



Project
MUSE[®]
Scholarly journals online

Critical Acts

The New Victory Danish Festival

A New Perspective on Puppetry and Family Entertainment

Claudia Orenstein

Americans have such a propensity to see puppetry as mere spectacle for children that many puppetry artists, striving to reach a more sophisticated audience, bemoan the fact that their work continues to be relegated to the realm of children's entertainment. This remains true in New York, even as the New York theatregoing public, educated by four years of the Henson International Festival of Puppet Theatre, has become increasingly aware of the exciting possibilities this theatrical medium affords. Local artists such as Theodora Skipitares, Dan Hurlin, Gretchn Van Lente, Brian Selznick, Lake Simons, and Great Small Works, to name only a few, buoyed by the more prominent successes of Julie Taymor and Basil Twist, continue to create engaging new puppet works for adults at avantgarde venues such as St. Ann's Warehouse, La Mama, and HERE Arts Center.

While these artists have blazed a trail through the territory of puppetry and performing object theatre beyond the well-worn terrain of kiddie shows, the New Victory Danish Festival (4–13 May 2007) at the New Victory Theatre, which advertises itself as “NYC's Ultimate Theatre for Kids and Families,” offered yet another path into this uncharted realm: puppetry for children that draws on the power of performing objects to delve into

the uncanny and fantastical, and so appeals to the unfettered imaginations of young minds, inventive artists, and adventurous adult spectators alike. While many scholars have reflected on the ability of puppets to capture the imagination of the child as well as the childlike capacity for wonder that persists in adulthood, the four companies whose works I saw (of the five that played in the Danish Festival¹) might better be credited with allowing adults to share in the avantgarde artistic inclinations of children, their ability to accept a world of images—even the unimaginable, bizarre, or surreal—stripped of narrative and rationalization, and to revel in its pure sensual pleasures. For the most part, these shows had few recognizable “puppets,” even according to the broad definition of “performing objects” that Stephen Kaplin offers in his article “A Puppet Tree” (2001). In this article Kaplin lays out a model for puppetry that connects a variety of apparently unique performance traditions by focusing on the actor's work of projecting character through an object. For Kaplin, actors wearing masks project character through objects that are directly connected to the actor's face. In puppetry, actors do the same work, but the object is in their hands. The further the object is removed from the performer's body, the more technol-

1. The fifth production of the festival was *Elephant and Crocodile*, by Max Velthuys, directed by Marc van der Velden and produced by Corona La Balance.

Claudia Orenstein is Associate Professor of Theatre at Hunter College, CUNY. She is the author of Festive Revolutions: The Politics of Popular Theatre (University of Mississippi Press, 1998) and coauthor, with Mira Felner, of The World of Theatre: Tradition and Innovation (Allyn and Bacon, 2005). She also serves as Associate Editor of Asian Theatre Journal. Her current research is on contemporary puppetry.

ogy required to manipulate it. Sometimes that technology is a string or a rod and sometimes an electronic device (as in the case of animatronic puppets), or even a sophisticated computer panel. Through this model Kaplin draws a continuum between the traditional actor's craft and a wide variety of performing objects, even going so far as to include NASA's Martian Sojourner as an object, performing on television, manipulated in outer space by computers on Earth. The artists in the Danish Festival focused on introducing both ordinary and extraordinary objects onstage in order to explore those objects' own engaging and enigmatic qualities. The biggest surprise for adult viewers ostensibly chaperoning their children was that at these presentations children, rather than posing the usual hindrance to aesthetic experiences, served instead as privileged passes to what might otherwise have been an undiscovered country of Performance. At some of the performances I attended I saw a few unaccompanied adults, but, apart from one performance-related special event (artist Sofie Krog in conversation with Basil Twist), the marketing seemed to be aimed predominantly at drawing in young audiences. Of course at all children's shows young audience members come with adults, so every children's show is necessarily a show for mixed age groups. Discovering an unusual way to mine the exciting potential this special audience mix offers was one of the Danish Festival's impressive accomplishments.

Carte Blanche's The Attic Under the Sky (2003), conceived and directed by Sara Topsøe-Jensen and recommended for ages six and up, began with a soft-spoken announcement from a slight woman dressed in black, who would be manipulating some of the objects in the play, letting us know that there was no story or prescribed way to understand what we would see, but that we should experience and enjoy it nonetheless. Her introduction didn't just ask us to be open-minded, it helped establish an intimate atmosphere, which in turn gave young viewers the feeling of security they needed to allow their minds to take flight.



Figure 1. *Carte Blanche, The Attic Under the Sky* (2003), New Victory Danish Festival, New Victory Theatre, 2007. (Courtesy of Jacob Eskildsen and The New Victory Theatre)

The piece follows a child, played by a grown woman, Topsøe-Jensen, as she explores the various objects she discovers in a small attic. The old boxes and suitcases piled about in the tightly defined stage area, and their contents—unearthed throughout the show—transport the audience back to the turn of the 20th century and WWI. Much of what the child discovers is purely fanciful. A curious china dish with a silver attachment soon reveals its function as a resting place for a comforting snack and glass of milk. But not all the objects offer such reassurance; some take the child into darker realms. In one sequence, the child leafs through a pile of photographs, holding each one up for us—a house, a tree—until she comes to one of a man in a pilot's uniform. As the lights change, we hear the whizzing of bomber planes. The attic reveals the horrors outside, but shelters us from them as well. In another sequence, a white ball becomes the head of a puppet that shares in the child's attic world. Operated through direct manipulation by a puppeteer in black (Hanne Sørensen), its quality of movement transforms with each new material the puppeteer and child attach to the puppet's head. The puppet seems to search for its perfect body match, trying on new personalities in an ever-changing body: a light fabric allows it to swing and float freely in the air and a stuffed fabric body with plush arms and legs seems to be the sought-after match, leading to an exuberant, floppy dance of celebration. Together the child and the puppet

discover a wind-up penguin. They play with it, witness its death as it walks off the side of a box, and give it a funeral, wrapping it carefully inside a makeshift coffin, one of the small boxes discovered in the attic. Like the puppet's body, in this attic, the child's mind moves freely between light and weighty matters.

Sometimes the disturbing thoughts these objects evoke lie beyond the child's ken. Looking again through some precious, worn photographs of a man, a woman, and some children, the child listens to the crackling voice coming from a record on an old gramophone. The voice reads out sentences from an English language lesson: "I am the father," "This is my wife," "She is my daughter," "She is her mother," etc. The child onstage, like the children in the audience, serenely absorbs these comforting affirmations of an ordered world. As an adult, I was lured into the secure past of childhood and the pre-WWII era that the play presents, enjoying the simplicity of the child's view while simultaneously thinking of the absurdist uses to which Eugène Ionesco put such language lessons in his *Bald Soprano* (1950) and the shattered, irrational world his post-WWII work reflects. One can understand the attic as a protected realm in which both pain and joy are experienced—even as the depths of their consequences await fuller revelation—and engage with the conflicting emotions as an experience of childhood itself.

By the end of the piece, the child has turned the boxes and suitcases over to reveal one side of each painted with a star-studded sky. Stacked together these boxes create a starscape on top of which the child finally stretches out to sleep. This somewhat predictable ending, indicated throughout the show as each new piece of the sky is revealed, and the not unfamiliar conceit of an attic filled with objects engaging and then transforming through a child's imagination, made *The Attic in the Sky* the most "conventional" of the children's shows at the festival. Nonetheless, the piece's nonlinear structure, its focus on pure engagement with discovered objects, and its free movement between comforting and disturbing emotions followed the meanderings of a child's mind, leading us into its rhythms rather than imposing structural models or sentimental motifs on them.

Songs from Above (2006), from Teater Reflexion and Teater My based in Århus, was directed by Bjarne Sandborg, whom I first met in September 2006 at the Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes in Charleville-Mézières, France, where we both attended a performance of *L'Homme-Chemin* (2004) from the French company Hélinka. I was surprised to see that *Songs From Above*, which Sandborg mentioned he was working on at the time, showed some influence from this French production, although *L'Homme-Chemin* addressed an older audience through sophisticated philosophical themes. In *L'Homme-Chemin*, audience members were asked to turn large wooden cranks to set in motion a series of medieval-looking machines, whose automated human figures made of roughly carved wood and attached to their surroundings through simple hand-built and operated mechanisms, expressed a series of metaphysical dilemmas. Our host explained the philosophical significance of each moving image as we watched. Metaphysical issues painstakingly physicalized through laboring automatons were not part of *Songs from Above*, which was meant for toddlers, but the small, circular tent set up in the middle of the studio theatre space, inside which this half-hour performance took place, echoed the yurt that housed *L'Homme-Chemin*. Far from Hélinka's earthy, rustic sensibility, this



Figure 2. *Carte Blanche*, *The Attic Under the Sky* (2003), New Victory Danish Festival, New Victory Theatre, 2007. (Courtesy of Jacob Eskildsen and The New Victory Theatre)

yurt had the calming fragility of a nursery. It was made of soft, white canvas, which we were warned not to lean against as we took off our shoes and found our floor or bench cushions among an audience of no more than 40: children, mostly under the age of five, and their parents. Entering this womblike environment was our first step into a very young child's prelinguistic world, a world of visual, emotional, and sensual experiences only beginning to find definition in words. The few and simple words of warning were offered to us by a somewhat eerie, ethereal woman in white (Mette Rosleff), who served as a mother figure guiding us to and through our experiences.

Surrounded by large white canvas and wooden stars built into the canvas wall behind her and spread out on the floor in front of her, the woman holds up a simple cutout paper star in her hands and says, "Star." Folding over two of its peaks, she turns it into a little boat and says, "Boat." She moves the boat, swaying it back and forth, up to one of the stars on the wall, opening the star to reveal a small seascape constructed inside. She places the boat into this sea. The lights dim, and now a larger shadow version of the boat travels across the canvas, behind the woman, around the tent behind our own heads, forcing us to turn as we follow it to the other side of the stage, over to a new star, which the woman opens to reveal yet another world. One star encloses a house illuminated from inside. A cutout paper figure of a boy travels from there down a string to meet a cutout paper girl, and both travel back to the star house to play hide-and-seek. When the woman lifts the top off one of the stars on the floor (starfish perhaps?), water streams down from inside the top, collecting in the basin below. "Rain," she says; she retrieves a miniature green umbrella from a beach scene on the wall and plants it in the basin so we can enjoy the water making a new pattern as it follows its course down the sides of the umbrella, leaving a dry patch underneath it. The woman's fingers search out two tiny red boots from within the gathering water. The finger character slips them on and then splashes and stomps in the water puddling up in the basin, like all children do, reveling in the sound and feel of the spraying water. The performance offers a simple, essential sensual and emotional experience of

objects in the world. At our performance, a two-year-old Japanese boy in the audience echoed enthusiastically each English word the woman spoke with his own Japanese language discoveries, underscoring the fact that we were experiencing the simple realm of two-year-olds through their eyes. The children in the audience, fully engaged in each moment, encountered a version of their familiar world rendered artistically. Adults participated in the almost Zen act of revisiting a child's world of pure, unadulterated experience. The children expressed their laughter, amazement, and other reactions to the events unfolding before them audibly, but they were not rowdy, and you could feel their attention focus on each new revelation.

While *Songs from Above* and *The Attic Under the Sky* explored the more gentle realms of childhood, *Hans Christian, You Must Be an Angel* (2005) from Guppe 38 and Sofie Krog Teater's *Diva* (2004) took us into byways of the surreal and bizarre, which, it turns out, are as engaging to young minds as they might be fascinating to adults. *Hans Christian, You Must Be an Angel*, a cross between Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1974-79) and a Salvador Dali painting, is more of a guided tour through installation art than a dramatic production. As spectators wait impatiently outside the studio door, a man dressed as a waiter runs into the hall and is quickly ushered back into the theatre by a woman, similarly dressed, until she deems they are finally ready to welcome the spectators inside to the dinner in honor of the great Danish children's storyteller, Hans Christian Andersen. A blue neon line on the floor, which our hosts warn us not to cross, surrounds the long table and modernist metal chairs in the middle of the space. But the waiters themselves continually override their own injunction by inviting us again and again to look closely at or touch objects on the table. We wander freely around the table throughout the presentation, choosing what to see or revisit, guided to new interesting events taking place around the table by our hosts.

Each place setting, they tell us, is for a different one of Andersen's famous tales, and, seemingly appropriate to Andersen's own varied sensibilities, we can see that these stations do not begin and end in an idealized fairy-tale

world, but include the disgusting, the pathetic, the macabre, and the unusual. The performance enlists every possible visual and kinetic medium. At the head of the table, at the place set for Andersen himself, a Danish script slowly, magically appears—through the “magic” of projection—writing itself in glowing white letters across a plate. At the seat for “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” lines of forks and knives suddenly stand at attention—a little army of cutlery—pulled by strings attaching them together and operated from underneath the table. On a screen built into the back of the chair, a continuously playing video shows a pudgy, naked, middle-aged man walking aimlessly around a courtyard wearing only a crown. (As an accommodation made to fit Puritanical American conventions, when the piece was performed here, a plastic covering on the screen blocked out the Emperor’s private parts.²)

The plate for “The Snowman,” whose main character loved warm stoves, is made of ice, and the waitstaff invite us to touch it each time they wipe away the melt-off water from its sides with their cloth napkins. The waiter and waitress also repeatedly refill “The Snow Queen’s” glass with smoking dry ice. All the chairs remain empty throughout, even as our hosts announce new guests to draw our attention to happenings at one or another end of the table. “The Lady with the Eggs” is visibly present, however, in an eerie face projected onto a large white egg in an oversized eggcup. “Slovenly Hans” also seems present at a chair that belches putrid brown liquid from its seat by means of a simple pump. Our hosts draw us away from the sight and the smell with a thermos they tell us to breathe into to wash away the foul odor. The panacea thermos smells of coffee.

Andersen’s love story of the tin soldier and the ballerina plays itself out at two place settings across from each other at a far end of the table. At one is the “ballerina”: an open pair of scissors perched atop a spinning record, which serves as this diner’s plate, turns in front of a lit candle. The shadow of the scissor on the

table takes the form of a pointed-toe figure in continuous pirouette. Across from her, a large paper origami boat makes its way off its plate, across the table, and toward the ballerina, only to drown in a hole that opens up under a swaying manhole cover directly in its path. The table holds other surprises. At one particularly dangerous central location, an unseen hand pulls the waiter’s napkin through a hole into the table each time he passes by, and as the waiter struggles with the invisible force he yells, “Death has got hold of my napkin!”

There are only a few structuring devices to this piece. The hosts repeatedly and elaborately set up and shoot a Cupid’s arrow down the center of the table to mark the beginning of the dinner and to indicate whenever things seem to go wrong—“rebooting” the party. A metal spike sticking out of the table draws back a red bow and releases it. There is no real arrow, just a whizzing noise, but the automatic parting of the table center pieces, the “boing” sound of a direct hit on a chair at the opposite end of the table, and the chair with its hanging dartboard tipping backward altogether, all give the impression that an arrow has flown across the room. The waiter and waitress announce each guest’s supposed entrance, which allows each place setting to take focus for a moment, but the two hosts also keep spectators engaged and entertained at different spots to spread us out, and the action at any one place setting replays continually so we can each view them all. A chair, built from a luggage trolley, carries a small, old travel case halfway up its poles. This contraption represents the story of “The Ugly Duckling,” whose place setting the waiter has carelessly forgotten. The waitress tries at intervals to squeeze it in at different locations, but she can never find an appropriate place. The piece formally concludes when “The Ugly Duckling” finally finds its home, right at the head of the table on Andersen’s chair. Setting it in this honored location, the waitress opens the case to reveal a film of a swan gliding on a lake projected onto the inside top of the case. While this brings the performance as such to an end, spectators are invited to stay and continue to

2. The actors/waiters implied that the censorship of the Emperor’s private parts was not necessary when performing this show in Denmark, even for young audiences.



Figure 3. "The Ugly Duckling," from *Hans Christian, You Must Be an Angel* (2005) by Guppe 38, New Victory Danish Festival, New Victory Theatre, 2007. (Courtesy of Jacob Eskildsen and The New Victory Theatre)

explore the table and the marvels it offers up for at least another half hour, until the operator-puppeteers finally crawl out from under their sweltering cover and pin up the white table cloth to reveal the elaborate system of cables and ropes underneath.

Although *Hans Christian, You Must Be an Angel* uses Andersen's fairy tales as a catalyst, and no doubt makes more references for Danes familiar with these tales than for most of the Americans present, the performance speaks to audiences of every age. I regret following the recommendation that the show was for ages eight and up, and not bringing my three-year old, who surely would have enjoyed exploring this uncanny world as much as her eight-year-old brother (the last audience member reluctantly pulled from the hall) and the other four- and five-year-olds who were there. As the show was part of a children's theatre festival, I did not encourage my mother, a professor of surrealism, nor my sister, a museum curator, to come, but both would have found that this work addressed them. This completely surprising and inventive piece redefines "entertainment for the whole family."

Having already seen Sofie Krog Teater's *Diva* at the puppet festival in Charleville, where it was one of the highlights of the 50 shows I attended there, I simply ignored the recommendation for ages 12 to adult and brought

everyone: my three-year-old, my eight-year-old, my husband, and I strongly encouraged the MA and PhD students in my graduate seminar on Puppetry and Performing Objects to set aside the many end-of-semester papers they were writing and go. While *Hans Christian, You Must Be an Angel* dabbled in surrealism, the best word to describe *Diva* is simply "bizarre," but in the best possible sense. And yet, this was the one show of the four that most resembled a traditional puppet show as it had a puppet stage, hand puppet characters, and a story.

The conceptualization and construction of this show emanates entirely from the mind and hands of deviser and puppet-builder Sofie Krog. Krog also executes every aspect of the performance from the center of a stage that she spins around her body to alternately reveal the four different settings in which the action takes place. Krog performs all the characters: The Professor, a head that moves around on a small, wheeled platform, is a cantankerous mad scientist who has erected an elaborate machine with flashing lights and moving parts to make the potion he hopes will provide him with the body he desires. Eddie is his minion, whom he sends to retrieve the "material" he needs for his potion. A small hand puppet, Eddie is an endearing vampire-esque white rabbit—or maybe a mouse, hard to tell—with black leather circles around his bulging eyes, two little pointy teeth jutting out of his mouth, and a black cape that makes him look more like a kid playing superhero than a prince of darkness. The Diva is a cabaret singer with deep red lips and sparkly purple eye shadow over her sultry, expressive eyes. Her head, which along with her hand (Krog's own hand) is all we see of her, is a large mask that Krog holds on her other hand, allowing her to operate the mouth and eyes from inside as her own arm becomes the Diva's alabaster neck. The Butler, whose desperate love for the Diva drives him to drink, rounds



Figure 4. *The Diva and Eddie*, in *Diva* by Sofie Krog Teater (2004), New Victory Danish Festival, New Victory Theatre, 2007. (Courtesy of Jacob Eskildsen and The New Victory Theatre)

out the main cast. He is simply Krog's expressive hand in a white glove.

The plot thickens when Eddie renders the Diva unconscious in the middle of a performance in order to retrieve the precious "material" he needs for the Professor's potion. The unlikely precious substance is the plastic fruit that decorates the palm trees onstage and the Diva's turban for her samba number. With the Diva unconscious, the manager calls in "guest stars" to entertain the angry, restless crowd. The Wonder Boys are two acrobatic music hall clowns, which Krog plays by putting miniature lederhosen on two fingers of each hand and Velcroing a clown face above the shorts to the back of each hand. The clowns do acrobatic tricks for us and then start to play tricks on each other as one pulls down the other's pants. In revenge, the pantless clown takes the surprising step of pulling off the other clown's Velcroed head. Soon they are both stumbling around headless, pants around their ankles.

When the Diva finally revives, she is appalled to find that the Butler, who also functions as a kind of Cabaret Manager, has

replaced her with these ridiculous performers. Her disgust drives the Butler to a further drinking bout and eventual suicide—the white glove sways limply, one of its fingers hanging from a rope. The Diva follows Eddie into the Professor's laboratory, hidden in the bowels of the theatre. An unexpected highlight is watching Krog as the Diva lay out a rope she will "climb" down to follow Eddie, dexterously tying a knot in a string with one hand; Krog's other hand is, of course, occupied with operating the Diva's head. A chase scene and mix-ups worthy of any thriller occur across several of the sets, and eventually it is the Diva who finds and drinks the magic potion. All the black curtains of the set close, and the puppet theatre spins and spins to the accompaniment of taped magical transformation music and mystical low lighting with white flecks that twinkle against the spinning curtain. When it stops, a long black curtain opens to reveal the effects of the magic potion: the Diva stands in front of us with a real body. Krog wears the Diva's mask over her own face, and her own body, clad in an elegant evening dress, is the end result of the magic. A final coda to the piece shows Eddie, whom the Diva had flushed down a

toilet earlier, happily cavorting with a female version of himself—another little hand puppet in a grass skirt—on a small island, complete with a single palm, that floats in the sewer system.

Krog's story draws on science fiction and other film tropes, playing with them in unusual and unpredictable ways. Her execution of every aspect of the event is masterful. She displays the many skills a puppeteer must perfect in order to envision and fully realize a world of one's own imagination onstage in miniature. Unlike the other shows discussed here, which capitalize on seeing and exploring objects in and of themselves, Krog cultivates the more traditional pleasures of puppetry: watching an artist transform inanimate materials into living creatures and endowing them with unique personalities, even as we are continually reminded of the lifeless material of which they are made. As we watch the Diva perform the seemingly simple act of tying a knot in a string, we follow the moment as one sequential event in a story. But what truly captivates us and occupies our minds is our appreciation of Krog's ability to execute this difficult one-handed maneuver knowing that the Diva's face, watching what is supposedly her own hand, hides Krog's other hand.

The New Victory Theatre can already be applauded for the excellent program of international performances it offers children, which parallels the Brooklyn Academy of Music's experimental mix of performance media, and its integration of physical theatre, circus arts, dance, and music with more traditional dramatic forms. Yet we can still learn several new things about children's theatre from the offerings at the New Victory Theatre's Danish Festival. First of all, Denmark, a country with 5.2 million people (less than the population of New York City) and over 120 children's theatres, has understood the value of cultivating young viewers and does so with sophistication and respect for young audiences and their parents. With Hans Christian Andersen as Denmark's archetypal children's entertainer, rather than Walt Disney, Danish theatres take a broad view of what a child's experience can incorporate; they do not shy away from the sad, pathetic, and unusual images and events that captivate children. In his book *In Search*

of Aesthetics for the Puppet Theatre (1992), Swedish puppeteer Michael Meschke writes of how, at his Marionetteatern in Stockholm, he eventually came to work against the fashion of breaking audiences down into specific age groups, striving instead to create shows that spectators of all ages could watch and enjoy together. This practice promotes the communal bonds that come with shared artistic experiences. The festival's theatres from Denmark seem to have followed suit in their work, in spite of the age recommendations the festival offered.

The Danish Festival also shows us the power of objects in performance—puppetry in its widest sense—to speak across a spectrum of ages. While one might not identify most of these shows as traditional puppetry, each displayed the power of objects to capture the imagination, and spoken language was minimal throughout. In *The Attic Under the Sky* the only words come from the gramophone; in *Songs from Above*, the spoken text consists of the woman's few, simple utterances; in *Hans Christian, You Must Be an Angel*, the waiter and waitress's improvisatory comments serve mainly to guide our attention; and the few words in *Diva* are reserved for the machine's mechanical notification that it needs "more material" and the Professor's echo of this call as he orders Eddie to get "more material." The focus on the visual over the spoken word or narrative allows these productions to speak to viewers at many levels, each on its own terms.

Looking at my own children's enjoyment of the works here—as much my eight-year-old son's gleeful laughter at the toddler show *Songs from Above* as my three-year-old's riveted gaze watching *Diva*—and at my own excitement in sharing interesting theatrical experiences with my children, it is clear to me that there is a point at which the aesthetic interests of children and adults meet and provide a mutually enriching and satisfying encounter. It is no accident that Julie Taymor won a 1998 Tony Award for *The Lion King* when she discovered this secret and offered a world of performing objects for children and adults to connect to, revitalizing Broadway entertainment. In fact, her understanding of how an interesting performance can offer fulfilling art to people of

every age is surely one of the riches Taymor brought back with her from her work with Teatr Loh in Indonesia in the late 1970s (see Taymor 1979), as much as any visual motifs or technical devices she uses in her work. In Bali, as in many other cultures around the globe, puppetry, masked dance, and other performances indiscriminately attract all members of a village community. Each may view the event from his or her own perspective, but no one is excluded. These shows have something for everyone and offer different points of interest depending on one's age and experience. Young children, watching with their elders, build up a background of these experiences, and everyone's sense of sharing in a communal culture is enriched. As they grow into adults, they can see greater depth and nuances in the performances. In our own devised productions in the West, swinging free from established communal traditions, finding the delicate balance of an art that does not talk down to adults nor above the heads of kids may be a somewhat greater challenge. The Danish Festival proves that it can be done, and it might begin by building on children's ability to see the world in unfamiliar ways and sharing those unusual views with us

all. So, the tendency to dismiss puppets as mere children's fare needs radical reassessment to discover the possibilities performing objects hold for developing a newer and truer kind of "family entertainment," one that unites the most inventive artistic propensities of children and adults to reaffirm communal bonds through shared artistic experiences.

References

- Kaplin, Stephen
2001 "A Puppet Tree." In *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, edited by John Bell, 18–25. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Meschke, Michael, with Margareta Sörenson
1992 *In Search of Aesthetics for the Puppet Theatre*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts: Sterling Publishers.
- Taymor, Julie
1979 "Teatr Loh, Indonesia, 1977–8." *TDR* 23, 2 (T82):63–76.

TDR: The Drama Review 52:3 (T199) Fall 2008. ©2008 New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

The Performance of Disappearance

Mike Parr's Amerika

Edward Scheer

The performance, from Tuesday 9 May 2006 at 6:00 A.M. through Friday 12 May at 8:30 A.M., was intended to last as long as possible. The artist Mike Parr had prepared himself in his usual manner by fasting and meditating for days beforehand. He would take no solids throughout the performance and drink only water, occasionally with a glucose additive. He would remain outdoors—outside the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney—with no shelter. He would be dressed as a bride.

In the middle of the night on Friday 12 May one of the gallery attendants recorded the following incident in a blog post:

a young man is dressing as a groom and suddenly emerges with a spade to dig a hole. he begins to dig. I receive the call and can hear people debating, how to stop the hole being dug on the perimeter of the Bride's space. when I

Edward Scheer is Associate Professor in the School of Theatre, Performance, and Cultural Policy at the University of Warwick. He is a founding editor, with Peter Eckersall, of the journal Performance Paradigm, president of Performance Studies international, and his monograph on Mike Parr's performance art is forthcoming from Schwartz Press. His current project, funded by the Australia Research Council, is a study of time and performance in multimedia art.