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The Phenomenology of Puppet Ontology in the Holocaust Performative

By Ariel Roitman

Abstract

The aesthetic deployment of puppetry Holocaust theatre serves multiple diverging inquiries about the Holocaust itself - that of spectatorship and agency, remembrance, transmission of testimony, and of therapeutic capabilities. This essay, however, calls particular attention to the phenomenon of puppet ontology within the 'Holocaust Performative.' Using puppets in the Holocaust Performative illuminates the phenomenon of what Vivian Patraka ascribes as "goneness," an interplay between that which is absent and that which is present. If we consider puppets as both corporeal and psychic actants that exist on an ontological spectrum, in what Mel Y. Chen suggests is a terrain of 'animacy,' puppets become theatrical surrogates of torture and mediators between the living and the dead. This essay looks at two works to frame the prevailing argument - Dutch company Hotel Modern's production of *KAMP* and Gilles Segal's play-text *The Puppeteer of Lodz* - as both utilize the puppet's ontological disparity to accentuate their own thematic "goneness." Ultimately, we come to see how the puppet may then labour as a proxy of remembrance within the Holocaust Performative, proving itself to be a dynamic and valuable theatrical tool in which to navigate our relationship with the preservation of Holocaust memory.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust*, Vivian Patraka describes what she coins a “Holocaust Performative.” Positioned against the model of the “Performative” constituted by a “doing” and “thing done,” the Holocaust Performative constitutes representation and reiteration as two symbiotic processes *and* two symbiotic objects; The *representing* and *reiterating* – the concurrent “doing” of *re-presenting* the Holocaust – allows for the “thing done” – the representation of “*the thing gone*” – to be “made ‘real,’ through its own reiteration” (Patraka 4-6). Patraka contends that “because performance is so heavily grounded in the presence of live bodies, it is a particularly useful site for investigating our accountability to the unimaginable injury and injustice done to bodies in the Holocaust” (10). I am compelled, however, to scrutinize the “live body” in the Holocaust Performative. Often one might assume these performers of a Holocaust play to be human, however, couldn’t puppets also constitute “live bodies?” Considering our willingness to anthropomorphize certain performance objects, particularly puppets, as spectators we allow a shift in our cognitive gaze and instill anthropomorphic value onto the puppet (Bell 46).

Some of the earliest records of manipulating performance objects into animated beings by a human puppeteer dates back to the 5th century BCE. As a theatrical and performative practice, puppetry is exercised in a range of diverse cultures across the globe in various aesthetic and

mechanical forms. Puppetry reached distinguishable popularity across Europe in the 18th century as a form of folk entertainment and is embedded within the artistic and cultural fabric of East and West Asian societies. Across multiple histories and geographies, puppetry has asserted itself as a popular form of performance practice. Thus, an increased use of puppetry in recent mainstream theatre comes to no surprise (Richman-Abdou). Productions like *The Lion King* (1997), *Avenue Q* (2003), *War Horse* (2007), and more recently, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (2017) and *The Life of Pi* (2019), demonstrate the infiltration of puppetry on Broadway and the West End.

This growing trend in contemporary performance practice can be rationalized by the puppet's "capacity for representing aspects of experience that elude human performance" (Cohen 129). These malleable and theatrically ambiguous performance objects "offer concrete means of playing with new embodiments of humanity...[and] the metaphysical 'self'" (Posner et al 2; 3). Considering "the puppet's ability to oscillate between states of life and death," theatre artists are turning to puppets in performances about the Holocaust (Posner et al 3). As one of the worst genocides known to humanity, the genre of Holocaust theatre exemplifies our "simultaneous attraction to and fear of the dead, [and] the need to continually rehearse and renegotiate the relationship with memory and the past" (Carlson 167). Employing puppets as performers in theatre about the Holocaust serves multiple diverging inquiries about the event itself, that of spectatorship and agency, remembrance and transmission of testimony, and their therapeutic capacity. While the argument for using puppets can be made within all these contexts, this essay calls attention to the phenomenology – our perceived manifestation of experience – of puppet ontology – the metaphysical quality of 'beingness – within the Holocaust Performative. Using puppets in the Holocaust Performative

illuminates the phenomenon of what Patraha ascribes as “goneness” – a term that “reflects the definitiveness, the starkness and the magnitude of this particular genocide by dictating the scope of what and who has been violently lost, including succeeding generations that cannot be” (4). If we consider puppets as both corporeal and psychic actants that exist on an ontological spectrum, in a terrain of animacy, they become theatrical surrogates of torture and mediators between the living and the dead. The puppet may then labour as a proxy of remembrance within the Holocaust Performative.

What follows below is, first, an overview of the central debate surrounding artistic representation of the Holocaust. Citing a select group of contributors to the discourse on Holocaust theatre, I aim to provide some context to the inquiries at large pertaining to representations of the Holocaust, of which, puppetry sits within. While this discord does not directly pertain to the centrality of my argument, it is always important to consider the ethical backdrop of artistic Holocaust representation given the difficult nature of performance these puppets participate in. To discern puppetry’s commemorative quality, the essay then delves into the ontological mechanisms at work during a puppet’s performance. The Holocaust layer is added subsequently and urges readers to consider the equivocal position of puppets as performers of simultaneous life and death, both within and outside the realm of the performance. To help frame this supposition I introduce two works: Dutch company Hotel Modern’s post-modern production of *KAMP* and Gilles Segal’s play-text *The Puppeteer of Lodz*. Both examples utilize the puppet’s ontological disparity to accentuate the thematic “goneness” purveyed throughout.

II. DILEMMAS AT HAND: ARTISTIC DEBATES IN HOLOCAUST REPRESENTATION

Over the past 80 years, the Holocaust has been a subject of inquiry within varying disciplines but has also become a disciplinary framework of its own, through which questions and theories of literature, visual art, film, trauma, and memory are explored. Given its traumatic nature, the Holocaust's "literature of silence" only began significant dissemination in the 1960s (Plunka 14). The Eichmann Trial prompted much philosophical debate over human nature and morality, issues of reconciliation, and the legacies of trauma. Works by Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Theodor Adorno, and Hannah Arendt became paramount, with Adorno's bold position that no art should be fashioned by the Holocaust sparking further debate over the ethics of its fictionalization and representation in art and literature. For, how *could* one represent or 'recreate' an event so grotesque and extreme? Claude Schumacher asks – rhetorically – whether one can justify a theatrical 'recreation' of the Holocaust. "And if [so], how can an actor hope to portray either the perpetrator or the victim, without glamourizing or demonizing the former and belittling or sanctifying the latter?" (Schumacher 3)

Philosophical discourse on this matter remains vast. Scholars who comment on Holocaust theatre engage in critical debate regarding theatrical Holocaust representation. Significant sub-threads include the literary *and* anthropological function of Holocaust drama, as well as the moral and aesthetic representation of the Holocaust in drama. What makes for a 'successful' play about the Holocaust? What functions does Holocaust drama serve, and how do they perform this function? How might one write, direct, produce, or design, a play about the Holocaust so

that it does not trivialize the victims without distorting historical truth?
How does one perform – and thus *re-present* – such an atrocity?

Robert Skloot's writings address the various aesthetic and moral challenges that a theatre director bears when staging a play from within the literary canon of the Holocaust; for "the wrong choice of image or word, as well as character and action, is of crucial importance, and can open the artist to charges of trivialization, complicity, or moral blindness" ("Directing the Holocaust Play" 529). As one of the earliest contributors to the debate on Holocaust representation on the stage, Skloot outlines three major questions:

First, is it possible for the Holocaust to be dealt with in works of art? Second, if it can be dealt with, will the experience be cheapened, trivialized, or exploited in the treatment it is given? And third, what moral responsibility do artists have in taking up the Holocaust theme? ("Introduction" 11)

Delineating the ethical complications of representing the Holocaust in theatre, Skloot asks: How, and should one, attempt to perform a physical representation of violence, torture, and dehumanization that is, essentially, unimaginable in any present human consciousness? In *Stages of Annihilation*, Edward Isser also scrutinizes this long-standing conundrum; how can/should we present theatre that represents the Holocaust from both an ethical and aesthetic point of view? How can one 'get it right' if 'it' is so inherently wrong? Why subject ourselves, and others, to a performance of this nature?

Both Skloot and Isser outline the aesthetic dilemma – of representing something so violent and barbaric in nature – as that between realism and abstraction. A postmodern approach, while generally more palatable for an audience, cannot fully portray 'exact' violence, and

thus “disguises suffering” so that it “ceases to be what it is” (Isser 15).

However, Isser acknowledges that:

The abstraction of violence in Holocaust drama is unavoidable. The symbolic representation of terror cushions the impact upon members of the audience, enabling them to remain and bear witness. The only alternative – the enactment of graphic violence – is problematic because terror, real terror, can never be represented on the stage. (15)

Realism or naturalism, while more faithful to the subject, attempt to represent something that, in the case of the Holocaust, is ‘unrepresentable.’ When violence is enacted on stage, there is a threat that historical authenticity becomes “glorified, idealized, and spiritualized” (ibid 15). Yet, a need remains - a “necessity to express something which no representational form can encompass” (16). A dynamic tension ultimately exists between presenting a piece *too* realistically or *too* experimentally, “that a realistic approach is a falsification of the subject and that an abstract approach is a betrayal of it” (Skloot, “Introduction” 17). On one hand, there is the potential to present a horror so real, that the act itself becomes unethical or trivial. On the other, abstracting testimony too far creates the potential to tarnish the historical validity of Holocaust testimonies. With both approaches, there is a risk to distort the realities and experiences Holocaust victims faced. Skloot explains:

The search for a style and a form for the Holocaust experience with all the challenges, responsibilities and risks it entails, is yet more difficult in the theatre, because of all the arts theatre is the most public and the most *real*. By presenting verbal and visual action in a perpetual present moment, the theatre creates an experience which *lives* before other people; performed by live actors during a time shared with an audience, a live performance has an impact and effectiveness which is immediate and powerful...the theatre’s temporal and physical nature evokes

immediate and intense interaction, permitting less evasion by encouraging greater subjective involvement. In this way history is made to live again in the most palpable of ways. ("Introduction" 16)

In line with Isser, Schumacher feels that Holocaust theatre cannot and should not follow a single "model of representation." Rather, he "argue[s] that the successful Shoah drama or performance is one that disturbs, offers no comfort, advances no solution;...It must be a play that generates stunned silence" (Schumacher 8). He affords less attention to the product on view (the play itself), directing it toward the outcome of the theatrical experience (what the play *does* for those who encounter it), while the subject (the Holocaust's inconceivability) remains as ambiguous, unresolved, and charged as it was initially.

With these moral and aesthetic considerations in mind, the employment of puppetry in Holocaust theatre generates opportunities to navigate issues relating to the live rendering of torture, injury, and death upon a performing body. We see this at play in Jerzy Grotowski's *Akropolis* (1962) where human actors perform as puppets, and Tadeuz Kantor's *Dead Class* where life-size mannequins take on an uncanny physical likeness to that of 'real' people. Both practitioners utilized characteristics of puppets as objects to accentuate the quality of disgust and gruesomeness in their work. Since puppets can take on several aesthetic and mechanical forms, they can be useful to productions of varying aesthetic forms. This variation manifests across more recent works like *Ghetto* (1989), *Tinka's New Dress* (1994), *Company of Angels* (2002), *Fabrik: The Legend of M. Rabinowitz* (2007), and *The Escape Act* (2019) among others. Ultimately, the ambiguous ontological nature of puppets may offer artists of Holocaust theatre an aesthetic and performative means to re-present the physical and psychological violence experienced by victims of the Holocaust in a morally preferable way, such that "real"

bodies *and* representations of reality are not at risk. While there is no ideal solution for the dilemma surrounding theatrical representation of the Holocaust, the rest of this paper argues for the puppet as a representative of the living and dead, a status they achieve through a phenomenon that occurs with each performance, one where “goneness” takes centre stage. In addition to being an artistic tool, they also may serve a memorial function.

III. EXPOSING THE STRINGS: OBJECT THEORY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES

In order to perceive the phenomenological “goneness” puppets fulfill in the Holocaust Performative, we must first investigate this process of anthropomorphising puppets. As the *Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* indicates:

The puppet exists in an inherently ambiguous, fundamentally dual state: it operates, as Margaret Williams notes, ‘in the collapsed boundaries between the living and the inanimate;’ it remains independent even as it is manipulated; and it expresses the will and persona of its animator while imparting meaning of its own. (Posner et al 5)

But how is this possible? How *do* we attribute life to innately “lifeless” objects? How can an inanimate *object* become an animated *subject*? Ultimately, a cognitive process occurs in which we forgo our epistemological tendencies. Like the “ontological hybridity” of puppets, spectators enter a state of perceptual “in-betweenness” (Wisniewska 56). We suspend our disbelief, allowing for the “*theatrical dissolution* of the human-puppet border” (Banfield 153). Echoing Sartre, Paul Piris attributes this as a phenomenon where spectators develop a “relation of self to the

Other,” the puppet, as a “result of our presence in the world as embodied consciousness” (Piris 30). Because we are conscious of ourselves as psychic beings, we inevitably endow consciousness in the Other by our very recognition of them as separate from ourselves. After we acknowledge the puppet’s “objectness,” which is manifested through our ability to *perceive* its materiality, we sequentially concede to the *imagination* of its “subjectness,” “its quality or state of being a subject” within a performance (Piris 39).

Acknowledging anthropological cognitive processes, then, allows us to perceive puppets’ “animacy,” a term Mel Y. Chen introduces which supports the ambiguity surrounding puppet, or object-oriented, ontology, and which pushes us to “disregard common understandings of ‘life’ or ‘liveliness’” (Chen 17). They reject the ‘conventional’ cognitive perception of ‘life’ on an “assumed cognitive scale extending from human through animal to inanimate” (8). Instead, Chen redirects us to a “richly affective territory of mediation between life and death, positivity and negativity, impulse and substance” (3). Animacy is a perpetual state of fluidity between “‘life’ or ‘death’ that runs across borders of animate and inanimate” (17). Animacy can reflect something that is not animate and not inanimate. It is both, and it is neither, alive or dead. This “territory of animacy” is congruent with an ontological spectrum in which puppets exist (3). Puppets can be both live, animate, and real at the same time as being dead, inanimate, and not real. In performance, they can be physically destroyed and reconstructed yet their animacy remains untouched, rendering them the ability to feel pain or acknowledge their own resurrection. Ultimately, they “occupy a potential space between the world of imagination and the world of actuality” (Cohen 123).

A puppet’s animacy manifests through its “phenomenal body [,] the perceptible body of the performer that is fully present in the here and

now, complete with its physical, kinetic and energetic characteristics” (Wisniewska 59). In other words, the puppet’s phenomenal body is made up of two qualities: corporeal (relating to the physical, material) and psychic (relating to the spirit or the soul). The puppet’s corporeal body recognizes its physical makeup (its materials, the way it moves) and its physical relationship to the puppeteer and the space it occupies. Its psychic body recognizes the puppet’s “life,” its existence as a live being. Within the temporality of any performance, its corporeal body is reflective of the puppet’s physical tangibility and its psychic body is reflective of the puppet’s spiritual tangibility – that is, from the perspective of an audience. After - and even during - the performance, the puppet’s phenomenal tangibility *can* remain and/or disappear. Combined, the puppet’s corporeal and psychic qualities attribute to its ontological ability to be present/absent, alive/not alive, real/not real, animate/inanimate. The phenomenal body determines its ontological tangibility.

Concerning the Holocaust Performative, we notice interesting thematic relations with puppet ontology or animacy. The Holocaust as a subject occupies a junction of physical and emotional dehumanization, destruction, and trauma. We come to face death in the most unthinkable fashion along with the heavy toll survivors carry while rebuilding their lives.

Margaret Williams reminds us of “the physical irreducibility of the human body,” and thus of the human performer: “No matter how much the stage tries to objectify the human body, it’s not an object *just* like any other, since there’s a limit to how one can [...] distort or dismantle it” (Williams 25). Patraka echoes this predicament: “Visualizing the injured body in pain is both too real and too artificial – pain is so excessively real as to dissolve the neat border of imitation, and it is necessarily sustained in representation by considerable artifice” (Patraka 101). As discussed

earlier, scholars and artists continue to ask how such an indescribable event could be represented. How, and why, would one show a tortured body on stage? Although concrete answers do not exist, the phenomenal body of the puppet – its corporeal and psychic tangibility – allows theatre makers to explore such questions. Unlike the human body, puppets offer endless possibilities through which to face and attempt an understanding of the Nazi orchestrated genocide.

IV. *KAMP & THE PUPPETEER OF LODZ*

The Dutch company Hotel Modern does exactly this in their post-dramatic production of *KAMP*. Hotel Modern's aesthetic trademark is their play with "model theatre" – "'model' signaling a relation of the miniature or toy proscenium stage to adult-scale theatre architecture and scenography" (Sussman 268). In *KAMP*, Hotel Modern constructs an expansive, yet miniaturized replica of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp full of thousands of miniature – seemingly 'lifeless' and 'faceless' – puppets (Hotel Modern, *KAMP*). Using "visual strategies of panorama" that play with scale and frame, three human puppeteers manipulate various scenes to "recreate" a day in the life of Auschwitz (Bleeker 286). A live video of the scenes projects against the back wall, providing spectators with simultaneous lenses of contrastive proximities. When the performance starts, the puppets are prisoners. Each individual puppet's face and body is unique, but when viewed as group they all look identical. But no matter spectators' extent of eyeshot, the miniature figurines literally and figuratively don't look human, perhaps exemplifying what Caroline Wake describes as "'faceness' to the faceless" (Wake 112). The artists intentionally "gave all the puppet prisoners an individualized face of clay with an emotional expression" to convey that "the anonymous mass

consisted of real people” (“Portfolio: Hotel Modern, Kamp”). The production explores the “destructive ontology of the puppet” throughout the performance when audiences directly face horrifying imagery and action (Cohen 127). Examples of these gruesome moments include a public hanging of prisoners at the noose, prisoners undressing and walking into the gas chambers, prisoners dragging naked dead bodies out of the gas chambers, puppets of SS guards forcefully beating prisoners, prisoners failing to escape through the electric fence, a prisoner climbing out of piles of naked – some dismembered – ‘dead bodies.’ The live camera that follows the prisoners orients the audience to view the world of the performance close up, despite their omnipresent spatial positioning surrounding the large-scale diorama.

Despite their evident puppetness, the scenes are no less uncomfortable or disturbing for spectators to watch. As the artists explain, the dehumanization of ‘unhuman’ objects somehow produces deep emotional effects for spectators:

Most people are very emotional during and after the performance. Some cry. A few have left because they couldn’t bear to watch. Some close their eyes. Audiences are often in a quiet shock afterward....our performance made them realize what the numbers and facts mean. You cannot talk about things like this—in a way it’s beyond words. (“Portfolio: Hotel Modern, Kamp”)

Corporeally, a prisoner/puppet’s “‘death’ is expressed as a transition from one form of materiality to another” (Williams 21). Yet, the level of psychic distance, the space in which spectators encounter the puppet’s psychic body – which “widens as the performer’s role becomes more distinct from the perform[ing]” body (Kaplin 22) – is narrow. There is simultaneous “closeness and distance of the real and the theatrical” (Martin 6). Our cognition simultaneously allows the puppets’ material

body to be destroyed – a phenomenal recognition of the real – and the body of a conscious subject to die – a phenomenal recognition of the not ‘real’ because no one *actually* died in the performance. Ontologically, however, the phenomenal body *is* real in both a perceived and imagined reality. The puppets are *alive* in the ‘re’-imagined world in *KAMP*. Before and after the production, the puppets are physically there, but the prisoners’ phenomenal bodies are absent. Only during the performance are they present, confirming, as Byroni Trezise explains: “In sites of traumatic memory, the very materiality of the bodily performs itself in contrast to the absent bodies that comprise the scene of trauma itself. Liveness ultimately stages its ontology as an act of return in place of the disappeared” (88).

We witness what is ‘done’ to the puppets, but also what is/was ‘done’ to the prisoners in Auschwitz. It is something happening *and* something that has happened. There is a phenomenological symbiosis of presence/absence in the temporal presentness of the performance. In one frame our gaze is focused on the material ‘modelness’ of the stage and the puppets, providing cognitive space to acknowledge that the puppets, their ‘death’ is ‘not real.’ In another, we do not see beyond what the frame offers, pushing us to meet the phenomenal subjects, the prisoners, that are ‘living’ and ‘dying’. But as Freddie Rokem explains, “It is obviously never the event itself that we see onstage. When the historical figures reappear on the stage through the work on of the actors on the basis of a dramatic text, the historical events are, rather, performed again” (6). Paradoxically, “goneness” becomes present when the liveness of the performance enters our awareness. Our temporal recognition of this past reality performing in the present interacts with our recognition of the puppets’ phenomenal bodies; in the performance, they are tortured,

slaughtered beings, but they are also semiotic representations of the 'real' people killed.

In contrast to Hotel Modern's post-dramatic approach, Gilles Segal's realist Holocaust drama *The Puppeteer of Lodz*, which originally premiered in 1983 in France, employs puppetry as part of its dramaturgy (Plunka). The narrative follows Holocaust survivor Finklebaum, a once admired puppet-master who escaped Auschwitz. Despite it being 1950, Finklebaum refuses to leave his attic in Berlin because he fears that the war is still happening outside. Being isolated from the outside world for over five years, Finklebaum turns everyday materials into puppets that keep him company. He interacts and converses with the puppets, including a life-size reconstruction of his dead, pregnant wife, and uses them to create a fantasy world, acting out various traumatic memories of life in the camp. Although *The Puppeteer of Lodz* has been produced hundreds of times by companies everywhere, each approaching the text with different scenography, the dramaturgical function of the puppets in the play does not change. The puppets provide Finklebaum with companionship and the means to work through his traumatic re-imaginings.

Unlike *KAMP* where the puppets themselves were the performers, *The Puppeteer of Lodz* has a human performer, Finklebaum, bring his puppets – props – in and out of 'life.' The phenomenal bodies of the *KAMP* prisoners are positioned in closer ontological proximity to its audience, whereas the phenomenal bodies of Finklebaum's puppets exist in a twice-removed ontological realm. Audiences are aware of the puppets' corporeal and psychic qualities both in the world of the play and in the word of the performance. While Finklebaum interacts with his puppets as substitutes for real people who have died, audiences acknowledge Finklebaum's belief of their 'liveness.' This dramaturgical construction

enforces the puppets' simultaneous life/death, presence/absence vis-à-vis Finklebaum. The play itself is contrived in a way that attests to puppets' animacy, and by utilizing this ontological dramaturgy, the phenomenology of the puppet is dually highlighted. "Goneness" is infused in the play world – Finklebaum's puppets replace those he has lost. However, "goneness" is intensified when spectators comprehend the puppets' substitutive function within the dramaturgy. The ambiguity of the puppets' ontological status throughout the play produces a subsequent acknowledgement of the lost lives and what remains of them in the present. The play uses puppets to mediate between disappearance and reappearance, the tangible and intangible, and the destruction and reconstruction of life.

Kamp and *The Puppeteer of Lodz* are just two examples of how puppets and their animacy illuminate "goneness" in Holocaust Performatives. Essentially, the puppet becomes an "analogon;" They "[allow] the absent object" – the dead – "to acquire a kind of presence in our consciousness" (Piris 39). Emulating the very phenomenology of "goneness" itself, the analogous puppet "allows the audience to imagine its absent subjectness through its present objectness" (Piris 40). When the subject in/of a Holocaust narrative is someone who is gone but present in our historical consciousness, they, like the puppet, "appear in order to disappear" (Phelan 152). This re-disappearance constitutes "goneness". The real human bodies that Nazi oppressors made disappear from the world are represented through puppets; they have the ontological capacity to appear in place of the dead only to disappear once more. If, as Nicholas Ridout asserts, "it is the awareness of one's body as a presence in a situation that seems to constitute the condition of theatricality," then the phenomenon of puppets' ontology, their animacy, is used as a representative *and* reiterative process of theatrical surrogacy for the absent, further producing the "goneness" already found within the

Holocaust Performative (Ridout 8). It is by proxy of the puppet that “goneness,” this interplay between what is absent and what is present, becomes doubly emphasized in the Holocaust Performative. The Holocaust Performative itself negotiates the atrocity it wants to represent and the means through which to do this. It dances between representing something real and representing something tangible. It cannot achieve both, thus it remains, intentionally, unresolved. Like Peggy Phelan’s description of “hardship art,” the Holocaust Performative: “[evokes]...the value of what is lost, to learn not the meaning but the value of what cannot be reproduced or seen (again). It begins with the knowledge of its own failure, that it cannot *be* achieved” (152). The puppets in *KAMP* and *Puppeteer of Lodz* perform as “absent bodies, representing a future that did not eventuate,” and in their ‘doing,’ the ‘thing done’ inadvertently becomes their, albeit intangible, eventuation in the present (Trezise 85). Puppets’ animacy mirrors the phenomenon of “goneness;” it is “inconceivable but its effects are palpable” (Patraka 4).

V. WHAT’S LEFT IN THE SHADOWS – FINAL REFLECTIONS

How, then, can we further attribute puppets’ “goneness” as means for Holocaust remembrance? Summarizing Sartre, Piris contends that “material contents can lead viewers to imagine absent objects because memory and affectivity are attached to any perception” (40). In a Holocaust Performative, it’s the absence of what is *imperceptible* that forces audiences to fill in its gaps. The result of theatricality, to induce “the spectator’s act of recognition,” relies on absence to bring the absent into view (Davis & Postlewait 27). Emma Willis suggests “Affect is generated by the lack (or missing) of an objectified other and has a means of making them ‘present’ in order that their suffering might be more fully

contemplated” (21). Ultimately “the ontology of disappearance enabled by the live performing body,” in this case the puppet, “is evidence of its capacity to operate beyond representation;” it also operates as a mode of remembrance (Trezise 81). The phenomenal bodies of puppets hold testimonies of the past and stories of the absent. The puppet shares the human’s memory while maintaining its “power to resist any psychological efforts on the part of the human to suppress that memory” (Banfield 150). Synchronously, “audiences’ perceptual multistability” – the shifting gaze between “‘presence’ and representation” – maintains cognitive and aesthetic distance (Wisniewska 60). Suspending our disbelief, embracing the puppet’s theatrical nature – its oscillating “goneness” – allows us to discern the very realness of Holocaust-induced absence. Patraha maintains that “the Holocaust performative, then, not only marks the gap between the ‘goneness’ of events and our desire to represent; it also demands an added dimension of accountability” (7). Trezise further contends, “The art of making disappearance re-disappear as opposed to reconstructing the disappeared is geared towards foregrounding affect rather than mimesis as a privileged mode of remembrance” (87). Recognizing puppet animacy calls attention to “goneness” as a theatrical phenomenon. “Goneness” produces the affect of which Trezise speaks, ultimately inciting accountability within the Holocaust Performative and its audiences: “I am guilty of making the work *work*, which is also to say, I am guilty of making the [work] re-disappear” (87). Because we *can* recognize “goneness” at work, we realize our own relationship to what, and who, is gone. When this, the Holocaust Performative, occurs, we enter the site of memory, becoming actants ourselves in the *representation* and *reiteration* of Holocaust memory.

By examining puppets’ animacy, we can ascribe their fluid ontological complexion to their phenomenal bodies. Their corporeal and

psychic qualities reinforce their own theatrical nature as performers of absence/presence and life/death. As is evident in *KAMP* and *Puppeteer of Lodz*, their animacy contributes to the performance of “goneness” within the Holocaust Performative. The phenomenology of puppet ontology, “goneness,” and the Holocaust Performative itself, work in oscillating concurrency to reflect said collaboration onto its audiences. Our reflection of this phenomenological reflection activates the accountability the Holocaust Performative endeavours through means of remembering. Ultimately though, Patraka reminds us that “the Holocaust performative acknowledges that there is nothing to say to goneness and yet we continue to try and make it, say it, identify it, memorialize the loss over and over” (Patraka 7).

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