



## INSTITUT INTERNATIONAL DE LA MARIONNETTE

### CALL FOR PAPERS

PUPPETRY AND POWER:

CENSORSHIP, PROPAGANDA, RESISTANCE (XIX-XXI<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)

International colloquium

From 20 to 22 November 2014 – Charleville-Mézières (France)

This international colloquium is rooted in a triple observation. First, a lack of historic, social and political studies dedicated to puppet theatres<sup>1</sup>. Second, the narrow link connecting the puppet to the concept of power in collective opinion and popularly held beliefs. Sometimes it is claimed as ontologically subversive by the puppeteers themselves, or it is used as a metaphor of a vain and manipulated humanity in the ordinary language and in the media, or, it is demoted to the rank of complete naivety and innocuous entertainment for children. Considering its influence and its relationship with entities (political, legal, economic, religious etc.), the puppet seems to be at a crossroads of contradictory or at least paradoxical view points. Third, in actuality there are many contemporary shows, performances and events testifying the vitality of satiric vein and agitprop theatre, such as the example *Top Goon, the story of a small dictator*, written and performed by the Syrian collective MasasitMati. In addition, the digitization and/or release of protected archives have recently given material for further research.

In the past three years since November 2011 symposiums and seminars have allowed a preliminary examination of the relationships between puppetry and censorship, propaganda and resistance<sup>2</sup>. This colloquium will gather researchers and artists to question the combination of these three expressions of power that puppetry maintained with the entities starting from the XIXth century to our day. Moreover, it will not limit the analysis to ideological approaches and will take into account Michel Foucault's method: "*Power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away ; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations*<sup>3</sup>".

Thanks to a thorough and in-context work on repertoires, techniques, aesthetics and practices, papers (or posters) should attempt to identify the components and the dynamics of these games and relations of power.

Suggested below are some indicative, yet not exhaustive, questions that we are particularly interested in seeing addressed:

<sup>1</sup> By 'puppet theatres', we mean any demonstration resorting to the animation of objects (puppets, silhouettes, manufactured objects, shadows, images) in front of an assembly.

<sup>2</sup> This cycle of research, impulse by the BnF and THEMAA, in partnership with Clastic Theatre and IIM, gave rise to two seminars and five symposiums. Three within the framework of the "Professional days of Clichy" (François Lazaro, Didier Plassard dir.): 1) "Puppetry and censorship" (Feb., 3-4<sup>th</sup>, 2012); 2) "Puppetry / Order, communication, propaganda" (Feb., 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013) ; 3) "Puppetry and Resistance" (Feb., 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014). Two others within the framework of the days "La Scène des Chercheurs" (Raphaële Fleury, Julie Sermon dir.): 1) "Puppets and censorship: bans, prescriptions, formatting?" (June, 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012, BnF) ; 2) "The Puppet: an instrument for propaganda?" (April, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Gadagne museums, Lyon). To read the presentation: <<http://www.saisonsdelamarionnette.fr/actions/marionnette-et-recherche/>>

<sup>3</sup> M. Foucault, [*Histoire de la sexualité I, La volonté de savoir*, Paris, TEL Gallimard, [1976] 1991, p. 123.] *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I: An Introduction, translated from the French by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978, p. 94.

### **Aspect 1. The Power of Puppetry**

Through its physical and ontological properties, puppet seems to have a propensity to offer, as a privileged instrument, aid to resistance movements, as well as to bypass or confront taboos and traumas, individual or collective. From this general observation, we will question the effectiveness of puppetry according to the techniques or aesthetics that are used, the audience to which it is addressed, and the context in which it is operating (street fairs, salons, theatre, meeting places, commercial or places of worship).

Besides, acknowledging the fact that in various circumstances, the authorities (political and/or religious) condemned or restricted puppetry forms of action, it will be interesting to examine, in a detailed manner, the motives for which a particular form of puppetry was considered dangerous or disruptive. What powers of nuisance does one associate with them? What explains the desire and exercise of control, officially and/or unofficially?

- Caricature, enchantement, humour, cruelty, etc. What is the arsenal for puppetry?
- "To Play", "to Show", "to Manipulate", "to Drive", "to Animate"? Definitions of the actions of the puppeteer and spectatorship (comparative study in several linguistic areas).
- Educational uses - scouting, popular education, religious, alternative pedagogies, humanitarian network and therapeutic puppetry. Relationships that puppeteers have established with institutions dedicated to mentoring and support for children and youth.
- Militant uses, partisan uses, commercial uses of the puppet.

### **Aspect 2. The Puppet of Crisis**

We will try to analyze censorship, propaganda uses and resistance reactions in several critical situations, taking care to identify the effects on repertoires, aesthetics and practices.

- Puppets in wartime: puppets at the front or behind the lines, puppets in labour camps or concentration camps.
- Puppets and Revolutions (French or Bolshevik, Arab Spring etc.)
- Puppets and occupation, colonization, post-colonialism. Popular characters, patriotism and nationalism; representations of the Other.
- Puppets in times of economic crisis. Poor materials, recycling craft: resistance or symptom (lack of funding for projects)?
- Puppets of Protest. Under what circumstances, in what places and how do we appropriate the various methods and modes?

### **Aspect 3. Militancy and self-regulation: History and current politics and economic structure of the profession.**

In the same way as other forms said "minors", "popular", "other", puppetry is still the object of a kind of economic and symbolic censorship: it receives globally less recognition, less places and less funding than other performing arts. However, this reports needs to be put in perspective of a wider social, statistical and economic context.

Throughout the twentieth century, puppeteers have been organized nationally (associations and unions) and internationally (UNIMA) to fight against the reality that puppetry is treated as a minor performance form, and to reach a symbolic, legal and economic recognition.

It would then be essential to question the discourses and the means implemented by puppeteers to defend, spread and impose their ideals and demands, but also to analyze the functioning of the structures and policies in place today, as well the games of censorship, self-censorship, propaganda and resistance within it:

- History of the internal and external policy of the International Union of Puppetry (UNIMA);
- Geography, sociology, economics, political relations between companies and instances of programming and broadcasting (comparative study between different countries).
- History of the national organization of professionals (comparative study between different countries).
- Evolution of the relationship between the world of amateur and the professional, case studies (Theatre Jeune Public in Strasbourg, for example.)
- The commitment through cultural action: endangering the status of artist?

**To respond to these questions, the contributions could be based on the exploration of archives still little explored, for instance:**

- Ethnographic Inquiries on puppeteers (for instance: those that were made by the National Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions);
- Petitions addressed to municipalities;
- Archives of the Neichthausen family (Lyon and Brindas);
- Répertoires censored (National Archives, museums, etc.).
- Archives and union publications industry and railroad associations, sponsorships, scouts;
- The archives of occupational structures in France and abroad (Union of puppeteers, National Centre for Puppetry THEMMA, Puppeteers of America, etc)
- The archives of the UNIMA International and its national centers (partially digitized and available on the [www.artsdelamarionnette.eu](http://www.artsdelamarionnette.eu))

**The proposals of papers or posters (approximately 1 page), in French or in English, accompanied with a short bio-bibliographical reference, are to be sent before March, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, to the following co-organizers of the colloquium:**

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