

01 SPECIAL INTERNATIONAL EDITION

# m a n i p

LE JOURNAL DE LA MARIONNETTE



A publication of **THEMAA**, National association of Puppet Theater and Associated Arts

MANIP is a professional magazine published by THEMAA (the National Association of Puppet Theatres and Associated Arts), which is the French core of UNIMA. The magazine gives a true and lively image of puppet companies and numerous field workers; approaches questions about different professions; widens debate and discussion on cultural issues; echoes ideas from gatherings and organized workshops; and heeds other matters.

Since 2005, THEMAA has published four times a year this magazine, which has an important role in providing information and reflection on an entire profession. Thematic off-prints complete the collection publishing its 44<sup>th</sup> issue today.

We thought it could be interesting to share a selection of our articles with a professional circle beyond borders, and to translate them into English and Spanish in order to make them more accessible. The portrayed themes certainly speak for the French reality, nevertheless they join a wider range of concerns regarding the contemporary reality of puppetry arts and their influence.

This first opus will undoubtedly allow an exchange and will perhaps provoke other similar initiatives in return...

We hope you enjoy reading.

For THEMAA,

Lucile Bodson, Greta Bruggeman,  
Veronika Door

Elected representatives for France at UNIMA

## The Incredible Metamorphosis

The art of puppetry, since its' origins, is an art in movement, absorbing the eras and landscapes that it crosses.

It is in perpetual mutation and transformation.

It is an effervescent art form, reflecting on and becoming aware of itself.

Aware of its' ancient origins, rituals and of its' many implications in today's world.

It is an art enriched by many traditions, crossed by so many diverse techniques that it weaves links strongly rooted in other artistic disciplines.

This is where this art form draws its' strength, and where it breathes life into new directions for the future.

It is also where it takes on its' full value as an art form which unites and shares, one of solidarity.

This art of origins, born long ago around objects of Gods and religions, flows once more from its' source. We have to observe, see and understand this creative melting-pot.

It is a joyous magma which comes to life before our very eyes and which we are fortunate to witness.

We need to know how to keep track of this new artistic cosmogony, how to freeze the moment in our era, pass it on, offer it up and make it shine like a lingering spark.

We are at the beginnings, sometimes modest, sometimes invisible, sometimes marginal, of this art form in full renewal. There exists on all the continents a multitude of initiatives, inventions and crazy ideas that are fertile ground for the future.

These are the very directions that while continuing to elaborate, experiment and explore, will build and form a new voice, that of the tomorrow's artists.

How do we bear witness to this art whose representations are ephemeral... if it is not by the written word.

So that tomorrow we may have a trace of the beauty of these fragile instants, of these momentary gestures.

The vocation of this international Manip is founded upon the sharing of testimonies in France today of our art, like a precious portrait of a year in puppetry, a pledge for the shining and promising years to come.

Angélique Friant

Chairman of THEMAA, 2015

# SUMMARY

## ART OF PUPPETRY STRUCTURATION

**Introduction** - Lucile Bodson

**04-05 20 years of traveling in the world of puppetry** -

Conversation about contemporary puppetry with Evelyne Lecucq

**06 2013 A Manifesto for the art of puppetry**

**08 THEMAA - The great history of a supportive profession** - Pierre Blaise

*Why did THEMAA join the UFISC* - Hubert Jégat

**09 French cultural landscape**

## ARTISTS AND THEIR PROFESSION

**Introduction** - Greta Bruggeman

**11 The specificities of puppet lighting** - Olivier Irthum

**12 Sound, a metronome for theatre** - Pierre Meunier

**13-15 Inventing space for movement**

A conversation on scenography for puppets - Marguerite Bordat & Brice Berthoud

**16 Writing for puppets** - Laurent Contamin

**18-19 Puppetry, arts education and cultural development** - Pierre Blaise

**20 Tribute to Alain Recoing** - Robert Abirached

**21 National libraries, Databases and Index in France**

**manip** / HORS-SÉRIE INTERNATIONAL

*Special international edition of Manip – the puppet newspaper, published by THEMAA – National association of puppet theaters and associated arts*  
24, rue Saint Lazare 75009 PARIS  
00 33 1 42 80 55 25 / contact@themaa-marionnettes.com  
www.themaa-marionnettes.com

*THEMAA is the French center of Unima international.  
THEMAA is a Ufisc member – Federal union of intervention of cultural structures.  
THEMAA is subsidized by the French ministry of culture (D.G.C.A.)*

**Publishing director:** Angélique Friant

**Editors:** Lucile Bodson, Greta Bruggeman, Veronika Door

**Subeditor:** Emmanuelle Castang

**Coordinator of the spanish part:** Claire Duchez

**Spanish translator:** Aitor Sanz Juanes, Rosita Lagos-Diaz, Isabel Vazquez de Castro, Yanisbel Victoria Martínez, Maritoñi Reyes

**English translator:** Philippe Sicard, Lara Zegart, Alison Corbett, Jo Smith

**Spanish proofreader:** Aitor Sanz Juanes, Yanisbel Victoria Martínez, Miguel Angel Lorefice, Rosita Lagos-Diaz, Isabel Vazquez de Castro, Idoya Otegui, Maritoñi Reyes, Angelines Juanes Canales

**English proofreader:** Cariad Astles, Alison Corbett, Kathy Foley, Colette Garigan, Lynn Jeffries, Narguess Madj, Jo Smith, Lara Zegart

**Layout artist:** Amankai Araya - www.amankai.net - www.aprim-caen.fr

*This special edition has been realized with articles published in Manip. It received international and national collective support: the editing, translation, and proofreading done by volunteer by members of THEMAA and Unima network, allowed the realization of this project. We would like to thank them and thanks also all the contributors for their kind authorization to cut, translate, and publish their articles.*

# ART OF PUPPETRY STRUCTURATION

Billed as the heir to a popular art and insightfully preserving the techniques and know-hows, the puppet theatre sector underwent a formidable evolution during the twentieth century. It is especially the post-80's developments that are the subject of a flashback, as described by Evelyne Lecucq in her article '20 ans de traversée marionnettique'. As a practitioner and observer, the old editor-in-chief of the journal 'Mu' paints the picture of an artistic field where different arts cross paths, enriching all involved.

These passionate developments allowed for the emergence of many artists and the creation of theatre companies, which today disseminate knowledge in the artistic sector. It is this wonderful artistic effervescence that has prompted the birth of a profession in the true sense of the term: recognizing their presence at the centre of a shared reality and coming together to defend a certain number of convictions. From this point forward, a charter revolves artists, theatres and festivals around common goals: *THEMAA* and *Latitude Marionnette* — which have strong associations through their members' commitment — contribute thus to the structuring of a profession that brings together the respective means of one another and defends several claims (vocational training, consolidation of financial means, dissemination of knowledge in the national sector...) The charter, signed at the end of 2013 by the two associations, testifies to the reality and current events of puppetry arts in France.

**LUCILE BODSON** Translation: Lara Zegart / Proof-reading: Jo Smith

## 20 years of traveling in the world of puppetry

*A conversation on contemporary puppetry*

*Evelyne Lecucq, a journalist, theorist and puppeteer, has been examining the art of puppetry over the last 20 years.*

*Chief editor at the magazine Mû, l'autre continent du théâtre – published by THEMAA from 1993 to 1999, organizer of the exhibitions « Marionnette, territoires de création » and « Craig et la Marionnette », she goes back over 20 years of creation with us.*

***Mû, l'autre continent du théâtre* was founded in 1993 at the request of THEMAA, what were the artistic context and stand-point of the magazine at the time?**

Companies had been plowing a huge experimental field for years, especially by reviving traditions. On the whole, the quality of their work was outstanding and the profession lacked an outside perspective, analytical viewpoints, documentation [...] I witnessed much interchange between France and other countries. It was still rare with the non-European South, but quite significant with Italy, Eastern and

Northern Europe and Asia. The artists from those countries astonished us and were admired for the quality of their work, making French puppeteers reflect upon themselves. The meeting of puppeteers from different horizons brought about information and triggered artistic investigations.

**Speaking of meeting, was it not also the time when interchange between disciplines emerged?**

Many puppeteers came from the visual arts but in the 1980s the greatest

influence came from contemporary dance. Some puppeteers such as Philippe Genty drew their inspiration from there and some dancers began to use puppets. A very interesting path opened up. However, in spite of this open attitude toward other art forms, there was a thing that bothered me: the rejection of drama by most puppeteers. Many viewed it as something of the past, something rigid although the primacy of the text had been shaken up for two decades and deep transformations of the art of puppetry had occurred alongside those of drama.

**Did they notice this theatrical renewal?  
Is this reconciliation between drama and  
puppetry accomplished today?**

I do not see this rejection from the new generation. Today the artists who train themselves in puppetry simultaneously train themselves in drama with almost the same attention toward direct interpretation. Whether at the ESNAM in Charleville, at the school of the Théâtre aux Mains Nues founded by Alain Recoing, in the *conservatoires* or at sessions, teachers have imposed this double exigency and take their pupils to the theater. One can't meld these approaches and their strengths without this opening up toward the other. The role of journalists is to provide creators with feedback, to question the form and content while preserving the need for freedom and thinking of artists, the regulating bodies and institutions.

**Critics specialized in puppetry are rather scarce, what is the specificity of the exercise?**

I think that there is no specificity. Besides, many productions are now "unclassifiable". Whatever the form, it ought to be analyzed with semiotic tools and one's five senses. The gaps as regards technical terms are rather easy to fill. Then there is substantive work in order to examine an artistic discipline, whatever it is: studying its history, its evolution in society, following the practitioners over the long run, spotting the influences and inner references. Today serious magazines are either in great financial difficulty or have disappeared. It is so difficult to enter into fair dialogue with artists when the fact of stressing their – sometimes transitory – weaknesses could endanger a company. The job of a critic – encouraging the artists with a potential and fueling the dialogue of a given period – seems to be almost impossible. This economic censorship from the press is dreadful for our future.

**What initiated your passion for puppetry?**

The production *Métamorphoses* by Figuren Theater Triangle triggered something in me: I was thoroughly carried away by its highly theatrical world at the dramaturgic level! There was not a single word and yet it was a bewitchingly

powerful language. From there, I felt like looking further.

**What has changed structurally over the last 20 years?**

The way some companies in France find places to prepare their productions, through residencies and fellowship, has radically changed working conditions. This is not enough but it is better. Nevertheless, some subsidized companies are not prepared at the time of their first performance, which I think is problematic, and I wonder if their ambitions are too great.



Ilka Schönbein, Theatre Meschugge, *Sinon je te mange*  
© Marinette Delanné

**Can ambitions be too great?**

Yes. Not artistically but technically. This is undoubtedly one of the dangers to be avoided at the moment. The time required for the mastery of sophisticated technology can be detrimental to the time of preparation and overbear the interpretation.

**What primarily moves you in puppetry?**

I like comedians who conscientiously perform through their outer characters, through their bodies, through their voices, through the space and sometimes even through an incident. The interpreter moves me in all disciplines yet the relationship between the interpreter and the puppet or a manipulated form greatly increases my pleasure. I expect from a production to renew the way I look at things. Specifically, the art of puppetry offers the audience the possibility to shift from a very close range to a panoramic view.

**What artistic trends are you particularly interested in nowadays?**

I am very interested in hyperrealistic

puppets. They disconcert me. Depending on the stage direction, they bring about impressions that are very far from one another. I think that there are still lots of things to explore with them. I am also interested in the relationship between puppets and dance. These connections seem to evolve very rapidly. The possibilities of occupation of spaces, levels... The use of new materials in creation is also a path with a fantastic potential.

**What would be the main stages over these last years?**

There are different kinds of stages: artistic, structural, political. I have already spoken so much about encounters with contemporary writing that I would like to stress the presence of music on stage as a true playing partner. It is fortunate that music is played live in many productions. Besides, the social and political stance of many productions and artist is a fundamental principle. Consolidating aims and purposes is liberating for the profession as a whole. Lastly, artistically, the extraordinary lesson of rigor and humility of an artist such as Ilka Schönbein, her work on the body, rhythm, the object and the mask is a schooling in itself!

**In conclusion, what would be your wish for the art of puppetry in the next 20 years?**

This is a very complex question! I'd rather not restrict the answer to a particular discipline and the next twenty years. It will be necessary to go on inventing daily ways to entertain in relationship with others and to create art so that everyone in our society is convinced of the essential character of art as opposed to the primacy of money.

> Interview by Emmanuelle Castang and Angélique Lagarde

Translation: Philippe Sicard  
Proof-reading: Kathy Foley

# 2013 A MANIFESTO FOR THE ART OF PUPPETRY

**The art of puppetry, situated as it is at a meeting point between the visual arts and the performing arts, is an important field for contemporary creation and an outstanding educational medium with widely varying applications.**

The innovative dramaturgy that can now be seen to be associated with all types of puppetry and also with the manipulation of matter and materials, objects and images, has completely altered the prejudices that might have once characterized this art form.

The radical breaking away from traditional drama aesthetics such as the visibility of the manipulators during manipulation, object theatre or digital art have favoured the emergence of new audiences and a renewed art form, that of a contemporary theatre with puppets.

The puppeteer is a performer-actor, who is also often a stage director, and sometimes a puppet designer. These characteristics widen the puppeteer's action to all performing arts and transposes it to a unique art form, that of a **contemporary theatre with puppets**.

On the initiative of THEMMA, the Théâtre de la Marionnette in Paris and the Institut International de la Marionnette, the first manifesto "for a lasting recognition of the arts of puppetry" was widely approved by the profession in 2007, leading to the implementation of the Saisons de la Marionnette 2007-2010.

**These years of collective work proved to be a great leap forward leading to the expansion of the profession.** During this period, changes occurred simultaneously on an artistic level with an increasing versatility of puppetry as an art form, on an economic one with its three-pronged stratagem of "creation, production, and distribution" and on sociological grounds due to ever-changing audiences.

**This structuring process was accompanied by the Direction Générale de la Création Artistique's significant efforts to develop puppetry,** underlining the Ministry of Culture's commitment and its willingness to organize and firmly anchor the art form in the nation's cultural landscape.

**However, the public authorities have failed to give the lasting support required to properly structure the profession which today still remains too precarious, both on institutional and economic levels.** The specific relationship this artistic field has with writing, drama and scenography; its specific time-scale; its diverse working methods with the constant coming and going from the construction workshop to the stage for performing, all imply the need for specially adapted means of production.

**We underline the existence of a unique artistic field and ask for a determined policy in favour of the art of puppetry both nationally and locally, a policy that should include:**

• **In the case of creation, production and touring** and as regards the diversity and the originality of the artistic work:

- Suitable grants for creating new work that take into account the specific requirements of puppetry (construction, writing and rehearsals)

- The financing of facilities that are specifically adapted to puppetry, a prerequisite for its development and in keeping with its wealth of creativity

- Outlets for the production, distribution and transmission of puppetry (state-funded theatres, puppet theatre spaces dedicated to accompanying developing artists, specialized theatres, festivals...), outlets that are perpetuated and legitimized by the creation of specific accredited theatre spaces that may but are not obliged to be part of existing organizations

- The continuation and reinforcement of the policy of appointing artists from the world of puppetry at the head of CDN (Centre Dramatique National) and of hiring directors open to their ideas at the head of the national, state-funded theatres

- The reinforcement of the presence of theatre professionals specialized in the art of puppetry on the boards of theatre experts in France

• **In the case of initial and further training,** regarding employment and training schemes:

- The creation of a national diploma for puppeteer-actors: Diplôme National Supérieur Professionnel d'acteur-marionnettiste (as part of the diploma for actors), which recognizes the uniqueness of the art of puppetry

- The registration of this trade in the national register and, for the newly qualified, the organizing of their entering into the profession through a system equivalent to the Jeune Théâtre National (JTN)

- The inclusion of puppet theatre spaces, dedicated to accompanying artists, in regional policies for on-going training

- The inclusion of the art of puppetry in the teaching programmes for drama at the Conservatoire

• **In the case of territorial planning,** regarding an even cultural distribution throughout all areas:

- An increase in the number of puppet theatre spaces dedicated to accompanying artists and to making and experimenting with puppets as well as the establishment of state-funded theatres dedicated to puppetry, with the aim of equipping the entire country

**These changes will lead to the establishment of national centres for puppetry and so reinforce the French puppetry landscape.** The centres may be established and developed in varying shapes and sizes, taking into account the special requirements for each region. They will take care to notice all actions involving the creation, production, and touring of puppetry as well as of events for the public (cultural action, artistic education etc.)

**All these measures will make it possible to structure in a lasting way this fast-expanding artistic sector** acknowledged by all those involved in puppetry in France. The achievement and implementation of these measures will give new impetus to the sector which will greatly boost artistic creation and offer to a whole new generation the wonderful opportunity of pursuing their work in a much better social and economic environment. They will thus greatly contribute to the reinforcement and development of artistic and cultural employment in France.

*On behalf of THEMMA  
The chairman, Pierre Blaise  
(2009 - 2015)*

*On behalf of Latitude Marionnette  
The chairman, Frédéric Maurin*

*Translation: Alison Corbett / Philippe Sicard*





## *The great history of a supportive profession*

THEMAA (The national Association of Puppet Theatre and Associated Arts) celebrated its 20th anniversary 2013.

In 1993 THEMMA came to life from the fusion between the 'Centre National des Marionnettes – The National Puppet Center' (CNM established in 1970) and UNIMA-France (established in 1961). The 'CNM' itself was an extension of the National Union of Puppetry Arts and Animation (established in 1956), and UNIMA France an extension of the Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA being established in 1929), which was historically the first theatrical grouping with a worldwide perspective.

From these two successive movements, a collective consciousness arose gradually and difficultly: driven by the determination of strong personalities. The collective consciousness of a very singular art form and a singularity of a profession with the need for interprofessional solidarity that transcends egos.

In France the structural evolution of the art of puppetry is the result of this long history. A history which is of course always in progress. The successive generations contribute to complete it. In this sense, everyone is indebted to each other. And yet we must be able to acknowledge the nature of this debt. Which means accessing our artistic as well as our political history. It sometimes happens that we spend a lot of energy reinventing what has already existed or still exists. The public recognition of the contemporary art of puppetry might still be too recent, too innocent. Yet, it is in this passionate, creative and turbulent history in its infancy that THEMMA has taken the momentary reigns.

**2014, Pierre Blaise, chairman of THEMMA  
(2009 - 2015)**

## Why did THEMMA join the UFISC?

***The Ufisc is a gathering of artistic federations and trade unions for the existence of small-scale structures of the social and supportive economy. THEMMA joined this organization in 2011.***

The future of a profession is often based on its abilities of self-questioning, of renewal, of invention, and, as artists and puppeteers we demonstrate these abilities and have reasons to be proud of the permanent movement that brings us toward each other, between generations, with other art forms, researchers and scholars, cultural partners and local politicians.

As puppeteers, we come from horizons and schools that are as diverse as our aesthetics, our techniques and our ways of representing the world. This is the reason why our profession is cosmopolitan, singular and so culturally rich. However, the socioeconomic issues we encounter have a dangerous tendency to make us lock ourselves into corporatism, as cultural policies too often aim to compartmentalize the arts by directing funds and mixing up cultural action and creation.

Legislating, controlling and transforming works of art into merchandise is the foundation upon which the architects of cultural policies work.

It is necessary for THEMMA to always be educational, to relentlessly remind us of what unites us, but also to be present in reflecting on cultural policies, to oversee negotiations, agreements and the laws that will concern us in the future.

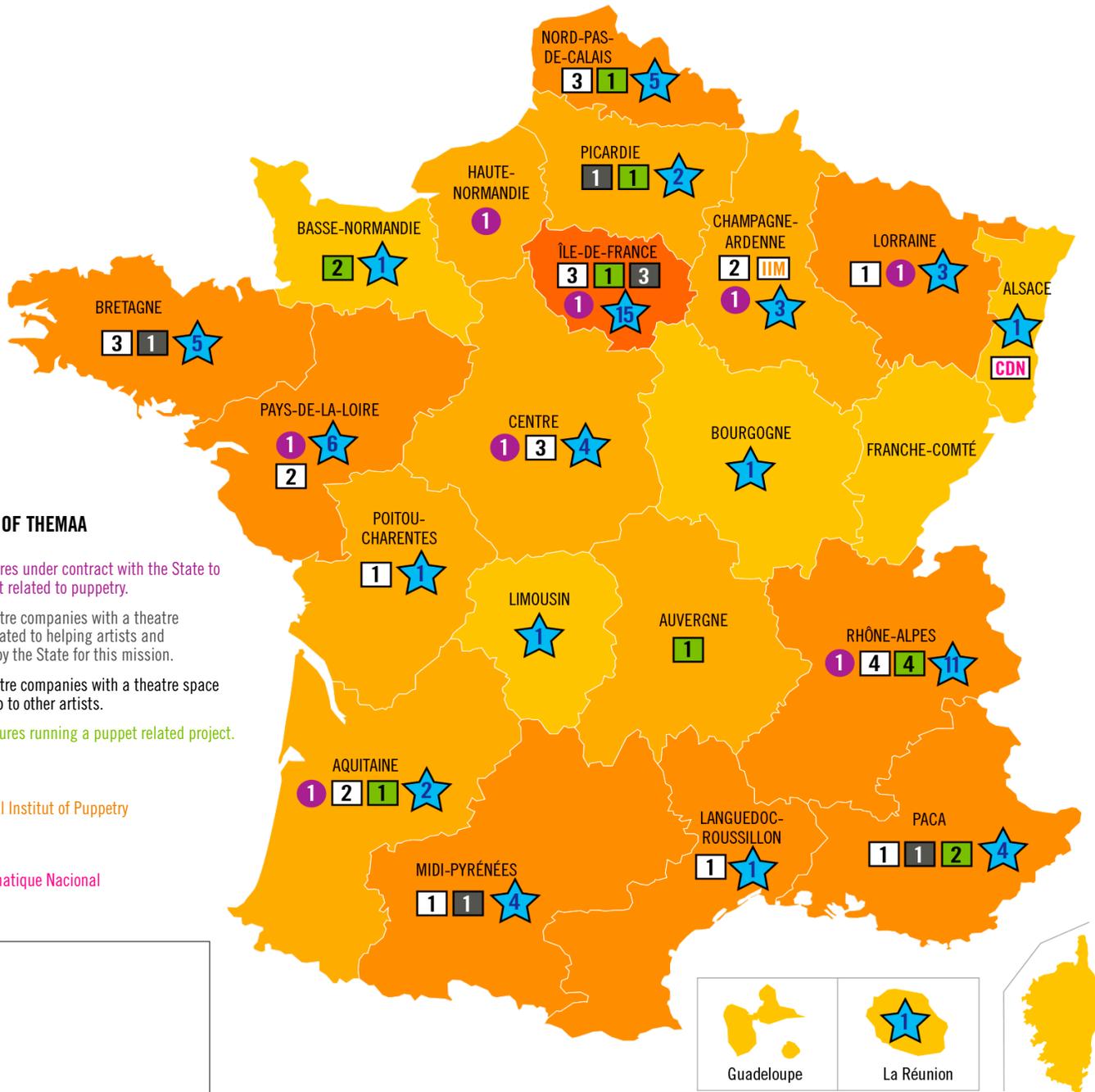
By joining the Ufisc, THEMMA shows its commitment in defending common values among actors of the artistic and cultural life and trade unions, and furthermore, in thinking about the economic and supportive alternatives in order to, together, build the conditions for our survival. The lack of security in our profession should not isolate us from the other actors of cultural life, as we can only be acknowledged as a collective.

There is plenty of work ahead for us and even though we know how to make our puppets, our future is closely connected to all the workers in art and culture with whom we will be able to build a more fair, supportive and creative world.

**> Hubert Jégat  
Vice-chairman of THEMMA, 2011  
(2009-2015)**

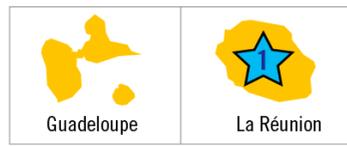
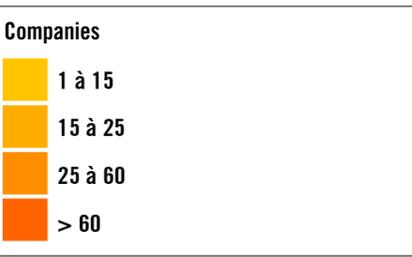
# FRENCH CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The French cultural landscape is made up of organisations bearing titles denoting various types of recognition by the State and of various funding schemes aimed at actions related to the art of puppetry. This map gives us a picture of the companies, the situation as regards production, the support given to artists and touring in France.



## MEMBERS 2013 OF THEMAA

- Public theatres under contract with the State to run a project related to puppetry.
- Puppet theatre companies with a theatre space dedicated to helping artists and recognized by the State for this mission.
- Puppet theatre companies with a theatre space they open up to other artists.
- Other structures running a puppet related project.
- Festivals
- International Institut of Puppetry
- Centre Dramatique Nacional





# ARTISTS AND THEIR PROFESSION

Creation of Alice Laloy for the cover of Manip 37 in relation with her research on actor-puppeteer

Every issue of Manip presents French and foreign artists who speak about their puppetry related work. The paths of the following six French artists come across other artistic disciplines: drama, cinema, circus and dance.

**BRICE BERTHOUD** is a juggler, set designer, playwright, director and co-founder of the company *Les anges au plafond*.

**PIERRE MEUNIER** is a stage and film director and actor who has invented a theatrical writing style that plays on what is physically tangible. He is the playwright and the constructor of his shows.

**OLIVIER IRTHUM** directs his lighting work towards an almost pictorial form of digital light, using video and new technologies as light sources.

**MARGUERITE BORDAT** is a set and costume designer for several companies. This stage director is also a lecturer at the 'School of Decorative Arts'.

**LAURENT CONTAMIN** is a playwright also writing short stories, essays and poetry. About twenty of his plays are published and he holds writing workshops. He also directs and acts. His plays have won several prizes in France and in Canada.

**PIERRE BLAISE** is the founder and the artistic director of the *Théâtre sans toit*. He is an actor, director, author, and puppeteer. He considers puppets to be theatrical instruments and develops a method based on the dramaturgy of the act. He is also the director of *Théâtre aux mains nues*.

**GRETA BRUGGEMAN** Translation: Lara Zegart / Proof-reading: Narguess Madj



*I am a lighting designer and work in several disciplines of the performing arts (drama, dance, music and puppets). I would say that every project has its particularities, regardless of the discipline.*

## > The specificities of puppet lighting



Les Aveugles, Company Trois six trente. Light : Olivier Irthum © Yvan Boccara

Puppetry challenges have a very specific nature. For example, puppets often change scale and are frequently small, so classical theatre spotlights might be too strong for them. If the head of a puppet stands out as a small overexposed white spot among all the elements forming a whole image on stage, it will be hard for the audience to see the head's details. The sources must, therefore, be adapted accordingly. This could be even more complicated in shows with puppets of different sizes.

For productions with a booth, in which inner light sources are required, it may be necessary to reinvent and build specific spotlights. Since light sources and puppets are very close in a booth, some adaptation is required in order to avoid the over exposure of puppets.

Non-hidden manipulators on stage is also a specific case requiring a subtle dose of light on puppets and their manipulators. How shall we meet the presence and absence needs of the dramaturgy? In order to focus on one or another part of the image, which light and direction shall we choose? If we wish to show the puppet and fade away the manipulator, we might

look for particular angles often “more focusing” than on the actor stage. The choice might also be not to fade the manipulators, but to have different light qualities for the puppets and the manipulators.

Choosing video sources is another alternative I have already tried (e.g. Maeterlinck's *The Blind* by Trois Six Trente Company in 2008). It allows to have identical light sources (video projectors carried along with the company while touring) everywhere not having to deal with heavy material. This solves the problem of temperature affecting the puppet heads' resin and creates a specific light atmosphere for the production. In *The Blind*, the forest atmosphere is created by touches on the moving upper and lower lights. This atmosphere projected on the entire stage, immerses the puppets and the manipulators in the same light. In order to highlight the puppets and to focus on them at the right time, I added precise white stains to the projected video. This procedure allows to raise the light discretely without using another light source, which would then create another shadow to deal with.

Translation: Philippe Sicard / Proof-reading: Narguess Madj



Although sometimes barely perceived by the audience, **sound creation has nonetheless an important effect on the intensity of a piece of theatre.**

*The sound of subtly amplified objects, techniques of manipulating live sound with sensors...*

**Manip explores La Belle Meunière's creating process with its artistic director Pierre Meunier.**

## ((·)) Sound, a metronome for theatre

Forbidden di sporgersi © Marguerite Bordat



### The theatrical role of sound as a stage partner

The element of sound has much influence on the overall meaning of a production, on the way the imagination is awakened and on what it has preceded or will follow. Nothing is gratuitous, a sound is never made for the mere sake of it. I also particularly like the moment when the need for silence becomes essential to the musicality of a whole piece. In our productions, much of the sound is made by using matter: the falling of sand, of gravel, the shock of iron sheets, the scraping noise of steel wires or the rustling of canvas. I mainly work with raw materials that produce sound. I feel that their capacity to make sound is as much a part of their basic nature as their shape and density. By creating the right conditions for careful listening, one discovers the immense wealth of sound, its infinite nuances and its great ability to stimulate the way a play is directed. Sound is not filtered, it plays directly on the imagination. It is the yeast or catalyst. Here we are talking about a dimension of sound that has nothing to do with using sound in an illustrative way. Here, it is an active ingredient that is just as important as the theatre space, the actor's presence or the words being delivered.

### What technical tools?

Alain Mahé and Géraldine Foucault, who often acts as his assistant and is in charge of the sound on tour, are linked up to IRCAM and therefore have access to fastly developing software that, for example, reprocesses sound in real time with algorithms or configurations that play around with the

pitch, rhythm, or make it possible to bring in a random factor when reworking sound that has just been recorded live. This can take us on a long journey that started out with raw sound. It is exciting to see what can be created in relation to the dramatic or poetic needs of a forthcoming production. It is then exciting to feel the theme of the play become more intense, filled with a deeper kind of truth. We make many recordings in all kinds of environments that are related to the themes we are treating. The work on broadcasting the sound is also of great importance. Whether the sound is coming from within, from behind, or on different levels, with a time lapse or from a precise source... all these elements have a great impact on the meaning of a piece. We sometimes use isolated loudspeakers with a distinct sound or a very special quality of microphone. These straightforward and deliberate choices help us to find coherence in what we are creating.

### The subconscious and the importance of sound

During a performance, sound is often designed to act upon the audience without one being able to define what is heard and so giving the piece a hidden rhythm. The sound reaches the audience on a subconscious level as it cannot really be identified by the listener. Sound can unsettle or puzzle but one is not always aware of hearing it at a given moment or even be able to dissociate it from one's overall impressions. Sound differs from music. When music is appropriate, it underlines something or plays on our emotions but it can be superfluous to the action on stage. Sound, on the other hand, takes us into our imagination and away from our emotions. Contrasts can be used as stimulation, such as the contrast between what one sees and what one might expect to hear, contrasts which bring unexpectedly to light other aspects of the theme of the play. This plays around with our logical expectations, creating a form of disorientation that can lead to humour, which I consider so essential, or even give rise to sudden complexity. Sound has this amazing ability to create contradiction and counterpoint or to broaden perspective. It enables us to compose something that is ambiguous. I mistrust a lack of ambiguity and always hope that my productions will offer a wide range of interpretations that will reach out to the audience on different levels.

*Translation: Alison Corbett / Philippe Sicard*



WITH MARGUERITA BORDAT AND  
BRICE BERTHOUD

Photo Brice Berthoud © Christophe Raynaud de Lage



Photo Marguerite Bordat © Yvan Boccarda

# Inventing space for *movement*

*A conversation on scenic design for puppets*

Scenic design in the art of puppetry is essential, just as it is in any kind of theatre, but in this case the multi-faceted art works in a double space: that of the puppet and that of the actor. Does that change the approach? To discuss this issue, Manip organized a meeting of two scenic designers with very different trajectories and worlds: Marguerite Bordat – long-time collaborator of Joël Pommerat and currently puppet designer and scenic designer for Bérangère Vantusso's creations – and Brice Berthoud, cofounder, stage director and scenic designer of the company Les Anges au Plafond.

**Manip: Does puppet theatre place specific requirements on your work as a scenic designer?**

**Marguerite Bordat** – I view the creation of a scenic design for both drama and puppet theatre in the same fashion. First and foremost, you have to imagine how to tell a story. The only difference is that in puppet theatre, you must take into account the actor/manipulator's body as well as the puppet's. This requires envisioning two juxtaposed spaces. Designs for Bérangère often deal with the relationship we have with reality. We superimpose two fictional spaces, both conveying a reality, but which, together, may create confusion. The puppets are treated in a hyper-realistic fashion, but their scale is either smaller (as with *Les Aveugles*) or larger (as with *Violet*) than that of the manipulators, whose presence is always asserted. When we rehearse, we need to define these two spaces. The puppets often occupy the center while the actors are at the

periphery. They are both the witnesses and the directors of the story they offer to our eyes and ears. We establish limits or boundaries that may or may not be crossed. Then our approach consists in inventing trespasses or juxtapositions that can produce some meaning. They help the text to be heard differently. In *Les Aveugles*, the puppets are set on benches which are placed on a pivoting platform. In this way, the puppets are on a plane that is 40 cm higher than that of the manipulators. At one time during the play, Junie, one of the actors, stands on the platform, making us aware of the tiny size of the puppets and giving them back their status of cold objects for a few minutes. Questions of scale and a permanent doubt about what is true and what is false are dominant themes in our work. In *Le Rêve d'Anna*, the scale relationship is not an issue, since the children we made are human-sized. This time, I designed a set which the puppets and their manipulators cohabit, leading to a kind of confusion. Brice Berthoud I don't know if it's any different from scenic

design for actors' theater. The design should create a space where it feels good for us to play and for the audience to listen. In all our productions, we place the audience on stage. This closeness does not necessarily mean they are invited to play a crucial role in the production, other than that of spectator, but their place in the shadows gives them a significant presence. The design takes into account this presence and the central space in which the story is told, but it breaks down the sanctity of the fourth wall.

**How does the scenic designer work with the lighting and sound designers, among others?**

**Brice Berthoud** – Dramaturgically, scenic design comes in to satisfy the need to believe in our story. As for lights, the space is designed while knowing there must be areas in shadow. The puppets and the actors are present but not necessarily meant to be revealed. They are part of this idea that the set does not end at the



black cube, but extends farther. In *les mains de Camille*, the play ends in the auditorium so as to show Camille Claudel being forgotten for thirty years. To show that time of solitude, we lost her in the auditorium, a public area. She ends up alone on the red theatre seats, lit by a starry sky. These seats are present throughout the performance even though they are never shown except at the end when the playing space extends beyond the cube. Yet the starry sky hangs over the seats as it does the rest of the set. People told us that they felt the presence of that auditorium during the performance, before it was revealed. So the role of lighting is to reveal feelings even when it conceals a space.

**M.B.** – Whether with Joël Pommerat or with Bérangère Vantusso, creation comes from several people, and through multiple productions. Before the beginning of a project, we already know which aesthetic and which drama bring us together. Joël, like a project manager, told us where he wished to go. He needs people around him to construct his dream. Bérangère starts from the design I propose. Thus, an aesthetic develops that is characteristic of the company, and evolves from one production to the next. But I always aim for surprise. I don't think at all about sound and lights when I design a space. Or, I try not to. In designing a space, I try to leave plenty of room for what is to come, and in fact, Bérangère has never challenged a design I've proposed. She works with this design, not necessarily as I had imagined, but always better. There is much room for doubt. I don't know what the stage director is going to do. I have my own ideas but I don't want the design to go where I think it should go. With Bérangère, I often stay away from rehearsals.

### **How is scenic design linked to the making of puppets?**

**M.B.** – I start to sculpt long before the start of rehearsals, and always thinking of the set design. Sculpting can take me two to three months in the workshop. When they arrive on stage, the puppets are not finished. I take some time to watch them move on stage, under the lights. Since our aim is to go as far as possible toward realism, the painting is an important finishing touch. As long as I don't believe in it, I look at them and work on them. There's a parallel between the make-up and costumes I devised with Joël's comedians and my puppets: he often asked me to transform the actors, make them taller, bigger, younger or uglier. In *Grace à mes yeux*, Saadia Bentaïeb played a hundred-year-old woman, which required makeup as convincing as possible. We spent much time, she and I, going back and forth between the stage and the dressing room trying to find the body and

face of that old woman. Later, while creating the 13 old men for *Les Aveugles*, it was like the continuation of this experience of transformation with Saadia.

**B.B.** – The work is done through a dialogue with Camille [Trouvé] who makes the puppets. There's a desire to enter the other's madness. Enrichment happens when you try to understand what someone else wishes, without necessarily trying to reach a consensus. I tacitly agree with Camille with whom I may strongly disagree at first, but it is a disagreement that excites me because I know that in principle she's right.

### **What motivates the work of scenic design?**

**M.B.** – Surprise. I always try to be surprised. I set up a design that can provoke accidents. The most beautiful things often happen by accident. With Pierre Meunier, our purpose is to always create a design that is conducive to accident.

**B.B.** – It's releasing the energy that lies in the story we want to tell and in which we want the audience participate and be complicit. This is why we create the sound and the lights together. They are another means to tell the story. The sound, the music and the lighting take over from the playing of the actors or the puppet and carry forward the dramaturgy. In effect, scenic design is much like dramaturgy. We organize a somewhat precise framework although it is characterized by imbalance so that during the performance there is something to resolve, both in the story and in the scenic space. We inject something that does not work, which is going to create conflict, lead to chaos. The more organized the scenic design is, the more energetically interesting this irruption of disorder becomes. You have to give the space and the audience room for chance. Try to create a humble space, an unessential space. Deliberately shaky so that it is not self-sufficient.

### **Does the style of puppets influence the scenic design?**

**M.B.** – The scale greatly influences the scenic design. In *Violet* for example, the design is quite simple: a platform, a door, a drum kit. The puppets are 2.20 meters high. The manipulators need to be able to rest their arms. We built 40 cm platforms for their wrists to be as high as the puppets' heads without having to raise their arms. You have to account for these simple constraints in designing the set. This requires work in two stages: I create a design which I test with the manipulators, then I go back and work on the final model. We need to test the reliability of the design. The issue of the scale of the door and the drum kit was very important too. We decided to build

them at the scale of the manipulators in order for the puppets to look too tall and not quite adapted to their environment. It was a way to talk about adolescence.

**B.B.** – It's the material which brings us together while working. Therefore, the scenic design and the puppets are very interdependent: the material is fed by the initial dramaturgic idea. It joins us together.

### **How do you take movement into account in the work of scenic design?**

**B.B.** – Movement is what gives life to something inert. Scenic design is not only there to reveal a space but to release the forces of play and of life. Movement is the very definition of our profession. Movement reveals the living character of a puppet or an object. A puppet is a stylistic suggestion, but it's the movement that makes the audience believe in the character. It is necessary to create specific designs that integrate this notion of what is alive.

**M.B.** – In any case, there are no rules. First, we make theater, then we utilize actors, stones or puppets. A puppet is a sort of moving toy, but we need to find the movement that leads us to a new work, a new search. A stage setting that moves is a stage setting to be searched for, to be invented. It's also the guarantee that I won't be bored.

### **> Interview by Patrick Boutigny and Emmanuelle Castang**

Translation: Philippe Sicard  
Proofreading: Lynn Jeffries



## > Writing for puppets

*Every three months Manip asks a professional to speak about her/his discipline through a question that is likely to be of interest for everyone. In this issue, Laurent Contamin, author and assistant to the artistic director (Gregoire Callies) at the TJP from 2002 to 2006, shares his experience of writing for puppets. According to Laurent Contamin, there are three key stages in this kind of writing: knowing, wandering and being a member of a fellowship.*

**“The work attracts he who dedicates himself to it to the point where it is put to the test of its impossibility,” said Blanchot. In this respect, writing and puppets – these two great pioneers of the unknown – are made to get along with each other.**

### 1- KNOWING

I think that if you are willing to write for puppets, you have to know your tools. My own experience, which was developed through training sessions at the Institut international of Puppetry (IIM) and the TJP, through research on Kantor (as part of a Villa Medicis Hors les Murs scholarship in Poland) and through observation (especially at the TJP), I gradually got to know this weird animal that had been erased by my initial training as an actor and totally ignored in my early writings.

The most important thing to experience, puppets made me grasp this fact: while manipulating them, I was both an actor giving them speech and a stage director directing them... and also – more mysteriously - (probably owing to the fact that in puppetry, you work with the sign and express yourself through your hands) – the author of what was being played: a revelation that manipulating is also writing.

So from the Chinese glove puppets of La Tragédie de l'Homme to the Bunraku puppets of Othello to the objects of Juby, I felt the singular weaving of these two languages, speech and the sign, and how they could get along and express together what they had to say.

### 2. WANDERING

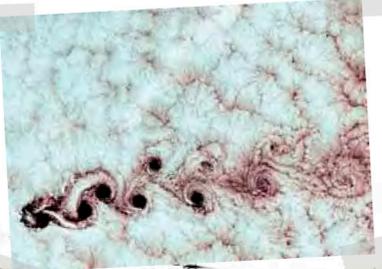
I feel that my activity as an author has always been in transit, exploring various writing statuses within protocols of transmission that are very different from one another: at one end of the spectrum, radio fiction – where there is nothing to be seen, one writes for the blind. Speech comes first and ought to convey images, spaces and figures to the listener. At the other end of the spectrum, writing for dance (A Bout de Souffle, for Thierry Thieû Niang), circus (Et qu'on les asseye au Rang des Princes for the 15th nomination of the CNAC), clowning... scenic languages that can do without a written text. You have to arrive carefully, not like a bulldozer. I also write a little poetry, especially haiku – that form of speech closest to silence: well, it is as a writer of haiku that you should meet choreographers, clowns, puppeteers or circus people. Looking at the different activities requires a change of perspective: so for example, in a production written and staged for the circus company Rouge Eléa, I deleted three quarters of my initial text. By the end, however, the text

was almost there. Writing for puppets requires the kind of flexibility acquired by travelling across the spectrum of scenic languages: “One must pass in transit” (Meister Eckhart).

**“Writing for puppets requires the kind of flexibility acquired by travelling across the spectrum of scenic languages”**

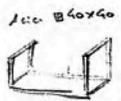
### 3. BEING A MEMBER OF A FELLOWSHIP

A text can rarely be intended for puppets outside of a concrete project. It is also true that texts written for live drama can theoretically be staged for a puppet production. This was the case for four of my texts. But most often, these were commissions (En Verre et contre Tout, Tohu-Bohu, Garin-Trousseboeuf, TJP, Souffle 14) and I worked as a member of a fellowship from the outset, at that moment when the stage director is intent on writing a text. In this scenario, the work rhythm is quite different. And that moment often occurs nearly one year prior to the first performance. There is plenty of time for sharing the short cuts taken during the first months, our searching, our wanderings... you are really involved in a project of co-authorship and as a writer it is important to accept this.. I co-wrote the first part of La petite Odyssée with Grégoire Callies. In France there is often a tendency to put writers on a pedestal (which they sometimes do themselves); there is a sanctification of writing. You have to accept the fact that writing for a puppet production comes from the weaving of several languages: words, signs, images, bodies, sounds... During the phase when both text and production are being developed, this fellowship often leads to lasting collaboration and a loyalty between the author and the stage directors. So it is important for the author to know companies which work with, about and for puppets.



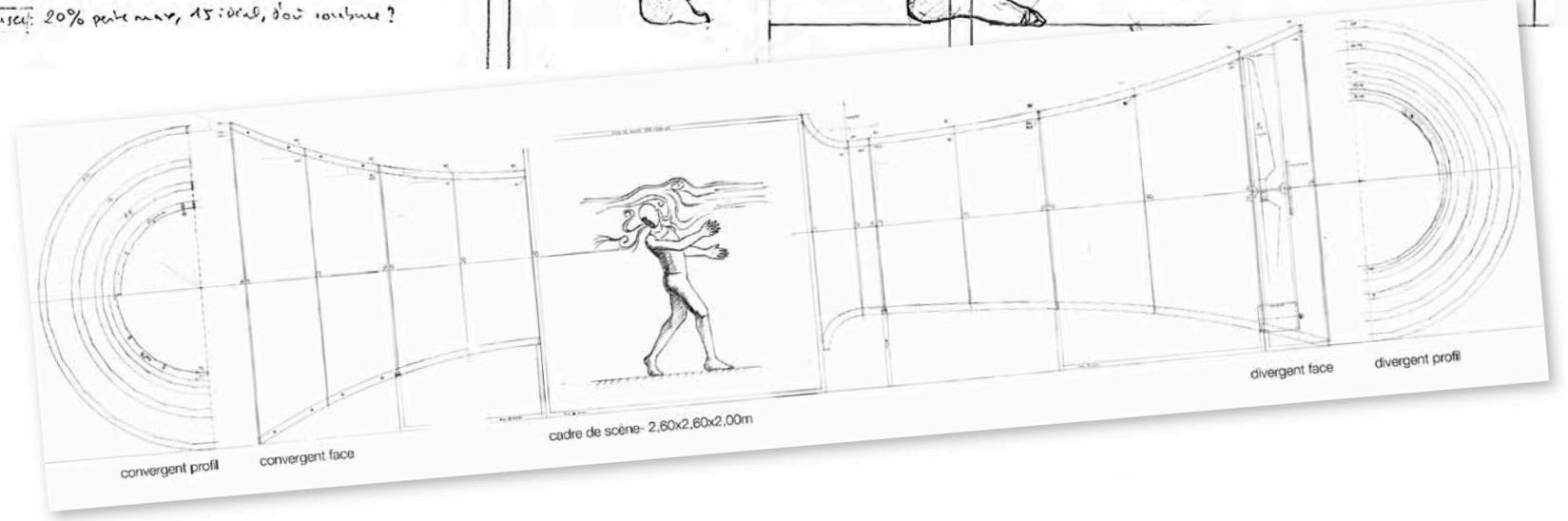
2 plus alternés

15°



escal: 20% pente max, 15 degrés, d'où courbe ?

ECH 1/10<sup>e</sup>



Interior cover of *Manip 41*.  
Extract of the book creation of Arnaud Louski-Pane, Mazette association.  
Preparatory plan of the project *Les Hautes Herbes*, study on a wind tunnel

*The promotion of arts education is one of the Ministry of Culture's major policies. With a view to writing a report "towards an access to art and culture for all young people," the Ministry has launched a national inquiry aimed at all sectors potentially involved and this includes THEMAA for the art of puppetry.*

## **> Puppetry, arts education and cultural development**

**Contributed by Pierre Blaise, chairman of THEMAA (2009-2015)**

A theatre for puppets is simply a synthesis of the visual and the performing arts. Not only is it a modern tool for artistic creation but it is also an outstanding educational medium with great scope.

For centuries, puppets have been part of the history of drama, the history of religion, of sculpture, automata and toys. Although for a long time an entertainment for adults, puppetry can be seen today as the most important chapter in the history of children's theatre.

- 1 -

The innovative dramaturgy now seen to be associated with all kinds of puppetry, as well as the manipulation of matter and materials, objects and images, has drastically changed the prejudices that still overshadowed this art form less than twenty years ago. Moreover, the radical aesthetic breaking away from Guignol with, for example, "object theatre", the visibility of manipulators during manipulation or even computer graphics has favoured the emergence of new audiences made up of young people brought up on visual images and ready for a new form of theatre inspired by images: a theatre of contemporary puppetry.

The uniting of all professional categories in the field of puppetry in the national association THEMAA, in addition to actions led by artists, publicity agents, researchers, tutors, librarians etc. has made it possible, with the Ministry's consent, to obtain means

of tangibly structuring the profession on a national scale. Certain training facilities, spaces for building shows and performing work, resource centres (Portail des Arts de la Marionnette) have been created, validated or designated very recently.

Media campaigns orchestrated by THEMAA, the organizing of national discussions on various themes, numerous conferences and the touring of two very attractive exhibitions highlighting the creative diversity of today's puppet companies have conveyed to artists and to the general public the idea of an interpreter rising from the ashes: the 21<sup>st</sup> century puppeteer.

The puppeteer is an interpreter.

As an interpreter, the question of the puppeteer's close connection to other art forms compels us to reassess professional training schemes in puppetry and to redefine the "work profiles" of the puppeteer's trade. On a more general level, however, this analysis helps reveal the wealth of educational resources that are part of becoming a puppeteer. In the field of puppetry, artistic events aimed at the general public involve skills that go well beyond those required of any one particular art form.

It is remarkable that in post-traumatic situations caused by disaster or conflict, or in the rehabilitation of offenders or indeed in the caring of the sick and disabled, the dual theatre space created by puppetry, is an opening towards freedom, towards new horizons for thought and self-improvement

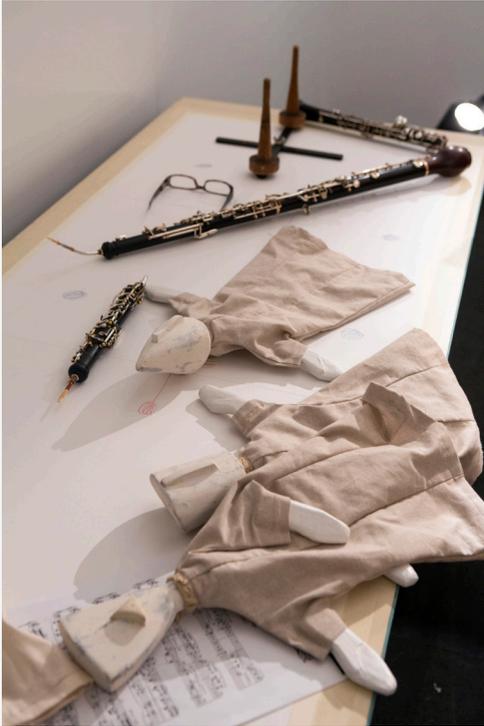
in a group situation. UNIMA4 is an NGO, historically affiliated to UNESCO. Human rights, equality, a high-standard of education for all, cultural diversity, the exchange of cultural values, are all ideals upheld by puppeteers and are of course related to the values of education in the arts which is deemed an essential part of our general education.

**"Seeing live work is the prime vehicle for arts education"**

A favoured and efficient tool in the postwar "éducation populaire" (a French movement for the education of the people by the people with the aim of educating all. Translator's note), puppet theatre found itself rapidly limited to young audiences, leading to the impoverishment of artists. Even if today, in 2013, the impact of developing artistic and cultural projects for children would appear to be vital, beneficial and feasible, we must be careful not to make the mistakes that we have made in the past. Whilst developing theatre for young audiences, we must take care not to neglect the far-reaching artistic repercussions of productions for adults, especially in the field of puppetry.

- 2 -

From the THEMAA standpoint, it is essential to prioritize the real aims of artistic education in order to foresee its needs and even distribution. If one were to ask the question of whether artistic education is a viable means of accessing art, we would reply that seeing live work is the prime vehicle for arts education. So there should be equal opportunities for the young to



Théâtre sans Toit - puppets for workshop

have access to art, that is to say to have access to the companies' new work and repertoires. The artist's various techniques for stimulating awareness, educating or building up a relationship with the public are of secondary importance. These educational methods depend on audiences being first confronted with artistic work. Arts education is therefore directly related to the present conditions in which work is produced, created, toured and promoted.

It is the artists themselves and they only who make up new shows and invent new artistic expressions. They bring together artistic talents, they write and design, build the sets and puppets, direct, rehearse over long periods of time and they perform. They

also promote their own work.

It is also none other than the artists themselves who invent the ways of promoting their work or invent educational games and resources, training programmes and ways of meeting or reaching out to children, to adult audiences, to other artists or to those promoting the arts and to the general public... Having been deprived of the direction of most theatres – which one might have considered a legitimate instrument for their work – these artists have come together in other ways. Through their inventiveness and working from their workshops or work sheds, they create places of local influence. These spaces, as yet without a name, are intelligently supportive of the community, both on social and artistic levels. They are places of fellowship, dedicated to supporting artists. Overcoming job insecurity, they create mutually recognized theatre spaces open to the public, just as their peers created theatres away from the cities not so long ago.

This input of creative and economic energy from the artists develops the scope for other theatre and puppetry related professions. The lack of job security experienced by most puppeteers is not only a serious problem but also perpetuates social inequality. Jean Vilar has already warned us that exploitation should not take precedence over artistic creation. This lack of job security directly concerns the supervisory authorities and also those who are responsible for the organizational and financial means of bringing artists and the public together.

- 3 -

Quality has become the main issue as far as arts education is concerned, in relation to the standards of production and the quality of interaction with the public. These standards depend on the means provided by theatres during the different stages of creating a show (the building, rehearsing and touring) and the amount of human resources they can offer. Productions

of a high standard or a good relationship with the general public can only be achieved over time. A production improves when performed to an audience and with each performance. Therefore, the quality of a show is not separate from the idea of quantity as regards the number of performances or spectators. Yet this notion of quality/quantity creates difficulties. It demands commitment in the choice of productions booked by the programmers. It requires thought on the real meaning and aims in showing a given piece of work to the public. The promoting of arts education and its organization requires encouragement on a collaborative basis. Independence of choice in the booking of productions is required when it comes to the influence of local councillors.

Perhaps it is because puppetry is a theatre of images, abundant in its expression and diversity; that it is so often exploited by festivals and special events. Festivals highlight its diversity ceaselessly and are unquestionably the main reason for the public's appreciation of this new and unexpected art form. However, if the piecemeal programming of puppetry becomes widespread, artists will be subject to commercial whim, without the reward of renewed or increased audiences.

Today artistic work has been subverted and is tending to become a tool for publicity for theatres or towns. The very concept of arts education would imply the exact opposite: productions should benefit from a theatre's publicity campaign in order to involve and reach out to as many people as possible.

> **Pierre Blaise, December 2012**  
**chairman of THEMAA (2009-2015)**

*Translation: Alison Corbett / Philippe Sicard*

# TRIBUTE TO ALAIN RECOING

***Stage director and puppeteer Alain RECOING left us in December 2013. His exceptional itinerary is associated with the development of the art of puppetry in France. He left us with an important legacy, especially in the field of training: many young artists have been trained at the Théâtre aux Mains Nues over the last 20 years. Legacy nurtures today's thought. Maintaining traces has become essential. Alain Recoing was a master***

For Alain Recoing, puppetry was one of the highest and most demanding forms of drama. As early as his training years under the leadership of Gaston Baty, he had understood that manipulation was a crucial technique which was to remain central in his art, and that it was mostly an instrument serving characters to be conjured up, myths to be built and the expectation of fantasized figures to move in a space that was both mobile and singular.

From the early 1970s onward, he decided not to be confined to performing and to free himself from school audiences. In effect, for him the art of puppetry was the art of an actor whose body and voice playing with objects, result from manipulation and the possibilities opened up by it.

Alain Recoing (with his wife), soon felt the need to open the space where puppets move, to visual artists, scenographers and musicians; therefore creating one of the first French contributions of what Brecht called "brotherly art forms". Yet he went further still by turning to properly account his experience in television to expand his research in kinetics and editing. Thus, by using all available means and all imaginable mediums (from masks to dolls), he was one of the foremost artists (with Yves Joly and Georges Lafaye) to reestablish the art of puppetry and contributed to its extraordinary expansion seen today.

As well as the tribute we owe Alain Recoing, we ought to emphasize his tireless work throughout his career in order for puppetry to be acknowledged as an art in its own right. Beaverling away for over fifty years among decision-makers, politicians, journalists and theater managers, he was not satisfied with a breakthrough at Chaillot with Antoine Vitez's complicity but strove further to found the Centre National de la Marionnette which was penniless for a long time and saw with satisfaction the new generations' willingness to join forces within THEMAA. Alain Recoing tirelessly endeavored to favor a lively conception of culture. He also saw the establishment of a large teaching and research institution in Charleville-Mezieres; the sign of an international recognition Alain Recoing was partly responsible for. According to him, puppetry is an art form related to living culture and rooted in today's world and society.

> Robert Abirached

Translation: Philippe Sicard / Proof-reading: Lara Zegart

# NATIONAL LIBRARIES, DATABASES AND INDEX IN FRANCE

- **Performing arts department of National French Library (BnF)**  
58 rue Richelieu  
75002 Paris  
[www.gallica.fr](http://www.gallica.fr)
- **International Institut of Puppetry**  
7 place Winston Churchill  
08000 Charleville-Mézières  
[www.marionnette.com](http://www.marionnette.com)
- **Arts of puppetry portal (PAM)**  
[www.artsdelamarionnette.eu](http://www.artsdelamarionnette.eu)
- **Documentation center of Gadagne's Museum**  
1 Place du Petit Collège, 69005 Lyon  
[www.gadagne.musees.lyon.fr](http://www.gadagne.musees.lyon.fr)
- **Library of Mouffetard's Theatre of puppetry art**  
73 rue Mouffetard  
75005 Paris  
[www.theatredelamarionnette.com](http://www.theatredelamarionnette.com)
- **Gaston Baty library – University Paris 3**  
13 rue de Santeuil  
75005 Paris
- **THEMAA – National association of Puppetry Theater and Associated Arts**  
24 rue Saint-Lazare  
75009 Paris  
[www.themaa-marionnettes.com](http://www.themaa-marionnettes.com)

