

# Performing the Fractured Puppet Self

Employing auto-ethnopuppetry to portray and  
challenge cultural and personal constructions of the  
disabled body

by

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## ABSTRACT

This research project examines personal and cultural constructs of the disabled body, with the creation of the puppet play *Pupa* as its practical culmination. The testimonials of six participants (including my own), all from artists with a disability or deaf artists, are the inspiration for *Pupa*. The qualitative research methodology used within this research combines ethnographic methods, auto-ethnography, practice-based research and narrative enquiry. I have adapted auto-ethnography by combining it with puppetry to coin new methodologies; ‘ethnopuppetry’ and ‘auto-ethnopuppetry’.

Inspired by fairytales, *Pupa* creates a fantastical world where the narratives of the participants find expression through a range of puppet characters. These testimonies examine what it is to identify with a disabled identity, and to ‘come out’ as disabled. It looks at how we perceive ourselves as disabled, and how we feel others perceive us. Creating a piece of theatre based around disabled identity led me to investigate the history of disabled performers, and historical depictions of disabled characters within theatre, fairytales and freak-shows, in order to see how they influence societal beliefs around disability today.

Within the practice element of this research, I experimented with unconventionally constructed puppets, as well as puppeteering my own disabled limb with an exo-skeleton, in order to question how I view disability in my own body. This research tracks my changing perceptions of my body. It charts my journey from viewing my disabled arm as an object, to seeing the exo-skeleton as an additional arm by incorporating it into my body schema, to then accepting my disabled arm as part of my body again.

The research participants become the composer, actor, songwriter, and choreographers of *Pupa*, and their stories are at the forefront of this research. I situate my practice-based research among other contemporary puppet theatre performances which centre around the disabled voice. The research reveals that disabled artists have only begun to puppeteer their own stories in the last few years, and that this area remains largely under-researched. By tracing the journey of my disability within this piece of theatre; from able-bodied, to 'abelist', to claiming my identities, and finally 'coming out' as disabled, I aspire to bring to light and through so doing, to subvert ableist perceptions of the disabled body.

Keywords: puppetry, disability, identity, body, narrative inquiry, auto-ethnopuppetry, ethnopuppetry.

## **Declaration**

I, Emma Fisher, declare that this thesis is my own work and has never been previously submitted by me or any other individual for the purpose of obtaining a qualification.

Signed:

Emma Fisher

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Date:

24-7-2018

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**Dedicated to Moira Brady Averill**

### The Prelude

All moveables of wonder, from all parts,  
Are here—Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs,  
The Horse of knowledge, and the learned Pig,  
The Stone-eater, the man that swallows fire,  
Giants, Ventriloquists, the Invisible Girl,  
The Bust that speaks and moves its goggling eyes,  
The Wax-work, Clock-work, all the marvellous craft  
Of modern Merlins, Wild Beasts, Puppet-shows,  
All out-o'-the-way, far-fetched, perverted things,  
All freaks of nature, all Promethean thoughts  
Of man, his dullness, madness, and their feats  
All jumbled up together, to compose  
A Parliament of Monsters. Tents and Booths  
Meanwhile, as if the whole were one vast mill,  
Are vomiting, receiving on all sides,  
Men, Women, three-years' Children, Babes in arms.  
Oh, blank confusion! true epitome  
Of what the mighty City is herself,  
To thousands upon thousands of her sons,  
Living amid the same perpetual whirl  
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced  
To one identity, by differences  
That have no law, no meaning, and no end  
Oppression, under which even highest minds  
Must labour, whence the strongest are not free.  
But though the picture weary out the eye,  
By nature an unmanageable sight,  
It is not wholly so to him who looks  
In steadiness, who hath among least things  
An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts  
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole.

(Wordsworth, 1850, pp. 122–123)



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## INTRODUCTION

This practice-based research project is firmly situated in theatre, specifically in the area of puppetry and disability studies. I was initially motivated to pursue this research as a puppeteer who has struggled with identifying as disabled. Within the practice element of this research, I have experimented with unconventionally constructed puppets, as well as puppeteering my own disabled body part. This is done in order to examine concepts of personal and cultural identity, to consider how one views oneself, how one names oneself, how others view you, and how others name you. Moore describes some of the challenges of working within this area:

We have named ourselves and have used the negative terms to our own benefit not only to shock people but to respect that these words are our history and we must claim them. (Moore, 2017, p. 6)

My ambition when starting my PhD journey was to take the ‘dis’ out of dis-ability. I have come to realise that this view was fuelled by the fact that I was yet to ‘come out’ as disabled, and instead of extracting the ‘dis’ from disability my research instead became about my need to reclaim the word.

### 0.1 Structure of the Thesis

The qualitative research methodology used within this research is a combination of ethnographic methods, auto-ethnography, practice-based research and narrative enquiry. Personal testimony, both my own and that of others, is used throughout, and it is filtered through my artistic practice, and participatory research practices involving some of the participants.

In chapter one, I introduce the methodology used in the research, as well as examining the central themes investigated in the research. In chapter two, I examine the specific methods and processes of the research, from data gathering to the public performance of my practice-based research piece, which is called *Pupa*.

Within this research, in order to examine my perspective of both puppetry and disability, I examine historic cultural perceptions and scholarly perceptions in both fields. As a puppeteer, puppets are ways for me to examine the world around me. In this research, the puppets I construct and employ in the performance physically embodied my questions. Chapter three of the thesis looks at puppetry; at how it has been used within theatre and performance, and how the history of puppetry as a form interacts with my history as a puppeteer. Within this chapter, I examine my relationship to puppetry and seek to address how this fuelled me to question how I viewed my disabled hand. Specifically, it deals with the issue of whether I see my disabled hand as a puppet and as a separate object. One of the primary questions of the research is tied to this discussion. It seeks to examine whether if in treating my disabled arm/hand as an 'object' through 'puppeteering' it, I discover how I view disability in my own body. In order to address this question, I created an exo-skeleton that allows my right hand to puppeteer my left hand in the performance of *Pupa*. The exo-skeleton allows me to turn my arm into a puppet, thus making the question physically tangible. This is done in order that I can examine this objecthood of my disabled body part, and it is examined in both chapters three and seven.

In order to situate both the narratives of both mine and the research participants as people with a disabled, this thesis examines in chapter four how the disabled narrative has been portrayed historically in fairy tales, plays and freak shows. I wish to investigate how historical, cultural perspectives of disability have shaped our individual views of our bodies. In planning the

research, I had intended to also examine how the disabled body has been portrayed historically through puppetry, however I found that there is a dearth of such work, so the thesis looks instead to disability in contemporary puppet theatre. This is in chapter five of this thesis. There is not a significant amount of such practice, however the work that has been created is profound and has the voice of a person with disabilities central to the work. This chapter serves as a means of positioning my play, *Pupa* within a contemporary puppet theatre tradition, although it obviously differs in its explicit research origin and focus.

In order to give the appropriate academic and artistic context to the practice and that the reader might understand the research journey, I have positioned my discussion of my practice near the end of this thesis. Chapter six examines *Pupa*, which is composed from stories from the experience of six contributors, who are all artists with a disability or are deaf. Their testimonials were used in the creation of *Pupa* which is the practical culmination of this research. I use my own personal experiences and those of five other participants, and connected them to inclusive contemporary puppet theatre, fairy-tales and the broader political, social and cultural understandings around the disabled body. This chapter examines the way in which participants' testimonies meet artistic form and meaning in *Pupa*. Specifically, it looks at the views offered on disabled bodies, and how participants feel they are perceived in society. The chapter links these views with the creation of puppets and characters within the play and how the puppets within *Pupa* display perceptions of our disabled bodies on their bodies. Within this chapter, I also examine another important research question, which is how the puppet can be used to tell the disabled narrative, and whether the puppet's body can serve to disrupt personal and cultural constructions of disability.

One of the central characters and her narrative within *Pupa* was inspired by my own story. In coming to the realisation that my own story needed to be told and represented within the research, I transformed the methodology of the research by adding a strong strand of auto/ethnographical narrative enquiry. My story was one I never intended to tell, and yet it is here front and centre. There have been moments where I felt that researching around myself was very egotistical, and moments where I wanted to disappear back into the shadows. However, the question that I had to ask myself was how I could ask five other artists to let me tell their stories and use those stories to fuel my examination into what it is to be disabled, when I wouldn't tell my own. I was reassured by the words of Saldaña:

I highly recommend ... to all qualitative researchers and ethno-dramatists that you really can't learn how to tell someone else's story until you first or also learn how to tell your own. (Saldaña, 2011, p. 75)

This has been both a personal and a research journey. I like to tell my students at Mary Immaculate College that research inspires practice and practice inspires research; and yet I never realised at the outset of this journey that research would also inspire me personally, and that my identity would inspire my research. Art has, of course, always been a means for the artist to understand their own identity: my research and my art are now one and the same. In the course of this study I look at, and question my own identity and my own disabled body in order to understand the participants' stories and their relationship to their bodies:

While it has been traditional practice to erase the researcher's body from the ethnographic text, 'subjective' bodily engagement is tacit in the process of trying to make sense of another's somatic knowledge. There is no other way to approach the felt dimensions of movement experience than through the researcher's own body. (Sklar, 2000, p. 71)

While the researcher tended historically not be part of their research, Sklar suggests that to understand a participant's story of their body, which in her case is through dance, and in mine

through puppetry, we cannot separate our own bodies from our research. In fact, it is essential in order to facilitate others' knowledge of their bodies.

With this in mind, the final chapter of the thesis will investigate the ways in which my perception of myself and my body changed over the course of this research. Through watching my practice-based research play *Pupa* (see Appendix F) and reading this thesis, the reader will gain an insight into why I undertook this research.

It is important to iterate here that this piece of research is not about change, or any kind of a psychological investigation, and any individual changes that may have come about or therapeutic effects that might have resulted from this study, are a side effect rather than the focus of the study. The focus of this research is on the personal and societal perceptions of disability, by looking at disabled artists telling their own narrative, rather than others helping people with disabilities tell their stories for therapeutic benefits.

The participants in this research projects, using their specific artistic fields of expertise, also became members of the team that helped to created *Pupa*. The play follows Puppet-Emma (a puppet inspired by my testimony), and Character-Conor (a character inspired by two of the participants' testimonies – Conor and Pat), as they navigate a coma world. In the coma world they meet other puppet characters who are based on the testimonies of other participants. These are Gunther the Caterpillar inspired by Gunther (composer), Puppet-Deirdre inspired by Deirdre (choreographer/dancer), and Kimberley the Dancer inspired by Kimberley (choreographer/dancer). They also meet Cat and Fox, Mouths in Jars, the Conductor, the Flamingos and the Owl Doctor. In *Pupa*, the puppet that represents me, Puppet-Emma, explores my own personal story and traces my journey of accepting my disability. Her journey

to acceptance takes one hour and fifteen minutes; my journey has been twenty-six years and counting.

## 0.2 My Story

At the age of nine, in May 1991, I was in a road traffic accident. I did a triple somersault off my bike landing on my left arm, severing all of the nerves, and causing a Brachial Plexus Injury. On arriving at hospital, I was induced into a coma to prevent any brain damage. I was in that coma for three weeks. *Pupa* begins with the circumstances of the accident. In the play, once the Puppet-Emma character is induced into a coma, it propels the audience into an imaginary coma world, where reality hides just beneath the surface.

In the context of my research journey, I have used fairy tales to reflect on my own personal tales and the stories I have encountered. This aspect of my research is grounded in my own personal experience. After I came out of my coma, I was told that my Grandfather had come in to hospital every day and read me fairy tales. This inspired me to delve into the world of fairy tales. However, my use of fairy tales to frame the stories in the play does not just stem from my Grandfather. Fairy tales are steeped in representations of the disabled body (see chapter four) and they lend themselves well to the quest storyline and in this way, provide a good foundation for the play. Furthermore, puppetry is also synonymous with fairy tales and the plight of the puppet boy Pinocchio seeking transformation, resonated with me and my own personal story as discussed in chapter six.

After I came out of the coma, I resolved to make sure my nerve damage would not be a disability. My mother and I went on a journey around Ireland asking the advice of every doctor she could find. The advice in every case was the same: amputation. My ever-strong mother

refused to accept this answer and after exhausting the list of doctors in Ireland, we boarded a plane to England, where I was fortunate enough to be taken under the wing of Professor Ralph Birch, one of the top Brachial Plexus specialists in the world. My first operation was to stabilise my shoulder. In a series of experimental surgical procedures, Prof. Birch rewired the nerves in my arm so that three nerves would do the job of five. Prof. Birch was my surgeon from 1990 to 2011 at which time he retired. At this stage I had had fifteen operations on my arm.

### **0.3 Unable to ask for a hand while dreaming of a way to get one back**

It is thanks to Prof. Birch and the persistence of my mother that I have the range of movement in my left arm that I have today. I have full rotation of my shoulder and biceps. Unfortunately, other operations to increase the range of movement in my wrist and hand were not so successful. I am delighted that the operations I had when I was younger have given me back the range of function that I have in my left arm.

Over the intervening years, I have searched for the cure, wished on a star, dreamt of being made whole. I was determined not to be seen as disabled. Fed by my need to 'fit in', I would cover my arm. I learned to avoid classes such as dance where I would draw attention to my arm, and I never admitted to not being able to do something, even if it risked putting strain on my body. I grew up unable to ask for help, and unable to show weakness in case I was seen as being disabled.

Since my accident, my family and I have taken a keen interest in all current developments in nerve repair technologies such as stem cell therapies, robotics and prosthetics. I grew up hoping for medical advancements that would mean that one day I would have two able hands again;

that one day I would be 'fixed'. I have come to accept that medically I cannot be 'fixed', and that the dream of being cured was standing in my way of accepting who I am.

Performing *Pupa* was the culmination of this research. This thesis now charts the journey I went on over the course of the research. It is the written account of my journey, of my exploration of the transformation from able to disabled, and then 'coming out' as disabled. All the while questioning social norms and cultural constructions around the disabled body through the vehicle of puppetry.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **My practice-based research, narrative inquiry and auto-ethnopuppetry**

In this chapter I introduce and develop my research methodology, which is practice-based research with additional participatory research methods. The three specific methodological tools used in the research are ethnopuppetry, auto-ethnopuppetry and narrative inquiry, all of which will be explained in the sections to follow. This chapter will also act as a guide, examined the framework of the central academic themes and debates that permeate throughout my research such as identity, coming-out, ableism and the medical model of disability verses the social model.

#### **1.1 Why practice-based research?**

As an artist who has been creating puppet theatre for fifteen years, I decipher and rebuild the world around me through my puppetry practice. This practice is the main tool I have chosen to explore the world with, and so when I embarked on this research, somewhat naturally, practice-based research was an obvious choice. In conceiving the research, I have always been drawn to using testimonies of people to create puppet theatre and I wanted to continue this practice but combine it with a rigorous research model. Some researchers are drawn to disseminating the ideas of others, whereas I need to create work to disseminate meanings based around how I see the world around me, how I fit within that world and how I relate to others. Through writing, making and performing, I ask questions of the world around me, attempting to generate new knowledge which I then share with others. My arts practice has always asked questions,

but I never before analysed these questions through a research lens in the pursuit of new knowledge.

Practice-based research or Practice as Research is a qualitative form of research that, as Hill (2008) describes, seeks new knowledge through practice. Borgdorff (2006) and Nelson (2013) describing this type of research as theory merged with practice. Borgdorff (2006) states that 'practice based research is a collective notion that may cover any form of practice-oriented research in the arts' (Borgdorff, 2006, p. 7). Nelson (2006) asserts that PaR can 'test certain concepts in ways of which words are not capable.' (Nelson, 2006, p. 108)

Trimingham (2002) states that while all arts practice is relevant to research, it is not research until said practice is examined in detail and this thorough analysis shared. Nelson (2013) agrees stating that there is a considerable difference between a piece of art (no matter how original it is) and a piece of academic research inquiry and this difference is found in the yielding, documenting and sharing of the new knowledge. As an emergent and already marginalised area of research, both Trimingham and Nelson warn of the danger of assuming that all practice is research, as some academics still question the validity of practice as research. Trimingham notes that a clear methodology structure must be in place to give integrity to the research, giving order to what she calls the 'disorderliness' (p.56) which is often present in the creative practice. Hughes, Kidd, and McNamara (2011) call this unpredictable element of arts practice 'mess' (p.186). They discuss philosopher Donald Schön's concepts around reflective practice. Schön (1983) looks at the artistry of making new knowledge, stating that the practitioner, once reflecting on the 'confusing messes' (p.42), has the ability to challenge method. This research, however, does not seek to challenge methods, it seeks to use traditional methods that are

already in place to generate new knowledge, something which both Trimmingham and Nelson acknowledge is central to practice based research. Conquergood (1995) states that;

theory is enlivened and most rigorously tested when it hits the ground in practice. Likewise, we believe that artistic practice can be deepened, complicated, and challenged in meaningful ways by engaging critical theory. (Conquergood, 1995, p. 139)

The combination of rigorously combining practice and theory is central to this research something Conquergood (1995) suggests that once reached has the possibility of challenging and giving a new fresh approach to research that deals with social, cultural and historical structures.

## **1.2 Why puppetry as practice-based research?**

I believe that puppetry as an art form is uniquely suited to examine disability, and particularly the experience of the transition from able to disabled. This is because unlike the human body, puppets can have body parts added and taken away during performance. They can tell the visual story of the transition within their bodies. The puppet's body is materially constructed and as such has the ability to represent everybody. Despite this potential to embody the unusual or the strange, in my research I will later explore the fact that puppet bodies have historically represented the perfectly able-bodied. Within this thesis, I will examine the lack of representation in puppet history and the stereotyped representation of the disabled body within theatre, fables and other art forms. This historical perspective both informs and inspires my practice. I realised in this work that until quite recently, in my own practice, I have also hidden behind the perfect constructs of the abled body. In this research I have begun to explore how the puppet can be reformed to distort normative constructions of the body, after I realised that I had been hiding behind these able puppets projecting an image of myself as how I wished to

be seen. Much of this is because, I had not come out as disabled and therefore not fully accepted myself.

Throughout my research, I also investigate my ongoing relationship with my puppets, and explore how this relationship has echoed and become entwined with my relationship with my own disability. I address the fact that in previous work I have used my puppets as something to hide behind, as a way of masking my disability, and as a means of instilling in the eyes of an audience the perception that I am able bodied. An aim of this research is to change the dynamic of this relationship, and instead use the puppet as a mirror; my aim is to create a puppet that can be an honest representation of my disabled body and my identity. As Grotowski, cited in Salata (2008) states below, my puppet was used to reveal part of myself.

What does it mean, not to hide from another person? Not to veil or mask yourself from another person? Not to play a different person? To reveal yourself? To reveal yourself? To disarm yourself before another person and to come forth like that?  
(Grotowski cited by Salata, 2008, p. 107)

I also investigate the ongoing relationship with my puppets and the way that this relationship has echoed and interacted with my relationship with my own disability.

Before this work, I had a preconceived and largely unrealised idea that a puppet moving realistically meant that the puppet must mirror the movement of an able body. This realistic able-bodied movement is hard to generate when being puppeteered by a disabled arm. In my practice, I tried all sorts of splints and gadgets to try and get the puppets arm, which was being puppeteered by my disabled arm, to not move the way my disabled arm did. I tried gaffa taping or using velcro to attach rods to my hand/arm in order to operate the left hand of the puppet. A tiny movement is a big movement in a puppet and so I felt my limited movement from my disabled arm might look ok in terms of the puppet in this illusion. I spent a long time trying to

get the puppet's arm to move in a realistic way without questioning whose reality I was mimicking. I now know that it certainly was not mine. When these puppets were made and measured in my past practice, their limbs were the same size. This was an internalised normalism and it was all done critically unawares to me. That said, I do not now believe that all puppets need to embody my body, but I do see they can embody my-body, everybody and anything; there is no limits on what a puppet can be.

With this realisation I started experimenting within my own practice-based research with puppets built in unconventional ways to represent the disabled body. I began to examine ways in which the puppet's body could disrupt cultural constructs of disability. Within my research, rather than seeking to mimic our bodies, puppets embody how we feel about them. Astles (2009) suggests that puppets can be regarded as embodiment, as they are firstly a constructed performer made for a particular reason, and secondly:

they embody the characters or concepts they represent ... the puppets/things embody those artists' presence and experience, and traces of their identity, through the process of making. Third, they comprise embodiments in their inscription on the very materials used. (Astles, 2009, p. 100)

In this research the puppets were constructed and manipulated to embody the identities of the participants in the research, of which I was one. They became a crucial research tool in looking at perceptions of the body. Through their construction they embodied our stories visually on their bodies. They became tools to express our emotions and thoughts.

The term emotional prosthesis, in relation to puppetry, was coined by Jane Taylor (2015) in her work around puppetry and political memory. Handsprings puppet company from South Africa (Jones & Kohler, 2012) have adopted this term. The term is not used to describe a prosthetic in the traditional sense, as an artificial body part, instead they are using the term to

describe the puppet as a tool to allow the puppeteer away to express themselves. (Bartlett, 2010) after working on a play with Handsprings called ‘Or You Could Kiss Me’, reflects upon the fact that puppets are like musical instruments; he describes them as tools used to articulate the performers thoughts and to express their emotions, calling them ‘ideational<sup>1</sup> and emotional prostheses’. In investigating the nature of my own disability through puppets, in retrospect I was using the puppet as an emotional prosthetic, by transferring how I felt about my body into the puppet, it became a mirror to how I viewed myself. This relationship is one I will discuss in chapter three.

The act of puppeteering is the breathing of life into what was formerly an inanimate object. This leads me in my work as a puppeteer to question the relationship that I have with my own ‘inanimate’ arm. Is this limb part of my body? An animate object? Something ‘other’ to me? If so, is it possible for my ‘able’ right arm to puppeteer my ‘disabled’ left arm thereby breathing new life into it? And if so, how might this new relationship change my perception of myself, my disability and my identity? These are questions that became increasingly important as the practice element of the research progressed. They are dealt with more fully in chapters three, six and seven of this thesis.

### **1.3 Participatory Research Methods**

A piece of theatre is made from, what Bergold & Thomas (2012) call a ‘convergence of perspectives’ (p. 2) from the cast and crew. My practice was no different. To add to the complexity and convergences, the participants in my research also became the cast and crew of the practice element of this research, and in so doing made elements of the practice

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<sup>1</sup> Ideational refers to ideas or thoughts of objects not immediately present to the senses.

participatory. Park et al., (1993) state that participatory research methods developed around the world in the 1970s. Bergold & Thomas (2012) justify using a participatory approach by arguing that through using participatory methodologies, the researcher is developing the growth of knowledge around qualitative research. Leavy states that this type of researches objective is to be “‘for’, ‘with’ and ‘by’ the people rather than ‘on’ the people” (2009, p.166), which is what my research strives to be:

Participatory research methods are geared towards planning and conducting the research process with those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study. (Bergold and Thomas, 2012, p. 1)

My practice incorporates not only the stories of the five participants, but also their perspectives, as they became part of the team for *Pupa*, and in so doing, they not only developed their own story but each other’s. I feel that my participants got a lot out of the experience of participating in the telling of their stories, however I will never know to what degree the scale tipped in terms of who got the most benefit. Oliver (1997) asserts that while participatory methods do place the participants further into the research, fundamentally the researcher controls the project and will most likely get the most benefit. While conducting my research I always had this at the back of my mind and strived to include the voices of the participants and to make sure it not only benefited me. I feel by placing myself as a participant in the research I was given insight into both perspectives. Like Shakespeare I will ‘follow my own intellectual and ethical standards, rather than trying to conform to an orthodoxy’ (Shakespeare cited by Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 229).

The specific participatory research methods implemented in my practice-based research are ethnopuppetry, auto-ethnopuppetry and narrative inquiry.

## 1.4 Ethnopuppetry

The participatory methods used are derived from ethnographic and auto-ethnographic research methodologies. In this work, these concepts have been adapted, expanded and combined with puppetry to coin new terms; ‘ethnopuppetry’ and ‘auto-ethnopuppetry’. Throughout this thesis, ethnopuppetry or auto-ethnopuppetry are being used in a similar context to ethnodrama or ethnotheatre and autoethnodrama or autoethnotheatre. Johnny Saldaña (2005) states that ethnodrama is a form of qualitative research where testimonies are collected, including personal experiences, and experience of the other participants is explored, adapted into a script. Ethnotheatre differs from this as it includes the performance of the script:

An ethnodrama, the written script, consists of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected through interviews, participant observation field notes, journal entries, and/ or print and media artefacts such as diaries, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, and court proceedings ... this is dramatizing the data. (Saldaña, 2005, p. 2)

Ethnotheatre takes ethnographic research that has been collected from participants interviews, documents, journals and transformed into a written and performed play. Denzin (1997) asserts that it is considered by many academics to be “the single, most powerful way for ethnography to recover yet interrogate the meanings of lived experience” (1997, pp. 94–95). Ackroyd and Toole (2010) agree on the power of such work and list the steps a qualitative researcher takes when conducting ethnographic research. They state that firstly the researcher collects the interviews which are live events. If the researcher videoed the interview they state then they have lost one dimension; if they audio record it they have lost another, and by transcribing it one has have lost all connection to the live event. By creating an ethnodrama the researcher has:

re-created a research site through performance ... so a form of reportage that maintains all the dimensions of the original interaction or observation can perhaps provide a valuable holding form. (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010, p. 4)

Their assertion is that by creating a live performance based on interviews the researcher captures an authenticity not available through other means and creates an authentic space in which to share these testimonies.

For the most part, the frameworks of ethnodrama and ethnotheatre were sufficient for what I needed for my methodological tools. However, what was missing within my research tools was something which adequately captured the creation of the materially made performer, the puppets. I certainly wrote a play in a form similar to that of ethnodrama and performed it as it would be in ethnotheatre, but the materiality of the puppets and the choices made regarding how embodied the disabled body were central to my research and neither of these methodologies encompassed such perspectives. Moving in this direction with my research methods link more with ethnographic methods used in sculpture-as-ethnography which David A Paton (2013) notes is a research method that stresses the importance of the process and the tools of making things ‘the agency and material properties of human and non-human actants’ (Paton, 2013, p. 1070). The making of the object plays an active part in telling the narrative and is an important step in the research methods of sculpture-as-ethnography. The object (puppet) in my research, and the way it is made and utilised within the performance, is a crucial step in understanding this research. Not only how the manner in which it was constructed but also the crucial relationship between bodies and materials used to represent bodies, best understood in how the puppeteer interacts with the puppet. Two large elements in puppetry practice are theatre and sculpture. Therefore, it was not surprising that while elements of ethnodrama, ethnotheatre and sculpture-as-ethnography as methodologies for this research served some of my research needs, they did not serve them all and with this in mind I coined a new term, ethnopuppetry.

Ethnopuppetry is a form of qualitative research and looks at using participants' testimonies which are explored and adapted into the writing of a puppet play, the building of the puppets and the performance of the puppet play, within the context of a research frame.

## 1.5 Auto-ethnopuppetry

Auto-ethnopuppetry is similar but differs in that it uses the researcher's own personal testimony. Auto-ethnography is when the researcher uses themselves as a research participant. Historically, researchers would not place themselves as a participant in their research in order to have a clearly objective lens with which to carry out their study. However, Leavy (2009) looks at how researchers in the last thirty years have started putting their own individual experiences into their research, creating the emergence of auto-ethnography as an accepted and important form of qualitative research - ethnography and auto-ethnography working hand in hand.

As a result, some researchers have come to see autoethnography as an extension of what ethnographers already do and thus use narrative autoethnography as part of a larger ethnographic research project. (Leavy, 2009, p. 39)

Coffey (1999) examines the impact of putting the researcher in the research and the effect this has on the researcher's own identity, as well as its effect on the research. Highlighting the impact of auto-ethnography on the researcher, Coffey discusses the shift in identity that she states can occur while pursuing this line of research. This resonates with my academic peregrination, when through the process, the research opened up to include my own narrative, and led me to embrace a new aspect of my own identity. Adding the self into the research transformed my ethnographical practice-based research into a piece of auto/ethnographical narrative inquiry, which took the form of a play. This play was based upon and inspired by the personal testimony of six artists (including my own), whose work explores their identity. In

particular, it focuses on people whose identity has been shaped by having a disability or by being deaf.

The reason I coined the terms ethnopuppetry and auto-ethnopuppetry is because this study looks specifically at how puppetry has a unique ability to tell the disabled narrative on its materially made body. I wanted to discuss my story and the stories of the other participants through puppetry, as it is a distinct art form and it brings about a unique and specific relationship between the content of the work, their source narratives and the material objects used to tell the stories.

## 1.6 Narrative Inquiry

The final strand of the participatory methods used in this practice-based research project is narrative inquiry. In using a narrative inquiry process, I collected narratives around personal and professional identity from individuals who have an acquired disability or have been born with a congenital disability. Within this research, I use these raw narratives and put them in a puppet theatre performance which I called *Pupa*.

...theatre is one of the artistic media through which fictionalised and non-fictionalised social life - the human condition – can be portrayed symbolically and aesthetically for spectator engagement and reflection. (Saldaña, 2005, p. 10)

By theatricalising and portraying symbolically the factual testimony around having disabilities, the intention is to engage the audience and inspire reflection on these lived experiences. Saldaña (2005) draws attention to the use of a participant's story in a performance, arguing that it creates greater understanding for both researcher and audience member. Such understanding, he argues, would not be possible through quantitative or indeed traditional qualitative approaches.

Narrative inquiry uses peoples' stories to look at human behaviour thus making it an effective tool in my qualitative research, utilising as it does, descriptive data to explore real life experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2004) in discussing theory in educational research, note that:

humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world. This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 2)

We navigate the world through stories on a personal level with our daily and social interactions, and on a professional level where we use our own stories and that of others to analyse, learn and teach. Through this process, we become both the teller and the subject. Subsequently those who have listened to and learnt from these stories go on to be the teller of the story, adding themselves as a character, creating a metamorphic tale of the human experience.

Patricia Leavy (2015) talks about the recent increase in narrative inquiry leading to a change in arts-based qualitative inquiry moving away from traditional qualitative methods. She uses her earlier work as an example of traditional qualitative methods and describes years of work as being, “sterile, jargon-filled and formulaic” (Leavy, 2015, p. 1), noting papers where she didn't believe that the cumulative narrative was sufficiently clear. Turning to arts practice she describes how she went beyond traditional qualitative research to use real stories to generate knowledge and create papers with a greater accessibility to the public reader. Leavy was then able to engage in “public scholarship” such as blogs, newspapers and personal correspondence. Looking at Leavy's change from traditional to arts-based inquiry, I see such accessibility as being at the core for both researcher and reader. This accessibility to the core narratives gathered as part of this research is one I strive for in this thesis, both written and performed.

Narratives are very important in my research, as I believe that first-person perspectives lend an insight into what it is to have a disability. As an artist, I am interested in personal and cultural stories. Burton (2001) talks about the world making sense by/through personal stories, as all our realities are simply our preconceptions of how we personally see the world, whereas cultural stories are culturally determined before we are born - a set of beliefs and past stories passed down to us from birth. The best way to gain knowledge of the personal and cultural 'lived' experience of disability is by talking to the people concerned and gathering their stories. Thereafter, the process of this research involved using the stories gathered from those interviewed, and afterwards by using my own lived experiences as a lens through which *Pupa* and this thesis were formed and developed. Nelson (2003) emphasises the value of this approach, arguing that:

...personal autobiographical memory is functionally and structurally related to the use of cultural myths and social narratives, and that the relative emphasis put on the self in different cultural and social contexts influences the form and function of autobiographical memory and the need for developing a uniquely personal life narrative in those contexts. (Nelson, 2003, p. 125)

The approach taken in creating *Pupa* was also collaborative because of the involvement of an artistic team in the process of making and showing the work, some of whom were contributors of stories to the research. At the outset, it was my intention to not only express myself and tell my own story, but to also help the other contributors to do the same. As they became active artistic participants in the telling of their own stories, a medley of voices was brought to bear, coming together to form one story. From the beginning I had intended to have the participants and their disabilities in open view as a celebration of the disabled body, rather than have their bodies hidden behind the puppet, to be visible, not cloaked and covered behind their puppets. Their stories and their artistry were to be heard and seen by all.

## 1.7 Identity

Saldana (2005) argues that Ethnodrama has a great efficacy, often centering on social issues and/or noteworthy events around the human condition. This research is true to that intent. As noted, I have combined ethnography and puppetry to coin the term ethnopuppetry 'in order to provide meaning, evoke emotion, and engage in reflexive practice' (Leavy, 2009, p. 71). The play that was created from this was a piece of ethnopuppetry and auto-ethnopuppetry which addresses social norms surrounding disabled identity, in particular the identities of my participants and myself. Some discussion of the concept of identity is therefore important.

Researchers around disability and performance, for very obvious reasons, often focuses in on identity. In her research around disability Phelan (2005) writes that such work always comes down to who the person is. Leavy (2009) agrees with this proposition, stating that practice-based research commonly involves identity studies. She cites Sandra L. Faulkner's 2006 study (p. 13) around identifying as both Jewish and Gay. These studies, Leavy says, often deal with the experience of being divergent from the norm, hiding your identity and stimulating conversations around stereotypes. My piece of research sits firmly within this latter category, examining as it does, identities associated with disability that can be perceived as marginal or stereotypical.

One of the participants, Gunther, spoke in his interview of not having one identity, and of not being that identity, but having it assumed or imposed. So instead of being disabled and a musician, he has a disability and he plays music. Rosenberg (2012) discusses how the concepts around identity have transformed from individuals having a singular identity to having multiple identities:

Earlier views of individuals as self-determined and integrated human beings have been replaced by more complex notions that people comprise multiple subjectivities, sometimes described as fractured or split. (Rosenberg, 2012, p. 80)

This shift means that people are seen as multi-layered instead of as one-dimensional. When people are seen as one-dimensional, labelled with one identity, there is an inherent danger in seeing the person as the identity and not the person, for example seeing them just on the basis of their disability. Murugami warns of the dangers of looking at shared experience instead of individual experience, and of looking at ‘fixed identities of people with disabilities’ (Murugami, 2009, p. 1). She argues that we can create our own narratives and choose what we identify as and not accept identities imposed upon us. She asserts that by doing this we can prevent being classified into a singular identity group.

Our sense of self is constantly evolving and we constantly reconfigure ourselves through multiple identities; time, space, and relationality are all important in identity formation and achievement of the self-concept. (Murugami, 2009, p. 25)

As with Murugami (2009) I see identity as ever-changing. If you happen to acquire a disability, your identity shifts, and the process of claiming that new identity can be a significant journey. Within my field-work for this research, this specific change and their acceptance of a new identity was openly discussed with all the participants who had an acquired disability. Their testimonies then fuelled *Pupa*, where the two main characters struggle to come to terms with their new identities. Interestingly, one of the main characters, while trying to navigate through her changing identity, firstly denies the change and adopts what might be regarded as ‘abelist’ views, but eventually ‘comes out’ as disabled and accepts the new identity. These important themes relating to how identity is dealt with in the play will be dealt with in more detail later in the thesis.

## **1.8 Other**

Throughout this body of research, I question whether people who have a disability or whose bodies are 'non-normative' (i.e. bodies that are not within what are commonly regarded as the norms of the biological human body) are considered 'other'. I seek to address the question as to what this state of 'otherness' consist of. The concept of 'otherness' is a rich and broad one, and it is central to how sociologists hypothesise how minorities and majorities are created. Hall (1990) argues that 'otherness' is judged against the dominant group. The dominant group have the most power and therefore anyone who is not of them is considered as 'other' to them. In order to understand 'otherism' and why such groups get formed firstly sociologists seek to understand how identities are formed and subsequently internalised and normalised:

Not only ... were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as 'Other'. (Hall, 1990, p. 225)

Tajfel (1979) writes about social categorisation, a social process by which societies assemble ourselves into groups in order to give ourselves a social identity, and by so doing, we create a need to reinforce our social standing thus creating a 'them' and 'us', with 'them' always being the minority. Haraway (1988) a feminist and consciousness scholar, discusses the imagined groupings of 'they' and 'we'. The 'they', in her work, are the dominant male group; the imposed 'we' (which she includes herself in), are labelled as the 'embodied others'. The 'we' (the embodied others) are not deemed separate from their bodies and are given a very limited voice outside their own social classification. While Haraway discusses these concepts in terms of her being 'othered' as a woman, her assertion can be applied to many minority groups, such as those who are disabled. The process of changing and accepting a new identity, and becoming 'other', is one that occurs for many people with acquired disability, and one that is central within this research.

If we apply this conceptual idea of 'other' to a person whose identity has changed and becomes part of a minority group, it stands to reason that the road to them accepting that new identity is paved by the fact that socially they are a 'them', someone who is no longer the norm, but an 'other'. As Haraway has pointed out, this 'other' is not seen as separate from the person's body. In the case of this research, this newly reshaped and disabled body represents what might be conceived of as an acoustic barrier between the subservient and the dominant group, which essentially prevents the 'othered' voices being heard.

Salverson (2008), while discussing the work of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, looks at the encounter with an 'other'. She suggests that by coming into contact with 'others' that are different to us, only then can we define the 'self'. She asserts that Levinas sees this interaction as an obligation, in that it allows you to listen and see beyond yourself. Such an interaction is fundamentally woven into the practice of my research as the audience and characters/performers are in a state of alterity towards each other, of being 'other' to each other. By creating an environment where the dominant group (the artists and performers in this instance) is what would socially and historically be labelled as 'other', and by having the audience and performers interact, the work sought to create the interaction that Levinas sees as crucial, with the hope that audience members and participants alike can step out of our social categorisation, through listening and hearing other perspectives. This orienting intent of the work is best described as my desire to enable all involved, '(t)o step out from behind a mask of solidarity and to engage with others' (Salverson, 2008, p. 254)

## **1.9 Ableism**

Much like racism and sexism, ableism is a word used to describe discrimination. Ableism was coined in Britain and America as a result of the civil rights movement during the 1960's, and

to highlight discrimination against people with disabilities. Ableists are defined as those who favoured the 'normative' body. Garland-Thomson (1996) created the term 'normate' to describe those whose bodies are not marked with disability. Garland-Thomson argues that stereotypes that have become common place in culture around disability have influenced how the disabled body is seen and how disabled people see themselves:

Inscribing certain bodies in terms of deficiency and essential inadequacy privileges a particular understanding of normalcy that is commensurate with the interests of dominant groups...the formation of ableist relations requires the normate individuals to depend upon the self of 'disabled' bodies being rendered beyond the realm of civility, thus becoming an unthinkable object of apprehension. (Campbell, 2009, p. 11)

Campbell notes that the disabled body has been positioned as essentially disruptive, and as a comparative to the 'real/essential human self', which is the able body and which is endowed with attributes of value. Young (2002) agrees with the essence of this idea, and in discussing disabled environments, she states that disabled people have been made deviant and the able body normal giving the upper hand to the latter.

Campbell (2009) states that internalising ableism means that a person has not accepted disability as part of themselves, arguing that similar to internalised racism, this creates self-hatred, and this self-loathing adds to the silence that exists around internalised racism/ ableism:

An involuntary reaction to oppression which originates outside one's group and which results in group members loathing themselves, disliking others in their group, and blaming themselves for the oppression – rather than realizing that these beliefs are constructed in them by oppressive socio-economic political systems. (Kovet cited in Campbell, 2009, p. 21)

Within this research project, I look at how these ableist views have filtered down through stories and theatre, and indeed throughout history more generally, into culture today and into the views of society in general. It also looks at the views disabled people have of themselves.

One of the repercussions of holding ableist views themselves, is that a person with a disability may hold the belief that they are somehow lesser as a human and try to hide their difference or disability. I discuss the implications of this further in the next section on coming out.

## 1.10 Coming out

In early 2015, while reading Petra Kuppers (2011), I came across the phenomenon of ‘coming out’ as disabled, which was linked with the commonly accepted cultural idea of ‘coming out’ as gay or queer. Coincidentally, that same week I attended Ann Blake's (2015) performance of her own play ‘Overnight Minority Report’ in the Belltable Theatre, which is a piece about her experiences of coming out as gay in her 30’s and becoming engaged to be married in a country where same sex marriage was then not yet legal. The idea of hiding something that was different to those around us was something that resonated deeply with me. Blake’s words explain why:

There’s this phenomenon I wasn’t familiar with, because I didn’t come out at a young age and all that, but it’s what’s called internalised homophobia.... Oh, God no, she’s reaching her hand towards mine. Doesn’t she understand? Not here. I mean I recognise that man paying at the counter. I think he worked in the college my dad worked in, he might see. He might say something to someone, casually. Don’t hold my hand, don’t make me move away from you, don’t put me in that position. I feel the echo of her gentle heartbreak and I want to reassure her and shout out ‘No I do care, I don’t mind. Just not here. Not here...’. Instead I ignore the moment. I act dumb, stir my coffee and ask if she’s enjoying her sandwich. I want to punch myself in the face. (Blake, 2015, p. 8)

As I sat in the audience and watched the scene unfold in front of me, I felt a wave of familiarity. In her scene, Blake pulls her hand away; I have a tendency to cover mine. In reflecting on this I wondered whether by hiding my hand, I was actually in denial about my injury and disability, and this line of thinking led me to ask myself if I had not yet ‘come out’ as disabled. Furthermore, as Blake described her ‘internalised homophobia’, I reflected on whether or not

I had similarly internalised ableism. These questions that I posed of myself in the darkened theatre space that day led me to look into my own identity, and to realise that my story was now fundamentally part of my research and subconsciously had been the whole way into the work. Without my realising it, on the day of my accident, I, like Blake, had ‘overnight’ been plunged into a minority.

This research examines the ways in which the journey of ‘coming-out’ as disabled mirrors the journey of ‘coming-out’ in terms of sexuality. Many disability academics such as Cameron and Swain (1999) look at disability as having more in common with sexual orientation than with that of gender or race studies. Samuels (2003) states that one factor often discussed is the common identity you have with your family within race and gender that you don’t have in sexuality and disability. Another is that gender, race, heterosexuality, and able-bodiedness are presumed (normates) unless otherwise stated. The fact that disability and homosexuality are not presumed unless clearly stated, point to the necessity to ‘come out’ as being a member of either of these two categories. However, with an obvious or noticeable visible disability (as in my case), the presumption of disability already exists, therefore precluding the need to ‘come out’. Samuels (2003), makes a distinction between ‘coming out’, which she describes as a personal acceptance, and “coming out to” which she understands as revealing and coming out to society:

The dual meaning most crucial to my argument can be signified grammatically: to “come out to” a person or group usually refers to a specific revelatory event, while to “come out” (without an object) usually refers to the time that one first realized and came to terms with one’s own identity. (Samuels, 2003, p. 237)

So, whilst my ‘coming out’ was my personal acceptance of an acquired identity, because I have a visible disability, members of society already classified me as disabled. My disability however, is easily disguised and covered, so I have turned a visible disability invisible.

Therefore, those with a hidden disability and sexuality have many steps to encounter in order to 'come out', firstly to themselves and then 'come out to' society. Samuel, speaking of a participant in her research notes that they almost needed proof:

It required her to construct a specific narrative explaining her body to a sceptical, ignorant, and somewhat hostile audience. (Samuels, 2003, p. 238)

Cameron and Swain (1999) state that in a lot of cases, those with invisible disabilities are less likely to 'come-out' as they can pass as being able-bodied. 'Passing' (Brune & Wilson, 2013) is associated with disguising race, stemming from identity research in the United States, when it was noted that people of mixed race would try to pass as white because of potential racial discrimination. This terminology has been adopted and can be equally used when a person with a disability hides differences to pass as 'normal'. With both her disability and sexuality invisible to the world, Samuel (2003) also looks at the analogy of being a femme lesbian to having an invisible disability. This analogy is one that emerged from an analogy of race and gender that emerged in 1970's America. Samuel effectively links the concepts of race and gender by arguing that people of a particular *race* and people of a particular *gender* have in the past been oppressed; that is, 'oppression' as the experience shared by those of a particular race/gender. In contrast, she employs the concept of 'liberation' to link discussions on sexuality and disability; that is, she posits that people of a particular sexual orientation and people who have a disability are often in search of 'liberation' and share the common experience of 'coming out'. Swain and Cameron (1999) state that this liberation, when it happens, is one-directional: you embrace your disabled identity and you are out:

Coming out, then, for disabled people is a process of redefinition of one's personal identity through rejecting the tyranny of the 'normate', positive recognition of impairment and embracing disability as a valid social identity. Having come out the disabled person no longer regards disability as a reason for self-disgust, or as something to be denied or hidden. (Swain and Cameron cited by Samuels, 2003, p. 237)

However, Samuels argues that the process of coming out is multi-directional. She states that the decision to embrace disabled and/or homosexual identity, whether the person comes out or goes back ‘into the closet’, is one made every day. My coming out as disabled was an acceptance of that identity; this is an acceptance that happened for me over the course of this research and is mirrored in my play. Like Samuels, I see this acceptance as multi-directional: there are times when I don my disguise and crawl back ‘into the closet’. The multi-directional nature of this public acceptance makes it a complicated aspect of my identity. It’s not one announcement disclosed to the world, it is a decision you make in every interaction, over the course of every day.

### **1.11 Pupa and Liminality**

This research charts what I argue is the liminal journey we go on from abled to disabled when we acquire an injury or illness, and the struggle and shift in identity when we re-emerge like a pupa from its cocoon. The process of acceptance leads to a ‘closeting’ of our new identity and if the new identity is finally accepted, a ‘coming out’.

The many meanings of the word pupa are why I choose the word for the title of the play. The main character is both a little girl and a puppet, who has just left one identity behind and is yet to re-emerge/accept her new identity. Furthermore, when one of the characters (Gunther the Caterpillar) transitions from a butterfly to a caterpillar, he is literally metamorphosing in reverse, in contrast to the other characters who seem to be permanently stuck in their chrysalises. This fits nicely with the etymology of the word puppet:

The word Puppet ‘derives from the Latin pupa, for little girl or doll, a word still used in entomology to describe the mysterious, more passive middle stage of an insect’s

metamorphosis, as the larva is covered in a chrysalis, and awaits re-emergence as a winged thing. (Gross, 2011, p. 3)

Much like the middle stage implied in the word pupa, liminality is the anthropological middle stage of a ritual. Liminality was coined by folklorist Van Gennep (1960), who states that a person in their liminal stage is no longer one identity, however, they are yet to emerge into their new standing as another identity. In the context of this research, liminality is therefore a useful and appropriate concept.

Turner (1967), an anthropologist whose research followed that of Van Gennep, called the liminal state of mind 'betwixt and between' and expanded on Van Gennep's research by theorising the rites of passage in modern society. He analysed society as a 'structure of positions' (Turner 1967, p. 93) 'where the liminal stage marks the transition between two socially viable positions' (Willett and Deegan, 2001, p. 139). Willett and Deegan argue that people with a disability can end up stuck in the liminal stage, and they sometimes blame society for not making the disabled person feel valued and have a respected place. A person with a disability listening to sometimes negative views within society can find it hard to 'come out' as disabled. An unacceptance of their disability can lead to them being stuck in a liminal state, no longer 'abled' but neither accepting their disability. Willett and Deegan also use Van Gennep's 'Rites of Passage' as a guide, as in that work he examines the core actions that trace a person's status in society, listing the three stages of the rites of passage as separation (preliminal), transition (liminal), and incorporation (post-liminal):

Rites of separation symbolically detach the individual from an existing point in the social structure. After this separation, the former social status no longer applies to the individual. In the transition or liminal stage, the individual is a symbolic outsider with no clearly defined status or role. The liminal personae (or "liminar") resides at the margins of society while they prepare to adopt a new role. The final stage of incorporation allows the individual to adopt a new social status and re-enter society. If

this re-entry does not occur, liminality does not end. (Willett and Deegan, 2001, p 138)

The research looks to liminal status and seeks to reflect on the similarities of a person going through rites of passage and those who have a disability. Citing Marilyn J. Phillips (1990) Willett and Deegan discuss how a person with a disability one is neither sick nor well, however their body will never be normalised, ‘suspended between the sick role and normality, between wrong bodies and right bodies.’ (2001, p 138). Stuck in a liminal stage, I argue that one becomes permanently ‘othered’ by society, creating further separation and potentially discrimination for the person with a disability.

However, unlike Willett and Deegan’s research, liminality is employed throughout this thesis to describe the experience of a person who is unsure about and questions their identity – that is, it describes their ‘middle stage’ or ‘transition period’. It is still the middle stage of acceptance but looks to the self rather than society. This transition period is akin to an able-bodied person becoming disabled; their bodies have altered, yet they are not yet ready to accept their new identity. Unlike other social identities, this transformation and reshaping of the body only occurs in the context of an acquired disability or illness, as well as sex reassignment surgery.

## **1.12 Medical Model verses Social Model of Disability**

When talking about identity politics and society in general, Rosenberg (2012) states that multiple narratives have been reduced to one narrative, with the result of a loss of personal experience and the depletion of empathy. While she describes society as a whole, this statement is very accurate when applied to the medical model of disability. The idea that all impairments

need to be fixed is central to the medical model of disability. The medical model links directly to the person's diagnosis and to their body. Within the medical model, the philosophical aim of systems and practitioners is to cure damage, and if this is not an option, to manage the damage caused by illness or disability. However, this view prioritises the disability/illness rather than the person, influencing how the disabled body is seen by others. Evans (2004) states that people with disabilities, are, within the medical model often defined by their disability, rather than as an individual, which can be insulting. Fisher and Goodley (2007) agree stating:

The role of 'patients' own narratives has often tended to be reduced to a process of eliciting information regarding specific symptoms of disease or of abnormality. (Fisher and Goodley, 2007, p.66)

By potentially not considering the person's story, the medical model categorises individuals by condition, with the risk being that the person with an illness/disability becomes a number rather than a unique individual:

It has taken a long time for the condition of being positioned as 'disabled' to be conceptualized as an oppression, rather than an unproblematic description of the characteristics and functionings of the bodies of some individuals. (Young, 2002, p. xii)

Young (2002) describes the flipped perspective that has occurred in some instances from viewing disability as a description of the body, to a word used to describe oppression, with this change coming about when a social model began to challenge the medical model. While the medical model looks at a person's disability being merely within the body, the social model looks at each person's personal experience (their narrative) and looks to the wider world and the disabling factors that can be changed, such as accessibility and the ableist views within society. Young (2002) asserts that the individual's body is not the problem, but the environment that body is in. She argues that the social model of disability has the ability to shift how we

view disability by shifting our view from looking at the 'needs' of people with disabilities to looking at 'justice' for people with disabilities.

Hahn (1985) asserting that the social model combines both social and political factors when approaching disability and comes to the conclusion that disability is made as a product of individual interactions with hostile inaccessible environments. He later states that the social model would pilot research around how people with a disability are an oppressed minority. Mertens, Sullivan, & Stace (2011) state that by disabled groups acquiring a minority group model, they allow themselves 'to present a united front in their struggle'. They go on to discuss the emancipatory model as applied to research in disability studies, which stresses the importance of participatory approaches when it comes to the social model of disability. This is because the researcher is giving power back to the disabled community, and they act as mentors/guides to the researcher if that researcher is not disabled.

While Evans (2004) notes that the medical model has a lot to learn from the social model, he also states that it is important that the social model doesn't re-enforce the 'them' and 'us' gap. Despite its impersonal approach, Evans states that the medical model has a practical necessity in dealing with illness and disability in the body and that both models can learn from each other.

This research sits within the social model of disability in both perspective and methodology. I also agree with Evans, in that these two models need to work together in order to work effectively. The need to fix and be fixed is represented in my play as something that hinders my main character's acceptance of her identity. This is representative of the moment I realised that medically I couldn't be fixed, and this need to be fixed was hindering my acceptance of

my identity. Within the play I represent the voice of the multiple doctors who told my mother that my arm should be amputated. As it would just get in the way, they saw this as getting rid of the problem, which to my mind, did not consider the implications for me personally. In retrospect, none of this is surprising given that it was 1990, and at the time there was less knowledge of how to treat brachial plexus injuries in Ireland. I had had a complete lesion of the brachial plexus, that is that all the roots, trucks and cords were severed from the spine. My understanding is that when the medics did not know how to fix my arm, they decided amputation was the way forward. This would have been the medical norm at the time for an injury as severe as mine in Ireland. In hindsight this was a misguided way to treat my arm when the possibility of treatment was a short plane ride away. However, I became the exception rather than the rule and got to keep my arm, and this was down to the perseverance of my mother, and through her personal research, found a doctor in London who could treat me without the necessity for amputation.

I surmise that a good example (following Evans (2004)) of how the medical and social models work together is the doctor my mother finally found for me, Prof. Birch, who eradicated my nerve pain, restored mobility to my shoulder and bicep, while also always considering who I was as a person. As an adult, he invited me and another patient who was a professional cyclist to talk about our work and our lives at a Brachial Plexus conference. We also demonstrated the puppets and bicycles that we had built to suit our own needs. While doctors at the conference suggested experimental operations that might further fix our injuries, meaning we could use non-modified puppets and bikes, Prof. Birch would lead us back to talking about the ways we have manipulate objects to fit our bodies, rather than our bodies to fit objects. This to me summarises the difference between the medical and social model. The medical model looks to fix our bodies to fit in the world, the social model to fix the world so our bodies fit in it:

The doctor locates what is ‘aberrant,’ abnormal, about the patient, and works toward normalizing the disabled person. (Kuppers, 2014, p 24)

When I was discharged from The Royal National Hospital, knowing that my injury wouldn’t be further improved by medical intervention, the realisation that I could no longer be fixed began the journey to accepting my new identity. I was nine years of age when I was plunged into a minority, and since then – over the course of twenty-five years – I have been on a journey. On this journey, I have sought ways that I could be fixed, and I have sought to escape that minority. In this research I found that I have emerged on the other side of the journey, still within that minority, and still not having accepted it. It was only after this realisation that I was able to start a personal journey of acceptance of my disability. Strangely, it is only when writing this thesis that the realisation occurred that I was finally discharged as a patient the same year I started this research:

What would it mean, then, in practice, to value disability as differences? It would certainly mean not assuming that every disability is a tragic loss or that everyone with a disability wants to be ‘cured’...it would mean giving up the myths of control and the quest for perfection of the human body. (Wendell, 1996 cited in Arneil & Hirschmann, 2016, p. 208)

The quote from Wendell’s notes what the medical model can learn from the social model but also resonates with my personal quest for a cure. By giving up on this quest, I have begun to value my difference. Once we realise there is no such thing as perfection, we can learn to value differences whether that be our own differences or that of a patient’s.

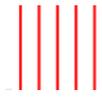
### **1.13 Conclusion**

Like the aforementioned disability theorists who discuss their ‘un-normate’ bodies, I have used my own personal journey and my body as a means of understanding the lived experience of others. However, ‘un-normate’ bodies, by their very definition, are different. It can be argued

then, that although there are similarities between my journey and those whose work I have engaged with, our lived experiences mean that they fundamentally differ. As a result of this, my research based on these lived experiences is both of their stories but also deeply of me.

This chapter has examined the concepts and methodologies that my research is built upon. The concepts in this chapter make up the themes that run through my practice as research play *Pupa*. The coma the characters are in in *Pupa* is a temporary liminal world. Within this liminal world the characters grapple with ‘coming out’ as disabled as well as their disabled identity and how this shift in their identity collides with their identity as artists. This struggle has been heightened by them now being seen as ‘other’ in an ‘abelist’ world that does not accommodate their bodies.

This thesis is my research story. Starting with why I am doing this research, it will walk you through who I read, who I talked to, what I created from this and how this effected my perspective and in the end, it will lead you to my revelations, not only about disability and puppetry but about my own personal views of my body and the puppet body. The puppet is my tool of choice and with its assemblage and dis-assemblage I have generated new knowledge, which I will give life to in the last few chapters of this thesis. Chapter two presents a step-by-step account of my practice-based research process. Taken together, chapter one and chapter two illuminate and guide the reader along my research journey.



## CHAPTER 2

### The Research Process

This chapter is a step-by-step discussion of the process of conducting this research. The data was gathered over two phases. In phase one, I interviewed artists with acquired and congenital disabilities; using their stories as inspiration for both the practice element of my research and this thesis. In phase two, five of these participants went on to collaborate with me in the making of a play as part of the research, entitled *Pupa*. All the points touched upon in this section will be discussed in greater depth throughout the remainder of the thesis.

As described in the opening chapter, this research project involved gathering a range of stories from a number of artists with disabilities. I found the participants through professional contacts. I wanted to work with artists as I wanted the participants to have a say in how their story was artistically portrayed. There were two phases to the data gathering, the first was a group workshop with four participants. Two of these participants went on to be participants in phase two, they were joined by three other participants. What I didn't realise at the time was that the five participants from phase two, would be artists in this practice and be involved as the cast and crew.

#### 2.1 Data Gathering

I started the field-work for this research process in late 2014. There were eight participants (this includes my own participation) in the first phase of the field-work. The first group

workshop took place in September 2015, and subsequently (at various dates in 2016/2017), I conducted three additional one-on-one interviews with the participants. Amongst the participants in phase, I had recruited four artists who created work around the concept of identity; two of these artists had a disability, and later became participants in my research, and two created work around their sexual identity. I knew these artists as I had either collaborated with them in the past or was aware of their work. We five met initially in a group forum, which was a mixture of discussions about identity, combined with a three-hour workshop that enabled me to collect their personal stories. I structured the conversation and the workshop in such a way that I hoped their stories would look at the challenges and preconceptions of being in a disabled minority group or within a sexual minority and I was interested to see how these two identities intersected.

Following the initial workshop/discussion work, I invited all the participants with disabilities to participate in an extended individual interview with me, and two of them volunteered to do so (along with three additional newly-recruited artists). My first solo participant interview took place just after my personal realisation that I had to include my own narrative as part of this research journey. As noted earlier, when I began this research, I did not identify as disabled. When reading Petra Kuppens (2014), I was struck by the notion that I had not ‘come out’ as disabled and that without realising it, this had partially fuelled my research. This revelation helped drive my questions around ‘identity’ in the interviews.

The participant interviews were semi-structured interviews based around personal accounts of the participants’ lived experiences of their own disability and/or sexuality. We discussed social and personal expectations regarding visible and invisible disabilities as well as sexuality. I discussed with two of the participants in detail how they attained or developed their

injury/illness. We talked about disability as an identity, had they felt their personal or professional identity change, what they identified as and whether they were comfortable within their social identities. Keeping in mind Saldaña (2011) hypothesis on not being able to tell others' stories until you tell your own; I told them my story first. The questions quickly changed into an open discussion between the four of us.

It was my intention that through these interviews I would gain a greater understanding as to what it was to identify as disabled. What emerged was that we had all travelled a road of acceptance in terms of our new identity, but we were all at different stages. This is reflected in the play. Two of the original workshop participants do not have disabilities but had created work around sexual identity. While these two participants do not have, or do not identify with having a disability, they did identify with another minority group. Through our group discussion, it emerged that there were similarities and crossovers between their experience of being a member of a minority group, and that of being a member of a disabled minority; for instance, the shared experiences of hiding what was different, and feeling the need to mask our differences is testament to this. Throughout the discussion, I audio recorded the conversation, after the session I transcribed the group discussion. This transcript was essential when I later embarked on writing the play.

In the initial workshop, I collected the research participants' stories and explored the ways that the participants wished to be represented in the research; this was done in a participatory manner, through making paper puppets. I used paper and tape in this work, as it can be used to make a puppet swiftly. Experience in this work has taught me that sometimes, without thinking about it, the puppet emerges unconsciously to the maker, revealing a truer representation of how they see themselves. I left the practical puppet-making until after we had an initial

discussion, as I felt the discussion around how we felt we were seen by society, and how we viewed ourselves, would inspire the puppet-making. I asked participants to make a puppet that represented how they saw themselves, rather than one that visually mirrored their bodies. As well as audio recording the workshop, I photographed the puppets as they emerged. Throughout the workshop I noted down things of importance, thoughts and ideas into my research diary. Directly after the workshop I sketched out ideas that the paper puppets and interviews had fuelled.

In advance of the workshop, I had crafted a puppet with the aspiration of creating something that accurately represented the way that I felt about my body. Having finished it, I examined what I had created and realised that the left arm was separated from the body and connected to the puppet only through a rod connected to my right hand. This meant that the puppeteer's right arm controlled the puppet's left arm.



FIGURE 2-1: FIRST PUPPET-EMMA PAPER PUPPET, FROM INITIAL INTERVIEW/WORKSHOP IN 2015, MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE

Looking at the puppet, I felt distressed that this was how I saw myself. I had compartmentalised my disabled arm in such a way that it had a separate identity, and this separate identity was being puppeteered by my right hand. I began to consider what this meant.

By attaching the left arm to a rod that would only move when it was manipulated by the right, I had made it into a puppet. Since a puppet is an inanimate object until it is manipulated I asked the question of myself as to whether I saw my arm as an inanimate object? This preparatory puppet revealed how I felt about my body and posed many questions that subsequently became significant to this research. The idea of a removable arm equalling a removable identity was one I explored in the puppet that represented me as the main character in *Pupa*. Also, the development of the concept to create an exo-skeleton to puppeteer my disabled hand with my able hand, to see how I felt about it, was ignited by this simple paper puppet. I will explore this further in chapter three and chapter seven.



FIGURE 2-2 PAPER PUPPETS DEPICTING HOW THE PARTICIPANTS SAW THEMSELVES, MADE AS PART OF THE FIRST GROUP INTERVIEW/WORKSHOP IN THE FIRST PHASE OF THE DATA GATHERING STAGE, 2015

My initial puppet had a detachable left arm that was puppeteered by my right; but interestingly, the other puppets made in the initial field-work workshop also had sections missing. Some had added mouths, others exaggerated arms and legs, and some were masked. These

puppets seemed to be truer representations of how we viewed aspects of our identity more so than that of the traditional puppet. Some of the participants revealed, after they had made their puppets, their surprise at what was before them. These puppets not only represented how they felt in that moment, but they could visually and physically trace their understanding of how their disability or sexuality made them feel on the puppet body before them. The puppet with two mouths (one covered), showed how one of the participants, had in the past, retreated into voluntary muteness because of outward societal forces. His puppet's mouth had been taped shut to represent this. He explained that the puppet's second mouth had grown back over time. This mouth was a defining feature of the puppet's face; it was wide open showing how his journey to music had released his voice. Another participant was confused at the time as to why he had made a half man. He only fully understood why in a debrief interview I conducted with him after we had created the play. This was how he had felt in the past, when he was coming to terms with his new physical limitations. Both these testimonies and their significant impact on the show will be expanded upon in chapter six.

As I have said previously, I had hidden in the past behind perfect puppets, but in this workshop, by disrupting the normative human puppet and by creating puppets with our disabilities, we created puppets that instead of hiding our difference, exaggerated it and put it in the foreground - instead of masks, they became mirrors.

As noted earlier two out of the four participants of this workshop went on to be involved in interviews and subsequently were involved in the production of *Pupa*. I met these two participants and three new participants for one-on-one interviews, twice, with each session lasting no longer than one hour. These initial interviews and workshops greatly influenced the

characters in *Pupa*. I will discuss these interviews and the characters that came from them in chapter six.

## 2.2 Participatory Practice

Phase Two took place over the course of 2016/2017. I used the testimonies that I had collected, and the ideas that I had generated, to write, design, rehearse and perform *Pupa*. Six research participants (excluding me) took part in Phase Two, with each participant contributing to the creation of the work through performance, choreography, or sound design for the other participants and their stories. After *Pupa* was performed, I conducted follow-up interviews with the research participants in order to de-brief and gain insight into the artistic process.

The participants were for the most part composed of professional artists with a disability who worked in the disciplines of theatre, music or dance. I approached this project in the same way I would have approached finding a team for a *Beyond the Bark*<sup>2</sup> (my puppet company) production. In methodological terms, it was a purposive convenience<sup>3</sup> sample of research participants in that I approached individuals who I believed would contribute to the research, based on my previous observations of their work.

I had seen the actor, Conor, perform in *On the Wire* and was aware of his previous work around the manner in which he had acquired his disability, whilst performing in *I am Hamlet*. I was

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<sup>2</sup> *Beyond the Bark* is an inclusive puppet and installation theatre which I founded in 2007. It uses puppetry, mask and physical theatre to approach reality in a fantastical way.

<sup>3</sup> Teddlie & Yu (2007) explain convenience sampling as collecting samples or in my case participants that are easily reached and are happy to take part in a study. Purpose samples can also be called qualitative samples, it is when you select your participants 'based on a specific purpose rather than randomly' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 713). So, a purposive convenience sample is one that is easily accessed, willing to take part and selected for a specific purpose.

invited to see composer, Gunther, perform his waterphone<sup>4</sup> at *Dance Limerick*. I had worked with singer/ song writer Patrick before and had heard him perform. I had met dancer Kimberley in Banff, and collaborated with her on a puppet intensive course, and dancer Deirdre's work had been recommended to me, and I then watched her film on-line. All but one of the artists I approached to take part accepted the invitation. Together, my participants included an actor, two dancers, a song writer/musician, a composer and a puppeteer (myself). These were people who principally lived independently with an injury that had been acquired through illness or accident, and in one case birth. Their ages ranged from thirty to sixty-six.

I worked with the five participants of phase two on the participatory practice stage of the research in two ways. Firstly, I analysed their stories as part of my narrative inquiry research and this informed all of the stories in the play *Pupa*. Secondly, I collaborated with them as fellow professional artists in my practice-based participatory work; whether that was as a sound designer, song writer, actor or choreographer. The idea of 'puppetry and disability' is synonymous with able-bodied puppeteers creating work with and for people with disabilities. As I will discuss in greater detail in chapter five, there is very little puppetry work where people with disabilities tell their own stories. These were the participants' stories and it was very important to me that they had an active part in the telling of them. Also, I had before me a very talented team willing to participate in the research, and it was logical to me to avail of their skills. My thinking was that who better to work with me on the play, than the peoples whose stories inspired it.

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<sup>4</sup> Waterphones are stainless steel and bronze monolithic, acoustic, tonal-friction instruments that utilise water in the interior of their resonators to bend tones and create water echoes.

We were joined in making *Pupa* by other professional theatre artists filling the creative and production roles that were not filled by the research participants. This included the director (and also a puppeteer), Thomas Baker. I had always wanted to professionally collaborate with Thomas. He is an exceptional puppeteer, who is very good at humour and it was very important to me that the disabled narrative be represented with wit. O'Reilly (2011) discusses a lack of representations of the disabled character as being funny and outrageous, and wants to subvert the view of disability as, 'being worthy, depressing, or a plethora of other negative associations' (O'Reilly, 2012, p.2) within her plays. I hand-picked Tommy and the other artists (see the company listing in Appendix A), and for the most part, they did not have disabilities, nor indeed have any explicit link with the project as a research piece – they were aware of the intent of the work but were for the most part working on a play, as they might normally do. To have crewed the show entirely by professional theatre artists with a disability would have been impossible in Ireland at the moment. McDonagh (2015) discusses the lack of such theatre artists, and notes that it means she is unable to find actors with disabilities for the roles in her plays: 'this creates a difficulty in getting disabled Irish actors that can play these parts.' (McDonagh, 2015, p. 5). I was in the same predicament as McDonagh, however the team that assembled were very respectful that this play was fueled by real stories, and that some of the stories came from some of those involved. Having many of the research participants working as part of the team meant the disabled voice was always at the centre of the piece as it moved through all the levels of preparation, rehearsal and performance.

I selected the rest of the team mostly from people I had collaborated with in the past who I knew would be a good fit for the show. By combining and working with people who are widely seen as abled, and with people who are seen in varying degrees as disabled, I created a team

that were able to stage the show with the highest possible degree of artistic ability and portray the key themes of identity and disability from both internalised viewpoints.

## **2.3 Visual Data Gathering - Pinterest**

Puppetry is a very visual art-form and part of my approach when writing and designing new work is to visually research by collecting images. *Pupa* was no different, and in 2014 I started a *Pinterest* board: here, I collected images for inspiration. I was inspired by images that participants had described or ones that I had conjured up in my head as they told me their stories. After each interview, I would look up images related to their stories, for example after talking to Gunther I looked up chrysalises. Over the last three years I have collected 300 images in the areas of sculpture, installation, photography, nature, puppetry, prosthetics, freak-shows and circus. If, at any time, I got stuck when writing or designing *Pupa* I would look through these images and they would always inspire. This board is my visual data gathering.  
<https://www.pinterest.ie/emmacfisher/phd-puppet-board/>

## **2.4 Research Ethics**

Given the nature of this research, it is essential that the ethics guiding the way in which the project is conducted are considered and rigorous. Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). In both the research ethics proposal itself and in the consent forms signed by all the participants, I stated that no research participant would be named and their stories would not be used within my thesis or play without their consent. Each participant in the study was given a pseudonym, however these were never actually used, as all participants wished to be named in the work. However, in the thesis I use only their first names.

All the information gathered in written, audio, video and pictorial format is stored in an encrypted file to which I have sole access. The information is stored in a password-controlled file with encrypted file software. Data will not be discussed unless with my Supervisor and critical friends using pseudonyms.

Data will be kept for four years after this study is completed, unless it is (with the participants' permission) used in some form within my thesis and play and then it will be permanently stored in this way. Two research participants from the first stage of the data collection (discussion and workshop), have not given their consent to be named and so their anonymity is assured. In their case, I am the only person with access to their testimonies and they will not be named, and their stories will not be used within my thesis or play. The participant information and consent forms for this study are contained in Appendix B of this thesis.

## 2.5 Writing the play

Informed by the workshop and interview data, I wrote *Pupa*. While writing the play I combined the testimonies that I had collected with inspiration from fairy-tales such as *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (Collodi, 1883), *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* (L. Carroll, 1865), and *The Snow Queen* (Andersen, 1912).

Writing *Pupa* was different to anything I had ever done of the fifteen plays I have devised or written. I have never written a piece with so much research and interviews informing the way in which it was to be created. As noted in Section 1.1 of this thesis, I had not used a puppet play as a research lens before in the pursuit of new knowledge. This play, fuelled by ethnographic data, was a research tool used to ask questions and probe into what it was to live

with a disability and what it was to identify as a person with a disability. The knowledge that I gained through collecting the data was examined and used to create the script of *Pupa*, which is fully replicated in Appendix C. This knowledge was then disseminated through the performance of the script and through my analysis of the text and performance within this thesis.

I created a piece of theatre which wove six stories together as one and combined them with the artistic inspiration provided by fairy tales and many visual, academic and societal reference points. The play sought to tell reality in a fantastical way, while still keeping the integrity of the individual stories contained within. While I collected testimonies as one would in verbatim theatre<sup>5</sup>, I did not use the participants' interviews exactly within the text of the play. In fact, only a few phrases from the interviews made their way into the script. Instead, I combined their stories and their visions as to how they would like to be represented, which had been gathered in the interviews. If there was something the research participants wanted to portray in the play, whether that be a feeling, a view of themselves or society, I mixed their testimony with artistic vision and it became somewhat removed. This was done for many reasons. Firstly, it offers a level of privacy to the participants. Secondly, I always intended to mix these testimonies with fairy tales. Historically, the disabled narrative within fairy tales has been represented negatively, and I wished to reclaim that narrative. This will be examined further in chapter four. Finally, artists throughout history have been blending reality with fiction. Gardner writes that 'imagination is the currency of all writers and theatre-makers.' (2014, p. 2). She forces home the point that story in theatre is what matters. *Pupa* is a piece of research, but also a piece of theatre, and as a puppet theatre maker, my artistry is that of fiction fueled by and embedded

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<sup>5</sup> Verbatim theatre is a type of documentary theatre that takes testimonies and puts them into a script. By presenting the words of the interviewee in the exact way it was told to them the playwright, this work is akin to that of a documentary film maker, editing real stories together to report on a real event.

with fact. I hoped that by heightening and exaggerating our testimonies, I was making them more visible. These stories are from the participant's artistic perspectives, so they naturally mix imagination and artistry in the telling of their reality.

Working in this way was no easy task, and before I wrote a single word of the play script, I listened back to the interviews, sketched ideas, read over my research journals, and re-read *The Adventures of Pinocchio* several times trying to pull out what resonated with me so much about this story. The story of Pinocchio holds a lot of parallels with the disabled narrative. I identified with Pinocchio and his search to be reshaped and reformed. *The Adventures of Pinocchio* acted as a loose structural guide for *Pupa*. One of the reasons I choose to do this is that at its heart of the story it is an identity quest; see the more detailed discussion in chapter six. I pulled from my research and looked at historical material from Shakespeare to fairy tales. I felt that I needed to examine the historic representation of the disabled narrative within theatre and stories, before writing about and adding to the present disabled narrative in theatre; this is discussed in detail in chapter four. I looked to the work of Petra Kuppers (2003, 2011, 2014) who has written so eloquently about all the issues that the participants and I had been questioning in our discussions and interviews. Kuppers' scholarship was a guide for me throughout this whole process of playwriting. It made me ask questions about my research and my own identity, served as a critical touchstone keeping my artistry research focussed and it also acted as an entry point to other academic discourses of disability.

As noted, puppetry is a very visual art form and I had a very strong artistic sense of what the play and characters would look like from the outset of creating the work. So, after each interview, I sketched what I had imagined based upon hearing the participants' stories. I incorporated the ideas of how the participants would like to be represented. These sketches became very useful when I began writing. I drew the first two sketches after the first group

interview/workshop in 2015. I started to sketch based on what I had heard. I had not conducted the rest of my interviews and had not yet decided on a narrative or structure, something which was to come much later. This was simply a process to get the images that the participants' stories had conjured up in my head, down on paper. While these images do resemble visually what happened in *Pupa*, the narrative surrounding them had not yet developed. For example, I drew a conveyor-belt of people, with fallen broken people underneath it. This image came from one of the participant interviews, where he talked about being at the peak of fitness among the able-bodies; to then falling and breaking. I also drew a man conducting mouths in jars; this man was originally the music teacher that helped one of the participants reclaim his voice, however this character became something very different within the narrative of the play, as will become clear in the analysis provided in chapter six.



FIGURE 2-3: INITIAL SKETCHES OF THE CONVEYOR BELT OF PUPPETS AND A MAN CONDUCTING MOUTHS IN JARS, 2015

When I came to write *Pupa*, I noted that while I had created a sketch based on everyone else's testimony and had a very visual sense of what they looked like, I had not sketched my own. When I finally started to write the play, it wasn't the visuals that dominated at all, but it was my own story that came out first.

I started at the beginning with what I knew, the moment when I obtained my disability; my accident and being induced into a coma. The coma or dream world has been used as a plot device in Europe since the ancient Greeks, appearing in Aeschylus' tragedy, *The Persians*, in the fifth century B.C, so I was in good company. It meant I could create a recursive reality where the audience stepped inside the dream-like state that the coma induced. This alternative world was similar to going down the rabbit hole where all things were possible, the deeper the characters went in *Pupa* the more surreal the story became.

When I started writing, I realise now that I was actually writing two stories. In terms of the form of the piece, I had imagined a dual promenade piece, with half the audience following me (playing my own character) in the performance, and half following Conor, (a professional actor and one of the participants in the research, who would be playing other roles), as we led them in opposite directions through the world. However, the more I wrote, the more I realised that these two characters should interact and aid each other on their journeys. They became the two main characters. While the characters were representatives of Conor and me, they also embodied other characters as well as aspects of a fairy-tale role. Puppet-Emma (as my character is known in the work) had aspects of Pinocchio, and Conor had aspects taken from *The Snow Queen* and *The Mad Hatter*. Gunther the Caterpillar's dialog was adapted and clearly recognisable from the caterpillar in *Alice in Wonderland*, however in his butterfly state he is an embodiment of the blackbird and the cricket from *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. The dual villains, Cat and Fox, are from *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, and they weave in and out of the play. They are the tricksters (a commonly used dramatic device) playing between character in an effort to cause trouble, and they also represent the bullies as well as negative inner-voices. As mentioned previously, the research participants were also the cast and crew of the show. However, the participants were artists in many areas of speciality, so, in the end only two of

the participants performed; Conor and myself, as he was an actor and I was a puppeteer. Also performing was our director Thomas Baker who took on all the non-disabled characters in the play. The other participants were either musicians or dancers. Song-writer Patrick and sound designer Gunther teamed up to create the soundscape. Dancers Deirdre and Kimberley worked specifically on the choreography of their own sections. In terms of the play itself, I will discuss each character fully in chapter six.

As I developed the work, I was being mentored by Gavin Kostick on the *Fishamble/Belltable Connect* mentoring program<sup>6</sup>, which led to my team and I being part of *Fishamble's New Play Clinic*<sup>7</sup>. Here, the research participants active in the production, as well as other members of the team, were brought together to 'iron out' the shows kinks and to make sure what we wanted was being effectively translated to the audience. This process meant that I could share what I had written and see how it was perceived by others. Four of the participants whose stories were in the play took part in the New Play Clinic, so this was also an opportunity to make sure that I was accurately representing their stories. Through working with my supervisor Michael Finneran (also the lighting designer for *Pupa*), my director Thomas Baker, and my mentor and consulting dramaturg Gavin Kostick, these six stories became one journey.

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<sup>6</sup> As part of the artist development initiative, Belltable: Connect, Belltable and Fishamble: The New Play Company came together offering a 10-month mentoring programme for playwrights, starting in September 2016. The Playwrights' Mentoring Programme was led by Gavin Kostick, Fishamble's Literary Officer and award winning playwright.

<sup>7</sup> Created in 2010, the New Play Clinic is Fishamble's ongoing initiative to support the dramaturgical development of new plays for production in Ireland.



FIGURE 2-4: NEW PLAY CLINIC, MARCH 2017, IMAGE COURTESY OF DOMINIK KOSICKI

I sent each draft of the script to the participants upon completion, so at any point they could flag any issues in how they were being portrayed. There were four drafts in total and I had a productive and useful ongoing dialogue with both the research participants as well as the non-research members of the artistic team throughout the writing work.

## 2.6 Making the Puppets

The construction and operation of the puppets in *Pupa* was of central importance in the creation of the play. It was very important to me that the puppets, no matter how different in puppet type (e.g. marionette, rod-puppet, etc.) and character they represented, still fitted aesthetically in the same world. This principle meant that I constructed them all using the same methods and materials. It is common practice in theatre (regardless of whether they are puppets or actors in costumes) to make the characters of the play in such a way that they are congruent with each other, and fit within one aesthetic or genre, in order to create a strong sense of time, place and mood. If this isn't accomplished, the characters can seem disjointed, which might lead to a visually confusing and diminished dramatic experience. In making *Pupa*, I was attempting to

bring six stories and myriad other influences together to create one play, and in order to achieve this I also needed to bring the aesthetics of the puppets together strongly.

As mentioned in chapter one, within ethnopuppetry, similarly to sculpture-as-ethnography, the techniques and materials used to make the puppets and objects within the play are as much a part of telling the narrative of the participants as the script and performance. The design of a puppet tells a story. The moment an audience sees a puppet and what it looks like, they are using their embodied knowledge<sup>8</sup> to create a narrative before the puppet even moves or utters a word. The puppet, similar to the set and costumes, has its own narrative. McKinney (2015) looks at the materiality of scenography and the role of the objects and materials used, in creating the experience of the play for the audience:

The expansion of scenographic practice to incorporate forms where objects and materials are central to the audience experience requires us to rethink the ways we account for scenography. (McKinney, 2015, p. 79)

McKinney puts forward the concept that the materials used and the pre-existing meanings they hold are fundamental to what the audience derives from the play. This concept can be also applied to puppetry with Bell examining the materials we use to construct puppets and ‘how the identities of these materials influence the performances created with them.’ (Bell, 2008, p. 219)

My history as a puppet maker echoes that of the history of puppets. With a few exceptions, my puppets in the past have been perfect representations of the abled body, that is, flawless replicas of the human body. I wanted the puppets in this body of research to reflect the disabled body,

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<sup>8</sup> Embodied Knowledge stems from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1962). It is where the body just understands, from experience without much conscious thought.

for example that they would have body parts missing and emphasised or to even have a puppet that is just a body part. I used the mock-up paper puppets made in the original workshop as my starting point. There were a lot of human/animal hybrids such as the half man/half caterpillar and the half women/half fish, that referenced historical freak-show acts such as *Seal-Boy* (which I will discuss in chapter four).



FIGURE 2-5: MAKING PUPPET DEIRDRE AND GUNTHER THE CATERPILLAR

It is my intention that these puppets represent a distorted reality of a biological human, and as such I wanted them to have a human skin, and so I decided to use latex as the construction material. The puppets, as our emotional prosthetics or avatars, were there to mirror how we saw ourselves. These were characters designed to represent not only our disabled bodies but how we felt beneath the skin. The characters that are human hybrids have sprung from a human story and so the caterpillars, foxes and cats body were all covered in latex. This was done as it resembled skin; it reflects the light and creates a translucency that is very similar to the way

that human skin reflects the light. Also, there is a medical connection as latex is commonly used within the medical field; with prosthetics that are trying to be life like visually, in movement and texture made from latex. Even the wheelchair, as an extension of Deirdre's body, was also covered in latex to look like it was skin. Functionally, the latex was very malleable and using it meant that we could manipulate the puppet's faces in order to demonstrate emotion.

My approach resonates strongly with the work of performance artist Tobias Bernstrup's 1970 latex costume as discussed by Kjellmer;

the costume becomes a bearer of physical experiences, a bridge between the portrayed and the perceived. Through our gaze, bodily experiences are transferred in the form of embodied knowledge or haptic vision. Materiality conveys meaning and communicates with our tactile memory through glossy latex. (Kjellmer, 2016, p. 151)

Kjellmer describes the use of material to evoke meaning. The material we use as artists is seen through the gaze of the audience who put their own embodied knowledge of that material onto the material, and visual meaning is generated. I sought to make the audience connect the latex to skin through its visually similarity and use their embodied knowledge of the material, to associated it with the medical world and to prosthetics. As part of this research I examine how the puppet can embody our emotional self, how it might act as an avatar<sup>9</sup>, in order to convey how we see the world. I will examine in chapter three some theoretical views on the materiality of the puppet and progress this discussion in chapter six by looking at how the materiality of the puppets within this research tells the visual story of how we see ourselves.

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<sup>9</sup> An avatar is a representation of a person most commonly linked to computer games and online, however here I use it to represent a physical 3D puppet.

When constructing the puppets, I first made clay faces and cast them. I modelled these faces on the actual faces of each participant. In some cases, I cast the actual participant's face so that it was an exact replica of their likeness.



FIGURE 2-6: CASTING CONOR'S FACE FOR THE FOX PUPPET, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

For my own puppet, I cast my niece's face as she happens to look remarkably similar to me, and Puppet-Emma is supposed to be nine years of age. In the very early stages of my research, I reflected on the fact that the character Mouth in *Not I* (Beckett, 1973) was represented as just a mouth. I noted in my reflective journal: 'are you and your body one thing?' and wondered 'could I be represented as just a body part such as a giant puppet arm?'

This early thought of having an aspect of my identity represented as just an arm never left me. I didn't realise at the time that it was to become a key part of my research to represent my disabled arm as its own puppet, giving my disabled part a separate identity so I did not have to identify with it (see further discussion in chapter six).



FIGURE 2-7: IMAGE FROM PRODUCTION OF *PUPA*, SCENE 1 WHERE PUPPET-EMMA'S ARM DETACHES BECOMING ITS OWN SEPARATE IDENTITY, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

As the idea of the disabled arm being its own separate puppet and identity developed, I began to wonder if I was to use an orthotic device to puppeteer my arm, would my arm then be a puppet? In exploring this idea, I experimented with different objects such as wood, mechanics, laser printing, latex and assistive technologies. I then worked with the American prosthetist, Ivan Owen, who came on-board with the project in in late 2016, to create an orthotic puppeteering device later referred to as an exo-skeleton. I will discuss the exo-skeleton, and the concept of my arm being a puppet in greater detail in chapters three and seven. There were many representatives of my character (Puppet-Emma) in the play, with the third representation made to reflect the exo-skeleton device; the cage-like body of the puppet was an exact replica of the upper part of the exo-skeleton.



FIGURE 2-8: IMAGE FROM PRODUCTION OF *PUPA*, SCENE 2, SECOND PUPPET-EMMA WHOSE BODY REFLECTS THE EXO-SKELETON. IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

These puppets all represent what it is to be disabled and ‘other’ in the project. Puppets have the ability to tell a very visual story with their bodies. By exaggerating our differences and having the puppets reflect these differences, it was my intention that the puppet which is already ‘other’ highlights an alien viewpoint for the viewer, i.e. one which is radically different to their own. This viewpoint for me is that difference should not be hidden but embraced and highlighted.

This positioning is similar to the idea discussed in Matt Smith (2016) research project using puppetry and conducted in an immigration removal centre in the United Kingdom. Influenced

by Bogost, Smith examines the power of the object and its agency and reevaluates his puppets within his practice as research. He asserts that when you consider the puppet's viewpoint you consider an alien viewpoint, one that he notes didn't seem that alien when brought into the detention centre. Rather, the puppet seems at home among the other objects that held their own narrative in this alien environment. The puppet within Smith's research holds its own viewpoint:

Bogost's method opens up a new way to view experiences of the otherness' of objects when they are performed and brought into particular networks. ...The puppets' experience of the research project has become an important aspect, and an alien viewpoint to consider... when brought into immigration detention highlights perspectives about the concept of what it is to be 'alien' and 'other'. (Smith, 2016, p.150)

The puppet is both an extension of him and a separate witness to the research; a separate entity whose view and feelings are carefully considered. When the 'alien' puppet which was 'other' was brought into the detention centre, it highlighted the 'othering' of the people and their viewpoint, within its walls. When I applied this concept in creating *Pupa*, I hoped that the puppets would highlight the viewpoint of the disabled participants and illustrate for the audience what it was to be viewed as 'alien' and 'other'. The characters in *Pupa* are exaggerated versions of the participants and me; they highlight difference and imbalance, and in their fragmentation they metaphorically represent how we view our bodies. These characters that grew from the participant narratives, by their very nature, couldn't be wholly represented by actors and instead called upon dramatic playing as Posner, Orenstein, & Bell (2015) describe below:

a character whose being embodies imbalance or fragmentation...begs to be played by puppets. (Posner, Orenstein, & Bell, 2015, p. 55)

One of these puppets used in *Pupa* came from the original group workshop. As mentioned previously, it was of an able-bodied man falling, and becoming disabled. I imagined a conveyor belt of perfect people with the fallen broken puppets lying underneath. These puppets, even when whole, needed to reflect fragility and show how easy it is to fall from abled to disabled. With this in mind, I approached ceramic artist, Sheila Stone, who agreed to make them for me, and we set out to create twenty porcelain paper puppets.



FIGURE 2-9: MAKING THE CERAMIC PUPPETS FOR *PUPA* WITH CERAMIC ARTIST SHEILA STONE AND HER ASSISTANT EVE FISHER, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

Ten male figures were made, representing male society, which were fashioned to look like Conor, and one of which had a detached head to represent his brain injury. Ten female figures were made, representing female society, which were fashioned to look like me, and one of which had a detachable left arm to represent my injury to my left arm. The porcelain people on the conveyor belt represented the ‘norm’, the able-bodied community, to which both Conor and I had belonged at one time. They are fragile, suspended from a height; the height represents the prelude to the fall, and the fragility denotes the fact that being able bodied is only a temporal existence, and it is only a matter of time before you fall. The figures underneath are the fallen, the broken, the people who had acquired a disability. The figure of Conor without his head and of me without my arm represented our injuries. This is echoed in Conor’s monologue at the end of the play. I will expand on this in chapter six.

**Character-Conor:** we are the fallen or the about to fall, the middle, the people in-between. The pupa before we emerge, we are the changed, the broken pieces.

## 2.7 Production Design of *Pupa*

*Pupa* was a large-scale, immersive, promenade piece of puppet theatre with a series of constructed rooms, each containing installation pieces, into which the performers led the audience (see Appendix D). A range of dramatic devices were used in the production, including puppetry, shadow puppetry, monologue, dialogue, song and projection. An interpretative scene by scene break-down of *Pupa* is offered in appendix H.

In making the piece, it was very important to me that the varied design elements helped to propel the narrative forward. All the designers came together at *The New Play Clinic* in January and February 2017. Here, they gained real insight into the play and I felt this translated into the designs. All of the different elements of the design helped to contribute to the telling of the narrative. During the time at *The New Play Clinic* it was pointed out that the play became more surreal the deeper into the coma the characters and audience ventured. This was mirrored by the lighting getting murkier, the sound becoming more abstract and the set dressing becoming denser. Because these design elements were created by other artists, I won't reflect upon them in significant depth here, other than to say that they were beautifully executed and added significantly to the dramatic action and symbolic depth of *Pupa*. It is appropriate, however, that I explain the significance of some of the elements of the set design, which was my own work.

I kept the audience numbers attending *Pupa* small, with 20 audience members able to attend each performance. This was because I wanted the audience to enter into a disabled puppet

world where the world and the characters, both puppeteers and puppets, are ‘other’ and so the audience would become the ‘alien’ factor in the world created. A number of considerations also came into play in the decision to keep the audience small. Firstly, if the audience were small, and in a world where the characters were the norm in their environment, it posed the question as to whether this meant that the audience were now the ‘different’ one in the social norm of this world? Secondly, if this was the case, does this juxtaposition challenge stereotypes around cultural disability identity? I liked the provocation of these questions in making the work, and a discussion of them will be revisited later in this thesis. I felt that in order for this juxtaposition to really impact upon the audience, that they would need to be completely immersed in the work. I had, from the very beginning, imagined a promenade piece, where each of the participant’s stories were given their own room. I wanted to take the audience on a physical quest through a maze. Starting in the foyer of the theatre with the section closest to reality, then plunging them into a fantastical maze within the theatre performance space, and finally to kick them out the emergency door at the back of the theatre, emerging back to reality in the rear city lane.

In the performance, the audience were led from room to room and in each room, they met a different character in *Pupa*. The influences guiding the set design also came from my research around freak-shows, a topic further explored in chapter four. The audience at freak-shows were led from tent to tent to meet new acts, and after hearing the act’s story, they would move on to the next. In the same way as my puppets have exaggerated parts, freaks would have their disabilities exaggerated and on public show.

Each room of the *Pupa* set was essentially a different installation piece, mirroring the display of sideshow acts in a freak show. Colette Conroy talks about the natural pull for disabled

performers towards freak shows as a type of; ‘... historical re-enactment. Somewhere, people who looked like you were stared at as freaks’ (Conroy, 2012, p. 168). I, like those who went before me, was drawn to the world of the freak show. It is argued that we cannot portray cultural identity without first looking into and understanding the complexity of that identity’s cultural past. Hall (1990) describes how our cultural identity belongs to the future as well as the past. He asserts that by claiming the history of our cultural identity we are positioning ourselves among it and securing our own identity:

cultural identity... is a matter of becoming’ as well as ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as the past... ...when found will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall, 1990, p. 225)

Our cultural past influenced the design of the space I created and the manner in which it was utilised in performance. It was important to me that all the elements of the design highlighted the research and helped tell the story, therefore the design being influenced by freak-shows was a nod to narratives of the disabled performers’ past. Creating a research piece of theatre around identifying as disabled led me to look to representations of disability throughout history. This history is reflected in *Pupa* and further discussed in chapter four.

In *Pupa* the audience of twenty first meet the characters in a realistic hospital scene in the foyer of the Belltable in Limerick city. Here, we see a stark white curtain with a hospital bed, wheelchair and medical equipment. The costumes are suited to this setting with a clean white doctor’s coat, the only embellishment is an owl on the doctor’s coat, alluding to the Owl Doctor character we will meet later.



FIGURE 2-10: IMAGE FROM PRODUCTION OF *PUPA*, SCENE 1, REALISTIC HOSPITAL SCENE IN FOYER OF BELLTABLE, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

After a piece of action takes place in the hospital scene, the audience are signalled to move into the installation part of the set in the main body of the black-box theatre. The set inside is made up of strands of white wool dipped in red. These threads connect to each puppet in each of the various rooms. We first see these threads in the foyer when Puppet-Emma removes her arm, leaving six dangling threads. The symbolic intention of these threads is to represent the severed nerves. As we descend into the coma world inside the theatre the threads are sporadic, but the further the audience go, the thicker they get. The threads connect to the mouths in jars, the Caterpillar and Puppet-Deirdre. The Caterpillar lies in the centre room on a cocooned hammock made from these threads, which reach down connecting to his many hands and feet.



FIGURE 2-11: IMAGE FROM PRODUCTION OF *PUPA*, SCENE SIX, PUPPET-EMMA MEETS GUNTHER THE CATERPILLAR  
IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

In the next room we meet Puppet-Deirdre, with threads descending from above while also attaching like roots to her chair from below. As the audience are led into the last room the threads are thinning out, and there are visual references to the hospital room from which the journey began. These threads represent not only the cut nerves of my injury, but also represent the idea of a pupa in all its meanings. They are strings connecting to the puppets, and they are also a cocoon. This is the liminal world of the pupa before it emerges from the chrysalis, the middle stage.

## 2.8 Performance of *Pupa*

The performance of *Pupa* was preceded by a three-week rehearsal period where Conor and I worked with Director/ Performer Thomas Baker and assistant director, Zara Starr. The puppet theatre performance was, for the most part, un-naturalistic and so, in stark contrast to that, Thomas directed us to perform in a naturalistic, simplistic way. My puppet (all three versions!) moved very slowly and with very deliberate movements. Conor stripped his performance back to make it as real as possible. The rehearsal period obviously brought life to the words I had penned and prepared the piece for public performance. But, it also brought meaning to the performance and the research as well. As *Pupa* is a piece of ethnopuppetry, and we were performing our own stories, albeit a fictionalised version of them, certain lines like, ‘is this weird for you?’, were improvised and incorporated into the performance. These were delivered directly to a member of the audience and were intended to make the audience question whether we were performing the piece as rehearsed or breaking out of performance mode, thus blurring the lines between performance and human interaction. This way of working resonates academically with the work of Tedlock, who states that there are;

... two main types of performance ethnography that directly link anthropological and theatrical thought. One considers human behavior as performance, and the other considers performance as human interaction. (Tedlock, 1991, p. 154)

Tedlock discusses how performance is everywhere in reality; for example, our daily lives are filled with performance and ethnographic performance can act like a reflective mirror of these performances. Conor’s performance stripped back the character that was based on his own story. He interacted with the audience and made the performance as real as possible. Conor’s character blends together both types of performance ethnography proposed by Tedlock and reveals the human behaviours on a number of levels. Firstly, he is performing the human interactions that fuelled his testimony. Secondly, he is performing the artistic interactions that

built the character he was playing and finally, by engaging in conversation with the audience, he added their interactions to the performance.

The other characters that we meet in *Pupa* are heightened caricatures, such as, the Owl Doctor, the Conductor, Mouths in Jars, Cat and Fox and a giant half-human Caterpillar. The rehearsal period enabled the realisation of my intention to examine through dramatic discourse how the use of puppetry and movement on stage could portray and perhaps change preconceptions of disability.

## **2.9 Reflection and Analysis**

In making *Pupa*, I combined all the data I had collected - such as the transcribed interviews, photographs, video, audio recordings, personal correspondence from professionals that I had consulted and my research diary - and the academic research carried out regarding the history of puppetry and disability. Dominik Kosicki, a professional film maker, helped me create a documentary on the making of *Pupa* (see Appendix E). During the research process, I formally interviewed the participants and professionals involved. With their consent I have used transcribed sections of these interviews within the thesis. I kept a research diary throughout the process. My play is based on the testimonies of the research participants but set in a heightened fantastical world. By moving beyond the naturalistic, and by setting it in the world of puppetry, mixing the real and the absurd, it was my intention to heighten the participants' stories and push past the audiences' preconceptions of disability. This later became about pushing past our own preconceptions surrounding our disabilities which are partially fuelled by society.

This chapter maps the processes I went through in order to create my practice-based research performance. The next three chapters look at my research in puppetry, the disabled narrative within fairy tale and theatre and reclaiming that narrative in current professional disabled puppetry practice. These three chapters allow me to locate my research among puppetry, disability and auto-ethnotheatre.



## CHAPTER 3

### A Hand, a Puppet and an Object

This chapter will look at what a puppet is and why puppets are relevant in theatre and to my practice. Touching upon historical, contemporary and global practices, I will examine puppetry theory to position myself amongst other puppet theorists, looking at the puppet as a material object and the puppet as an idea. This history will feed into my history as a puppeteer and my auto-ethnopuppetry practice where I analyse my relationship to my disability and my relationship to puppets. These relationships fuelled me to ask the question of whether I treat my disabled arm/hand as an ‘object’, and as such as a puppet in itself? In order to answer this question through practice, I built an exoskeleton to puppeteer my arm/hand in my play, *Pupa*. In this chapter, I will discuss the process of making the exoskeleton and the questions that this process evoked around how I viewed my disability and how I viewed a puppet. Chapter seven will further investigate the implications of this ‘objecthood’<sup>10</sup> of my disabled arm.

#### 3.1 What is puppetry?

Puppetry is an object-based form of performing arts culture. It concerns itself with materials and is materially made. The materials that make the puppet are not separate from what it is, but they help tell its story. Bell describes puppetry as, ‘the stuff, junk, puppets, masks, detritus, machines, bones, and moulded plastic things that people use to tell stories or represent ideas.’ (2008, p. 2). These materials are formed, imbued with both real and imagined stories,

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<sup>10</sup> Objecthood is an individual thing that is perceived as a material thing.

sometimes given anthropomorphised<sup>11</sup> or zoomorphised<sup>12</sup> elements and brought to life by a puppeteer. Arnott agrees with this broad definition and notes that puppets are a ‘replica of a human, or other form moved by artificial means’ (1964, p. 58). By combining anthropomorphic traits with the materially made, puppets can metaphorically chart an ‘understanding of what it means to be human’ (Posner et al., 2015, p. 2). Within this ethnopuppetry/auto-ethnopuppetry research, puppets are used to metaphorically chart an understanding of what it means to be disabled.

Bell (2008) describes heated debates between puppeteers as to what is and is not a puppet, with giant puppets, stop motion puppets and special effects being a few examples under debate. Trimmingham (2011) discusses Steve Tillis 1992 study into symbolic definitions and classifications of the puppet, and points out that his study warns us against assuming strict definitions of the puppet, such as marionettes, rod, shadow or hand puppets. There are multiple combinations of these categories and they come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Posner et al (2015) point out the ever-expansive nature of the puppet has pushed past the idea of the puppet being merely anthropomorphic in nature. They note that a puppet can be formed from anything (even a coffee bean), and that many scholars and practitioners in puppetry would distinguish an object that is animated in performance as a puppet.

Puppets are fundamentally a story-telling tool that can be used in many ways within entertainment, media, political activism and therapy, to name a few media. Astles (2016a) describes this distinctive ability that the puppet holds to transcend borders and be applied to an infinite number of fields. Puppetry enables:

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<sup>11</sup> Anthropomorphisation is when one attributes human traits to an animal, plant or material object.

<sup>12</sup> Zoomorphisation is when one attributes animal traits to a human, plant or material object.

discussion about metaphysics, neuroscience, emotions, anatomy and mechanics; tradition, cultural heritage, politics, narrative, childhood and literacy; song and religion; and almost any field you can imagine. It is a particular fusion of the material and immaterial. (Astles, 2016a, p. 54)

Gross (2015) describes this as a ‘myriad of stages’ (*cited in* Posner et al., 2015, p. xxiii) ranging from table top to temple, and from political rally to robotics. Bell (2008) states that puppetry has broad roots that are embedded in culture globally. Bottoni et al., (2008) asserts that these roots are venerable and universal, having their source in ancient ritual, with each culture having their own unique form specific to the local environment which harnesses traditional oral storytelling. The origins of the first puppet have been traced back to religion and ritual all over the world, starting around 600 AD. Ruby (2017) writes that within Europe, puppets very much remained in the service of religion until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The advent of morality plays<sup>13</sup> saw puppets released from the church and relinquished into the hands of the people.

In the hands of the people puppetry became a vehicle of agency. They not only became a voice for the puppeteer but a voice for the people. Bicât (2008) describes how the puppet essentially became a political activist, saying what the actor could not:

Puppets have been used to tell the political dissident stories that might have caused a real actor or writer to be thrown into prison or sent off to bleak Siberia. And they have always been able to speak for the under-dog. It would take a very brave or very stupid dictator to risk his dignity and credibility by arresting a bundle of sticks and rags. (Bicât, 2008, p. 49)

During World War Two, when other art forms were banned in Prague, puppetry was temporarily allowed to continue as it was seen as a harmless entertainment for children. However, puppetry became a voice to stand up to the oppressor. It took a while for the Nazis

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<sup>13</sup> Morality plays were introduced in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. These plays have a moral message influenced by Christianity. The characters within the plays depicted good and evil.

to realise that they were being mocked in front of their eyes. Malton (2003) states that when this realisation occurred, puppetry was banned and over one hundred puppeteers arrested, sent to concentration camps and murdered, for using their puppet theatre as a stage for political activism. This led to an underground puppetry movement, where anti-fascist performances called ‘daisies’ or ‘daisy shows’ sprung up, and where puppeteers continued to risk their lives for their political views by continuing to speak the truth against their oppressors through their puppets. These performances would spring up in homes, trains and even concentration camps. Gardner (1999) explains the reason why they were called Daisies; as you plucked one, another would grow in its place.

Burkett discussed the Daisy groups with journalist Lyn Gardner, and noted the power of the puppet activist, saying, ‘make the bastards laugh and they won't realise that you're saying something ....Don't fuck with a puppet - you'll only get splinters.’ (Burkett cited by Gardner, 1999, p. 13). Ronnie Burkett’s 1999 puppetry performance *Tinka’s New Dress* looked at the historic daisy groups in Prague. Astles (2016b) notes that the dedication of puppeteers in the daisy groups such as *Skupa* and *Malik* have been recognised globally. Astles discusses Burkett’s recognition of these heroic puppeteers in discussing how his ...:

... poignant and political string puppet performance drew from Skupa’s 1937 performance *The Three-tiered Carousel* and the figures of the Czech puppet cabaret; the performance recalls the events of the 1930s and 40s in occupied Prague. (Astles, 2016b, p. 109)

Puppets are powerful tools, one which can be used to express views and like all tools you must be careful how you use them. Smith (2012) cites an account of puppetry being used for propaganda, warning that puppeteers should be cautious and carefully consider when using the puppet for political means:

One of the most ancient theatrical forms, puppetry became for the republicans an element of contemporary struggle, adopting a role in antifascist propaganda which, in

the words of one enthusiastic reviewer, saw the puppet as no less useful than the rifle in the successful prosecution of the war. (McCarthy cited by Smith, 2012, p. 81)

Astles asserts that when there is political crisis, puppetry will surface whether that be for propaganda, for protest or to elude censorship by allowing the puppeteer to be accused instead of the puppet. She references a case where puppeteer Jan Neomicky Last'ovka in 19<sup>th</sup> century Prague escaped persecution by redirecting blame to the puppet. Unfortunately, not all puppeteers have got away with placing blame on their puppets and sometimes even the puppets get arrested. Bellacomo (2004) recalls how in 2000, *Bread and Puppets Theater's* puppets were confiscated by police, and members arrested while the puppets were being built in preparation of a planned protest at the Republican Convention in Philadelphia. Graeber (2007) writes about this dislike of puppets:

Often police strategies aim to destroy or capture them before they can even appear on the streets. As a result, a major concern for those planning actions soon became how to hide the puppets so they will not be destroyed in pre-emptive attacks. What's more, for many individual officers at least, the objection to puppets appeared to be not merely strategic, but personal, even visceral. Cops hate puppets. Activists are puzzled as to why. (2007, p. 1)

It can be argued, that as with many elements of artistic form, the power of the puppet can make police and dictators alike, quite fearful.

*Bread and Puppet Theater* is overtly political and was formed by Peter Schuman in 1962. Falk's charts *Bread and Puppet's* journey, 'from direct political focus to suffused political awareness' (1977, p. 24). She notes that in the beginning, one of its main agendas was to protest the Vietnamese war, and the pageantry of both the large scale outdoor pieces and smaller indoor pieces were fuelled by political outrage. After the war, the energy of the theatre changed, and the Schuman family moved to Vermont where they started an outdoor political puppet circus and continued to make work which challenged war and repressive regimes and stood up for the

oppressed. Schuman's piece *The Mountain Man of Chile* charts a similar story to the Burkett piece referenced earlier. Building on a flower analogy, it proffered the idea that you may pluck one flower, but another will rise in its place:

The story relates how the mountain man goes to the city where he is arrested, interrogated, imprisoned, tortured, and finally condemned to death. But another mountain man rises, like a flower, to take his place. (Falk, 1977, p. 25)

Bell (2008) discusses the effectiveness of *Bread and Puppet's* street parades. They raged both against a global oppressor and involved local community since the 1970s in Vermont. While as events, they don't reach millions like mass media, the thousands they do reach are met directly, interrupting the everyday for a random group, and speaking directly to the people. Fast forward to 2006 and *Bread and Puppet* are actively involved in protesting the war in Palestine, and simultaneously protesting in association with local farmers, the tagging of their cows by the US government. This is the point at which puppet history intersects with my history as a puppeteer.

I arrived in Vermont in 2006, with my home on my back (a one-man tent), and very excited for my first dalliance with puppetry as one of the puppet apprentices for *Bread and Puppet* Theater. As a visual artist and theatre designer, I was used to being back-stage in performance work. I went to Vermont hoping to make puppets, but that was not to be. In a baptism of fire, I was thrown into performance. I got to witness first-hand the power of the puppet and be a tiny part of this theatre company's immense history. I was a sheep, a stilt walking grasshopper, a pink lady, and was involved in dances where we simultaneously puppeteered puppets that represented a single Palestinian, piling them high to reveal an image of mass murder. Within the context of this remarkable company, puppetry is not an occupation, it is a vocation. *Bread and Puppet* taught me that a simple tool, when wielded effectively, can deliver a powerful blow. I feel it fitting that my beginning in puppet theatre happened where the voice of the

underdog was represented and used to actively try to change political, social and personal views. Bell quotes poet Grace Paley's poem about *Bread and Puppet*, 'Why not speak the truth directly? Just speak out! Speak up! Speak to! Why not?' (Bell, 2008, p. 218). Whether it be your own personal truth or the truth of a group such as disabled rights activists, it is my belief that it is work of this nature that puppets do best, and the work of this research project takes inspiration from such an activist stance.

### 3.2 My history with puppets

On returning from working with *Bread and Puppet* I was somewhat obsessed, and no longer hungry only to learn how to make puppets, but to learn how to puppeteer them as well. What I learned at *Bread and Puppet Theater* was that in order to make a puppet you actually needed to know how to puppeteer it, and in order to do that, you needed to know the story and motivation for that movement. With this motivation in mind, I sought out and found a puppet school to train at.

By the end of 2006 I had started my training at the London School of Puppetry. Prior to going to Bread and Puppet, I had completed a degree in Interactive Art, where I had created mechanical installations, and a postgraduate programme in Theatre Design. While at puppetry school, I put my skills for design and building to good use when building puppets and sets for myself. For example, my shadow screen had wooden arms with puppets hanging on them that I could hinge in and out of scenes. I created light sensors that were operated with my feet. By combining these hinged arms and multiple lights, I was able to operate multiple puppets at once. After one show, an audience member wondered aloud as to how many hands I had. Needless to say, I was delighted! With simple innovative techniques like this, I was able to

pass for able-bodied, for abled. After seeing this very same show, I was offered a job on a European puppet tour by a director for a professional company. However, on noticing my arm, the offer was immediately rescinded, and my ability to do the job of puppeteer implicitly questioned.

The most damaging aspect of this incident is that I was essentially disabled by the director's pre-conceptions of what it is to have a disability. This over-rode her perceptions of my ability formed when watching my show, and which had led to her offering me the job in the first instance. My sense is that I am not alone in moments such as this, and that it is a common occurrence for a person with a disability. While I always knew I could do the job at hand, I saw through her eyes in that moment how I was perceived by society. This made me weary of working for other puppet companies. When I did, I tended to physically overcompensate (often hurting or exhausting myself), for example by lifting things I shouldn't, so as not to be seen as being less able and subsequently lesser. I began to disable myself by putting myself in situations I should not have.

In 2007, I founded my own puppet company, *Beyond the Bark* which combines both my love of installation art and puppetry. In establishing this company, those worries about how I would be viewed as a puppeteer went away, as I was creating the work and I was carefully picking who I worked with. I have always been fascinated by real stories and how they can be embedded into fiction, with the reality hiding in full sight. *Beyond the Bark's* plays are fuelled by other stories, whether that be my nephew's imaginary friend, Piedva the spider; or an article I read about a real-life turtle-turner; or testimonies of national, personal and/or sexual identity. I have always wanted to lend the underdog a voice where there was none, however in all my work, I had never told my own story. In actual fact, I had also used as many gadgets as possible

to disguise my lack of arm function so as not to expose my story. I had used puppetry to hold mirrors up to others, while simultaneously masking myself. On reflection on my practice, my puppets have been, for the most part, anthropomorphic figures of varying sizes representing the able body. I learned early on that the puppet lends itself naturally to representing the ‘other’, and to make a puppet too human-like was to negate its need to be. However, and perhaps serendipitously, I didn’t delve into this until I was ready to examine my own disability within this body of research.

### **3.3 Puppets: Making Real the Intangible**

I made my first ever puppet at the London School of Puppetry. It was a puppet of Lady Macbeth. She was normally proportioned and painted skin-coloured. I wasn’t happy with it, though I had no idea why. I took it to show Caroline Astell-Burt, the Head of the school and explained my predicament. When I contacted her recently via email, she confirmed that my memory of her response was an accurate recollection, and that she had been echoing the words of Phillipe Genty:

It is because it is too human’ she replied. ‘The puppet can be anything; it can do what the actor cannot. If it looks no different and acts no different than an actor it has failed. If you can do the show any other way, then don't use the puppet. (C. Astell-Burt, personal correspondence, 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 2016)

After my conversation with Caroline, I went back down to the workshop and made a second head. This time the head was large; she had ears, a nose and two eyes, but no mouth. Her skin was made from brown paper, unpainted, with no attempt to make it look like human skin. I was much happier with this one and took it to show to Caroline. She asked me why she didn’t have a mouth, and I replied that is was, ‘because she does not speak’, to which I recall Caroline replied, ‘good answer!’. This was, for me a revelatory moment, wherein I discovered

something which for me is integral to what puppetry is. You start with the story, then you make the puppet to represent that story on its body in a visual way. It doesn't have to be created in a prescribed way and this is its power. If we make it exactly mirroring the human in size and attributes, then it loses its power. Von Kleist (1810) sees the puppet as having a freedom that humans do not. This freedom comes from what he calls negative freedom, which is an absence of the types of obstacles that the human brain forms, something that a puppet or non-human obviously does not do. The puppet's freedom comes from not having a determined state, and not having to act in a prescribed way.

Cardus (2015) talks about von Kleist's view of the puppet and states that this freedom of the puppet is one that humans endeavor to also grasp, particularly through the pursuit of science which might enable us to escape the limitations of the human body. She describes the belief that through growing our knowledge in this way humans will gain and possess freedom unlike other beings. Ironically, however, this is the very freedom that von Kleist states puppets naturally possess. The neutral freedom that the puppet has comes from the fact that it is materially formed. It is a blank canvas that can absorb our stories. It has the ability to physically reform on stage in away an actor cannot.

Why is the character played by a puppet and not an actor? If we cannot answer this question, it is probably because the character is too like a human and should remain in that domain. (Posner et al., 2015, p. 55)

The puppet must be something 'other' than a simple representation of the standard human form, because otherwise it is rendered obsolete by actors. The need for puppets to be something other than the normal human makes them the perfect vessel to represent the disabled body. Like the disabled body, the puppet's body has also been 'othered' and therefore I see it as a way to examine what it is to be 'othered'. As Astles states:

We live in a world where the corporate and the commercial dominate; where race, gender, religion and nationhood are once more fiercely contested sites of meaning amongst hegemonies of fear and varying states of 'otherness'. Puppetry – always to some extent 'othered' – enables us to disentangle these complex threads of cultural ambivalence and re-examine what it means to be. (Astles, 2016a, p. 54)

Puppetry allows access to the 'othered' and offers ways to examine different states of 'otherness' such as those experienced by marginalised groups. In *Pupa*, we put these two different others in dialog with each other; the disabled puppeteer and the puppet, creating a symbiotic relationship, one telling the other's story. The relationship between the puppet and the puppeteer is different to that of a craftsman and their tool. A puppet is an extension of the puppeteer - not just physically but emotionally, because the puppeteer invests the puppet with part of their consciousness. The puppet is in a very real sense imbued with a soul. It is an emotional prosthesis.

Pizzi (2011) describes Gervais's discussion on the symbiotic relationship between the puppeteer and the puppet, arguing that the puppeteer offers the self, in order to bequeath it to the puppet. Without this concentrated transfer of self, he states that the puppet is nothing but a piece of wood. Williams (2007) states that the puppet holds collective quintessential belief that inanimate objects anthropomorphised are magical and possess powers. Zamir (2010) notes that puppets are given momentarily resuscitation, which temporarily captures life. She asserts that the puppet questions their own, and the puppeteer's control. The puppet is given both the illusion of spontaneity and freedom by the puppeteer, while also subverting the puppeteer's control.

This model that I have presented above, of the puppet/puppeteer relationship as one of emotion symbiosis, where both puppet and puppeteer are dependent on each other, stands in stark

contrast to the most common idea of the puppet/puppeteer relationship as one best characterised as manipulated and manipulator. This conceptualisation of the puppet/puppeteer dyad may be clearly seen within in the Danish puppet film *Strings* (2004). Here, the puppeteers are presented as god-like characters in the sky, serving as the controllers/manipulators of their worlds, with the puppets being subservient to their master's whims. A general acceptance of the subjugated nature of the puppet within this relationship has likewise filtered into common parlance, with 'puppet' and 'puppeteer/puppet master' offered, often in derogatory terms, to convey opposing ends of a mutually exclusive spectrum of power.



FIGURE 3-1: DANISH PUPPET FILM *STRINGS* (2004), PUPPET CHARACTERS NEZO MURDERING JHINNA BY CUTTING HER STRINGS, SEVERING HER LINK TO THE PUPPETEERS IN THE SKY, IMAGE RIGHTS PURCHASED FROM ALAMY STOCK PHOTOS

In the remainder of this chapter, I will confront this conceptualisation of the puppet/puppeteer dyad, by attempting to posit that this relationship instead is a positive one. Challenging the perception of the puppet and puppeteer as being two entities – i.e. the manipulator and the manipulated - I will argue, that in fact, they are one.

### 3.4 Investing the Puppet with Humanity

Puppeteers throughout history have imbued their puppets with life, with puppet figures traceable to the ‘earliest periods of human culture’ (Posner et al., 2015, p. 2). From this period onwards, puppets have enabled artists to tap into a uniquely rich form of non-verbal language by projecting their thoughts and feelings onto what was previously an inanimate object. In doing this, puppetry breaks the boundaries of the body and allows the puppeteer to give physical embodiment to their thoughts and feelings. The puppet makes real the image inside the mind of the puppeteer. In the practice element of this doctoral research, the physical embodiment of these ideas and feelings expressed by disabled artists, and projected by me on to the puppets sought to help illuminate and deepen for participants an understanding of their own feelings and emotions, and given audience members an insight into that world. Orenstein (2015) describe how the puppet has the ability to examine the self by offering; ‘... concrete means of playing with new embodiments of humanity. To understand our engagement with puppetry is to chart and reveal new expressions of ourselves’ (*cited in* Posner et al., 2015, p. 2).

While this dynamic is similar in some respects to the foundational ideas associated with many ‘talking therapies’, such as ‘Cognitive Behavioral Therapy’ (Beck & Beck, 2011), the non-verbal nature of the communication enables a unique glimpse of the disabled artists’ perspective and lived experience. Another area of similarity between puppetry and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and therapies more broadly, is the acting out or directly engaging with a fictionalised or potentially true past scenario. Working in puppetry allows the puppeteer to consider their own interpretation of, or reaction to such situations abstractly, within an artistic frame and possibly a fictional lens, whereas in therapeutic work, people are required to expose themselves in a confrontational manner to that which gives them profound anxiety. Puppetry

is unique as the puppeteer can explore an avatar of themselves in a context of the scenario. It should also be noted that the intent of the puppetry in this research was never one of therapy. It was always that of artistic representation, with the inherent and ever-present possibility of personal change which all art holds.

By examining the self through a puppet, the puppeteer is given a tool to see their thoughts and feelings physically portrayed outside their body. Once the puppet has been created, it is both an extension of the self and a separate object. The puppeteer through imbuing the puppet with memories and imagining it alive gives it temporary consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) states that through interacting with objects, a person gains memory of these objects. Such memories imbue those objects with a temporary consciousness, but this is not a shared consciousness; it is a personal one between that person and the object. Tracey (2017) argues that the life of a puppet can be understood in terms of consciousness. When the audience and puppeteer imagine the puppet to be alive they are imbuing it with consciousness. If we apply Merleau-Ponty's thesis to a puppet, it follows that a puppeteer who builds and articulates a puppet (object), also builds memories of the puppet and imbues their memories onto the puppet, and in so doing, transfers their consciousness to the puppet. An audience member won't have the same memories; this may be the first time they have seen the puppet and therefore they will use their knowledge of puppetry and movement in general to 'invest it with humanity' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 373).

### **3.5 The puppet as a visual voice**

The act of puppeteering can be interpreted as the transfer of the puppeteer's consciousness to the puppet. The creation of a bespoke puppet allows for this to be done in a complete way, and

cumulatively, this means that the puppet is a perfect visual tool through which to tell a personal story. In fairy tales, myths and legends the puppet has told cultural stories throughout its existence. Traditional Indonesian Wayang theatrical performance using puppets is a great example of this. It was believed that these puppets could be visited and inhabited by passed ancestral spirits. This belief meant that at times such as bad harvests, certain puppet shows would be performed to help ward off the threat of pests. Brandon and Guritno (1993) describe stories connected to local culture such as stories around rice cultivation. It is in Indonesia during the reign of King Airlangga (1035-1049) that a court poet wrote about the puppet's ability to come to life:

There are people who weep, are sad and aroused watching the puppets, though they know they are merely carved pieces of leather manipulated and made to speak. These people are like men who, thirsting for sensuous pleasures, live in a world of illusion; they do not realize the magic hallucinations they see are not real. (Brandon & Guritno, 1993, p. 3)

Puppets open up opportunities for visual storytelling that would not be available to a live actor. While an actor can use their physical body to represent aspects of their identity, they cannot embody radical physical ideas like flying or disconnecting body parts in order to tell a story or, as in the case of this research, represent a change in identity metaphorically. Yet, a puppet can. Bicât (2008) discusses the characteristics that puppets have and which humans have always desired. Unlike the actor, the puppet is crafted specially to be the character in the play, and as such physically embodies the character completely. Powell agrees, stating in a talk at the Puppet Power conference (2018) ‘... puppets are not actors learning lines, they are the characters in your story’ (Powell & Powell, 2018). For example, again from *Pupa*, a puppet with no mouth echoes a voice that is lost. Puppets allow for expressing beyond what is possible with a human actor; ‘the puppet is an unpredictable creature...it ferries us between worlds.’ (Gross cited in Posner et al., 2015, p. 1). Puppets can delve into fairy tales and represent freakish monsters, such as half man/half animal hybrids. Despite these abilities, for the most

part, puppets remain representational of the ‘normative’ body: two arms, two legs. Cultural signposts that are used to represent a disability in puppetry are often a wheelchair, a patch or a wooded peg-leg, all appearing in historic puppet bodies. However, fractured puppets (such as my dismembered disabled arm puppet in *Pupa*), despite their ability to represent the disabled body, do not appear in historic puppet bodies.

We use the puppet to tell stories we cannot tell with our own bodies. They are creatures that break the physical restraints of the human body. They can split themselves in two, as Puppet-Emma does in *Pupa*. They can make themselves such as those seen in Jan Svankmajer’s *Darkness Light Darkness* (Svankmajer, 1990), where a body is constructed from dismembered parts. The film starts simply with the hands, which collect other body parts to finally construct a complete, anatomically perfect body.



FIGURE 3-2: JAN SVANKMAIR'S DARKNESS LIGHT DARKNESS (SVANKMAJER, 1990)

Grossvogel talks about the ability the puppet has to represent, ‘the mystery and power of the inanimate figure’ (cited by Levitt, 1975, p. 973). It is ‘superhuman’ because it differs from the human body and through this can ‘embrace all humans’ precepts. Grossvogel suggests that the marionette is the perfect example of this.

So far, I have examined the nature of the puppet and the way in which the puppet is a powerful tool for personal self-expression, as well as my own personal story in puppetry. But what is personal is also political, and never more so than when it pertains to the lived experiences of marginalised social groups. With this in mind, when writing *Pupa*, I drew not only from the stories of the individual artists who worked on the show but reached more widely into disability culture for my inspiration.

I began my research with the intention of investigating the history of the representation of the disabled form in puppet theatre. However, despite extensive searches I have been unable to uncover a single purposeful instance of the deliberate representation of the disabled body or of a disabled puppeteer prior to the early 21st century.

This is perhaps because the voice of disabled artists has only emerged very recently, coinciding with the disability culture and rights activism of the 1970s and the emergence of greater rights that it brought.

### **3.6 Representations of the fractured puppet body**

I have written about the way in which the medium of puppetry breaks down the barriers of the body and how the puppet is infused with the consciousness of the puppeteer. Also, the way in which the ‘othered’ nature of the puppet makes it ideal for representing ‘non-normative’

bodies. It is therefore strange to me, that even though puppetry has existed for thousands of years it is only recently that the physical body of the puppet has been broken down and reshaped.

As the 20th century unfolded, it produced art movements that were more conceptual than figurative, such as Cubism, Expressionism, etc. Most avant-garde puppet makers did not see the relevance that Cubism brought to their art-form, and ignored the influences of painters such as Pablo Picasso, who were fracturing and dissecting the human form. While they did experiment with dimensions of the puppet's body, the bodies that they created were still 'whole'. However, puppet artists such as Harry Kramer and Fred Schneckenger embraced Cubism and led the way in rethinking and reshaping the puppet body to represent forms that belonged to the oppressed forms that seemed monstrous to many:

The twentieth century's innovations in visual art, such as abstraction and cubism, did not generally seem useful for the construction of humans that could function, and most puppet makers, like most surgeons, ignored them. But puppet artists who did explore this new ground discovered broad new possibilities. Why after all did puppets have to suggest any real-world model ... Why not use these new approaches to help make puppets that reflect the century's shaken sense of humanity and to express its war-ravaged psyche? (Blumenthal, 2005, p. 98-101)

The physical forms of Harry Kramer's 'Figure with Three Wheels and Red Head' circa 1960 and 'Hellishness on Wheels' circa 1954, while not overtly representational of the disabled body, echo notions of disability nonetheless. The twisted spine, the legs replaced by wheels and missing eye, for me, all allude to the disabled form.



FIGURE 3-3: FIGURE WITH THREE WHEELS AND RED HEAD, BY HARRY KRAMER (1925 - 1997), GERMANY, CIRCA 1960, MUNICH CITY MUSEUM, PUPPET THEATRE, IMAGE RIGHTS PURCHASED FROM SHUTTERSTOCK

In Philippe Genty's *Breath* (1981), there are shapes that change into different creatures and body parts. They resemble human wombs, with penises and vaginas. While these puppets are fragmented, they are arguably more representative of sexuality than disability. In Alassane Saidu's (a Nigerian puppet artist) work, the puppet's penis is exaggerated becoming its most dominant characteristic. Some of his puppets have stumps or no arms but, again, the dominant theme is sexuality.

*Snuff Puppets* is an Australian puppet troupe which has an ethos of inspiring cultural change with their aesthetic of grotesque puppets, and their moto of inclusivity. The company has a history of involvement in political rallies to support gay rights, asylum seekers and third world debt relief. Their outdoor puppet spectacle, installation and performance piece, *Everybody* (2015) is the perfect example of a puppetry piece that explores and challenges preconceptions

of the physical body. This is achieved through fracturing the puppet and making visible the hidden, uncovering what is seen as shameful bodily functions.



FIGURE 3-4: PRODUCTION SHOT OF EVERYBODY, IMAGE COURTESY OF SNUFF PUPPETS

*Everybody* is a giant 26.5 metre puppet that splits up in the show and becomes independent parts. The performance begins with a random accident of a brick falling on the puppet's head. The rest of the show consists of the puppet's life flashing before it, starting with its birth through its own vagina. Body parts separate out, creating independent puppets all operated from the inside, rendering the puppeteers invisible. These puppets, such as the penis and breasts, excrete liquids that get sprayed into the crowd. This piece culminates with the death and subsequent deterioration of the body of the puppet. This is *Everybody's* life cycle. The puppet is genderless and multi-racial as the company want the puppet to represent 'everybody'. The tag line of the show is 'Everybody's born/ Everybody cries/ Everybody shits/ Everybody dies.' I asked the company producer Katrina Chandra by email, whether they meant to represent the disabled body with their fractured puppet:

The difficulty with answering your question is firstly that we try not to prescribe meaning too much, so people can make their own impressions. (K. Chandra, personal correspondence, May 18<sup>th</sup> 2017)

The idea of normalising fractured bodies and bodily functions comes across strongly in the performance as the audience's reactions visibly go from shock to acceptance. *Everybody* may not set out prescribed meanings, but what is evident is that *Snuff Puppets* challenges what is seen as shameful about the body by poking fun at it and putting it in a public arena. Laura

Purcell- Gates, in a paper presented at the American Society for Theatre Research Conference in November 2016 discusses *Everybody* and notes that:

... 'spectators' affective response to the abject - disgust - is evoked by clearly-marked representations of human secretions, not by the actual abjected 'thing'. This is an explicitly material mimesis in which the puppetry performance unsettles the boundary between abjected aspects of human bodies and inorganic material objects. (Purcell-Gates, 2016, pp. 11–12)

Here, Purcell-Gates observes that the disgust that the audience feels is brought on by the ability that the synthetic human bodily waste has in mimicking the real thing. The puppet object succeeds in blurring the line between real and not real. *Everybody* is the perfect example of the puppet breaking down the boundaries of the body; not only do the body parts of the giant puppet break apart, claiming (like Puppet-Emma's arm) their own identity, but Purcell-Gates notes that elements of the body of the puppet disturb the lines between body and objects through mirroring the real thing. *Everybody*, while not overtly dealing with disabled puppets, made me look at puppets' ability to metaphorically representing the body fracturing. Within the performance of *Pupa*, Character-Conor asks the question 'are you the fallen or about to fall' symbolising that what the audience watched is our story but at some point, in the audiences lives it will be every bodies.

I suggest that the puppet form has the inherent ability to be deconstructed and reconstructed, and to physically embody any shape, and is therefore the ideal figure to represent the disabled body. The inherent attributes of the puppet ideally position it to explore what it means to be disabled in an able-bodied society. I refute the two common but negative conceptualisations of the puppet/puppeteer dyad, by proposing that instead of two entities, one with power over the other, through the puppeteer imbuing the puppet with life, they instead become one entity; the puppet visually making real the thoughts and feelings of the puppeteer. Through this process,

the puppet, which was previously an inanimate object, comes to life. This understanding of the role of the puppet enables me to address the research question as to whether I perceive my arm as a puppet, and whether this means I see it as an inanimate object and somehow separate to myself and my identity.

### **3.7 My arm: Puppet, Object or Extension of the self?**

The final section of this chapter will examine the reasoning and process of development which lay behind the creation of the arm exo-skeleton device worn by me whilst portraying the character of Puppet-Emma in *Pupa*. This process initially came about as a means to allow me to examine the question noted above about how I viewed my damaged arm, and which emerged as significant at the outset of the study. What transpired through and within the production of *Pupa*, was that through examining my views of my disability through physically puppeteering it, my view of the puppet also shifted. This shift in my view of the puppet/puppeteer dyed, resulted in a shift of my own view of the able/disabled dyed in my body. Chapter Seven will further analyse and resolve this question, however in this section I initially examine the path upon which this investigation brought me.

#### **3.7.1 Orthotics**

In building the performance of *Pupa*, I made the decision to investigate the question of my arm in a very physical way. I did this by examining the possibility of building a device around my left arm that would allow my right arm to manipulate my injured left arm.

As a puppeteer for the last twelve years, I have adapted many splints with the help of my Occupational Therapist, and in order to maximise the movement I had in my left arm so that it could aid me in operating puppets. These adaptations were very basic and often involved using

Velcro or Gaffa tape to attach a hook or a rod to my wrist support. While these splints worked to some extent, I was still unable to drop or pick up a rod while on stage, thus I had never fully managed to emulate a puppeteer with two working hands.



FIGURE 3-5: OPERATING PUPPET JAMES, USING A STICK WITH A HOOK STRAPPED TO MY SPLINT, IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ROYAL NATIONAL ORTHOPAEDIC HOSPITAL

When I first approached my Occupational Therapist, she enlisted a colleague to help with the work. They started to investigate the creation of an orthotic device similar to those that I had encountered in my youth. This process created a very useful practical splint which I will utilise in my future puppeteering practice. The splint is operated when my left elbow moves, which triggers a hook strapped to my secured stationary hand, causing the hand to open and close. The device did not aid me in manipulating my left hand with my right in order to turn it into a physical puppet as desired. So, it did not act as the research tool I needed to investigate my views around my disabled hand, therefore, I continued to search for other ways in which I could achieve this end. In October 2016, a friend and fellow puppeteer, Kay Yasugi called me to tell me that while reading Kennedy (2016), she came across a Seattle-based, hand-puppet maker and open-source hand prosthetics designer called Ivan Owen. I looked him up on line and

contacted him in the hope of learning more about his work, and perhaps seeking some advice around a device that would aid me. He was intrigued and instead offered to be part of the team to help design and build the device and proposed the idea of building an exo-skeleton.

### **3.7.2 Making the Exo-Skeleton**

Ivan and I worked remotely via Skype for three months. He sent me files of the design of the piece, and with the assistance of *Fab Lab Limerick*, I printed parts of the exo-skeleton out of wood using a laser cutter. The ability for us to work remotely prior to working in person was essential, as our time working together in person was limited to 10 days. The task would have been far too complex to achieve within this time window. The remote working was crucial to the success of the project as we could use tools such as Google Docs, Skype and email to send photos, videos, sketches of ideas and measurements back and forth.

Throughout the design and construction process of the exo-skeleton, I sent images to Ivan of different parts of my arm and hand with measurements, as well as making patterns that would fit over both my lower and upper arm in order for him to design the device to my exact measurements. At first, it felt strangely exposing sending images of my arm uncovered and without splints, as I usually cover it, but this feeling dissipated. It is strange to recollect this feeling from November 2016, when five months later I would show my arm proudly to an audience and not feel exposed.



FIGURE 3-6: PHOTOGRAPHS OF MY ARM SENT TO IVAN OWEN, IMAGES COURTESY OF EVE FISHER

As the work proceeded, I routinely sent Ivan images of my arm to demonstrate how the parts I was printing and assembling fit my arm. This communicative process helped me feel more comfortable. The device of the exo-skeleton was made up of hundreds of tiny parts, that I laser cut out of wood and assembled. It was a modern digitally fabricated device that looked akin to a Leonardo De Vinci design.

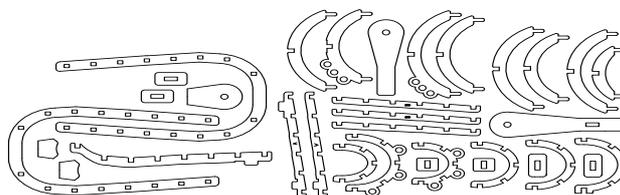


FIGURE 3-7: DESIGN OF PARTS FOR SECTION OF THE EXO-SKELETON, IMAGE COURTESY OF IVAN OWEN

Ivan and I continued to work remotely until February 2017 when I secured Arts Council funding to bring him over to Ireland to work with Thomas Baker (Director and Puppeteer),

Gemma Morris (Costume designer) and I. We worked for ten days in *Fab Lab Limerick*, continuing to refine the design and build the prototype.



FIGURE 3-8: IVAN OWEN AND EMMA FISHER ASSEMBLING THE EXO-SKELETON IN FAB LAB LIMERICK FEBRUARY 2017, IMAGE COURTESY OF THOMAS BAKER

The exo-skeleton was originally designed to work through a complex system of sensors and motors. The closer we got to completing the device, the more uncomfortable this made me. Even though the plan was to build in limit switches that would turn the motors off, I worried these might not work and my already delicate hand might get even more damaged. I shared these concerns with the team and Thomas Baker came up with an idea of using a bike brake cable instead. Ivan Owen quickly started recalculating and redesigning. In the end, the device built was far more appropriate than one with motors, as to my mind, it represented more of a puppet on a string, whereas a motor-driven device would have been more robotic. There was also greater peace of mind for me knowing that I, and not a motor, was controlling the movement of my arm.

The only reservations that Ivan held about his participation in the project was the short amount of time that would be available for me to learn to operate the device, as *Pupa* was opening five months after the time we first established contact. However, my experience as a puppeteer meant that I was at an advantage in using the device when it was realised. As a marionette puppeteer, I am trained to use each of my fingers independently of each other to operate different parts of the puppet. After my accident my Occupational Therapist also gave me exercises to perform in front of a mirror, whereby when my right hand moved, it would trick my brain to thinking that both hands were moving. Now, when I move my right hand, and even though my left hand is obviously not moving, if I am not looking at my left hand, it feels as though it is moving too. So, moving two fingers on my right side to move my left hand is a movement that holds something very natural for me.

It was very important to me in this process that my hand remain visible, and that the device was constructed from wood so that it had a similar aesthetic to my puppets. The device worked by allowing my right ring finger and baby finger to pull on cables. The cables were connected to wooden clock-work cogs housed in a mechanism that I carried on my back. When a cable was pulled, it fed through the cogs and then down my left arm causing my left hand to open and close. My arm was encased in the exo-skeleton, which allowed my disabled left arm to be manipulated by my able right arm, giving it function that it would otherwise not have. I was now able to puppeteer my left hand.

### **3.7.3 Puppeteering my disabled body**

The first time I used the exo-skeleton, I pulled the lever and my left hand picked up a screwdriver. The experience for me was very much like operating a puppet. We then tested out

whether I would be able to use both hands simultaneously, operating the head of a puppet with the three fingers of my right hand while at the same time picking something up with my left. This was the first time in twenty-six years that I had been able to use both my hands simultaneously. I must say that when this worked I was giddy with excitement and danced around the Fab Lab.



FIGURE 3-9: TESTING THE EXO-SKELETON FOR FIRST TIME IN FAB LAB LIMERICK, IMAGE COURTESY OF THOMAS BAKER

This extra functionality granted by the exo-skeleton device is what allowed my left-arm to puppeteer Puppet-Emma's left arm. On a practical level, while performing in the show, I needed my left hand to operate the puppet's left arm. Usually in my practice, this would be accomplished by taping the puppet's arm directly to my arm, however now I had a device that would allow me to pick up and drop puppet rods. This device enabled my left hand to operate Puppet-Emma's hand and subsequently to open and close a dismembered beak which was in Puppet-Emma's hand from scene four to scene eleven.

In terms of the arm's general function, it is similar to other exoskeletons which have previously been developed. In terms of the arm's aesthetics, materials and intended use, I am unaware of anything similar. The combination of design choices which are intended to communicate with an audience, that it was purposefully created for use in puppetry and that it was fabricated primarily with a laser-cutter make it unique. (I.Owen, personal correspondence, 26<sup>th</sup> of April, 2017)

Whereas all the hand designs Ivan has worked on previously largely hid the user's hand, the design and vision for this device was for the disabled arm to be fully visible while the device was on. The exo-skeleton also differed from the prosthetic hands that Ivan has previously created in terms of the materials that were used; wood and leather instead of plastic and Velcro. A large part of these differences stem from the end use of this device. It needed to emulate a puppet and help tell a story.



FIGURE 3-10: FINISHED EXO-SKELETON, FEBRUARY 2017

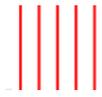
Finally, beyond physical construction, the mutual interpretation of this device between Emma and myself as we started developing it, and the rest of the team as we worked to finish it, was of the device as a story telling/puppeteering tool rather than a prosthetic or orthotic. (I.Owen, personal correspondence, 26<sup>th</sup> of April, 2017)

I wore the exo-skeleton throughout *Pupa*, however it was concealed with a robe until scene eleven where it is revealed that I was puppeteering my arm with the aid of the exo-skeleton. The

hiding of the device and my disability was very important, as I wanted the reveal at the end to be that this was my story, if it had been on view there would have been no 'coming out'.

My abled right arm operated a pulley which physically manipulated the exo-skeleton, and this exo-skeleton subsequently operated my disabled left arm which then helped operate Puppet-Emma, which I argue was acting as my emotional prosthesis. In simple terms, my physical able self, operated my disabled emotional self. This dynamic raised for me the question of whether by turning my arm into a physical puppet by using orthotics to operate it, as to whether I was deepening the unilateral divide, expanding the split in my identity and reinstating the belief that my arm is a puppet and therefore an object? However, it is important to reiterate, and as stated earlier in this chapter, I do not see puppets as separate objects but instead see them as extensions of the self. I will examine further my relationship to my arm since building the exo-skeleton, which is intrinsically related to the way in which I view puppets, in chapter seven.

With the lack of previously published material in puppet history regarding the disabled body, I have delved into the fracturing of the puppet's body which emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chapter four will continue my search of how the disabled body has been explored and represented in the theatrical arts and stories.



## CHAPTER 4

### Representations of the disabled body

An acceptance of self sits at the heart of this research journey. My puppet character in *Pupa* charts my journey from the early days of my trying to fit in, to a later acceptance of my disabled identity. My views of myself as a person with a disability are arguably layered with hundreds of years of negative perception and indeed oppression of disabled people. This oppression is built upon historically negative views of people like me. Normalised views and acceptable images of this negativity and oppression have been recycled through the disabled narratives of well-loved and celebrated stories within fairy tales, literature and theatre. This research charts my personal journey of claiming my identity and seeks to understand and share it for both artistic and academic audiences. In order to fully do so, it's important to thoroughly understand what disabled identity means and why I had not claimed it up to now in my life. In an interview with Rust (2004), Jennifer Miller describes her reasoning in performing as a bearded lady as a way for her to interact and examine a figure that optimises how the general public can often see people who look like her.

I was growing my beard long before I worked in the sideshow, so I always had this image of the bearded lady as kind of this little icon sitting on my shoulder, you know, battling with me and how I was seen in the world. So when the opportunity came, when I was invited, enticed, to come work in the sideshow, I wanted to give it a try. I wanted to meet this person, this image, this history that I had been in dialogue with, sort of face to face. (Miller cited by Stephens, 2006, p. 485)

Like Miller, I feel the need to delve into the past, to first understand the historic narrative of disability that fuels present societal and personal views. As Morris states, the emergence of a disabled culture shines a light on the pressure that exists for people to conform in their thinking, making us confront not only society's views, but also our own:

‘The emergence of a disability culture is difficult but tremendously liberating. Such a culture enables us to recognize the pressure to pretend to be normal for the oppressive and impossible-to-achieve hurdle which it is. Most importantly, this culture challenges our own prejudices about ourselves, as well as those of the non-disabled culture.’ (Morris cited by Brown, 2002, p. 40)

In order to examine the pressures that exist for disabled people to present themselves as ‘normal’ in the world and which (Morris, 1991) asserts exists, it is important to first briefly trace where these pressures came from and the backdrop within which greater civil rights for disabled people were fought for. More specifically with regard to performance, while there is a dearth in the presence of the voice of the disabled artists, disabled characters have been ever-present in theatre and fairy tales. This chapter will examine the historically stereotypical narrative that both fictional disabled characters and disabled performers, have had to operate within in theatre performance, fables and freak shows. It will also examine some modern-day reclamation by disabled performers of their historical identity. Lastly, it will look at the practice of ‘cripping up’<sup>14</sup> of able-bodied performers in performance tradition and offer puppetry as a performance practice which is perfectly positioned to rupture ideological constructions of the disabled body.

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Crippling up’ is a term coined by Kaite O’Reilly (2005) to describe able bodied performers playing disabled roles.

## 4.1 The Disabled Characters Narrative

From Shakespeare using the twisted spine of Richard the Third as a manifestation of his twisted soul, to the Cinderella's Step-sister getting her eyes plucked out as punishment for her misdeeds, physical deviation from the accepted norm has long been used as a dramatic trope. Physical or mental disability generally has represented wrong or evil within that trope.

Schemiesing (2014) states that the representations of disability within historic narratives (in this case in fiction and performance) is a wholly negative occurrence broadly falling into three categories: to represent the characters fall from grace; to represent some spiritual malignancy in the character; or as something to be pitied and perhaps erased by a fairy godmother. Significantly, in terms of the centrality of identity to this research, Mitchell and Snyder refer to the long history of culturally signposting the character's body as 'other' by marking it with disabilities:

Since what we now call disability has been historically narrated as that which characterizes a body as deviant from shared norms of bodily appearance and ability, disability has functioned throughout history as one of the most marked and remarked upon differences that originates the act of storytelling. Narratives turn signs of cultural deviance into textually marked bodies. (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, p. 54)

This hypothesis is called 'narrative prosthesis' and, 'forwards the notion that all narratives operate out of the desire to compensate for a limitation' (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, p. 53). Mitchell and Snyder attribute the term 'narrative prosthesis' to Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp who analysed characters in folk tales. Mitchell and Snyder describe narrative prosthesis as a widely used narrative aid within literature that was extensively recognisable by a reader or audience member. To simply show the downfall or deviant nature of a character, the character was given a disability. They use Shakespeare's plays Oedipus and Richard the third, as examples of how narrative have historically represented disability.

Classically, and as referenced above, Shakespeare's seminal character, Richard the Third, is an example of disability representing spiritual malignancy in the character. Wilson (2017) points out however, that the adjective 'the disabled' to reference a group of people did not appear until 1740, after Shakespeare's time. His use of characters who were lame, blind and deformed is extensive within his texts, but he was, of course, not aware of these characters as anything other than unfortunately reduced human beings.

I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,  
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,  
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time  
Into this breathing world scarce half made up,  
and that so lamely and unfashionable  
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them.  
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,  
Have no delight to pass away the time,  
Unless to see my shadow in the sun  
And descant on mine own deformity.  
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover  
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,  
I am determinèd to prove a villain.  
(Shakespeare, 1996, Act 1, scene 1, p.1)

In the soliloquy above, Richard the Third describes his physical form as one that is deformed, and therefore unfit for sex, as he has a disability. As he has desexualised himself and declared himself unfit to be a lover, he decides instead to be a villain. (Smith, 2014) asserts that people with disabilities are also stripped of their sexuality, by a general social attitude that aligns their disability with being unappealing and unfit to find partners. Akhtar, Rauf, Ikram, & Rehman (2017) interpret deformity within the play as a trope for wickedness, with Richard blaming his wickedness directly on his body. Williams (2016) also notes that having a disability is seen within the play as a sign of moral impairment. She suggests that the narrative of Richard the Third is predominately informed by what the character calls his deformed body; a body which

is described prior to knowing about his wicked actions. Shakespeare, for the purpose of dramatic impact, exaggerated Richard the Third's injury<sup>15</sup>. I surmise that his disability was exaggerated as a narrative device; with the idea that being more disabled equalled his character being more wicked. Akhtar, Rauf, Ikram, Rehman (2017) and Williams (2016) agree that his twisted body was used as a visual sign of his moral impairment.

Many of the well know fairy-tales we know today were collected by the Brothers Grimm. They worked collecting the folk-tales that existed in oral tradition in Germany and wrote them down for posterity. However, as is invariably the case, they left their mark on the stories and the characters in the process.

Changing focus to literature, Schmiesing (2014) writes about the manner in which the Grimm Brother's tales are preoccupied with disability. Curious to what extent this preoccupation was already in the stories before the brothers rewrote them, Schmiesing offers an in-depth analysis of disability within the tales. She finds that many mentions of deformities, injuries and disabilities, such as eyes being pecked out were not in the original stories, only appearing after they were collected and rewritten by the Grimm's brothers. Wilhelm Grimm notably suffered from ill health all his life. It is speculative but nonetheless interesting to wonder of the fascination with disability evident in so many of the tales stems from this.

Schmiesing (2014) notes that the approach to disability that the Grimms took in their stories closely followed the stereotypic representations of disability that already existed in their society, such as their use of disability to signify a malignant soul or as a punishment meted out

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<sup>15</sup> Pappas (2014) examines the post-mortem results of King Richard the Third's bones. It reveals that he did indeed have a curvature of the spine caused by scoliosis. However, it did not affect his hips, which means that he did not walk with a limp. Because of the curvature of the spine, one of his shoulders was higher than the other, but he had complete use of both.

to those who deserved it. However, the fascination of the Brothers Grimm in emphasising the disabled figure, even if in a stereotypical manner, provides the spark of a voice in terms of the representation of the disabled, that would not be fully ignited until nearly 100 years later.

One of the recurring themes in the Grimm's fairy tales is the appearance of changelings. Changelings are creatures in folktales who take the place of human children stolen by fairies. These stories were frequently used in medieval society as explanations for children born with deformities or developmental problems. In these stories human babies are replaced by deviant fairy ones. Ashliman (2017) discusses the founder of the Protestant church, Martin Luther, who was a firm believer that children born with disabilities were changelings, the spawn of the devil. He saw them as having no soul, they were in his eyes "only a piece of flesh." (Luther cited by Ashliman, 2017, p. 10). Ashliman states that Luther's writing offered moral reassurance to parents who felt that the best thing to do was to kill their child. It was this use of changelings to explain congenital birth defects that led to even the Royal Academy, Britain's foremost scientific institution, to use the very same word when referring to babies born with a disability at the start of the 19th Century. Ashliman states that at this time it was common to abandon or institutionalise babies with disabilities, who were seen by some as changelings, left by the fairies or elves who had stolen their own perfectly able child:

‘... unlike most fantasy tales’, the fact that these tales ‘were actually widely believed suggest that a physically or mentally abnormal child is very likely not the human parents' offspring at all, but rather a changeling -- a creature begotten by some supernatural being and then secretly exchanged for the rightful child’ (Ashliman, 2017, p. 6)

Ashliman goes on to talk about court cases that took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Ireland and Europe for the murder and abuse of disabled children, in which it was claimed that these were not children, but changelings. This use of the word changeling explicitly made

these children less than human. And since they were not human, the abuse, abandonment or murder of these disabled children was not seen for the terrible crime that it was.

The cultural signposting of the disabled characters body and narrative as ‘other’ specifically within Shakespeare and the Grimm Brother’s fairytales is indicative of the highly deficit societal perspective towards disability. The ‘narrative prosthesis’ that occurred within these stories was influenced by the views that existed at the time around the disabled persons body; these views subsequently leapt off the page to influence beliefs at the time, transforming a disabled child into a mythical changeling character. As stated above narrative prosthesis is when a character has or is given a disability as a plot device to show the deviant nature and/or down fall of the character. Such views marked the disabled body as one with a twisted soul, or with no soul at all:

‘The distortion of human form in performance connects metaphorically with the unseen twisting and deforming that sin causes to the soul’ (Conroy, 2009, p. 19)

## **4.2 Behind the curtain: Freak-Shows**

Grande (2010) states that freak shows came into existence in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in England. Later in the 17<sup>th</sup> century they appeared in America and Ireland, their success peaking in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These shows featured people with ‘abnormalities’. Siamese twins, bearded ladies, dwarfs and pinheads<sup>16</sup> being just a few. Stein (2009) states that in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the selling of a disabled child to such a show occurred usually by impoverished families. The next section will examine the freak show and the exaggeration of the disabled performer’s narrative within this performative context.

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<sup>16</sup> Pinhead was the name given within sideshows and freak shows to a person who had Microcephaly. Microcephaly is a neurological disorder where the brain develops slower than the rest of the body resulting in a smaller than average head.

Sheffield writes about the way in which people with physical differences were seen as live abnormal curiosities that were exhibited for entertainment in the Victorian period:

The exhibition of freaks, monstrosities or marvels of nature were essential components of travelling exhibitions in Europe and America throughout the Victorian period. What was saleable as far as the freak was concerned was, of course, physical difference, in a form that was both marketable and palatable. (Sheffield, 2017, p. 1)

The stories and real-life experiences of the people who were featured in the shows were often replaced by fantastical fictional biographies. This was done to make people in the freak shows, as Sheffield (2017) notes, more marketable. Garland-Thomson (1996) and MacLean (2014) asserts that this was done to make the audiences less interested in the person they were looking at, and more interested in their deformities. Often these biographies would regale the audience with far-fetched stories of the far-off lands that the specimens had come from, where entire tribes existed with the same deformities. Garland-Thomson (1996) in her book 'Freakery' talks about the 'true life' pamphlets that were distributed to the audience, noting that these pamphlets created new identities for the performers in order to generate more ticket sales. Before the audience glimpsed these 'freaks of nature', they were sold glamorous tales of half men/half animal, rare tribes of men from foreign lands and strange singular oddities that hale from your very street. Garland-Thomson describes how they would entice viewers with exaggerated tales which would not only tantalise the audience's curiosity, but also justify it by making it exotic instead of voyeuristic; after all, people were not coming to stare at a man with no arms and legs, but a penguin man. MacLean (2014) suggests that this approach veiled a new and emergent narrative that the 'othered' body of the freak was reinforced through direct comparison with the audience's understood identity as normal. This emphasised dichotomy acted to reinforce the disabled body as different. Whereas a puppeteer anthropomorphises a

puppet from object to human form, narrowing the divide between puppet and audience, in freak show acts, animal characteristics were exaggerated, insinuating that the performers were less human and more animal. This served to furthered the divide between performer and audience, so the audience could watch guilt-free. Garland-Thomson describes one of these exaggerated tales:

Irregular pigmentation enhanced by a loincloth and some palm fronds produced the Leopard Boy... Shaved heads, top-knots, and gaudy tunics render two microcephalics into the Aztec Children. (Garland-Thomson, 1996, p. 5)

Hidden behind the veil of exaggeration and invention was a person, whose body was, in itself a true narrative, even if the costume that adorned it were not. It is important to note that freak shows did not provide a platform for disabled people to find their voice or tell their stories. Indeed, their own biographies were explicitly silenced and replaced by exaggerations and inventions. However, what the freak show form did provide to disabled people in this era was the opportunity not to be invisible. For the first time, here was the disabled body being represented by a disabled person. An idealistic view of the freak show might see it as a celebration of the disabled body. But this was not the case. The freak show was another way to differentiate between 'them' (the minority) and 'us' (the dominant social group):

The point is that freak shows were productions which staged not 'real life' as such, but more or less meticulously contrived spectacles, which encouraged viewers to think and see in terms of various binary distinctions between "them" and "us". (Shildrick, 2001, p. 24)

As Shildrick notes, it was and is a fascination built around gazing at abnormality, encouraging the viewer to compare the abnormality in the 'freak's' body to their own 'normal' body, thus reinforcing the divide. This polarisation of the freak has stabilised and ultimately connected the identity of the disabled body as being 'other', enabling the spectator to feel safe in their normative bodies. The freak show was set up to show a considerable divide, where in reality there is a thin line between the normative and non-normative body.

In *Pupa*, when the audience enter the room, they are, much like the audience in a freak show, forced to stare at these misshapen puppets. The puppets and performers acknowledge them, perform for them, and interact with them before sending them on their way to meet the next act. Kennett Gross describes the puppet as:

... so often a crude and disproportioned thing, with its staring eye and leering teeth...barely human in form like a monster or mistake. (Gross, 2011, p. 2)

Both the puppet and the freak are described here as “a monster”. Garland-Thomson describes the shift of meaning behind the freak:

What was once ominous marvel now becomes gratuitous oddity as monsters shift into the category of curiosities. (Garland-Thomson, 1996, p. 4)

This dual meaning of the freak and the puppet as monstrous lends the puppet’s body the ability to be the perfect vessel to portray and hold the story of the freak, as the puppet body can capture the emulate the exaggerated construct of the freak, thus shining a light on the historic exaggeration and fictionalisation of the freak’s narrative and body:

Congenital anomalies and progressive or hereditary conditions yielded imaginative hybrids of the human and animal reminiscent of classical satyrs, centaurs, or minotaurs: the Turtle Boy, the Mule-Faced Women, Serpentina, the Camel Girl, the Dog-Faced Boy, the Bear Women, the Lobster Boy, the Lion Women, the Alligator Man and Seal. (Garland-Thomson, 1996, p. 5)

The half man/half animal hybrids puppets in *Pupa* reference the fantastical acts of the freak-show, which transformed the acts’ bodies into beastly forms. While this strategy in freak-shows deepened the divide being the abled and the disabled, and further removed the acts from any resemblance of normal humanity, in *Pupa*, the animal part of the puppets, such as Gunther the Caterpillar, reclaims this negative association and seeks to transform it into a positive one.

### 4.3 Exploring Personal Accounts of being in a Freak-show

I will now look at first-hand accounts of freak show acts, to gain a better understanding of what it was like to be given a fictitious identity and make your living out of others staring and marvelling at your body. While above I discuss the exaggeration and invention of the performer's body and narrative within the freak show, here I will look to the performers' testimonies, to gain a greater understanding of their views and discern a true narrative behind the exaggerated narrative.

In *The American Last Freak Show*, a 1994 documentary film directed by Mike Barker, Dick P Brisban talks about what it was like being Penguin Man. This was a new identity given to him by Ward Hall, one of the partner owners of the freak show, in order to paint what he calls 'word pictures' or 'word illusions', and to make people say, 'I have got to go see that' (Barker, 1994).

Below is a transcribed extract from the documentary:

**Dick:** We are not freaks. We are just odd and unusual people. Just because we don't look like a normal person, we get along and we do just as a normal person. It takes us a little bit longer than normal people to do things but and we get it done.... Why shouldn't I go out and try and better myself and make money at the same time.... billed me as the penguin boy because I walk and I waddle like a penguin when I walk. No I don't necessary like the word penguin boy but that is the way it has to be cause he has to build ...in front of the show so he can sell tickets. (Barker, 1994, 34:05 - 35:50)

Fast forward to 2011 and another documentary by Channel Four entitled *The Last Freak Show*, which follows musician Jeffrey Marshall as he embarked on a journey to join *The Last Freak Show*. This is the same freak show that Dick Brisban was a part of, and in it, Ward Hall gives him Dick's old stage name, Penguin Man. Marshall is curious to know if his fans come to hear his band play or just to look at him perform, as he has no arms and plays the guitar with his feet. Like his predecessor, he is not enamoured with the name, and he later talks about the experience of being paid for being stared at:

I'm looking at all these people staring at me, you know and I'm realising I gave them twenty seconds of my energy, equivalent to a sound check and people pay for that over and over and over again, and the thing is people are looking at me with all these preconceptions, poor little man you know, on the ground you know he has to travel in the freak show to make money you know, but the matter of the fact is I'm taking their money you know. They leave that freak show poorer people than when they came in and I leave richer. Who's exploiting who? (Tatum, Simon, 2011, p. 18:38-19:25)

Common words, with the same sentiments being expressed by both men, seventeen years apart. Garland-Thomson notes that it was the main agenda of human exhibits in freak show to make money, that they did not necessarily mind the term 'freak' and instead looked down on the audience as they were not members of their club. However, Garland goes on to question the consent of the human exhibits in freak shows, and whether this consent was compromised by the nature of social views, and the marginalisation of disability, at the time. She states that exploitation and the cohesion of consent should be considered when taking about the morality of the freak-show.

*The Last Freak Show* seems to be a recurring title. Garry Robson, artistic director of Graeae's play, *Fittings: The Last Freak Show*, talks about where the play came from, having sprung from an original thought around the everyday experience for people with disabilities, in wearing fittings (such as wheelchairs, orthotics), to navigate a prominently 'alien environment':

... for many disabled people to be stared at – in someone's wonderful phrase 'me and Madonna get looked at when we walk into a room' – from there it was a short roll to consider what it was like to be exhibited, and from there a minor lurch to reclaim from the dustbins of history what was one of the few opportunities for crips in past times – The Freak Show.' (Sealey, 2002, p. 226)

*Fittings*, inspired by the historic freak-shows, exaggerates the life narratives of their acts, blurs the lines between fantasy and reality, bringing history into the present day. Over the next few pages I will use excerpts from the play *Fittings: The Last Freak Show* which is part of the

collection of plays, *Graeae Plays 1* (Sealey, 2002). I will do this in order to illustrate the socio-historic thinking that I feel explains much of the way in which disability meets the performative.

**Gustav:** ‘There are monsters and prodigies – creatures who live in the shadows, outside the limits of your imagination.’ (p. 228)

In the performance of *Fittings: The Last Freak Show*, spectators enter a large tent on New Year Eve, but once inside they realise that this is no fantasyland. Gustav Drool, the ringmaster’s character, declares at the beginning of the play that, “this is the message. But it’s in code.” (p. 229). I argue that this play lays bare not the life of a freak, but the life of a disabled person. It asks questions that normative culture is afraid to such as whether performers in the freak show actually have sexual relationships. It looks at disabled hierarches within the disabled community, as this quote illustrates:

**Avia:** She’s a metaphor, I can’t stand metaphors. You are not a freak. A Real Freak. (p. 235)

They even reference what I mention earlier in terms of the twisted spine of Richard the Third as a manifestation of his twisted soul:

**Avia:** No way. I’m not a metaphor  
I’m a phenomenon.  
You see, you can go either way with me.  
Physical state outside-  
Could be evidence of evil within-  
Richard the Third  
Rumpelstiltskin  
Or holy fool  
Quasimodo. (p. 235)

In the play, disabled performers look to the narratives of the past to examine present-day disabled issues, looking at perceptions of the disabled body and how their bodies are seen by society, as well as how they see each other. When Avia accuses another act of not being one

of them, of being a pretend 'freak', she is employing a hierarchy of disability. I use a similar hierarchy with the Flamingos in scene eight of my play, *Pupa*.

Disabled actor, Matt Fraser also looks to the freak-show for inspiration, in order to examine his own relationship to his body, as well as to examine the shared heritage of the disabled performer: the historic freak. Petra Kuppers discusses Fraser's desire for re-enactment when talking about his character *Sealboy*. He resurrects Stanley Berent aka *Sealo the Seal boy*, when he decided to go to Coney Island and join a side-show. He then goes on to star as *Seal Boy* in *American Horror Story: Freak Show*.

... Fraser was searching for his historic role model, his roots, his heritage. I stress these words: employing these terms- role models, roots, heritage - designates his disability experience not as an individual and singular faith, but as a cultural minority experience. (Petra Kuppers, 2014, p. 97)

In order to examine societal and personal relationships to their disability these performers examined first how historically they were seen and portrayed, they did this by seeing through historical representations of people who looked like them. While in this research I do not step into the shoes of a historic character that resembles me, I have examined how historically the disabled body has been perceived within historic characters and drawn from these characters when creating Puppet-Emma. For example, I drew inspiration from how the handless Lavina from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* has been represented in productions of the play (see chapter six).

## 4.4 Stereotyping

Monstrous disabled characters, like Gustav Drool from *Fittings: The Last Freak Show*, who disables others while being disabled himself, are rare. In a review of *Fittings: The Last Freak Show*, Lyn Gardner describes his treatment of the performers under his care:

But Drool is in combative mood and he's down fighting at the last chance saloon: exploiting his performers' weakness, manipulating their emotions and spurring them on to ever greater acts of degradation. And wouldn't you just know it, Drool is one of them. We all are. Drool knows all our weak spots, our prejudices and fears. "Who needs a hall of mirrors when you've got us?" (Gardner, 1999, p. 2)

Actor Garry Robson's role as Gustav Drool breaks through the stereotypical roles that disabled actors seem to be predominantly given in modern theatre. Actors with disabilities like Matt Fraser are challenging overtly politically-correct parts which disabled actors are offered, embracing the 'monstrous freak' stereotype of the past, rather than be pigeon-holed into being the inspirational or the nice guy. Going from one extreme to another, Matt Fraser describes in an interview with Mark Hay (2016) how disabled characters are now written with extreme sensitivity and given inspiring story lines, he calls this 'inspiration porn' (p. 11). He took this phrase from Stella Young (2014), who in her TED talk *I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much*, talks about how ordinary people with disabilities, have been turned into objects of inspiration. From historic freak shows where Garland-Thomson (2005) states a disabled person doing the ordinary was viewed as the extraordinary, such as a rolling a cigarette, to present day where the ordinary is viewed as inspirational, the disabled character is rarely just normal and every day. Their disability stands for something. It is a narrative prosthesis that signposts the viewer towards who this character is. I would surmise that the 'narrative prosthesis' of the disabled characters may have shifted from monstrous to inspirational, but the disabled body and as such the disabled character is still being pigeon-holed into representing one type of person. As I mentioned above, stereotyped disabled characters are prolific within Shakespeare

and fairytales however as Fraser in an interview with Hay (2016) points out, these parts are rarely given to disabled actors.

Matt Fraser, in an interview with the BBC, talks about being the first disabled actor to play the role of Richard the Third. Like Gustav Drool, Richard is heinous as he murders and manipulates his way to the crown: 'it's literally my job to make him as horrible as possible' (Fraser interviewed in Youngs, 2017). He has no problem portraying Richard this way and finds it refreshing to not have to be politically correct:

Shakespeare's words are liberating in an age when most modern disabled characters are portrayed with the utmost sensitivity...I don't have to start performing my own impairments," Fraser says. "I can just be, in my body. (Fraser interviewed in Youngs, 2017, p.16)

The next section will examine 'cripping up' when a disabled character is played by an able-bodied actor.

## 4.5 'Crippling up'

Modern theatre, film and story still influences, to a significant degree, how both society in general and a person with a disability sees the disabled body. MacLean (2014) states that freak shows are continuing to influence the marginalised portrayal of people with disabilities, in film and theatre. Disabled characters are still as present as ever, and while the interpretation may have changed from universally wicked to a more benign range of characterisations. House with No Steps<sup>17</sup> (2016) asserts that these characters are for the most part still stereotypes, not fuelled

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<sup>17</sup> *House with No Steps* is an Australian's disability service provider, 'dedicated to giving people with a disability greater choice, control, and freedom – empowering them to live life on their own terms across NSW, Qld, Vic, and the ACT.' (House with No Steps, 2016).

by testimonies of people with disabilities and not played by people with disabilities. House with No Steps wishes to provoke change by challenging the media representation:

Our challenge to the media: let's move away from these stereotypes and instead represent people with disabilities as three-dimensional people, not caricatures. (House with No Steps, 2016)

This can be achieved by representing people with disabilities in the media as three-dimensional characters driven by a process of consulting people with disabilities, with the characters and plots written by people with disabilities, and the parts played by people with disabilities. If achieved, I hope that the next generation of people with disabilities will have positive role models that look like them, to look up to, thus dispelling negative views that fuel societal and personal views of the disabled body. However, for the most part it seems that currently, these disabled characters are written by able-bodied authors and generally are played by able-bodied actors.

'Crippling up' is a term coined by disabled playwright Kaite O'Reilly (2005) to describe when able-bodied actors play disabled characters. Hutcheon (2013) traces the path of the word cripple, from its exclusive initial use in describing a person with a disability; to its meaning widening to describe an, 'action/event/object/person, not useful according to its intended purpose, or weakened' (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 2). Cripple developed a derogatory meaning and as such stopped being used within research vocabulary to describe a person with a disability. However, and as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Moore (2017) notes that through reclaiming these negative words and making them our own, we take back control of their meaning. In this way, the word 'cripping' in the last few years has been used as a way for the disabled community to name themselves and take back control and power:

There is a dearth of plays with disabled characters, and when these are produced, the parts are invariably played by non-disabled or hearing actors. Those who know me and my play *Peelings* will know I'm not a fan of this kind of casting. As one of the characters says in *Peelings*, a play all about performance. (O'Reilly, 2011, p. 1)

O'Reilly (2011) notes that there is an array of disabled characters in theatre that never get played by disabled actors. These are often in plays that are neither played in, nor written by people with disabilities. McDonagh (2015) published an article in *Irish Theatre Magazine* called 'Crippling Up - Copping On'. She was exasperated at her isolation as a disabled performer in Irish theatre and at the 'cripping up' of able-bodied performers. Both McDonagh and Fraser raise the issue of the "authentic body" of the disabled performers. Fraser looks at 'attitudinal barriers' that need to change but points out that they have not changed in twenty years. McDonagh talks about the struggle within Ireland to find disabled performers that suit the body type of the disabled character:

For me the question of crippling up is an exercise purely for the non-disabled ego: the illusion that you can control, modify and contain, if not your own body, then somebody else's. The dilemma is: what do you do in a country that prides itself on a legacy of being part of the universal canon of theatre but pays no real dividends to disabled artists or performers? 'Dividends' in this context is used as a metaphor for cultural inclusion. In short, the authentic disabled aesthetic is erased out of Irish theatre and performances. (McDonagh, 2015, p. 6)

In a recent article written by Laura Purcell Gates and I (2017) in response to McDonagh's provocation, we propose puppetry as a practice uniquely situated to intervene in ideological constructions of the disabled body both onstage and off. This addresses a core concern of McDonagh's work:

They say an actor should be able to perform any part, borrow an aesthetic. There are some parts that actors can't play. Characters are built, shaped, pulled and stretched to envelop an outside reality and bring it inside themselves. (McDonagh, 2015, p. 7)

Whereas actors are typecast by their bodies, puppets are not. As puppets are materially constructed they can represent any body shape, and this allows puppeteers to not be typecast by their own bodies, as they create bodies specifically for the characters they need to represent. Puppets are similar to McDonagh's description of character above in that they are made, moulded and manipulated, and when they take to the stage, they place our outside realities within themselves:

... this ability to be two things at once allow puppets to create polyphonic performances while the story unwinds, associations thread in and out... freeing actors from the constraints of the human body. (Blumenthal, 2005, p. 101)

As a playwright who writes for puppetry, I create my characters to represent any disability and ability. Therefore, within the theatre that I propose and make, a disabled performer could perform their own impairment or that of someone else. In chapter three, I peered into the history of the disabled puppet and found it lacking, however, in recent years performers like disabled actor Fraser, and disabled musician Marshall, disabled puppeteers are taking to the stage to create work that seeks to both challenge and rupture views around the disabled body. Chapter five will discuss recent and current work which, like *Pupa*, uses disabled narrative to tackle how society sees the disabled body. Whilst there is a lack of academic discourse in this area, it is important that contemporary performance practices are fully examined and understood, in order that this research can be adequately located. Chapter five looks at puppeteers who are doing just this, using the puppet's body to explore their own disabled body.

In this chapter, I have looked at the stereotyped representation of the disabled body within theatre, fables and freak shows. This has been done by examining the social history of the disabled performer and disabled characters within performance to see how they have both influenced, but also been influenced by societal beliefs today. I have looked to the past, to the images that the freak shows conjure up to help me situate the negative views that surround

disability, which until recently had undoubtedly been part of the complex landscape which played a part in preventing me from identifying as such. Through combining historical disabled characters, with testimonies of people with a disability, I attempt to reclaim the disabled narrative something that will be discussed further in chapter six.



## CHAPTER 5

# Disabled Puppet Theatre: Reclaiming the Disabled Narrative

In the last few years puppet theatre companies have emerged to create work around the personal stories of those with disabilities and that of disabled culture. This chapter will look to these puppet performances as they frame one of the concepts that lies at the heart of *Pupa*, the use of puppetry to explore the disabled body, and the way my artistic practice is located within a broader field of work. While all these stories are unique, much like personal disabled narratives, there are common themes expressed in this work as to what it is to live as a disabled person in an able world. I also wish to examine *Pupa* with reference to other work in the field, for reasons of cross-comparison, in order to see where parallels lie. This is done because of the practical parallels with this work. As noted, work of this nature is a relatively new practice, and therefore, there is a dearth of academic literature in this field, so this chapter will be mainly descriptive, as well as looking to personal interviews in addition to theatrical analysis and reviews.

When I introduce my research by explaining that it is situated within puppetry and disability studies, for the most part it is assumed that I am using puppets therapeutically to work with people with disabilities, as this is the most common use of puppets in relation to disability. Whereas professional disabled puppeteers creating work around their own story is not commonly known, puppets are potentially a powerful therapeutic tool to engage a child or adult. Applied puppeteers and puppet therapists are now working in hospitals, nursing homes

and schools, creating puppets for and with children with disabilities. Smith (2015) notes that the term applied puppetry is a relatively new term, which has borrowed its concepts from applied theatre, and that it is where puppeteers work with in schools, hospitals and community settings. One of the subsets of my practice is applied puppetry; however, this research does not aim to fit into this therapeutic category. Through investigating the history of disability and puppetry I found that while the history of the disabled puppeteer was largely non-existent, there was a history of puppetry working with people with disabilities in a therapeutic way. The oldest record I found was from the 1920's and 1930's in Ypsilanti State Hospital in Michigan. Here, Brown (1937) notes the use of puppets within the occupational therapy department:

(A)n occupational therapist from Ypsilanti State Hospital in Michigan, stressed that although puppets should look attractive and be easily manipulated, occupational therapists should be more concerned with adapting puppets to the requirements of the patient than in creating a super finished product. (M. E. Phillips, 1996, p. 231)

While puppet therapy lies in a different field to this research, this statement illustrates the cross-overs that can occur. As examined in chapter three, part of my journey research has led me to explore how assistive technologies can be adapted to suit the puppeteer's requirements and become an aid in the telling of the story (see also the discussion in chapter seven).

The puppetry form allows the artist to use abstraction and imaginative visual storytelling and lends itself well to initiating a non-disabled audience to the lived experiences of the disabled. In this chapter I will explore puppet work created by *Graeae Theatre Company*, *Hijinks*, *Daryl Beeton* and *Corina Duvyn* to demonstrate how the puppet has the ability to highlight, by being both fantastical and abstract, the reality of the disabled narrative. From puppets being put into a literal box, to puppets unable to navigate a disproportionate world, these shows shine a sometimes, farcical light on what it is like to be disabled and the absurdity of an exclusive world.

## 5.1 *A Square World*

Daryl Beeton's work looks at inclusion and celebrates what it is to be different. In his piece *A Square World* which toured the UK, Italy and Germany in late 2016 and early 2017, his puppet performers are foam squares. The world is made for these squares. The human performer sits behind a table-top puppeteering the squares around their perfect world which has been specifically designed for them. However, in an accident, where the puppeteer wheelchair rolls over a square, one of the squares becomes a circle. It is here that the audiences see that the performer has a disability, as in order to pick that circle up, he comes out from behind the table in his wheelchair. Suddenly the world becomes harder to navigate for this circle.



FIGURE 5-1: PRODUCTION SHOT OF *A SQUARE WORLD*, IMAGE COURTESY OF DARYL BEETON

This piece demonstrates what it is to change shape and transition from abled to disabled, suddenly becoming other. The circle can no longer fit in the seats, play with the same toys, and navigate the square steps. It is now completely left out. *A Square World* makes the point that there is nothing inherently inferior about the disabled body; it is just that the world they inhabit is not inclusive and is designed around a different type of body.

Thus, by using puppets to represent aspects of the experience of the disabled community, the play crystallises their experience in a way that is pithy and understandable. Similarly, in *Pupa*, I use visuals and character archetypes such as the butterfly and the caterpillar, in order to make it clear that I am exploring the liminal journey someone goes on when they transition to suddenly becoming disabled and thus perceived as ‘other’.

## 5.2 Meet Fred

*Meet Fred* is a puppet and performance show by Inclusive theatre company *Hijinks*. Fred is a puppet. He gets taken out of his box by actor Gareth John who is playing the role of a stage manager. He lies him down on the table ready for the show; he is lifeless. Fred the puppet at first does not know he is a puppet and much like Puppet-Emma, has a realisation moment. In *Pupa* Puppet-Emma discovers her casts and prototype heads, while Fred discovers his puppeteers. When asked, ‘what do you want to be?’, he answers, ‘I guess I just want to be like everyone else, I just want to be a regular guy’. He just wants to be a normal guy like everyone else, but that’s hard when you’re a two-foot-tall cloth puppet.



FIGURE 5-2: PRODUCTION SHOT OF *MEET FRED*, COURTESY OF HIJINKS THEATRE

In an interview with puppet Fred and the cast of *Meet Fred*, Tracey (2016) of BBC News asks what puppets and disabled people have in common. Tracey asks Fred if he considers himself disabled, and Fred, voiced by puppeteer, Daniel McGown turns the question back on her asking what she means by disability. Tracey quotes the social model of disability stating that disability is when one is impaired by society such as inaccessible buildings. This Fred can relate to. As a two-foot puppet, man-made environments are not accessible for him.

*Hijinks* expertly highlight both the physical and social problems that arise when one's body is not the 'norm'. Much like *Pupa*, this piece of theatre was devised with the artists from *Hijinks*, and issues that puppet Fred faces in the show are taken from the lived experiences of some of the disabled members of the company; the creation of the show is led by the disabled voice. What links *Pupa* and all the puppet theatre pieces in this chapter is that they are primarily led by the disabled voice. Proud (2017) discusses why this authentic voice is necessary, citing the 1995 UK Disability Discrimination Act slogan 'Nothing about us, without us!', and stating that people with disabilities need to be consulted when writing and performing disabled characters so as not to remove these characters from the reality of disability:

It is the duty of the arts to highlight and change perceptions. The problem comes when non-disabled people are the only people creating the narrative. While they might be able to understand some of the medical aspects, to represent us they must understand our culture and that is where most depictions of disability fail. (Proud, 2017, p. 8)

In *Meet Fred*, when Fred describes the experience of not being paid, or having his puppetry allowance reduced, he is echoing the authentic voice of *Meet Fred* actress Lindsay Foster, who has had issues with claiming Disability Allowance. One of the reasons Foster cites for these issues is that, 'you're either disabled or you're not, and I'm kind of in the middle' (Tracey, 2016). Being in a liminal area between being classified as disabled or abled by society is a sentiment that was expressed by Conor during one of the interviews I conducted with him, describing being both a

part of, and not a part of the disabled and able community at the same time, ‘living in two lands; both broken’ (Fisher, 2017, p. 9). Fred is told that he has to apply for work and cannot be paid as a performer because he will lose his Puppetry Living Allowance. As he is a two-foot puppet and made of cloth, the work proposed would be impossible for him to do. When he does not take the jobs offered, he is threatened with losing part of his allowance, which would lead to the loss of one of his puppeteers. He ends up losing his leg puppeteer; another example of disabling forces from outside being visited upon someone:

**Fred:** ‘do any of us fit a particular box ... I have a literal box’

While disabled people must tick a box to demonstrate they are in the group, this puppet (Fred) is kept in a box. This demonstrates how puppets have the ability to make metaphors literal and draw attention to the absurdity of the situation. *Meet Fred*, as with *The Square World*, both portray a puppet body in a non-puppet accessible world. Whereas in the square world its inaccessible nature is due to its shape, in *Meet Fred* he is in a human world where everything is proportionately too big for him to reach, inviting comparisons with a disabled body with little disabled accesses in the real world. This is done in order to bring awareness to accessibility issues. A circle in a square world; a two-foot puppet in a world where the average male is six feet. These two shows make us look at the world and see it as an outsider.

In *Meet Fred* the puppet first rails against the puppeteers trying to break free of them. The puppeteers are made visible as the manipulators, and this dramatic metaphor is used to demonstrate the similarities of the lives of the disabled actors on stage who too feel at times manipulated. This play is a story of a puppet trying to be like everybody else. Fred embarks on a journey to meet a girl and get a job. When his Puppet Living Allowance is threatened, this

foul-mouthed puppet takes a stand. He is refreshing, and takes relish in not being politically correct, fighting against patronising stereotypical roles that I discussed in chapter four:

Fred is no angel – his quick-witted profanities ensure that the piece is refreshing unwholesome and steers far away from any temptation to infantilise disability. Or puppets. (Hughes, 2016, p. 3).

Puppet Fred clearly demonstrates the absurdities that a disabled person navigating an abled world must contend with.

### 5.3 *Life Out Side the Box*

Corina Duyn’s puppet project, *Life Outside the Box*, challenges the boxes that disabled people are put in. It premiered at the 2017 *International Picture This Disability Film Festival* in Calgary, Canada.

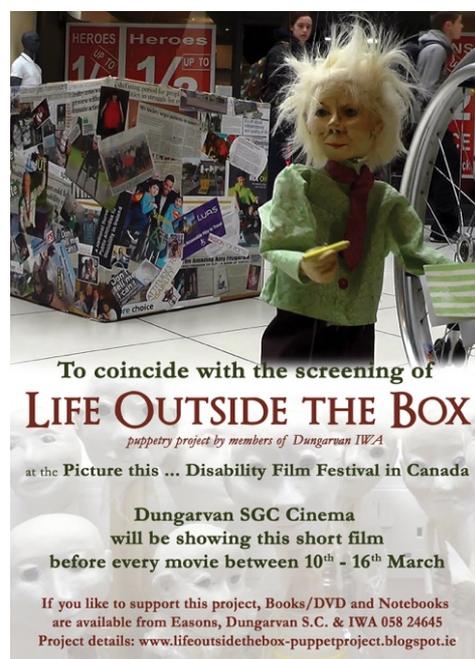


FIGURE 5-3: LIFE OUTSIDE THE BOX FILM POSTER, IMAGE COURTESY OF CORINA DUYN

Duyn is an artist who is also a member of the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA). She was approached by the staff of IWA to run a puppet project with her fellow members, who were of

a range of ages between 27 and 73. They were all living with ‘limited/partial mobility, congenital physical disabilities, long term illness, or acquired brain injuries’ (Duyn, 2016, p. 1). In order to climb out of the metaphorical box that the participants felt society had put them in, they first physically build a box that their puppets would emerge from. This was a cardboard box filled with news articles around disability. While making the puppets, the participants talked about their puppets having arthritis, large heads and one eye:

Their story becomes clear to us. Their story – Our story. Society would like to put us in a box. The disability box. Our thoughts: Step out of the box and you are free. (C. Duyn, personal correspondence, 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2016)

One of the participants, Amy, made a women puppet that flies on a butterfly. She sees the butterfly as a symbol of re-emergence from a hard time, but stronger than before. Although she did not choose to be disabled, she can choose how she feels about herself and her new identity. She does not mention how society sees her, just that we have the choice to not let that influence our own perception of ourselves. Her representation as a butterfly and her attitude of being happy in your own skin is akin to that of Gunther and his reasoning behind being represented as a caterpillar in *Pupa*, something I will examine in more depth later.

What *Life Out Side the Box* demonstrates as a piece is that as a person with disabilities, you are surrounded by boxes; ones to tick, ones to climb out of and ones that society have made inaccessible. That a puppet emerging from a simple box can speak of reclaimed disabled identities, non-conformity to stereotypes and inaccessibility, demonstrates to me why the puppet is the perfect tool to carry the disabled narrative.

Through this research journey, I now associate as someone as having a disability, but I struggle to tick the literal box, the box to identify as disabled. I have often wondered whether this is

because in ticking it, I feel labelled. Instead of being in the box, I have tried to question whether disability might just be one of many boxes/identities that I as a person with a disability have. Howard Axelrod's article *Seeing Outside the Disability Box* looks at what it is to not fit inside or outside the disability box:

Perhaps it seems that because my impairment is largely invisible, I've let an invisible shame keep an important part of my identity invisible, too. Or perhaps it seems I'm ambivalent because there's no appropriate box for me. (Axelrod, 2017, p. 9)

Many of the participants in this research, myself included, rather than associating our identity as being solely one of being disabled, instead associate with the idea of having a disability. A disability that is just one facet of the many identities that we hold.

#### **5.4 Graeae Theatre Company**

*Graeae* is a London based theatre company formed in 1980. The company is made up of artists with physical and sensory disabilities. Their artistic statement is to create:

... a force for change in world-class theatre, boldly placing D/deaf and disabled actors centre stage and challenging preconceptions. (Graeae, 1980)

I interviewed Amit Sharma from *Graeae Theatre Company* in December 2015. I asked Amit what *Graeae* meant. He told me the story of Medusa and the Graeae sisters. The Graeae sisters shared a single tooth and a single eye. Perseus went to them to find Medusa. When they refused to tell him where she was, he stole their tooth and eye refusing to give it back unless they revealed to him where Medusa was. The sisters explained where to find Medusa and after extracting the information he needed from them, he broke his promise and threw their eye and tooth in the river. Amit said the reason their theatre company is called after Graeae is because

it was Perseus who disabled them. Until he arrived, they were happy and able, sharing their one eye and tooth.

So, Perseus, like the characters of Cat and the Fox in *Pupa*, is a character that represents society as a disabling force. Whereas Perseus tricks the Graeae sisters out of their sight and tooth, in *Pupa*, Cat and Fox take Character-Conor's and Puppet-Emma's mouth, in both cases in an attempt to subdue the disabled character in order to increase the power balance in their favour. However, unlike the Graeae story, my story goes on to reveal that we are also Cat and Fox, but that this is fuelled by societal influences on how we view ourselves (see a further discussion of this in chapter six).

In the interview with *Graeae Theatre Company*, Amit Sharma, he told me about their multi award-winning show *The Iron Man*, which was adapted from the book of the same name by Ted Hughes. It tells the story of a boy, Hogart, who becomes friends with a 5-metre-high giant iron man who arrives one day. Hogart, like the other people, is initially scared of him, but is drawn to him and they become friends. Amit told me the story was perfect for *Graeae Theatre Company* as it encompassed many metaphors of disability. It was about a giant man who is seen as different and is misunderstood by the rest of society, until eventually he saves them from an alien invader. Amit brought out a small version of the puppet to show me and showed me pictures of the giant puppet.

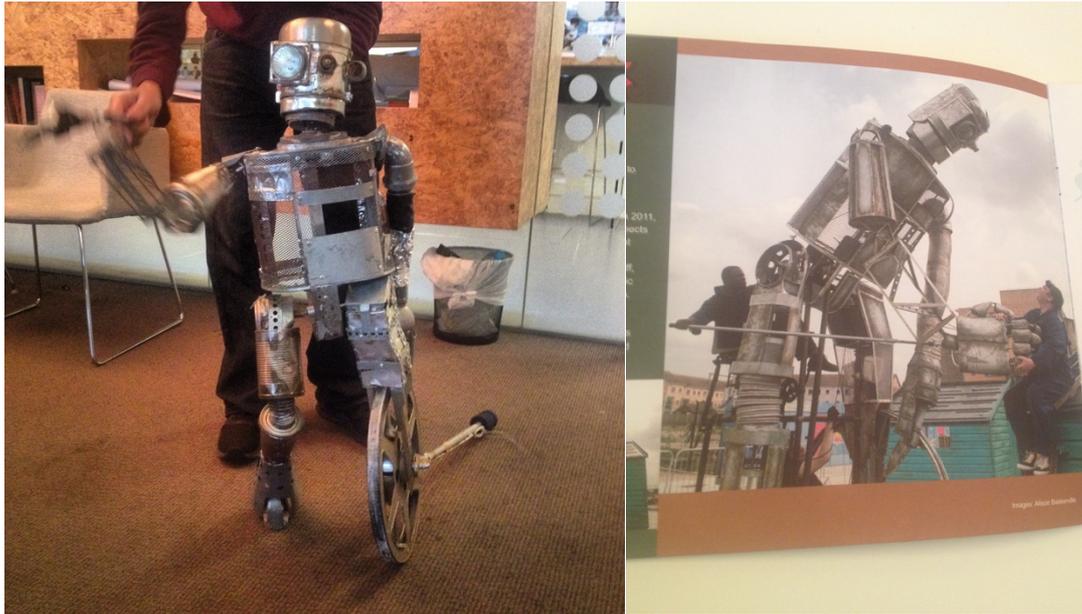


FIGURE 5-4: MINIATURE IRON MAN PUPPET, AMIT SHARMA DEMONSTRATED HOW TO OPERATE THE PUPPET IN AN INTERVIEW DECEMBER 2015, & PHOTOGRAPH OF PROGRAM, WITH LARGE IRON MAN PUPPET, TAKEN IN GRAEAE THEATRE, LONDON

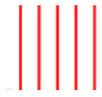
He told me that in order to better represent the disabled body, their iron man puppet combines elements of both man and machine. With a mixture of powered wheelchair components, he stands sixteen feet high. He is not only a man-cyborg hybrid, but in fact a cyborg-puppet hybrid, much like my exo-skeleton. This is a perfect example of how puppets as a material body can be used to visually tell the disabled narrative, on its body.

It is only in the last few years that disabled puppeteers have emerged to tell their own stories through the puppet. Work like companies such as *Hijinks* and *Graeae*, and individuals such as Daryl Beeton and Corina Duyn are still rare. In this chapter I have sought to look at disabled puppet artists who through their work explore their own narrative. While we are few in number, it can be clearly seen from this chapter that I am not alone in creating work around disability, puppetry and identity. However, whereas the other puppet pieces cited in this chapter are pieces of puppetry art, *Pupa* is firstly a piece of ethnopuppetry research and this is where its uniqueness lies. All practice can be constructed and examined through a research lens. However, and as examined in chapter one through looking at the work of Nelson (2003) and

Trimingham (2002), all practice is not research unless it is explicitly framed as such, comprehensively scrutinised and documented, with that documentation generating new knowledge, and that new knowledge being disseminated to broader communities for whom it is of interest and relevance:

PAR is doing itself no favours by claiming that ‘all practice is research’. All practice is relevant to research but does not necessarily contribute to research until it is subject to analysis and commentary, using a language that aims to be as clear and unambiguous as possible. (Trimingham, 2002, p. 54)

The next chapters in this thesis discuss in greater depth my practice research in puppetry and disability and the practice of ethnopuppetry, as represented in my play, *Pupa*.



## CHAPTER 6

### *Pupa's* characters and the reality within

This chapter will look in detail at my practice-based research play *Pupa*. I will begin by examining the testimonies of the research participants to explore how they inform the characters and events in the play. In discussing the participant's testimonies and the characters that are inspired by them, it will become evident how my own story is woven through *Pupa*. This chapter will also examine the journey that Puppet-Emma takes in *Pupa*, how she splits herself and her identity in two, and the ways in which the character's narrative intersects with my autobiographical story. It will also look at how Puppet-Emma's story intersects with Character Conor's story and how these sections of intersection are inspired by original tale of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi. I will then analyse in greater detail the other four characters in *Pupa*, who are inspired by stories of the research participants, by also looking at their interviews and other data collected as part of the research process. In doing this, I will examine how puppets are used to perform the disabled story of the six participants including my own. I will also examine whether the puppet's body can visibly and physically capture how the participants feel about our own disabled identity, and in so doing, somehow disrupt cultural or personal constructs of disability? The participants in this study represent a wide diversity within the spectrum of disability and as such represent a wide diversity of perspectives.

One of the fundamental aspects of disability is that it is a wildly diverse phenomenon. In fact, in some ways diversity is one of the defining qualities of disability. Mackelprang & Salsgiver (2016) regard disability as a diverse phenomenon and suggest that as opposed to seeing

themselves as ‘other’, a person with disabilities should regard themselves as part of the diverse elements that form society. Couser (2005) argues that disability is a broader spectrum than ‘race, gender, class, and sexual orientation’:

Furthermore, because of the way this minority is constituted, it is arguably more heterogeneous than those of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Disabilities may affect one’s senses or one’s mobility; they may be static or progressive, congenital or acquired, formal (affecting the shape of the body) or functional, visible or invisible. (Couser, 2005, p. 96)

A person who is disabled is someone whose body or mind is in some way different from what is considered to be a normative body type. There is no cast-iron definition of where, on the spectrum of human physical diversity, an individual passes from being ‘able-bodied’ to being ‘disabled’. Testament to this are the six participants of this research whose experiences are spread across the spectrum of human physical diversity. Siebers (2008) states that people with physical disabilities cannot be condensed into one clearly defined framework.

Ashby (2011) notes that within disability studies, qualitative research needs to be either ‘giving voice’ or ‘facilitating voice’. The characters in *Pupa* reclaim their own voices, and the research participants help tell their own stories through their art forms. This chapter will therefore focus on voice and the way in which *Pupa* seeks to both give voice to and facilitate the voices of the research participants in order that the stories of artists and disability can better be heard.

## **6.1 *Pupa*: The Freakish Metamorphic Tale of Us**

A puppet girl struggling with her disabled part splits herself in two, casts off her disabled part and banishes it to the room of forgotten limbs. A man falls from normality, breaks and reforms. As they go on their quests to find a sense of wholeness they navigate a dark coma world. They

encounter many characters on their way that help them on their quest. These characters range from a wise bug, fragmented and broken bodies, singing mouths in jars, and silence.

Within *Pupa*, there are five principal characters, each of whom stemmed from the participants stories. Puppet-Emma is primarily informed by my own story. Character-Conor is informed mainly by Conor and Patrick's stories. Gunther the Caterpillar is informed by Gunther's story, Puppet-Deirdre is informed by Deirdre's story, and Kimberley the Dancer is informed by Kimberley's story. All the other characters we meet in the play – the Doctor and Owl Doctor, the Conductor, the Flamingos, and Cat and Fox – are dramatic representations created from elements of all of our stories.

As described in chapter one, and using ethnopuppetry and auto-ethnopuppetry methods, these characters are based upon the experiences and personal testimony of the other artists with disabilities that I interviewed, in the same way that the story of the central character is based upon my own lived experience. Mixing puppetry, masks, ceramics, song and film, together we told the freakish, metamorphic tale of us. In a land where we are all different, I question what the concept of normality even means. I tell stories of coming out/identifying as disabled and navigating the grey area between disabled and abled. Working with both abled and disabled artists I have created a fragile environment where puppet bodies break and reform to explore and embrace the disabled body.

In the performance of *Pupa*, audiences were lead through a multi-sensory, interactive, interpretation of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* as never seen before. Historically, puppet bodies are perfect 'able' bodies, and this piece experimented with unconventionally constructed puppets that represent the disabled body in a unique and unprecedented way. Appendices C, F,

G and H offers the full script, documentation of the performance, a short promotional video and a descriptive breakdown of the sequential story of *Pupa*, all of which will support the themes examined within this chapter.



FIGURE 6-1: PRODUCTION POSTER FOR *PUPA*, DESIGNED BY KEN COLEMAN

## 6.2 The Adventures of Pinocchio

*Pupa* was inspired by the original fairy-tale, *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (*Le avventure di Pinocchio*) written by Carlo Collodi in 1883, and which is referenced in both the play and this thesis. Here I will summarise the parts of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* that inspired *Pupa*, highlighting its links with disability. I do this to give the reader an insight into my attraction to being inspired by *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. Later in the chapter, I will go into greater detail to show the links with *Pupa* specifically with the Cat and Fox characters.

For me, the original story, *The Adventures of Pinocchio* is one that has many parallels with the experience of people with a disability. Pinocchio's body is outside the parameters of what is considered normal, being made of wood, unlike a 'real boy'. Pinocchio loses his legs when he falls asleep too close to a fire and his nose deforms and grows when he lies. Within the storyline, dis-obedience, laziness and lying are punished by deformity for the varying characters. I am not alone at looking at the character of Pinocchio as one that represents the disabled body. Smith suggests that the character of Pinocchio is autistic:

The protagonist of Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* illustrates numerous autistic phenomena such as communication difficulties, sensory and perceptual distortions and mindblindness. (Smith, 2017, p. 263)

Jackson (2017) uses the narrative of Pinocchio to look at his own identity crisis. He calls the wish for a person with a disability to be transformed into a different human form as 'Pinocchio syndrome'. One of the symptoms of this syndrome is the desire to exchange one body for another. Pinocchio is unhappy with his puppet body and is in search of being a real flesh and blood boy. This search to fit in and have a new body resonated deeply with the story I was telling in *Pupa*, specifically in the story of Puppet-Emma as she grapples with her new disabled body, all the while hoping to be reformed and transformed like Pinocchio.

Pinocchio is dis-obedient, and over the course of the tale he has his father Geppetto imprisoned, kills Jiminy Cricket, sells his school books, and runs away to Toyland. As a result, Pinocchio is punished by being disfigured: he is transformed into a donkey, his nose grows and his legs get burnt off. Pinocchio is portrayed as a very selfish puppet always taking the fun and easy option and not worrying about others:

Fate has decreed that all lazy boys who come to hate books  
and schools and teachers and spend all their days with toys

and games must sooner or later turn into donkeys. (Collodi, 1883, p. 101)

Throughout the tale, Pinocchio meets the Cat and Fox, who attempt to trick him out of his money. They go so far as to seek pity from Pinocchio by pretending to be disabled. I will discuss Pinocchio's interactions with Cat and Fox in a later section as this was a major influence in my development of the characters of Cat and Fox in *Pupa*.

At the end of the story of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, Pinocchio redeems himself by saving Geppetto who had been swallowed by a dogfish while looking for Pinocchio. On their way home, they meet Cat and Fox who are by now really blind and lame, and almost hairless. When they ask for help they are told by Pinocchio that they deserve what they have gotten, with the clear moral of the story being that misfortunes equals wickedness:

It was the Fox and the Cat, but one could hardly recognize them, they looked so miserable. The Cat, after pretending to be blind for so many years had really lost the sight of both eyes. And the Fox, old, thin, and almost hairless, had even lost his tail. That sly thief had fallen into deepest poverty, and one day he had been forced to sell his beautiful tail for a bite to eat. 'Oh, Pinocchio,' he cried in a tearful voice. 'Give us some alms, we beg of you! We are old, tired, and sick.' 'Sick!' repeated the Cat....you deserve it! Remember the old proverb which says: 'Stolen money never bears fruit', said Pinocchio. (Collodi, 1883, pp. 121–122)

Pinocchio, who has saved his money, now gives it all away to save the Blue Fairy and is rewarded for his selflessness by being turned into a real boy, and by Geppetto having his health restored. Again, there is a clear moral arc to this, in that the good are rewarded by their health returning, and receiving new normal bodies, which is in complete contrast to the earlier events in the story where the bad become disabled. A similar reward is offered to both Puppet-Emma and Character-Conor at the end of *Pupa*, however both turn it down.

Throughout the tale, Pinocchio encounters many characters who help him discover who he is and who he wants to be. Within *Pupa*, Puppet-Emma also meets many characters who help her to discover who she is. At the end of the tale, Pinocchio's wish is granted and an able bodied 'real-boy' materialises, invested with the soul that had hitherto lived within the body of the wooden puppet. The now empty (disabled) puppet form is discarded and left to one side, now no more than tinder. In *Pupa*, Puppet-Emma was also discarded and I (the real women) stepped forward. When the puppet is discarded in *Pupa* looks as if it is dramatically mirroring what happens to the puppet Pinocchio, it is really done to reveal that the story was mine and I am ready to come out from behind the puppet to show the reality of my story at that point in the play.

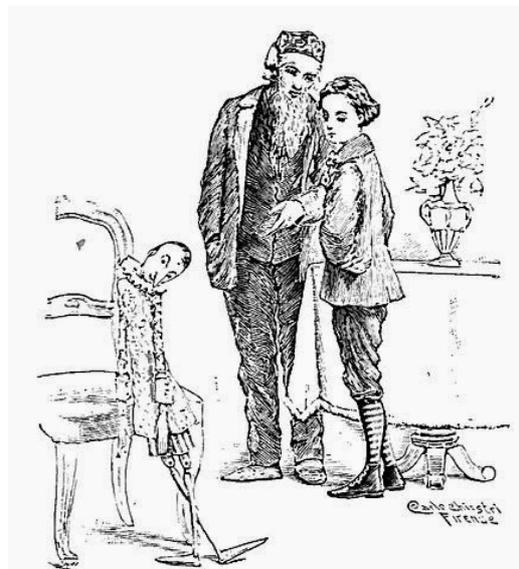


FIGURE 6-2: ILLUSTRATIONS FROM "LE AVVENTURE DI PINOCCHIO, STORIA DI UN BURATTINO", CARLO COLLODI, BEMPORAD & FIGLIO, FIRENZE 1902 (DRAWINGS AND ENGRAVINGS BY CARLO CHIOSTRI, AND A. BONGINI), IMAGE PORTRAYING BODY OF PINOCCHIO PUPPET DISCARDED ON CHAIR, WHILE GEPPETTO AND "REAL BOY" PINOCCHIO LOOK ON.

Within my work, I see Pinocchio as a rebirth plot, wherein a disabled boy is rewarded for being good with a miracle and his disabled puppet body is discarded in favour of a brand new able bodied one. This is another example of the good being rewarded by becoming normal, insinuating the ones that are not fixed are not good (see the discussion in chapter four).

### **6.3 Puppet-Emma's Character and the reality within**

This section will look at the development of Puppet-Emma and how both my story and my research helped form the character. In particular, it will focus specifically on my personal views of my disabled arm; as an object, a puppet, and as a separate identity and how this informed the character development. By tracing the journey of my disability within this piece of theatre; from able-bodied to 'abelist', to claiming my identity and finally, 'coming out' as disabled, I aspire to bring to light and subvert ableist perceptions of the disabled body. Stories weave in and out of each other and at times it is impossible to tell where one ends, and another begins. For that reason, while looking at Puppet-Emma's journey I also discuss how it interacts with Character-Conor's peregrination.

#### **6.3.1 Splitting my identity**

The construction of Puppet-Emma was informed by the paper puppet I made as part of the initial research workshop discussed in chapter two. The paper puppet had a detached left arm that was puppeteered by the right hand, making it into a puppet. This paper puppet made me question if I saw my hand as a puppet and subsequently an object.

Our hands are the tools that we use to interact with the world, to feed ourselves and to wash ourselves. But over the twenty-five years since my accident, I often wondered whether my right arm had become my left hand's carer. Over the years of cleaning and dressing my left arm, a symbolic intellectual split had occurred in me; instead of my hand cleaning and dressing me, I was caring for it. This, without my realising, had led me to see my arm as separate. This separation was also fuelled by the need to not be, or be seen to be disabled. If my arm was a separate disabled identity I could continue to think of myself as able-bodied. The rest of my body was the dominant group and in order to keep my social standing and remain in my social

categorisation, I had made my arm ‘other’. I used Puppet-Emma within *Pupa* to physically show this split within my own identity.

As described in chapter two, *Pupa* begins with a recreation of the day that my accident occurred. I do not remember much from that day, so the dramatic action in the play is a reconstruction as much as it is a piece of autobiography.



FIGURE 6-3: PRODUCTION SHOT *PUPA*, SCENE 1, PUPPET-EMMA AND DOCTOR, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

When we meet the first Puppet-Emma in Scene One, she is made to look as life-like as possible; her face is a cast of my niece’s face, with a full head of hair, and clothing. Although she is a puppet I wanted her to look as realistic as possible to fit within this hospital scene and to be a contrast to the ‘other’ versions of her that the audience meet in coma world.

A doctor checks Puppet-Emma over for broken bones, and when he reaches her right arm she jumps. She attempts to move her arm and when it is unresponsive she is scared. She pushes the un-moving limb away from her and turns her back on it. With the doctor’s help the arm is

separated from Puppet-Emma, thus becoming its own character. This visual separation of a disabled body symbolises my (previously mentioned) intellectual split directly in the puppet's identity, separating her disabled part from the rest of her body.

The doctor then peels a layer of skin from her face, creating a translucent mask which joins with the arm. The mask of Puppet-Emma's face is a signifier of her identity, later appearing on the different versions of Puppet-Emma that we meet over the course of the play. Emma is now split in two – with the arm taking on a separate identity.



FIGURE 6-4: PRODUCTION SHOT *PUPA*, SCENE 1, THE ARM BECOMING ITS OWN IDENTITY, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

The two incarnations of Emma, her able-bodied self and her disabled body, look at one another, before her paralysed arm and the disabled identity that goes with it are banished into a box marked 'For the Room of Forgotten Limbs'. Not wanting to face what has happened, Puppet-Emma physically banishes her arm, which a puppet can do. In the real world, this is akin to me covering my arm and hiding my identity. This point in the play is about the puppet making real on its body and with its physical actions how I have felt in the past about my disability;

capturing the liminal stage of my transition, no longer able-bodied, but yet to see myself as disabled. The puppet is physically embodying the question of how I view my disability.

So far in *Pupa* we have met two different representations of Puppet-Emma. In *Coma World*, we meet the third representative, constructed in such a way as to draw attention to the fact that she is a puppet rather than a ‘real living person’.



FIGURE 6-5: MAKING PUPPET-EMMA, PUPPET-EMMA’S HEAD AFTER IT LOSES ITS MOUTH, IMAGES COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

The decision to have Puppet-Emma have an injury to her right arm rather than her left (as I did) was in part due to the technical practicalities of operating her. I require my right arm to operate her head and so I need to operate her arm with my disabled left hand. However, it was also a creative choice on my part. I wanted the puppet to be my mirror image as her story reflects part of my life. As noted earlier, my earlier puppets masked my body; this puppet was to mirror it, both metaphorically and physically, so that when I faced Puppet-Emma, my injured arm and hers, faced each other.

### 6.3.2 The need to feel whole: Cat and Fox

Schmiesing asks those with disabilities to consider would they would restore their bodies to a fully able-bodied state. I have asked this question of myself throughout my life:

If we were capable of restoring the body to an ideal able-bodied state, what point of time would we restore it to? And what point in time, similarly, would we restore a tale to in order to bring it back to an ideal state of wholeness (Schmiesing, 2014, p. 91)

As a child, I fantasised that I could travel back to a time before my accident and stop it from happening, or, that I would be miraculously fixed, visited somehow by my very own Fairy-Godmother. I also researched new ways for my injury to be fixed. This search to have my arm restored or fixed is what influences Puppet-Emma's search for a new body part.

In Coma World, Puppet-Emma examines her body: left leg; then right leg; then left arm but no right arm. Behind her, a right arm appears, emerging from the shadows. She tries to retrieve it; it is her first attempt to get a new arm, but it grabs her and after a brief struggle, she is pulled into the shadows. In this shadow world, she encounters Cat and Fox.

Cat and Fox are inspired by Collodi's Cat and Fox in *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. Pinocchio is effortlessly led astray by Cat and Fox who repeatedly try to con him out of his money, one pretending to be lame, the other blind, even going so far as donning disguises and hanging Pinocchio in a tree. All with the goal of coming back the next day to retrieve the money once he is dead. Pinocchio is taken down from the tree, and three doctors investigate whether he is dead. One of the doctors is an Owl who proclaims that Pinocchio is alive unless of course he is dead. This Owl Doctor appears in the last scene of Pupa and will be discussed presently. In the story he proclaims:

To my mind this Marionette is alive; but if, by any evil chance, he were not, then that would be a sure sign that he is wholly dead! (Collodi, 1883, p. 41)

After Pinocchio has recovered, Cat and Fox finally succeed in getting his money. They convince him that if he buries his money in the Field of Wonders and then leaves, on his return he will find a tree full of money. Pinocchio even ignores a wise Blackbird who tries to warn him of their trick, whereupon the Cat promptly eats the Blackbird:

Pinocchio, do not listen to bad advice. If you do, you'll be sorry!" Poor little Blackbird! If he had only kept his words to himself! In the twinkling of an eyelid, the Cat leaped on him, and ate him, feathers and all. (Collodi, 1883, p. 29)

In *Pupa*, Gunther the Caterpillar (in the form of a butterfly) warns Puppet-Emma not to trust Cat and Fox, getting his wings eaten by Cat as a result. I also made a decision to remodel some other events from the original text. The moment where Cat and Fox promise Pinocchio that by burying his coins in the ground a magical money tree will grow is combined with the scene where Pinocchio is strung up in the tree. In *Pupa*, Cat and Fox manage to take Puppet-Emma's mouth, by convincing her that they can give her that which she longs for; a replacement arm and for her to be whole of body again. Cat and Fox tell her that if she gives them her mouth, they will take her to a magical field where she can bury a branch, and in its place, a tree filled with perfect limbs will grow, as this excerpt shows:

**Fox:** There is a field, the field of wonders, and in this field, you can bury things, deep in the earth. Cover them with soil and water, and a pinch of salt for good luck, wait, for patience is a virtue. In the darkness sprouts limbs and blossoms that spiral up like a banyan tree and on these branches, will hang arms and limbs, and just take your pick. Don't you worry we are here to fix thee?

**Cat and Fox:** For this service, there will be a small price to pay



FIGURE 6-6: PRODUCTION SHOT OF *PUPA*, SCENE 4, CAT AND FOX STRING PUPPET-EMMA INTO A TREE, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC, ILLUSTRATIONS FROM "LE AVVENTURE DI PINOCCHIO, STORIA DI UN BURATTINO", CARLO COLLODI, BEMPORAD & FIGLIO, FIRENZE 1902 (DRAWINGS AND ENGRAVINGS BY CARLO CHIOSTRI, AND A. BONGINI), CAT AND FOX STRING PINOCCHIO INTO A TREE.

Once Puppet-Emma has agreed to the deal, Cat and Fox tie her, like Pinocchio, to a tree, so she will not renege on their deal. They leave her in the tree so that once their lie is discovered, they will be long gone. She is oblivious to Cat and Fox's deception and her subsequent oppression. Puppet-Emma does not realise she is being oppressed by giving up her voice, something that resonates strongly with disability theory:

If one does not critically understand they are oppressed and the state that they are in, they can never want or wish to be liberated and become free. Therefore, to control others is to take away their experience, for their experience is what unites them to create a collective identity, which aids in developing a social movement. (Nocella, 2008, p. 77)

By taking Puppet-Emma's voice away, Cat and Fox take the very thing that would liberate her. Echoing Nocella's idea, they 'take away' her 'experience', her power to tell her own story. Puppet-Emma is not the only character in *Pupa* to have her voice stolen. Cat and Fox have stolen many voices of disabled characters, such as Character-Conor and all the mouths in jars (discussed in section 6.3.2). In Nocella's terms, Cat and Fox by taking voices are stealing the possibility of disabled people to unite over their shared experiences and stand up for their rights as equal members in society.

Mouths in *Pupa* symbolises these voices. Puppet-Emma gives the Cat and Fox her mouth in an attempt to get her arm back. By giving up her mouth freely, and by not accepting that she is disabled, she is not claiming her voice and is disabled even more by society. If she was happy in who she was, she would not have fallen for the manipulations of Cat and Fox. She represents the repression of disability civil rights. In contrast, Character-Conor (see section 6.3) differs as he did not give his voice freely, and this illustrates someone who wasn't manipulated into giving up their voice but instead had it taken away by forceful appropriation.

As discussed in a previous chapter, if a disabled person has absorbed society's negative perception of disability, is ashamed of their disability and hides their difference as a result, as a result they now see themselves as 'other'. I argue that they have adopted an internalised 'ableist' view towards their disabled body by seeing it as lesser. Perceiving disability in this negative way and judgemental light means the newly disabled person is faced with two barriers – firstly, finding their inner voice and secondly, speaking up against the external societal voice. It was my intention in *Pupa* to show the difference between giving your voice up freely and having it stolen: the former suggests passivity and the latter a person who can speak out for their rights. Driedger (1989) notes:

If we have learned one thing from the civil rights movement in the U.S., it's that when others speak for you, you lose. (Driedger 1989, p. 28)

Puppet-Emma is passive in the play and does not fight for her rights therefore silencing herself, putting herself in the 'closet'. She has, in Driedger's terms above, let others speak for her. Puppet-Emma contends with both inner and outer judgement. However, Character-Conor is not influenced by society's views and fought for his voice as it was taken forcefully. He contends with societal judgement, he just does not let this influence how he sees himself, he, unlike Puppet-Emma is not an internalised 'ableist'. Internalising ableism means that a person

has not accepted disability as part of themselves, and as with internalised racism, this creates self-hatred, and this self-loathing adds to the silence that exists around internalised ableism.

Kovet suggests that it is:

... An involuntary reaction to oppression which originates outside one's group and which results in group members loathing themselves, disliking others in their group, and blaming themselves for the oppression – rather than realizing that these beliefs are constructed in them by oppressive socio-economic political systems. (Kovet cited in Campbell, 2009, p. 21)

Cat and Fox largely represent the external societal voice regarding disability in *Pupa*. In the second shadow scene, we see Character-Conor come under attack by the foxes. This part of the story stems from how the research participants felt they were bullied by others for being 'other'. Fox transforms into a pack of foxes, and physically attacks Character-Conor. Puppet-Emma jumps into the shadows and gets attacked by multiples of Cat; within the piece, this represents additional bullying forces which create invisible and physiological scars.



FIGURE 6-7: PRODUCTION SHOT OF PUPA, SCENE FIVE, CHARACTER-CONOR AND FOXES IN SHADOWS,  
IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

### 6.3.3 Functionless Prosthetics

While I physically have an arm, Puppet-Emma in the play does not as she has banished it. As Puppet-Emma journeys on her search to be whole, she accumulates various props or replacement prosthetics to mask that which is missing (her arm), even if they have no function or sometimes hinder her. This search clearly represents my personal desire to be fixed. My research on how disabled hands have been seen in other fictional representations, and within prosthetics, influenced my decision to have Puppet-Emma look whole in *Pupa*, even if her temporary substitute arm is functionless. Therefore, in this section I will examine how Puppet-Emma's character traits link with the narratives of plays, fairy-tales and my research around prosthetics.

Schmiesing notes that within the Brother Grimm's fairy-tales, characters with ailments and disabilities are only fully restored to health by either potions accumulated with great difficulty, magic water, or by, 'the magical disassembling and reassembling of body parts' (Schmiesing, 2014, p. 63). In my modern fairy-tale *Pupa*, Puppet-Emma has been disassembled by being split and now she seeks to be reassembled.

In scene three, Puppet-Emma realises that the tree of limbs will not grow, and she takes a half-buried branch and attaches it to her body in lieu of the limb she craves. This is a direct reference of Julie Taymor's adaptation of the play *Titus Andronicus*<sup>18</sup> simply called *Titus*<sup>19</sup>. In this play, Lavinia is robbed of her ability to communicate – her tongue is cut out, and her hands are

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<sup>18</sup> *Titus Andronicus* is a tragic play written by William Shakespeare. It was first performed in 1594. Titus is a general who returns after a ten-year war with the Goths. The queen of the Goths, Tamora, and her sons are his captives. Titus kills Tamora's eldest son and a series of revenge killings happen on both sides. Titus' daughter Lavinia gets caught up in this and is raped and mutilated by having her hands and tongue cut off by Tamora's two sons. Titus, who feels that he is putting her out of her misery, kills his daughter Lavinia.

<sup>19</sup> Julie Taymore's 1999 film *Titus* is an adaptation of *Titus Andronicus*.

severed. In the original Shakespearean version, he did not seek to hide disability, and in fact used it as a character device (see Chapter Seven). However, in Taymor's staging, instead of leaving her with exposed and bloody stumps, Lavinia is given various props such as branches as a proxy for her missing hands. Nicola M. Imbracsio (2012) suggests that the replacement of Lavinia's hands in both Julie Taymor and Peter Brook's<sup>20</sup> versions of *Titus Andronicus* is a way to show the audience a more complete 'acceptable' body, more like the one she had before her hands were taken:

These objects become "stage hands," or theatrical prosthetics, which seek to fulfill audience imaginations of the body in its previously whole state. Unlike Shakespeare's text, when these productions of *Titus Andronicus* use theatrical objects as prosthetics the body is no longer seen as a disabled body capable of violent retribution, but a disabled body in need of assistance. Brook's and Taymor's productions and their prosthetic impulse to "prop" the disabled body reflect more upon our own, modern, conceptions and biases about the disabled body than they do of Shakespeare's text and culture. (Imbracsio, 2012, p. 292)

Why does this need exist to complete the body? In Grimm's fairytale, *The Girl without Hands*, her husband fashions silver hands for her to wear rather than have stumps. These very impractical and non-functional hands seem to me more disabling than the stumps. Schmiesing talks about this unwillingness to portray the girl without hands, stating that illustrations in the book always portray the girl before she loses her hands, or, after she has gained substitute hands, which 'obscure her handlessness' (Schmiesing, 2014, p. 97). Since silver is connected with purity in fairy-tales, Schmiesing observes that the girl's replacement prosthetic silver hands are there to remind us of the girl's purity and distract from the horror of her father cutting her real hands off. They serve as a reward for her virtue; the greater reward coming at the end of the tale, when she is completely physically restored. So, I suggest that the need to complete the body within the telling of these tales is two-fold; firstly, it has stemmed from the authors'

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Brook staged *Titus Andronicus* in 1955.

or directors' desire to shield the reader or audience from the horror of the violent action that took the hands away and caused the disability. Secondly it is to portray a more complete and acceptable body, alleviating the reaction that might be induced by seeing an incomplete disabled body.

This choice of having functionless props masking the character's disability echoed something that was said in a talk by Ivan Owen (2017) about his work with e-NABLE, an open source prosthetic hand company. He discussed how many people he had encountered prefer a prosthetic hand that looks realistic and natural but that has no functional movement, to one with functionality that is clearly a prosthetic. He notes that aesthetics have generally played a major role when users of e-NABLE select a hand design. In some cultures, the desire for a normal appearance outweighs function. Owen offers the example of Nigeria, where amputees who received 3D printed limbs have sometimes opted for a design which looked more anatomically correct even though it has little or no active function. In other places, users have chosen to highlight their limb difference and select a device which expresses their personality:

An example of this is a young man named Luke who decided he wanted a hand with two thumbs as he liked the way it looked and it helped him to better grip a toy sword to whack his brother. (Owen, 2017)



FIGURE 6-8: LUKE WITH ONE OF HIS E-NABLE 3D PRINTED HANDS, IMAGE FROM ENABLINGTHEFUTURE.ORG

There is a long tradition in both fairy tales and religious stories of characters with disabilities being miraculously cured. The title character in *The Girl with No Hands* is given her hands back and restored to able-bodied-ness, while in *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, Gippetto's health is restored by the Blue Fairy. It is in the hope of such a miracle that Puppet-Emma embarks on her search, as she feels that her disabled body is unacceptable. These views of disability as being monstrous deformities that must be cured fit into the first stage of Eimir McGrath's 'Evolutionary Framework of Perception of Disability'. This first stage is characterised as follows:

The least evolved understanding of disability, the pre-Enlightenment view of disability as monstrous freak. (McGrath, 2013, p. 213)

The evolutionary path that McGrath ascribes to societal views of disability ends at a more enlightened view of disability, which is defined by an acceptance of corporeal difference. This path is in some ways a mirror of the quest that Puppet-Emma must make on her journey of self-acceptance.

### 6.3.4 Acceptance of new Identity

In *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, death does not stop Jiminy Cricket from giving Pinocchio advice. Instead, the cricket appears to him as a ghost. In *Pupa*, Puppet-Emma meets Gunther the Butterfly later in her journey, though he is now a caterpillar who is restricted to lying on his back, rather than a butterfly with the power of flight. Gunther the Caterpillar chides her, both for not listening to him, and for attacking him:

**Gunther the Caterpillar:** I tried to warn you, when I was a butterfly, but you swiped me from the sky and ate my wings and spat me out.

**Puppet-Emma:** No that was not me, that was Cat.

Gunther the Caterpillar calls Puppet-Emma out for hurting him, making her face what she has done, and to begin to realise that Cat is part of her. He attempts to make her take ownership of her own story, accusing her for blaming others for the loss of her arm and mouth. He tells her to look inward, and to ask herself was it not she who gave them both away:

**Gunther the Caterpillar:** I suppose it wasn't you who didn't listen, who sent your arm away and gave up your voice.

**Puppet-Emma:** No I mean yes, But I'm not used to it!

This is the start of Puppet-Emma's realisation that her identity has changed and a distinct turning point in her journey of 'coming out' as a person with a disability.

We next meet Puppet-Emma in Scene Ten, where she stands frozen with her head in a cloud, this can be read as a dramatic reflection on the idiom 'to have your head in the clouds'. The reasoning behind Puppet-Emma's mirroring of Kimberley the dancer's stillness (see section 6.5.2) with her head in the cloud, was in symbolically representing Puppet-Emma listening to someone else's story and allowing the space for that story to have its time, to have a voice. Like Pinocchio, her thoughts up to this point are only of herself, so by experiencing someone else's story first hand, she is thinking about someone other than herself. When she does emerge from the cloud, Kimberley the dancer has disappeared, and Puppet-Emma is faced with Cat. This is the first time we see Cat not in the shadows.

Cat has Puppet-Emma's face at this point, and she mirrors Puppet-Emma's moves, then bows and exits. Up to this point, in the shadows, the audience have seen Cat trick Puppet-Emma into giving up her voice, and multiple cats attack her in the shadows. The change in one of the villains in the play now becoming sympathetic to and representative of the protagonist is a

deliberate one. If Cat is merely a representation of society then it is society that is the disabling force, something which is not in keeping with the way in which disability is understood in this work. Puppet-Emma's desire to be normal, her desire to be 'fixed' means she does not want to be 'other'. In seeing herself as 'other' and seeking to be 'fixed', Puppet-Emma sees herself as lesser, believing cultural constructions of the disabled body to be true, thus reinforcing and echoing the same view as society's. The perspectives of both Puppet-Emma and society are therefore both to be seen in Cat's actions at this point. Tom Shakespeare notes that in an attempt to not be 'othered' people with disabilities will sometimes deny this part of their identity, thus reinforcing societies views on disability:

Using the notion of otherness, I suggested that the processes of denial and projection are involved in the cultural construction of disability. (Shakespeare cited in Barnes & Mercer, 1996, p. 98).

Puppet-Emma up to this point has been in denial, a hidden ableist perspective mirroring the point in my journey when I realised that I had not 'come out' as disabled. External influence and stereotypical views led Puppet-Emma on a road to putting herself in the disabled closet which was paved by a belief in the stereotypical negative views around disability and a wish for the normative body. Cat turning out to be another version of Puppet-Emma is a physical representation of the effects of societal pressure to be perfect.

### **6.3.5 The Room of Forgotten Limbs**

In the penultimate scene of *Pupa*, the audience enter 'The Room of Forgotten Limbs' with Puppet-Emma and Character-Conor. As described in chapter two, the set at this point is a coma-world version of the hospital set from Scene One. Here we meet an incarnation of the doctor from Scene One, in the form of an owl (inspired by the owl doctor in *The Adventures of*

*Pinocchio*). Printed on his doctor's coat are images of limbs. In front of the Owl Doctor sits two tables, one with a porcelain figure of Character-Conor, with his head separated from his body; and one with a porcelain figure of Character-Emma, with her right arm separated from her body. On the arrival of Puppet-Emma, Character-Conor and the travelling audience, the Owl Doctor welcomes them.



FIGURE 6-9: PRODUCTION SHOT *PUPA*, SCENE ELEVEN, CHARACTER-CONOR, OWL DOCTOR WITH PORCELAIN FIGURE OF HOSPITAL GURNEYS, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

**Owl Doctor:** Welcome, welcome to the room of forgotten limbs. If you are here you wish to retrieve something, a memory perchange. This is your beginning (points at Character-Conor) but it could be your end, (he points at Puppet-Emma) or your middle um (he points at someone in the audience)

While Puppet-Emma has been edging forward from the point of her accident, we now see that Character-Conor has been heading back to the site of his. (discussed further in section 6.3). The Owl Doctor gets very excited on their arrival, ushers Character-Conor over to the table and offers to put him back together, as it is his job to fix people. People fall and he attempts to put them back together before putting them on the conveyor belt if that is possible, or sweeping

them into a pile if not. He then awaits the next fall. However, Character-Conor refuses to be fixed and grabs his severed porcelain head, baffling the Owl Doctor:

**Owl Doctor:** But I fix, that's what I do. See, I make things whole, it won't take a second.

The doctor then spots Puppet-Emma. He forcefully takes from her the branch that she slotted in as a temporary arm in Scene Three, declaring that he can fix her and give her a new arm, and he departs in search of it. While he is gone, Puppet-Emma finds the box labelled 'The room of Forgotten Limbs' from Scene One, inside which is her arm; the arm that she rejected at the beginning of the play. With Character-Conor's help, she reattaches it to herself. The Owl Doctor returns with a new arm and makes her one final offer; a seemingly perfect replacement arm, at the cost of amputating her imperfect one. Puppet-Emma rejects his offer, returning the arm she had banished to its rightful place.



FIGURE 6-10: PRODUCTION SHOT *PUPA*, SCENE 11, PUPPET EMMA AND OWL DOCTOR, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

**Owl Doctor:** No, I could have fixed you. Look, here's a brand-new arm. I can cut that off, it'll just take a tick. It will just get in the way. *He lifts her arm and it drops back down saying 'see'.*

Puppet-Emma has ruptured the fairy-tale-ending by rejecting the Owl Doctor's offer to be magically restored. She physically re-joins her disabled self and her able self back together. By reattaching her disabled limb, she is claiming it as part of her and claiming her disabled identity. Once again, the puppet physically embodies, on its body, and through its actions my feelings towards my disabled identity.

The Owl Doctor represents not only the medical model of disability, but also what fairy-tales offer their damaged protagonists as a reward for being good (see Chapter Four). By refusing his offer and having come to terms with their new physical form in the play, Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma rupture the fairy tale ending. The decision this represents is that Pupa is not a tale of disability being conquered, but a tale of disability being accepted.

At this point I, as the puppeteer (Character-Emma), step forward into the light. I remove the gown that had completely covered my body and reveal my exo-skeleton and my disabled left arm. This is my public 'coming out' as disabled. When Character-Emma 'comes out', it is through the acceptance of who she is that she is able to leave Coma World. In reality, the decision is one to not hide what is different. It is a decision that I will struggle with every day:

Even though it's been more than five years now I struggle with that shit every day.  
And it's very annoying. (Blake, 2015, p. 8)

Garland Thomson (1996) talks about the idea that someone with a physical disability might 'come out' could outwardly be perceived as odd, but social pressures to fit into society fuel a reluctance to accept our disabled identity:

The notion that someone with a very visible physical disability might "come out" perhaps seems oxymoronic to those for whom the cultural assumptions that structure

the normal remain unquestioned. Indeed, pressures to deny, ignore, normalize, and remain silent about one's own disability are both compelling and seductive in a social order intolerant of deviations from the bodily standards enforced by a quotidian matrix of economic, social, and political forces. (Garland-Thomson, 1996, p. xvii)

In the past, in both my professional and personal life, I normally covered my hand. After one performance of *Pupa*, a member of the audience approached me and asked me why I had exposed my soul in the play. While my act of 'coming out' was certainly very personal, I did not feel that I was bearing my soul; I was bearing my hand. I saw this as a moment in which I took pride in my bodily difference, and used that difference to help create a piece of art. This was, for me, akin to the moment in Catherine Cole's theatre and dance piece, 'Five Foot Feet' where she reveals her missing leg and speaks the following words:

Here's what my body looks like. Feel however you feel about that, and now let's move on! (Cole cited by Sandahl & Auslander, 2009, p. 4).

At the end of the play, it was not the puppet but me who had to step forward, saying outwardly that I do not view my body in a negative light anymore, but instead that this is me for who I really am. This is all of me. In a review written by Bernardine Carroll about *Pupa* she writes:

The puppeteer only looks up at the end, and at this stage I am ready to leave this world, and I can tell she is as well. She has told the story, she looks up and makes eye contact. "There you have it", is what I can see on her face. I am a puppeteer that has a disabled arm.... It is an act of creative defiance. The biggest challenge in doing this kind of work is not the overcoming of the disability, but the acknowledging of it. (Carroll, 2017)

Carroll's account reinforces my intent that the work does not seek to overcome disability but to acknowledge and claim it. The audience have seen my puppet-self split in two. They have witnessed Puppet-Emma's journey to be whole. They have seen her sacrifice her voice. They have watched her realise that wasn't what she needed and seen her understand that what she

needed was a shift in her view of how she saw her body. My hope was that at this point in the play, the moment of revelation, that the audience would understand that I was saying that I have challenged my views on the construct of my own disabled body and I have found that there is nothing ‘lesser’ about it. And that they would ask that same question in terms of how they saw me, and others like me. The audience might stare at my disability, as often I have caught people doing, but something had changed. At that moment, I no longer needed societal validation, a shift had occurred, and I no longer felt the need to hide that which is different.

Character-Emma leaves the theatre through the rear fire door, and in doing so allow light from the outdoor reality flood into the Coma world as she closes the door behind her. As she departs, she leaves Character-Conor standing under the conveyor belt of porcelain puppets which then begins to move.

## 6.4 Character-Conor



FIGURE 6-11: PRODUCTION SHOT OF PUPA, CHARACTER-CONOR IN SCENE SIX,  
IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

Character-Conor, within *Pupa*, is inspired by both Conor and Patrick’s testimonies as research participants. Conor performed both as an actor and puppeteer in *Pupa*. Patrick wrote the four

songs that were used in the piece. The contribution of both Patrick and Conor touched upon the stories of other participants as well as their own.

I first encountered Conor in 2014 when I went to see the site-specific theatre piece *On the Wire* by *Wilderbeast Theatre Company*. Conor was playing the lead role. His character, Jack, had just returned from war with damage to his eyes and was suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Conor's performance in this piece was extremely naturalistic, as if he were simply being, rather than acting a role. I would later discover that Conor has double vision, one of the symptoms brought on by an accident he had on stage, so like Mat Fraser in *Richard the Third* (see Chapter Seven), he did not need to act the disability, he was able to just be in his own body.

In 2011, Conor was playing *Hamlet* in a *Second Age Theatre* production, when during a stage sword fight, he was injured in the eye, which resulted in him having a stroke on stage. This dramatic accident led to a long recovery as well as permanent sight and brain damage. In an instant, Conor went from being what he calls 'rugby player fit' to having to learn to walk again:

**Conor:** Yes, with my accident I went from the very pinnacle of fitness, the very height of abled-bodied fitness into not being able to walk. Overnight... bang... and stayed that way for a month... so I didn't have to come to terms with it... terms were brought to me. (Research workshop, Conor, 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2015)

In the blink of an eye as Blake (2015) puts it, Conor became an overnight minority. This was something Conor and I had in common – an accident. However, unlike my journey to come out as disabled, Conor's acceptance of his new identity was by his own description, almost instant. He puts this down to two things. Firstly, the dramatic change in his body, and secondly that he does not care what society thinks:

**Conor:** This is what it is now. It was not like I had to make peace with it. It was like ‘hey body this is the way shit is now’. There was no... ‘I could still try this’. If I climb up a ladder I’ll fall off it. If I run, I run at an angle. It’s totally apparent to me, so it was easier for to me say I was disabled, because it was such a difference between my body when I was playing Hamlet. (Research workshop, Conor, 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2015)

This personal history gave an undoubted authenticity to Conor’s portrayal of Character-Conor in *Pupa*, and also meant that Conor did not need to perform Character-Conor’s disability; his intention was to play the character in a very naturalistic way. A decision was made in the rehearsal room with Thomas Baker that both Conor and my character would be played as naturalistically as possible, and not overly dramatic or emotional, in stark contrast to the other surreal characters in *Pupa*. One day, when I was struggling in rehearsal to take my robe off in Scene Eleven, Conor said something which I recorded in my journal. He said, ‘that’s the gold Emma... you don’t have to pretend to struggle... it’s authentic struggle so just go with it’. Conor embraces the accidental moments in theatre and he incorporates them naturally into his performance, so every performance of his in *Pupa* was slightly different. His willingness to improvise and his edginess in so-doing was sometimes visibly disconcerting to audience members as he interacted with them, with many declaring in feedback given after the show that they felt he wasn’t acting at all. Carroll’s review of the production later described this aspect of the performance:

The under-performed sense of this work really appealed to me, allowing a very engaging story-telling without the insincerity of acting with a capital A. (Carroll, 2017)

As noted earlier, at the very end of *Pupa*, Character-Conor has taken a head for his porcelain puppet from the Owl Doctor. The fix to his problems is at hand. In a nod to *Hamlet* and Conor’s accident, he holds it in his hand while he delivers the final soliloquy of the play. In Scene One, As the Doctor induces Puppet-Emma into a coma he tells her to, ‘imagine that you’re falling’. This phrase is now echoed by Character-Conor in ‘The Room of Forgotten Limbs’. As the

audience are about to leave and enter back into the real world, the meaning of the words has changed this time. Character-Conor is standing underneath a conveyor belt of perfect paper porcelain puppets and one of the puppets lies fallen at his feet. 'Imagine you are falling', he says. He now refers to how in a blink of an eye you can fall, as we all inevitably will. Everyone is just a moment away from being changed forever, as Conor was. The choice of paper porcelain as the material for the figures in 'The Room of Forgotten Limbs' reflects the fragility of the body.

In the end, unlike my character, Conor remains in the room as *Pupa* draws to a close. The decision to not accept to be fixed and to remain in the coma world is not representational of Conor's personal story. Here, Character-Conor actually embodied my story. During *The New Play Clinic*, I told the group of my childhood wish to go back to the date of my accident and prevent it from happening. I told the group that as I got older I realised that not having my accident would dramatically change me, so, this wish mutated into a desire to awake miraculously fixed but to somehow have still have had the accident. I no longer believe I will ever be fixed. I would not change that I was in an accident even if I could. I would fall again.

Conor said he would not. He had no doubt in his mind that he would not fall again. Conor was in his mid-twenties when he had his accident but I was only nine so it had shaped me from an early age. We decided that my character needed to leave coma world to demonstrate an acceptance of her disability, and in dramatic opposition Character-Conor would stay within it, in a perpetual loop and with his eyes wide open he would fall again. Character-Conor remaining in coma world also represents an un-readiness to accept the new identity that awaited him had he left, were as performer Conor had accepted his new disabled identity.

While working on the show with Conor, we both began referring to ourselves in the third person as a way of differentiating between us talking about ourselves as people, and as the characters we were portraying. There was Conor and then there was Character-Conor. These were two very different people. Character-Conor made decisions in the play that Conor would not have made. Both Conor as an actor, and myself as a writer/ puppeteer were highly aware of the sensitivity and respect in which one needs to treat real people's stories:

**Conor:** There are decisions that I would like to have made as an actor, totally unconnected with people's stories. I would make decisions that I would deem acceptable, but you're dealing with personal real stories, real lives so you have to be delicate with that. (Research interview, Conor, 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2017)

Harter, Japp and Beck (2008) explain that each story is unique, and that when dealing with other people's stories one must treat them with respect. That state that our stories weave through each other's and that 'no life is ever one's own? (Harter, Japp and Beck, 2008, p.11). This was very helpful when it was necessary to weave two testimonies together into one character, and all six testimonies into one play. This was done using the common themes that the participants and characters explored in *Pupa*, through this process, each personal story helped to tell the other stories: 'Stories entwine and tell each other, yet each story is no less unique for that.' (Harter, Japp and Beck, 2008, p.11).

### **6.4.1 Mirror, Mirror on the wall**

In this section I will examine more closely Character-Conor's connection to the fractured mirror in *Pupa* and his monologues in scenes six and nine of the play.

We first meet Character-Conor sitting in a wheelchair in a comatose state with his back to the audience. He is holding a mirror and his reflection is all the audience can see. When the Doctor

reads the story of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, he is telling it to both Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma. It was very important to me to have Character-Conor in the first scene as I felt that the coma world then belonged to both Puppet-Emma and Character-Conor; it was a shared experience. The next time we meet Character-Conor is deep in coma world, when he comes to the rescue of Puppet-Emma and cuts her down from the tree (to which she has been tied by Cat and Fox), with a fragment of broken mirror that he has already obtained. In *Pupa*, Character-Conor has been in this fantasy world for an un-known amount of time. He is already on his journey, coming to terms with a fall that has left him inwardly fragmented, while outwardly he collects pieces of fragmented mirror on his journey. In scene four the Conductor (see section 6.3.2) gives Character-Conor a second piece of mirror which restores his mouth as a reward for getting his choir to sing properly. Character-Conor adds this to his collection.

Later, Character-Conor leads us to a wall of broken mirrors. He is confused and shaken, and he starts to inform the audience that he dropped the mirror (referencing *The Snow Queen*<sup>21</sup> by *Hans Christian Andersen*), and it broke into thousands of pieces. His story is as fragmented as the mirror that he is looking into. He slots the mirror fragments he has collected so far into the wall. Moments of both Scenes Six and Nine are an internal soliloquy, broken only when Character-Conor faces and questions the audience. He has been re-assembling this mirror while he has inhabited this world. The broken mirror reflects his fractured head, and as he stumbles to put it back together it is his hope that when it is complete, he will fix his injury and leave this world.

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<sup>21</sup> The Snow Queen was written by Hans Christian Anderson in 1844. It is a tale about a magic mirror that was created by a troll that distorts good into bad and beautiful into ugly. The mirror is dropped shattering into thousands of pieces over the earth, and falling into people's eyes and hearts making them see everything as bad and ugly.



FIGURE 6-12: PRODUCTION SHOT OF PUPA, CHARACTER-CONOR WITH FRACTURED MIRROR, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

A third piece is presented to him by Puppet-Deirdre in Scene Eight after he watches her share her story. This is the last piece of mirror necessary to finish the mirror wall. Character-Conor slots it in, and a door opens in the mirror through which Fox appears. He now has Character-Conor's face and he mirrors Character-Conor's movements. In this moment, Character-Conor's perception of Fox shifts. Not only was he the maleficent bullying presence who stole his voice attempting to silence him, he is also representative of Character-Conor and how he viewed himself. In a fairy-tale, he would place the last piece of mirror into the wall and be

miraculously restored. I asked Conor in an interview after the show how he felt about the metaphor or perhaps the cliché of the broken mirror:

**Conor:** The fragmented mirror and putting it back together... it was a very immediate sign 'oh that's what that is, that's what that means'. Clichés are not a bad thing... it was necessary to be in the show at this point. A lot of people were looking at themselves in the mirror. I was looking at people and they wouldn't be looking at me... they were looking at themselves... it's interesting for the audience to stare at themselves in a broken mirror. (Research interview, Conor, 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2017)

Interestingly, both Patrick and Gunther in their post-show interviews spoke about seeing elements of their story reflected in the mirror, and audience members also mentioned this in informal feedback. I wondered whether it was something of this that Conor was seeing while he looked at the audience looking at themselves in the mirror at one point in *Pupa*. Did they see their fractured selves in the mirror, and reflect on the line that we are 'all broken here' and that it included them? One audience member who had suffered a stroke commented on Conor's performance as an accurate portrayal of what that feels like.

In a similar vein to this, Bouchard discusses the piece *Under Glass* by *Clod Ensemble*<sup>22</sup>. She notes that the audience are framed in gazing on the performers as specimens:

Like images in a hall of mirrors replicating their reflections, curious spectators inhabit simultaneously the roles of inquirer and object of inquiry, watching themselves watching, and creating ever more curious consumers. This solipsistic aspect makes curiosity vulnerable to the host of moral charges traditionally associated with narcissism (Benedict cited by Bouchard, 2016, p. 146)

She cites Garland-Thomson (1996) who states that by staring, the audience try to understand the unfamiliar. Bouchard suggests that this perspective creates a 'dynamic between the 'curious

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<sup>22</sup> *Clod Ensemble* is a UK performance company that creates work incorporating dancers, actors, musicians, medics, architects and orchestras. *Under Glass* is a promenade piece, where the performers are displayed in glass in test tubes petri dishes and glass jars. *Under Glass*, like *Pupa*, leads the audience around a space to encounter 'specimens'.

object' and the spectator (2016, p. 146). I attempted to create a similar dynamic within this scene where by staring at both Character-Conor and at their own broken reflection the audience are assuming the role of both inquirer and the object of inquiry.

By having an invisible disability Conor, lives in two lands – that of the disabled and the abled. By suggesting that both these worlds are broken, I am clearly not implying that both visually disabled and invisibly disabled people are broken, but that both disabled and abled people as individuals are broken – no-one is perfect.

**Character-Conor:** I live in two lands, both broken.

In my collaboration with Conor, he wrote a section of his Scene Nine soliloquy, and then asked if I would edit it. However, I left it unchanged as I felt it fitted with the rest of the soliloquy. Character-Conor tells the tale of a boy who fell. His monologue starts as would a traditional fairy-tale with 'once upon a time'. It goes on to tell of a boy's fall after his accident. The dream and wish to be whole is echoed here again. He then addresses the audience, asking if they felt this was weird for them. He says he is not in jail, as he can still think and act and be. However, he is trapped. While I wrote all the other words of the play, this was Conor's story. This, to my mind, was Conor's 'coming out'.

**Character-Conor:** Once upon a time there was a fall. A boy. Crowds watched on with joy. He was small. He was pushed. Forced. Smashed. He was swallowed and the crowds couldn't follow. They went home and he fell, alone. His only dream was to be happy, to be whole. The fall let him think. It was a small fall but time ceased. He thought about death and dying and how alone you are. He thought about the futility of life and how death isn't a relief. He thought 'uh-oh', he thought 'shit'. Sound changed shape and he could smell the end; a small bump then he opened his eyes and looked around. Is this the rest of my life?

In a research interview with me, Conor spoke about his real-life fall in this way:

**Conor:** I was just stabbed in the face and I was falling backwards and I had two thoughts. First I was 'uh oh'... that was my first thought. My second thought was

‘you are alone when you die’... that was my second thought... I hadn’t even hit the ground. It’s you that is dying... it’s your life... it’s no one else’s... and so I hit the ground and that was it. I moved on, but that always stayed with me. (Research interview, Conor, 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2017)

Conor credits his injury as being a formative event, calling it a ‘proper gift’. He said that before his accident he had been living in denial of death, and it woke him up to the realisation that we are alone when we die. This is our life, so it really does not matter what society thinks, just what the individual thinks.

### 6.4.2 The Disabled Voice

The image of the mouthless man and the mouths in jars in Scene Four came from the initial research workshop at the very start of my field-work. Patrick, one of the research participants, spoke about being metaphorically robbed of his mouth. As noted previously, when he made the puppet version of himself, it had two mouths, one that was covered and a second mouth that wasn’t covered. The loss of one’s physical voice is something that both Patrick and Conor can relate to. After Conor’s accident, he temporarily lost his voice, whereas Patrick’s stutter meant that he could not speak, but instead learned to sing:

**Patrick:** In my work... when talking to kids about when I was their age... I tell them that I couldn’t speak and that I had an awful stammer and I couldn’t ask a question. You write songs because they say something. I could sing it perfectly but not say it. Working on this show reminded me of why I write songs. (Research interview, Patrick, 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2017)

Character-Conor refers to these two mouths from Patrick’s original puppet, and also refers to the fact that he is a character who holds many voices, all of which were brought together to make him:

**Character-Conor:** Mouths, voices in and out, I hear them all, before there was just one, one taken, two grew back, but now I hold many.

Patrick told me about a teacher he met in secondary school who introduced him to the guitar and singing, and through song, he regained his voice:

**Patrick:** I could never trust my voice back then I could always trust music. (Research workshop, Patrick, 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2015)

Patrick set out to give others back their voices. He talked in particular about one girl, who he referred to as Octopus Girl. This particular girl, he explained, gained a voice through song, and is now teaching others to do the same; in a way, creating an echo of voices being returned. The first reaction Character-Conor has when he gets his mouth back is to return voices to others that have had them stolen. With this, he is representing Patrick's story of being given back a voice and then heading out into the world to do the same for others:

**Character-Conor:** The traveling mouth choir will go where needed, returning voices to those that have had them stolen.

When we hear the mouth choir in *Pupa*, both Puppet-Emma and Character-Conor have no mouths. They lead the audience around the corner where they discover a man conducting rows of mouths in jars. The puppet mouths live imprisoned in jars and they physically represent the disabled voices that have been taken away.

In this scene we also meet Thomas Baker playing the role of the Conductor and who is dressed like a Ring Master. He singles out Character-Conor and promises him a mouth if he can teach them a new song, as the mouths won't sing well for him. These mouths were purchased by the Conductor from Cat and Fox. While the Conductor believes that he is giving the mouths a home and a job as he is still displaying them and making them perform, a clear reference to freak show acts. He has also created a 'supply-and-demand' solution with Cat and Fox. The

Conductor may pretend that he does not know they are stolen, however, by trying to firstly conceal Character-Conor's voice and then Puppet-Emma's voice, he reveals that he may well in fact know how these mouths were obtained. When the audience arrive, the Conductor is delighted, as he has been waiting for this moment to show off his mouth choir. However, he is embarrassed when they sing very unenthusiastically and out of tune. He believes Character-Conor is making fun of him and invites him to conduct the mouth choir instead and see if he can do better. When the mouths start to sing in-tune for Character-Conor, as one of the voices is his own, the Conductor realises that he can profit from Character-Conor. He strikes a deal – Character-Conor's gets his voice back in exchange for Character-Conor working for him.



FIGURE 6-13: PRODUCTION SHOT OF PUPA, SCENE 4, CONDUCTOR WITH MOUTHS IN JARS AND CHARACTER-CONOR, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

**Mouths:** I want to go home,  
This is not what I started for, I can't see this anymore.

Patrick wrote these lyrics while being in hospital attending to a family member as he explains:

**Patrick:** 'I want to go home' was written after sitting in hospital. Trapped in endless loop of doctors but wanting to be at home. (Research interview, Patrick, 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2017)

When Character-Conor gets his mouth back, I sought to emphasise in the play the fact that Character-Conor has not only been in the coma world for longer, but he has also been without a mouth:

**Character-Conor:** I have been without a mouth, for um, well, I don't know, but a long time.

### 6.4.3 The Flamingos: Exploring perceptions of invisible disability

In *Pupa*, I incorporated some of the feelings of societal judgement that participants expressed, as well as my research on invisible disability and social exclusion, into the creation of the Flamingo characters.

As the audience enter Scene Eight, two chatty prosthetic flamingos operated by Thomas Baker (who is hidden), are talking and dancing, positioned on the arms of a wheelchair.



FIGURE 6-14: PRODUCTION SHOT OF *PUPA*, SCENE 8, PROSTHETIC FLAMINGO'S AND CHARACTER-CONOR, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

They see Character-Conor and start probing him with questions that they give him no time to answer:

**Flamingo 1:** Why are you here?

**Flamingo 2:** I haven't the slightest idea me, look, he's got legs.

**Flamingo 1:** What is he right?

**Flamingo 2:** He can't be right, no one here is right.

**Flamingo 1:** UMM what's wrong with you then. (points at Character-Conor)

The Flamingos, though all physically attached in the performance to Puppet-Deirdre, were more connected to Character-Conor's story than hers. The Flamingos seek proof of Character-Conor, questioning whether he belongs there and whether he fits in, as outwardly he does not look disabled and most of the characters are disabled in the world of the play. His disabilities are invisible; he is no longer able-bodied but is not accepted without proof that he is disabled. Samuels (2003) notes the frustrations at being caught between two communities and not accepted in either:

(P)eople with nonvisible disabilities not only are marginalized in disability communities but walk an uneasy line between those communities and the dominant culture, often facing significant discrimination because our identities are unrecognized or disbelieved' (Samuels, 2003, pp. 244–245)

I wanted to express this unacceptance of the non-visible disabled body that Samuels discusses, and I did this through the questions asked of Character-Conor by the Flamingos. As performers, we were aware that both Conor and I (when I was cloaked in my costume) visibly 'pass' as being non-disabled, therefore the flamingos ask the questions some of our audience members might be asking. Particularly the question as to what gives these able-bodied performers the right to tell disabled stories. During the research interviews, when discussing how society views disability, it became apparent to me that in a general way, the participants with a visible disability felt pitied, whereas those with an invisible disability felt judged. Some participants in this research, who have invisible disabilities, have been told to carry a cane so that they look more disabled and that they were not disabled enough. Lainie (2017) asserts that assistive devices such as wheelchairs represent to society that a person has a disability. If they do not have such a device, they are treated differently. Participants with visible disabilities have been told they are too disabled to do certain jobs, accused of waving their disability around and offered unsolicited help constantly. They also reported often being overtly pitied. Kali (2009)

suggest that when a disabled person is pitied they are reduced to their disability, they stop being seen as a functioning human, and instead are reduced to an object.

It took a lot of personal courage for some participants in this study to identify as a person who has a disability. However, once they had associated as disabled, they were still socially excluded within certain disabled communities, having to almost prove their disability, as if they were seeking to gain membership to a club. Stewart suggests that disabled people discriminating against other disabled people creates a disabled hierarchy:

The fact that many disabled people believe in a hierarchy of disability only perpetuates the social exclusion and stigma felt by all persons with disabilities. Disabled people might not know they discriminate against or degrade others with disabilities, but it still occurs, often in forms not easy to recognize. (Stewart, 2004, p. 113)

I questioned in this research journey whether it is possible to still be a ‘them’ to both the able and disabled sections of society, and not an ‘us’ in the eyes of other people with different impairments. I wondered whether I and others are even seen if there are no codifications to identify that you have a disability. Conor noted the same phenomenon:

**Conor:** You have become a minority within a minority ... a disabled person yet disabled people don’t really think you are disabled and abled people know that you’re not abled so you’re a minority within a minority. (Research interview, Conor, 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2016)

In terms of my own narrative, there have been times where I have felt caught between two worlds. Considered part of the disabled community by members of the normative bodied mainstream, whilst encountering members of the disabled community who believe that I am too ‘able-bodied’ to identify as being disabled. Conor clearly also felt judged at times. It must be said that not all the apparent judgement was coming from mainstream society.

When the Flamingos re-emerge from behind Puppet-Deirdre, they state that they have looked Character-Conor up and he is not in the book. They deduce that there is nothing wrong with him and suggest that he does not belong in the world of the play. The Flamingo puppets are made from orthotics; they embody on their body and through their text a world that seeks visual clarification of disability. Character-Conor walks to the Flamingos, gently takes the Flamingo orthotics off the hands, placing them on the arm of the wheelchair thereby returning them to being mere orthotic objects. Character-Conor is quietening these negative voices.

Identifying as someone who has a disability comes at the end of a long journey, but we are social creatures and how we identify ourselves is only one half of the equation. The other is the way in which others in our society perceive us.

#### **6.4.4 Character-Conor's Fall**

In a similar fashion to Puppet-Emma's genesis, the conveyor belt of porcelain people that appears in the final scene of *Pupa* grew from Conor's paper puppet in the original research workshop.



FIGURE 6-15: CONOR'S PAPER PUPPET, MADE AS PART OF THE WORKSHOP 2015

In that first workshop, Conor made a half-man puppet that was physically cut down the middle. At the time, he said he didn't know why he had made it. When, as with all participants, I asked him how he would like to be represented in *Pupa*, he described a room full of perfect men, with himself as a half-man in the middle, and again he repeated that he did not know why this image sprung to mind. However, in the post-show interview Conor had a better understanding of why he made this choice:

**Conor:** The half puppet was a reflection of myself and I would say that I can only judge myself. I'm judging myself on what I was before. I'd go running and now I can't run. I remember the feeling of jumping really far, of running really fast, that's what's missing and I've found nothing to replace what I lost, what I've felt I've lost, which is a real fucking shame. Biking, was part of my life, can't ride a bike anymore, there is nothing that will replace that, which is shitty. (Research interview, Conor, 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2017)

Conor's story of his physically falling and breaking, and then becoming this metaphorical half-person, brought me to conjure up the image of a conveyor belt of perfect people, with the fallen fragmented pieces of broken people on the floor. The porcelain male figures hanging on the conveyor belt represent Conor before the accident; able bodied and at a perfect physical peak. There are multiple figures because they do not just represent Conor, but able-bodied society more generally. There is a uniformity in their perfection. The porcelain man lying on the floor, and the porcelain man lying without a head on the hospital gurney represents Conor after the fall. There are other bodies broken in a pile on the floor, and like the diversity of the disability spectrum, they are all different. While I did not visually represent Conor as the half-man his paper puppet portrayed, it was my intention that the conveyer belt of porcelain people and the porcelain people underneath portrayed his feelings about this transition and spoke of the universal nature of disability, and in so doing asked the audience to question the fragility of the able body. While Conor claims that it was an instant transition for him when claiming his

disabled identity, he clearly also mourns the loss of his able identity. This mourning was spoken about by other research participants who had also acquired a disability.



FIGURE 6-16: PRODUCTION SHOT *PUPA*, SCENE TWELVE, CHARACTER-CONOR UNDER CONVEYOR BELT, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

A sense of longing for a return to the person that once was, is something that is a common theme in the interviews that I conducted as part of my research; it is also something that I have experienced throughout the course of my life. Of the six disabled artists that were involved in the creation of the show, five had acquired their conditions partway through their lives, whilst only one had had their condition at birth. All of those who had acquired their condition had at some point in their lives fantasised about being miraculously cured or having the incident that led to the acquiring their condition wiped from their past. However, in the case of Gunther, his quest to have his body restored to that which it once was, was something he had been able to leave behind. The next section will look at Gunther and his character Gunther the Caterpillar.

## 6.5 Gunter the Caterpillar



FIGURE 6-17: PRODUCTION SHOT OF *PUPA*, SCENE SEVEN, GUNTHER THE CATERPILLAR AND PUPPET-EMMA, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

In this section I will look at Gunther's testimony and views around his disability. Then I will chart how these materialised in *Pupa* in the form of the puppet and character Gunther the Caterpillar.

I first met Gunther in 2015. He was in Limerick to perform as part of the show *Pigtown Scratchings*, a cabaret theatre show where he was playing the Waterphone. I subsequently arranged to interview him as part of my research. Gunther was diagnosed with Multiple-Sclerosis (MS) in his 40s. He was, at that time, a professional saxophonist and his musical aptitude was a key part of his self-identity. As his health deteriorated, so did his ability to play musical instrument, a process which led to him to cease playing his instrument:

**Gunther:** As far as I was concerned I wouldn't qualify for the label 'live musician' anymore. I was Gunther the musician and then I wasn't anymore. (Research interview , Gunther, 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2015)

As well impacting on Gunther in terms of his ability to create music, his MS also affected the way that people interacted with him. He describes in his interview what he calls the, ‘does he take sugar effect’, which he characterises as the experience of people directing questions to his companions, that they would once have asked of him directly – as they might in the case of a young child. In the early stages of his illness, he recounted stories where ‘bus drivers and taxi drivers would turn me away because they thought I was drunk’. These changes in the way that people perceived him created an additional layer of complication in Gunther’s life. He told me, ‘it’s hard enough to stay on top of my illness without having to deal and argue with preconceived ideas about my illness.’

One of Gunther’s musical inspirations is the percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie, and in 2011 he saw the film *Touch and Sound*, in which she speaks about her experience of being profoundly deaf. For Gunther, this was a revelation as he had been unaware that she was deaf. This inspired Gunther to return to creating music.

**Gunther:** I can do it... I can’t play the saxophone but there are instruments I can play. (Research interview, Gunther, 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2015)

This led to Gunther purchasing a Waterphone for his 60th birthday and his return to playing live music. It also widened the scope of what he felt music was and how it could be made. Gunther started collecting the sounds of the world using a digital recorder and using these recordings to create new music. He collects sounds where ever he goes, from natural sounds such as water, to sounds of objects being played like percussion instruments, and he then digitally explores these sounds through turning them into compositions. Gunther wrote to Evelyn Glennie to thank her for being the turning point that had inspired him to return to music.

They later met and spoke about the different ways one could create music. Gunther is now using his experience to inspire other people to make music.

Recently, Gunther has been trying to change how people perceive and define music; with *Cork City Gamelan*, he believes that anyone can make music:

**Gunther:** You adjust yourself to your capabilities, to what you can actually do, physically or mentally, and you find your limitations and you work within those limitations. (Research interview, Gunther, 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2015)

In terms of his personal journey, Gunther has created a way of defining himself by what he does with music, and has reclaimed his self-identity:

**Gunther:** I am not a disabled person, but a person who has a disability... I am not a musician... I am someone who makes music. (Research interview, Gunther, 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2015)

Gunther has what I would describe as a modular approach to identity, which has allowed him to subdivide his identity into smaller parts. He does not classify himself as having one particular identity but accepts all the different aspects that make him who he is. This approach has led to him being comfortable in his own skin once more, and it is this lesson that inspired the relationship between Gunther the Caterpillar and Puppet-Emma (see sections 6.2.2 and 6.2.4).

The figure of a mentor has a long tradition in fairy tales: Merlin takes a young King Arthur under his wing; and a tree grants Cinderella her wishes in the original story by the Brothers Grimm. These mentor figures often express altruism and in many cases, are portrayed as enchanted animals, trees and fairies. The story of *Pupa* is no different in this respect, and in her journey of self-discovery, Puppet-Emma meets an old and wise caterpillar. Up to the point where she meets Gunther the Caterpillar, Puppet-Emma is searching for a way to return to

being the able-bodied person she had been before her accident, a quest that stops her from accepting and becoming comfortable with her new identity.

The choice of a caterpillar is intentional. In fact, it emerged directly from a question that I asked Gunther as to what puppet might represent him. While he was unable to give an immediate answer, by the end of the interview he had come up with a response. He said that he would like to be represented by a maggot or a caterpillar. This choice surprised me, in part because my mind leapt to all the negative connotations that maggots have of being parasitic, and of how those connotations might be seen by audience as representative of the negative views that some in society have of people with disabilities. Gunther explained that his decision was based upon an illustration he had once drawn of a character called Grubby Magoo, a many-legged percussionist who used his numerous limbs to create many different sounds. This illustration had taken on new meaning for Gunther because of his newly-found method for creating music. The story he wanted to emerge from his involvement in the piece was that having a disability had awakened the knowledge that for him, the world was an instrument and he now had many hands with which to play it. The puppet of Gunther the Caterpillar physically embodies Gunther's physical limitations, while also showing how his disability metaphorically gives him many hands to play music with. Puppet-Emma showed my story to the audience asking them to question their views, and similarly, Gunther's puppet showed the audience, that there are positive things to be taken from disability:

**Caterpillar:** It is not I but you who are offended,  
for who am I but me and who are you but you.  
Around the corner you must go,  
you will learn all that you must know.  
For I am happy to be me,  
for I have legs so many to see,  
they all play sounds.  
it all becomes clear the world is but an instrument my dear.  
No, them and us just you and me.

So we must be happy to be.

One of the reasons that Gunther was represented as a caterpillar was that it created the opportunity for metamorphosis. Caterpillars transform into butterflies, and this transformational quality is present in the play.

Gunther also wanted to express that he feels his re-found love of creating music has given him the ability to fly. On stage in *Pupa*, this is expressed through his puppet's many hands and by a soundscape that Gunther designed, which is played with the lights blacked-out. The audience can hear Gunther the caterpillar exclaiming:

**Gunther the Caterpillar:** Yes, I'm flying, I'm flying. I'm free.

At the same time, some of the audience members are holding on to ropes suspended from the lighting grid. When the lights go out, the ropes begin to move, and lights begin to flash onto the ropes so the rest of the audience see their movement. My intention was to give the impression that the puppet of Gunther the Caterpillar has been hoisted up into the air. Although not seeing him, but instead by seeing or feeling the ropes that are connected to the puppet and by hearing him exclaiming that he is flying, the audience imagines him in flight.

The ideas that Gunther expressed in his interviews, had a huge impact on the creation of *Pupa*. Not only did Gunther design the sound for the show, but his idea of being represented as a caterpillar inspired the ways in which other fairy-tales were woven into the text. Gunther the Caterpillar was reminiscent of the wise cricket from *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, the Blackbird from *The Adventures of Pinocchio* and the caterpillar from *Alice in Wonderland*.

In the shadows of the first scene we meet a butterfly with a man's face (Gunther the Butterfly). Like the Blackbird in *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, Gunther the Butterfly lands on the tree and warns Puppet-Emma against taking the bad advice from Cat and Fox and gets attacked by Cat for his efforts. The Cat attacks also the Blackbird in *Pinocchio*:

**Pinocchio:** "Poor Blackbird!" said Pinocchio to the Cat. "Why did you kill him?"

**Cat:** "I killed him to teach him a lesson. He talks too much. Next time he will keep his words to himself." (Collodi, 1883, p. 29)

In *Pupa*, Gunther the Butterfly damages his wings, and the next time we meet this character he is now a caterpillar. Gunther the Butterfly, like Gunther's own body, is metamorphosing in reverse. Gunther composed the soundscape for *Pupa*, collecting specific sounds for each participant's stories, which created a deeply personal and profound soundscape that not only assisted in the telling of his story, but in the telling of all of our stories.

The soundscape in the beginning of the piece was that of hospital noises that Gunther collected during a time in hospital. It was important to create contrast, so the first scene has sounds that are real; in direct contrast with the sounds within the series of rooms located in the theatre, where the audience are met with an ominously dark score, which seeks to transport them into the fairy tale world. Some of the compositions within the maze of rooms, were created by Gunther playing with the original medical noises and quickening and slowing them down so they were disguised. Despite the fact that this level of detail in the soundscape is something which is largely undeterminable by the audience, for me it is quite a beautiful nod to the fact that the audience are in the minds of the characters, and those characters had never left the hospital bed – they are in a coma world. At the end of *Pupa*, the hospital sounds audibly filter back into the soundscape, as Puppet-Emma begins to come out of her coma and the play comes

to a close. The soundscape Gunter created for Kimberley was especially important to create the feeling she wanted to express.

We told Gunther's story and his perceptions of his body through both the puppet that I built and the soundscape that Gunther created. Gunther's voice was ever present in his specific art-form. The next section will look at both Deirdre and Kimberley's stories which combined puppetry and their art form, dance, to show the audience their views and feelings about their bodies.

## **6.6 Choreographing their own stories**

Both Deirdre and Kimberley are dancers. Deidre is a contemporary dancer and Kimberley is a jazz dancer. They both shared with me their stories and each choreographed their own section of *Pupa*. Whereas the other stories of research participants weave into each other in a layered and complex ways, these two are a little different, as they are glimpses into a feeling rather than being narrative-led. Both dancers wanted to show the audience what it feels like to be in their bodies. Character-Conor interacts with the Flamingos but has very little interaction with Puppet-Deirdre. Likewise, Puppet-Emma has her head in the cloud while Kimberley the Dancer dances. These moments of stillness in the action of *Pupa* and the quiet and static observation from Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma means that the full attention is on Puppet-Deirdre and Kimberley the Dancer. My two main characters pause and give space for other stories. Both these testimonies and the scenes subsequent to them lend another perspective to the research as Deirdre is the only participant that has a congenital disability and Kimberley considers herself deaf but not disabled.

## 6.6.1 Puppet-Deirdre



FIGURE 6-18: PRODUCTION SHOT *PUPA*, SCENE 8, PUPPET-DEIRDRE AND CHARACTER CONOR, IMAGE COURTESY OF EMMA MAC

In July 2016, I met Deirdre for an initial meeting. Deirdre is the only participant in this research with a congenital disability. She has never questioned her disabled identity as it was one she was born with. When I asked her if she identified as disabled, she replied simply:

**Deirdre:** I've faced many challenges in my life, I have to be. I overcome them with dance. Dance helps me bring out different emotions and I look at connections in my body when I dance. I'm very positive when I'm dancing, it gets me out. It's like I'm not in a wheelchair when I dance. (Research interview, Deirdre, 27<sup>th</sup> of July 2016)

The physical constraints imposed by having a congenital physical disability are different to acquired disabilities, because those who become disabled know ability, they feel the loss of it, and it is a journey to accept a new identity. Ability is not something Deirdre has lost, she sees it more as a magical thing, an imagining. Such a fantasy is made real when Deirdre dances. Deirdre wished to portray the feeling that when she dances, she floats out of her chair. At that

point she becomes two; becoming both the abled and disabled versions of herself, who dance together. This sentiment is echoed in her song, sung by Kathleen Turner, and which plays as she floats out of her chair. Patrick and Kathleen wrote the song with Deidre's story in mind:

**Patrick:** We were trying to write as if she was a puppet and puppeteering herself, puppeteering her own body... Chords are all major chords and not minor, so they are all happy chords because there is no flat or sharp they are all round sounding chords. (Research interview, Patrick, 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2017)

They took on board the feelings Deidre wanted to express, so that even the chords sounded joyful. Likewise, Thomas Baker who was puppeteering Deidre-Puppet tried to embody that feeling of pure joy (that she felt when she danced) into the puppet.

**Puppet-Deidre:** Look down, can you see me,  
look down, can you feel me,  
look down, I can see me,  
look down, I can feel me.  
The heart and the bones,  
the feet on a cold stone,  
I move through the air,  
I move through the air,  
my heart in my hands,  
feelings I don't understand.

Deidre, dancer Lisa Cahill and photographer Ken Coleman met with me a few months before the show to do a photoshoot. The idea was that we would put a series of twenty still images into a zoetrope<sup>23</sup> which would be projected onto Puppet-Deidre's nightdress. Ivan Owen volunteered to design and laser cut a zoetrope to project the images. Deidre had the idea of layering images of the two dancers (herself and Lisa) over each other. Ken then suggested turning Lisa into a drawing in order to represent Deidre's imagination as she danced. The end result was that both her physical disabled body and her imagined able bodied danced together.

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<sup>23</sup> A zoetrope is an animation device; a cylindrical drum with slots to insert a series of images, and when it is turned gives the illusion of movement.



FIGURE 6-19: SLIDES FROM THE ZOETROPE, PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN AND LAYERED BY KEN COLEMAN OF DANCERS DEIRDRE AND LISA, IMAGES COURTESY OF KEN COLEMAN

## 6.6.2 Kimberley the dancer

I first met Kimberley at the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts in Alberta, Canada when we were both on a puppet intensive course. Kimberley runs the largest jazz dance company in Canada. She has been dancing since she was a child and is profoundly deaf. She lost her hearing from an illness at the age of four, however she quickly learnt to lip read so her deafness wasn't discovered until she was six:

**Kimberley:** People do seem surprised when I tell them I'm a deaf dancer. (Research interview, Kimberley, 28<sup>th</sup> of July 2016)

Kimberley feels that her deafness has led her to dance, just as my arm has led me to puppeteering:

**Kimberley:** No hearing – a dancer; no hand movement – a puppeteer. (Research interview, Kimberley, 28<sup>th</sup> of July 2016)

They say that when you lose one sense the others are heightened:

**Kimberley:** When I told someone I was a dancer they said, 'well of course ... loud music, don't have to talk and you're an expert at body language ... that makes sense'. (Research interview, Kimberley, 28<sup>th</sup> of July 2016)

She talked about the idea of a world where we are all disabled, where the norm is to be other:

**Kimberley:** We are all disabled. Maybe we are the lucky ones as we know it and can see it. (Research interview, Kimberley, 28<sup>th</sup> of July 2016)

However, like many people who are deaf, Kimberley does not identify as disabled. Lane (2005) posits the position that a person who is deaf should not be labelled as disabled. He states that there are many reasons not to label them as such. Firstly, they themselves do not consider themselves to have a disability and secondly, the medical construction of disability brings with it needless risks from surgery. Finally, he suggests that the disability label would risk what he calls the 'deaf-world'. Deaf-world refers to distinguishing deafness as being part of a culture which has its own language. McQuigg (2013) notes that deaf people do not view themselves as disabled but as a linguistic minority.

Kimberley got her first hearing aid at the age of 43. Only after acquiring the aid did she realise how hard she had been working up to that point. When I asked her how she would like to be represented, her first thought was as an ear. Like me, her instinctive reaction was to create a puppet that very literally represented her deafness. However, the more she thought about it, the more she thought that she would like to create a dance piece which gave the viewer a sense of what it was to be deaf and have the volume suddenly turned up. She choreographed a dance piece where her head is in the cloud, and while in the cloud she is still, with the accompanying musical composition playing very loudly. She falls out of the cloud and dances in silence. The sound as she falls is reminiscent of a hearing aid being turned down, a high-pitched hiss, and then silence. As Kimberly is raised back up into the cloud to repeat this action, the sound is sharply turned up. She also asked that the sound resemble that of being under-water. As a deaf dancer, Kimberley wanted the audience to experience what it was like to dance in silence. She said she didn't realise the immensity of the silence until she had some sense of sound. Gunther took Kimberley's note of having the sound resemble being underwater and he created part of her soundscape in his kitchen sink. He used the sink as a percussion instrument and using a

wavetable synth<sup>24</sup> he created a soundscape from a single drip of water that went from frantic to sparse.

I received an email from Kimberley after our first initial interview saying she would like to be a half woman/half fish puppet in *Pupa*, as the muffled sound underwater echoed how she heard sounds. I started working on a fish head, and I took my friend Moira Brady Averill's film *FISH* as inspiration. This film follows a woman with a fish on her head for a day, where she is excluded from activities, isolated and stigmatised for being a fish woman.



FIGURE 6-20: STILL FROM MOIRA BRADY AVERILL'S FILM *FISH*, 2010

The fish was at first to be a mask like the Owls, however it transitioned into a body of a tuna that could be worn almost like a hat around the face, covering the ears of the performer.

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<sup>24</sup> Wavetable Synthesis was first created by Wolfgang Palm in the 70's. It is a sound design technique that creates natural tones, and where the user can sample a single note or sound in order to create a sequence of sounds. 'Wavetable Synthesis in its simplest form consists of playing a table that contains a single cycle complex waveform with an oscillator. In more sophisticated manifestations, a table-based technique sometimes referred to as Table-lookup Synthesis, involves dynamically modifying a complex waveform in real time by evolving multiple wavetables (in a manner similar to vector synthesis)'. (Bianchini & Cipriani, 2008, p. 22)



FIGURE 6-21: FISH PUPPET MADE FOR *PUPA*

I was unfortunately unable to secure funding to bring Kimberley over to perform live in *Pupa*. I considered the possibility of Kimberly choreographing another dancer in Limerick, however this did not work out. I then turned the mask into a puppet to be puppeteered by Thomas Baker. Like all of my puppets, I wanted the face to be the signifier of the participant's identity, so I decided to give the fish Kimberley's face. For a range of artistic reasons, the fish puppet never made it into the final performance of the show. It was the right decision for *Pupa*, but I was sorry to see it go. In the end, Kimberley danced. This was only right as her body was performing her story. Noel Begin filmed her dance in Canada and with the help of Dominik Kosicki and Mario Beck we projected her into the Belltable to virtually perform alongside us.



FIGURE 6-22: PRODUCTION SHOT *PUPA*, SCENE 10, PROJECTING OF KIMBERLEY'S DANCE, image courtesy of Emma Mac

## 6.7 Conclusion

This chapter looks at how each participant views their disability, how they see their body and feel society views them. These thoughts and views were combined with my desk research around disability and puppet theory and were infused into the puppets the script and the dramaturgy of *Pupa*. The process of interviewing the participants, making the puppets and writing the script was an examination of our (the participants') views. This led to questions around our own identities and for some of us, led to us changing our perceptions of ourselves. The puppets and characters in *Pupa* shared these views with the audience. The play was both how I distilled meaning and documented this journey. Showing *Pupa* to the public was an attempt to disrupt cultural perceptions. By showing them my research journey and our changing

perceptions of disability, I hope that it led the audience to question their views around disability. Based on informal questions I was asked after the performance, I know that some audience members left questioning their views on the disabled body, but I cannot prove that portraying our stories through the puppets changed anyone's view of the disabled body other than our own, nor did this research seek to change views, simply to examine them.

While there is research in puppetry, disability and auto-ethnotheatre, which I have discussed in chapters three, four and five, the work presented in *Pupa* and in this thesis represents a unique study, as I have not found any research combining these fields. I also have not found any projects where puppets have been adapted using prosthetics and orthotics to be used with performers of different abilities to create a professional piece of theatre. In the next chapter I will further the impact of the exo-skeleton on both me and the performance.



## CHAPTER 7

### Shifting Perceptions of Personal Identity

This chapter will examine the idea of the cyborg and, more specifically, the intersection between human and machine:

A cyborg is a fusion between a human and a machine, and is a common theme for science fiction stories.’ (Biørnstad, 2014, p. 1)

It will also look to the academic discourse of New-Materiality in order to examine the blurred lines between object and subject. This discussion allows me to look at the ‘objecthood’ of my disabled arm, and to examine the conclusions I reached on creating the exo-skeleton as part of *Pupa*.

Our stories as people are interwoven with tales of augmentation of humanity. By this I mean tales of ordinary humans whose inherent abilities have in some way been added to by technology<sup>25</sup>. From the *Iron Man* comic books, to the *Robocop* films, there is a contemporary theme within fiction that the idea of adding to our abilities through the use of technology is something radical, something that fundamentally changes who or what we are. However, when viewed in terms of the use of technology to augment the capabilities of a disabled person, the question arises as to whether the augmentation process or prosthesis used somehow changes our view of ourselves and what it means to be us. The reality is that within the modern world,

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<sup>25</sup> Technology is here defined as either the machines or tools created from scientific knowledge or the ways in which scientific knowledge is applied practically. Franklin (1989), an experimental physicist, regards technology as practice engaged with tools or machines to gain knowledge and solve problems.

it is rare to find anyone who is not using technology to somehow add to what they are able to do:

(T)he realities of modern life happen to include a relationship between people and technology so intimate that it's no longer possible to tell where we end and machines begin. (Kunzru, 1997, p.8)

When I was growing up, I could recall from memory the phone numbers of close friends and family. This job has since been outsourced to the memory of my smartphone. Such quotidian forms of augmentation are centuries old. Humans have been using telescopes to extend the range of our eyesight for over 1000 years. We have been using tools such as hammers to add to our strength for millennia. The question for this research is to probe where the line is to be drawn between a tool that is external to ourselves and a prosthesis, which is in some way part of our selves. This line is one that I probed through the development of the exo-skeleton within the performance of *Pupa*. The exo-skeleton started as a tool and ended up becoming an extension of the self, posing certain questions with regard to identity.

## 7.1 Cyborg Identity

The prosthetic expert on this project, Ivan Owen, put me in touch with one of the e-NABLE<sup>26</sup> digital fabricators, Paragine Hawthorn<sup>27</sup>, who has been making their own 3D printed arms for years. Paragine told me it was only after they started making prosthetics for their hand that they started to identify with it:

I never felt a huge sense of identity around my left hand/arm (or much of the rest of me, for that matter) until I started making prosthetics. (P. Hawthorn, personal correspondence, 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2017)

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<sup>26</sup> e-NABLE is an open source 3D printed prosthetic hand company run by volunteers.

<sup>27</sup> Paragine requested to be referred to in a gender-neutral manner within the thesis.

A person's identity is, by definition, described by certain characteristics determining who or what they are. Paragine's suggestion of their identity being tied to their prosthetic suggests that it has become part of what defines them. By incorporating their prosthetic into their body, Paragine is arguably becoming part-cyborg, and therefore blurring the separation of the human and the machine. As Haraway notes, new identities emerge when definitions are blurred, moving past opposing others and helping to push past oppression:

The hybrid figure of the cyborg blurs categorical distinctions such as human/machine, human/animal and nature/culture and moves beyond the dualisms which contribute to the domination of those marked as other. Cyborgs can unsettle the existing order by creating new modes of resistance and recoupling. (Haraway, 1991, p. 154)

What is clear from Paragine's description is that they encountered a new mode of recoupling with their arm, and a new aspect of identity began to emerge.



FIGURE 7-1: KEN RENALDO'S PIECE "MEDIATED ENCOUNTERS", AT LILLE FRANCE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE, 2004, IMAGE COURTESY OF KEN RENALDO

In Ken Renaldo's installation piece *Mediated Encounters*, Siamese fighting fish can rotate their fish bowl (which hangs on a crane like apparatus), and come into interaction with one another. The bowl can be seen as an extension of the fish, in that they are able to direct the mechanism

that controls the bowl's movements, creating what could be thought of as the first ever cyborg fish. To put this provocation in a human orthotic frame, the question arises as to whether this mean that when I wear the exo-skeleton, I can, like these fish, be seen as a cyborg Some people who wear prosthetics and orthotics, such as Paragine, have started identifying as cyborg rather than disabled:

I identify as a cyborg, as well as agender, slightly disabled, and a couple flavours of neurodivergant. ... When I first started using my prosthetic hand, it was a prototype. It still is. It also very quickly became a part of me. I look down at my hand, and I see something that I actively work to change and improve, and that idea spread to the rest of me. Now I am the prototype. I am an engineer and a fabricator, and everything I make is a part of me. Making my own prosthetics allowed me to become a part of me. Every new iteration marks a new development in who I am.' (P. Hawthorn, personal correspondence, 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2017)

In a similar vein, Iwakuma (2006) describes a visit to a basketball team in Japan where she observed how they treated their wheelchairs, each designing them personally to suit their identity. She describes the participants' obsession as they embodied their chairs and engineered their own legs.

In an article by Live Science Staff (2009), they discuss a study carried out in The Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale (INSERM)<sup>28</sup> and the Université Claude Bernard Lyon on the idea that humans see tools as an extension of our bodies. Their findings suggest that, 'once the tool is incorporated in the body schema, it can be manoeuvred and controlled as if it were a body part itself.' (Cardinali cited by Live Science Staff, 2009, p. 11). Holmes and Spence (2004), describe the body schema (a concept developed by English neurologist Henry Head in 1911), as the mind's ability and awareness to guide the body through space, while also

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<sup>28</sup> The Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale is the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research.

being aware of nearby objects. By assimilating an object, tool or a prosthetic into the body schema, such as Paragine's 3D printed arm, it has the possibility of becoming an extension of the self.

Phenomenologist Merleau Ponty (1962) asks us to imagine a blind man navigating a city and asks where the blind man ends and his stick begins. The stick is how the blind man interacts with the world; it sends signals to him like an extended arm. The cane is an extension of the blind man's perception of the world. Iwakuma argues that Merleau Ponty's analogy of the blind man's cane is an example of the, 'extension of the bodily synthesis' (Iwakuma, 2006, p. 78), and that it is an embodied idea. If the body extends the object, it becomes an extension of the body, such as in the case of a medical prosthesis for a person using one. Or in the way a musician might relate to their instrument, and I would add, as a puppeteer relates to their puppet. Iwakuma goes so far to suggest that the wheelchair user embodies the wheelchair as part of their identity, so much so, that if a lover of a person in a wheelchair touches the chair, the occupant shivers, as if their flesh was touched. Iwakuma borrows from Uexküll (1957) and posits that the cane in Merleau Ponty's scenario or the wheelchair, becomes a 'tactile organ' (Iwakuma, 2006, p. 79).

In *Pupa*, Puppet-Deirdre's wheelchair is an extension of the puppet. To demonstrate this, the wheelchair is stilted and skin-coloured, much like most prosthetic limbs. The reason for the skin-covered wheelchair is to show the complexity and dependency of the relationship with Puppet-Deirdre. A study led by Mariella Pazzaglia (2013) looks at how the brain views tools such as the wheelchair. This study suggests that the brain of the person using the chair adjusts and starts to treat the chair as an extension of that person's body; the wheels in the mind of the person are

now replacing limbs that have lost their function. In a report on the study, Mariella suggests that this kind of research could lead to ways to enhance the body in people who are physically disabled:

Bodily representations can be extended to include exoskeletons, prostheses, robots and virtual avatars. (Dottinga & Randy, n.d. p.3)

Don Ihde (1991) discusses objects becoming part of our embodiment of meaning, calling this ‘embodiment relations’ (p .75). Such objects help us perceive the world and over time, the brain perceives these objects as part of us, like Merleau Ponty’s (1962) Blind Man’s cane. Merleau Ponty and Don Ihde talk about the possibilities of imbuing of objects such as a cane or a prosthetic with consciousness<sup>29</sup> in order that they are understood as a phenomenological part of the body.

A provocative idea in the context of this research is if the opposite occurs, and the brain, through trauma, stops perceiving a part of the body as being a part of it. If instead it perceives a body-part as an object, can the brain be retrained to re-connect to that body part, in order that it becomes a wholly conscious body-part again, as happened during my making of *Pupa*:

Much in the way that the mind appears to incorporate tools into its body schema, Emma's device will likely be incorporated into her body schema as an extension of self. This could be amplified by her training as a puppeteer who breathes life into inanimate objects as a part of her art. The questions she raised about how this might

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<sup>29</sup> Crick and Koch (2003) argue that most neuroscientists currently see consciousness as a mystery. They do accept the existence of consciousness, but the majority do not study it for two reasons:

1. They consider it to be a philosophical problem, and so best left to philosophers.
2. They concede that it is a scientific problem, but think it is premature to study it now. (Crick & Koch, 2003, p. 35)

While Crick and Koch do not agree with this perspective, they feel that the time for this study is now, and they concede that until it is better understood, consciousness should not be defined. The most recognised consciousness theories are based in neuroscience and psychology. This thesis does not seek to define consciousness but uses philosopher’s views of the transfer of consciousness from subject to an object to support my introspective observations of my changing view of my disabled arm.

Despite the difficulty in defining consciousness and the lack of any singular theory of what it is and where it resides, there seems to be a general consensus that it involves an awareness of oneself, others and external objects.

impact her view of her disabled arm struck me as incredibly complex and I was intrigued to learn what she would discover. (I. Owen, personal correspondence, 26<sup>th</sup> of April, 2017)

In the case of my research, the orthotics (exo-skeleton) is that which Ivan suggests may have the ability to become part of my body schema. In section 7.3, I will examine in further detail whether like the cane or the wheelchair, the exo-skeleton can be perceived of as an extension of myself. Before I discuss the conclusions reached on the exo-skeleton, and how I now view my arm, I firstly want to examine views on animacy and what constitutes an object.

## 7.2 Animacy

Jabr (2013) notes that Aristotle's defined life as that which was 'animate'. As opposed to the inanimate. He suggests that there are three types of 'animate' and that they are living organisms, vegetation, animal and human. An in-animate object in this classification does not have consciousness, and is by definition, not alive. These are the 'hierarchies of animacy' (Chen cited by Werry, 2014, p.76) and central to the discourse of the New Materialists<sup>30</sup>. In Chen's hierarchies of animacy, he adds disability to the list, noting that his work ...:

... conceptually arrange(s) human life, disabled life, animal life, plant life, and forms of non-living material in orders of value and priority (Chen cited by Werry, 2014, p. 76)

Werry (2014) decries New Materialists as idealists who reassign agency to all matter. Werry asserts that 'inanimate' and 'object' are usually words that are intimately tied. She pairs the inanimate and the dead together as she is interested in where these two intersect, as human

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<sup>30</sup> New Materialism Emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. New Materialism weaves through many fields such as philosophy, feminism, visual art and cultural theory. I would add puppetry and theatre. Connolly (2013) states that it re-evaluates the human/non-human binary as well as assumptions around matter in the universe.

remains are both human and inhuman; life being a journey to (in)animacy. She states that theatre is a particularly fruitful ground in which to examine (in)animacy.

Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012) compare the theories and discourses of new materiality and materiality. They state that both look at objects and how they effect and interact with humans, and that the great difference is that new materiality moves away from the dualities between human and non-human and between culture and nature. They go on to state that new materiality challenges the hierarches of the human, and suggests that rather than being at the top, they are instead a part of human/non-human collaborations, which happen every day. New materiality as a conceptual discourse has opened new ways to examine the dynamics of human performer and puppet relationship.

Paavolainen suggests that puppetry, 'is both uncanny and gives impression of having mental activity, blurring the lines between object and subject' (2017, p. 15). If puppets blur the line between object and subject, and through puppetry one can turn an object into a subject, it follows that puppets can be both states simultaneously. My questioning as to whether my arm was an object and also a puppet, can be seeing as having reinforced the dualisms that new materialism seeks to forego. By letting go of the dualisms of object/subject and puppet/puppeteer, I was in fact creating a space of possibility for an object, a subject, a puppet and a puppeteer to have multiple identities and allowing these identities to co-exist. Conceptually, my arm can be understood as any of these things within a new materialist paradigm. Paavolainen (2017) states that blurring lines in this way can induce fear. He asks why we not blur lines between the actor and environment, and why not blur lines between the

body and object or puppet. In positing this position, Paavolainen applies environmental psychologist James Gibson's term affordance<sup>31</sup> noting that:

Once we relax our anthropocentric views of agents and artefacts, and allow for a more fuzzy boundary ... between ourselves and our environment, we begin to fathom the fundamentally distributed character of agency and cognition. (Paavolainen, 2017, p. 43)

Citing Velrtusky, Paavolainen (2017) states that one of the theatres greatest social purposes is to question man's relationship and interaction with things, as seeks to shine a light on our understanding of the world.

### 7.3 My arm: Puppet, Object or Extension of the Self (Part 2)

The mechanical prosthetic that I created with Ivan Owen allowed me to manipulate my disabled left arm with the fourth and fifth finger of my able right hand. The way that the device was designed meant that it was conspicuous. In making it visually obvious that my left hand does not function, the device highlighted that which I had spent a lifetime trying to hide.



FIGURE 7-2: WEARING THE EXO-SKELETON IN REHEARSALS FOR *PUPA*, IMAGE COURTESY OF THOMAS BAKER

FIGURE 7-3: PETER WELLER IN *ROBOCOP*, 1987 DIRECTED BY PAUL VERHOEVEN [ORION PICTURES CORPORATION] IMAGE RIGHTS PURCHASED AT ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

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<sup>31</sup> 'The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.' (Gibson, 1979, p. 127)

Our prosthetics/orthotics exaggerates our otherness. I look like a cyborg when I wear the exoskeleton. So much so, that throughout rehearsals ‘Robocop’ became a common reference; a reference which I must admit I took some pleasure in. After all, *Robocop* is the story of a man who is disabled in a violent crime, but who is later turned into a cyborg superhuman. I remember my friend Gibdel Wilson, a blind puppeteer and doctor echoing the Paralympics 2016 slogan by telling me that we are the super humans; ‘we do the same as they do but with more obstacles and pain and that makes us not inferior but superhuman’ (G.Wilson, personal correspondence, May 2017).

Science has reached the point where mechanical objects such as prosthetic arms can be attached to the nervous system and can be controlled in a similar way to organic parts of the body. In 2013, Swedish researchers Max Ortiz Catalan and Richard Branemark fitted the first ever bone-anchored prosthesis. The prosthetic connects to the bones, nerves and muscles sending signals to the brain from the nerves and muscles, so the wearer can feel what the hand is touching.



FIGURE 7-4: FIRST EVER BONE-ANCHORED PROTHESIS BY RESEARCHERS MAX ORITZ CATALAN AND RICHARD BRANEMARK, IMAGE COURTESY OF DR MAX ORITZ-CATALAN

Machines are unconscious – man is conscious: however robotic arms can be linked to a person and that person can train themselves to treat it as a normal limb. Therefore, it is possible that the old limb was not vital to consciousness and as such already an object. Ingerslev states that in reflecting on our own self-consciousness, the body will be categorised as an object:

Self-distance is the suggestion that bodily self-consciousness consist in a reflective stance where you conceive of your body as a physical thing, an object in the world as well as the subject of bodily experiences. (Ingerslev, 2013, p. 163)

Aristotle's view is that the mind and body are connected, they are not distinct, and one does not fuel the other. However, this view does not explain why damage to parts of the body does not affect consciousness, whereas serious damage to the brain has profound effects on the consciousness of a being. An arm moves because your conscious brain tells it to. However, certain types of brain injury can change a person's personality and thus identity, beyond recognition. For Conor, his brain damage changed many facets of his identity:

**Conor:** I haven't lost any limbs at all. .... but the scar, the brain injury literally feels like to be honest, it feels that way more than half of me has been taken away. It only feels in the last few years like I'm coming back to myself, because it was so instant because there was no time to question who am I. Bang your this now. It's been six, seven years now and I feel I was born at the time that the accident happened, and I'm seven now. So, the first five years are spend being grand, and then the next while is spend asking what is my place in the world now, seven is the age of reason don't they say? (Research interview, Conor, 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2016)

Aristotle suggest that if you change the structure of the body you change the person. So, by altering oneself through use of technology, you are disappearing, and a new machine being (a cyborg) will be created. By this logic, changes to your body such as losing an arm or gaining a mechanical one, means that one can change identity by changing the characteristics determining who you are, but not your state of being aware of your consciousness.

My injury to my arm altered my identity. But, in effect, I ended up viewing my arm as being separate to myself. I created an identity for my arm that was not connected to myself. By compartmentalising my arm, by making it ‘other’ to me, I felt my identity did not have to shift. My arm was disabled, but I was not. What I hadn’t considered until now was whether by bestowing an identity on my arm, I had thought of it as an object and whether an object can have an identity. Karen Barad in an interview with Dolphijn and van der Tuin talks about how new materialism demonstrates that, ‘the mind is the idea of the body and ‘the mind has the body as its object’ (Barad cited in Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p. 48). Within this new materialist frame, my arm as part of the body was already an object. This research looks at how I see my arm as a separate inanimate object.

When I approached Ivan with the concept of creating a device that would allow me to puppeteer my disabled hand with my able hand, I was subordinating my disabled hand to the role of puppet for my able hand to puppeteer. This created a dynamic which can be described as follows.

Arm = Puppet

Puppet = Object

If we apply Barad’s (2012) statement that new materialism demonstrates that the body is the mind’s object then:

Body = Object

Arm = Separate object

Puppet = Separate object

In chapter three, I discuss creating the exo-skeleton as an investigatory tool to investigate whether I did see my arm as a puppet, and subsequently as an object. I wanted to make real my

concerns by literally making my arm into a puppet, to see if this would illuminate the answer. With the exo-skeleton I achieved my goal, and when wearing it was able to puppeteer my arm. My reasoning was that if my arm was a puppet then it must be a separate inanimate object, however I do not consider puppets to be objects. Last year, while taking part in the puppet intensive course at the Banff Centre, my view of the puppet-puppeteer relationship shifted. We were introduced to the Suzuki method which was invented by Tadashi Suzuki, a Japanese theatre director. Suzuki is used to building awareness of the body and to be more present in the moment. Through breathing, it helps to quieten the mind and builds awareness of the energy from the other performers, the audience, and your connection with the puppet.

My group's final performance of the intensive was about to start. I started to concentrate on my breathing and became aware of the other performers' energy. The next thing I remember is coming off stage. I was so fully in the moment. I do not think I have ever performed so well. Up to that point, I was too much in my head. This experience changed my view of my puppets, I realised then that the puppet embodies the feelings of how we view ourselves. We transfer our consciousness onto it; it is our mirror; we are one. So, if the puppet is part of me and my arm is a puppet, then through the exercise of puppeteering my arm, I argue that I transfer my consciousness into it, making it an extension of the self rather than an object. Gross (2011) agrees, stating that for puppeteers ...:

... energy and character and emotion is passed into the puppet and that the puppeteers are more like external witnesses as much as controllers ... the puppet is always an extension of a living human body. There's a sense that the body becomes the soul of the puppet. (Gross, 2011, p. 42)

Taking the exo-skeleton off in Scene Eleven of *Pupa* revealed my naked hand underneath. This was me taking pride in my bodily difference, incorporating the disabled identity my hand stood for into the rest of my body and accepting that identity as part of me. It was no longer an

independent object, but one that was part of me. Aristotle saw the mind as body as one, but I was perceiving my arm (part of my body) as an object, as a physical thing outside of my self-consciousness:

Self-distance is the suggestion that bodily self-consciousness consist in a reflective stance where you conceive of your body as a physical thing, an object in the world as well as the subject of bodily experiences (Ingerslev, 2013, p. 163)

By incorporating my arm back into my body, and therefore my identity, I am connecting it back to my consciousness: they are no longer two entities, but one. So, whereas above, the body equalled object, the arm equalled separate object and the puppet equalled separate object, now:

Arm = Puppet

Puppet = extension of the self

Arm = extension of the self

Exo-skeleton = puppet

Exo-skeleton = removable extension of the self

Arm = Arm

Dolphijn and Van der Tuin (2012) argue that new materialism puts forward a cultural theory which like Haraway's (1991) description of the cyborg earlier challenges a dualism that is so ingrained in our current societal views and looks to how these dualisms are created. Iwakuma (2006) argues that dualistic thinking has created division between nature/culture, subject/object, substance/extended substance and body/soul. She notes that Merleau Ponty sought to overcome these dualisms and examine a phenomenon in terms of its 'total parts' (Madison, 1981, p. 175). So, as opposed to being opposites, the puppeteer and puppet are one, and my able and disabled parts and my exo-skeleton are one. The human and inhuman are not

divided but one, challenging as per Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, the dualisms so central to our (post-)modern thinking. As a puppeteer, whose role it is to manipulate matter, new materialism can offer ways to interpret the puppet and look at our relationship to it. By engaging with the non-human, we can give visible form to the human.

I had the ability to change my arm into an object, an exo-skeleton into an arm by incorporating it into the body schema, and an arm back into being an arm. Through using this technology, I now see my disabled arm as part of me. By exposing the exo-skeleton in the play, I was utilising a story-telling tool that my brain saw as a part of me, much like a puppet. By taking it off and showing my bare arm I was now revealing (to myself as much as the audience), my disabled arm not as a separate identity that I hid, but my disability that was now part of me.

I didn't struggle with the decision to take the device off, but I did struggle with why people thought it was so meaningful. It is only now as I reflect on the experience, that I understand why this decision was so meaningful and that through this research, I have gained self-awareness and become one with my fractured self.



## CONCLUSION

*Pupa* was the apotheosis of this research. The stories collected, the many wonderful books I read, the development of the exo-skeleton; these were all steps in this research, all culminating in this puppet play which wove our narratives together. Like building blocks, I drew concepts, ideas and practices from disabled theorists, philosophers and puppet and theatre scholars to inform my writing of *Pupa* and this thesis.

Positioning myself in the research was daunting. This research was about claiming the disabled identity and examining the constructs of the disabled body, and so I put my unstable identity and my body on display, and I was a guinea pig at my own disposal. I set out to examine and challenge and question with the hope of igniting change. I delved through narratives, fairy-tales, documentaries, interviews; and at a point in this research, my artistry, my personal identity and my research became one. Every decision made was with the goal of exploring views around the disabled body and disabled identity.

Myself and my supervisor Michael Finneran set out on this academic peregrination in 2014, and we were soon joined by a team of formidable conspirators. Firstly, in 2015, we were joined by research participants who were a group of artists with disabilities who aided me in probing what it means to be disabled. Thereafter, we were joined by an additional artistic team in 2016/2017; this then completed the team that made *Pupa*. Through our frank, honest, and revealing interviews, I learned a lot about how disabled people view themselves, but also how they feel they are being perceived. However, surprisingly, I learned a great deal about how I

personally viewed myself and how I had let my perspective of how I was viewed affect my pride in my bodily difference.

As I discussed in chapter one, the realisation that I had not ‘come out’ as disabled happened through a culmination of events. First, attending Ann Blake’s play and seeing an honest portrayal of what it was to struggle with a new identity and to ‘come out’ as gay in your 30s. I had never considered myself disabled and I didn’t realise I was hiding part of myself. Blake talks about being out with her partner, her partner reached for her hand and she pulled hers away, worried what others who did not know of her sexuality would think. On hearing her talk of her hidden hand equalling her hidden identity a lightbulb went off; I too had been hiding my hand and the identity it held. A few days later, reading Petra Kupperts (2014) I came across a section on Ellen Samuels’ (2003) paper about coming out as gay linked with coming out as disabled. This paper was one of the bricks this research was built on.

However, the moment where I really understood how I viewed my disability was when I waited in anticipation of meeting the research participants to conduct my first group workshop session in Mary Immaculate College in 2015. As discussed in chapter two, I began to make a prototype puppet of myself out of paper and tape, as I was going to ask each of the participants to do the same. As I looked at what I made, I was not just surprised, I was overwhelmed by a wave of sadness. This might have been partly fuelled by the fact that I was nervous about my first set of research interviews, as I was about to approach very personal issues with my participants. But I had just unconsciously made an intangible feeling in a physically real puppet. This puppet visually embodied how I saw myself. By making this puppet, I had broken the boundaries of the body and I had allowed the puppet to give physical embodiment to my thoughts and

feelings. The puppet in two parts that was before me, was a body without an arm and an arm without a body; one puppeteering the other.

The puppet became an extremely useful research tool that I had at my disposal. Throughout this research, I have used puppets as a means of physically embodying my questions, in order to seek answers. With the goal of examining these questions and making them more physically tangible, I turned questions into physical objects. To answer the question, ‘do I see my arm as a puppet and subsequently an object?’, I made my arm into a physical puppet with the aid of the exo-skeleton. To address this question, I had to not only look at how I view disability but also at how I view a puppet. A main question driving this research was if my right hand is the puppeteer (the manipulator), and my left hand the puppet (the manipulated), are they two entities or one? By originally viewing them as two – the manipulator and the manipulated – I had subscribed to an idea that I had hoped to rupture (as discussed in chapter three). This idea was of the derogatory conceptualisation of the weak puppet subjugated by the powerful puppeteer. In contrast, I view the puppeteer and puppet as one, rather than being comprised of two entities; one entity making real the thoughts and feelings of the other. Therefore, even if my left arm *was* a puppet, it was not an object as it was still part of me.

With this puppet tool at hand, I examined the narratives of the participants as well as my own personal narratives; this was carried out with the goal of making the questions I explored more physically tangible. Each puppet in *Pupa* emerged from our narratives; they physically embodied our feelings and thoughts. While I examined societal constructs through research and the perceptions of how a person with disabilities feels they are viewed, I can only hypothesise about how another person thinks and sees. However, in *Pupa*, and by stating the participants’ and my own perspectives, I asked society to reveal their own perspective. We

presented ourselves and asked the audience to view us and tell us what they thought. While I will never know the answer, I did ask the question, and questions are the first step in generating change.

The questions I asked myself during this research generated change in how I perceive my body and the disabled body. We put our stories and bodies out there and took pride in our difference. We are the dancer who can't hear, the dancer who can't walk, the song writer who could sing before he could talk, the composer who can fly, but at times finds it hard to walk, the performer with brain damage who sees twice what you see. We are the puppeteers who can't move a hand. We are all of this, but we are much more than this. We do the unexpected, we are the unexpected and we create art which is unexpected.

**Character-Conor:** Come this way, roll up roll up, for here we are other, supernatural. We are the fallen or the about to fall, the middle, the people in-between. The pupa before we emerge, we are the changed, the broken pieces. We are hiding in our bodies or in full sight, punched in the mouth from the inside.

This piece of script is a direct homage to the Ringmaster at a freak show, to the sales pitch made to bring in the crowd, and also to Shakespeare's epilogues, where the character directly addresses the crowd to sum up the play. In writing this, it was my ambition to not only sum up the play but the whole research. Character-Conor addresses the crowd, telling them of our personal, cultural, emergent, and hidden disabled identity, asking the audience where they fit, whether they are, 'the fallen or the about to fall?'

The fairy tale was a perfect place for this practice-based research to dwell. In the world of fairy tales and freak shows, where historically we are the fallen and twisted, we can reclaim the stereotypes of the past and rewrite our own stories.

What emerged through this research was that only in the last few years have disabled artists started to puppeteer their own stories, and I have yet to find any academic writing around this practice. Therefore, I posit that this is a unique area of study, and while there is research in puppetry, disability and auto-ethnotheatre I have not found any research combining these fields. This is why my ethnopuppetry and auto-ethnopuppetry work is methodologically significant.

This is the beginning of my research journey, and with that in mind and a flashlight in hand, I head back into the realms of fantastical puppetry and fairy-tales. I do so to shine light on the real narratives that hide in full sight, or in shadows in the enclosures of the body; in the hope to make that which is physically intangible more visible.

Round and round I go, when I'll wake up nobody knows.  
Imagine that you are falling. (E. Fisher, 2017, p. 18)



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Members of the *Pupa* Creative & Production Team

<b>Emma Fisher</b>	Writer, Set & Puppet Designer, Puppeteer & Producer
<b>Tommy Baker</b>	Director/Puppeteer
<b>Conor Madden</b>	Actor
<b>Zara Starr</b>	Assistant Director
<b>Tara Doolan</b>	Production Stage Manager
<b>Gemma Morris Kavanagh</b>	Costume Designer
<b>Shane Hickey-O'Mara</b>	Deputy Stage Manager
<b>Gunther Berkus</b>	Composer
<b>Patrick O'Brien</b>	Song Writer
<b>Kathleen Turner</b>	Assistant Song Writer
<b>Dr Michael Finneran</b>	Lighting Designer & PhD Supervisor
<b>Ivan Owens</b>	Mechanical Designer
<b>Gavin Kostick</b>	Dramaturgy Advisory
<b>Kimberley Cooper</b>	Film Dancer and Choreographer
<b>Colin Bartley</b>	Set Builder
<b>Sheila Stone</b>	Ceramic Artist
<b>Ken Coleman</b>	Graphic Designer/Photographer
<b>Deirdre Corry</b>	Zoetrope Choreographer
<b>Kay Yasugi</b>	Shadow Puppet Artist
<b>Eve Fisher</b>	Assistant Designer & Assistant Ceramicist
<b>Emma Mac</b>	Assistant Set Designer
<b>Lisa Cahill</b>	Dance Artist
<b>Boris Hunka</b>	Pianist
<b>Dominik Kosicki</b>	Documentarian and Editor
<b>Larissa Manley &amp; Liam Byrne</b>	Ushers
<b>Luke Frawley</b>	Lighting Operator
<b>Conor Cusack</b>	Lighting Technician
<b>Gary Lysaght &amp; Jay Kavanagh</b>	House Technicians

# APPENDIX B: Participant Information Sheets and Sample Consent Form



COLÁISTE MHUIRE GAN SMÁL  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH  
MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

## **Puppetry and Ability: creative exploration, narratives and performances of experiences of disability**

### **Participant Information Sheet: Phase 1**

#### **What is this research study about?**

The aim of this practice based research project is to write, perform and reflect upon a play using puppetry, that challenges people's preconceptions of disability. The play will be inspired by testimonies gathered from people who would traditionally be labelled as 'dis-abled'. The research also seeks to explore new technology and advanced puppet making skills to enable people with acquired disabilities to operate puppets more easily. Therefore making puppetry a more inclusive practice for all. I hope to teach differently abled individuals to operate purpose built puppets to participate in new work which their personal story will inspire. The project will also question the concept of “dis-ability” in the context of creativity and communication, explore where testimony theatre and puppetry can meet and look at the history of puppetry to see how it has been applied in ways that transcend oppression, sexism, racism, politics and the body

#### **Who is involved in carrying out this study?**

Emma Fisher (PhD Student). The research project is being supervised by Dr Michael Finneran at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

#### **Why is it being undertaken?**

I want to challenge peoples preconceptions of “dis-ability”. I will be collecting stories of people with disabilities. These stories will inspire a play that will look at society's view on disability in an exaggerated form using the medium of puppetry. I will adapt puppets for others as well as myself and create new ways of operating them. I hope that by doing this I will open up ways to make puppetry more inclusive to people who are differently abled. Expanding the limits of the frontiers of puppetry, to contribute to the conceptual knowledge around puppetry.

#### **What is involved for the participants?**

Participants who consent to be involved will first meet me at a Forum. The Forum will be away for me to tell you more about the project and get you thinking about stories you would like to contribute, there will be between 15 to 20 people attending. After the forum you may choose to tell your story or go no further with the process that is totally up to you. The forum will be held in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

If you choose to tell your story I will conduct semi structured interviews which will be a relaxed conversation around disability. These interviews with your consent will be audio recorded so I can transcribe them later. These recordings will be kept on an encrypted hard drive that only I have access to. The interviews will last no longer than 45 minutes and I will meet you between 1 and 2 times. I will give you a pseudonym and your identity will only be known by me. I will then write a play inspired by the stories gathered.

An example of what we will be discussing is:

- a. personal accounts of the lived experience of your disability and
- b. personal accounts of your experience of other people's expectations or lack thereof.

### **Will the researchers know who I am?**

All the information gathered will be completely anonymous. Every effort will be made to ensure that your anonymity is assured. I will be the only person who knows your identity. If you take part in phase 2 and are performing in the play or creating work for the play, I will ask your consent to be named as one of the performers, this will be totally up to you.

### **Right to withdraw**

You are free to withdraw at any time and at any stage of the project without giving a reason and without consequence. This can be done by contacting Emma Fisher at the contact details below.

### **What will happen to the data after research has been completed?**

Data will be kept for four years after my PhD is completed, unless it is (with the participants permission) used with in my thesis and play and then it will be stored in this form infinitely. However, in this case there will be no identifiers of that person, unless (because of the nature of the work) they agree to be named.

**Contact details:** If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study please contact:

**Emma Fisher**

**Email: [emma.fisher@mic.ul.ie](mailto:emma.fisher@mic.ul.ie)**

**Telephone: 0876485678**

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:

**MIREC Administrator**

**Mary Immaculate College**

**South Circular Road**

**Limerick**

**061-204515**

**[mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)**

Thank you for taking the time to read this material



**COLÁISTE MUIRE GAN SMÁL**  
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH  
**MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE**  
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

## **Puppetry and Ability: creative exploration, narratives and performances of experiences of disability**

### **Participant Information Sheet: Phase 2**

#### **What is this research study about?**

The aim of this practice based research project is to write, perform and reflect upon a play using puppetry, that challenges people's preconceptions of disability. The play will be inspired by testimonies gathered from people who would traditionally be labelled as 'dis-abled'. The research also seeks to explore new technology and advanced puppet making skills to enable people with acquired disabilities to operate puppets more easily. Therefore making puppetry a more inclusive practice for all. I hope to teach differently abled individuals to operate purpose built puppets to participate in new work which their personal story will inspire. The project will also question the concept of "dis-ability" in the context of creativity and communication, explore where testimony theatre and puppetry can meet and look at the history of puppetry to see how it has been applied in ways that transcend oppression, sexism, racism, politics and the body

#### **Who is involved in carrying out this study?**

Emma Fisher (PhD Student). The research project is being supervised by Dr Michael Finneran at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

#### **Why is it being undertaken?**

I want to challenge people's preconceptions of "dis-ability". I will be collecting stories of people with disabilities, these stories will inspire a play that will look at society's view on disability in an exaggerated form using the medium of puppetry.

I will adapt puppets for others as well as myself and create new ways of operating them. I hope that by doing this I will open up ways to make puppetry more inclusive to people who are differently abled therefore expanding the limits of the frontiers of puppetry thus contributing to our working and conceptual knowledge in the field.

#### **What is involved for the participants?**

Between 2 to 8 participants will be invited to take part in this phase. As part of this phase you will have custom made splints and puppets built for you by an occupational therapist and myself and will take part in puppetry training with the puppets. This will be between 6 to 10 months in duration, where you will be involved for a maximum of two to three hours a week and take place in Dublin and Limerick in Enable Ireland or the college.

This process will be photographed and filmed to record the journey. You will be measured and fitted for the puppet and splints by the occupational therapist and myself. This will be all done with great sensitivity and the documentation will be kept in an encrypted file on a hard drive only accessible to me. If I wish to use any documentation in my thesis or in the play you will first be contacted and will be asked for your consent. Do not worry about refusing consent, it is totally up to you.

The next part of this phase is between 4 to 6 weeks and will be full time. This will incorporate rehearsals and performance in the play that has been inspired by the participant's stories from phase one. The performance will be held at a limerick theatre venue. I will be the writer, however, during this phase we may choose to devise and in this case I would be very happy for you to contribute ideas.

### **Will the researchers know who I am?**

All the information gathered will be completely anonymous. Every effort will be made to ensure that your anonymity is assured. I will be the only person who knows your identity. If you take part in phase 2 and are performing in the play or creating work for the play, I will ask your consent to be named as one of the performers, this will be totally up to you.

### **Right to withdraw**

You are free to withdraw at any time and at any stage of the project without giving a reason and without consequence. This can be done by contacting Emma Fisher at the contact details below.

### **What will happen to the data after research has been completed?**

Data will be kept for four years after my PhD is completed, unless it is (with the participants permission) used with in my thesis and play and then it will be stored in this form infinitely. However, in this case there will be no identifiers of that person, unless (because of the nature of the work) they agree to be named.

### **Contact details**

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study please contact:

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**Limerick**  
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Thank you for taking the time to read this material



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## **Puppeteering through Disability**

### **Informed Consent form**

Dear Participant,

I will be collecting stories based around identity, in order to conduct research that will result in a theatre performance involving puppets, as well as a written thesis.

The below information should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the research study.

You are free to withdraw from the research at any time.

#### **Will the researchers know who I am?**

All the information gathered will be completely anonymous. Every effort will be made to ensure that your anonymity is assured. I will be the only person who knows your identity. If you take part in phase 2 and are performing in the play or creating work for the play, I will ask your consent to be named as one of the performers, this will be totally up to you.

#### **Right to withdraw**

You are free to withdraw from this research at any time and at any stage of the project without giving a reason and without consequence. This can be done by contacting Emma Fisher at the contact details below.

#### **What will happen to the data after research has been completed?**

Data will be kept for four years after my PhD is completed, unless it is (with the participants permission) used with in my thesis and play and then it will be stored in this form infinitely. However, in this case there will be no identifiers of that person, unless otherwise agreed.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form:

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I understand that my identity will be protected.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.
- I understand that if my story is performed in the play or written about in the thesis. I will first be asked if the content can be used and if I wish to be credited for it.
- I am 18 years of age or older

Name

(PRINTED):

Name

(Signature):

Date:

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# APPENDIX C: Script of *Pupa: A Freakish Metamorphic Tale of Us*

## **Pupa: A Freakish Metamorphic Tale of Us**

by Emma Fisher

### Characters

The performers, Emma, Conor & Tommy play multiple characters throughout *Pupa*. For ease of reading, their initial appears in the script before a part they play.

**E Emma:** Puppet-Emma, Character-Emma and voice of Cat

**C Conor:** Character-Conor, Mouths, Gunther the Caterpillar, voice of Fox and shadow puppets.

**T Thomas:** Doctor and Owl Doctor, Conductor, Cat and Fox, Flamingos and shadow puppets.

### Scene 1

*In the foyer space of the theatre, Puppet-Emma lies broken and motionless on the floor, her left arm hanging by strings from her shoulder. Emma crouches over her. We hear the sound of an ambulance and a doctor arrives through the hospital curtain, pulling the curtain back to reveal Character-Conor sitting in a wheelchair in a catatonic state looking in a mirror. Character-Conor is on stage left on a chair, there is a hospital bed on stage right. As the Doctor pulls the curtain open, Emma lowers down and starts to shallow breath Puppet-Emma. The doctor scoops down, checks Puppet-Emma's vital signs and lifts her up.*

**T Doctor:** It's off to the theatre with you my dear.

*Still in the theatre foyer, the doctor carries Puppet-Emma behind the hospital curtain and places her on the bed. A stark light shines on a hospital gurney with Puppet-Emma lying on it. The doctor starts to examine Puppet-Emma. He checks her legs and her left arm. When he touches her right arm she gets distressed. On seeing that her arm is pulled out from her shoulder, she tries to fit it back in but it won't work. She panics and pushes it away. The Doctor calms her down, and then as if operating, pulls out the arm from the shoulder exposing the five severed nerves. The arm lies on the bed. The doctor peels a layer of Puppet-Emma's face off, revealing a translucent mask. She has the same face underneath. He places the mask on the shoulder of the arm, and the arm comes to life puppeteered by Thomas. Puppet-Emma and Arm-Puppet-Emma look at each other before Puppet-Emma turns her back on her arm. The newly formed arm puppet hopes down the bed and into a box marked Room of Forgotten Limbs. Puppet-Emma gets more distressed. The doctor see's the distress. He puts a breathing apparatus over her mouth. He injects a drug called barbiturate into a tube and she loses consciousness. Puppeteer Emma leaves. The doctor addresses the audience.*

**T Doctor:** And now I shall induce the patient into a coma, this will stop her brain swelling and allow her to rest. When swelling is relieved, pressure on the brain also reduces, hopefully preventing some or all brain damage from occurring.

*Looks to Character-Conor.*

**T Doctor:** How are you today Conor? *To audience* He's been under a while.

*The Doctor looks at a pile of books on the chair of Fairy Tales (The Adventures of Pinocchio, Alice in Wonderland, the Ice Queen and Metamorphosis). The Doctor picks up The Adventures of Pinocchio and begins to read to Puppet-Emma and Character-Conor.*

**T Doctor:** Once upon a time there was a piece of wood. Just a normal block of firewood.

*The monitoring machine that is attached to Puppet-Emma signals that something is happening to the patient. Sound effects of her heart speeding up beep, beep, beep. The Doctor injects more barbiturate into the tube he has attached to Puppet-Emma. She relaxes. Emma leaves the puppet as the drug is induced.*

**T Doctor:** You are probably beginning to feel drowsy, but it won't hurt as much, deep breaths and imagine that you're falling, *looking to audience* 10, 9, 8, 7, 6...

*When the doctor gets to six, a sound recording of his voice is echoed down the hall that enters the theatre. The count-down continues. The Doctor continues to read the story, sitting in the chair looking at the book, moving his mouth but not making any sound. Audience are ushered inside to theatre, where they hear the Countdown from all around 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. They then hear a recording of the Doctors muffled voice reading:*

**Doctor (Audio Recording):** It was not an expensive piece of wood. Far from it. Just a common block of firewood, one of those thick, solid logs that are put on the fire in winter to make cold rooms cosy and warm.

## Scene 2

*They enter the theatre space which has been transformed into a maze of rooms. Hanging from the black walls of the maze are strands of white woven wool dipped in red, resembling a cocoon and puppet strings. In the first room, they are met by another version of Puppet-Emma hanging slightly above a stage-riser; she is very similar to the earlier puppet. There are wood shavings around her and a cast of her face and of her right arm, like she has just been made. She has no right arm. From behind a screen we hear:*

**Doctor (Audio Recording):** Little puppet made of pine, awake. The gift of life is thine.

*She wakes up starts to breathe and lands on the floor in slow motion. She tries to get up, wobbles and falls. After a few shaky starts she stands up. She looks down at her body to check her legs, her left arm and then realises that she does not have a right arm. She looks around as if she will find it there but cannot. She finds the cast for it and tries to fit her left*

*arm inside. She looks at all the different cast of her. Puppet-Emma gives prolonged stares at the audience intermittently throughout this scene. All of this is done to the rhythms in Gunter's suspense track. Puppet-Emma hears voices coming from behind the wall.*

**Fox (Audio Recording):** Do you like my muzzle-less hairless dog?

**Cat (Audio Recording):** Well, look how my muzzle-less sheared sheep trembles with cold.

**Fox (Audio Recording):** Ha that's nothing! See my beak-less chicken.

**Cat (Audio Recording):** Your beak-less chicken is no match for my beak-less, tailless peacock.

*Cat and Fox both laugh*

**E Puppet Emma:** Hello, is anyone there?

**Cat (Audio Recording):** Shhhhhhh

*By the table an arm sticks out of the wall (it looks paw like), Puppet-Emma jumps off the table and goes to retrieve it, but instead it pulls her into the wall.*

### Scene 3

*This whole scene is done with Shadow puppets with musical backing. A light goes on in the wall revealing a shadow scene. A fox and a cat, both with human faces, can be seen. They are standing upright. They are pulling Puppet-Emma along by her one arm. They pull her past hairless dogs, sheared sheep, beak-less chickens and tailless peacocks.*

**C Fox:** Oh, little girl, what do we have here?

**E Cat:** Oh, you poor thing, what's missing my dear?

**C Fox:** She's missing her arm.

**E Cat:** An arm you say.

**C Fox:** Well, I was once blind but now I see.

**E Cat:** I was lame but my hand grew back to me.

**C Fox:** ... and Cat! We're very pleased to meet you.

**C Fox:** There is a field, the field of wonders, and in this field you can bury things, deep in the earth. Cover them with soil and water, and a pinch of salt for good luck, wait, for patience is a virtue. In the darkness sprouts limbs and blossoms that spiral up like a banyan tree and on this, branches will hang arms and limbs, and just take your pick. Don't you worry we are here to fix thee.

**E Cat and C Fox:** For this service there will be a small price to pay.

**E Cat:** Allow me to tie you to tree; there is something you must give to me.

*They tie her to a tree singing.*

**C Fox:** It will be all right you'll see,

We'll make you what you want to be,  
We'll show you what you want to see.

**C Fox and E Cat:** We are very pleased to meet you.

*A butterfly with a man's face and a German accent lands on the tree.*

**C Gunther the Butterfly:** Do not listen to bad advice.  
Before you do you must think twice.  
They are playing you like mice.

*The Cat leaps on him, knocking him from the tree and eats his wings. He lies motionless upside down on the floor. He now looks like a caterpillar.*

**E Puppet-Emma:** Poor butterfly, why did you hurt him?

**C Fox:** He doesn't want what's best for you my dear.  
Don't worry it will all become clear.

**E Cat:** I hurt him to teach him a lesson.  
There can be no digression,  
He talks too much and it is such.

**C Fox:** Next time he will keep his mouth shut, and his words to himself.  
And you know he is a very negative person.

*Puppet-Emma does not heed the warning. She nods at them, and they take her mouth.*

**E Cat:** Pluck out your mouth, give it to me,  
We will bury this branch, there will be a tree,  
A limb will grow back to thee.

**C Fox:** We are very pleased to meet you.

*They leave laughing. Character-Conor's shadow (which has no mouth, as Character-Conor is wearing a latex half mask over it) passes and goes to help her. He produces a piece of mirror and cuts the rope. She jumps to the ground and waits but no arm appears. She digs at the earth only to find the branch. Character-Conor helps her slot the branch into to her gaping shoulder. At this the screen goes dark and Puppet-Emma and Character-Conor fall back out of the wall. A light comes up on them and we hear a recording of Cat and Fox.*

**C Fox:** Come on now, come with me,  
We'll tell you stories you've never seen,  
take you where you've never been.

**E Cat:** Pluck out your mouth and eat your dreams.

**C Fox and E Cat:** We're very pleased to eat you.

**E Cat:** Come now fox lets sell our wares,  
How sweet she thought we dealt in repairs.

**C Fox:** I'm the Fox and she's the cat,  
and you just might be the rat,  
scurrying around our little maze,  
are you living in a haze?  
enjoy our domain, if you will,  
we've got lots of time for the kill.

**C Fox & E Cat:** (*Whispering*) We'll be very pleased to eat you.

*The sound fades. Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma look at each other. They are hunched over and scared. Character-Conor is wearing a half mask that covers his mouth. Puppet-Emma reaches up and pulls his hand down, which up to now has been covering his mouth, to reveal his lack of one.*

## Scene 4

*As the audience follows Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma down the hall, they hear singing. The lights come up to reveal a conductor; he is talking to mouths in jars. He is dressed like a Ring Master; he has a cart with rows of mouths in jars on top of it. Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma are standing amongst the audience, Puppet-Emma hides behind Character-Conor.*

**T Conductor:** me, me, me, me, ok higher, me, me, me, me, higher, me, me, me, me, me. Ok you lower, low, low, low, lower, low, low, low, lower, laaa. I didn't say you, him, low, low, low, that's good. Me, me, me, la, la, la, low, low, low. Ok everyone together. Aahhhhh, stop.

*When the audience enter he pulls himself together quickly.*

**T Conductor:** I knew you'd come, welcome, welcome, we've been rehearsing forever for this moment, I almost feel emotional. *He looks to the mouths.* Get it fucking right you.

*Some of the mouths give sly remarks adlibbed by Thomas. They stop when the Conductor catches them. He picks up a stick and starts to conduct; the mouths are slow to respond. He runs a stick along the jars to wake them up.*

**T Conductor:** Pay attention, 1, 2, 3

*The mouths sing a song about being excited. They sound tired and bored, like they have been on tour for years.*

**Mouths (Audio Recording):** Ba, ba, ba,  
Hey, it's you I'm so excited, and I don't know, looking for you,  
Hey, we know just what you wanted and that you could be one of the crew *cough*,  
Hey, we know, so excited and I know that we been looking for you,  
Hey, so excited, so exciting, I'm excited. *sighs*  
Can we get some coffee now?

*The Conductor gets infuriated and starts to curse at the mouths.*

**T Conductor:** Yes, it's fucking exciting. When are you ever going to work right?

*The conductor turns and walks to Character-Conor*

**T Conductor:** What are you looking at? You think you can do better? Yeah you I saw you. No, I'm talking to you. Show us your voice. Oh, you're one of them. It's not here anyway. These are my own private collection. Maybe you misplaced it. It's not one of my beauties. Sit, it's time for some new blood lads. Come now boy, show what you've got, give me a song, a song not sung yet. If you can teach us a new song, a mouth will find you.

**Mouths (Audio Recording):** Pick me, pick me.

**T Conductor:** Quiet down, all of you. You know you'll know if you belong to him. Wrong mouth, and it's all tangled up he'd be getting, and that's good for no one mouth or boy.

*All the mouths clear their throats and get ready to sing.*

**Mouths (Audio Recording):** *voices tuning*

I want to go home,  
I can't stay here anymore,  
I want to go home,  
I can't see what I am for,  
I want to go home,  
I can't sleep anymore  
I want to go home.

This is not what I wanted to be,  
This is not who I wanted to be.

I want to go home,  
Can't stay here anymore,  
I want to go home,  
I want to go home.  
This is not what I started for,  
I can't see this anymore,  
I want to go home.  
This is not what I was meant for,

This is not what I started for,  
Ohhhhhhhh I want to go home.  
Can't sleep anymore,  
I want to go home,  
I want to go home,  
I want to go home,  
Can't sleep anymore,  
I want to go home, I do.  
This is not where I was meant for  
This is not where I began.  
I want to go home,  
I want to go home,  
Can't sleep anymore,  
I want to go home.

*As the mouths sing and Character-Conor conducts, the conductor jumps around trying to get the audience to join in. When they won't he proclaims:*

**T Conductor:** This one's mute! *Looking at Character-Conor.* I smell toast; You're fucking cooking boy. Open mouths, open doors, boy.

*When the song finishes we hear a faint voice singing from a box, as both the Conductor and Character-Conor reach for it together. The box starts to sing the song, puppeteered by Thomas.*

**Character-Conor (Audio Recording):** *Singing*

I want to go home,  
I can't stay here anymore,  
I want to go home,  
I can't see what I am for,  
I want to go home,  
I can't sleep anymore,  
I want to go home.  
*Spoken* I want to go home,  
I want to go home.

*The conductor then holds the box closed.*

**T Conductor:** Well, if you come with us, you can have it.

*He takes out a piece of mirror and holds it up and Conor, with his back to the audience takes off his mask and the audience see his mouth in the mirror.*

**T Conductor:** Ah ha, take this and guard your voice, remember open mouths opens doors, and a song can always change the mood. Now join with us.

**C Character-Conor:** The traveling mouth choir will go where needed; returning voices to those that have had them stolen.

**T Conductor:** *Shrugs* UM, sure, why not, come on.

*Character-Conor turns to Puppet-Emma.*

**Character-Conor:** I have been out a mouth for, um, well I don't know, but a long time. Let me see if I can find yours.

*Looking to the conductor he asks:*

**Character-Conor:** Do you have a mouth for her?

**Puppet-Emma (Audio Recording):** Hello, hello, hello

*At each hello the conductor tries to talk over it.*

**T Conductor:** No little girl's mouth's here. *He slams boxes closed.* Here, she can have this beak. Remember, open mouths or beaks open doors.

*Character-Conor puts it in her left hand.*

**C Character-Conor:** Would you like to join us?

*Puppet-Emma looks from the Conductor to Character-Conor.*

**E Puppet-Emma:** No

*She is surprised by this and goes to follow them, but they are gone.*

## Scene 5

*Puppet-Emma looks around at the audience, then down at the beak in her hand. She tries to say hello through it. She approaches different audience members and says hello, trying to get used to using the beak.*

**E Puppet-Emma:** Heeee Heeeellloooo

*We hear the conductor and Character-Conor whistling the song happily together, and a light comes on in the shadow screen. In the shadows, Fox and the Conductor meet. The Fox wants his money for the mouths; the conductor does not have it. The Fox sees that he has returned a mouth and isn't happy.*

**T Conductor:** I have your money.

**C Fox:** You have my money.

**T Conductor:** I don't have your money.

**C Fox:** You don't have our money.

**T Conductor:** I can get your money. See, I have this guy here; he's going to make me money.

**C Fox:** You're returning mouths.

**T Conductor:** No, but, em...

**Fox:** We are very pleased to beat you.

*Fox tries to attack the Conductor, but the Conductor runs away. He attacks Character-Conor. We see Character-Conor's shadow; there are now many Foxes who are all swooping and biting at him. Puppet-Emma has been watching nervously not knowing what to do, finally jumping in and shouts at Fox.*

**E Shadow Emma:** STOP

*Sound has been building up here and on the shouted stop, goes silent.*

*Character-Conor and the Foxes disappear. Character-Conor 'falls' out of the screen. Cat appears. Puppet-Emma is trapped in the wall. We see the Cat shadow getting bigger and bigger in the background, blocking out the light and then darkness on the screen, trapping Puppet-Emma inside.*

## Scene 6

*Character-Conor turns to face a broken mirrored wall with his back to the audience; we can see his reflection in fragments. He has the two pieces of mirror in his bag and places them into the wall. Character-Conor talks facing the wall of mirrors.*

**C Character-Conor:** Broken, fragmented pieces. It's grinning at me, can you see.

*Character-Conor's grin is reflected in the mirror.*

**C Character-Conor:** It flew out of my hands and I, umm, I mean it fell to the earth, where it was dashed in a hundred million and more pieces. Some of these pieces were hardly so large as a grain of sand, and they flew about in the wide world, everyday um, (*pause*) every day.

*Turning around he smiles at the audience*

**C Character-Conor:** Blue sky thinking, clear as the sky, clear as the thing filled with airplanes and birds and gas. Mouths, voices in and out, I hear them all, before there was just one, one taken, two grew back; but now I hold many. I am the man of many voices and reflections you see, the keeper of truths. I see twice what you see. I live in two lands, both broken. This is a place. Like no place on Earth. A land full of wonder, mystery, and danger! Some say to survive it: You need to be as mad as a milliner.

*(Conor points at one member of the audience) Which luckily you are.*

What a very large head I have, *(looks in mirror)* and a tiny pimple of a head. Are you hiding her?

*He looks back at the mirror.*

**C Character-Conor:** Have I gone mad?

*Turning to look at the audience*

**C Character-Conor:** I'm afraid so. You're all entirely broken. But I'll tell you a secret. All the best people are. Turns back towards mirrors and crouches on the floor.

*He looks at the mirror and whispers*

**C Character-Conor:** Come back, please come back.

*He then leaves the room. Puppet-Emma comes out of wall. She is shaking and scared.*

**E Puppet-Emma:** I'm back

*She looks around for Character-Conor but can't find him, so she goes through the audience leading them to the next room.*

## Scene 7

*Character-Conor disappears behind the Gunther the Caterpillar puppet and starts to move and voice him. Puppet-Emma is examining the caterpillar's feet as the audience enter the room. She then starts tugging his arm to get it for herself.*

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** Ouch *(in a German accent)*

*Puppet-Emma jumps back. Gunther the Caterpillar and Puppet-Emma look at each other for some time in silence. At last, the Caterpillar addresses them in a languid, sleepy voice.*

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** Who are you little pupa?

**E Puppet-Emma:** Me I'm ... I, I, I, hardly know, just at present, at least I know who I was when I woke up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** What do you mean by that? Explain yourself!

**E Puppet-Emma:** I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, because I'm not myself, you see.

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** I don't see.

**E Puppet-Emma:** I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly, for I can't understand it myself to begin with; and losing your arm and your voice in one day and to keep changing into a shadow is very confusing.

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** It isn't.

**E Puppet-Emma:** Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet, but when you have to turn into a pupa, you will some day, you know and then after that into a butterfly. I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** Not a bit.

**E Puppet-Emma:** Well, perhaps your feelings may be different. All I know is, it feels very queer to me.

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** You! (*he says contemptuously*). Who are you?

**E Puppet-Emma:** I think you ought to tell me who you are first.

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** Why?

*At this, Puppet-Emma turns away and begins to walk off.*

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** Come back! I've something important to say!

*Puppet-Emma turns and comes back.*

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** Keep your temper.

**E Puppet-Emma:** Is that all? (*Angrily*)

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** No. (*Caterpillar pauses*) So you think you're changed, do you?

**E Puppet-Emma:** I'm afraid I am. I'm searching to be whole again, but I keep getting robbed of other parts. I can't stay the same for ten minutes together!

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** (*The caterpillar begins to laugh.*) Whole! No one is whole. We are all broken here. Who robbed thee?

**E Puppet-Emma:** A Cat and a Fox.

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** How doth the little Pussycat and Fox improve their shinning grin? They prey on your insecurities and set you in a spin. How cheerfully they seem to smile; how neatly spread their claws and welcome little fishes (*points at Puppet-Emma*) in, with gently beaming jaws. I know them well, they like to lend a hand, lurking in the shadows and trip you up with it to.

**E Puppet-Emma:** Well, I should like to have my arm back just as it was before, or a new one.

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** Did someone take it?

**E Puppet-Emma:** Well, um, it's just one doesn't like changing so often, you know.

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** I don't know (*he says sarcastically*). There is no going back only forward and there is no going forward only back. I was a Butterfly and now I'm a Caterpillar, you see?

**E Puppet-Emma:** No, I don't see.

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** I tried to warn you. When I was a Butterfly. But you swiped me from the sky and ate my wings and spat me out.

**E Puppet-Emma:** No that was not me, that was Cat (*pause*). I'm sorry you lost your wings.

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** I suppose it wasn't you who didn't listen, who sent your arm away and gave up your voice.

**E Puppet-Emma:** No, I mean yes! But I'm not used to it! (*pleading in a piteous tone*). I wish the creatures wouldn't be so easily offended!

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** It is not I, but you who are offended, for who am I but me and who are you but you?

Around the corner you must go,

You will learn all that you must know.

For I am happy to be me,

For I have legs so many to see,

They all play sounds,

It all becomes clear the world is but an instrument my dear.

No them and us just you and me.

So, we must be happy to be.

Before you go do one thing for me, all hold onto ropes and help me be free.

*The audience are asked to wait and hold onto the ropes. They look attached to Gunther the Caterpillar's legs. A flash of light and we see the giant Caterpillar, then darkness. They hold onto ropes in the darkness. A rope moves. Music and sounds begin to play. A soundscape, created by Gunther, with low lights that travels along the rope that is moving. While this is happening, we hear the Caterpillar say:*

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** Lovely, yes I'm flying, I'm flying. I'm free.

*Lights come up and the Caterpillar hasn't moved. The Caterpillar looks at Puppet-Emma and the audience and laughs.*

**C Gunther the Caterpillar:** I'm flying free (*then he yawns*). Will you turn out the lights when you go?

*Conor emerges from behind Gunther the Caterpillar*

**E Puppet-Emma:** I'm back!

**C Character-Conor:** What are you talking about? (*he says in a confused way*) Come on!

*He leaves leading the audience to the next room.*

## Scene 8

*They come across Puppet-Deirdre in a pink dressing gown in a wheelchair. There are two flamingos perched at the end of her arms. They are made partially of pink dressing gown and orthotic foot splints. They are chatting incomprehensively with each other. They stop and stare at Conor. The flamingos should be the same person, with one on each arm.*

**T Flamingo 1:** Don't touch that.

**T Flamingo 2:** Don't touch that.

**T Flamingo 1:** Why are you here?

**T Flamingo 2:** I haven't a clue why he is here. Why are you here?

**T Flamingo 1:** He doesn't know, don't ask him.

**T Flamingo 2:** Look at him, what's wrong with him?

**T Flamingo 1:** I haven't the slightest idea me. Look, he's got legs.

**T Flamingo 2:** He's got legs. What is he right? Are you right?

**T Flamingo 1:** He can't be right. No one here is right.

**T Flamingo 2:** Don't be asking him questions like that, he doesn't know.

**T Flamingo 1:** Ummmmmm, what's wrong with you then? (*Points at Character-Conor*)

**T Flamingo 2:** What's right? (*They both start laughing*).

**T Flamingo 1:** We'll have to check the book.

**T Flamingo 2:** Let's go and check the book.

*The Flamingos disappear behind the wheelchair. Puppet-Deirdre starts to move out of the chair. She slips out of the pink dressing gown and stands up out of her wheelchair. Under it, she is wearing a white nightdress. She starts to dance and as she does, a zoetrope turns and projects two women in pink dressing gowns dancing around and around; one layered over the other. Both are the same costume as Puppet-Deirdre. One in a wheelchair is a*

*photograph; the other floats above on her foot and is a drawing. As she lifts out of the chair, her song starts to play.*

**Puppet-Deirdre (Audio Recording):**

Look down, I can see me,  
Look down I can feel me,  
The heart and the bones,  
The feet on a cold stone,  
I move through the air,  
Move through the air,  
My heart in my hands,  
Feelings I don't understand.  
Look down can you see me,  
Look down can you feel me,  
*(here Puppet-Deirdre drifts down and the puppeteer helps her back in to her and her dressing gown)*  
My heart and my bones,  
My feet on the cold stone.

*When Puppet-Deirdre is back in the chair, the two flamingos return.*

**T Flamingo 1:** I looked in the book and he's not in it.

**T Flamingo 2:** What you mean he's not in it? He must be right so.

**T Flamingo 1:** Yeah, he must be right, he is handsome too.

**T Flamingo 2:** Nothing wrong with you so.

**T Flamingo 1:** Nothing wrong with you.

**T Flamingo 2:** Why are you here?

**T Flamingo 1:** Why are you here?

*Character-Conor takes the flamingo puppet splints off Puppet-Deirdre's hands, placing them on the arms of her wheelchair. Her hands drift down to her lap. She takes a piece of mirror from a pocket, showing the audience their reflection and then gives it to Character-Conor.*

## **Scene 9**

*Conor takes the mirror and leads the audience back to the wall of mirrors. He faces the mirror.*

**C Character-Conor:** Once upon a time there was a fall. A boy. Crowds watched on with joy. He was small. He was pushed. Forced. Smashed. He was swallowed, and the crowds couldn't follow. They went home, and he fell, alone. His only dream was to be happy, to be

whole. The fall let him think it was a small fall, but time ceased He thought about death and dying and how alone you are. He thought about the futility of life and how death isn't a relief, he thought "uh-oh", he thought "shit". Sound changed shape and he could smell the end. A small bump, then he opened his eyes and looked around. Is this the rest of my life? He said. I was not alive when I was free; I am trapped now, basically dead, and so are we. Here we are round and round fragments of broken mirror to be found.

*Turns and looks at the audience.*

**C Character-Conor:** Is it weird for you? It's weird for me. Something more than fishy is going on. You think this is a jail, don't you? But this place is no jail, I am free. To think and act and never hurt another. But we're alone here, trapped, half are gone but more than half comes back. This is not where I was meant for, but I have been here before.

*Character-Conor looks at the mirror and slots in the last piece of mirror. As he does a door in the mirror appears. Inside we see puppet Fox. He has Character-Conor's face. Character-Conor moves and Fox moves.*

**C Character-Conor and Fox:** Who are you?

**C Character-Conor and Fox:** I am me and I am you.

*Character-Conor slams the door and talks to his reflection.*

**C Character-Conor:** What did you see? Me. No. Nothing.

## Scene 10

*Character-Conor turns and sits on the floor. Puppet-Emma stands frozen with her head in a cloud mirroring a projection of Kimberley the Dancer who also stands still with her head in a cloud. The music is very loud. We hear the music turned down sharply and then silence. Kimberley the Dancer appears out of the cloud. She dances in complete silence. As the music starts to fade her head disappears back into her cloud and she freezes. This is repeated three times. When she emerges the third time from the cloud, she falls to the floor, darting here and there, fish like. The Cat puppet with Puppet-Emma's face appears. It tries to get at the fish like dancer on the floor. Kimberley the dancer dances out of shot almost melting into the floor and the projection fades. As she disappears, Puppet-Emma comes out of cloud. Both puppet Cat and Puppet-Emma look at each other and start to mirror each other, then the cat bows at Puppet-Emma and disappears. Character-Conor approaches Puppet-Emma.*

**C Character-Conor:** What did you see?

**E Puppet-Emma:** It was, it was me.

## Scene 11

*Here, the sounds from the first scene at the hospital bleed in. Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma lead the audience down a corridor where they find the Owl Doctor behind a white screen. The Owl doctor comes out from behind the screen. He is standing behind two mini-hospital beds, which have a porcelain Emma and a porcelain Conor lying on them. Porcelain-Emma's arm is broken off and Porcelain-Conor's head is broken off. The room mirrors the hospital room we left the Doctor in earlier. This is the room of forgotten limbs.*

**T Owl Doctor:** I'll be right with you. I have just what you need. You will be all fixed up in no time. Ah, just in time you two. Well, where are my manners? Welcome. Welcome to the room of forgotten limbs. If you are here you wish to retrieve something, a memory perchance, this is your beginning (*points at Character-Conor*) but it could be your end (*points at Puppet-Emma*) or your middle ... um (*he points at someone in the room*). R- r- r-right. Here you will find a glimpse is all, a feeling that tiny seed that changes you.

*Owl Doctor looks at Character-Conor*

**T Owl Doctor:** I have just what you need

*The Owl Doctor picks up porcelain Character-Conor's head and is about to fix it back on.*

**C Character-Conor:** No, no, no, not for me.

*Character-Conor picks up his head and walks off. The Owl Doctor looks confused.*

**T Owl Doctor:** But I fix, that's what I do, see. I make things whole, it won't take a second.

*The Owl Doctor looks at Puppet-Emma.*

**T Owl Doctor:** You how about you? I'll fix you.

**E Puppet-Emma:** No, I've looked at this all wrong, I've wanted that for so long, but a new arm's not for me, for I have learned just to be.

**T Owl Doctor:** That beak. Can I have it? I know who owns it.

*She hands it to him and he walks behind the screen.*

**T Owl Doctor:** Gertrude, I have your beak. Ha ha, and presto! Here you go my dear chicken.

*We hear the sound of a chicken. The Owl Doctor comes back from behind the screen.*

**T Owl Doctor:** Um, where was I? Oh yes, your arm, I have just the thing.

*The Owl Doctor pulls at Puppet-Emma's branch arm, she pulls against him, he pulls it out and she falls to her knees.*

**T Owl Doctor:** Wait, wait there. I'll be right back. I have the perfect arm here.

*The Owl exits. Puppet-Emma notices the box marked Room of Forgotten Limbs on the ground (the same as the one from first scene), and with Character-Conor's help she opens the box. Inside she finds her arm (which she pushed away in the first scene). Character-Conor helps her put it on.*

**T Owl Doctor:** No, I could have fixed you. Look, here, a brand-new arm, I can cut that off; just take a tick, it will just get in the way (*he lifts her arm and it drops back down*) see.

*At this Character-Emma breaks her concentration on Puppet-Emma and looks at the Owl and says:*

**E Character-Emma:** NO (*Firmly*)

*The Owl Doctor disappears. Character-Emma kneels and Puppet-Emma sits on her knee. They look at each other. As Character-Emma speaks the first verse of the song, she places her puppet down and detaches it from her.*

**E Character-Emma:**

Is the good always new? that's what I was told,  
What's broken should be fixed,  
Closed mouths, opens doors.  
To a place where they plan, what parts are replaced,  
And what parts are removed packaged up, just to be returned.

*Emma pauses and looks at Emma-Puppet*

**E Character-Emma:**

I've got my fair share of secrets,  
That I've never written down,  
That's why I've got two deep lines in the middle of my brow.

*Character-Emma Gets up and steps away from puppet.*

**E Character-Emma:**

I've never told a living soul,  
I've always found it hard to know,  
Which story I should let go and  
Which story (*Emma stares at audience*) I should hold on to,  
What should I hold on to?

*Character-Emma looks down and starts to take off her puppetry robe.*

**E Character-Emma:**

Is the good always new?  
That's what I was told.  
What's broken should be fixed,  
Closed mouths, opens doors.  
To a place where they plan what parts are replaced,  
And what parts are removed,  
Packaged up just to be returned.

*Emma places a robe over Puppet-Emma. She turns allowing the audience to see what has been on her back. The exo-skeleton that has helped her puppeteer the puppet is revealed. She is wearing the same costume as the first Puppet-Emma from scene one. She takes off the device during the next verse, revealing her hand without the device.*

**E Character-Emma:**

You'll find a box with a lock if you go through that door,  
Full of things best forgotten swept to the corner of the floor,  
Under that dust covered lid if you take a look inside,  
You'll find all the missing pieces that you thought you left behind.

*Character-Emma steps back to where Character-Conor is standing and they sing together. At this, the lights come up on the porcelain figures hanging on the conveyor belt.*

**C+E Character-Emma and Character-Conor:**

Is the good always new?  
That's what I was told,  
What's broken should be fixed,  
Closed mouths, opens doors,  
To a place where they plan what parts are replaced  
And what parts are removed packaged up just to be returned.

*During the last verse of the song, Character-Emma notices the fire exit. A light comes up on it. She stops and stares at Character-Conor.*

**E Character-Emma:** Are you coming?

**C Character-Conor:** No

*Character-Emma exits through the back door and the door closes behind her.*

## **Scene 12**

*Thomas starts to turn the crank to operate the conveyor belt, which starts to move the porcelain people in a circle. Character-Conor is now in the middle of the porcelain people.*

**C Character-Conor:** Are you real? You swap skins, you are new, who are you?  
Is this your future or your past? Come this way, roll up roll up, for here we are other.,  
supernatural. We are the fallen or the about to fall, the middle, the people in-between. The  
pupa before we emerge. We are the changed, the broken pieces. We are hiding in our bodies  
or in full sight, punched in the mouth from the inside.

*He looks up*

**C Character-Conor:** Round and round I go, when I'll wake up nobody knows.

*He looks at audience, then up at the conveyor belt.*

**C Character-Conor:** Imagine that you are falling.

*He looks at the fallen Porcelain-Conor on the floor; there is a piece of mirror beside him. He picks it up and turning his back to the audience heads back into the maze. The audience see his face in the mirror as he leaves.*

Lights down

## **APPENDIX D: Film of Set**

The set of *Pupa*, filmed by Dominik Kosicki of RedPaw Media.

See the back cover of the thesis for the attached DVD. The film of the set is available under the extras menu.

## **APPENDIX E: Documentary**

'*Pupa: Behind the broken mirror*', is a documentary made with Dominik Kosicki from RedPaw Media on the making of the practice of this research.

See the back cover of the thesis for the attached DVD. The documentary is available under the extras menu.

## **APPENDIX F: Recording of Full Dress Rehearsal of *Pupa***

Recording of full dress rehearsal of *Pupa* by Dominik Kosicki from RedPaw Media.

See the back cover of the thesis for the attached DVD. The full recording of the performance is available on the home page of the DVD.

## **APPENDIX G: Promotional film of *Pupa***

Recording of promotional film of *Pupa* by Dominik Kosicki from RedPaw Media.

See the back cover of the thesis for the attached DVD. The promotional video of *Pupa* is available under the extras menu.

## APPENDIX H: Descriptive breakdown of scenes in *Pupa*

### Scene One

The story of *Pupa* focuses upon a young girl, Puppet-Emma and a man, Character-Conor. The play opens in the foyer of the Belltable theatre. The audience first discover Puppet-Emma lying prone on the floor of the foyer just outside a white curtained hospital cubical. The audience hear an ambulance arrive. As the sound dissipates, a Doctor opens the curtain and steps out of the cubical revealing an A&E hospital room within. There is an empty bed and Character-Conor, wearing a surgical mask that covers his mouth, sits in a wheelchair in a catatonic state, staring into a mirror.

The Doctor picks the girl up, gently positioning her on the hospital bed. She is conscious and panicked. The Doctor checks her vitals and all limbs for breaks. When he reaches the right arm, she jumps. Puppet-Emma looks at the arm, it is dangling from her shoulder with six severed nerves. With the help of the Doctor, Puppet-Emma pulls the arm away from her, turning her back on it. This dismissal of her disabled part represents a non-acceptance of her new disabled identity - representing the compartmentalisation of disability within the body. By casting her arm off from her body, the puppet is casting away her disabled body part in the hope of remaining able-bodied. The actor playing the Doctor (Thomas Baker), becomes the puppeteer of the arm. A mask of Puppet-Emma's face is peeled off the puppet, revealing the same face underneath. This mask is placed on the newly separated arm puppet, Arm-Puppet-Emma is then put in a box marked 'The Room of Forgotten Limbs'. The box and arm make a re-appearance in the penultimate scene.

Thomas returns to performing the Doctor. He puts a breathing mask on the puppet and induces her into a coma. The Doctor then sits down and begins to read the opening of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* to Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma. On line three, a recording of him reading permeates from the theatre, indicating it is now time for the audience to be led into the maze of rooms inside the theatre space. The Doctor starts to count down to sleep:

**Doctor:** ‘Imagine that you’re falling’

The first scene mirrors my own accident when I was induced into a coma. Furthermore, the narrative is informed by my feeling since then of being in a state of limbo between disabled and abled. I use the character’s coma, and the fairy-tale world which she inhabits while unconscious as a way of combining my autobiographical stories with the biographical stories collected through interviews.

## Scene Two

The audience leave Puppet-Emma, Character-Conor and the Doctor in the more realistic world of the hospital room in the foyer and are led into the theatre, which is a representation of a coma world that both Puppet-Emma and Character-Conor are now inhabiting.

In this macabre fantasy coma world, they first discover a puppet hanging, unmoving. This puppet is the third representation of Puppet-Emma. While her face is still a latex cast, the rest of her is carved or laser cut out of wood. Casts of her face, feet and hands lie around her, she appears as if freshly made. When she starts to move, she looks to the audience and then to her body. She is investigating who she is. This is when she discovers that she is missing her right arm. An arm juts out from the wall and the puppet tries to retrieve it for herself; she attempts

to pull it from the wall. This is her first attempt in obtaining a new arm. She is unsuccessful and the arm pulls her into the wall. This mirrors my search for medical advances.

### Scene Three

Here, Puppet-Emma first encounters Cat and Fox in the shadows. They, like the Cat and Fox in *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, are the tricksters of the play. By showing her pity for her situation and claiming that they once had disabilities but are now cured, they lure her to the 'Field of Wonders' where they tie her to a tree, and convince her to give up her mouth in exchange for instructions on how to get her arm back. We also meet Gunther in this scene. He is a Butterfly who, like the Blackbird in *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, tries to warn her but gets attached and partially eaten by Cat. Unheeding the butterfly's warning, she sacrifices her mouth to Cat and Fox. The sacrificing of her mouth is very symbolic here. She is giving up her voice, her advocacy. Cat and Fox, by taking her voice, are silencing her and taking away that which she could use to stand up for herself (see Chapters Four and Five). Cat and Fox fool her into believing a buried branch will take roots and a tree full of limbs will grow. This is where Character-Conor finds her. Cat and Fox have left, and she is tied to the tree. He cuts her down with a piece of mirror and helps her dig. When she finds the branch, she slots it in to her shoulder as a temporary prosthetic. Both characters proceed to fall out of the shadows. Her need to be seen as whole motivates her to have a prosthetic branch even if it is useless and further disabling (see Chapter Five).

### Scene Four

Puppet-Emma starts on a journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance through a dark world populated with beings that are fantastical and freakish. She has met Character-Conor who has

been in this fantasy world for an un-known amount of time. He is already on his journey, coming to terms with a fall that has left him inwardly fragmented, while outwardly he collects pieces of fragmented mirror. He also acts as guide to the newly arrived Puppet-Emma.

As the two characters descend deeper into the maze, the audience follow them. We next meet a man who is conducting mouths in jars. He bullies the mouths into performing a song which they don't want to sing. He gets frustrated when they sing unenthusiastically and thinks Character-Conor is laughing at how bad they are singing, to then discover that Character-Conor does not have a mouth. The Conductor invites Character-Conor up from the audience, (as both Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma have situated themselves in the audience to watch the conductor), to get the mouths to sing a new song, promising Character-Conor a mouth if he likes what he hears. Character-Conor starts to conduct the mouths to sing his song. They get far more excited singing his song and soon the mouths are joined by another voice, Character-Conor's voice, which is located in a box. On opening the box, the Conductor finds a piece of mirror, he gives it to Character-Conor on the proviso that he come with him. Character-Conor, with his back to the audience, holds up the mirror revealing his mouth for the first time and puts this piece of mirror in his bag with his other piece of mirror. Character-Conor goes willingly as he has been given the impression that they will be able to return the mouths to their rightful owners. On receiving his own voice back, Character-Conor is overjoyed. He immediately thinks of Puppet-Emma and asks if the Conductor has her voice. The audience can hear three faint 'hellos' coming from a box that the Conductor hides. He instead offers her the use of a beak until she finds her own. The girl is afraid of the Conductor so does not go with Character-Conor. The mouths represent the voices of people with a disability that have been silenced (see Chapter Four).

## Scene Five

Puppet-Emma walks in one direction trying to get used to her new temporary voice in the form of a beak. The Conductor and Character-Conor walk back the way the audience have come. A light shines on the wall and the audience can see the shadows of the Conductor and Character-Conor meeting Fox. Unknown to Character-Conor, the Conductor has been buying the mouths from Cat and Fox. They want to be paid and are unhappy to find that the Conductor has returned Character-Conor's mouth. Fox becomes aggressive and attacks the Conductor who flees, and then attacks Character-Conor. Fox multiplies and many Foxes attack Character-Conor. Puppet-Emma jumps in to the shadows to help, (her first heroic act) however, when she appears in the shadows, both Character-Conor and the Foxes disappear and are replaced by multiples of Cat. The Cats swoop down on her. They grow and grow, completely blocking out the light, and the screen goes dark trapping her inside. Character-Conor falls out of the wall (see Chapter Four).

## Scene Six

Character-Conor turns to face a broken mirrored wall, his back is to the audience, and we can see that his reflection is fragmented. He takes the two pieces of mirror from his bag and places them into the wall. The text here references *The Snow Queen*, as Character-Conor talks about the mirror falling out of his hands breaking into thousands of pieces. Every day he looks for pieces of mirror in the hope that putting the mirror back together will restore him to how he was before the fall.

**Character-Conor:** 'Mouths, voices in and out, I hear them all, before there was just one, one taken, two grew back but now I hold many, I am the man of many voices and reflections you see.'

Here I reference both the stealing of his voice and the reclaiming of it. This is also a nod to the fact that actor Conor is not just telling his own story, but also another research participant's voice which is woven in with his. 'I see twice what you see', references, Conor's double vision that occurred when he fell. The fractured mirror represents his brain injury caused by the fall (fully explored in Chapter Four). He alternates between talking to himself in the mirror and talking to the audience. He asks himself if he has gone mad, and then accuses an audience member of being mad. There are moments of the Mad Hatter, from *Alice in Wonderland*, about this monologue, plunging the audience into yet another fairy-tale. He looks in the mirror pleading to his own reflection to come back and leaves (see Chapter Four). Puppet-Emma hears the plea and thinks it is aimed at her. She manages to break through the wall, only to find the audience and the mirror but no Character-Conor. She sets out in search of him, leading the audience to the next room.

## Scene Seven

A giant cocooned Caterpillar awaits them in the next room. He is unmoving and as Puppet-Emma approaches him, she sees he has multiple hands. Trying to pull one off (she is still searching for a replacement), she wakes the Caterpillar up. The Caterpillar has the same face as the Butterfly from earlier. It has been modelled on research participant Gunther's face. He has metamorphosed in reverse. The extract used here is adapted from *Alice in Wonderland*. Through the course of the conversation between Gunther the Caterpillar and Puppet-Emma, the Caterpillar asks her a series of questions, starting with who she is. She finds it hard to tell him who she is, explaining that she is not herself as she keeps changing. She reveals to him that she wants to be whole. Gunther The Caterpillar finds this hilarious and explains no one is whole and that they are all broken 'here'. The word 'here' indicates the maze in which they find themselves. The allusion is to a coma world which is an alternate world where everyone

is disabled, everyone is broken. Gunther The Caterpillar tells her that he once was a Butterfly and accuses her of eating his wings, which she refutes, blaming Cat. This is the first insinuation that Puppet-Emma and Cat are one and the same. He tells her that instead of blaming others she should look to herself. He advises her that she should accept her new self like he has; he shows her all his legs that play music. Gunther the Caterpillar is comfortable with his disability, he has accepted it and encourages her to do the same rather than chasing after a new arm and a 'normate' body.

The audience are asked by Gunther the Caterpillar to help him by holding his ropes. The lights go out and we hear a soundtrack composed by Gunther to demonstrate transformation and flight. Layered on top, we hear Gunther the Caterpillar call out that he is flying.

However, when the lights come up he is where he was when the lights went out. He declares he is still flying, the music made him fly. Flight here is a frame of mind that breaks free of the borders of the body (see Chapter Four). Character-Conor arrives into the room. Puppet-Emma is delighted to see him, declaring that she is back. He looks confused and ushers the audience forward into the next room.

## **Scene Eight**

A woman (Puppet-Deirdre) sits in perfect stillness in a stilted wheelchair covered in skin (latex). On her hands are two prosthetics that are altered to look like Flamingos. They are dancing, but they stop what they are doing when Character-Conor and the audience walk in. They start to question Character-Conor, 'What's wrong with you then?', but don't let him reply. They insinuate that because he doesn't look like there is anything wrong with him, he doesn't fit in this world, the world of the maze, which is the 'here' that Gunther the

Caterpillar talked about only having disabled inhabitants. The Flamingos disappear to investigate and judge if he does indeed belong there.

While they are gone, Puppet-Deirdre starts to move, stretching up and out of her chair and sings of looking down on herself. A zoetrope (a zoetrope is an animation device; a cylindrical drum with slots to insert a series of images, and when it is turned gives the illusion of movement) projects images of two dancers, two different versions of her, both spinning in circles, one in her chair and one on her feet. Whilst at the heart of *Pupa* is the idea of acceptance of a new disabled identity, that doesn't mean the research participants never dream of what it would be to escape the boundaries of their bodies. This piece reflects how Deirdre feels when she dances and breaks free from her chair, having an outer body experience like floating above herself. This is similar to how Gunther feels when he composes music. As the music stops Puppet-Deirdre floats back into her chair returning to stillness (see Chapter Four).

The Flamingos return to explain to Character-Conor that they looked him up, and that there is no proof that there is anything wrong with him. At this, Character-Conor approaches them and gently slips the Flamingo orthotics off Puppet-Deirdre's hands, quieting the judgmental voices of the Flamingos. Puppet-Deirdre's now bare hands present Character-Conor with a piece of mirror; his last piece.

## Scene Nine

This scene continues a story begun scene six. Once again, we are back in front of the broken mirror. Character-Conor stands with the last piece of mirror in his hand. He tells the tale of a boy who fell. This monologue starts as a traditional fairy-tale would, with 'once upon a time',

and it goes on to tell of a boy's fall (see Chapter Four). Turning his back on the audience and facing the mirror, Character-Conor slots in the last piece, completing the fragmented mirror. A door opens in the mirror and Fox appears. He has Character-Conor's face and he mirrors Character-Conor's movements. Here Character-Conor's perception of Fox shifts. Not only is he the maleficent bullying presence that stole his voice attempting to silence him, he is also representative of Character-Conor and how he viewed himself.

## Scene Ten

Character-Conor pushes through the audience and sits in the middle of the floor. In front of him is a projection of a still dancer (Kimberley the Dancer), with her head in a cloud. Puppet-Emma stands in front of this projection with her head in a physical cloud suspended from the lighting rig. She is also completely still. The sound is loud, and the audience can hear sounds that indicate darting movement. The sound is turned down and then falls silent. At the point of silence, Kimberley the Dancer starts to move. The volume of the sound increases again (this sound echoes that of turning up a hearing aid), and Kimberley the Dancer returns to being still. This is repeated three times. The third time Kimberley the Dancer begins to move she falls to the floor. Her movements are inspired by a darting fish. This section explores what it is like to be a deaf dancer. The sound design was made to respond to Kimberley the Dancer's movements, however the audience can't hear when she dances, and when they can hear, there is no movement. The stillness and the heightened sound are devices so the audience really notice the sound levels decrease and they are plunged into silence.

The third time the sound decreases, Kimberley the Dancer falls to the floor imitating fish movements. Cat arrives trying to catch the fish dancer. Kimberley the Dancer disappears at the same moment Puppet-Emma emerges from the cloud. She is now faced with Cat. Cat, up

to this point, like Fox, was a trickster determined to steal her voice, attacking her and keeping her in the shadows. So the audience are faced with the question of how Cat could be Puppet-Emma? (see Chapter Five). When Cat leaves, Character-Conor who has been watching, comes and asks Puppet-Emma what she sees. 'It was me', she admits.

## Scene Eleven

Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma hear hospital sounds and lead the audience down a corridor to a large room. In the first scene of the play we left the Doctor, Character-Conor, and Puppet-Emma in the A&E room at the hospital. The first part of this last room is a distorted version of that initial scene. Instead of one hospital bed and a wheelchair, there now are two miniature hospital beds. Instead of Puppet-Emma, there is a ceramic women puppet lying on the bed with her right arm broken off; and instead of Character-Conor, there is a Ceramic man puppet lying on the other bed with his head broken off. There is a backdrop of a hospital curtain similar to the one in the first scene. Further on in the room is a large wooden wheel (conveyor belt) hanging eight feet above the ground, with nineteen porcelain puppets hanging from it. One of the puppets is missing. Below the gap where he should be hanging, a fallen porcelain man lies. At the centre of the room is a pile of discarded and broken body parts and the box from Scene One marked, 'For the Room of Forgotten Limbs'. The Doctor appears out from behind the Hospital Curtain. He now has a puppet Owl's head, and his Doctor's coat has limbs printed on it. This is the 'Room of Forgotten Limbs'. The Owl Doctor references the Owl Doctor in *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. He offers to fix them both proclaiming, 'that's what he does', but both Character-Conor and Puppet-Emma refuse. Both characters have expressed the desire to be whole in the play, so through the act of refusal, they implicitly imply that they accept their bodies. The Owl Doctor insists that he can fix Puppet-Emma and heads behind the curtain to look for a new arm. While he is gone, Puppet-

Emma spots the box marked 'For the Room of Forgotten Limbs'. She opens it, finds her discarded arm, and with Character-Conor's help, she puts it on. The Owl Doctor arrives back with a new arm, and on seeing that she is reunited with her old one, proclaims that he could have fixed her and her old arm is no good. He wants to cut it off, and mirroring my personal narrative and the encounters I had with doctors I met after my accident, the Owl Doctor suggests it would just get in the way.

Here, for the first time in the whole play, I, as the performer, look up from Puppet-Emma, to tell the Doctor 'No'. I then proceed to put the puppet down, mirroring the end of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, when the puppet gets replaced by a real boy, I reveal I am a 'real girl' and this is my story.

Making eye-contact with the audience and singing throughout this scene, I start to take the robe that has been covering my body off revealing the exo-skeleton that I have been wearing underneath throughout the performance. I then proceed to take the exo-skeleton off, revealing my arm, my disabled part. This is my 'coming out'. Character-Conor, who has been standing under the conveyor belt of porcelain puppets, joins in with the last verse of my song. We sing together, and at the end of the song I ask him if he is coming with me. I have seen the fire exit and it is my time to leave coma world, and to wake up, accepting my new identity.

However, Character-Conor is not ready to leave and stays. I walk through the fire escape and begin to exit into the alleyway at the back of the theatre. Opening the door, I let the light spill in, then slamming it behind me, I depart the play, leaving Character-Conor and the audience inside.

## Scene Twelve

The conveyor belt starts to move as Character-Conor delivers his final soliloquy. He is holding the severed head of the porcelain puppet that was lying on the gurney. He addresses the audience much like a freak-show Ring Master would, saying ‘roll up, roll up’, and stating that this will be their future, but it may be their past. This references the temporality of the able-bodied, that some of the audience may already be disabled, but for the rest it’s only a matter of time.

**Character-Conor:** ‘We are hiding in our bodies or in full sight, punched in the mouth from the inside.’

This line references the fact that we, the characters in the play, are both visually disabled and invisibly disabled. The idea of being punched in the mouth from the inside references us silencing ourselves. In the end, Character-Conor is not ready to leave. Hearing the sound of breaking glass, he scoops down and picks up a piece of mirror. As he leaves the final room, he repeats the words the Doctor says in scene one as the audience are beginning their journey in coma world:

**Character-Conor:** ‘Imagine that you’re falling’.