NEWSLETTER N°14 - January 2022

Editorial : Crossing the threshold

EARCH PROGA

2022 will be a decisive year for the European project *PuppetPlays*: in Spring, we will deliver our mid-term scientific report to the ERC, and we will open the database to the public; in Autumn, the viva of Francesca Di Fazio's doctoral dissertation *L'Écriture pour la marionnette contemporaine en France et en Italie* will take place, and the proceedings of the international conference Western-European Literary Writing for Puppets and Marionettes (17th – 21st centuries) will be published.

Just as for the actor behind the scenes who is about to go on stage, this transition of our work in the full light is a symbolic threshold towards which all our eyes are focused and which mobilises all our forces, and which of course causes a little stage fright. Being both a story-teller and a medicine-man, the Indonesian puppeteer (*dalang*), when he is about to leave his house to perform a show, has to ponder over his breathing: if it comes stronger from his left nostril, he will have to cross the threshold with his left foot first; if it comes stronger from his right nostril, his right foot will have to get outside first; if it comes equally from his two nostrils, he will have to jump with both feet over the threshold. In such a difficult moment, when breathing is the subject of so much concern, let us jump - but on tiptoes into the new year.

[Prof. Dr. Didier Plassard]

Edward Gordon Craig, "The Signal-Man 2", *A Book of Penny Toys*, 1899. © E. G. Craig Estate.

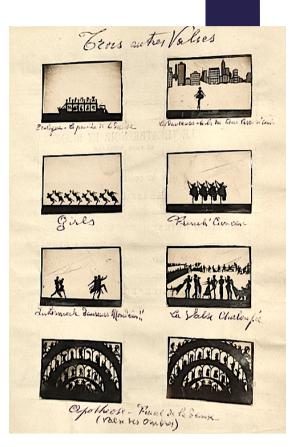


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Some shadow play historians have emphasized the technical nature of the device designed by the radio and electrical engineer Paul Vieillard. Thanks to his plans of the backstage and diagrams, we can imagine all the means he deployed to realize his "Théâtre Noir et Blanc" (which was in activity intermittently during the first half of the 20th century). A typewritten leaflet written by Paul Vieillard in Grenoble in 1941 (private collection) gives us the opportunity to understand his approach better, especially his will to transmit a tradition while modernizing it.

Distancing himself from the "decorative approach" that he sees in the shows of the Chat Noir, Paul Vieillard aspired to a form of kinetic purity. He multiplied light sources to reduce the transitions between scenes in the show and he mechanised the silhouettes to increase their gestural possibilities. He wanted to introduce more animation and variety into his scenes in order to make the performance more dynamic. In his working documents, partly preserved at the BNF and in private collections, certain scenes are broken down into series of shots that show the different placements of the figures, or even their successive movements, just like a movie. In dialogue with chronophotography and nascent cinema, Paul Vieillard conceived movement as a mechanical and geometric reality whose fluidity and infinite variations the shadow theatre had to render.

[Ma. Sophie Courtade]



Photograph of a page extracted from a printed booklet by Paul Vieillard *Le Théâtre Noir et Blanc* (private collection), dedicated by Paul Vieillard to Denis Bordat. The vignettes are glued and the writings are handwritten.

The other and the human: identity recovered through galactic travel

Science-fiction, as a genre of alterity, has reflected on the problem of extraterrestrial life since early on: identity and alterity are important notions shaping the perception of reality. On the puppet stage, they influence the aesthetics and the dramaturgy of the plays. *Le Cosmonaute* [*The Cosmonaut*] by Pol Danheux and Hubert Roman was published in the volume of all the plays staged by their company, Les Zygomars, between 1965 and 1974, and was performed at the international festival in Chrudim. A man from Earth reaches an unknown planet. He speaks in a robotic manner, has no feelings, and constantly refers to his manual when he interacts with the aliens. They test him to determine whether he is a human being, which refers to the Turing test. The cosmonaut learns how to manage encounters with others, becoming a human being again. In a symbolic scene, he strips off his clothes at the end of the play, subtitled "I think therefore I am, or the very beautiful and very marvellous story of John-Igor Macdupont, the qualified astronaut who became

human like you and me". The aliens are played by glove puppets, whereas the cosmonaut is played by an actor. Their simultaneous presence questions identity, as it questions dichotomies. The alien puppets convey dynamics and vital energy; they strongly express their feelings, underlined by the abundance of exclamation marks in the text. They are sincere in their behaviour, while the cosmonaut poses and feigns feelings. The puppets speak in a popular and incisive manner, and their punchlines mocking the cosmonaut create the perfect tempo for glove puppet. It is thanks to these characteristics that the identity problem of the hero stands out. The puppet thus urges the human being to transform himself by bringing out his deepest identity.



Roman, Hubert, *Recueil des textes joués par le Théâtre des Zygomars de 1965 à 1974*, Namur: Théâtre des Zygomars, 1980, p. 89. Illustration by André Lange.

[Dr. Manuela Mohr]

Creating a collaborative transcription platform

Among the 2,000 works to be described in the *PuppetPlays* database, 300 will be published in full text. This corpus will have to be representative of the periods, languages and countries covered by the project, not hesitating to find a place for plays in dialect. Such a choice implies the mobilisation of specific linguistic skills, mastered today only by a small number of speakers. Transcribing such singular and mostly unpublished texts will be a long and difficult task.

To quicken the pace of this task, we will set up a collaborative transcription platform. To do so, we will rely on the source code of the TACT platform developed during the research project "Massive and Rich Data for Human and Social Sciences" (Démarre SHS!) led by the Institut des Données de Grenoble. The platform was designed by the Équipe Littératures et Arts Numériques (ELAN) of the UMR 5316 Litt&Arts, whom we thank for this wonderful work.

The operation of the collaborative transcription platform is an extension of the research work carried out by Anne Vikhrova for her doctoral thesis entitled *L'évaluation de la méthode du crowdsourcing pour la transcription de manuscrits* (PhD supervised by Thomas Lebarbé and defended in December 2017 at the Université Grenoble Alpes). As Vikhrova presents it, transcription work is divided into 3 roles: managers, transcribers and proofreaders. The managers organise the transcription work, such as the number of proofreadings required, the posting of documents online or the creation of documentation to help the transcriptions. Transcribers transcribe texts from scanned images and proofreaders check these transcriptions. After a certain number of retranscriptions and proofreadings, a transcription is validated. The validated pages can then be downloaded and, in our case, uploaded to the *PuppetPlays* website.

Follow the PuppetPlays team outisde PuppetPlays

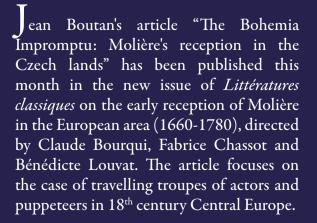
he proceedings of the conference *Creating* for the Stage: Questioning Practices and Theories (co-organised in 2020 by EASTAP - European Association For the Studies of Theatre and Performance-, Emilia Romagna Teatro and the University of Bologna) have been published. Francesca Di Fazio, PhD student at *PuppetPlays*, has written two contributions (in Italian):

 Marta Cuscunà, Animatronica e componentistica industriale applicate alla scena. In dialogo con Francesca Di Fazio. [Marta Cuscunà, Animatronics and industrial components applied to the stage. In dialogue with Francesca Di Fazio].

 Francesca Di Fazio, Drammaturgie originali per il teatro di figura contemporaneo. Il Macbeth all'improvviso di Gigio Brunello e Gyula Molnár [Original dramaturgies for contemporary puppet theatre. Macbeth all'improvviso by Gigio Brunello and Gyula Molnár].

Link to the full text : <u>amsacta.unibo.it/6823/1/</u> Creating_for_the_stage_and_other_space.pdf The two articles can be found on p. 105 and p. 585.

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Link to the publisher's website : <u>pum.univ-tlse2.</u> <u>fr/~no-106-La-premiere-reception-de~.html</u>#

Clickable links at the end of this newsletter or on our website, <u>puppetplays.www.univ-montp3.fr</u>, in the "Newsletters" section.

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Design : Claire-Marine Parod

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