

**APPLIED PUPPETRY IN EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND THERAPY:  
THEORY AND PRACTICE**

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# **APPLIED PUPPETRY IN EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND THERAPY: THEORY AND PRACTICE**

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## From reviews

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This piece fills the gap in the literature on applied puppetry: the scientific foundation and practice of using puppets in up-bringing, education and therapy. Various authors, from many countries of Europe, and North and South America, throw light on the question from many different angles. These are research studies, both scientific and professional, founded on practice.

The book presents different and new approaches to the use of puppets in up-bringing, education, social work and therapy. It is a significant contribution to the study of applied puppetry, of a research and theoretical nature, with a firm basis in practice. It includes the previously unpublished results of scientific research and case studies. It is aimed at students and teaching staff at humanities and teaching faculties, art academies and medical faculties; scientists and practitioners of applied theatre and puppetry (drama educators, teachers, pre-school teachers, psychologists, social workers and therapists).

This book is up-to-date, necessary and will fill an enormous gap in the literature on applied theatre and puppetry.

Prof. Edvard Majaron,  
Faculty of Education,  
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The use of puppets in the educational and therapeutic context is an important topic. Their potential is varied and great, as shown by everyday practice. But since there is not just one possible mode of use, but an extremely wide range of possibilities, it is important to describe and comment, and also research different practices, which is precisely the focus of this book. Contemporary educational and therapeutic, but also artistic, practice constantly examines new possibilities of approach and inclusion of participants in a more personal way, which makes the main subject of this book extremely current, and its potential range significant.

Puppets and puppetry have been present for decades in educational and therapeutic practice, whilst a professional and scientific description of and research into the phenomenon have been lacking, which has slowed the development of the practice. In that sense, it is important to present recent thought, experience and research. The book in question does this in the best possible way, because it gathers together experts from many countries, that is, from very different educational, cultural and artistic traditions, where it is clear that a general consensus has been reached on the fundamental standpoint: the use of puppets in educational and therapeutic contexts is very important, and offers enormous potential.

The book gathers together experts in different areas who work in significantly different contexts, and with significantly different fundamental intentions (from raising the quality of life in homes for the aged and infirm, through treatment of collective trauma, to typical therapeutic and structured forms of work). If we also add the different social contexts, the tremendous effort invested in presenting the variety of ways of thinking and practice may be seen. We should also add the fact that all the contributions are written in a serious and professional manner.

The combination of practice founded on professional studies, and scientific research founded on practice contributes in the best possible way to our understanding of the phenomenon, at the same time encouraging further research and the development of practice.

Iva Gruić, PhD,  
Faculty of Teacher Education,  
University of Zagreb, Croatia

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## Preface

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The miracle of the puppet never ceases to surprise us with its inexplicable power. A puppet is so gentle and fragile, but so powerful! We marvel and wonder, artists and scientists research this phenomenon, academics try to explain it, and practitioners use it in practice on a wide scale. The UNIMA *Puppets in Education, Development and Therapy Commission* has joined the effort to research the phenomenon of puppets, whilst at the same time giving examples of the successful use of puppets in three fields: education, development and therapy. People are writing more and more about the use of puppets in places and for purposes beyond the theatre, but there is still a strong need for good quality texts, scientific and professional articles, and practitioners are constantly calling for and waiting with gratitude for examples from practice which will give them fresh ideas for their work in the field.

The EDT commission has so far published two books, whose titles clearly indicate their faith in the power of puppets (*The Puppet – What a Miracle!* and *The Power of the Puppet*), which can be downloaded in several languages from the UNIMA International website (<https://www.unima.org/en/commission/education-development-and-therapy/>).

In the desire to be even more open and more accessible to all those interested around the world, we are publishing our first e-book. I am grateful to all the authors who have selflessly given their texts for no fee, and to all those who have worked tirelessly so that this book can see the light of day.

Since we dealt more with education in our first two books, the emphasis now is on therapy, without, however, neglecting education and development. That is why its title is *Applied Puppetry in Education, Development, and Therapy: Theory and Practice*. It is, therefore, about the use of puppets outside the theatre, about puppets who do not appear before an audience in a theatrical performance in an exclusively artistic role, but in the many roles they are given in other areas of human life.

The concept of applied puppetry itself is dealt with in the first article in the book, written by **Matt Smith** (*Applied Puppetry – Provisional*

*Principles and Practices*), who explains the meaning, development and use of that term.

The second article begins with an universal research question, in the article by **Livija Kroflin**, *The Differences between Animation in Applied Puppetry and Puppetry as an Art Form*. She deals with the differences between applied puppetry and puppetry as an art form, with particular reference to animation, emphasizing the fact that there is an important difference in approach between puppetry in terms of artistic theatre puppets, and applied puppetry, but that neither of them is more or less valuable.

This is followed by articles on the use of puppets in education. The article by **Juliet Lockhart** *Why Puppets?* talks about work with an atypical population of children, describing work in institutions for children who have been expelled from “normal” schools.

**Michael J. Vetere III and Mary T. Vetere** deal with the education of teachers, examining the influence of work with puppets during studies, on the basis of their experience of their own creative capacities (*Teacher Candidates in the Age of Arts Integration: How Puppetry Can Inspire Creativity*).

**Matteo Corbucci's** article *Playing the game of theatre together: the use of puppets in social inclusion activities* tells of a successful, linked activity using the puppet as a pedagogical and artistic tool, during a series of socio-cultural activities carried out throughout Italy, in the context of amateur theatre.

The use of puppets is normal in work with children, but this book includes several interesting articles which show how puppets are used successfully in work with adults too. The article by **Meg Amsden**, *The value of practical experience when working with elders and puppets over 30 years*, takes an important and interesting step forward in that context: it describes work with residents of homes for the elderly and infirm, giving very constructive and applicable recommendations.

Several articles deal with the use of puppets in various types of therapy. *Puppet Therapy in Penitentiary Institutions of Russia* by **Larisa Telnova** explains how to approach adolescents and adults in penal institutions.

**Marialena Tsiamoura** researches how puppets function as a therapeutic tool. The puppet is linked with some theatrical characteristics, which, either on stage or during therapy, make it therapeutic, according to the

author of the article, *Searching for the Characteristics of the Theatrical Puppet during Therapy*.

Åsa Viklund writes about a study conducted on a world level (*Puppets in Psychotherapy – an international web-based study among clinicians*). The aim of the study was to understand more about how puppets are used among therapists today, and also to examine how they can be a useful tool in psychotherapy in the future.

Some of the articles express the author's own experience, often describing the work process, which will be immediately useful for interested readers in expanding their own understanding of the possibilities of this form of work. A typical example is the article, *A Psychodynamic Approach to Puppet Play*, in which the author **Eleanor Irwin** explains the importance of both form and content in analysis and understanding of play situations in the therapeutic context, offering an abundance of suggestions and recommendations for work.

**Karrie Marshall's** article, *Puppetry and the Art of Therapeutic Connection in Dementia Care*, shares good practice in therapeutic puppetry for adults experiencing cognitive changes affecting memory, communication, and cognitive functions. The author aims to clarify how puppetry can stimulate and connect with adults living with different forms of dementia.

**Svetlana Smirnova's** article, *Metaphorical Dolls in a Psychological Correction and Psychotherapy*, presents the theoretical and practical aspects of work with a metaphorical image of a doll at art-therapy sessions.

**Antje Wegener** talks about a specific situation involving the use of puppets in Germany, their presence, spread, and advantages and difficulties (*Practical Links to Art and Sciences – Therapeutic Puppetry in Germany*).

An impressive example is given in the article, *Puppet Therapy and Traumatic Memory in Post-dictatorship Chile*, by **Andrea Markovits**, who describes a series of workshops with adults, entitled "Puppets and Memory", devised to prompt people to talk about their personal trauma, the inexpressible, in order to halt the transfer of trauma from the older to the younger generation, and ease the enormous social trauma of a difficult period.

The authors **Tatiana Pushkareva and Darya Agaltsova** present a method of work based on Gestalt psychology, which, according to them, could be extremely useful to students of teaching and social-pedagogy (*A*

*Social-cultural Project “My doll and me” – Combined Educational, Psychological and Art Technology).*

The article, *From Ludic to Therapeutic: the Experience of Three Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder with the Art of Puppetry*, by three authors (**Roberto Ferreira da Silva, Aparecida Oliveira da Silva and Ana Paula da Silva Freitas**) is in fact a report based on the experience of the use of puppetry in the therapeutic treatment of three children with autism. Throughout the sessions the children carried out a series of activities to stimulate creativity, focus and self-confidence, impacting their behaviour.

These sixteen articles were written by authors from various parts of the world (Europe, South and North America), and ten countries: Brazil, Chile, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Russia, Sweden, U.K., and the U.S.A.). Their social, professional and personal backgrounds differ, and their approaches to the subject are also varied. Precisely this variety is the particular value of this book, as well as the fact that all the writers agree about their fundamental standpoint regarding the importance and applicability of puppets in education, development and therapy.

The book is intended for all those who are interested in the use of puppets outside the theatre: scientists, pre-school and school teachers, drama teachers, psychologists, pedagogues, psycho-therapists, speech therapists, social workers, students preparing for these professions and their teachers, but also theatre artists working in applied theatre. We believe that they will all find in it encouragement and inspiration for further work, in which their main partner will be that miraculous item with a soul, the puppet.

Livija Kroflin  
 President of the UNIMA Education,  
 Development & Therapy Commission  
[www.unima.org/education](http://www.unima.org/education)

Matt Smith  
**Applied Puppetry – Principles and Practices**

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*Review paper*

**Abstract:** This positioning document presents how the author sees the development of the term applied puppetry. The intention is for the proposed principles to be taken as points of departure for practitioners and scholars from which to consider the possibilities of applied puppetry. It further attempts to define the idea of applied puppetry which is a more widespread term to describe educational and therapeutic practices. The list of aphorisms are intended to provoke as much as to provide a mapping of a field.

**Key words:** applied puppetry, object oriented ontology, bridges, augmenting

The idea of applied puppetry has been around for quite a while. The establishment of the educational puppetry association in the British context in 1943 is evidence of this. During the war the EPA presented a very hopeful vision for puppetry with a social purpose. We could be inspired by the spirit of this organisation today. The idea of puppetry as a social educational force was clear, even during those dark days. Much later in 1992 the position of puppetry in the UK was surveyed by Allen, Ellis and Shaw and they noted that

Almost three quarters of the companies surveyed work in schools and more than half in community centres; performances and workshops in residential homes and institutions are common, and a handful of puppeteers work with the health service. For some puppeteers, a performance or workshop in a school is no more than a useful source of income; for others it is a conscious choice to work in education. Similarly, for some teachers, the puppeteers are no more than entertainers; for others, they are professional artists contributing to the educational process (Allen, Shaw and Ellis, 1992, 43).

This view of UK puppetry demonstrates a shift from the idealism of the EPA's vision for puppetry. My hope would be that applied puppeteers today are committed to the idea of puppetry as a social educational form and not just a handy secondary income.

I began my practice at the time of the *On the Brink of Belonging* publication and my work emerged in this context before the contemporary situation of puppetry as a mainstream artform in the UK. My position in regards to the shifts in puppetry I see as embodying the coming together of both applied theatre and puppetry since 1992.

Since training to be a puppeteer at Central School of Speech and Drama I wandered through lots of work that was applied. Through contexts like youth theatres, playschemes, street theatre, care homes, youth clubs, prisons, probation, special needs groups, museums, galleries, health networks, environmental projects and education from pre-school to masters students and in these contexts I have participated in and witnessed the potential of the puppet. I became known as "Matt the Puppet Man" through my work as a freelance artist and through my company, Pickleherring. I

am now, an academic looking back on all this practice, trying to make sense of it and also looking forward to further mapping the terrain of applied puppetry. Much of my work explores the haptic and ludic pleasure of applied puppetry through workshops, research, residencies, lectures and performances.



Bear and Elephant Boy from *The Generosity of Penguins* by Lavinia Murray, Pickleherring touring show. 1996. Photograph Mike Wight.

For the last ten years I have been advocating for the adoption of applied puppetry as a term to encapsulate the myriad of practices involving puppetry when it is used for community art, educational contexts and therapy. I am following the lead of the major contribution in the field of scholarship in applied theatre (Nicholson, 2014 and Thompson, 2003) and the way that applied theatre is recognised as an umbrella term. I have presented this term as worthy of adoption in both the context of European conferences and in the USA and met with some suspicion and hostility about using a term that can be considered broad and difficult to define. By adopting applied puppetry the intention was not to homogenise the rich landscape of puppetry used with specific purpose in relation to specific communities. The intention was to align puppetry towards developments

in wider theatre cultures and the great deal of both practical and theoretical knowledge in applied theatre. It also relates to my positionality as a practitioner who has combined applied theatre and puppetry professionally as practitioner and later in my career as scholar. It is clear that in the last ten years some very interesting developments have changed the map of puppetry and this has had an effect on applied puppetry. For example the major shift in the UK context has been the success of the puppet show *War Horse* and its positive effect on the fortunes of The National Theatre. It is now one of my many anecdotes that this puppet show financially saved jobs and the National Theatre's fortunes.<sup>1</sup> More importantly this show changed the idea of puppetry as an artform in British theatre cultures, for when I first toured adult puppetry at the beginning of the 90s I found venues reluctant to take the risk and now this is not the case. The next key change is in the theoretical landscape, for example in philosophies of things and objects found in new materialism (Brown, 2009), vibrant matter (Bennett, 2009) and Object Oriented Ontology (Harman, 2010). This has played out over the last ten years and I suggest that these key challenges to the way we think about ontology as not centred on the human subject are the theoretical backbone of how to look into the practice of puppetry in general, but more specifically applied puppetry. This body of thought has challenged me to think differently about both the puppet as something that has even more wonder and mystery as a performing object, but also how I think about human participants in my practice amongst the networks of objects I need to consider in applied puppetry.

I am encouraged that UNIMA is now adopting the term applied puppetry because this useful combination of words has helped me to both define, but also question what I consider a very vibrant and dynamic set of practices globally. Debating the usefulness of such terminology should also be part of its future as otherwise ossification in practice and thinking will develop. For the rest of this paper I will explore and present some of the pertinent and relevant aspects of applied puppetry from my scholarly explorations. But before we move on I would like to offer this thought;

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1 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/oct/03/war-horse-national-theatre-success>  
War Horse covers National Theatre's lost Arts Council grants 2011, Brown, Mark.

with all the different types of groups I have worked with in communities, I have found that they always appreciate and like to adopt a name they choose for themselves. So naming your practice is tricky.

I am arguing that applied puppetry involves an increased awareness of objects in networks. This awareness tries to avoid instrumentalism and instead includes attending to the mysteries of both the human and non-human in practice. This relates to a phrase I am playing with at the moment, as a way of understanding the whole ensemble in theatre, which includes the “non-human ensemble”. To explore this world of the non-human ensemble, I suggest, for applied puppetry a set of new principles and a re-visioning of practice. This is a provisional list and is always in transition and grows in reaction to the learning from new networks of objects, including the ideas of participants. By flattening the ontologies of my practice in this way it does not devalue the human in my work, as that would be ridiculous. Instead, the impossible challenge is, through cathexis, to pay more attention to everything in the space and imagine the subjective in all objects or things. To make this set of principles I am suggesting palatable and useful, I present them as a set of aphorisms inspired by the great visionary Peter Schumann from Bread and Puppet Theater.

### **Ethics of the “hand to hand”**

Responding to philosopher Emanuel Levinas and his idea of the “face to face” moment in ethics I have characterised puppetry in workshops as a space in which the face to face is deferred to the haptic space of the hand to hand. This deferment of the responsibility to the others “being” from the face to the hands makes some exchanges in workshops less intense and challenging for participants. When we focus on hand based activities we find different ways of exchanging between ourselves. This can allow for surprising conversations, confessions and discussions. The notion of hand to hand ethics in applied practice could be developed both in community context and around theories of how object based performances position bodies and identities.