

**Playing Sex:
The exploration, creation and transmission
of gender codes in puppetry through the
practical exploration of *Cleansed***

by
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Declaration

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Opsomming

Hierdie studie ondersoek die verkenning, skepping en oordrag van geslagskodes in toneelpoppe. Die studie ondersoek die gebruik van geslagskodes in die skepping van manlike en vroulike identiteite. Die navorsing word baseer op Judith Butler (1999) se teorieë met betrekking tot geslagsgedrag waarvolgens geslag uit herhaalde gestyleerde aksies bestaan waaruit manlike en vroulike identiteite geskep word. Geslag word dus deur spesifieke geslagskodes weergegee wat in kleding, optrede en kommunikasie gevind word.

In die studie word daar gekyk na die drie kenmerkende tekens van kommunikasie wat betrokke is by 'n toneelpop, naamlik ontwerp, beweging en spraak. Verder ondersoek die studie ook die kreatiewe prosesse soos gevind in die verhoogproduksie *Cleansed* (2009) wat as praktiese verkenning gedoen is om die oordrag van geslagskodes (ontwerp, beweging en spraak) by die toneelpop te illustreer.

Abstract

This study investigates the exploration, creation and transmission of gender codes in puppetry. It investigates the gender codes used to construct masculine and feminine identities; this is done through the exploration of Judith Butler's (1999) theories on gender *performativity*. According to Butler (1999) gender consists of a stylized repetition of acts and through these socially constructed acts, a gendered self is constructed. Gender is thus communicated through gender codes and these codes are found in the way we dress, act and speak.

This study also investigates the semiotics of the puppet, with specific reference to design, movement and speech as significant signs. This study also investigates the creative processes of *Cleansed* (2009). It is through this process that the gender codes (found in the design, movement and speech of the puppet) are explored, created and ultimately transmitted.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (Butler 1999: 140).

The statement made by Judith Butler in the above quotation precisely captures what we, as performers, are trying to do with puppets. Gendered puppet characters are created on the grounds of male/female gender identification and these gender identifications are based on socially constructed gender ideals. Butler's statement suggests that gendered puppet identities are based on the unstable grounds of our own fabricated gender identities.

The process of creating a character in a performance, whether it is done by an actor or puppeteer, can be documented and analysed. The actor is himself/herself an individual and he/she can embody different characters during a performance. The actor becomes the character by physically modifying his/her appearance, gestures, speech patterns and posture. A puppet, on the other hand, is created to represent a specific character; it is physically built to represent the character and is dressed and manipulated accordingly. The puppet has no individual life apart from its character, it is a lifeless object that is brought to life through manipulation. Consequently a puppet must be constructed as a character and thus be manipulated as such. Thus, in a performance an actor becomes the character, whereas a puppet represents that character.

With this study I aim to investigate the construction of a gender core within a puppet character and analyse the creative processes involved when creating a gendered puppet character for a given performance.

1.2. Research questions and aim

When researching the aspects mentioned above, a number of questions arose.

What are gender codes? What is gender performativity? How does the actor communicate? How does the actor go about creating a character for a performance? What are the creative processes involved when creating a character for a performance? How will the puppeteer go about creating and manipulating a character for a performance? What is the creative process involved in the exploration of the creation and the transmission of gender codes in puppetry manipulation? Can these creative processes be linked to each other? These questions led me to the following central research questions:

*How do we explore, create and transmit gender codes in puppetry through the practical exploration of *Cleansed* (2009)?*

In order to answer these questions I will aim to investigate the following:

- 1) Gender codes; focusing on gender and gender performativity and how gender codes are constructed and transmitted.
- 3) The sign systems of the puppet; focusing on semiotics as a theatrical concept, and exploring the three sign systems of the puppet: design, movement and speech.

4) A detailed analysis of the text and characters in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998) and an exploration of the creative process used for creating a gendered human puppet character for the performance of *Cleansed* (2009).

5) The creative process of the puppet compared to that of the actor in order to ultimately determine whether the puppet and actor use the same modes of communication to convey meaning, specifically gender.

1.3. Structure of the study

1.3.1. Chapter 2

In this study I am exploring the creation and transmission of gender codes in puppetry and this chapter is a short introductory chapter that focuses on gender codes. In this chapter I will be looking at gender performativity and its links to the theatrical concept of performance.

My research started with a reading of Judith Butler's theories on gender and gender performativity. She is an American post-structural philosopher and a precursor in the studies of Feminism, Queer Theory and post-modern ethics. In this document I will refer to *Bodies that matter: On the Discursive limits of "sex"* (Butler 1993) and *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (Butler 1999).

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, Butler (1999) discusses gender, sex and sexuality and the core of her argument is that gender is culturally and socially constructed. This is done through the recurring of stylized gestures. She sees gender as a performative act that can be recreated through what she calls the Drag Act. In her theories on gender performativity, Butler argues that all these gender codes that define men and women are socially constructed. We are not born with femininity or

masculinity; we are taught how to be feminine and masculine. We dress and act according to our gender:

Consider gender, for instance, as a corporeal style, an "act," as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "performative" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning (Butler 1999: 139).

For the performance part of this study I will focus on *Between Theater and Anthropology* (1985), *Performance Theory* (1988), by Richard Schechner and *Performance: a critical introduction* (1996), by Marvin Carlson. In *Performance: a critical introduction* (1996), Marvin Carlson writes about the evolution and development of performance as a concept within the various social sciences. He investigates the sociological and psychological aspects of performance and how social behavior is in a sense “performed” and “theatrical”. Carlson (1996:3) states that performance art is the demonstration of the skills and training of human beings who are physically present and active within a performance.

Through Schechner and Carlson I will aim to define not only performance as a theatrical concept, but its ties to gender and gender performativity.

1.3.2. Chapter 3

Chapter 3 will discuss the three sign systems of the puppet: design, movement and speech. Before I can discuss the semiotics of the puppet, I first have to look at semiotics as a theatrical term. In performance puppets function as sign symbols. The puppet’s design, speech and movement act as sign-vehicles (Elam, 1980: 7). These sign-vehicles refer to the three specific systems of signification: design, movement and speech as presented by the puppet (Tillis 1992: 67). Design, movement and speech are used to encode messages like feelings, thoughts, intentions, desires, commands and social status. More than that, gender is also communicated through the puppet’s design, movement and speech. The semiotic value of these sign-vehicles is emphasised in a performance in order to create meaning and ultimately to communicate.

The design of the puppet will be discussed under three sub categories: features and size; physical material; and the onstage visibility of the puppeteer(s). Movement is discussed according to the different variables of movement, appropriate to puppet manipulation. These include the control mechanics, control points and articulation points of the puppet. I will discuss the four variables within the sign system of speech: paralinguistic features, dialect/language, voice modifications, and the on-stage presence or absence of the living speaker(s).

For the semiotics component of this study I will focus on the work done by Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theater and Drama* (1980). He provides a detailed analysis of semiotics and the function of theatrical communication through the different sign-vehicles. In a theatrical performance everything that is present on stage could be seen as sign-vehicles: set, props, actors, lighting and sound (music, recordings, noise and external sounds). Meaning is then created and communicated through the combined use of these sign-vehicles.

Theater communicates by means of different sign systems and Elam (1980) investigates the different components and aspects of theatrical communication. He focuses on the actor and the different sign-vehicles connected to the actor's performance: costume and make-up, voice and body. He also discusses the environment in which the actor functions and performs: the performance space (stage) and the symbolic space (set). Semiotics of theater is important for this study because it includes an analysis of the semiotics of the puppet. It is thus necessary for me to investigate semiotics as a theatrical term.

My research on puppetry directed me to the theoretical work of Steve Tillis (1992), *Towards an Aesthetics of the Puppet*. I will focus on his theories on the sign systems of the puppet: design, movement and speech. I will also look at Henryk Jurkowski's (1988) *Aspects of Puppet Theater* in which he discusses the relationship between live acting and puppetry. Jurkowski (1988: 11) argues that the actor becomes a character and that the

puppet is that character. He adds that "no actor is able to create the representation of a generalised human being, because he is himself an individual. Only the puppet can do this, because it is not a human being" (Jurkowski 1988: 24). A puppet is created for a specific character and cannot change its character during a performance. Jurkowski (1998:18-19) also discusses the theatrical values of the puppet. He states that the puppet is a lifeless object which only comes alive through performance and that "in reality it is the use made of the puppet when it's onstage that determines its value in its setting".

In *The Art of the Puppet*, Bill Baird (1965) discusses the different forms and origins of puppet theater, most of which are not important to this study. His introduction is, however, of importance because it is here that he gives a short, general description on the design, movements and speech of the puppet.

1.3.4. Chapter 4

In Chapter 4 I will provide a short analysis of the text and characters in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998). I will focus mainly on the production of *Cleansed* (2009), explaining why and how I used the performance as research for this study. I will also look at the creative processes of the two puppets and their operators, comparing these creative processes to those of the actors in *Cleansed* (2009).

Practice-led research is used for this part of the study in order to explore and investigate the creation of gender codes in puppetry. Practice-led research, also known as performance research, refers to "the work of art as a form of research" and to "the creation of the work generating research insights which might then be documented, theorized and generalised" (Dean and Smith 2009: 7).

Research, therefore, needs to be treated, not monolithically, but as an activity which can appear in a variety of guises across the spectrum of practice and research. It can be basic research carried out independent of creative work (though it may be subsequently applied to it); research conducted in the

process of shaping an artwork; or research which is the documentation, theorization and contextualization of an artwork - and the process of making it - by its creator (Dean and Smith 2009: 3).

With reference to the performance of *Cleansed* (2009), I will apply the theories discussed in the previous chapters as means to document and contextualize the creative processes involved in the creation of a performance. This includes the creative processes involved in the construction and presentation of gendered puppet characters for a performance. This practical research project provides me with the opportunity to explore and combine two different elements of performance, live actors and puppets, and this study consequently includes a comparison between the two.

Sarah Kane's play text, *Cleansed* (1998), creates the perfect environment for my theoretical research to be tested and analysed. *Cleansed* (1998) is a play about love and the extent to which love can be pushed or even pursued. David Greig (2001: xii) described the work Kane had done in *Cleansed* as “[stripping] away the mechanics of explanatory narrative and [presenting] the audience with a series of poetic images and paired dialogue”. He felt that “[she] wrote a play which demanded that its staging be as poetic as its writing” (Greig 2001: xiii).

Sarah Kane was an English playwright and she was often referred to as “the most-talked about, least-seen British playwright” (Urban 2001:36). Kane suffered depression and committed suicide at the tender age of 28, days after finishing her fifth play *4.48 Psychosis*. Her body of work includes *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996), *Skin* (1997), *Cleansed* (1998), *Crave* (1998) and *4.48 Psychosis* (1999).

Kane, along with other young British playwrights of the time, wanted to break away from naturalism in theater. Ken Urban (2001: 37) stated that “by the mid-90’s, a divergent group of young writers had emerged whose plays addressed violence and sexuality in an unflinching manner [and] their plays often critique the conservative ideology that deems certain characters and subject matter unsuitable for art”. These writers of “smack and

sodomy” were referred to as the “New British Nihilists” or “New Brutalists” and Urban notes that of all the “New British Nihilists”, Sarah Kane emerged “as the most far-reaching experimentalist” and that “her plays represent the most devastating overturning of that form [realism]” (Urban 2001: 37) .

Kane (in Urban 2001: 39) had the following to say about her work:

There isn't anything you can't represent on stage. If you're saying that you can't represent something, you are saying you can't talk about it, you are denying its existence. My responsibility is to the truth, however difficult that truth happens to be.

This was the way in which Kane approached theater and as a writer she “wanted to do things that hadn't been done, to invent new forms, find new modes of representation” (Kane in Sierz 2000: 92). Her first play, *Blasted*, rocked the foundations of the British stage with its violent and very graphic sexual content. Critics were shocked and horrified and one even called it a “disgusting feast of filth” (Tinker in Sierz 2000: 94-95). Despite the unwelcome reception by critics, *Blasted* was quickly recognised as one of the most important British plays of the decade (Urban 2001: 37), for it marked the start of a change in British theater.

Ken Urban (2001: 42) described *Cleansed* (1998) as “a play which removes the final vestiges of naturalism from [Sarah Kane's] work” and he argued that by moving further away from realism she opted for “a world of vivid stage pictures that push what theater can show to its limits”.

The play is set in a university and the story is set in motion by the death of Graham. In the first scene of the play Graham is given an overdose of drugs by Tinker, seen as the insane experimenter and protagonist of the play. Tinker is violent and brutal; he torments the other characters in the play with physical and emotional abuse. He tests the characters relationships by seeing how far they are willing to go for love, using any means possible to achieve this goal. Grace is Graham's sister and she comes to the

university in search of Graham's clothes, the only thing linking him to the physical world. After she obtains his clothes she refuses to leave until she is transformed into Graham. Graham and Grace have an incestuous relationship and after she dresses in his clothes Graham appears to her and they make love. Throughout the play Grace gradually transforms into Graham and the final transformation happens when Tinker gives her a "sex change". He literally sows Carl's genitals on to her, completing the final step of her transformation.

Carl is in a relationship with Rod in the second scene in the play Carl and Rod have a dispute about their relationship. Carl wants Rod to commit to him by exchanging rings and promising each other that they would never leave and always love one another. Rod being a realist tells Carl he is not willing to commit and that even though he loves him he will not commit to saying that he will be with him forever or that he will die for him (Kane 1998: 7). This relationship gets tested by Tinker; he uses violence to test Carl's love for Rod. He continuously tortures Carl by raping him with a pole, amputating his arms and legs and castrating him. Yet in the end it is Rod who gives up his life for Carl.

Tinker has an obsession with the dancer, an unknown character named Woman. Unlike all the other characters in the play not all of information is given about her character. She has no identity apart from being a sexual object. She plays along when Tinker projects Grace's identity on to her and in the end of the play she calls herself Grace (Kane 1998: 45).

Robin is a young boy who falls in love with Grace, his love for Grace is a maternal love. She teaches him to write, read and count and through this he falls in love with her, for she gave him knowledge and self empowerment. Robin gets physically and emotionally abused by Tinker. Robin figures out that he is never going to be able to escape Tinker and the institution. He realizes that the only way he is ever going to be free is through death, so he resorts to hanging himself by using Grace's tights.

Cleansed (1998), as stated earlier, is a play about love and its not your run of the mill love story. The play deals with love in a torturous and grotesque way. Relationships get tested through brutality and violence and raise the question of how far one is willing to go for love. The play deals with themes of love, violence, identity and cruelty which will later be discussed in Chapter 4.

1.3.5. Chapter 5

The conclusion will provide a short summary of the work done in the study and a discussion on how the research has contributed to an understanding of the exploration, creation and transmission of gender codes in puppetry. The work done in *Cleansed* (2009) will then be applied to contemporary puppet theater in general.

Chapter 2 - Gender Codes

Gender refers to the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction. These structures and processes do not constitute a 'biological base', a natural mechanism that has social effects. Rather, they constitute an *arena*, a bodily site where something social happens. Among the things that happen is the creation of the cultural categories 'woman' and 'men' (and any other gender categories that a particular society marks out). (Connell 2002: 48)

From the above quotation we gather that R.W. Connell not only defines gender as the term used to distinguish between categories of male and female; it is the socially constructed ideology that places men and woman into different categories of sex based on their reproductive organs. The debate around gender is precisely this; that the sex one is born with determines one's gender- male or female. According to the sex one is born with, one is then categorized into different social roles that define men and women. Thus implying that one is not born a man/woman; one rather becomes a man/woman. Judith Butler (1999: 112) argues that if we view gender as a sort of becoming or activity, then "gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort".

Butler (1993: 231) describes gender as a "practice". This refers to the embodiment of certain norms and repeating it until it becomes an inherent and coherent truth. Butler (1999: 140) states that gender is not a fact; it does not express or externalise an "essence" nor does it aspire to an "objective ideal". Gender is constituted out of various acts that create the idea of gender and without these acts there will be no gender at all.

To Butler (1999: 33), gender is not something we are born with, nor is it something created by the mind or spirit. She states that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts". These acts are performed over a period of time and ultimately produce the "appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being", thus making gender performative. Performativity comes from the term performance and in order to

understand and comprehend gender as a performative act, it is necessary that I give a definition of performance.

Performance is a term used in a variety of studies. It refers to an artistic presentation, a manner of functioning, working effectiveness, a display of behaviour and the accomplishment of certain tasks. Richard Schechner (1988: xiv) describes performance as an “inclusive term” and states that “theater is only one node on a continuum that reaches from ritualizations of animals (including humans) through performances in everyday life”. It can be serious and meaningful, as in rituals, or entertaining as in theater. We are constantly performing in our everyday life, whether it is through socially constructed roles, sports, actions and play.

Marvin Carlson (1996: 4) states that performance can be divided into three different concepts. Firstly performances involve a display of skills. The performative arts require the physical presence of a trained/skilled human being where the demonstration of their skills is the performance (Carlson 1996: 3). Secondly performance involves "a display of skills but less of particular skill than of a recognized and culturally coded pattern of behavior" (1996: 4). He states that our lives are structured according to socially sanctioned modes of behavior, thus the possibility exists that all human activity can be considered as "performance".

He supports his argument with Richard Schechner's (1985) theory on "restored behavior". Restored behaviour refers to actions that are consciously separated from the person performing them and it refers to a quality of performance where there is a distance between the “self” and the behaviour in the performance. It is “analogous to that between an actor and the role the actor plays on stage” (Carlson 1996: 4).

Restored behavior is used in all kinds of performances and it can be seen as one of the main characteristic of performance. Schechner (1985: 35) states that "restored behavior is living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film". The "strips of behavior" referred to here are the actions and gestures created/constructed by the performer. These "strips" of behavior can be rearranged or reconstructed and they stand "independent

[from] the casual systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence (Schechner 1985: 35). The behavior and actions performed is not that of the performer, but that of the character he/she portrays. He/she does this by recovering, remembering or even inventing strips of behavior, the performer then behaves according to these strips. This behavior can be stored, transmitted and manipulated because the behavior is seen as separate from the person performing them (Schechner 1985: 36). This is done through the rehearsal process:

It is the work of rehearsals to prepare the strips of behavior so that when expressed by performers these strips seem spontaneous, authentic, unrehearsed. (Schechner 1985: 52)

Lastly, performances can be the measurement through which the general success of an activity or process can be judged. This definition of performance is frequently applied to non-human activity (Carlson 1996: 5). Through these definitions of performance we can gather that performance is a broad term found not only in theater or ritual but in every day experiences and actions. Gender itself is not seen as a performance, the nature of gender itself can be seen as a performative act; gender performativity is thus an element of performance. Butler (1999: 136) states that:

...acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.

Gender is removed from the body; it is not created in or through the body itself but is located on the surface through words, acts and gestures. Thus, gender behavior can be stored, transmitted and manipulated for the behavior is seen as separate from the body performing it. This is seen in Butler's (1993) theories on the drag act. She states that:

What is "performed" in drag is, of course, *the sign* of gender, a sign that is not the same as the body that it figures, but that cannot be read without it. (Butler 1993: 273)

The drag performer draws upon the signs of gender that best represents a female identity. He is dressed like a woman, he acts and speaks like a woman; yet his sex is not female. It is precisely this aspect of gender that makes it performative. Butler (1999: 231) states that "the practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms...is a repeated process"; a twice-behaved behavior. Gendering occurs through repeated acts located on the surface of the body. Through the repetition of these acts a gendered identity is created, and when expressed this behavior seems authentic and spontaneous. The behavior is not located within the "self" but created by socially constructed norms of male and female identity.

These socially constructed norms are the gender codes through which gender is communicated. We communicate our gender through signs/codes and these codes lie within the way we dress, act, speak and ultimately express ourselves:

Gender refers to the words, gestures, appearances, ideas and behavior that dominant culture understands as indices of feminine or masculine identity. When spectators 'see' gender they are seeing (and reproducing) the cultural signs of gender, and by implication, the gender ideology of culture. (Diamond in Counsell and Wolf 2001: 79)

Gender codes are thus the mediums through which we communicate our gender and, as we have come to learn, these codes are socially constructed and are located on the surface of the body. Because gender codes are not located within the "self", the possibility exist that these codes can be explored, created and transmitted through theatrical performances such as drag and even puppet theater.

Chapter 3 – The Semiotics of the puppet

3.1. Introduction

Semiotics is the study of the different sign-systems and codes at work in a society. It is a science devoted to the study of the production of meaning in society. It is equally concerned with the processes of signification and communication as the means whereby meanings are produced and exchanged (Elam 1980:1). Ferdinand Saussure (in Counsell & Wolf 2001: 3) defines semiotics as “the addressing [of] physical objects in terms of their ability to convey meaning, as signs” and lists three key characteristics:

- 1) Signs are more than a means of communication; they comprise the basic fabric of culture.
- 2) Signs do not merely express existing meanings; they are the mechanisms by which meaning is created.
- 3) Sign systems provide the structures in which thought occurs, shaping our perceptions and experiences.

The study of sign systems started with Prague structuralism¹ in which the signifying and communicative behaviour of humans, within the framework of general semiotics, is analysed. It also defines signs as a “two-faced entity linking a material *vehicle* or *signifier* with a mental *concept* or *signified*” (Elam 1980:6). The *signifier* (sign-vehicle) is “the work itself as ‘thing’, or ensemble of material elements, whose *signified* is the ‘aesthetic object’ residing in the collective consciousness of the public” (Elam 1980:7).

¹ Prague structuralism developed under the influences of Russian formalist poetics and Saussurian structural linguistics (Counsell & Wolf 2001: 3).

Semiotics of the theater refers then to the study of the production of meaning in theater, specifically how meaning is created by means of socially constructed sign systems and codes. In theatrical terms, the *signifier* refers to the physical object represented on stage and *signified* refers to the inherent aesthetic value of that object, that which it represents.

3.2. Theatrical signs

Theatrical signs consist of objects (set/decor and props), actor (costume, make-up, and movement), lighting and music/sound, and performance space. The audience views the performance as a network of semiotic units working together to convey meaning.

Jiří Veltruský (in Elam 1980: 7) states that “all that is on the stage is a sign”. In a theatrical performance:

The stage radically transforms all objects and bodies defined within it, bestowing upon them an overriding signifying power which they lack – or which at least is less evident – in their normal social function: ‘on the stage things that play the part of theatrical signs ... acquire special features, qualities and attributes that they do not have in real life’. (Elam 1980:7)

The practical function of the object is replaced (in this case) on stage by the aesthetic function because in daily life the “utilitarian function of an object is usually more important than its signification, on a theatrical set the signification is all important” (Brušák in Elam 1980: 8).

A sign-vehicle may carry more than one meaning during a performance. The same applies to a puppet because it can either be seen as an inanimate object or as a living character and it is possible for the audience to acknowledge the puppet in both ways at once (Tillis 1992: 59). This is called double vision and refers to the dual nature of the puppet.

In his chapter on double vision, Tillis (1992: 76) states that “the puppet is only one way of presenting theater” and that “what has been called the ‘performing object’ is also involved in theatrical presentation”. He questions the double-vision evoked by the puppet, the manner in which it differs from objects, and actors, and how each of these are seen by audiences. The concept of double-vision could also be applied to the living actor because the audience imagines the actor as the character he or she portrays. The audience is represented with the knowledge that the characters portrayed on stage are only actors acting out given characters. Yet, unlike the puppet, the actor is not an object; he/she is a living being. It is easier for the audience to imagine the life of the character in the actor than in the puppet. Tillis (1992: 82) states that:

The actor is perceived by the audience to be nothing other than alive; the actor is also imagined to be alive, although the imaginary life is not usually that of the actor, but of the character he or she is representing.

Tillis (1992: 82) concludes his argument by stating that the puppet, like the actor, is imagined to be alive but, unlike the actor, is at the same time perceived to be an object. And this is the essential difference between the actor and the puppet. Tillis (1992: 83) argues that “the living being of the actor complicates the artificiality of his or her deployed signs of character with the simultaneous deployment of signs of real life. But the puppet has no real life. Strip the actor and the puppet of their theatrical signs, and you still have a living person, while the puppet has ceased to exist”. The puppet ceases to exist for it consists of only artificial signs whereas the actor embodies both.

Theatrical communication takes place on different levels and by means of different modes. The following section focuses on the different modes of signification in a theatrical performance: space and actor.

The theatrical space can be divided into three *proxemic* “syntactic” systems: fixed-feature, semi-fixed-feature, and the informal feature. Edward T. Hall (in Elam 1980: 62) describes *proxemics* as “the interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space

as a specialised elaboration of culture". The science dedicated to the study of spatial codes rests upon the following assumption:

This science is founded on the well-tested hypothesis that man's use of space in his architectural, domestic, urban, workplace and aesthetic activities is neither casual nor merely functional but represents a semiotically loaded choice subject to powerful rules which generate a range of (connotative) cultural units. (Elam 1980:63)

The fixed-feature space is the space in which the performance takes place. The fixed-feature contributes to the aesthetics of the performance. It is not only the space in which the performance takes place; it acts as a symbolic representation of the imagined space.

In puppetry the type of fix-featured space depends on the type of puppet that is used and whether the puppets are performed in a conventional way. When performed in a conventional way, hand puppets and rod puppets will be manipulated by puppeteers who are out of sight of the audience. This can be done from underneath or from the back of the area in which the puppets are visible to the audience. This is, however, not always the case: hand puppets and rod puppets can also be performed without the use of a screen or booth.

The size and dimension of "framed" performance space for shadow puppets is more limited because a screen and a light source from behind the screen are necessary in order to create the shadows used for the performance and these shadow images exclude the puppeteers. Marionettes can be manipulated without the use of a specific fixed-feature space so that both the marionette and its puppeteer are visible to the audience. Traditionally, however, a structure (called a bridge) is needed in order for the marionette (string puppet) to be manipulated from above in a space relative to its size and movements. Finger puppets require an intimate space because they are small and, when conventionally performed, they require a small framed space which cannot include the puppeteers.

The semi-fixed-feature space refers to moveable but non-dynamic objects; the set and auxiliary factors. The semi-fixed space functions within the fixed-feature space and becomes the physical embodiment of the represented fixed-feature space. The audience draws meaning from the semi-fixed-feature; it is the representation of the environment in which the performance takes place. It also signifies the social and psychological environment of the characters.

The informal space refers to the “ever-shifting relations of proximity and distance between individuals, thus applying, in the theater to actor-actor, actor-spectator and spectator-spectator interplay” (Elam 1980:63). The actor-actor relationship is defined by “blocking” and this is done to “create visual patterns and to emblemise relationships” (Elam 1980:65). The space between two characters becomes a symbolic representation of their relationship. Distance (measured) across space could for example symbolise power, comfort, fear and unease. The same happens in a puppet performance and it does not differ from any other performance genre in this respect.

All of these proxemic modalities are simultaneously operative in a performance. The space, whether it is on physical or symbolical level, constantly shifts and with the shifting of spaces meaning is created and communicated.

As seen in *Cleansed* (2009), the space set up is that of a university. There are seven different settings within the institution: Tinker's office, the sanitarium, the library, the dancer's booth, the “torture” room, the setting where the rape takes place, and the outside perimeter of the university. Each of these settings holds significant meaning for each character. The library, for example, becomes significant to Robin because it is where he learns to read and write and eventually it is also where he chooses to die.

The stage is divided by gauze covering the entire length of the stage. Certain scenes take place behind the gauze. The dancer's booth, as seen in Figure 1 below, is placed behind the gauze and this effect causes a distorted image of the dancer and Tinker. This created an effect of the audience having their own little “peep show” when Tinker visits the dancer's booth:



Figure 1: The dancer's booth in *Cleansed* (2009) as seen behind the gauze. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

Throughout the play, Tinker watches the actions taking place and the gauze makes it possible for him to be visible, to the audience, while still being separated from the actions taking place in front of the gauze as seen in figure 2 below:



Figure 2: A scene from *Cleansed* (2009) with Tinker watching from behind the gauze. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

Moreover, the gauze is used for projections of drawings. These are projected during different scenes in order to contribute to the aesthetic and symbolic value of the play. The first significant use of the projections is that the drawings portray the “outside” of the institution. Secondly, the drawings degenerate throughout the performance (as seen in figure 3) and this is symbolic of the degeneration of the characters in the play:



Figure 3: Projections used in *Cleansed* (2009) depict how the projections degenerate through the course of the stage production. (Photo by Colijn Strydom, Stellenbosch 2009).

All the elements of the stage (props, decor, lighting, projections and gauze) constitute the aesthetics of the play. The projections formed part of the semi-fixed space for the projections communicated the setting and sometimes the decay of a specific setting (as seen in Figure 3). Each aspect in itself had a communicating function within the play and it is within the symbolic world that the actors and puppets come into play and represent and communicate their characters.

The actor and the puppet communicate by means of verbal and non-verbal language. Verbal language refers to the actor's voice, more specifically words and sounds, and non-verbal language refers to the language created through movement of the body. Elam (1980: 78-79) refers to verbal communication as "linguistic utterance" and he states that "[it] is not simply a product of the phonological, syntactic and semantic rules of the language" but also "intimately related to the speaker's parakinesic 'orchestrating' of his discourse".

By merely changing his/her voice, the actor can express different emotions and intentions. This is done with a change in pitch, loudness, tempo, timbre and non-verbal sounds, and "such features supply essential information regarding the speaker's state, intentions and attitudes" (Elam 1980: 79). The voice of the actor cannot only signify his/her state of mind, but also his/her social and psychological background.

During a theatrical performance the actor not only communicates verbally but also by means of movement, gestures and facial expressions. The actor "dresses" his/her body physically and symbolically; costumes and make-up form part of the outward characterization and gestures while posture and facial expressions are part of the inward psychological characterization. Although gestures, postures and facial expressions are an outward form of characterization, it is through emotions that these gestures are motivated and brought to life.

The actor's outward characterisations work as a sign-vehicle for the representation of the character's age, gender, social status, as well as his psychological and socio-economical

functions. Dress is an extension of the human body; it links the body to the social world and thus dress becomes the frontier between the self and the not-self. And in all societies the “body is dressed, and everywhere dress and adornment play symbolic, communicative and aesthetic roles” (Wilson in Counsell and Wolf 2001: 148). Dress or costumes become one of the modes of physical representation of a character in the theater. The same applies to the puppet.

As with the actor, the puppet’s body is dressed physically and symbolically and the puppet’s design and costume form part of the outward characterisation. The puppet’s gestures, posture, and sometimes facial expressions² form part of the puppet’s inward psychological characterization. The “psychological” dressing of the body is done by the actor through the physical manipulation of postures, gestures and facial expressions. The movements are rehearsed and done intentionally in order to convey meaning and ultimately to communicate. The “psychological” dressing of the body refers to the physical characterization of the character.

The performer’s body as well as the puppet’s body becomes a sign, functioning within a space where everything in it acts as sign-symbols. The performance thus becomes the mode through which the performers and puppets communicate their stories and emotions to the audience. It is of immense importance that the performer knows exactly what he wants to communicate and that this is achieved through rehearsals and, in most cases, direction from the director.

Puppets function as sign symbols in a performance. When discussing the sign systems, reference is made both to the construction as well as the manipulation of the puppet. The puppet’s construction and design determines the quality and mobility of its movements and, because of the peculiarity of construction, puppets often transcend the limitations of reality (Jurkowski 1998:19). The sign system also refers to the self-expression of the

² If a puppet is made of soft material such as cloth and sponge (as find in the case of so-called Muppets) and the head is manipulated by placing the hand of the puppeteer inside the puppet’s head, the facial expression of the puppet can be altered. Some sophisticated rod puppets have movable facial features such as articulated eye lids and mouths.

puppet. Jurkowski (1988:3) states that "the metaphoric use of the structure of the puppet theater would not be so important if it were not for the fact that it expresses so well the psychological attraction of creative puppetry". The puppet's design, speech and movements all act as sign-vehicles. In a performance the semiotic value of these sign vehicles is emphasised in order to create meaning and ultimately to communicate.

3.3. Design as significant system

Tillis (1992) divides puppet design as a sign system into three variables: **features and size of the puppet, physical material**, and the **onstage presence of the puppeteer(s)**.

3.3.1. Feature and size

The feature and size of the puppet refers to the physical and anatomical details, such as hair, eyes, nose, mouth, limbs, body and general shape of the puppet. These features (anatomical details) can communicate the gender, ethnicity, species (animal or human), personality and age of a puppet. For example, the facial features of a male and female character will differ from each other; the female character will have more defined cheekbones and her lips will be more heart shaped and a male character might have a stronger jaw line and defined brow.

The features of the puppet could indicate inherent qualities of a character, whether they are good/evil, happy/sad and sweet/angry to name a few. In most cases puppets have fixed facial expressions and the facial features of the puppet indicate the inherent qualities of the character. For example, a grumpy old man might have grey hair, frown lines on his face, squinted eyes and pursed lips. A young girl might have pigtails, big open eyes, pink cheeks and a smile indicating that she is a sweet and naive character. Some puppets, like the Japanese Bunraku puppets, have trick-heads where one character can go from good to evil. The puppets have mechanisms in the head that operates the jaw

of the puppet when the jaw drops the mouth of the puppet opens up and a set of sharp spiked teeth is revealed.

Tillis (1992: 123) states that “the feature-signs in the design of the puppet [range] from the imitative to the stylised to the conceptual” and this is dependent on whether puppets are “lifelike in quality and quantity” or “whether their quality and/or quantity have been so radically altered as to render them unlikelike”. If a puppet is imitative it aims to be a representation of a human/animal character. Hand puppets tend to be imitative; they are constructed to represent human/animal like character. Stylized puppets, like the Japanese Bunraku puppets, have different shapes and forms of heads ranging from young and old to good and evil. Yet all the features of the puppets are equally representational in quality and quantity:

That is, all of the puppet heads have features of a nearly lifelike quality, and all of them have a full complement of such features, including ears, although these are often covered by wigs. Additionally, all of the puppets have arms that are lifelike in design; male puppets have lifelike legs as well, while female puppets have costumes that hide the absence of legs. (Tillis 1992: 120)

Conceptual features refer to puppets whose feature-signs are so unlikelike that the puppets become unrecognizable outside of the performance. Tillis (1992: 122) gives an example of such a performance done by the Budapest State Puppet Theater. The characters were represented by objects; a suit on a hanger, an umbrella and a lady's wig and hat. He states that the "feature-signs of the represented characters, a man and a woman, are subjected to a radical process of selection" and in the end "all that remains are what seems to be elements of their costumes and props (1992: 122). An exaggeration of the puppets features could also render a puppet unlikelike and conceptual.

Tillis (1992: 123) divides the size-sign of a puppet into relative absolute size. In explaining the difference between the relative size and absolute size of puppets, Tillis (1992: 126) mentions that when the size-signs of puppets are deployed in such a way as to create the conventional illusion of Puppet Theater, the quality of the puppet becomes lifelike and somewhat imitative. Each style of puppet has its own conventional

performance space; the hand puppet is performed in a "box" that is relative to its size, the Marionette is performed on a stage and manipulated from above and shadow puppets are performed behind a sheet of material. And when these puppets are performed in their conventional performance spaces they tend to be lifelike and imitative.

The relative size of the puppet refers to a puppet when it is not being perceived according to the human notions of scale, but according to the scale established in the performance itself. Meaning about the relative size of the puppet is generated by contrasting it to other puppets, as well as the environment and surroundings in which it functions. Baird (1965: 24) states that “puppetry thrives on diversity” and “unlike human actors the range in relative sizes of puppets is enormous”. For Baird there is no criterion for the size of the puppet. Meaning that there is no limit in the puppets size, a puppet can be as small as a coin and as tall as a building. When a puppet is relative in size and the relationship between the puppet and its surroundings are emphasised, it tends to be more stylised because its quality has been subjected to exaggeration.

The absolute size of the puppet refers to a puppet when its perceived according to human scale. The audience may perceive the puppet to be larger than life-size, near life-size or smaller than life-size. Meaning about the absolute size is generated not by its contrasting the puppet to its environment or other puppets, but intrinsically through the puppet itself (Tillis 1992: 123-125). If a puppet demonstrates absolute size its quality is rendered unlikelike and conceptual.

3.3.2. Physical material

The physical material from which a puppet is constructed can be of any nature. The materials may be chosen because they are inexpensive, easy to work with or have communicative meanings of their own. Inexpensive materials like papier-mâché and disposable waste products are easy to work with and do not necessarily have communicative meanings. The materials in it self might have something to convey, for example in figure 4 below:



Figure 4: A photo from *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1998) showing how materials are used in an expressive way. (Photo by Ruphin Coudzer, Johannesburg 1998).

Ubu and the Truth Commission (1997), written by Jane Taylor, was designed by William Kentridge in collaboration with the Handspring Puppet Company. In the play, the puppet called Niles (displayed in figure 4 above) has a dual function. It functions as Ma Ubu's handbag as well as Pa Ubu's pet advisor and cover-up man. Pa Ubu used the mouth of the puppet as a “shredder” to destroy evidence. Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler (1998: xvi) state that “the crocodile has a mouth that can swallow fairly large objects and its belly is a large canvas bag [...] for storing them. Here they are easily accessible for discovery by Ma Ubu”. The shredding part of the puppet symbolises Pa Ubu's dishonesty and the handbag part represents the money he gets for being dishonest. Pa Ubu's dishonesty pays for his and Ma Ubu's lifestyle.

Part of the physical material of the puppet could be the costume in which the puppet is dressed and the materials used to create the “lifelike” features of the puppet. The costume of the puppet can be used to emphasise the character. For example, a puppet in a uniform can represent a doctor, nurse or officer. Costume can also indicate ethnicity and gender, like the Bunraku puppets that are dressed in traditional Japanese clothes.

Colour also forms an element of design. The colour of the costume or puppet can bear meaning; colour is used to indicate status, royalty and social standing. Furthermore, the colour of the materials used to construct the puppet can communicate a character's race and ethnicity. The materials used to create the “lifelike” qualities of the puppet include beads or metal for the eyes. Under the correct lighting, these beads or metal strips shimmer and create “life” in the eyes and might even contribute to the characteristics of the puppet character. The Bamana of Mali use metal pieces in the eyes and on the face of some of their Sogo Bò puppets which are performed at night to symbolize the magic powers of some of these animal characters³.

3.3.3. Onstage presence of the puppeteer(s)

The onstage presence of a puppeteer can have a profound impact on the way a puppet is viewed by the audience. The visibility of the puppeteer(s) can have a fundamental impact on the “quality and quantity of the puppet’s design-signs as a whole” (Tillis 1992: 131).

There are different ways to present the puppeteer(s) on stage. The puppeteer(s) could be entirely hidden or he/she could be visible but dressed completely in black so that his/her features are hidden. Alternatively, they could be completely visible. In each instance, the puppeteer’s presence could influence the aesthetics of the entire performance. When the puppeteers are hidden, it could add to the illusion that the puppet moves and acts on its own, rendering its quality more imitative.

³ See for example Mary Jo Arnoldi, *Playing with Time. Art and Performance in central Mali* (1995).

When puppeteers are present on stage, the audience becomes more aware that the puppets are operated by an external force. The illusion of the puppet having a life of its own could be broken by the presence of the puppeteer. The puppets are more directly viewed as an extension of the operator's body. As seen below in figure 5, an image from *Cleansed* (2009), the puppeteers are visible on stage. Even though they were dressed in black and their features were obscured, the audience could see how they operated the puppet.



Figure 5: A scene from *Cleansed* (2009) which shows the visibility of the operators. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

When the puppeteers are completely visible, the puppet's features are immediately contrasted to that of the puppeteer. The puppeteer's presence alters the puppet's design-signs presented on stage because it presents an "overall design that is un-lifelike in quality and quantity, and is conceptual, in that the visual concept of the puppet as puppet, is stressed" (Tillis 1992:131). This can be seen in Figure 6 below:



Figure 6: A photo from *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1998) showing the full visibility of the operators. (Photo by Ruphin Coudzer, Johannesburg 1998).

This is exactly what was done in *Ubu and the truth commission*, figure 6. The play deals with apartheid and the puppets “delivered” the testimonies of real apartheid victims. The puppeteers faces support the emotion emitted by the puppet and thus contributes to the somber atmosphere. When the face is covered in black this supportive sign, which can sometimes also be distractive, is blocked out.

In conclusion it can be stated that the materials of construction and costume of the puppet plays a vital role in the representation of a character. This design-sign is of great importance for the puppet needs to be created according to the specific needs of the performance and puppeteer(s).

The gender codes found in the design of the puppet lies firstly within the features and overall shape and size of the puppet. The facial features of a female puppet will often be more delicate and in a way sensual; the puppet might have fuller lips, a smaller nose, high cheekbones and more expressive eyes and lashes. Whereas a male puppet might have stronger and sharper facial details; strong jaw line, expressive eyebrows, thinner lips and a bigger nose. The shape of the bodies will be different; a male puppet might be bigger in size, have broader shoulders, bigger hands and will sometimes have more muscular features. The female puppet on the other hand will be smaller than the male counterpart, curvier (breasts), smaller delicate hands and the body features will be softer and smoother. Secondly gender coding in the design of the puppet lies within the dressing of the puppet. Costumes and materials are used to enhance the lifelike qualities of the puppet.

3.4. Movement as significant system

Baird (1965: 14) states that the puppet's first requirement is to move, for it is the puppet's style of movement that brings it to life. The puppet's movements are of great importance because it is the one sign system that is constantly present in creating the illusion of life in the puppet as an object.

The motions imparted to the puppets are similar to those of the beings they represent. This is not a matter of more or less precise formulation; a crucial moment of the puppet performance is at stake... The puppets' motions convey a meaning of internal impulse corresponding to the impulse that produces the live beings' movements...and, by contiguity; this implied meaning reflects in the spectator's mind on the puppets themselves, thus tending to attribute to them a life of their own. (Veltruský in Tillis 1992: 133)

Thus, the movements of the puppet must be choreographed according to the given intention (and/or emotion and speech) so that relevant meaning can be created and communicated. Hours of rehearsing is needed in order for the puppeteer to explore and create the different movement/gesture possibilities his/her puppet is capable of executing.

The mobility of the puppet depends on the design of the puppet.

The variables of movement are the control mechanics, control points and articulation points of the puppet Tillis (1992: 135). Unlike the variables of design, there are no sub-sign-systems in the variables of movement. Tillis (1992: 134) argues that “the variables in movement do not, in themselves, present signs. They operate on a level beneath that of the sign itself; they generate signs of movement”. This is due to the difference between the static nature of design in opposition to the dynamic nature of movement. The variables in design present themselves directly.

The control mechanics are the means by which the puppeteer exerts control. The puppet is also defined by and named after its control mechanics: the hand puppet is controlled and operated by the human hand; the rod puppet is controlled by rods; marionettes are stringed and the strings are then attached to a main control mechanism⁴.

The term control refers to the places where control is exerted. The circled parts in figure 11 illustrate an example of the type of control points used on a puppet in *Cleansed* (2009). Controls are inserted in the “elbow joint” and the “neck” of the puppet. This was done in order to create mobility using the articulation points of the arms and head.

⁴For more information on the control mechanics of the various types of puppets see H. Binyon: *Puppetry Today: Designing and making marionettes, glove puppets, rod puppets and shadow puppets* (1966). M. Batchelder: (1947), *The puppet theater handbook* (1947), M. Kruger Poppespel: 'n Ondersoek na die historiese ontwikkeling, die spelbeginsels, karakter en gebruiksmoontlikhede van die toneelpop (1987).

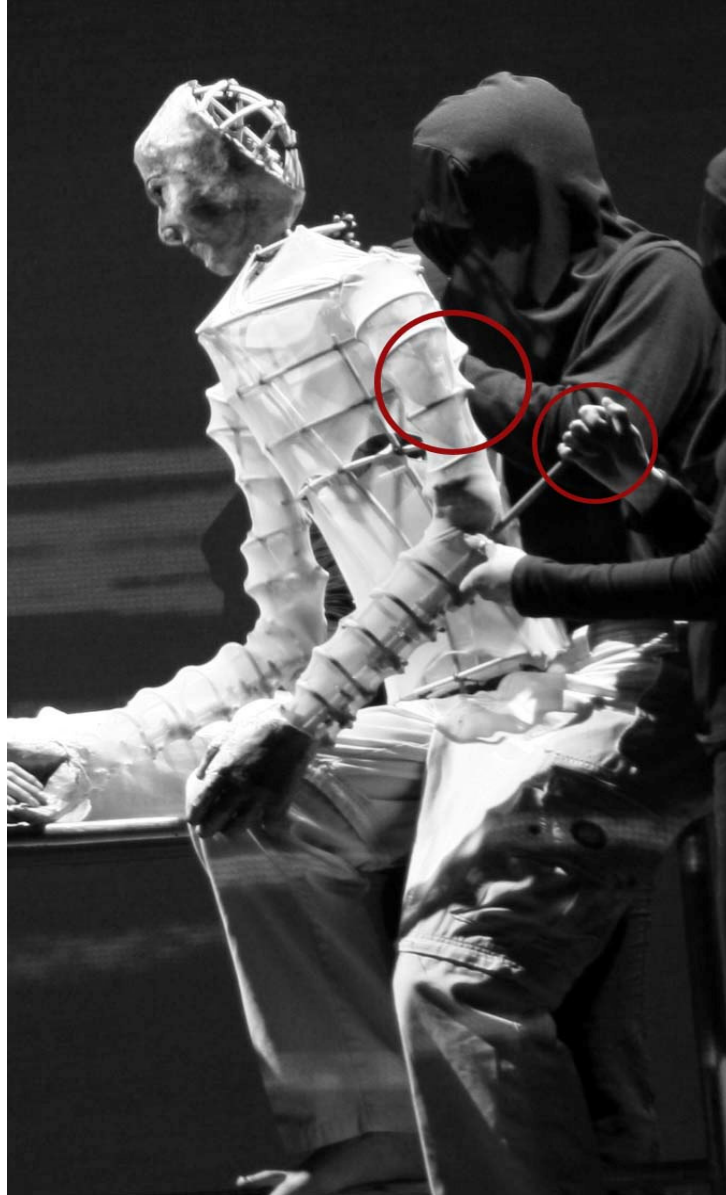


Figure 7: The control points of the character Graham in *Cleansed* (2009). The upper circle shows the control point for the head and the lower circle indicates the control points for the arms. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).



Figure 8: A scene from *Cleansed* (2009) which shows the articulation points of the puppet. The upper circle indicates the articulation points of the shoulders and the lower circle indicates the articulation points in the elbow. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

Articulation points are the places where the puppet is jointed to allow for differential movements of its parts (as seen in figure 8). The highlighted parts are the articulation points used for both puppets in *Cleansed* (2009). These articulation points in the arms, elbows, shoulders and head allows for a variety of movements: lifting the arm up and down; stretching the arm out and pulling it back; movement in the neck made it possible for the puppeteers to turn the puppets head.

In conclusion, the variables of movement work separately and together in order to generate movement and Tillis (1992: 142) argues that movement signs can be differentiated: movements made *with* the puppet, *despite* of the puppet and *against* the puppet.

Movement signs made *with* the puppet refer to the set movements created during the rehearsal process. These are movements created to communicate specific meanings and intentions and are created with the natural flow of the puppet and no excess strain is placed on the creation of movement. Movement signs made *despite* of the puppet refer to puppets which are created for specific stylised movements. Tillis (1992: 143) argues that “movement signs made despite the puppet must maintain, in their stylisation and conventionalisation, a certain consistency of representation”. Even though these set movements are stylised, they still need to be recognisable in order to be decoded by the audience.

Movement signs made *against* the puppet are those signs where, for deployment, the intrinsic variables have little or no relevance and in which the extrinsic variable might be used to generate implicit movement. These signs provide a quality of conceptual representation (Tillis 1992: 142-143). When movements are conceptual in nature they become unrecognisable. In other words exaggerating, emphasising and thus distorting one quality of movement to a point where it becomes unfamiliar.

Baird (1965: 18) argues that we must not only think primarily of facial expressions in puppets since the “whole body in movement often says more than a face”. There might be instances when “the puppeteer’s reflection of reality produces a puppet with no face or body”. Not only does the puppet come to life through movement, it also communicates through gestures and actions.

The puppet's construction and outward characterization will determine the quality of movement generated by the puppeteer. If the character is a fat old man, and is constructed to represent a fat old man, then the puppet will have to move like a fat old

man. The gender codes found in the movements generated by the puppeteer(s) lies within the basic actions and gestures expressed in the performance. The quality of a male puppet's movements might differ from that of a female puppet. The male puppets movements will be stronger, sharp and more direct where the female's movements will be softer and more flowing.

3.5. Speech as significant system

The four major variables within this sign system are paralinguistic features, dialect/language, voice modifications, and the on-stage presence or absence of the living speaker(s) (Tillis 1992: 151). The speaker, in this case, is the main puppeteer operating the head of the puppet.

Paralinguistic features refer to the way in which the puppeteer manipulates his voice to create the vocal characteristics of the puppet character. This is done through “loudness, pitch, timbre, rate, inflection, rhythm, and enunciation” (Elam 1980: 81). The puppet is an inanimate object so it cannot speak, thus it is the puppeteer's job to create a unique voice appropriate to its character. By taking the character qualities presented by the design signs into consideration and drawing upon it, the speaker can create a character voice for the puppet.

The variable of dialect/language is used to indicate a certain social standing, nationality and class. And so contributes to the characterisation of the puppet and by using dialect, information could be communicated to the audience. When the puppeteer wants to move away from a “realistic” representation of character he/she makes use of mechanisms to distort the speaker’s voice, referred to as voice modifications. Voice modifications entail the distortion and modification of the speaker’s voice and this is done through the use of a mechanical device placed in the mouth of the speaker (Tillis 1992: 153).

The last variable is the on-stage presence or absence of the speaker (Tillis 1992: 156). This has an impact similar to that of the on-stage presence or absence of the puppeteer(s). The speech sign of the puppet is radically transformed with the presence and visibility of the speaker. Unlike movement, which is generated in the puppet by the puppeteer, the speech sign of the puppet is not generated in the puppet. It comes from an external source, the puppeteer. When the puppeteer is visible on stage the audience can see that the speech of the puppet comes from an external source. Whether they are realistic and imitative in nature or distorted, the speech-signs will be influenced by the on-stage presence of the speaker.

The sign system of speech differs from the other two sign systems in three ways: it can be dispensed with, it can be presented automatically and the speech of the puppet is more grounded in real life than they (the puppets themselves) are (Tillis 1992: 148, 150).

The sign system of speech can be dispensed with; speech, as in many other performances (physical theater, mime, dance), is thus not a necessity in puppet theater. When speech is dispensed with, more emphasis could be placed on the gestures and actions of the puppet. When speech is involved in a performance the movements become secondary to the dialogue/speech. The movements support that which is being said, and when speech is dispensed with, movement becomes the main communicative tool within the puppet.

The sign system of speech can be presented automatically, meaning that the voice of the puppet could be pre-recorded and that the puppeteers then synchronise the gestures and actions to the pre-recorded text. The last difference is the speech of the puppet is more grounded in real life than they (the puppets themselves) are. Unlike the design and movement signs of the puppet, which are presented by or through the puppet, speech is removed because it is the one sign system which cannot be produced by the puppet. The design-sign is found within the puppets construction, the movement-sign is expressed through the movements generated in the puppet by the puppeteer. The speech-sign comes from an external source and it is not produced in or through the puppet itself.

The last difference lies at the heart of the sign system of speech for the “variables in the sign-system are all concerned with finding ways in which the puppet’s speech, or lack

thereof, may be made to coincide with the puppet's design and movement, to be appropriate to the puppet" (Tillis 1992: 151). The speech of the puppet, as is also the case with the actor, should be an extended representation (or rather, integral aspect) of the character.

Baird (1965: 14) states that sound is equally important to the creation of meaning in the character of a puppet and that a large part of the puppet's characterization is "the music [it] works to, or the voice [it] emits". The voice created for the puppet can be as innovative as its movements for, not only are there hundreds of word languages to choose from, the puppet can also speak through "signs, roars, coughs; through buzzers, poundings on the floor, bells on the ankles of the operators, and sounds of instruments" (Baird 1965: 14).

Gender codes found within the speech-sign of the puppet frequently lies within the paralinguistic features. The puppeteer (speaker) can change the pitch, timbre, rate, inflection, rhythm, and enunciation of his/her voice to fit to that of a male/female character. Men's voices tend to be lower in pitch, whereas a woman's voice tends to be higher in pitch.

3.6. Conclusion

In a performance, puppets function as sign symbols. The design, movements and sounds that are produced in puppets can communicate age, ethnicity, character and gender. If we draw these three sign systems back into that of the live theater, we come to realise that the actor transforms him/herself into a character. By dressing him/herself in costume and manipulating his/her posture into that of the character, the actor changes the "design" of his/her body. The actor "choreographs" his/her movements so that it fits with the character. I use the term "choreograph" because, during the rehearsal process, the actor creates movements appropriate to the given situation and text. These movements are done in support of the spoken text most of the time. The same is done to the actor's voice:

The actor's appearance can be designed only so much before exhausting the arts of makeup and costume; the actor's motion can occur only in the manner that bones and muscles will allow, even with the aid of mechanical contrivance; and the actors speech can be delivered only with so much variation of voice, and, in general, is delivered only by the actor. (Tillis 1992: 45)

The difference between the actor and the puppet is that the actor is a living being and the puppet an animated object. The actor is not being manipulated by someone else; he/she is manipulating him/herself in order to become that character. The puppet, however, *is* a more literal representation of a character. The one thing that the actor and the puppet have in common is that they both give life to a character. The puppet character comes alive and the actor becomes his character through a theatrical performance. Throughout the history of the puppet theater the puppet has been compared to the actor, object and prop. It is at the centre of these systems that the puppet, as a semiological and aesthetic figure, lies. The puppet draws on different elements of each of these systems – the humanlike qualities of the actor, the functional qualities of the object, and the theatrical properties of prop – conveying meaning and communicating via the sign systems of design, movement and speech.

In the next chapter I investigate the creative processes involved in the exploration and creation of a gendered puppet character for a performance. I use the different sign systems discussed in this chapter to discuss the work done in *Cleansed* (2009).

Chapter 4 - The creative process: The exploration, creation and transmission of gender codes in *Cleansed* (2009)

4.1. *Cleansed* (1998) - A personal reading

Cleansed (1998) is a play about love and the extent to which love can be pushed or even pursued. The play's antagonist, Tinker, is seen as an "insane experimenter" who "drives the characters to the extremes of pain in order to find out what power love has over them" (Greig 2001: xii). The characters in *Cleansed* (1998) are all driven by 'need'; the need to be loved and they are willing to do anything for love. One of the themes in *Cleansed* (1998) is violence and Sierz (2000: 114) states that the central theme in *Cleansed* is "the ability of love to survive fascistic, institutional cruelty". Tinker brutally tortures the characters to see how far he can push their "love" for one another and thus each character's identity is affirmed by this love. Gender identification plays an important part in the play and is brought to the surface by the different "love relationships" formed between the characters:

In each case, the relationship is difficult and makes suggestive assumptions about gender and identity: Grace becomes Graham without ceasing to be female; Carl and Rod are the same sex but have opposite sensibilities; Tinker has the power to abuse the dancer, but she's complicit in her victimization; Robin is needy and falls in love with care and knowledge, which kill him. Less sensationally, and more sentimentally, identity is affirmed through love. (Sierz 2000: 114)

Tinker and the dancer, Woman, express the "ultimate heterosexuality" – masculine and feminine. The dancer is the ultimate ideal of sexuality and femininity and this is precisely the reason for the allusive character name given to her. Tinker is the alpha male, oozing confidence and male dominance. Their encounters are explicit and full of sexual promiscuity. He masturbates while watching her dance and seeks emotional

comfort from her afterward. She denies him this initially but eventually she gives in to his needs. Their scenes become more explicit as the play progresses with Grace's transformation into Graham. The more masculine Grace becomes, the more explicit and sexually aggravated Tinker becomes. In their last scene together, Tinker and the dancer have sexual intercourse and this is very explicit in action and in dialogue:

Woman: I love your cock, Tinker. I love your cock inside me, Tinker. Fuck me, Tinker. Harder, harder, harder. Come inside me. I love you, Tinker (Kane 1998: 44).



Figure 9: The final scene in *Cleansed* (2009) and the moment after Tinker and Woman had sex. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

Tinker continuously calls the dancer by Grace's name. This seems to imply that he seeks the femininity which Grace lacks within the dancer. This may also be the reason why the dancer has no name; she is a universal/archetypal character that resembles femininity.

She is simply present to act as a symbolic metaphor of that which Grace gives up and/or loses. Tinker is also threatened by the homosexual relationship between Carl and Rod because it threatens his sexuality and masculinity. This could be another reason why Tinker visits the dancer and why he masturbates while she dances. By going to her, he asserts his sexuality and sexual preference.



Figure 10: A scene from *Cleansed* (2009) portraying Grace when she first enters the institution. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009). Grace and Graham have an incestuous relationship. Their love for each other is so strong that when Graham dies, Grace does everything in her power to recapture his memory. She believes that the only way she can deal with her loss is to become Graham and, in this way, she attempts to keep him with her forever. Therefore she becomes him, starting with the search for his clothes which are the only physical belongings of his left to her. She puts his clothes on and demands to be kept in the institution. By shedding her own clothes and dressing in his, she sheds the first layer of her feminine identity:



Figure 11: In this scene from *Cleansed* (2009), Grace wears Graham's clothes. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

The next phase of her transformation takes place in scene five when Graham's ghost comes to her. In this scene Grace asks Graham to teach her how to be like him and he tells her that she is more like him than he ever was (Kane 1998: 15). Graham then starts to dance and Grace imitates him, as stated in the stage directions:

Graham dances – a dance of love for Grace. Grace dances opposite him, copying his movements. Gradually, she takes on the masculinity of his movement, his facial expression. Finally, she no longer has to watch him – she mirrors him perfectly as they dance exactly in time. When she speaks, her voice is more like his (Kane 1998: 15).

After the dance, Grace and Graham make love. This is a metaphoric way for her to ultimately take in his "body"; a way to become him, move like him, talk like him and use the same masculine gestures as him. Shedding her feminine identity (gestures, speech patterns and movements), Grace ultimately becomes that which makes Graham, Graham. The only thing keeping her from *becoming* a representation of Graham, a man, is her sex:

Graham/Robin: What would you change?

Grace: My body. So it looked like it feels. Graham outside like Graham inside. (Kane 1998: 22)

She is emotionally stripped of her sex and sexuality in scene ten when she gets raped by the voices. After this incident, Grace starts believing that she has male genitals. This is affirmed in the scene during which she states that her "balls hurt" (Kane 1998: 30). During scene eighteen, Grace's transformation is complete; she has now physically transformed into a man, Graham. Tinker gives Grace a "sex change" as he sows Carl's genitals onto her body. He made Grace what she wanted to become according to her statement in scene three when she refers to Graham: "I look like him. Say you thought I was a man" (Kane 1998: 10). In scene eighteen, Tinker (Kane 1998: 41 - 42) affirms this statement by saying:

Tinker: Nice looking lad. Like your brother. I hope you ... What you wanted.

Tinker: You'll get used to him. Can't call you Grace any more. Call you ... Graham. I'll call you Graham.

In this scene, Graham leaves Grace and this is symbolic of her completed transformation. She is now Graham and her body is "perfect":



Figure 12: Grace and Carl in the last scene of *Cleansed* (2009). This scene portrays Grace's complete transformation into Graham. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

Figure 10, 11 and 12 clearly show the physical transformation Grace undergoes during the play. When the audience is first introduced to Grace (figure 10), she wears a summer dress and she looks feminine. This feminine image of her is contrasted by the masculine image of her wearing her brother's clothes as seen in figure 11. In the last scene (figure 12) we see Grace's complete transformation into Graham. This image of her is in direct contrast to the first image of her.

The only physical act of transformation takes place when Tinker turns Grace into a man by giving her male genitals. All the other transformations are psychological and happen in metaphorical ways.

In order for Grace to become Graham, she has to strip herself from everything that makes her Grace, a woman, in order to become and embody Graham, a man. Grace and Graham are twins and in a sense they “share” an identity. Therefore, when Graham dies, it is like a part of Grace dies with him. She has no identity without him. So her identity is asserted in her bond with, and her love for him.

The next relationship focuses on the relationship between Carl and Rod. Carl and Rod are in a homosexual relationship and both of them have “opposite sensibilities”: Carl is perceived as “idealistic” and Rod as “realistic” (Sierz 2000: 114). Carl is idealistic about love, life and his relationships. Rod wants nothing more than what he has and lives each day as it comes. The original text states that Carl has been with Rod for three months and their scene opens with Carl taking off his ring and asking Rod for his (Kane 1998: 5). Carl wants to affirm his love for Rod by giving him his ring and this is his way of showing his commitment:

Rod: What are you thinking?
Carl: That I’ll always love you.
Rod: (*Laughs*)
Carl: That I’ll never betray you.
Rod: (*Laughs more*)
Carl: That I’ll never lie to you.
(Kane 1998: 6)

Rod replies by stating that he doesn’t want to give his ring to Carl. He says he cannot promise him anything and that he wouldn’t die for him (Kane 1998: 6). This, as we come to learn later on in the play, is not true. In the end, it is Carl who, when threatened with death, denies his relationship with Rod to Tinker, thus betraying Rod. Rod on the other hand gives his own life in order to save Carl’s.

When Carl betrays Rod, he asks his forgiveness afterwards and this is when Tinker cuts out his tongue and tells him to have no regrets (Kane 1998: 13). From this point on, Carl has to find different ways to communicate his remorse and love to Rod. When he loses his tongue and is unable to speak, he uses his hands to write in the ground. Tinker sees this and cuts off his hands. He then tries to show his love by doing a dance for Rod. Tinker sees this as well and then cuts off his feet. Lastly, Carl makes love to Rod, showing his affection through this sexual act. This is when Tinker kills Rod and later removes Carl's genitals. Each time Carl tries to express his love for Rod, Tinker takes away that means of expression.



Figure 13: A scene from *Cleansed* (2009) indicating Carl's mutilated body as he has lost his hands and feet. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

The last relationship, is the one between Grace and Robin; a love affirmed through knowledge and nurturing:

Robin: My mum weren't my mum and I had to choose another, I'd choose you.

Robin: If I - If I had to get married, I'd marry you (Kane 1998: 22).

Our first introduction to Robin is in scene three when Grace orders him to remove Graham's clothes and change into hers. In *Cleansed* (2009) Grace initially wears a green summer dress with leggings. Robin then changes into these clothes. The audience is immediately confronted with an image of a man dressed as a woman and this influences the way the character is viewed from the very beginning. Consider figure 10 and 14: in figure 10, Grace fills out her dress with her female curves and feminine qualities and in figure 14 the dress hangs loose on Robin, failing to fit the form of his body. The same happens when Grace puts on Graham's clothes and loses her feminine figure as the t-shirt hides her breasts completely and takes away her female curves as can be seen in figure 12.



Figure 14: A scene from *Cleansed* (2009) in which Robin looks at himself in the mirror while wearing Grace's clothes. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

Robin is illiterate and uneducated and when Grace takes it upon herself to educate him, his love for her begins to grow. He confuses love with care and knowledge and ultimately it is this knowledge that leads him to commit suicide. In scene seventeen, Robin counts off the number of days he has left in the "institution" and only then does he realise how long he still has to be in there. He cannot deal with this information and when he reaches out to Grace for reassurance she ignores his plea and he commits suicide by hanging himself with Grace's tights.

At the beginning of the play, Robin is perceived as fragile and submissive. Because he is uneducated, Tinker has the power to dominate and control him. Robin simply does not know any better. However, as soon as Robin starts to gain knowledge, he starts to gain control over his life and comes into his own identity. A good example of this is in scene eleven when Robin visits the same booth as Tinker. By visiting the booth, Robin tries to take control over his body and sexuality; this newfound "power" excites and scares him as stated in the stage directions (Kane 1998: 30):

The Woman is dancing. Robin watches – at first innocently eager, then bemused, then distressed. She dances for sixty seconds. The flap closes. Robin sits and cries his heart out.

The reason Robin cries is because he does not know how to deal with this new sense of power and knowledge, more than that, Robin does not know how to be a man. He is dressed like a woman and is constantly treated like a woman and this creates an internal struggle about gender identity. When he goes into the booth he tries to be a man and when he can't live up to the general standards of being manly he breaks down and cries. He does not understand the changes his body and mind are going through. Tinker realises that Robin is gaining power over his own body and mind and he reacts by verbally and physically abusing him in scene fifteen. Tinker forces Robin to eat the chocolates that he had bought for Grace (a symbol of his affection for her). Tinker treats Robin like a dog (making him submissive) by throwing the chocolates at him one by one. During this interaction, Robin cries and wets himself. Tinker then verbally abuses him by calling him a “filthy little perv” and a “woman”. Tinker orders Robin to burn all the books and in so doing, denies him any further growth and knowledge.

Since the books no longer exist, Robin turns to the abacuses in search of knowledge and it is this (he learns how to count) that eventually leads to his death. By committing suicide, Robin asserts control over his body. He would rather die than spend the rest of his life in the institution. He realises that things will not change and that it will in fact only get worse. He decides that the only way to escape is through death. Robin has no real identity at the beginning of the play and his personality develops throughout the play as he moulds his own person. Through Grace, Robin experiences love, nurturing, sexual needs and ultimately an awareness of himself and his surroundings for the first time. In the end, he comes to realise that Grace, the “love of his life”, is no longer the woman he admired and that he is but a prisoner, not only in the institution but also in his own body.

Each character transforms throughout the play. Tinker transforms from violent and sadistic experimenter to sensitive and emotional lover. Woman transforms from a sexual object with no identity to Grace, a lover. Robin changes from an uneducated, powerless

subordinate to someone who gains power through knowledge and uses it to set himself free. Rod changes from realist to idealist and Carl is left with nothing as he is stripped of everything that makes him Carl, including his identity. Graham's change is more obvious. He goes from life to death but, as he states, he is more alive in death than he ever was in real life. Grace's transformation is more prominent as she transforms physically and emotionally; she starts as Grace (a woman) and transforms in body and mind into Graham (a man).

Through the personal reading of *Cleansed* (1998) a basic understanding of the text and its characters was formed. I concluded that Graham could be represented by a puppet for he is only a figment of Grace's imagination. More importantly though, the levels of representation deepen when Grace's/Graham's gender core is based on that of the puppet. She copies the acts and gestures of the puppet in order to become Graham in contrast to the femininity of the dancer. Carl can also be characterised by a puppet. Firstly, unlike an actor, the puppet's limbs can be physically removed on stage, thus emphasising and heightening the symbolism found within the play. Secondly, with a puppet you have to work twice as hard on expression in order to convey and communicate the correct information. When Carl has to find alternative meanings of expression, the puppet's movements, if executed correctly, can again intensify that which Carl is trying to communicate. This aspect of the performance can be explored further during the creative processes involved in the production of *Cleansed* (2009).

4.2. The exploration, creation and transmission of gender codes in *Cleansed* (2009)

4.2.1 Design

In *Cleansed* (2009), certain materials were used specifically to draw attention to the quality of the materials itself (see figure 5). The puppets were not meant to look "lifelike" as the play in itself is very symbolic. The puppets were made from wicker, an

inexpensive and easy-to-use material. The wicker moulds and bends easily, making it fairly effortless to work with. Moreover, it gives the illusion of a skeleton underneath the stockings. The stockings were used to create the illusion of skin and to add texture to the body of the puppet, the stockings also helped to conceal the cable ties that were used to connect the limbs,

Plaster moulds of the actors' faces were used to create the heads of the puppets. These moulds were then used to make masks from strips of brown cardboard paper. The masks were then attached to the wicker heads and shaped according to the heads of the puppets. Highlights and low-lights were then painted on to give the faces more definition and character. Highlights under the brow accentuated the eyes and made the brows appear fuller and more masculine. Low-lights underneath the cheeks and highlights on the chin accentuate the puppet's jaw.



Figure 15: A rehearsal scene from *Cleansed* (2009) which shows the materials (wicker, stockings and brown paper) out of which the puppets are made. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

The puppets have masculine features; the facial features were based on that of the actors (main puppeteers) and bodies of the puppets were constructed in a 'v-shape'; broad shoulders and small waist. Graham's puppet was constructed without legs and so the main puppeteer's legs were used to represent the legs of the puppet. Carl's puppet had only upper legs for in the play Tinker cuts off Carl's feet and the upper legs were used to represent his legs after the amputation. Both of the puppets were dressed in pants and the upper half of the body was left uncovered. The puppets initially had shirts on, but the shirts distorted the masculine features of the body and gave the puppets a block-like shape. By leaving the upper bodies nude the masculine qualities in the puppets construction could be seen.

4.2.2 Movement

The puppets used in *Cleansed* (2009) are rod puppets and control is exerted through the rods which are inserted in the head and the arms of the puppet. A central rod is used to support the puppet's body and another rod is inserted in the head of the puppet to allow the head to move up, down and sideways. The rods in the arms make arm movements possible and the joints in the elbows and shoulders allow for movement of the arms to be more articulated and expressive. Only one of the puppets in *Cleansed* (2009) has legs and these were articulated limbs by adding joints (at the hips) to the point where the legs are attached to the torso. The articulation points are specifically added in order to create and represent the natural movement of a human being.

Before the puppeteers started working with the puppets they had to first learn how to manipulate and explore the basic movements made by rod puppets. At first, each puppeteer got the opportunity to experiment with the puppets in order to see how the puppets move and what mechanisms are used to create movements. Next the puppeteers

were grouped in twos or threes and each group was given a puppet. They were asked to move around the space, making the puppets walk.

Once the puppeteers were more comfortable with the basic movements of the puppets, we started exploring interaction between two puppets. How does it look when one puppet touches another puppet's face or body? What happens to a puppet's head and body when the arms reach out to touch the other puppet? First puppets were just made to greet each other and then they touched each other. The more the puppeteers interacted, the more relaxed and comfortable they became with the puppets.

Once the initial movements and interactions were addressed we could move on to exploring gestures and speech as the expressive qualities of the puppets. During this process, the puppeteers were forced to act on their own instincts. The main puppeteer would speak and the puppeteers on the hands had to communicate what was being said with gestures. Puppeteers need to know exactly what is being said and what is being expressed in order to work together to find the best means of expression. Next the puppets had to interact with one another, acting and reacting in accordance with what the other puppets were saying. During the first week of rehearsals the puppeteers just focused on the basic movements of the puppets. They explored the different movement possibilities and learned to work together as a unit. During rehearsals the puppeteers explored and created different expressive movements for each of the puppet characters.

The movements generated through the puppet, by the puppeteers, had to be soft and flowing; giving Graham's movements a flow-like quality in order to symbolise his almost ghostlike status. More importantly, Graham's movements had to express his masculinity. It is this masculinity of his movements and gestures that Grace copies and internalises. Therefore, the puppeteers first explored this masculine aspect through the basic movements generated through the puppet – the way he is able to walk, sit and use his arms and hands.

As stated earlier, the main puppeteer's legs represented the legs of the puppet; when the puppet walks the main puppeteer syncs the body of the puppet with the movement in his legs. The rhythm and tempo of his walk had to be incorporated into the body (torso, arms and head) of the puppet to create the illusion of walking. Firstly movement was generated in the torso; by making small up and down movements that synced with the left and right movements in the legs and feet of the puppeteer. The arms were then incorporated by generating a slight swing in the arms and moving them at the same rhythm and speed as the torso and legs. Together these movements created the illusion of walking. What gave these movements a masculine quality was the up and down movements generated in the legs of the puppeteer and in the body of the puppet. A female puppet of the same construction might have a left to right swing in the 'hips' to create a more flow-like quality of movement. Men tend to lead with their feet whereas women tend to lead with their hips.

When the puppet had to sit, attention had to be given to the alignment of the puppet's body and the puppeteer's legs; so that the body doesn't look disconnected from the legs. More than that, the puppeteers had to explore the masculine qualities of the puppet in a sitting position. This was done by opening the legs of the puppeteer and leaning the body (torso) slightly forward, with either one hand or both hands resting on the puppeteer's knee. From this position the puppeteers could play around with expression in the arms and hands.

The movements in the shoulders, arms and hands of the puppet are used for gestures and actions. Through these gestures and actions (generated by the puppeteer) the puppet communicates emotion, intention and most importantly, gender. His masculinity lies within the quality of movement expressed through his gestures and actions. Even though his movements were slow and flow-like, they were still presented as sharp and direct.

For Graham the focus was placed on movements which Grace could copy; movements that could read well and were expressive in nature. In the beginning of the play, in scene 5, Graham dances with Grace and she gradually starts to copy his movements. Much of

what Grace imitated lay within the expressions of the upper and lower arms. A precise sequence of movements had to be created and expressed in order for Grace to follow and copy in this sequence. Movements such as: opening the arms and lifting the elbows and shoulders; pushing the hands forward and pulling them back. In this sequence Grace internalises the quality of movement generated within the hands and arms of the puppet. Her soft and flow-like movements become sharper and more direct, she is thus taking on the masculinity of his movements.

Graham is gentle and loving throughout the play and his movements have to portray this. Therefore the flow of his movements have to stay the same throughout the entire performance. This is also important for Grace's transformation because the quality of Graham's gestures is what Grace copies and embodies throughout the performance. Eventually they are synced and they express the same intentions and meanings.



Figure 16: A scene from *Cleansed* (2009) depicting the similarities in posture and placement of Grace and Graham's hands. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

Eventually the puppeteers explored movements that generated intentions and emotions: how does Graham touch Grace and how do we create expression in this action? Intention is vital in this instance – what is his intention when touching her? Through exploration, intention and emotion were created by touching Grace's arm, face and body (refer to figure 17 below). Placing the puppet's hand on her leg and slowly sliding it down to the bottom, can indicate Graham's sexual attraction to Grace.



Figure 17: A rehearsal scene from *Cleansed* (2009) showing how a gesture like a touch of the leg could become communicative and sexually expressive. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

Graham's movements were rehearsed even before his puppet was incorporated, making the puppeteers' process easier. When we incorporated Graham's puppet, we focused on perfecting and shaping the movements as well as the placement of the puppeteers. Carl on the other hand had a longer and more intricate process. He could script the inner emotional journey but not the physical journey of the puppet. Only when incorporating the puppet could his physical journey be placed and rehearsed.

Where Graham's puppet relied (aside from relying on the design) on movement and speech to communicate, Carl's puppet relied mostly on movement (aside from design) as his mode of communication. The character's tongue is cut out by Tinker and he finds new ways to communicate his love and regret to his lover Rod (Kane 1998: 13). He first uses his hands to beg for forgiveness and, after he loses these, he uses his feet to do a dance of "love" for Rod. After he loses his tongue, Kane (1998: 13) describes in the stage directions that he is "silent"; unable to make a sound, not even a grunt. While creating a movement core for Carl, we had to pay close attention to the intention and meaning generated by his movements.

In the first part of scene 2 (Kane 1998: 12), Carl's character speaks; it is only at the end of the scene that his tongue is cut out. In this scene, the puppet is beaten and raped. In order for the puppeteers to portray this physical beating, they had to create reactions in the appropriate body parts. Because the puppet is suspended by his arms (while being tortured) the communicative potential for movement lay within the head and body of the puppet (refer to figure 18):



Figure 18: A scene from *Cleansed* (2009) where Carl is suspended by his arms. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

When the character gets raped and the pole is inserted, the body stiffens and tenses. The puppeteers created the illusion of tension in the body by shaking the puppet's body lightly as the pole was being inserted by Robin. After the pole is removed, Carl goes into a 'release and collapse' and this was suggested by a drop of the head and a slight sway of the body.

In scene eight (Kane 1998: 25), Carl tries to communicate to Rod his remorse through hand gestures. He cannot speak and becomes frustrated because he feels that Rod does not understand what he is trying to communicate. He pounds the ground and then realises that he could write in the mud by using his hands. When the puppeteers first

started experimenting with movements, they gathered that the best way to show remorse was to stretch out the arms and open the hands before bringing them back to the body whilst shaking the head. The design (construction) of the puppets meant that the puppeteers were not able to physically shrug the shoulders, but this could be suggested by slightly lifting and dropping the arms of the puppet. This process was repeated and the action increased, in speed and size and was more emphasised each time, thus representing Carl's frustration.



Figure 19: A rehearsal scene from *Cleansed* (2009) where Carl is showing his frustration by placing his hands on his head and slightly moving it from side to side. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

In scene thirteen (Kane 1998: 31), Carl tries to communicate his love for Rod through an interpretive dance which starts out as fluid movements and later becomes spastic and unrecognisable. During the dance, the puppet's movements are slow and communicative; the puppeteers create fluid movements. When the movements became more convulsive, the quality changed from slow and fluid to more sharp and erratic. Carl's feet (represented by the puppeteer) are now stuck in the mud resulting in more aggravated and sharp arm movements.

Throughout the play, the quality of Graham's movements stays the same; his movements are controlled and never really changes in rhythm or speed. Carl's movements on the other hand changes as the play progresses. Every time Carl tries to communicate with Rod his movements become more emphasized and uncontrolled. The movements were emphasized by generating bigger gestures in the arms and body of the puppet. In essence Carl's movements had a feminine quality to it. Carl's arms were manipulated in a circular motion in order to create more fluid expressions, whereas Graham's movements were more sharp and direct.

4.2.3. Speech

In *Cleansed* (2009), the actors portraying Carl and Graham are, as earlier stated, the main puppeteers controlling the heads and also the voices of the puppets. The main puppeteers did not significantly alter their voices for the performance of *Cleansed* (2009); they represented male characters and their voices were already masculine. Because the puppets are based on the actors, the voice of the puppets becomes a central signifying element linking the actor and the puppet to one another. When the puppet speaks for the first time, the audience should associate the voice with that of the character previously presented. When Carl is first introduced as a puppet, he speaks. It is only after his tongue is cut out that he makes use of sounds to communicate: for example breathing and grunting communicates the character's pain, frustration and sadness.

4.4. Conclusion

In conclusion we can now gather that during the rehearsal process the actors created external gender codes for the characters. These gender codes then became the blueprints upon which the puppets' movements and actions were based. In each case, the puppet became a representation of the actor's more than they became representations of human

beings. I first made use of the live actors in the performance: Graham and Carl were introduced by the actors and then later on they were portrayed by the puppets. The reason for this is that I wanted to establish the characters first before I introduced the puppets. The audience needed to make the connection between what was previously represented and what was subsequently represented to them.

The costumes and physical exteriors of the puppets were the first level of representation, because both the actors and puppets wore the same costumes and the puppets' measurements were based on the measurements of the actors as seen below in figure 20 and 21:



Figure 20: A rehearsal scene from *Cleansed* (2009). This image shows that the puppet's features resemble that of the actor. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).



Figure 21: A rehearsal scene from *Cleansed* (2009) shows the relationship in size between the puppet and actor. (Photo by Petrus Du Preez, Stellenbosch 2009).

Secondly, the main puppeteers are also the actors and so their voices become the next level of identification and representation. Lastly, the movements and gestures of the puppets were based on the quality of the movements generated by the actors. The puppeteers could not copy the precise movements generated by the actors so they explored the intentions with which these movements were generated. They had to analyse every movement of the actors in order to find the essence of what the actors were trying to communicate. They then had to create similar movements within the puppets and they had to create the same characters created by the actors. Thus the gender codes created by the actors are the same codes used in the creation of a gendered puppet character.

I can now conclude that gender codes are the codes found in the design, movement and speech of the character. These codes ultimately form part of the character's gender core. The creative processes of the puppet and the actor (for this specific study) are then the

exploration, creation and transmission of its design, movement and speech. In the practical exploration of the puppet's design as significant sign, the design of the puppet was based on the male actor's body and was constructed according to those specifications. In the exploration, creation and transmission of movement as significant sign, the movements of the puppet was based on the gestures and actions of the actor. In the exploration, creation and transmission of speech as significant sign, the actor (who also portrays the puppet character) later became the main operator and voice of the puppet.

Chapter 5 – Summary and conclusion

I aimed to explore the creative processes involved in the exploration, creation and transmission of gender codes in puppetry with this study. In doing so I asked the following question: How do we explore, create and transmit gender codes in puppetry?

In order to answer this question I had to define the term 'gender codes' and I did this through Judith Butler's theories on gender performativity. Gender, as stated in Chapter 2, *Gender Codes*, is socially constructed and manifests itself on the surface of the body through the stylized repetition of acts. These 'acts' are the gender codes through which gender is communicated; these codes lie in the way we dress, act, speak and ultimately express ourselves. Gender codes are thus the socially constructed mediums through which we communicate our gender.

In Chapter 3, *The Semiotics of the Puppet*, I had to explore the aesthetics and semiotics of performance in order to understand the realm in which actors and puppets function as sign symbols. Signs are there to communicate information about the characters, their circumstances and the text. Both the actor and the puppet act as sign-vehicles during a performance. These sign-vehicles (characters) come to life within a given performance. The decor, props, space, lighting and sound act as supporting sign-vehicles to the actors and puppets. When working with characters everything becomes a sign; the costume and physical appearance (design), gestures and actions (movements), and the spoken text (speech).

I discussed the three significant signs used by the puppet/puppeteer to convey meaning and information. These three significant signs are (as previously mentioned) design, movement and sound. Design refers to the physical appearance of the puppet including its construction and costume as well as the visibility of the puppeteers. The design of the puppet conveys meaning through the construction by style which can be realistic or

stylized, the proportions of the puppet, features, costume and materials used in its construction. The design of the puppet could indicate character, gender and social status.

Movement refers to the actions, gestures and overall movements generated by the puppet. Movement as a significant sign also refers to the mechanical aspects of the puppet. This includes the mechanisms used to make the puppet move; the articulation points; the control mechanics; the control points; as well as lighting and scenery. Together, these variables are used to create, not only movement in the puppet, but also to express the emotions, intentions and gender of the puppet. Sound refers to the sounds generated by the puppeteer and external sound sources. These sounds include verbal communication, music, grunts, breathing and general sounds created for the performance. The puppet (like the human being and actor) does not always rely on sound as a vehicle of communication and for this reason sound can be dispensed with.

These signifying systems are used to design and portray a character.. However, even more importantly, they are used to bring the character to life (through movement and sound). In the introduction to this study, Chapter 1, I stated that the actor *becomes* a character and the puppet *represents* that character. The puppet is constructed according to the character; the movements are created according to its construction and design. In contrast to the puppet, the actor modifies his appearance (design) and gestures (movements) in order to represent his/her character.

In Chapter 4, *The Creative Process: The Exploration, Creation and Transmission of Gender Codes*, I did a practical exploration of the creative processes involved in the creation of a gendered puppet character. I did this through the production of *Cleansed* (2009). I used the rehearsal process to investigate the exploration and creation involved in the construction of a gendered puppet character for a performance. During this process, I investigated the creation process of the actor and the puppet for each puppet character was based on a character already created by an actor. These actors then controlled the bodies and voices of the puppets. Other puppeteers (operating the arms)

had to study and incorporate the actor's movements (gestures and actions) into the puppet.

The creative process plays an important part in the performance, not only in the placement of the actors and puppets, but also in the creation of meaning by each individual character whether it is an actor or puppet. Actors and puppeteers eventually draw on the same signifying codes to ultimately communicate thoughts, intentions, emotions, actions and gender. Firstly, the actor and the puppeteer rely on design as an outward form of gender coding – the physical appearance of the puppet and the actor. Secondly, they both use movement as a form of “dressing” the body with gestures in order to externalise their emotions and actions. The puppet, even more so than the actor, relies on its movements to indicate gender and sexuality. Lastly, both the puppet and the actor relies on speech as a form of gender signification; the actor more than the puppet.

Through the rehearsal process it became evident that the puppets draw on the same bodily movements as the actors, but the puppets only draw on the essence of what is being communicated. Meaning is thus created either by a suggestive movement or by emphasising the movements of the actor. So, in order to communicate and express the right meaning, we have to break the actor's movements down to its essence and then either incorporate it in a suggestive way or use it in a noticeable (emphasised) way.

The actors used the rehearsal process as a time to explore their characters and build constructive internal core for these characters. They experimented with gestures and actions, determining which of these fit best with the situations and the text being portrayed. The actor already has an internal core from which he/she chooses those acts and gestures that communicate his/her character and situation best. The puppet on the other hand does not have an internal core and during rehearsals meaning is created and an internal core is established via the movements created by the puppeteers. The puppeteers only create movements according to the character and situations and this becomes the puppet's internal gesture core. During rehearsals, the focus is on perfecting and

internalising the movements made by the puppet so that it becomes “natural” and creates the illusion of being free and intentional.

When considering Judith Butler's theories on the Drag Act, the following question can be asked: if a man can incorporate female gestures into a performance act and make these female qualities his own traits, is it not possible then for a puppet to draw upon these same qualities in order to become a representation of a human being? Butler (1999: 136) states that:

... acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggests, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.

This theory not only applies to the production of *Cleansed* (2009), but also to the construction of a gendered puppet character for any performance. When we create a gendered puppet character for a performance, we construct, dress and manipulate it according to a specific gender. The puppet's gender codes are emitted through its design, movements and speech and these gender codes are based on our own gender ideals. These gender ideals are socially constructed and performative, as Butler (1999: 140) states, through the stylised repetitions of acts and gestures produced on the surface of the body. Even in a puppet, despite it being a lifeless object, acts, gestures, words and desires produce, on the surface of the body, the appearance of an internal core. These acts and gestures are socially constructed and based upon those of the actor/character it portrays. These qualities eventually create the illusion of life within the puppet.

The puppet is thus brought to life through the exploration, creation and transmission of fabricated corporeal signs (gender codes). These fabricated corporeal signs are then explored, created and ultimately transmitted during the creative process. This makes the

gender codes expressed by the puppet *performative* for the gendered body of the puppet has no ontological status apart from the various acts (design, movement and speech) which constitute its reality. The puppet has no real gender. It is only through the execution of its design, movements and speech that the puppet is playing sex.

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Addendum

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