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Editorial

Cariad Astles, Emma Fisher, Laura Purcell-Gates, Persephone Sextou

In 2016, Emma Fisher proposed to the UNIMA Research Commission a symposium on the themes of puppetry[1], disability, health and wellbeing. The symposium was supported by the UNIMA Research Commission and came to be titled The Broken Puppet symposium. The title 'Broken Puppet' celebrates the *de*construction of the puppet as a representation of the human body, rather than a *con*structed, idealised, commodified, or 'perfect' representation of what is considered the 'norm', thus bringing attention to the 'otherness' of both the puppet and the disabled body. It was launched in 2017 at the Cork Puppet Festival, hosted by University College Cork in Ireland. Puppeteers, academics and scholars from across the world presented at the event, including practitioners creating puppetry about their own disability or health issue, and also those creating work with people who had a disability or working in healthcare settings. The popularity of the first Broken Puppet symposium led to a second, at Bath Spa University in 2018, and a third at Newman University, Birmingham, in 2019. The first Broken Puppet symposium was co-convened by Emma Fisher and Cariad Astles, who for the second were joined by Laura Purcell-Gates, and for the third by Persephone Sextou. We four form the editorial team for this special journal issue.

Over the span of three years a rich tapestry of work was shared, and a community was formed of like-minded artists and scholars working in this niche of puppetry, disability and health. Practitioners creating work around their own disability and health had, for the most part, not yet published or spoken about their work in an academic context. For example, puppet-maker and contributor Corina Duyn gave her first talk at Broken Puppet 1 about her puppetry practice as a disabled person. Since then, Duyn has been a keynote speaker at Broken Puppet 2, has authored articles and has presented in Ireland, Chile, Brazil and the UK. Duyn writes in her article in this special issue:

[1] Puppet: anima, consciousness, spirit in matter; animated bodies, objects, figures, materials, masks, technologies; something that radically broadens what we care for; a mysterious friend that bridges worlds and connect souls (Astles, Fisher, Purcell-Gates, Sextou 2020).

...being immersed in the ‘Broken Puppet’ symposia, I became much more consciously aware of the power of puppets to explore the issues of illness and disability, and to bring our experiences to a wider public (Duyn 2020).

We are particularly pleased to bring this volume of edited writings to you because, as Ross Prior, chief editor of the *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* and keynote speaker at the third Broken Puppet symposium, notes, there has been scant published academic literature addressing the terminologies, approaches, practices and modes of using puppetry in healthcare, disability and wellbeing contexts. Applied puppetry, the overarching field within which puppetry in healthcare and wellbeing and aspects of disability performance broadly sits, is itself a recently coined and recognised phenomenon.

This volume, therefore, aims to redress this paucity of existing literature and provide some insights into two specific areas: firstly, to consider and analyse the widespread and excellent practices and approaches carried out by puppeteers, healthcare workers, therapists and related professions. These approaches draw on the specificity of the puppet in enabling the development and creation of communication, relationship and identity in contexts of health, wellbeing and disability as well as in creating work around one’s own identity and lived experience in relation to these areas. In so doing, they are themselves analysing and finessing the skills of puppetry within these settings. Their work showcases the scholarly analyses within this journal issue: how puppets are, and can be, used in the relevant applied and performance settings, and, related to this: what training is needed to work with puppets in healthcare and wellbeing settings, and in performance that explores one’s own identity?

The second area of focus for this volume is to work towards a growing scholarship within applied puppetry. Which other fields (such as psychology, sociology, medicine, disability studies, studies of health and social care) should be studied and understood by scholars and practitioners of applied puppetry? These questions are particularly pertinent as the editors consider the creation of a diploma or training in applied puppetry, given the high level of international interest from artists, medical and therapeutic professionals, carers, playworkers, teachers and community leaders from all over the world. Networks and projects in this previously unknown and certainly unrecognised area of work and scholarship are

emerging at an encouraging and inspiring rate. Increasingly, people from multiple walks of life are recognising that the puppet is special and unique and does something particular that a human cannot do.

The Broken Puppet symposia, later the Broken Puppet Project, have provided a focus for this growing interest. An international AHRC research network titled 'Objects with Objectives', led by David Grant of Queen's University Belfast, brought together applied theatre and puppetry scholars and practitioners between 2017 and 2018 to interrogate and develop the emerging field of applied puppetry; the network included several of the contributors to this special journal issue. Since the three Broken Puppet symposia, several other umbrella projects related to the idea of the puppet within cultures of health, disability studies and wellbeing, have begun, directly inspired by the Broken Puppet project. In September 2019 the National Drama Centre in Madrid, the puppet centre TOPIC in Tolosa and the Ministry for Public Health in Madrid organised three days of talks and round tables linked to the idea of the puppet as healer and educator: *Sana, Sana: Jornadas Internacionales del Títere* (Heal, heal: puppetry discussion days). In January 2020 Finnish puppeteers Katriina Andrianov and Riku Laakonen, with South African/Australian puppeteer Gary Friedman, set up a network to promote and support applied puppetry in the Nordic region of Europe.

The contributors to this volume explore discrete areas of their practice and thinking through detailed examination of the principles and practices of puppetry in relation to narratives of illness, disability and 'otherness'. Key to this enquiry is the idea that puppetry provides a place for exploration of identity in relation to body-self; three of the writers within the first section draw upon their own personal experiences of body/disability/illness.

Emma Fisher notes the 'negative freedom' offered by the puppet (drawing on Kleist); its complete ability to be and do whatever it is made to do. Focusing largely on disability theory, she links the idea of 'fractured bodies' to the idea that bodies are disabled by the society that surrounds them. The puppet, therefore, is only limited by whatever is constructed and set up around it. This sheds a clear light on the way in which we perceive normative bodily construction, and how societies have enabled certain ways of being over others. The

puppet, therefore, focuses our attention on the nature in which bodies are 'othered' by society.

Cariad Astles discusses the synergies between studies of empathy, neuroscience and puppetry performance in ritual and contemporary settings, identifying the qualities of mediation, accompaniment and testimony as particular to the puppet in enabling cognitive, affective and social empathy for both performers of puppetry and audiences or participants. Her article addresses ways in which puppetry training and performance can be considered to engage similar processes to those connected to empathy within the brain; her article analyses can this in turn can have significant affect within healthcare.

The puppet or thing as embodiment of power relations provides the theme of Matt Smith's article. Smith deconstructs and disentangles the way in which we perceive objects through an examination of object theories, power relations and space construction. He notes, as other contributors have alluded to, that there is a dynamic interplay between ethics, bodies and power, which is highlighted by the brokenness and 'thingliness' of the puppet, which provides an 'internal hum'. Humans do not exist without objects; and the way in which they exist is always in relationship to these objects. Performing objects, therefore, provide perspective and illuminate the trajectory taken by humans navigating systems of power.

Petra Kuppers considers that puppetry enables 'new alignments of difference' as narrational and relational objects. Her article discusses, through analyses of a series of performance encounters, how the puppet, or animated material, can be seen as something via which people are able to explore non-realist embodiment and enmindment. Kuppers notes that puppets are not necessarily anthropomorphic figures with two legs, two arms, etc, but instead hybrid, complex, animated, moving narratives.

Ross Prior's article suggests that the puppet/puppeteer may perform something of the role of the shaman in healing: the collaborative process that is enacted by puppeteer and audience/participant creates an environment within which understanding (and, by extension, healing) is collaboratively 'performed' and knowledge is collectively constructed. This means that the puppet is not only therapeutic for an individual performer or audience but deeply so for communities as well. Prior uses the concepts of animism, transference and embodiment as key means to understanding the puppet within healing contexts.

Marina Tsaplina's position paper further develops the narrative about the puppet enabling a clear vision of the diversity of the potential and actual body into an exploration of the sometimes tense relationship between traditional ecological knowledge and scientific ecological knowledge. She highlights the way in which indigenous ways of knowledge elaborate far more clearly the processual nature of human experience and being. Like Fisher and Kuppers, she notes her own personal and individual experience of disability/illness to enable discussion of how one is never static in relation to this condition.

The ideas expressed above are further elaborated in the range of notes from the field included within section two. Susan Linn, writing about her work with seriously ill and hospitalised children, draws on psychodynamic theory, in particular D. Winnicott's writings on play, to unpack the psychological functions that she argues puppetry enhances: the creation of a holding environment, projection and identification, modelling, mastery, and self-expression. Linn points in particular to the sense of hiddenness and separateness that puppetry evokes, which allows children experiencing stress and trauma to engage with overwhelming emotions through the safe medium of the puppet.

Karim Dakroub uses the example of a six-year-old boy previously diagnosed with ADHD who, through therapeutic puppetry work, is able to 'symbolically transform' his internal conflicts into creative activity. Dakroub draws on the Embodiment, Projection and Role (EPR) model developed by Sue Jennings in order to reframe the child's difficulties from an ADHD diagnosis to difficulties with the child's self-perception and role within the family; puppetry is used therapeutically to allow the child to reconstruct these perceptions.

Corina Duyn draws on lived experience of chronic illness/disability to explore the ways in which puppetry can function both as an embodied mode of adaptation - the discovery that there is always a way to craft a puppet - and as an expressive mode of crafting self-image. Central to the latter are the words that accompany her Invisible Octopus puppet: 'Who is the hand that has control...What is the hands that holds the cross and moves 'my strings' at its will?'. Invisibility and visibility intersect in the figure of the puppet that makes manifest the unseen realities of chronic illness and disability.

Caroline Astell-Burt, Theresa McNally, Gemma Collard-Strokes and Yoon Irons analyse the functions of puppetry in dementia care, proposing a model of 'withness' that replaces the model of the 'autonomous living puppet' with the relational

‘spectator-with-puppet-with-puppeteer’. The authors link their case studies to research on memory that highlights the kinaesthetic dimensions of puppets and connections between multi-sensory engagement and emotional memory. This, together with the inherently relational form of puppetry, allows the authors to make a strong case for continuing research into the unique roles puppetry can play in dementia care.

Jaime Rojas-Bermúdez and Graciela Moyano trace the developments in psychodrama made possible through the use of puppets with chronic psychotic patients in Buenos Aires. For these patients, who had withdrawn into intense self-isolation and faced significant barriers interacting with other humans, puppets allowed movement towards human communication through their function as ‘intermediary’ objects - the patient can communicate with objects when human-to-human communication is impossible. Further work with these patients revealed puppets as ‘intra-intermediary’ objects as well, with which patients, when covered with masks or manipulating puppets, were capable of greater self-expression.

Antje Wegener leads the reader through a series of sessions of therapeutic puppetry with a traumatised four-year-old girl, foregrounding the theatrical framing by highlighting the role of the therapist as dramaturg and patient as director. Wegener highlights the ability of puppet play to construct a safe space through distancing, the ways in which puppets enable the construction of a narrative over which one has control, and the ability to use puppets to craft a new self-image. The fun and seemingly endless expressive possibilities of puppets are at play in this piece.

Continuing the focus on memory in a different context, Andrea Markovits discusses the work carried out by the company Puppets in Transit in Chile, in engaging with post-dictatorship memory for survivors of political violence and family members of the detained and disappeared. Puppetry here is identified with a particular ability to engage in *reparatory actions*, through puppets’ abilities to express the inexpressible, to construct meaning within silence, to rebuild fragmented memories, and to embody the absent.

The third part of this special issue is dedicated to practice through interviews which reflect on skills, training and community beneficiaries. It aims to present the interdisciplinary value of the arts and puppetry praxis in community health-related contexts and settings accessibly.

The opening interview by Persephone Sextou and Wesley Rolston considers the conditions of bedside performance in NHS hospitals in England. This article is presented in a Socratic dialogue format reflecting on a community-based approach to applied theatre practice using puppets with children at Birmingham's Children Hospital and Heartlands Hospital. Sextou and Rolston explore the exchanges between reality and fiction in environments of illness and discuss the emotional skills that are required from community actors and puppeteers to work in healthcare.

Rachel Warr discusses a cross-disciplinary comparative approach to puppetry and medicine undertaken during collaborations between the artist and a professor of surgical education at Imperial College in London. The author notes that parallels can be drawn between the skills required by surgical teams working in open surgery, especially when using a laparoscopic method, and puppetry teams working with techniques such as long-rod puppetry. This example of collaboration between the arts and sciences particularly highlights how implicit subject-specific knowledge and an ability to combine it creatively can contribute to public health.

Gibdel Wilson continues the theme of puppetry in healthcare, as a doctor who specialises in emergencies and rescue efforts in Central America. This interview highlights the great potential of puppets in easing patients' anxiety and fears during community crises such as earthquakes and floods.

Finally, Vicky Tsikplonou relates the work of her company, Evalgo Puppetry Company, to health, wellbeing and disability awareness in Togo. One such example is the focus on health education by training communities in making and animating puppets to improve awareness about the rights of the disabled and combat social stigma.

The powerful practical work presented by all the practitioners in this special issue becomes the basis for us to ask whether puppetry could be embraced and supported by governments and healthcare authorities to offer communities care, education and hope.

Broken Puppet 1, which launched the three-year project that has resulted in this special journal issue, sought to challenge stigma/stigmatisation to do with disability/health and to open up discussions around disability and health inflected through the particular power of the puppet. This special edition aims to give readers a sense of the rich and varied

discourses and practices that are emerging in the world of ‘broken puppets’ and the people who encounter them.

The editors would like to give special thanks to UNIMA, Helena Enright, Michael Finneran, Fiona McDonagh and David Grant. The special issue is dedicated to Ivan, Atlas, Owain, Corin, Luca, Kai, Tobi and children in hospitals around the world.