sex suggests to Merleau-Ponty an inability to project himself into a sexual possibility that is not immediately available to him (Merleau-Ponty 181).

Thus consciousness, for Merleau-Ponty, is an embodied experience of one's body as it relates to the world. And Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl and Heidegger before him, that bodily being-in-the-world is essentially *temporal*. Consider the relationship between motor intentionality and the power of projection discussed above. Motor intentionality names the body's ability to relate to the world as it is in the present moment, whereas the power of projection requires the subject to consider that same body in relation to some possible futural world—for instance, the possibility of a sexual encounter, which Schneider is incapable of projecting, but which characterizes normal sexual relations. The earlier example I gave of typing on my computer, in contrast, refers to a skill founded in what Merleau-Ponty calls my habit-body—thanks to a familiarity between my body and the keys established in the past, my present motor intentionality is afforded a special kind of ease in its relation to the keys, an unreflexive competence thanks to my body "literally *incarnating the past*: the practice that went into our acquiring the motor skill in question" (Morris 69). My past, present, and imagined futural bodies work in tandem fluidly in order to facilitate my successful negotiation of the world around me.

In sum, then, consciousness is fully embodied and relational for Merleau-Ponty. My body is the perspective through which I enter into relation with the world, and thus it cannot be considered a mere object like other objects in the world that my body encounters. If my body is not an object to be directed by my rational mind, then there can be no distinction between an interior mind and an exterior body, as in the Cartesian metaphor of the "ghost in the machine." As Merleau-Ponty claims, "Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body. A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its 'world', and to move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation" (Merleau-Ponty 159-61). That lack of "representation" is another way of saying that the things we often think about as "interior" considerations of our mind – imagining, remembering, etc. – must themselves be rethought as embodied, eschewing the erroneous inner/outer divide that suggests us capable of operations that happen simply "in our minds."

Movement as Thought in Puppetry

On its face, then, Merleau-Ponty's claim that consciousness is embodied fits well with Jones's claim that "movement is consciousness" in Handspring's theatre. But what, precisely, does that mean in relation to the puppet theatre?

First, if consciousness is wholly embodied, the body's movements are themselves the puppet's life, and do not merely gesture to an inaccessible interior. Indeed, as I argued at the beginning of this chapter, Handspring tends to privilege movement as the site of their puppets' "life." Handspring puppets are often large, and though Adrian Kohler's designs are not illusionistic in appearance, they are able to move with striking realism. Take the horses in *War*

Horse, for instance. All three puppeteers are visible: two inside the horse operating its legs and one to the side operating its head with a rod. The horse's body is made of visible bent cane covered in sheer fabric. And yet, the precision of the horse's movements, from its expert trotting to the small details, like fully rotatable ears that can realistically turn backwards to express the horse's fear, make the puppet horse seem surprisingly similar to a real one. The subtle, dexterous, realistic movements of the puppets do seem to attest to the life of the puppets, and the idea that their imagined consciousness can be found in their bodily movements rather than some interior, detached "mind" seems like a perfect description for objects which, the audience knows, have no "minds" to begin with. In other words, to say that the body is a form of consciousness, and that movement is the expression of that consciousness, seems perfectly in keeping with Handspring's puppets in particular.

However, there is an element of Handspring's puppetry that seems out of keeping with this Merleau-Pontian reading of puppet "life." At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that the rehearsal technique revealed in the promotional video "Thinking Puppets" – wherein Bartlett narrated the puppet's thoughts and the puppeteers responded to them by moving the puppet accordingly – suggested a Cartesian rather than phenomenological vision of consciousness. The division between the puppet's thoughts (Bartlett) and its body (the puppet, controlled by puppeteers) mimics the kind of mind/body dualism that Merleau-Ponty abhors. While this technique of narrating the puppet's thoughts does not occur onstage, there is one frequent element of Handspring's staging that hints at the kind of division that one associates with Descartes. Because Handspring puppets are typically Bunraku-style, they require two or more puppeteers to operate effectively, and the puppeteers (as in *War Horse*) are always visible. If the puppet's movements express its imagined, embodied consciousness, what roles do the

puppeteers play, and how do they avoid the impression that they are the "minds,"

manipulating the puppets just as Descartes's cogito manipulates his body?

One possible answer can be found in the importance of breath for Handspring. While

Jones and Kohler frequently reference movement in general as the key to bringing their puppets

to life, they often zero in on what they call "micromovements" – that is, "apparently minor

quotidian functions" that constitute "a performance of Ur-narrative: the performance of life"

(Jones 256-7). Jones contrasts these micromovements with "macrolevel" action, which "engages

with the script and the choreography" (257). A puppet sword fight, for instance, would constitute

a macromovement, or macrolevel action: it would move the action along; it would be notated in

the script (or narrative) of the production; and one would take notice of it even if the performers

were actors rather than puppets. But the puppet's breath—that is, the barely noticeable

movement of the puppet's shoulders and chest subtly and rhythmically rising and falling—is not

directly related to the narrative of the performance, but crucial to the Ur-narrative of the puppet's

imagined "life." Jones often writes of breath as the most important puppet micromovement. For

instance, he writes that

> The audience, in noticing the tiny in breath and out breath of the puppet, enter into an
>
> empathetic relationship with the object that is being brought to life. The breathing is
>
> physical, yet it has a profound metaphorical power. This non-existent substance (air) that
>
> is passing through this mechanical being represents the very essence of life: the soul.
>
> (Jones 262)

Jones' reference here to the puppet's metaphorical "soul" may initially seem to contradict the

Merleau-Pontian reading of Handspring's work that I have proposed. The notion of a moving

body on one hand and an immaterial soul (represented by immaterial breath) on the other again

smacks of the Cartesian divide. But there are other ways of characterizing breath. In *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski*, Phillip B. Zarrilli points to breath as a crucial tool for *reuniting* the body and the mind of the actor. Zarrilli suggests that Stanislavski himself understood the importance of a union between body and mind, and Zarrilli draws on both phenomenology and Eastern influences like Sanskrit *prana* and Chinese *qui* in order to argue for a performance training that does not sublimate the body to emotional exercises for the mind. He writes that "breathing provides a beginning point toward inhabiting an optimal state of bodymind awareness and readiness" (Zarrilli 25) for the actor and notably, he replaces Jones's use of the word "soul" with the idea of "inner energy" that he sees represented in both *prana* and *qui* (Zarrilli 19). In other words, Zarrilli sees breath as a bridge uniting mind and body into a single entity; his "bodymind" is related to Merleau-Ponty's embodied consciousness. On this reading, the focus on breath serves two functions. First, it signals a fusion of body and mind (or bodymind) to be imagined in the puppet. Second, since the breath of the puppet in Handspring's performance often derives from the puppeteers breathing in unison with one another, I argue that breath can serve to unite the puppeteers and puppet, forming a unit of embodied consciousness. In other words, by focusing on breath, Handspring's puppetry casts its puppeteer as embodied movers rather than disembodied minds.

Or You Could Kiss Me *in Context: A Brief History of Handspring Puppet Company*

Founded in 1981 by four graduates of the Michaelis School of Fine Art, including Jones and Kohler, South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company has transformed from its early years as a traveling children's theatre to one of the world's most celebrated purveyors of puppetry for adult audiences. Their first adult-oriented production was South African playwright David

Lytton's *Episodes of an Easter Rising* (1985), a political drama about a wounded black activist who seeks refuge in the home of two white women. The play was well-received at home in Cape Town, and drew great enthusiasm from the sold-out house at the World Puppet Festival in Charleville-Mézières, France.

After a handful of adult productions within South Africa, Handspring met with an even more robust outpouring of international acclaim for Starbrites! (1990), which toured predominantly throughout the UK. But widespread international success would come with their next production: *Woyzeck on the Highveld* (1992), directed by South African visual artist and animator William Kentridge. *Woyzeck* was the first of a trilogy of collaborations between Handspring and Kentridge which staged adaptations of well-known plays within a South African context. While *Woyzeck* and their next project, *Faustus in Africa* (1995) stayed close to the original texts, Jane Taylor's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997) took more liberties with their source materials, directly addressing the aftermath of apartheid through the iconic character of Ubu Roi. Each of these three productions toured extensively to vast acclaim.

The fruitful collaboration between Kentridge and Handspring produced three subsequent productions: *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse* (1998), *Zeno at 4am* (2001) and *Confessions of Zeno* (2002), the latter two of which Jane Taylor wrote. More recently, however, Handspring has entered into collaborations with artists outside of South Africa, to interesting results. In 2004, Handspring entered into a complex international partnership with the Sogolon Puppet Troupe of Mali, Beninian choreographer Koffl Kôkô, South African director Marthinus Basson and New York-based playwright Khephra Burns to produce *Tall Horse*. Mixing the traditional Bambara puppetry of the Sogolon Puppet Troupe with Handspring's Bunraku-inspired aesthetic, the play told the story of a giraffe's journey from its capture in the Sudan to its presentation to the King

of France as a gift in the early nineteenth century. The show received mixed reviews, and the tumultuous process of inter-cultural collaboration is well-documented in Mervyn Millar's *Journey of the Tall Horse: A Story of African Theatre* (2006).

While *Tall Horse* had its share of artistic difficulties, it also helped to pave the way for Handspring's next collaboration, which would also be, in many ways, their most successful. The life-sized giraffe puppet in *Tall Horse* caught the attention of Tom Morris, an Associate Director at the National Theatre in London. Morris had been following Handspring's work since *Faustus in Africa* had toured to the Battersea Arts Centre in London; Morris had particularly appreciated the intricate hyena puppet in that production, and had been since looking for a project on which to collaborate with the Handspring team (Millar, *Staging* 8). After seeing *Tall Horse*, Morris invited Handspring to collaborate on a production that would require both the life-sized dimensions of the *Tall Horse* giraffe and the articulated movements of the *Faustus in Africa* hyena. Eager to expand the National Theatre's appeal to young audiences while still drawing adult admiration, Morris wanted to adapt Michael Morpurgo's *War Horse*, a children's story about a boy and his horse during World War I. In 2003 and 2004, the National Theatre had experimented with puppetry to bring Philip Pullman's fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials* to the stage, proving that puppetry could draw enthusiasm from a National Theatre audience. In *War Horse*, the protagonist of the show would be Joey, a life-size, fully articulate, rideable horse puppet.

The resulting production, which opened in 2007 after almost three years of development, took the National Theatre by storm. Critics and audiences praised the show, in particular the stunning horse puppets. It transferred to the West End in 2009 and opened on Broadway in 2011, where it promptly won Tonys for Best Play, Direction, Lighting Design, Scenic Design, and

Sound Design, as well as a Special Tony Award presented to Kohler and Jones (*Tony Awards*). Since then, the production has toured extensively.

With the enormous success of *War Horse*, the National Theatre was eager to support a second collaboration with Handspring. As Kohler explains in the *Or You Could Kiss Me* program notes, the goal of this new piece would be to push beyond the territory etched out by *His Dark Materials* (an adaptation of the Philip Pullman trilogy) and *War Horse* into a different kind of puppetry:

> Puppets as elements of fantasy, and puppets as animals, are both in the realm of the expected when it comes to the use of the animated figure in the theatre. The territory we now wished to further explore, was the puppet as human in a naturalistic piece devoid of fantasy. Could a puppet handle this task? Would the audience ask whether this could have been done more simply with actors? (Kohler in Bartlett 11)

The source material for this naturalistic story slowly evolved from conversations between Kohler, Jones, and Neil Bartlett, who would become the playwright and director of the piece. Bartlett describes these early conversations as being

> about very personal things (things which had happened to us in hospitals, in parked cars, on rocks, on squash courts and in bedrooms and on the telephone, but sometimes about the very different times and places we had lived in during the 1970s and 1980s—they in South Africa and I in London. Out of our conversations I proposed transforming these autobiographical anecdotes into a fiction[.] (Bartlett 8)

Thus, while plot of *Or You Could Kiss Me* is often personal and even autobiographical, the work expands on true elements from the lives of its actors and imagines them from the perspective of old men looking back on their lives.

Embodied Consciousness in Or You Could Kiss Me

The plot of *Or You Could Kiss Me* focuses on the end of a love story between two men. Old B, an 86-year-old chain-smoking South African man with a prickly personality, suffers from emphysema which wracks his frame with coughs and an aphasia that jumbles his memory, making his own past, at times, unrecognizable to him. Aging has taken its toll on him both physically and mentally, and we learn in the opening moments of the play that the doctors suspect that his end is near. While Old B struggles with his fading memories of the past, his partner, Old A, tries to come to terms with the realization that he will soon be left alone for the first time since the two men met over 60 years ago. It also introduces an element of conflict into the relationship, as Old A tries to convince Old B to finally make out his will, and Old B stubbornly refuses. The play follows Old A and Old B in what are presumably the final days or weeks of Old B's life.

This summary suggests a simple chronology of events, but in fact the basic plot of Old A and Old B cannot do justice to the complexity of the play's narrative and staging complexities.[48] Both Old A and Old B are puppets, manipulated by up to three puppeteers at once. But they are not the only iterations of these characters that we see. There is also Young A and Young B, the 19- and 20-year-old versions of the men, also puppets and also manipulated by between one and three puppeteers each. And there are A and B, the middle-aged versions of the characters situated somewhere between Old and Young, looking back on their pasts and forward into their futures. A and B are not puppets; they are performed, respectively, by Kohler and Jones. One other

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[48] The production of *Or You Could Kiss Me* that I will be referring to throughout will be a DVD preview copy distributed by Handspring Puppet Company.

puppet – Old A and Old B's dog – makes a few appearances in the scenes at the men's house. It is a small puppet operated by a single puppeteer, held by a handle on his back. Its legs move in unison and are controlled by the hand holding the dog's back handle, its head and ears are operated by the other hand using a lever in the back of the head, using similar controls to those of the *War Horse* horses. In the only piece of trick puppetry in the show, the dog can lift its leg and urinate on the stage floor.

Other performers also share the stage with Kohler and Jones. The four puppeteers mentioned above – Tommy Luther, Mervyn Millar, Craig Leo, and Finn Caldwell – take turns operating various parts of puppets as needed. These four men are referred to as "Assistants" in the printed text. All of the puppeteers wear black pants and jackets and no shoes, although the Assistants wear black t-shirts while Kohler and Jones wear white dress shirts under their jackets. At times, the Assistants step out of the role of puppeteer to briefly perform other characters as needed, like Old B's aunt or a group of party-goers in two different flashback sequences. They also sometimes provide dialogue for Young A and Young B; only Kohler and Jones voice Old A and Old B. For the most part, though, the puppeteers play the role of concerned participants in the narrative. The play sets up two objectives for its main characters: Old A wants Old B to finish his will, and Old B wants to remember his past, particularly the first time the two made love. The puppeteers are party to these quests: they sometimes advise, prompt, or question the various iterations of A and B, or converse with the M.C., played by Adjoa Andoh. Even more than the puppeteers, Andoh acts as a narrator/guide figure, often gently counseling Old A (and sometimes others) on how to deal with the situation of Old B's deterioration. She also takes on a handful of other roles: a doctor who explains the science behind memory loss; Old A and Old B's maid; a nurse at the hospital. In general, all of the people onstage seem committed to helping

Old A and Old B reach their respective goals, and they offer assistance both physically, by manipulating their bodies, and verbally.

A description of the opening moments of the play will clarify the performance aesthetic of this complicated piece. The lights come up on the National Theatre's Cottesloe stage, a black box theatre configured for this production with audiences on floor level on both sides of an alley stage and in a balcony that stretches around three of the four sides. The stage is almost bare at first, with only Jones (B) in a simple wooden chair and Kohler (A) standing beside him, both clad in black, standing center stage and gazing towards the wall at the far narrow end of the stage. Behind them at the other narrow end of the stage are two double doors with a sign reading "No Smoking" in English, Afrikaans[,] and Xhosa (Bartlett 23).[49] The M.C. enters and delivers a short prologue speech, attributed to the Roman poet Ovid, into a microphone: "Unmeasurable is the power of Time, and It/Can have no end. And know, what Time has mind to bring about,/ Must take effect. So, in this tale, put ye out of doubt" (Bartlett 27). The two doors burst open, and sounds of hospital machinery and a voice on a PA system punctuate the silence. A and B turn to see two puppets advancing towards them, lit from below by lights attached to the sides of the stage. The puppets' heads and hands are carved of wood, while their chests are made of plaster (Personal Interview). Arms and legs are laser-cut pieces of wood in the shape of limbs, lacking the impression of skin that the carved wooden head and hands capture so beautifully. The joints that allow the puppet such an impressive range of movement are fully visible, especially in Old B who wears only a flimsy sleeveless shirt.[50]

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[49] Rae Smith designed the set for *Or You Could Kiss Me*.

[50] Since Young A and Young B are shirtless throughout, Kohler had do attend to the aesthetics of the puppet joints more closely than his typical human puppets, whose joints are covered by clothing. Many of the innovations used in the *War Horse* puppets, such as Teflon joints and

Unlike the puppets in the promotional video "Thinking Puppets," the movements of the puppets in the production are precise, subtle, and controlled. As they enter, Old B sits motionless in his wheelchair and Old A pushes him forward. All four Assistants enter as a clump behind the two puppets: Finn Caldwell shuffles Old A's feet forward, while Tommy Luther and Craig Leo each control one of Old A's hands, currently clutching the handles of the wheelchair. Leo also holds a bar in Old A's back, keeping his body upright. Mervyn Millar follows behind with his hand on Caldwell's shoulder, dragging Old B's oxygen tank behind him.

The puppets, designed by Kohler, are 5/6 lifesize, and typically require three puppeteers to move effectively; one on the head and right arm, one on the left arm, and one on the feet. This can cause some difficulty in terms of sight lines; Bunraku- style puppetry is typically performed on proscenium stages in order to avoid this awkwardness. The inclusion of the audience on three sides of the action requires a high degree of attentiveness on the part of the puppeteers to stay out of the audience's way, and they achieve that goal most of the time (although, especially from the floor level, some blockages are inevitable). In this first scene, the puppeteers congregate behind the puppets, manipulating Old A from behind and leaving Old B inanimate for the moment. When the two come to a stop, Luther places his hand on Old B's head and allows the puppet to take his first breath, indicated by the movements in his shoulders and by the sound of air rushing through the bellows of live musician Marcus Tilt's accordion, which will be used throughout to provide both live accompaniment and periodic breathing sounds.

After a moment, Kohler joins the Assistants, first helping Old B to remove his oxygen mask, then taking over the body and right arm controls for Old A. Caldwell procures a cigarette

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hidden ball bearings, were also used in the puppet construction of this piece (NT Platform). Kohler also studied artificial limb designs in the process of designing these puppets (Personal Interview).

as per Old B's silent request, and Kohler reaches Old A's hand out, grasps the cigarette

between his own hand and Old A's, and then deposits it in the space between Old B's awaiting

fingers. Finally, Jones joins the group, kneeling before Old B to light his cigarette. When the tip

ignites, the sound of the air through Tilt's accordion bellows and visual of Luther moving Old

B's head up and down combine to signify Old B's inhale and exhale. Jones takes his place at Old

B's side, moving his left arm and bringing the cigarette to his lips (Fig. 4). Everyone other than

Kohler and Jones moves away, and they are left alone with their older selves as the accordion

begins to play its opening song. After a handful of peaceful drags on the cigarette, however, Old

B's emphysema gets the best of him, and he collapses into a coughing fit, prompting Old A to

call for the nurse and the Assistants to rush back to the old men's aid, oxygen mask in tow. The

intimacy of this moment between the puppeteers A and B, and the puppets Old A and Old B, is

lost in the flurry of activity.

Fig. 4. Basil Jones manipulating puppet Old B in *Or You Could Kiss Me*. Puppet Old A looks on. Copyright Simon Annand.

I have described this sequence in detail in order to offer a sense of the careful choreography involved in bringing these puppets to life. I want to reflect in particular upon the role of breath in this sequence. This opening scene explicitly highlights the use of breath as a way of signifying the puppets' life, and I want to suggest that this image sets up two important theoretical concepts for the show. The first concerns the relationship between the mind and the body. As I have argued earlier, breath can signify a connection between mind and body, and certainly that connection is made manifest in Old B, whose illness contains both traditionally physical (emphysema) and mental (dementia) components. Writing about Merleau-Ponty's concept of illness, Eric Matthews tells us that "It is not merely a breakdown in mechanical

functioning…but a disordered way of being-in-the-world, of relating to one's own body, or

to other people, or to the world in general" (82). This coughing fit exemplifies Merleau-Ponty's

concept of illness as disordered being-in-the-world: the puppet's body seems "made for" the

cigarette, right down to the fact that the fingers are carved precisely to hold it without any human

intervention, just as our habit bodies calcify skills or habits learned in the past and bring them to

bear on our present motor intentionality. The look shared between A and B hints at this

familiarity with the past. But the coughing fit disorders this relationship: the cigarette is no

longer to-be-smoked in the same easy fashion, and he suddenly must rely on the oxygen mask

and the intervention of concerned Assistants to right himself. This physical disordering of Old

B's being-in-the-world, I argue, is metaphorically linked to the disordered relation soon to be

revealed between Old B and his memories, a crucial theme at the heart of this production. Just as

the coughing fit attacks his own familiarity with the needs and abilities of his own body, his

inability to remember crucial details of his past will strike at his sense of who he is in the present.

As I have alluded to above, this early vignette, focusing on Old B's breath, not only hints

at a connection between mind and body, but also between B and Old B. Jones operates the hand

of the puppet in order to bring the cigarette to its mouth, but he also breathes in unison with Old

B's inhalation and exhalation.[51] A single breath exists between the two of them: Old B "inhales"

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[51] While I am interested only in the story told onstage, it is perhaps relevant to note a few
significant items of autobiographical overlap between the lives of A and B and their actors. Apart
from the obvious correlation of the initials A and B with Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones, it is also
true that Kohler and Jones met when they were 19 and 20, respectively, on a Cape Town beach,
and that the two have been together ever since. A photograph in the program from 1971 shows
the two young men smiling with their arms around each other, along with the caption "This did
happen". While Bartlett is cagey in his program notes about which elements of the production
are taken from the lives of the leads and the others involved in the creation process (including
Bartlett himself), writing that "all the events of the play, both those which take place in the past
and those which take place in the future, are true" (Bartlett 10), he is a little more forthcoming in

the smoke from the cigarette, but of course it is B's breath that blows the smoke from the tip

of the cigarette on the exhale. When Old B coughs, Jones's body mirrors the puppet's as he

produces the sound of the cough in his own lungs. While the Assistants' expressions suggest

concern for and commitment to the puppets—indeed, Bartlett describes the posture necessary for

moving the slightly smaller than life-sized puppets as "a relationship of tenderness" (NT

Platform)—it is Kohler and Jones whose union with the puppets begins the show proper, and

whose voices provide dialogue for the two older versions of A and B. This relationship between

puppet and puppeteer through breath is similar to the argument I made earlier about how breath

unites puppets and puppeteers into a single embodied consciousness, but this version is more

complicated. Here, Kohler and Jones perform characters of their own (A and B), so they are not

simply one with their puppets. But since Old B and B are the same character, separated by time,

they are also not wholly other than their puppets, either.

This connection between A and B and their older (and, later, younger) puppet counterparts

is at the heart of this play's narrative. Old B's disordered being-in-the-world affects his

memories, and his faulty memories in turn impact his sense of self in the present. Only by

reconciling past, present, and future is Old B able to accept his current situation and sign his will.

The play dramatizes this search for self that can only be satisfied by uniting the temporally

multiple selves through the body. The remainder of this chapter will focus on memory, taking

Old B and Old A as the final instantiations of A and B looking back over their lives together. As

I shall show, there is support for this reading: the conflict of the narrative does focus on Old A

and Old B. However, it is also true that A and B are the only human versions of these characters,

a talk back session on October 18, 2010 where he reveals, for instance, that the opening image
described above is based on a couple he saw from a distance at a hospital.

and that they frame the story present onstage before the older puppets arrive and after they leave. If A and B are the focus of the production, it is clear that this is a play about both memory *and* imagination: the ability to look back to an earlier time as well as the ability to project oneself forward to an unseen future. While the role of imagination might also hold fruitful connections to Merleau-Ponty's work, a thorough exploration of imagination lies beyond the scope of this chapter, and therefore I will be confining my analysis to the ways in which memory is treated in the play.

Embodied Remembering

Like Merleau-Ponty's Schneider, Old B draws attention to "normal" being-in-the-world by enacting its opposite. In particular, he offers insight into how memory should properly function through his example of faulty memory. Old B's failing memory is clear in Scene 4, when he sorts through a shoebox of old photographs. At the beginning of the scene, the puppeteers onstage watch intently, trying to understand Old B's motivations:

ASSISTANT B: Ssssh…(*Speaking quietly, as if not to break the puppet's thread of thought.*) He's trying to think.

B: Trying to remember. To remember the first time.

ASSISTANT A: The first time what?

ASSISTANT A: The first time they – (*made love*)?

B: The first time he *knew*. The first time it felt like they were…

ASSISTANT: Were what?

> *Beat.*

B: He's trying to find some *proof*. (37)

What exactly Old B is trying to remember, how he must go about it, and why this particular recollection is needed are topics of central concern for the remainder of the play. In this scene, though, we see Old B's struggle to find the "proof" he needs. As Old B fights to put the photographs in some kind of order and to remember the identities of their subjects, the MC takes on the role of "Lecturer," intercutting the scene between the puppets and puppeteers with a prepared lecture delivered on the "underlying *mechanisms* of memory alteration" (Bartlett 36). In relatively dry, scientific terms, the Lecturer lists various kinds of faulty memory: selective memory, confabulation, preservation, substitution, catastrophic reaction, and flooding (Bartlett 38-44). Old B performs these various categories: for instance, Old B asks "why?" when he means to ask "who?", and the MC describes this as an instance of substitution (Bartlett 43). However, these labels are smokescreens: they reveal nothing about why Old B's attempts to recall these people from his past are so important to him, or how functioning memory should work. Like the list of Schneider's symptoms that Merleau-Ponty culls from his doctors' descriptions of him, the Lecturer's list of memory deficiencies *describe* Old B's problems, but tell little about their underlying cause or meaning. In order to understand the kind of memory that Old B seeks and why, I must turn back to phenomenology, and in particular the embodied intentionality of Merleau-Ponty.

In the scene cited at length above, Assistant B suggests that Old B is trying to *think*, and B corrects him, clarifying that Old B is trying to *remember*. Indeed, these two functions share a common trait: both are often considered *internal* processes, but Merleau-Ponty wants to reject this common reading, and to situate both in the body. For Merleau-Ponty, to think or remember *requires* a body. Thinking must be expressed; it cannot exist simply as a representation "within" the mind.

Similarly, scholars have argued that Merleau-Ponty's notion of memory must be equally tied to both the body and the world. As Dylan Trigg argues,

> Memory is not simply confined to our heads, as it were. While it is true that without our brains, recognition of the past would crumble, it is nonetheless the interaction between persons and world that provides the genesis for remembering. *Things* in the world activate our brains, directing us in different paths accordingly. (47)

As Trigg suggests, memory is not simply an internal experience within the mind. Rather, it is a process prompted by a particular relation to the world of people and things which the remembering subject inhabits. Kirsten Jacobson characterizes this relationship as a gift, directed towards the subject from the world around her (37). Old B's relation to the photographs in the shoebox is an example of this kind of worldly gift gone awry. Confronted by the photo entitled "Sunday Lunch with his Aunties, Summer of 71," Old B recognizes that he should be able to recall the faces in the picture. But his relation to the world has been unsettled by illness; he fails to make the connection, and he needs Old A to remind him that the woman in the photo is his Auntie May.

This memory of Auntie May illustrates a second key quality of phenomenological memory that is particularly important for this play: that is, the temporal experience of remembering. In various ways that I will explore momentarily, memory erodes the sharp distinction between past and present. As Edward Casey proclaims in his book *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, remembering an object or experience from the non-immediate past "is to give them a second chance, a second life…It is a main means by which the present and the non-immediate past rejoin each other in human experience" (52). This "rejoining" is another way of saying that remembering involves a revivifying, or bringing to life, of an absent past, or,

alternately, a sense of absorption on the part of the subject into the past itself. Either way – whether the past is enlivened in the subject's present or the subject feels herself transported into the past where the memory resides – the subject experiences a reunion with the content of the memory in some sense. As I will show, the ways of constituting this union vary, but the sense of reentering an experience, either as participant or observer, is significant here.

Although one may think of memory as bringing the past into the present, Casey warns that human memory cannot be compared to computer memory, in which past details are filed away for future retrieval (5). Rather, in this rejoining of past and present, the two become *relational* in the act of remembering – just as the world and the subject are co-dependent in Merleau-Ponty's understanding, the past and present maintain a mutual relationship as well. To put this differently: the memory of the past both *constitutes* and *is constituted by* the remembering subject. I need to take a moment to explore this important claim.

First, I will consider how the subject is constituted by his memories. As Eric Matthews points out, the past one has lived is "sedimented" in their bodies – it forms the foundation of the subject we now recognize as "I" (Matthews 96). Recall my earlier discussion of the habit body: my ability to type without looking at the keyboard is a reality sedimented in my present body thanks to skill formations of the past. My memories, in other words, cannot be approached as separate from me; they are always already part of the story of the constitution of the self I now am. But they are also, at the same time, a recollection of selves that are not the self I now am— memories of myself as a child, or a teenager, or an undergraduate shape my present, but I am no longer these things.

Puppetry gives us a unique way of articulating this complicated relationship with remembered selves. When Jones and Kohler manipulate Young A and Young B, there is a

simultaneous sense of the puppets as other than Jones and Kohler – they are literal objects,

ontologically separate from their operators – and at the same times they move according to the

motor intentionality of their puppeteers. They share a kind of embodiment-with-a-difference.

This gives the older versions of the character the opportunity to look at a younger version of

themselves.[52] Gerhard Marx remarks on a version of this relationship when he says of

Handspring's earlier work that "There is no better literalisation of this self-reflexivity (the self

looking at the self) than the intimacy between puppet and visible puppeteer as it plays out in

Handspring's work" (Marx 244-5). Indeed, there is often a sense in Handspring productions that

the character is somehow spread between the puppet and puppeteer, with both contributing

(sometimes conflicting) reactions to the action and environment of the play. But in *Or You Could*

Kiss Me, this sense of looking at the self is always temporally marked, so that the self observed is

not coextensive with the self of the present.

The confrontation with the past self is something altogether different, and it offers

different outcomes. According to Casey, the juxtaposition of the former self and the current one

through the process of remembering serves to strengthen the subject's present identity, as he

compares it to his earlier self (292). Jacobson takes the meaning of the experience one step

further, and her reading is perhaps more in keeping with Merleau-Ponty: she refers to the arrival

of the remembered past self as a "visitation" which brings to the surface the subject's otherwise

ignored relation between himself and his world (Jacobson 37). That is to say, a memory of one's

former self has the potential to reorient the subject towards the world, to remind him of his

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[52] Puppetry is not alone in creating an opportunity for a character to confront his or herself – video projections and audio recordings can have a similar effect. I would argue, however, that the tangibility of puppetry allows the various "selves" to interact in a way that video projection cannot, and that the relation between puppet and puppeteer comes closer to the "constitutes and is constituted by" relationship of remembering subject to past self that I describe above.

embodied interrelation to the objects and people around him. Most significantly, though, memories serve to connect seemingly disparate conceptions of the self, separated across time. As Casey puts it, "it is the same memories that unite our temporally disparate selves into one self: *my* self" (290). For some, like Trigg following Merleau-Ponty, it is the corporeality of the body that allows for this continuity between past and present. The various instantiations of the self are written on and recalled by the body: remembering itself is physical. Trigg writes that "It is this relation between memory and re-enactment that is vital: it not only renders the body the center of experience, but also implicates the body's retrieval of the past as being deeply emblematic of the specificity of the self, giving the self a temporal density that would be ultimately fragmented were memory a solely cognitive affair" (Trigg 17). If consciousness was not fundamentally embodied, in other words, there would be nothing concrete to hold together the I of the past and the I of the present.

In the photograph scene of *Or You Could Kiss Me*, Old B experiences a breakdown of this cohesive experience of self. Picking up one of the photographs, he asks, "Who's that? Who is it? Who?" (Bartlett 43), and Old A responds, "That's you when you still had your brown hair" (43). As Old B gets increasingly panicked, the Assistants reassure him with the same line: "(*Very gently, as a chorus*.) You. You, when you still had your brown hair" (44). Old B's reaction is described in the subsequent stage direction: "*Old B stares at the photo. His breath becomes very agitated. He is overcome by the sight of his lost self*" (44). In performance, Jones takes quick, shallow breaths, moving the puppet body so that Old B appears to do the same. He makes Old B tremble slightly, then stand abruptly, clutching at his chest as the other puppeteers rush to retrieve his oxygen mask. The photo does not properly jog his memory; the failed "visitation" of his former self, in which the self confronts him but he cannot recognize it, does not reorient him

in relation to the world as Jacobson implies; it only intensifies the disorder of his being-in-the-world.

Thus far, I have considered the ways in which memory *constitutes* the self – or how the self is determined and affected by the memories it recalls. Jacobson emphasizes this passive relation to memory by introducing the language of the gift and visitation: the subject is confronted by pieces of her former self through items in the world with which she interacts. But this is not to say that memory is merely an unintentional surprise, foisted upon the acquiescent subject. That sort of approach to memory suggests a lack of freedom on the part of the subject, and while Merleau-Ponty is suspicious of Sartre's overarching sense of freedom, he still subscribes to the notion of the subject as essentially free. In other words, while the subject's past invariably shapes his present, he is not predetermined by his past in some straightforward way. Instead, the subject enjoys what Casey calls a "bi-directional" freedom in memory, able to "consolidate the self I have been and shape the self I am coming to be" (291). The subject, in other words, has some agency in relation to the memory: he can choose how past memories are organized and categorized, as well as, to an extent, how those memories affect him in the present and future. Thus, the process of remembering is a relational give and take between past and present that engages both the memory and the subject in the active creation of the present and future self.

This is the process that breaks down for Old B in *Or You Could Kiss Me*. His struggle to remember is a struggle to reassert this agency of the rememberer, in order to consolidate the disparate selves of his past—represented physically by the multiple puppets and actors performing those past selves—as a way of understanding the self he is now. In order to understand how Old B approaches this quest, and ultimately succeeds in his attempts at self-

knowledge, I will explore in greater depth the different kinds of memory articulated in this production.

In Casey's *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, the author draws on the work of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in order to catalogue the many different modes of remembering. For the purposes of this play, two of Casey's modes are of particular significance: reminiscence and body memory. For the first of these two types of memory, Casey draws on Husserl and Heidegger rather than Merleau-Ponty. In reminiscence, he writes, the subject returns to the past in order to achieve some goal in the present. This goal may be pleasure itself—the subject may return to the past to enjoy the pleasant feelings associated with the memory—or it may serve a more specific function. Namely, as Casey points out, "We reminisce not only to savor but to understand, or re-understand, the past more adequately—where 'understand' retains something of its root meaning of 'standing under,' gaining an intimate perspective not otherwise attainable" (117). Reminiscing allows the subject to return to the experience with the distance necessary to make sense of it after the fact. "In reminiscing, we try to get back inside a given experience—to insinuate ourselves into it, as I have said—so as to come to know it better. Better, perhaps, than we knew it in its first flurry, which may well have been more disorienting than clarifying" (Casey 117). The subject is at once "insinuated into" a reminiscence, and productively set apart from it, able to analyze and organize its content from his more objective standpoint in order to tell the story in a meaningful way. This storytelling component is crucial for Casey – while reminiscence can be expressed by the subject to the subject, it is typically directed towards another, in the form of a narrative constructed from the past. Both the embodied experience of "insinuat[ing] ourselves" back into the memory, *and* construction of the past into language, are crucial. For John Russon, narrativization names the very process of unification that

memory allows, reuniting the multiple selves stretching out through time but rooted in the

same body. Russon writes that

> At both the implicit and explicit levels, our self-identity is accomplished as a telling of a
>
> story about ourselves—a story of reconciliation, a story in principle answerable to the
>
> terms of communication with others—an articulating of the identities and conjuring of
>
> the events so as to present explicitly to ourselves and to others a coherent vision of who
>
> we are. (Russon 97)

For Russon, then, reminiscence in particular—the mode of memory in which we revisit the past

in order to narrativize it into a story told by ourselves, about ourselves–seems to be the primary

mode of memory as self-knowledge.

Unsurprisingly, *Or You Could Kiss Me* is full of memories that could be classified using

Casey's definition of reminiscence. Old B's search for "proof" leads him back to earlier

memories, and those memories are woven together as a narrative. But reminiscing is not a

straightforward process of crafting a narrative. The complicated relationship between

reminiscence and self-identity in this play is evident in the squash game flashback.

As the stage directions clarify, this scene takes place at Capetown University in the

summer of 1971, nine weeks after A and B met but before their relationship became physical.

The Young A and Young B puppets, wielded by Jones, Millar and Caldwell, and Kohler, Luther

and Leo respectively, mime a squash game (Fig. 5). Old A and Old B observe the memory from

outside of the scene, unmanipulated. The squash game is physically demanding, for both the

puppet characters and for their puppeteers, who hold the heavy puppets above their heads and

contort their own bodies in order to move the puppets' legs, arms, and torsos convincingly

during this taxing and fast-paced scene. Jones and Kohler deliver lines in the past tense, but in

the printed script the characters are listed as their younger counterparts. The following section of dialogue makes this point (note that the "X's" indicate the speaker making contact with the ball, demonstrated onstage by a mimed action and sound effect).

YOUNG B: It was a long hot summer – X!!

YOUNG A: And they were Nine – X!

B: Nine-fucking-teen. X!!!!

A: X!!! (*A concise, infuriatingly clever winning shot by YOUNG A at end of rally. The ball rolls away across the floor as YOUNG B stumbles and falls.*)[53]

A: Got you. Actually, you were twenty. (60-1)

The variation in the character names is telling. Just as A and B's bodies mimic Young A's and Young B's, metaphorically hinting at the ways in which the actions of the younger men are somehow "sedimented," to use Matthews' word, in the bodies of the older ones, the identities of the younger and older selves overlap. A and B have literally "stepped into" the memory in order to narrativize it, going so far as to put their present words into the mouths of their past selves, as if their current understanding of events were evident even to this earlier instantiation of themselves. While the fluidity between character names is only present in the published script and not necessarily evident onstage, I would argue that the fact that Kohler and Jones each operate their puppet's racket arm, almost as an extension of their own, makes the visual point as strikingly as does the written text. Indeed, the sequence begins with Kohler and Jones holding the prop squash rackets themselves, before the puppets are brought into position and their own

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[53] In production, this action is not quite as clear – at the "fall," the puppets simply go limp and are carried to their next position. This makes A's "Actually, you were twenty" (Bartlett 61) seem even more like a line in the present, separated from the past which seems momentarily inert and distant.

racket-wielding hands overlap the puppets'. Like the photographs, but more effectively this time, an object transports the men backwards in time. Despite a few disagreements, like A's correction that B was in fact 20, not 19, the two men seem to share the same memory. They share the narrative and body sense, but quibble over individual facts.

Fig. 5. The cast of *Or You Could Kiss Me* with puppets Young B (left) and Young A (right) during the squash scene. Copyright Simon Annand.

Soon, however, that easy synchronism between A and B, past and present begins to erode. Almost immediately following the cited section above, the two find themselves within what the stage directions call "kissing range of each other" (61). Before their physical desires can be consummated, though, the two young men realize that they are being watched. We never see the janitor who caught them in this sexually-charged but innocent position, but we hear his voice, provided by the MC: "Hierde keer," translated by A as "Now I've got you," and "Het ek julle

gevang," translated as "I see you!" (62). The MC confirms the veracity of the memory,

saying her oft-repeated phrase, "This did happen" (62). However, when she and the Assistants

press B for his reaction to the janitor, B responds, "I said: leave it. Just walk away" (63), while A

contradicts, "He shouted at him…You shouted at him" (63). The Assistants stand holding Young

A and Young B uncomfortably poised over their heads as they wait for this disagreement to be

resolved, but such resolution never comes: B decides instead to skip forward in the memory,

"*staging it the way he wants to remember it*" (63). Taking over the controls for Young A, he

demonstrates how he recalls Young A leaving the court: waving goodbye without turning

around. Angrily, B tries to get A to agree to his version of the memory:

> B: I remember it. When you waved goodbye; you said;

> A: Not what I should have said.

> B: You said; …

> *A has had enough of this – he passes the line to an ASSISTANT to say –*

> A: I said see you tomorrow at twelve.

> ASSISTANT A: See you tomorrow then!!!! Twelve o'clock. (64)

This reminiscence divides the two men rather than bringing them together. When A wants to

distance himself from the memory, which he isn't proud of and which he refuses to enter into, he

passes the line to the Assistant in order to retain an element of detachment from the memory. Old

B, on the other hand, denies his memory entirely. The stage directions tell us that B "*knows [Old*

B] is lying to himself, but doesn't know how to help him" (64). The implication is that Old B

knows his version of events is false, but perhaps cannot allow himself to remember them

accurately. In a way, this scene performs the problem with narrativizing the past: the stories told

about mutual memories may conflict, either from misremembering or a kind of willful rewriting,

plunging the rememberers into a solipsistic form of reminiscence that, far from drawing

them closer to their interlocutors, cements rifts in the present.

Casey makes clear that reminiscence has a physical component – it occupies a "stance on

the borderline of … mind and the environing world" (144). In other words, as we have seen,

reminiscence relies on the body: the conflation of the puppeteers' bodies with the puppets' in the

squash scene literalize this fact. And yet, as I've pointed out, Casey calls largely on Husserl and

Heidegger in his descriptions of reminiscence. In order to consider a more strictly Merleau-

Pontian (and thus more strictly embodied) form of memory, Casey must turn to body memory.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, as we have seen, Merleau-Ponty discusses body

memory in terms of habit. Casey accuses Merleau-Ponty of being unnecessarily limiting by

reducing all body memory to habit, and he presents three additional kinds of body memory:

performative, traumatic, and erotic. The last two will be of particular interest to our current

inquiry. Casey distinguishes body memory from reminiscence as such:

> Instead of taking up a perspective on the past—getting a clearer 'view' of it as we often
>
> attempt to do in recollection or in reminiscence—in body memories we allow the past to
>
> enter actively into the very present in which our remembering is taking place. (168)

Reminiscence, in other words, involves a transportation of our present selves back to the past, as

information gatherers intent on excavating information of use to the present. While reminiscence

involves a bodily/worldly component – the photograph, the embodied memory of the squash

swing – it still affords the rememberer an element of detachment, permitting him to have one

foot in the present and one in the past. In body memory, on the other hand, the past rushes

forward into the present. Consider the old adage about riding a bicycle: even though I haven't

found myself on a bicycle for over a decade, I have reason to suspect that, if I were to try today, I

could easily find my balance and ride it down the street. This would not be a case of me reflecting on the ways in which my body moved in the past, and constructing a narrative of what that looked like for others. Instead, my body would simply remember and perform my past body in the present. In mundane cases like this one, Casey says, there is almost "an identity of past and present. But if the two were to become strictly identical, we could no longer speak meaningfully of *memory*, which calls for presence, however slight, of some *decalage* or differential between past and present" (168). All body memory, therefore, draws the past body into the present one, and in extreme cases, while that conflation can never be absolute, it becomes difficult to separate the two. Body memory is present, then, in the squash movements themselves in the previous scene, but not necessarily in the narrative surrounding the game.

One example of body memory that Merleau-Ponty overlooks, according to Casey, is traumatic body memory. Like habituation, trauma can enliven the past body in the present one. We see a version of this in one of the flashback sequences of *Or You Could Kiss Me*. While the memory discussed is not a conventionally "traumatic" one, I would argue that the performance of this moment meets the criteria of Casey's definition of traumatic memory, and that reading it as such is fruitful in approaching the play as a whole.

The scene is once again jogged by an object in the present world: this time, a particular song on a record transports B back to a party in the 1970s, just before meeting Young A. The Assistants perform the other party-goers, while Jones manipulates Young B alone, holding the puppet's large body in front of his own, its feet dangling off the floor. Since the Young B puppet is made to be manipulated by three people, Jones gets little movement out of the puppet, and the "life" of the object becomes a little harder to detect. When this happens, the focus shifts to B, whose head is down as if he is experiencing the discomfort of the party in real time. Around him,

the Assistants explain Young B's thought process in moments like this one: "Oh *god* the embarrassment. The embarrassment of waiting to get picked at the end of the evening" (54). As the last song of the evening plays, they begin directly narrating Young B's internal monologue: "oh shit shit shit shit shit […] somebody […] choose me" (54). As the Assistants seem to close in on B and Young B, Jones desperately utters the line "Somebody please touch me" (55). The published text attributes this line to Young B, but in performance the puppet's relative immobility combined with the expressiveness of Jones's face and body complicates this simple reading. It seems, instead, like B is uttering the phrase. The pain of this moment that took place years before enters into the present. There is a similar confusion between Young B and Old B at the beginning of the scene: when one of the Assistants in the flashback offers Young B a cigarette, Old B says "thank you" (53).

It might be said that this is simply a confusion on the part of Old B – his mind is "playing tricks" on him, making him think that he is back at this party. But the fact that B is similarly implicated in the scene suggests something else is going on here. In the previous scene, Old B sees a vision of Young B (prompted again by the photographs), and as the song begins to play that will lead us into the party flashback, the stage directions note that "*OLD B's mind pursues this clue [of the music] to his memory of himself when he still had a body like that*" (52). Again, it is the inability to recognize his past self as his own self, *united* (not divided) by his body, that plagues Old B. And so it is perhaps not surprising that it is in this scene, where the boundaries between the selves/bodies of the various B's become blurry, that Old B comes closest to his goal: Young B looks at him for the first time. But when Old B reaches for him, Young B is "*horrified by what he sees*" and disappears (55). Thus, this memory gets him closer to his former self and

the unity he seeks than ever before, but it is still not fully effective. In order to achieve the

self-knowledge he longs for, Old B must remember the first time he and A made love.

Like traumatic memory, erotic memory is essentially bodily. However, there are

important differences between the two. First, traumatic memory often emphasizes a fragmented

body, or a body turned against the subject. Pain can make the body seem other than the self, the

source rather than the victim of the trauma.[54] Erotic memory, on the other hand, emphasizes a

"robust intactness"(Casey 160). Casey doesn't explain this phrase, but one can extrapolate from

what comes before: if body memory is indeed the foundation of memory and self, then erotic

memory foregrounds the body in a way that does not undermine the creation of the self, as in

traumatic memory, but instead solidifies it.

The other difference between traumatic and erotic memory is in their relation to the

Other. If another is present in the traumatic memory, it is often as antagonist, the subject

standing over and against the body-object. In erotic memory, on the other hand, the relation

between self and other is blurred. As Casey writes, it is

> difficult to draw any strict dividing line in such a memory between myself-as-being-
>
> touched by the other and the other-as-touching me. The two of us form a dyadic pair who
>
> collaborate in the experience as it was once lived and is now being remembered. The
>
> members of this dyad are so intimately interlocked that I cannot say for sure where one
>
> leaves off and the other begins: the touched and the toucher merge in a phenomenon of
>
> interpersonal 'reversibility.' Each of us share in a genuinely common process that cannot
>
> be remembered without including both of us. Such dovetailing of self and other is rarely
>
> accomplished in other types of body memory. (Casey 158)

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[54] See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*

The lover and the beloved enjoy a kind of reversibility. This means that the lover, in a crucial way, is *part of* the beloved's subjectivity, and vice versa.

The climax of the play offers an example of this form of embodied erotic memory. After struggling with Old B's deteriorating health and memory for the whole play, Old A finally seems ready to properly engage with Old B's quest to understand their relationship in the present. This entails a shift in focus, from Old B's desperation to Old A's participation –Old A is alone at the beginning of Scene 12 for the first time (Bartlett 76). At the prompting of the MC, Old A wakes Old B. The MC tells A to "Tell us how you got here," and when A begins to describe the taxi drive from their lawyer's office to their apartment earlier in the day, the MC responds, "No; how did you get here" (76). The MC is prompting A to fill in the gaps for Old B between the few snippets he has previously remembered (the squash game, for instance) and their current lives together. In other words, the MC wants A to tell the story of how they fell in love. The implication is that Old B's stubbornness regarding his will, his inability to act appropriately in the present and make arrangements for his partner after his death (in the future), arises from a failing of reminiscence, his inability to tell himself a coherent story about his relationship with B.

It is telling that Old B cannot reconstruct this narrative on his own. As the MC tells us in the voice of the Lecturer we met earlier in the piece, "Memory is *not* a solitary activity. It can be verified" (77). As was the case earlier, the Lecturer seems both right and wrong. It is true that Old B needs Old A/A's intervention here in order to complete the narrative – solitary reminiscence is not enough. But the Lecturer's implication that A's role is to "verify" the facts rings false; we saw an attempt to do this work in the squash game, and it evoked more pain and frustration than it relieved. The idea of verifiable facts casts memory in terms of what Merleau-Ponty calls Objective Thought—the work he ascribes to an empiricist or scientist, which makes

sense given that the Lecturer is a doctor. But in performance, it is clear that what Old B

needs is not simply an objective, scientific reconstruction of the events. Rather, Old B seeks a

memory that is both *interrelational* and *embodied*. The memory he ultimately needs is a

phenomenological one and, more specifically, an erotic one.

While Jones and Kohler begin the scene by assisting in the manipulation of the elderly

puppets, they quickly separate themselves, standing at the edges of the stage light, facing each

other, speaking into microphones as does the MC, giving the impression that these three are the

most important characters in the narration to come. Meanwhile, two Assistants place Old A and

Old B in the remaining two corners of the stage, allowing them to "watch" the action from there.

The four Assistants return to the light with Young A and Young B, holding them facing each

other above their heads as they try to work out the details of the night. One detail causes some

argument among the Assistants: when Young A and Young B were out driving that night, did

they turn onto Constantia Road or Brommersvlei Road? "Does it matter?" asks one of the

Assistants. Another replies that it does, because "there were no streetlights on the Constantia

Road" (Bartlett 79). At this answer, the Assistants seat each of two young puppets on one of Finn

Caldwell's shoulders, as if they were seated in a car, and the group of Assistants begin to move

around the stage as if puppet Young B was driving with Young A in the passenger seat.

This debate about Constantia or Brommersvlei Road reveals the role of "facts" in this

flashback. The MC insists on accuracy, but not simply for the sake of objectivity. Unlike the

earlier argument about whether Young B was 19 or 20, these facts are significant insofar as the

environment impacted the young men's actions; without the proper road, with its darkness and

its possibilities, the encounter Young A and Young B are about to enjoy would be impossible.

Once the young men pull off the road into a quiet, dark, secluded spot, Jones and Kohler rejoin the Assistants to manipulate Young B and Young A. The puppets are lowered as they reach for each other, so that the bodies of Kohler, Jones, and the Assistants largely conceal the puppets on all sides. The audience can see glimpses of one puppet's hand caressing the other's face, for instance, but the overriding impression of the scene is not visual, but aural: specifically, the heated breathing of all the men onstage amplified by a handheld microphone held in their midst. The puppeteers' shoulders and the puppets move up and down along with this audible breathing, until the puppets break apart and lie back on the stage in post-coital satisfaction.

There are several things to note about this scene. First, we should recognize a transition from reminiscence to body memory at the climax of the scene: although the Assistants begin by arguing over which road the young men turned onto, the erotic scene is not narrated but enacted. As Casey argues, while body memories do not exactly resist sequential narration, neither do they cry out for it in the way that reminiscence does. Indeed, "[e]ven when we suspect that it does belong to such a story, our primary interest does not reside in knowing precisely how it does so: we leave any such concern to situations of reminiscence or recollection" (Casey 162).

The staging of the sex is significant to the conclusion. The crush of bodies surrounding Young A and Young B mimic those surrounding Young B in the traumatic party scene (obviously, they are even the same bodies), but whereas in the party scene those bodies represented an external threat to a body treated as an object (i.e. the limp puppet body held aloft by Jones), here they all seem to represent aspects of A and B, united by their shared breathing. Recall that breath is the foundational life force of Handspring's puppets, and that Zarrilli characterizes breath as a psychophysical disproof of the Cartesian boundary between mind and

body. Recall, too, that it is difficult to see which Assistant operates which puppet,

emphasizing the sense that this breath belongs to both puppets, as well as all of the Assistants, at

the same time. This is the most united the puppeteers and puppets become in this play, a physical

enactment of the "robust intactness" that Casey writes about (Casey 160). Indeed, when Young

A and Young B recline at opposite ends of the stage after their lovemaking, they do so by resting

on the reclining bodies of A and B respectively, so that the human bodies and puppet bodies hold

the same shape. Rather than mimicking puppet breath by purposefully moving the puppets'

shoulders or chests up and down, the puppets "breathe" vicariously through A and B's actual

breath, resting on their chests and rising and falling in the same rhythm. When a post-coital

cigarette is produced, it is B who smokes it, and A who provides the light, leaving the puppets

out of it entirely. Off to the side, Old B also smokes. This, I would argue, is the closest union of

past and present we have seen in the show, and it is accomplished through the bodies and breaths

of the participants. What it leads to, of course, is Old B's acquiescence: "Give me that bloody

form. I'll sign it!" (82).

Thus, I want to claim that the show's narrative and performance complement each other

while also cutting across each other in the same way that memory itself operates. Just as

reminiscence gravitates towards narration, the MC prompts the men to recall the details of their

lives together, filling in the gaps as accurately as possible. This is accomplished through

language, and requires the bodies of the participants and the world around them to prompt the

memories and allow for their recall. And yet, words do not produce the whole story. It is bodies,

in their interactions with each other and with their environments, that ultimately go where

narration cannot. The performance of the sexual encounter between the two young men,

essentially wordless, conveys an intactness and a blurring between self and other that exceeds the words used to describe it in the play.

In the next chapter, I will continue my exploration of the self-other relationship in the puppet theatre through the use of voice in Redmoon Theater's *The Cabinet*. Whereas my Merleau-Pontian reading of *Or You Could Kiss Me* ultimately emphasizes a *blurring* between self and other as the climactic moment of the production, the phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas provides me with a way to read the *impossibility* of blurring self and other as central to *The Cabinet.*

CHAPTER 4:

THE VOICE, CARTESIAN DUALISM, AND LEVINASIAN ETHICS IN REDMOON

THEATER'S *THE CABINET*

Voice and the Puppet Theatre

In Blind Summit's *The Table*, a production I mentioned in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, puppet Moses promises his audience an evening of "extreme puppetry" (7:16). And perhaps no moment lives up to that claim as fully as Moses's lesson on what he calls "focus." For Moses, focus seems to refer to both the puppeteers' focus and the puppet's. The latter is akin to the gaze or look discussed in Chapter 2 – Moses stares thoughtfully at the bare table top and tells the audience about the various flowers he sees, reminding them that "I can use focus to make you see things that aren't actually there" (31:33). The former refers to the focus of the puppeteers on his puppet body; he points out that he comes "into focus" when his three puppeteers turn their gazes onto him, but "I go blurry" when they look up at the audience (30:02). At the end of this sequence, Moses decides to test the power of focus to both bring the puppet into focus and to make the audience see things that are not there. Specifically, he claims that focus allows puppeteers to engage in puppetry without an actual puppet. He orders his puppeteers to leave his cloth and cardboard body on the edge of the table, lying on his belly in a comfortable-seeming repose. The puppeteers let go of his puppet body on Moses's command, and they immediately move their empty hands to the center of the table in the same formation they had adopted while holding Moses only a moment ago: Laura Caldow places her hands on the table as invisible Moses's feet; Sean Garratt's fists hover a few inches above, grasping invisible Moses's right arm and posterior; and Mark Down "holds" invisible Moses's left arm in his own left hand, while

turning his right hand into invisible Moses's head, complete with a new "mouth" made from Mark's thumb and four fingers, like the hinged mouth of a Muppet without the puppet body. In other words, while the physical Moses puppet lies on the edge of the table, the puppeteers mime their own version of his body. Mark Down brings his thumb and four fingers together to mime a talking mouth, and Moses's familiar voice says, "And I'm basically still here" (33:58). This new, invisible body takes the place of the cloth and cardboard one, and Moses stays "alive" to the audience.

Moses argues that the most crucial component of the puppeteers' technique, the one that keeps him "alive" during even the most outrageous experiments, is focus. And indeed, this theory holds true as the puppeteers stretch their arms wide to make invisible Moses "grow" and bring their hands close together to make him "shrink." However, things quickly get more complicated. After claiming he can "move all my body parts independently of each other" (34:42), the puppeteers' hands stop miming the invisible body of Moses and begin instead to operate seemingly autonomously, breaking away from their designated roles as part of the "body"—Moses calls this "break[ing] apart in a sort of German Expressionist way" (35:14). At this point, I would argue, it is difficult to support the claim that "focus" is at the heart of Moses's imagined life. Moses's experiments in "extreme puppetry" have truly stretched the puppeteers to the very edges of the form, until the puppeteers seem to leave puppetry behind altogether. Indeed, there is only one marker of life belonging to the original Moses that remains throughout this lengthy segment of experimentation, and it is not the puppeteers' "focus." Rather, it is Moses's gravelly, recognizable voice, which Mark Downs continues to provide even as the "body" splinters into oblivion.

In this chapter, I will explore puppet voice, arguably the most powerful and most nebulous of the markers of life discussed in this dissertation. As we see in Moses, the voice is capable of sustaining a sense of "life" even in the absence of a puppet body. This makes the voice a particularly stable and cohesive marker of life, but it also calls into question the embodiment that I have placed at the heart of my phenomenological reading of puppetry. Unlike movement and design, in other words, voice can maintain the puppet's coherent life even in the absence of the puppet, producing a mimetic "life" that is antithetical to Merleau-Ponty's embodied consciousness, and even counter to Sartre's notion of the Look. By considering Redmoon Theater's 2005 *The Cabinet*, I will argue that focusing on puppet voice as the primary marker of life in a production allows the performance to explore the limits of Cartesian dualism, and the ethics of choosing solipsism over a relationship with others.

As I have already mentioned, voice is the most oft-debated marker of puppet life. For some, voice is not of paramount importance to the life of the puppet. Steve Tillis, for instance, characterizes voice as the most dispensable of the life-evoking techniques—movement and design are essential in his opinion, but voice is optional (*Toward* 147). Indeed, as Tillis points out, many puppeteers, including American Bil Baird and Russian Sergei Obraztsov, conspicuously leave out or dramatically downplay speech in their definitions of puppetry (*Toward* 146). The plethora of mute puppets in the history of puppet performance justifies Tillis's assessment; one need look no further than Tranter's Faust from Chapter 2 of this dissertation for an example of a puppet who exhibits my definition of puppet "life" without ever uttering a word.

And yet, while voice is theoretically dispensable in the puppet theatre, other theorists imbue it with enormous power, both positive and negative. Prague School semiotician Petr

Bogatyrev emphasizes the uniqueness of voice as a conveyer of life in the puppet theatre on the grounds that "voice is all that remains from a live person, and it is through voice that puppets approximate living persons" ("Semiotics" 49). The voice originates from the human performer, thus bridging the gap between inanimate object and the living, breathing human being. While the puppet body is a manmade construction, often created from inorganic or dead materials, and its movements can be marred by artifice, Bogatyrev sees the voice as the most authentically "alive" part of the puppet. Kenneth Gross references this same function of the voice, but whereas Bogatyrev sees it as a point of unification between object and living being, Gross recognizes voice as a point of tension in the puppet theatre. He writes that "a puppet's words can never come from inside it. While a puppet's movements will seem to belong to the physical thing it is—even if moved by the hand of the puppeteer—the puppet's voice always comes from the outside. Its voice is always alien, never its own" (66-7). Gross and Bogatyrev name the same phenomenon: the voice of the puppet is more closely linked to the human being than any of the other markers of puppet life. But whereas Bogatyrev sees that connection as a way of nudging the puppet object towards the "life" side of the object/life dichotomy, making the puppet's imagined "life" seem more authentically real, Gross sees the "authenticity" or "liveness" of the voice as precisely that which reminds us that it cannot originate in the puppet, since the puppet remains always an object incapable of itself producing a voice. Both authors are correct: voice occupies a contradictory role in the puppet theatre. On one hand, a puppet possessing voice retains a connection to genuine life that the mute puppet lacks; on the other, the inclusion of voice tends to fragments the puppet character, emphasizing its objectness by drawing attention to its inability to produce this distinctly organic sound.

The disagreement between Bogatyrev and Gross highlights a powerful tension at the heart of puppet voice. Voice from Bogatyrev's perspective seems to adhere to my phenomenological, embodied reading of puppet life: the inclusion of a human voice in the performance recalls the (present or absent) body of the puppeteer/performer who utters it more directly than either design or movement. To put it differently, the puppet's construction may contain visible traces of the puppeteer's handiwork, and the puppet's movements may follow upon similar or very different movements of the puppeteer's own body, but the voice is the least dividable from its embodied source. Likewise, voice itself is a distinctly phenomenological phenomenon. It is created by the body, but as in the case of intentionality or consciousness itself, the voice does not remain enclosed in that body; rather, it always reaches beyond itself, projecting itself into the world around it and becoming itself through interactions with that world. This is what Steven Connor signifies in his book *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* when he suggests that voice is "the mediation between the phenomenological body and its social and cultural contexts" (12). Although this phrasing seems to suggest a distinction between the phenomenological body and the rest of the world, this mediation is of course at the very heart of phenomenology, which situates the human as a being-in-the-world, always already wrapped up in the world beyond itself. In this sense, voice offers an ideal site for the exploration of phenomenological embodiment, intentionality, and relationality.

On the other hand, as Gross's theories on puppet voice indicate, voice in the puppet theatre might have the opposite impact: rather than emphasizing embodiment, voice might highlight the impossibility of embodiment. Or, to put it another way: the puppeteer's voice may be embodied, but the puppet's voice always belongs to a body which is not its own. The connection between the puppet and its own voice is more tenuous than its movement or its

design. A ventriloquist, for instance, can throw his voice in such a way that the voice itself acquires a sort of "life" in its own right. Connor's history of ventriloquism makes clear that the ventriloquist dummy was a late addition to the form; nineteenth-century vocal performers threw their voices down wells or offstage, performing a living Other with voice alone (Connor 257-97). The voice in performance is complicated. It may be attached to the puppeteer, bringing the puppet along with it, as in Bogatyrev. It may attach to the puppeteer but leave the puppet behind, as in Gross. Or it may set out on its own, becoming its own mimetically living entity, as in Connor. It may contribute to the phenomenological "life" of the puppet, or it may undercut the entire premise of an embodied consciousness.

Fittingly, then, this chapter does not proceed with a straightforwardly phenomenological reading as the previous two have done. Rather, I will offer two possible philosophy-inflected readings of the use of voice in Redmoon Theater's *The Cabinet.* In the first half of the chapter, I will argue that the play employs puppet voice at precisely this nexus between phenomenological embodiment and disassociated, disembodied alienation. By throwing into question the very premise of phenomenological life that I have been working with throughout this dissertation, the play not only emulates a particular philosophy of life, but enters into the precise philosophical debate that began my exploration of puppet life: whether phenomenology or Cartesianism properly defines what it means to be a subject. In the second half, I will explore the play in relation to Emmanuel Levinas's ethical phenomenology and consider how Levinas's ethics conform to and diverge from the self/Other relations I have previously discussed in the work of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.

The Strange Status of the Voice in the Western Tradition

Language, and particularly speech, has enjoyed an outsized prominence in metaphysics for centuries, leading to charges of "logocentrism" from Derrida and his followers. And yet, as Adriana Cavarero writes in *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, "[t]he history of metaphysics should in fact be told as the strange history of the devocalization of logos" (37). Language, in other words, reigns supreme in the history of Western metaphysics, but voice—the musical utterance of sound vibrations produced by the lips, tongue, throat, and lungs of an individual human being—has been largely ignored. This separation of the aural quality of the voice and the content of speech has a lengthy history and a significant impact on subsequent philosophy. Aristotle was the first to acknowledge the distinction between the two; in the *Poetics*, he defines logos as *phone semantike* ("signifying voice") and man as *zoon logon echon* ("the living creature who has *logos* [i.e. a signifying voice]*"*) (Cavarero 34). Both *phone,* or voice, and *semantike*, or the signifying content of speech, are assigned to human beings in *Poetics*, but it is only the latter that elevates human beings above the realm of other animals. All animals have voice, writes Aristotle, but only human beings have the signifying capacity of speech which sets them above their animal subjects. The non-signifying voice is here coded as "an insignificant remain, an excess that is disturbingly close to animality" (Cavarero 34). Thus *phone* is relegated to the sidelines, important only insofar as it makes audible the thoughts of the human being. Indeed, the *semantike* can exist in the mind alone, unuttered, while the voice is distinctly corporeal. Plato takes this hierarchization one step further, espousing, as Cavarero writes,

> the firm belief that the more speech loses its phonic component and consists in a pure chain of signifieds, the closer it gets to the realm of truth. The voice thus becomes the

limit of speech—its imperfection, its dead weight. The voice becomes the only

reason for truth's ineffability; but also the acoustic filter that impedes the realm of

signifieds from presenting itself to the noetic gaze. (Cavarero 42)

Voice is not only inferior to mental signifieds, it constantly degrades their perfection in the

process of communication. As such, the goal of philosophy has been to access the *semantike* in

spite of and at the expense of the distorting and animalistic *phone*. Voice is coded as bodily,

animalistic, and feminine, while language is associated with reason, masculinity, and the mind.

Voice finds itself on the losing end of the dichotomy, trapped within "a system of signification

that subordinates speech to the concept; that is, that subordinates verbal signification to mental

signifieds" (Cavarero 34).

This prioritization of the *semantike* of the mind over the *phone* of the body parallels

Descartes's mind/body dualism, discussed in Chapter 1. Descartes, the father of modern

subjectivity, identifies his thinking self (the *cogito*) as the foundation of the self that he is. His

body, on the other hand, is akin to a machine for Descartes, capable of reacting to the needs of

the mind but not absolutely necessary for the existence of the self (Descartes does argue for the

existence of an immortal soul, after all). Although Descartes does not directly address the

category of voice in his *Meditations*, his cogito behaves linguistically (thinking, doubting, and

reasoning through the use of language), but not vocally (it is not necessary for the thinking to be

uttered in order for the cogito to exist). The cogito exists on the side of *semantike,* while *phone* is

as dispensable to Descartes as the body itself.

Philosophy, then, offers us two distinct kinds of voices: the voice of the mind (*semantike*)

and the voice of the body (*phone*). To prioritize the voice of the mind is to align oneself with the

Cartesian tradition the privileges mind over body, whereas an attentiveness to *phone* might be

seen as a nod to the phenomenological tradition which acknowledges the significance of embodiment. The play we will explore in this chapter uses both *semantike* and *phone* to tell the story of Cesare, a somnambulist controlled by the nefarious Caligari.

Redmoon Theater: A Brief History

Chicago puppeteer Blair Thomas founded Redmoon Theater in 1990. Eventual Artistic Director Jim Lasko writes that "Redmoon was founded as a puppet theatre with an equal focus on creating work in theatres and in streets and parks," but by the end of their history their focus had shifted to outdoor spectacles with an eye to promoting "community, creativity, and an empowered democracy" (Lasko 98). The company produced both outdoor, often free spectacles in 40 of Chicago's 77 neighbourhoods, and indoor theatre, either staged in their own theatre, Redmoon Central, or in collaboration with other local Chicago spaces like Steppenwolf and Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Their indoor performances frequently included literary adaptation like *Moby Dick* (1995)*; Frankenstein* (1996);[56] *Hunchback* (2000); and *Salao: The Worst Kind of Unlucky* (2000), based on Hemmingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Other productions, like *Once Upon a Time (Or The Secret Language of Birds)* (2007) and *Boneyard Prayer* (2008), were based on original scripts. Occasionally, Redmoon tackled theatre classics, as in their critically acclaimed 2012 *The Feast: An Intimate Tempest*, a reworking of Shakespeare's *Tempest* in collaboration with Chicago Shakespeare Theater, directed by Jessica Thebus and Frank Maugeri.

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[56] Although the final production of *Frankenstein* was performed indoors at Steppenwolf Theatre, it grew out of an elaborate series of community engagements undertaken by Redmoon in 1996. For more information about the project, see Lasko, "The Third Thing," *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, New York: Routledge, 2014: 100-2.

Like their indoor theatre, Redmoon's outdoor spectacles often combined puppets, performing objects, mask work, and unmasked live actors. In keeping with their commitment to "unexpected theater in unexpected locations" (Program, *The Cabinet* 2010), Redmoon performances can happen anywhere. Every Halloween from 1995-2002, Redmoon produced *All Hallow's Eve*, an outdoor spectacle in Chicago's Logan Square neighbourhood. In 2009, President Barak Obama invited Redmoon to perform a Halloween celebration at the White House. Meanwhile, other Redmoon spectacles have taken on more of a "flashmob" quality; *The Momentary Opera*, for instance, was mounted eight times from April to August of 2009, each time in a different public space. This two-minute musical performance involved a total of 43 singers (though not all of the performers were at each location) holding oversized two-dimensional masks with holes for mouths taking audiences by surprise in grocery stores, art exhibits, and parks to name only a few locations.

In 2014, Redmoon embarked on a new and ambitious project: The Great Chicago Fire Festival. The festival was named for the 1871 fire that decimated Chicago, and was meant to be a celebration of the city's resilience, both in the past and the present. It would involve a series of performances and venues (including a neighbourhood bazaar, fireworks, and a performance by the Chicago Children's Choir), and it would culminate in an enormous spectacle on the Chicago river: Victorian house replicas igniting in a huge fiery blaze while floating on the water. The city of Chicago contributed $350,000 to the $2 million event, and 30,000 spectators arrived for the climactic vignette. However, the houses failed to ignite, prompting the assembled audience to begin chanting "We want fire" (Lulay). The failure took a toll on Redmoon's reputation and funding, and even though the city still contributed $100,000 to a scaled down, more successful festival the next year, the company's finances were crippled. They found themselves in arrears

on their payments to their landlord, and in December 2015 Redmoon artistic directors Lasko

and Frank Maugeri announced that the company was closing its doors for good.

Design and Performance of The Cabinet

Of their indoor performances, *The Cabinet* was the longest running, premiering in 2006

and returning to Chicago in 2010 before touring to four Brazilian cities (Redmoon website).

Subtitled "A Spectacle in Miniature," *The Cabinet* combines elements of nineteenth-century toy

theatre, Japanese Bunraku, and shadow puppetry to bring Robert Wiene's German Expressionist

film classic *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) to the puppet stage. Like the film, this production

traces the narrative of a somnambulist manipulated by his doctor to commit murder against his

will. Redmoon's co-artistic director Frank Maugeri directed the first run, while Vanessa Stalling

took over the helm for the second. The text was written by playwright Mickle Maher.

The play follows the tragic exploits of a somnambulist committed to an asylum who

cannot recall a time when he was either truly awake or truly asleep. Although the asylum stay is

meant to treat his somnambulism, he finds himself under the control of the asylum Director, who

seems more intent on harnessing the somnambulist for his own nefarious plots than curing him.

The somnambulist discovers that the Director has developed a fascination with an eighteenth-

century mystic named Caligari, who manipulated his own somnambulist, Cesare, into

committing a series of grisly murders. Indeed, the Director has begun to identify himself *as*

Caligari, and referring to the somnambulist as Cesare. I will follow his lead, and refer to the

somnambulist as Cesare and the asylum director as Caligari throughout this chapter. Caligari

follows the exploits of his namesake, manipulating the mind and body of his own Cesare so that

the somnambulist, through his waking sleep, commits murders against his will: first a

nondescript clerk, then a young man named Alan whom Cesare knows and for whom he is particularly grieved. When Caligari sends Cesare to kill Alan's love, the Young Woman, her scream at the sight of him wakes Cesare from his somnambulism for the first time, and he flees with her in his arms. But what seems like a triumph does not last; Cesare again submits to his waking sleep, and he returns to the asylum to live out all of these events over and over, uncured and incurable.

The action takes place within a 12-foot tall 10-foot wide, dark wood cabinet, designed by Neil Verplank (Fig. 6). Harkening back to the expressionist source material, Verplank's cabinet eschews right angles: the edges of its drawers and doors to lean this way and that. These extreme angles are mirrored in the various black and white backdrops within the cabinet itself, designed by Margaret Goddard, but at the top of the show the doors are closed and the backdrops within invisible. There are three distinct levels of this cabinet. The bottom level consists of a series of small drawers on either side and a larger door in the center. On the next level – the center of the cabinet – two doors open to the sides to reveal the main playing area, a long rectangle in which the majority of the action takes place. Above, three side-by-side square doors can open individually. In her review of the 2005 production, Jennifer Schlueter compares the various cabinet compartments in which the action plays out to frames of a graphic novel, or, in a nod to the original *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, to the filmic language: the middle panel presents the action in a wide shot, while the top three panels offer the possibility of a close up (340).

Fig. 6. The set of *The Cabinet*.

There is a range of puppet styles utilized in this production: a pop-up book illustrates first

the patients in the asylum, then the original Caligari's murderous rampage; overhead projector

puppets[57] are used for Alan's murder and Cesare's vision of the Young Woman afterwards;

2D cutouts for fellow performers at the carnival where Caligari initially displays Cesare. But the

bulk of the action is performed by direct contact puppets. Caligari, Cesare, Alan, Young Woman,

and First Murder Victim puppets, designed by Lisa Barcy, all fit this description. Each puppet is

approximately 2 feet tall, with paperclay heads and jointed wooden bodies unseen beneath their

costumes.[58] The puppets' eyes are realistic doll eyes, some of which move: Caligari's shift back

and forth, and Cesare's eyelids can raise and lower. Both are manipulated by mechanisms hidden

in the hollow heads of the puppets.

Each direct contact puppet is manipulated by one to three visible puppeteers at a time.

Occasionally, puppeteers attach a rod to a puppet's hand or head to assist with manipulation, but

more frequently they grasp the puppet directly at the wrists, head, ankles, etc. Both puppets and

puppeteers mimic the expressionist aesthetic of the original film, with ashen complexions and

black, white and grey clothing. The puppeteers wear monocles and gloves, and often use tongs to

manipulate smaller items onstage, as if they are scientists observing the events even as they

create them. This makes the puppeteers seem like employees of the asylum, perhaps the

attendants Cesare refers to at the end of the play. The puppeteers' movements range from crisp

and abrupt to languid and controlled as they work their way acrobatically through the set,

swinging down into the middle frame from the top section or popping up from below.

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[57] These are like shadow puppets, in that they are two dimensional and rely on back lighting to
be visible, but the are produced by drawing figures on pieces of acetate and then manipulating
them under the light of an overhead projector. The figures are thus projected onto the cabinet
itself, making it visible to the audience.
[58] Only Caligari did not have a wooden body. His body was made of multiple layers of plastic
grocery bags. (Barcy, Personal Interview)

The voice of the somnambulist (Colm O'Reilly) narrates the story from an automated gramophone which appears from beneath the stage. In the opening minutes of the show, the large door in the center of the bottom level of the cabinet opens, and a gramophone slides out. The horn of the gramophone rises as if by its own accord, and a puppeteer's hand reaches out from within the cabinet to place the gramophone's needle on its record, allowing the narration to begin. This voice is soon identified as Cesare's, but it tells the story of the action onstage in past tense, creating more distance between the puppet Cesare and the voice emanating from the gramophone, which has the slightly hollow quality of a gramophone voice recording. On the rare occasions when other characters speak, they also come prerecorded from the gramophone, but are garbled and incomprehensible; the content of this speech is only intelligible thanks to captions projected above the cabinet itself.

The Cartesian Dimension of Cesare's Voice

Describing puppet "life" in this play, playwright Mickle Maher explains that it is complicated by "the added twist that one of the main characters, Cesare, is dead…I mean, he's asleep. So [sic] you're trying to evoke aliveness in something that is inanimate, and an aliveness that suggests deadness" (*The Making of the Cabinet* 1:41). I will turn to the "aliveness" that Maher refers to in a moment; for now, I want to consider the ways in which the puppeteers and designers manipulate Cesare in order to convey what Maher calls a kind of "deadness." As Maher makes clear, the character Cesare is, in fact, alive, but because he is never fully *awake*, he cannot be fully alive. This "deadness" can be seen in Cesare's design and in his movement. First, from a design standpoint, for the majority of the production, Cesare's eyes are closed, robbing him of the gaze that enlivened Tranter's puppets in Chapter 2. Even when Cesare's eyelids open,

with one exception that I will discuss momentarily, they do so only as the narration reminds us that Caligari has bidden it, and this verbal reminder prompts the audience to read the eyes as emptily staring rather than focusing with intention. His movements, similarly, are not intentional, but imposed upon him by Caligari and his assistants. The visible puppeteers take on an ominous meaning as their manipulation begins to indicate not Cesare's life, but their almost complete control over his body. While they continue to move Cesare in a lifelike fashion, the puppeteers sometimes emphasize their control over his body by treating him more like an object than a living thing, pulling him from one level to the next by his head or the front of his shirt and allowing his body to dangle lifelessly from their hands. Cesare becomes a puppet twice over: he is manipulated in the narrative by Caligari and in the performance by the puppeteers. His perceived consciousness, so crucial to his status as a puppet, is subsumed by the layers of manipulation which conceal his own thoughts, impulses, and motivations. His "deadness," then, lies in his lack of intentionality, borne from an almost complete lack of control over his body.

As Cesare's "deadness" is performed in his design and his movements, his "life" – that is, the part of him that appears to think, will, and desire – is largely confined to the voice. Cesare's voice represents the biggest difference between the original *Caligari* film and this puppet adaptation. In the film, the narrator is Francis, who witnesses Caligari and Cesare's crimes but is not himself a part of them. The film's Cesare remains silent throughout, a plaything of Caligari's without any clear personality of his own. By giving Cesare a voice, *The Cabinet* suggests that Cesare retains the capacity to feel, think, and desire. In other words, while his body may belong to the murderous Caligari, Cesare's narrating voice reveals a form of consciousness present within the tomb of an unresponsive body.

This type of consciousness is a far cry from the intentional, relational, phenomenological consciousness I have been referring to throughout this dissertation. Whereas phenomenological consciousness is an embodied, "public thing," as Sokolowski puts it (12), Cesare's consciousness seems to exist in spite of his body, which throughout most of the show refuses to react to the desires of his mind. Even when Cesare tries to resist Caligari's summons to commit murder, Caligari "patiently…tore the threads of [Cesare's] will," (42:42), leaving Cesare unable to act intentionally. If the phenomenological paradigm of puppet "life" no longer holds, what kind of puppet "life" is present in *The Cabinet*?

In order to answer this question, I shall consider precisely what kind of voice *The Cabinet* employs in the service of this new version of puppet "life." The opening moments of the play are informative in this regard. Before a word has been spoken, a gramophone slides forward from the lower third of the cabinet as if of its own accord. Similarly unassisted, the horn rises and the crank controlling the record begins to turn, setting the disk into motion. The gloved hand of an otherwise concealed puppeteer emerges from within the cabinet to set the needle onto the record, and then recedes into the darkness again before Cesare's voice utters first words of the show:

> Who can say? Perhaps the world had always been silent, long before, even, my story began. The world for its part might well be a dream, and like a dream, contain only the idea of sound, as a dream of genuine sound would wake its dreamer. (*The Cabinet* 1:00:13)

This opening scene is interesting for my purposes for two reasons. First, the use of a visible, almost autonomous gramophone as the conveyor of Cesare's voice serves to emphasize the disembodiment of that voice. In his discussion of cinematic voice-overs, film theorist Michel Chion writes that

Ever since the telephone and the gramophone made it possible to isolate voices from

bodies, the voice naturally has reminded us of the voice of the dead….Particularly in the

cinema, the voice enjoys a certain proximity to the soul, the shadow, the double…these

immaterial, detachable representations of the body, which survive its death and

sometimes even leave it during its life. (46-7)

Thus, Chion writes, "immaterial, detachable" depictions of the voice – such as the voice from a

gramophone – suggest a part of the self that is separable from the body, akin to the soul. The

inclusion of a gramophone emphasizes the disembodiment of the voice itself.

This disembodied voice has something in common with *semantike*, defined by Cavarero

earlier in this chapter. Recall that Caverero distinguishes between two kinds of voice: *semantike*,

or the voice of the mind, and *phone,* the voice of the body. *Semantike* refers to the content of the

voice without the mechanics: the language of thought, without the physical intervention of lungs,

tongue, teeth and lips. Naturally, the gramophone voice is not literally *semantike* – it was

produced by an actor for the audience's consumption. But within the narrative, Cesare's voice on

the gramophone operates as an example of *semantike*. Cesare is, after all, asleep. The voice the

audience hears is not directed to another, but merely the thoughts of a man unable to make

himself heard from within the tomb of his unresponsive body. As he says at the end of the play,

"here in my silence, this story is told only to myself. That is, to no one. To nothing. To the black,

shallow pools of a mind stripped of light. There is no one to listen. There is no one here" (*The

Cabinet* 55:57). The gramophone gives the audience insight into Cesare's mind, even as it

reinforces the disjuncture between the puppet body the audience sees onstage and the workings

of Cesare's mind.

The content of Cesare's openings lines further supports the division between mind and body implied by the presence of the gramophone. As I have already argued, the *semantike*/*phone* divide – between the voice of the mind and the voice of the body – offers a vocal equivalent for Descartes's famous dualism. In the opening lines of the play, Cesare's voice introduces a particularly Cartesian concern when he muses that "[t]he world for its part might well be a dream, and like a dream, contain only the idea of sound, as a dream of genuine sound would wake its dreamer" (1:00:13). In the First Meditation of Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes reminds his readers that "there are no conclusive indications by which waking life can be distinguished from sleep" (Descartes 19). This moment is part of Descartes's initial radical doubt, wherein he presents various arguments against the belief that he can trust anything at all about the world around him. Descartes eventually overcomes this radical doubt, and is able to say with certainty that the world around him does, in fact, exist. But even at the end of his Meditations, Descartes's rationalism retains a certain solipsism: while he is willing to concede that the world does exist and is not merely a figment of his imagination, the fact that he relies on his own mind to prove it opens himself up to the charge. Cesare perfectly sums up this Cartesian solipsism: the world, for Cesare, might very well exist only in his mind.

Thus, I argue that Cesare's puppet "life" eschews phenomenological embodiment, intentionality and relationality in favour of Cartesian dualism, which privileges the mind as the seat of the subject and views the body as a mere mechanical appendage, responding to the mind to varying degrees. This is not to say that puppet "life" is not phenomenological, as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation. Cesare's puppet "life" is portrayed as aberrant; that is, the mind-body disconnect experienced by Cesare is not a proper puppet life, but a life that conveys "deadness," or a lack of autonomy, as Mickle Maher suggests. The distinction here is similar to

the one I introduced in Chapter 1 between the domination metaphor as a theme in the puppet theatre, and the truth of the symbiotic relationship between puppet and puppeteer experienced by the puppeteers themselves.[59] In that case, I argued that the domination metaphor is a powerful one for puppet narratives, even though it assumes something inaccurate about puppetry (that the puppeteer imposes his will on the inert matter of the puppet in a straightforwardly top-down relationship). Similarly, *The Cabinet* reveals that puppetry is capable of depicting Cartesian dualism, but it does not undermine the phenomenological basis of puppet life as such in doing so.

Indeed, even in this play, there is a brief moment of genuine, embodied puppet "life" for Ceasar. Interestingly, it is precipitated by a moment of embodied voice, or *phone*. Against his will, Cesare is driven by Caligari's control to the Young Woman's home, where she is asleep in her bed. As he looms over her, knife raised, he tells us that he feels as though his facial features change into those of the Director, suggesting that Caligari's control over his body has become so complete that the two are now one. But she awakens before he can fulfill his grisly act. He presses a hand over her mouth as she struggles, and his narrative voice on the gramophone describes for the audience what is about happen:

> But all dreams desire their own endings, and have hidden within themselves each a way
> to find an end. Her scream. Not a scream one hears with sleeping ears, but alive, distant
> at first, as though emerging from the ends of a twisting subterranean corridor. Growing,
> insisting… (47:52)

Under this narration, as Cesare struggles with the Woman onstage, the musical soundtrack, which has provided plinking, sometimes atonal music to add drama throughout the piece, becomes a dull roar, quiet at first but growing louder as the narration suggests. This noise

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[59] See Chapter 1, pages 19-23.

morphs into her piercing scream, and it is the scream that ultimately awakens Cesare, allowing him to rejoin the world outside of his own sleeping mind. At the moment when he appears to lose his subjectivity most fully, when his very facial features succumb to those of Caligari, the pure vocality of the Woman's scream has a restorative effect.

I will consider the ethical and phenomenological dimension of this climactic scene momentarily, when I turn to the work of Emmanuel Levinas. For now, I simply want to highlight that this scream brings Cesare back to phenomenological life or consciousness – that is, back to the reunification of mind and body – by first staging a reintegration of body and voice in the Young Woman puppet. When the Woman struggles free from Cesare's grasp and emits the climactic scream, a moment of trick puppetry emphasizes the reunion of mind and body by joining puppet body and human voice despite the limitations of the puppet body. According to Kenneth Gross, as I pointed out earlier, voice in the puppet theatre almost always results in an element of fracture, since puppets' lips cannot form human sounds realistically. The scream is an exception; a puppet's mouth may perfectly (or slightly exaggeratedly) mimic the gaping "O" of a scream. The Young Woman of *The Cabinet* has no such gaping mouth; her small lips are pursed throughout the production, and the solidity of her construction belies no hint that this tiny mouth could ever open, whether to speak or to scream. In fact, this is the case—the Young Woman puppet is incapable of opening her closed lips. But there is a clever secret to her design: on the back of the Woman's head, hidden by her hair, is a second face, its eyes wide with terror, its mouth agape in an exaggerated scream. The puppeteer merely turns the puppet around while simultaneously flipping its hair in the other direction, making it seem, momentarily, as if the face has, impossibly, shifted expressions. This moment is even more effective *because* it undercuts the audience's expectations of what the puppet can physically achieve; the perceived

impossibility of the sound of the scream coming from the puppet and of the puppet changing

facial expressions drives home the fact that the Cartesian fragmentation to which the audience

has become accustomed has been briefly overcome. In response to this unification of voice and

body in the Young Woman puppet, Cesare undergoes a similar (if slightly less dramatic) shift:

his eyes open, and for the first time he seems capable of truly seeing, rather than staring as if in a

dream state. As he looks from his own hands to the woman, the narration tells the audience "I

was...awake! For the first time, awake!" (*The Cabinet*, 48:39). After the reunification of mind

and body, exemplified by a change in gaze and movement, Cesare performs phenomenological

puppet "life" for the first time.

Levinasian Ethics in The Cabinet

        Thus far, we have considered the role of the voice in producing the complicated Cartesian

life of Cesare, allowing for a division between mind and body that is mended in the one moment

of true wakefulness experienced by the character. On this level, we might say that the play

argues that consciousness is properly phenomenological; only Caligari's mystical machinations

open the door for Cesare's Cartesian dualism. However, there is another phenomenological

reading of this play, and like the previous two chapters, it hinges on relations with others.

Specifically, I want to argue that *The Cabinet* offers a glimpse of Emmanuel Levinas's radical

alterity in action.

        Like Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, Levinas considers himself a part of the

phenomenological tradition, following in the footsteps of Husserl. And like them, he is critical of

many aspects of Husserl, particularly what he sees as Husserl's prioritization of thinking and

knowing at the heart of the phenomenological subject's relation to her world. As I pointed out in

Chapter 1, Heidegger is the first to famously break with Husserl's so-called intellectualism,

by emphasizing "being-in-the-world" rather than consciousness or traditional intentionality.

Levinas takes up this criticism of Husserl, but also finds himself at odds with Heidegger's

emphasis on "Being." Specifically, Levinas famously argues that "First philosophy is an ethics"

(*Ethics* 77). In other words, before the subject comes into relation with Being as such, he first

encounters the Other—that is, his fellow human being. To put it succinctly, whereas Heidegger's

human being is fundamentally, at his core, a meaning maker who, by his very existence,

organizes the world in meaningful relations to himself, Levinas's human being is fundamentally,

at his core, an ethical being who, by his very existence, finds himself in "a relation of infinite

responsibility to the other person" (Critchley 6).

Thus, for Levinas, a relationship to others is primary to the construction of the self, not an

afterthought. Whereas Heidegger sees others as "the they," capable of concealing one's true

relationship to Being, Levinas places others at the heart of the formation of an autonomous

subject.[60] But what does this ethical relation to the Other look like?

In order to explain the exemplariness of the Other, Levinas introduces the terms totality

and infinity, which together comprise the title of his first major philosophical work published in

1961. Levinas characterizes the history of philosophy as an urge towards totality, which he

describes as "an attempt at universal synthesis, a reduction of all experience, of all that is

reasonable, to a totality wherein consciousness embraces the world, leaves nothing other outside

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[60] There are historical reasons for Levinas's focus: in the light of the Holocaust and Heidegger's infamous endorsement of the National Socialist Party, Levinas struggled to understand how an intellectual giant like Heidegger, whose work Levinas idolized, could be so enormously and tragically wrong about the Nazis. Levinas retrospectively saw in Heidegger's work a diminishment of true ethical relationality between individuals, potentially opening the door for the kind of dehumanization of the Other that characterized Nazi Germany (Critchley 13).

of itself, and thus becomes absolute thought. The consciousness of self is at the same time

the consciousness of the whole" (*Ethics and Infinity* 75). This is what Sartre wryly refers to as

"digestive philosophy" (Sartre, "Intentionality" 4, in Critchley 16): a sense in which everything

is reducible to knowledge, in which nothing in the world exceeds the colonizing impulse of

consciousness. Consider, for instance, Descartes's wax example from Chapter 1: in order to

"understand" the wax, Descartes must turn inward, using his rational capacity rather than

empirical evidence in order to define what the wax truly is.[61] Nothing stands apart from

consciousness, because everything is mediated through consciousness: knowledge of the self is

the grounding of all other knowledge.

However, Levinas sees in Descartes the possibility of something outside of totality. In the

case of Descartes, this is the idea of infinity. When Descartes explores his own conscious mind,

he discovers that he has many ideas that he might reasonably attribute to himself – that is, ideas

that he could logically have created – but one idea that he cannot easily explain. As a finite

being, Descartes claims, it is impossible that he could create the idea of infinity. This argument

relies on Descartes's acceptance of the Aristotelian premise that a being with less objective

reality cannot create something with more objective reality. In other words, while Descartes is a

finite substance, and thus might be able to imagine a plethora of other finite substances, the fact

that he is finite bars him from creating an infinite substance in his own mind (Descartes 32-3).

And yet, he finds that he possesses an idea of infinity within him. Descartes writes that "although

the idea of substance is in me by virtue of the fact that I am a substance, that fact is not sufficient

to explain my having the idea of an infinite substance, since I am finite, unless this idea

proceeded from some substance which really was infinite" (31). This is a pivotal moment in

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[61] See Chapter 1, page 30.

Descartes's meditations. It constitutes Descartes's first proof for the existence of God, the infinite substance outside of Descartes that put the idea of infinity into him. It also offers to Descartes the first step outside of himself: Descartes uses this realization of the idea of infinity within him in order to combat the solipsism of the cogito.

For Levinas, what is important about this moment in Descartes is the acknowledgment of something that exists outside of the totality of consciousness. That is, the idea of infinity represents for Descartes something that cannot be "digested" into consciousness, but must rather point beyond the individual, necessarily outside of his consciousness and, at the same time, preceding and constituting it. For Levinas, this idea of infinity is personified by the Other. The Other is he who cannot be understood or, as Levinas puts it, "synthesized," into the self (77). Rather, the relation between self and other is one of "radical alterity," in which the Other remains utterly distinct from the self. This cannot be a relationship of empathy, in which the self acknowledges that he 'knows how the Other feels.' Levinas emphasizes the ultimate foreignness of the Other as that which allows him to exist outside of the totalizing impulse of one's consciousness. Levinas's approach to the Other stands in opposition to Sartre's from Chapter 2. For Sartre, the encounter with the Other spawns a competition, wherein the self tries to dominate the Other, reconstituting him as an object in the self's world rather than a subject in his own right. This reintegration of the Other into the known world of the self is foreign to Levinas's philosophy. For Levinas, the subject's encounter with the Other is fundamentally one of radical alterity which cannot be reintegrated into the existing matrix of the subject. The ultimate seat of this alterity, according to Levinas, lies in the face of the Other, which is "present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed" (Levinas, "Ethics and the Face" 515).

What exactly does Levinas mean when he refers to the face of the other? On one hand, Levinas uses the language of the face to signify the particularity of the encounter with the Other. As Michael L. Morgan writes, the encounter with the face is "concrete and particular…this woman's responsibility and this man's suffering" (61). That is, the face of the Other does not simply "stand in" for a more originary otherness beyond the individual, or remind the self of a generalized responsibility to *all* others; rather, the face-to-face encounter is a call from one particular individual to another, which the self recognizes and affirms with a feeling of utter responsibility for the other. This responsibility to the Other, experienced time and time again through countless face-to-face encounters, grounds Levinas's subject just as Descartes's God grounds his own. That is, as Levinas writes, "responsibility [is] the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity" (*Ethics and Infinity* 95). The self is formed as a self through these ethical relationships with others.

The phenomenological status of the face is one of Levinas's most complicated ideas, and while a more complete discursion on it lies outside the scope of this chapter, I must make one crucial point. When Levinas writes about the face, he is not referring *only* to an actual human face available to one's perception. While it is true that the face-to-face encounter in Levinas is meant to name a concrete relationship between individuals in the world, and that at times Levinas speaks of the face as a literal, empirical face of the Other, there is also a transcendent moment in Levinas's rhetoric that cannot be ignored. As Levinas says, "The relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that" (*Ethics and Infinity* 85-6). In other words, while Levinas considers himself a phenomenologist, the face exceeds phenomenological vocabulary: phenomenology is the study of phenomena as they appear to consciousness, Levinas argues that the face itself is not a

phenomenon or an appearance, but an "epiphany" ("Ethics and the Face" 520). The face "is

neither seen nor touched—for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the

alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content" (Levinas, "Ethics and the Face" 515).

To speak of the face in terms of perception attempts to place the face within the totality,

"enveloping" the Other within the familiar context of the I. Instead, Levinas's face is an example

of infinity: something so utterly other, like Descartes's God, that it pre-exists appearance and

phenomena. For the rest of this chapter, I will be focusing on the empirical side of Levinas's

dealings with the face, rather than this nod to transcendence. In order to properly appreciate

Levinas, however, one must keep in mind the presence of both sides at once.

After Cesare, under the control of the Caligari, kills Alan, *The Cabinet* stages a literal

face-to-face encounter between Cesare and the Young Woman. Cesare is consumed by the horror

of murdering "the only happiness, the only sanity inside my sad, small dream" (34:49), and he

happily believes that he will now die, thus escaping the misery of his life. Against his wishes,

however, Caligari nurses him back to health and confines Cesare's struggling body once more to

the small, coffin-like cabinet in which the latter is kept.[62] The stage lights go out, and the

audience sees what Cesare sees within the cabinet: total darkness. The voice on the gramophone

continues: "Of the reality of what happened next in my story I still am not certain. It may have

been a dream. My only one. For my cabinet after—an hour? A minute?—was opened. And all

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[62] Cesare's attempt to resist Caligari in this scene is one of the few examples of Cesare's body responding to his own desires rather than Caligari's. Although Caligari succeeds, Cesare's struggles suggest that the connection between Cesare's mind and his body has not been completely severed. Another example of this resistance occurs early in the play, when Caligari tests Cesare by having him hold his hand over a burning candle flame; Cesare reaches out to the candle, but retracts his hand hastily when he is burned. Cesare seems to be capable of automatic responses (ones prompted by bodily fear or pain), but even in these cases his eyes stay closed, and he remains mostly under the control of Caligari.

there was was face. Her face. With nothing, no world around it. Her face, the dark-haired girl, Alan's love" (40:36). Cesare's vision is enacted by overhead projector puppets in the three top panels of the cabinet, which now act as projection screens. At first, the visual of the Young Woman's face is fragmented. In the three screen panels at the top of the cabinet, there are three colour overhead projections of individual parts of the woman's face: her lips first, then her ear, then her eye. The images begin to scroll upwards, first depicting a mass of her hair and then a complete profile of her face, spanning all three panels and looking down upon the puppet stage below. Next, overhead projector puppets of both the Woman and Cesare come together on the screen until the two transparent puppets overlap, his left eye aligning with her right one.

While this encounter between Cesare and the Woman seems to be staging a Levinasian face-to-face encounter, it lacks the crucial component of radical alterity. Cesare recognizes the woman as "my twin" with "a face of grief like mine, and, with the meeting of our eyes, horror like mine" (41:14). The relation between Cesare and this Other is one of similarity, perhaps so much so that the Woman may dissolve into a figment of Cesare's own psyche—he cannot tell whether he is still dreaming or not. Here, I would argue, Cesare attempts to integrate the Woman into his own frame of reference, treating her as totality rather than infinity. Disturbingly, the overlaying of the overhead projector puppets' faces – when Cesare's eye merges with the Young Woman's eye – seems to foreshadow Cesare's horrific sensation of his own facial features becoming Caligari's as he looms over the Young Woman's sleeping body, knife raised in his hand. There is potentially something destructive—or, to borrow Sartre's language, digestive— about this kind of relation to the other.

Indeed, this non-Levinasian encounter with the Woman's face has no lasting effect on Cesare; despite his attempt at resistance, Caligari "patiently…tore the threads of [Cesare's] will"

(43:34), and an off-screen puppeteer places a knife in the hand of the overhead projector

puppet Cesare. Cesare is called to murder the Woman immediately after experiencing this

moment of empathy or connection with her.

By Levinas's own admission, the image of "the face" is limited, offering a too-simplistic,

perceptual example of the encounter with the other. While Levinas's emphasis on the face of the

Other seems sequestered to the realm of the visual, it is in fact intimately entwined with speech;

at times, Levinas goes so far as to conflate the two, as in his claim that the "attestation of oneself

is possible only as a face, that is, as speech" (Levinas, "Ethics and the Face" 520). Other times,

Levinas appears to prioritize words in the experience of radical alterity, writing that "[a]bsolute

difference, inconceivable in terms of formal logic, is established only by language" ("Ethics and

the Face" 515). By speaking, says Levinas, the Other makes possible a "divergence that

inevitably opens between the Other as my theme and the Other as my interlocutor, emancipated

from the theme that seemed a moment to hold him, forthwith contests the meaning I ascribe to

my interlocutor" ("Ethics and the Face" 516). In other words, although Levinas most often refers

to the face as the site of the Other's radical alterity, "Face and discourse are tied. The face

speaks" (Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity* 87).

On the topic of speech, Levinas makes a crucial distinction between what he calls the

Said and the Saying. The Said describes the content of the speech – that is, the language used to

signify what is being spoken about. The Saying, on the other hand, is the act of speaking itself.

Levinas privileges the Saying in the ethical relation to the Other. He writes that "the *saying* is the

fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it" (*Ethics

and Infinity* 88). The fact that the face speaks requires a response. Thus, the "Saying" of the face,

regardless of the "Said," forms the basis of Levinas's ethics.

As Cavarero points out, there is a strange asymmetry to Levinas's choice to "resolve speech in the face" (Cavarero 27). Levinas privileges the act of speaking over the content of the speech, because the act of speaking is bound to the individual who speaks. But when he describes that individual in his/her individuality, he refers to the face, rather than the voice. As Cavarero points out, "this Saying, precisely because it is a *saying* – in spite of what Levinas himself claims – implies the voice rather than the gaze" (181). Thus, for Cavarero, the "ontology of uniqueness" – or, as Levinas would have it, the Other's radical alterity –should be rooted in "the phenomenology of voice, rather than in that of the gaze" (181) because "[w]hen the human voice vibrates, there is someone in flesh and bone who emits it" (4). Like Bogatyrev and Gross, Cavarero links the voice (*phone*) to the physical body that utters it. It is therefore impossible to universalize voice; each voice is different, recognizable, and emphatically tied to its speaker. Language (or *semantike*), by contrast, prioritizes the act of signification, the production of meaning through the strictly regulated process of combining words and phrases. While an individual's particular language may vary depending on his or her nationality, dialect, or culture to name but a few criteria, language as such—that is, the signifying capacity of words linked in meaningful units—makes no such claims on the individual speaker or the individual body. *Phone,* for Cavarero, fills the same function that Levinas's idea of the face does, even if Levinas himself does not explore the possibility of aural alterity.

I have already described the climactic moment of the Young Woman's scream as the moment when Cesare first experiences true phenomenological embodiment. But it is also the first moment of true relationality in the play. In Cavarero's terms, the scream is pure *phone*, leaving aside the *semantike*. It is, in other words, an ideal example of the "ontology of uniqueness" Cavarero sees Levinas striving for in his discussion of the face, but that she prefers

to situate in the voice. The scream does not offer language; only the visceral sound of the Young Woman's particular, individual, ununiversalizable voice. Cesare describes her scream as "Not a scream one hears with sleeping ears, but alive" (47:52). The scream cannot be part of the totality, integrated into Cesare's dream state like the Young Woman's face was moments ago. Even the audience is made to feel in their bodies the significance of the scream: in the production, the scream erupts from the speakers of the small theatre at a previously unused decibel.

I have already mentioned that the Young Woman's scream brings Cesare back to his body, but it also awakens in him an ethical response that had previously lain dormant. He says that once he awoke, "I ran with her. Thinking what? To escape, to save her, to save us both. I ran." (48:45). In response to the Young Woman's scream, he finds himself responsible for her.

It is the scream, then, that ultimately brings Cesare back to life, and it does so in two ways: through its reconnection of the mind to the body, and through its evocation of true relationality between self and Other. The first example, which I want to call the anti-Cartesian activity of the scream, is the way in which the scream regrounds the articulate, self-reflexive voice of the mind in the body. The second reveals the relationship between self and Other as a properly ethical one, predicated not on similarity, but on the alterity of the Other's infinity, grounded in the pure vocality of the voice.

And yet, Cesare's newfound phenomenological embodiment and relationality is short-lived. After finding himself on a grassy hill with the Young Woman, Cesare stares up at the stars overhead, and the narrating voice from the gramophone tells us that he imagines them to say, "to be awake is to resist the weight of us and all else. The iron tonnage of the conscious woken world" (51:35). In other words, wakefulness comes at a cost – it takes effort to carry its weight.

In particular, he says, the murders he has committed, "horrible enough in sleep, now shown blazing in my woken mind – unbearable" (49:41). Cesare quickly discovers that wakefulness, or true consciousness, is not the release that he had hoped it would be; although he is free from Caligari's machinations, he is now feels himself subject to the responsibilities of the conscious subject—that is, the ethical call of the Other. It is precisely that relationship with the Other that his sleeping self abnegated, and the guilt of that transgression crushes him now that he is awake. As the Young Woman wakes up beside Cesare in one of the top frames of the set, the unseen puppeteer slowly closes Cesare's black-lidded eyes, and allows his body to slump against the side of the frame. The puppeteer pulls the door of the panel shut, and the stage is plunged into darkness. Cesare's voice on the gramophone says, "Because all our wrongs wake with us. One doesn't surrender ever to sleep; one retreats there, on surrendering to the heaviness of all this life. And so I did, again. Retreat" (51:41). Cesare chooses to withdraw from the world entirely rather than continue this newfound relationship with another. He willingly returns to his somnambulist state, leaving embodiment and relationality behind.

The final moments of the play confine Cesare yet again to a world delimited by his own mind. Cesare sits on a chair in the centre of the otherwise empty bottom panel of the set, his eyes still closed, trembling slightly, a single puppeteer watching him intently as they manipulate him. The voice on the gramophone says: "I thought once that I might escape and awake and tell my story to whoever might listen. But here in my silence, this story is told only to myself. That is, to no one. To nothing. To the black, shallow pools of a mind stripped of light. There is no one to listen. There is no one here."[55] This ending reminds the audience of the peculiar status of the gramophone: it allows the voice to travel forth from the body through time and space, connecting the speaker to a remote listener. But the relationship is not reciprocal. The sacrifice he makes for

returning to the comfortable confines of sleep is a great one: by shirking his ethical duty to others, he loses others – and, thus, a fully realized version of himself – entirely. Cesare's "silence" is in fact the sound of his own voiceless articulations, echoing into an abyss.

CODA: FINAL THOUGHTS

In his review of *Or You Could Kiss Me* for *The Guardian,* Michael Billington wrote, "The question is: what does the story gain by being told by near life-size wooden puppets operated by seven black-suited figures[?]." While Billington offers a few tepid answers to this question – that puppets emphasize "the particularity of each moment" and "the dramatic power of silence," he ends his three-out-of-five-stars review with the conclusion that "while dazzled by technical finesse, I began to crave, after 100 minutes in the company of puppets, the spontaneous combustion created by the presence of living actors" (Billington).

Although Billington attributes his misgivings towards the show to a lack of "spontaneous combustion," his problem initially seems to be his inability to answer the question: "why puppets?" Without a clear understanding of how the form of puppetry might intersect in enriching and provocative ways with the story being told, Billington focuses instead on the "technical finesse" of the production. This is a form of a criticism Basil Jones says he hears often: "lovely puppets, pity about the text" (Jones 256). Jones attributes this reaction to the primacy of the puppet's Ur-narrative of its own "life" over the events of the narrative, as well as the primacy of movement over language in the minds of puppet audiences. As I have been arguing in this dissertation, I maintain that the criticisms like Billington's are born not from a fundamental tension between narrative and puppet performance, but from an insufficiently robust critical vocabulary with which to describe the interrelation of the two. In this final chapter, I will summarize the ways in which my phenomenological approach offers new interpretive models for puppet performance to fill this gap. I will identify both the strengths and limits of this approach, and offer potential paths for future research.

The core argument of my dissertation is that the imagined "life" of the puppet should be understood in conjunction with phenomenology; that is, as relational, intentional, and embodied. This claim holds true for all three of my case studies, and I posit that it is true of all puppet theatre. While scholars like Steve Tillis and Penny Francis have worked to codify elements of puppetry's imagined "life," these earlier explorations pointed only to the techniques used by puppeteers to signify life in the object: movement, design (or "presence" in Francis's taxonomy), and sometimes voice. These lists offer some insight into *how* imagined life is produced, but they do not in themselves expand the theoretical vocabulary that critics and audiences can use to talk about that life. To put it another way, Billington's question "why puppets?" cannot be sufficiently answered with these definitions.

The benefit of my model of phenomenological puppet life for puppetry in general is the multifaceted interpretive world that my definition opens up. When puppet life is defined phenomenologically, it can be brought into conversation with the many aspects of the phenomenological tradition. In each of my three case studies, I investigated the theories of a single phenomenologist in relation to the performance. In the preceding chapters, I have used Sartre's description of the Look to describe interpersonal relations in *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Merleau-Ponty's motor intentionality as a catalyst for an exploration of embodied memory in *Or You Could Kiss Me*, and Levinas's concept of radical alterity as the foundation of the ethical world presented in *The Cabinet.* In each case, the performance also illuminated or challenged something about the philosophical interlocutor I have chosen. Although *The Seven Deadly Sins* largely supported Sartre's vision of being-for-others, I argued that the audience's relationship to the puppets onstage offered an alternative model for a less antagonistic model of human relations. In Chapter 3, I followed Edward Casey's suggestion that Merleau-Ponty's body

memory needed to be expanded beyond habit alone to categories like erotic and traumatic body memory, which I identified as crucial to narrative resolution of *Or You Could Kiss Me*. Finally, in Chapter 4, I suggested that despite Levinas's frequent use of the image of the face as the site of radical alterity, the voice is a more accurate choice. In each case, then, the philosopher illuminated something about the puppet performance and narrative, while the performance offered subtle critiques of or additions to the philosophical model.

Reading these plays phenomenologically led to the reoccurrence of similar themes, but in keeping with the variety of conflicting opinions within the phenomenological tradition, the readings were often at odds. For instance, all three productions explored relationships between individuals, a theme that is both a theatrical mainstay and a crucial question for phenomenology. Since phenomenology conceives of consciousness as a relation between the self and the world, interactions with others are of critical importance to the perceiving subject's relationship to the world. However, all three case studies approached these relationships differently. Sartre's being-for-others is predicated on a complicated combination of mutual antagonism and a need for recognition, as Tranter's *The Seven Deadly Sins* explores at length. In Casey's reading of erotic memory, inspired by Merleau-Ponty's body memory, the lover experiences the memory of himself and his beloved as a kind of "reversibility," where the borders of one ending and the other beginning become blurred. Although this reversibility has something in common with the dominating attitude of the Sartrean subject, who seeks to make the Other into a part of his own project, Casey's erotic reversibility is one of intimacy, not domination, as the climactic moment of *Or You Could Kiss Me* suggests. Levinas's radical alterity eschews any hint of sameness or reversibility, suggesting instead that it is the very asymmetry between individuals that leads the self into a relationship of utter responsibility for the Other, a relationship that Cesare is unable to

fulfill in *The Cabinet.* The ability of the phenomenological approach to sustain all of these

contradictory readings is one of its strengths.

Indeed, the three analyses offered in this dissertation only begin to explore the many

possible interpretations. When selecting the philosopher whose theories I would bring to bear on

each production, I chose the philosopher whose theories seemed to fall most in line with the

techniques foregrounded in the creation of puppet life in that performance: the gaze, movement,

or voice. However, every puppet performance relies on a variety of techniques to create

imagined life in the puppet. As Alissa Mello points out, voice is just as significant to Tranter's

work as the puppet's gaze (Mello 156-9). Although I have argued that Tranter's puppets can

"live" without speaking but not without looking, the centrality of the voice to Tranter's hinged-

mouth puppets deserves further attention. When I asked Lisa Barcy, designer of *The Cabinet*'s

puppets, what life-creating technique was most important to that show, she suggested that eye-

lines were central, rather than my suggestion of the voice. Although I argue that the techniques I

have chosen to foreground in each chapter are the ones most central to the creation of puppet life

in each production, they are not the only techniques that may be considered in relation to the

puppet's phenomenological life.

The above observations do not point to limitations of my argument, but rather to the

openness of the phenomenological model. Puppet performances are often able to sustain multiple

phenomenological readings, some complementary, some divergent. For instance, I argued in

Chapter 4 that Cesare's description of the Young Woman as his "twin" with "a face of grief like

mine" (*The Cabinet* 41:14) reveals a failure of Levinasian radical alterity, which I suggested was

later resolved by the radical alterity of the Young Woman's scream. However, one might also

take Lisa Barcy's suggestion that the gaze is a crucial element of puppet life in *The Cabinet* as an

invitation to apply Sartre's model of being-with-others to the performance. In this reading,

Cesare's description of the Young Woman as "my twin" recalls the Sartrean recognition between

self and other that opens and closes *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Sartre's antagonistic relationship

between self and other is very different from Levinas's vision of total responsibility of the self

towards the other, but the play opens itself up to this kind of productive disagreement. Likewise,

there are facets of the relationships between the case study productions and philosophers that my

analysis has not approached. For instance, alongside micromovement, Basil Jones lists "touch"

as a crucial principle of puppetry. He writes that "[o]ne of your most important tasks as a

puppeteer is to allow the audience to feel how the world touches the puppet and how the puppet

touches those in the world around it" (Jones 265). The love making scene in *Or You Could Kiss

Me* offers an excellent example of puppet touch, as does the final scene of the play, when Old A

and Old B caress each other's faces while the MC recites Ovid's story of Baucis and Philemon.

Merleau-Ponty could shed interesting light on the phenomenology of touch, particularly through

his theory of "the flesh" which he outlines in his posthumously published, unfinished work *The

Visible and the Invisible* (1969). In other words, while my goal in these pages has been to offer a

particular theoretical framework and to test that framework on aspects of three different

productions, neither the insights of the philosophers nor the riches of the productions have been

exhausted.

  In addition to the possibility of extending the kinds of analysis presented in this

dissertation, there are questions raised by my project that would benefit from extended study.

First, there is the question of animal intentionality, made particularly pressing by the popularity

of animal puppets in recent years, from Handspring's *War Horse* to Michael Morpurgo's newest

adaptation for the stage *Running Wild*, which featured elephant and orangutan puppets and

played in Regent Park's Open Air Theatre from May-June 2016. Given that most

phenomenologists consider intentionality as a particularly human quality, the efficacy of the

model for non-anthropomorphic puppet life requires further scrutiny. Likewise, while my

research focuses on narrative puppet theatre in particular, the implications of phenomenological

puppet life on puppetry that does not adhere to a clear narrative structure, including dance

performances like Basil Twist's *Symphonie Fantastique* or Company Non Nova's *L'Aprés-Midi

d'un Foehn*, in which plastic bags moved by large electric fans dance to Debussy's *Prélude à

l'aprés-midi d'une faune.* A study of these non-narrative performances would also be well

situated to consider how my phenomenological model of puppet life might be compatible with

the object-oriented ontologies of Jane Bennett or Graham Harman.

Finally, this dissertation gestures to a need for more scholarship on how imagined puppet

"life" is produced, and how the impression of it is sustained. This project has focused primarily

on the reception of puppet life, while taking largely for granted that the puppeteers are able to

produce that life through a combination of providing movement, design, and sometimes voice to

an object in front of an audience. However, now that I have defined puppet life in

phenomenological terms, more research is needed into how puppeteers are able to create a life

that is embodied, relational, and intentional in objects. In particular, I am interested in the

process of translating conventional acting training, which focuses on honing the actor's mind and

body as in instrument of theatrical expression, into performances in which the puppet is the site

of that expression. My next project will focus on this question in particular.

My goal in this dissertation has been to offer a convincing definition of puppet life

capable of generating new models of analysis for the puppet theatre. Rather than distracting the

viewer or reviewer from the narrative, puppet life has the critical nuance to enhance,

complicate, and enliven performances in a way that significantly distinguishes it from live actor

theatre.

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