

Imagine—Inspire—Intuit: Reflections on the Art of the Puppet and the Celebration of Story

— Janene Ping and Lynn St. Pierre

A biannual Puppetry Collaboration Conference at Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School in the summer of 2012 inspired an article that was then published in Kindling, the Waldorf early childhood journal in the UK. The following reflections on the art of puppetry were the substance of one of the lectures that Janene gave at that conference. The next collaborative conference will be in July 2014; visit www.magicalpuppettree.net for updates.

The puppetry impulse is one of the most important art therapy impulses for the coming century. . . . The marionette play is for children an unconscious education in imaginative vision, and therefore it is an activator of the highest order of the forces of self-healing. . . . an effective alternative to television and the multi-media culture of our day. —Dr. Michaela Glöckler, in “The Healing Strength of Puppetry”

What is the essence of our times? What are the children’s needs when early childhood development is little understood and unprotected? What are the needs of the parents? Where do we begin in offering an antidote to modern life—the frenzied pace of society, increasing empowerment of electronic media, and disconnection from nature and other human beings?

In exploring these questions, I would like to share a small moment of time—perhaps it will feel familiar: The school’s Yuletide Fair has come once again and the kindergarten puppet theater room is packed. After months of story study and creative endeavor, a group of artists, musicians and teachers have come together to share a wonderful fairy tale. The candle is lit and as the music begins, two puppeteers slowly lift the silk veil that covers the stage. In the quiet hush of anticipation we hear a child say triumphantly, “This is the moment I’ve been waiting for!”

As the audience leans into the magic of living story, the creative expression reflected in the art of puppetry embodies a distinct aspect of what it means to be human; human intention enlivens what is otherwise inanimate. When the physical body of the puppet is “ensouled” through the puppeteer’s endeavor, we metaphorically experience how earthly matter is filled with an invisible or spiritual force in order to come into enlivened movement. This is mirrored in the hu-

man relationship with destiny and the world. How do we incarnate into this earthly world, take up our lives, and fulfill our destinies? How can we help the children in our care to be empowered to do this to the very best of their ability?

There are limitless possibilities yet to be discovered in how we as human beings can “ensoul” this life! This is a gift given when we are born to this earth. The possibilities unfold as we live into our story and come to know the stories of humanity as our own. Stories of wisdom, courage, and service to others, as well as stories of tragedy, deepen our understanding and awaken our compassion.

Puppetry brings pictures of the universal archetypes within these stories into an enriching experience for the child that creates strong and lasting impressions. Don’t we all hunger for the soul nourishment received through connection with our universal humanity? In freedom, the archetype leads us toward a process of identification. Where within lives the Mother, the Sun King? the Clown? the Warrior? the Healer? True archetype moves beyond gender, race, and age and unites us in recognition of familiar experience and universal truth. It is the opposite of stereotype, which locks gender or race into a limited and often disrespectful definition.

The microcosmic story that unfolds in the world of little “puppet people” reflects larger, macrocosmic world stories. Our inter-dependence is an essential truth. We live in a time when each individual is being called to become consciously active in the creation of humanity’s story—the story of our future that directly rests on our human activity of the present.

In “Marionette Theater, Posing a Task for Socially Oriented Education,” Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen wrote: “We must not neglect the concrete questions of

the creation of a counter-balance against a civilization inimical to children. Whatever can be done to offer children enlivening soul nourishment must be begun. . . This picturesque, educational medium, the living play imbued with the inner imagination and fantasy, should be offered in many styles as a way of activating the creative powers of children.”

To nourish and help activate the creative powers of children is a wondrous responsibility. As artists, as puppeteers, to be a “vessel for the archetype” requires that we reach beyond ourselves. This work encompasses dedicated striving in the realms of meditation, study, creative playfulness, and social arts such as forgiveness—of others and especially ourselves. Many aspects of artistic discipline are woven together: storytelling, sculpture of form and figure, gesture, music, color, light, and “ensoulment” of the puppet, as we create a tableau of living story.

How do we as adults nurture the creative soulfulness needed for this work? We turn towards the essence of what lies in imagination, intuition, and inspiration to partake in the source of these gifts.

To *Imagine* is to have a vision of what is possible, to open the door to the unlimited, to embrace the freedom of potential. It is important for each individual to have a way to embrace creative play within the arts to nurture this capacity. To *Intuit* is to sense the higher truth beyond personal knowledge; to experience a discerning “seership” that is connected to and yet also moves beyond the development of the four highest of the twelve senses.* Daily meditation and the practice of being present allow us to awaken to our inner intuition. To *Inspire* (and to be inspired) is to breathe into the realm of the infinite, to take in a Godly spirit and to be moved in wonder. When our hearts are moved by a story, sermon, or teaching, or when we study the great esoteric works of others who have shared their inner journey, we enter a realm where it is possible to join in the spiritual evolution of humanity and breathe in inspiration.

Humanity longs for the connection to the cosmos that is bridged through capacities of imagination, intuition, and inspiration. In these times, the light of creative spirit is much needed, both in the arts and in daily life, especially in the areas of life that hold challenge. Most especially, young children need to be met in the place they naturally want to be: a place of joyful play and creativity.

Through our artistic striving we hope to help the young child to feel comforted and welcomed in this earthly realm. Through the portrayal of meaningful sto-

ry, the child is able to integrate experiences of polarity such as courage and fear, sorrow and joy. The unfolding of context within a story is a picture of community and a reassurance of the continuity of relationships. This is essential in the education of the child, but is so often missing within the disconnected and isolated experiences of modern life. Art can be a healing balm for our etheric life forces; with soulful expression we build connections with the children and one another.

Through involvement in the many arts that puppetry encompasses, through meditative practice, striving and forgiveness, through capacities to imagine, intuit and inspire, we have the opportunity to create healing therapeutic, artistic and educational experiences for the children and our communities. Is not this the moment we have been waiting for? ♦

* See *Anthroposophy (A Fragment)* by Rudolf Steiner, and *Our Twelve Senses* by Albert Soesman.

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A beautiful Babouschka puppet. Photo courtesy of Suzanne Down