

*Puppet & Design – flânerie*

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*Jedes Ding hat seinen Stolz  
(Everything has its pride)*

R.M. Rilke, *Puppen* (1914)

*Puppet & Design or Puppet vs Design?*

*Brainstorming*

Juxtaposing the two terms at the core of this project generates sparks, and reveals multiple possible connections. This is the sign of a fortunate association, facilitating reflections, images, interrogatives. We aim at analysing some of the themes arising from the title *Puppet & Design*.

It appears appropriate to specify, at least concisely, in which of the many possible acceptations we will approach the two terms.

We have used the term *Puppet* in a broad sense, and as a synonym of Figure, the latter being the only word inclusive enough to embrace the immense realm of ‘non human’ presences. This term implies material, as well as imaginary inferences, artistic procedures, and rhetorical figures. We will refer to the term ‘*Design*’ as it came to establish itself at the beginning of last Century, placing a strong emphasis on the idea of ‘project’ supporting an organism (*design*’ also as a metaphor), and consequently on the concept of construction and organic architecture. A ‘smart’ project with aesthetic qualities, where functionality and look fuse long-lasting alliances, as clearly shown by the best Design conceived a hundred years ago – a reference to the Bauhaus production is mandatory here.

The *object* is the common denominator of the many imaginable connections. An object/thing, with a physicality incorporating its own conceptual genesis, the thought that *designed* it, but also the movement, physical or intangible – related to emotion, affection or the mind – that will characterise its existence. The *type of object* will determine just as inevitably the quality of the *relationships* it engenders.

Anyone who has reflected on the *statute of material objects*, has highlighted their potential to establish relationships – including emotional ones.

Puppet & Design reveals itself to be a polycentric universe, in which we have attempted to identify prominent elements, in the perspective set by the type of *animation*, how an object is infused with life, or connected with it.

Pursuing the development of our theme – the relationship between Design and Puppet – our aim is not only to focus on movement as a sign of ‘animation’, but also on the

anthropomorphic element (or more generally related to a living, organic form), and the mutualism or migrations that can occur through specularity, inversion, deformation, dissolution and reconstruction.

If *Puppet & Design*, as described in this website's presentation, aims at working around "the relations, connections and bonds existing between the world of puppetry and the world of everyday objects, artefacts and design items", this clearly implies that the project concerns the relationship between the realm of theatre and the realm of everyday life. In a broader perspective, we can say that it concerns the relationship between Art and Life.

The driving idea in the innovations of the early 1900 was the need for a tighter relationship between the artistic and the existential realms, idea underpinning the theatrical conceptions of the time. It is a period, spanning between the end of 19th and the first twenty years of the 20th Century, in which also the concept of puppet is reimagined, paving the way to the ensuing 20th century conceptions.

Apart from anything else, it might be interesting to ask ourselves where the influence of design – as in 'life' outside the theatre – is stronger, and where the opposite occurs; where the 'things' of the world are taking control of the stage's laws and are *staged*, and where, vice versa, the outer reality is metamorphosed into stage presence.

We have drawn a map, that we will summarise in its reference 'places'.

Within this net of connections, there is the **matter** constituting the object. In design, materials are inseparable from the form, and from the movements they allow. In figures, likewise, the materials and the mechanics aren't separable from the poetics and the dramaturgy.

Let's look at materials of inexhaustible potential such as **paper** or **wax**, of which we can find uncountable inflected versions within our two areas of reference.

The Puppet is, before *anything* else, essentially an **object**; observed from this perspective, the object is in any case, always, potentially a 'figure', in a universe that draws from relations and contexts – and vice versa, from decontextualisation, with a view to re-contextualisation.

**Utensils** are inflected versions of objects, transfigured by artists and diverted from their original function. As well as perfectly useless objects, **ornaments**, **knick-knacks**, undefined objects serviceable to our sight and affections.

It is indeed the context, therefore the gaze we are invited to direct towards these objects, that *animates* them, to allow them into the realm of figures.

Considerable interest has arisen around the family of **toys** – presences having the noble purpose of making us 'play' (*giocare, jouer, spielen*). Toys incorporate play, theatre and design, to form an 'active' creativity product – in recent times, Art Toys have been occasionally hosted by the Figures' stages.

**Ready made, objet trouvé** are objects crucial to the avant-garde movements, which draw from poetics (and their relative techniques, such as collage and bricolage) that often stand as points of reference for the theatre of Figures artists, and as an exchange and meeting-point for visual, as well as performing arts.

Also **refuse materials** can be transformed into new figures, like in shadow installations, or in the numerous *lines* of design ‘sustainable’ products. Within the theatrical environment, Michel Lambu defines himself and his partners as “Archéologues du quotidien, archéologues de la semaine passé”. The archeologists of the other day... Let’s just think of Antonio Panzuto’s workshop within the Puppet & Design project.

The **doll** escapes more than any other toy its confinement to the world of childhood,. She’s the puppet’s sister since ancient times, but also fetish, ritual object, a necessary presence in animistic cultures.

Within the European context, the most appreciable element distinguishing a doll from a puppet, is the absence of physical joints attached to the movement of the human (threads, sticks, gloves...). This separateness, has made the doll the most suitable figure to incarnate the Uncanny, the erotic ghost, the oneiric or subconscious dimension.

From animation to animism, the route is complete. Not a circular one, though, rather spiral, open to limitless possibilities ‘of movement’.

‘To animate’ is a verb implied in all speculations around figures. Here, it recurs as a key word allowing the proximity between Puppets and Design. It is a verb marking the transition from stillness to movement, from death to life.

In theatre (but also in life – maybe less so, in design...), things operate within trajectories - namely strategies and practises – that are unpredictable, and that are unimaginable in the absence of an interaction with the actor/performer.

In the theatre of figures, these dynamics generate an ambivalence that ‘unfolds’ before the spectator’s eyes – and following multiple paths. The acting game always proceeds on different levels, the reception is layered and simultaneous of coexistent realities, generating frictions – but also synthesis – between object and figure, life and death, the animated and the inanimate.