Kadri Kalda

„I don´t like puppets!"

C. Carrignon

-   Reasons and inspiration for founding object theatre

TURUN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
TURKU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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Ari Ahlholm

Kadri Kalda

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The topic of my thesis is founding object theatre. The ground for object theatre was perfect to come into being in the 1980´s. There were mainly two reasons and a lot of inspiration for it. One of the biggest reasons was the puppetry back then, the puppets had mostly form of little humans, who were pedagogical very correct. Object theatre pioneers wanted to take distance from it. Secondly was the matter of mass producing and mass consuming trough what people after World War II wanted to feel happiness and carelessness. The fabricated ready-made objects were the tool, with what the object theatre makers started to work against the mass consuming.

Object theatre makers felt a lot of inspiration of many movements and persons in the recent history of art. Mostly in the photography and cinema area, because of similar technical manners. Also Dadaism played big role in the presence of an object and the unusual narrative dramaturgy.

Very often the puppeteers make the mistake of taking an object under the style "object theatre" and animate it as if it is a puppet. The very main principal and biggest difference with puppetry is that the objects are not manipulated. The performer acts through material, creates spaces, meanings.

KEYWORDS:

object theatre, ready-made, puppetry, movie, Dadaism

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of writing this theses is not only to find out, why object theatre was founded and how the social life has influenced theatre makers in the 1980´s, but also to show my esteem towards object theatre pioneers. It seems to me, that this art form is the most fragile of theatre forms I have met. In my opinion the object theatre is endangered due to contemporary concept of mixing different forms and also misinterpretation. I will be glad, if my research will be easily understood also to the readers, who are not familiar with object theatre and if it will bring clarity to those readers who have made some kind of contact, but do not know what is it actually about?

Everything I write about has grown from the conversations with my great idols Katy Deville and Christian Carrignon and their workshop, lectures. Thanks to them I have inspiration and material in this area to think about. This theses will be as familiar as they make their theatre and share their knowledge.

Also a big help has been from the materials that the scientific staff member Anke Meyer from Deutsches Forum für Figurentheater und Puppenspielkunst have send to me.

2 OBJECT AND THEATER – OBJECT THEATER

„Objects are vacuum cleaner of the memory" C. Carrignon (Berlin, April 2010)

The word object does not hide any deeper meaning then it sounds. It is man-made thing to make life easier, happier, more entertaining. It is usually handy, meant to be able to grip it with humans hand, can be made from plastic, metal, china, wood or such other. Every culture has its own objects with what people feel empathy with. This is caused by tradition and designs which are popular in one place and this in turn causes memories. For example every chinese person knows Welcoming Cat and every person from old Soviet Union has emotional connection with red cans with white dots.

Theatre is performing art. Meant to show for audience and needs at least one performer. Object theatre does not have definition. It can be explained with the importance of the object and comparison with puppetry. "On one hand, objects are means of expression – like colour for the painter or a drum for the drummer. On the other hand the object carries its own story in itself that can be integrated into the play. Unlike in drama theatre, where the actor creates only from himself, with his own voice, body, mimic" (*Ulrike-Kirsten Hanne „Eindrücke eines Seitensprunges" Das Andere Theater, 2003*). Object theatre plays with mixture of those two – inside the object and outside the object. Objects are not animated, as in puppetry. They are given life by charging. Though the actor has also a role as an actor, but the actor plays through the object. The performer in the show is not only the storyteller but also the manipulator and the dramatic figure. In his head he has to change his status permanently.

An example a scene from Gyula Molnars object theater play „Three little suicides", where the kids do not want to play with the one who is different from the appearance. Kids a symbolised by colourful candies and the

unhappy one by aspirin that melts in water. The performer is sitting behind the desk and plays with the candies – makes happy voices and the children jump around, it is called ´inside the object`. When he puts the aspirin on the table, he himself express the feelings of the children, that are annoyed and puts them into a paper bag, we as audience understand that they do not want to play with him and leave. The performer charges the aspirin with sad look and a sigh, it is called ´outside the object` - we as audience understand the sadness of the lonely guy. During the performer puts the aspirin into the water, he does not make any expressive voices nor faces. Because of the symbols and context we understand, that he has made a suicide by drowning himself.
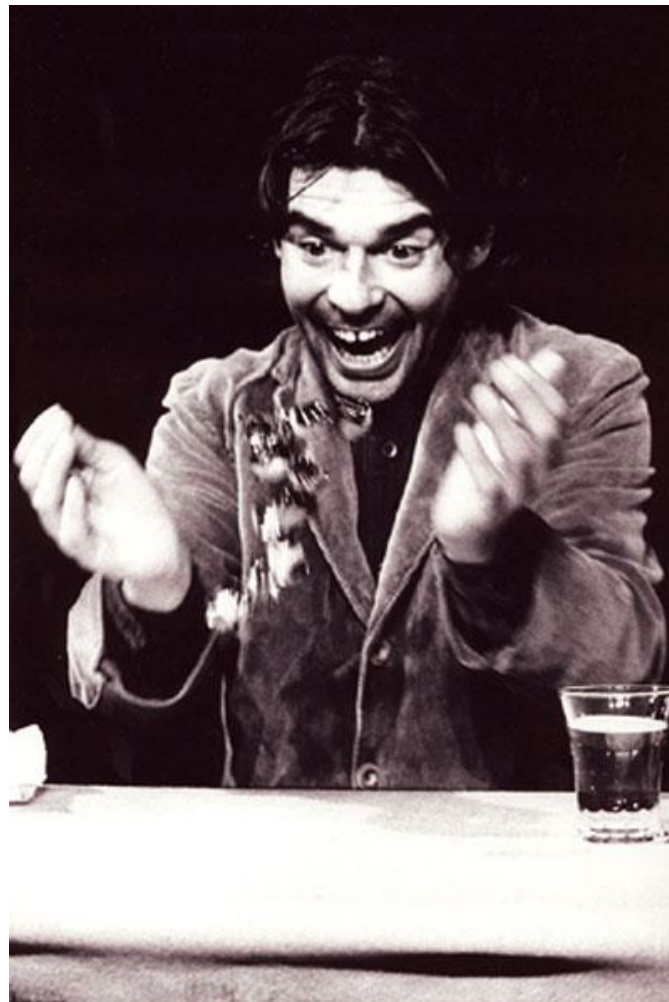
Gyula Molnar (Hungarian roots, family moved to Italy when he was young) in „Three Little Suicides".

TERM

The new way of thinking needed a new name that could take distance from puppet theatre. "´Theatre´ sounded too close to big literature and made us fear. ´Object´ had an effect of something cold and without life. 1980 used Katy Deville for the first time term ´théâtre d´objet´". (Christian Carrignon, "Eine kleine Geschichte des Objekttheaters" Animation Fremder Körper, 2000).

Katy Deville in the legendary show "Twenty minutes under the sea"

3 CHARACTERISTICS AND COMPARISONS

As already said, one of the biggest feature in object theatre is the fact of not manipulating the objects. The things get life, stories, meanings through the player. This is called charging the object.

The use of ready-made objects is the second characteristic element. The things are often taken from the same everyday life, the same culture, where the performer and the audience belong to. The spectator has the same esthetical understandings. The recognition and cultural experience with the objects gives possibility for audience to make also his own associations, a lot of fantasy space in the heads of audience.

Every person from the USSR recognizes red dishes with white dots

Almost everybody in the world have they imagination start working, when they see banana being peeled

In object theatre there are no figures, roles. The only figure who remains is the performer himself, the "me", (usually, with few exceptions, object theatre shows are solos) who tells his stories. For this reason is object theatre descendant of the comedian of the silent movie. I will bring some examples form the art of old silent movies: who is Buster Keaton in the movie "The General" or who is Charlie Chaplin in "The Modern Times"? Of course they are themselves, primarily "me", also the spectator.

Buster Keaton in "The General"

The biggest similarity with puppet theatre makers is the matter of dramaturgy. The drama theatre or "normal theatre" as we call it uses mostly text for the starting point. Basically it means, that half of the work is already done by somebody else, by the playwright. There are still some puppetry schools who start working with written text, for example the puppetry department in The Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Art, but nowadays this is exception. Otherwise the puppet theatre and object theatre makers use what is there right in front of them. They don´t start with text rehearsal nor text analysis. The material - the puppets and the objects – have the dramaturgy in them, it is possible to invent the story, dramaturgy, text during the process.

4 FOUNDING

4.1 Plastic Age

After the World War II, the way of thinking changed in Western Europe very fast. People were tired and wanted to live carefree and comfortably. „The aim was to live without any barriers, with big wish of owning objects" (Jean-Luc Mattéoli „Le téâtre d´objet" 2009). Started so called plastic age, which meant mass production and consuming of plastic objects, because they were cheap to produce. The value changed, every day was time for new object, people exchanged other people against things. Everything started to change very fast - landscape, transport, homes.

Object theatre was founded in the 1980´s, when it was understood, that this system should have an end. Now it was clear, this kind of society is not eternal and different theatre makers from different western countries felt the same urge to act against the mass producing and consuming. Without being violent nor showing with the finger, object theatre was like a view, a question to the society. They took the same objects, put them on the stage and made stories out of them. It worked very well, because everybody knew those objects that they saw on stage and had emotional connection, own memories. "Also audience becomes story-teller, because in object theatre there is a lot of fantasy space in the heads of audience. Although public sees from far away and not every detail, he remembers and recognizes in the memory the use and characteristics of the object" (Christian Carrignon "„Le téâtre d´objet" 2009)

4.2 Puppetry

Christian Carrignon has said: "I don't like puppets!". This sentence is provocation to contrast puppetry, not to be anyhow mixed with manipulated

puppets. Also in the object theatre history it has a value. In the 1980´s puppets were mainly "little humans", who represented pedagogically infallible correct characters. They played happy ending fairy tales and had always something to teach the audience. "That was in the 80s, and we discussed this silly and terrible dolls, about the princess on the moon and the insufferable master lamp. And why the puppets had to be quite as educational and yet so completely drained of all ambitions." (Christian Carrignon, "Das Andere Theater" article "Ich mag keine Puppen!" Heft 1, 2008). Also this fact played a big role when some of the puppeteers threw puppets into the corner and put on stage objects.
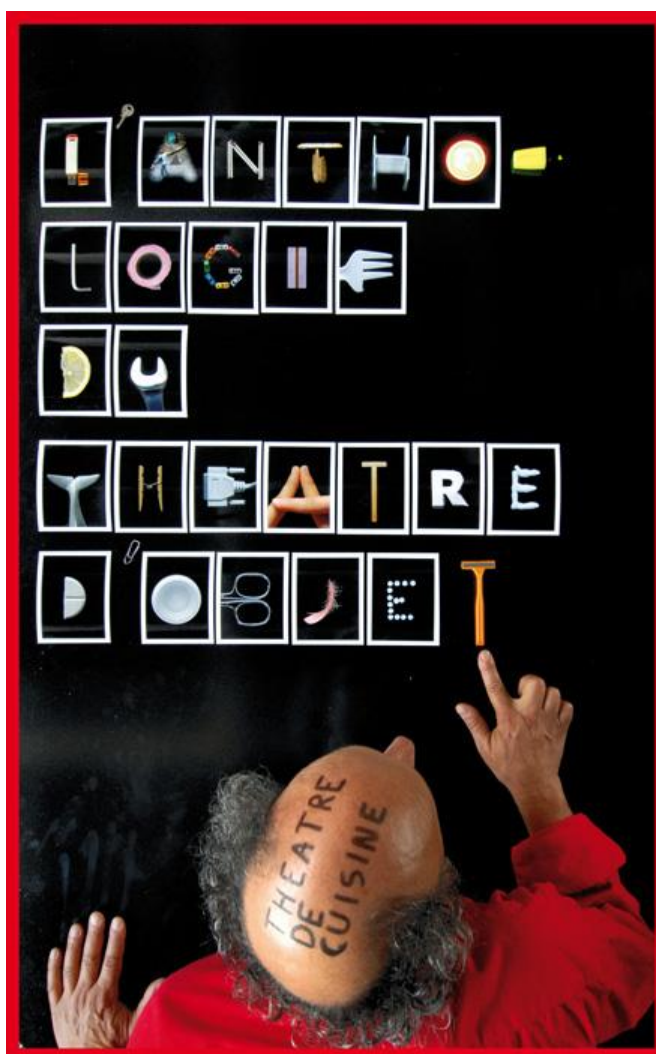
Christian Carrignon with objects

5 INSPIRATION

### 5.1 Pictures, moving pictures

Object theater is storytelling theatre. It is also very visual. Object theatre makers have their own inspiration sources, people and phenomena, which they even call their ancestors.

It all started with the first photo in the world at the year 1826. Paintings were beautiful and offered artistically high experience, but photograph was instant, detailed, real picture. Of course, the first photo in the world wasn´t the fastest one, it took the french inventor Joseph Niépce (1765-1833) 8 hours for the exposure time and didn´t look very clear, but the invention and development of photography and with it also the movie has begun (http://www.anomalies-unlimited.com/Odd%20Pics%202/Niepce.html).

The world´s first photo „View from the Window at Le Gras" 1826

After this fallows a list of dignified men, who changed the world with moving the pictures in row – developing movie. The development of movie until what we can see in television nowadays has been a long process, but to the brothers Auguste Marie Louis Nicolas Lumière (1862-1954) and Louis Jean Lumière (1864-1948) we can give the title `fathers´. They invented a machine for film projection and development, and started to show their experimentations to publicity. They first public screening of films was held on December 28, 1895, at Salon Indien du Grand Café in Paris. In this history-making presentation was shown ten short films, among them the first film of Louis Lumière "Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auguste_and_Louis_Lumi%C3%A8re).
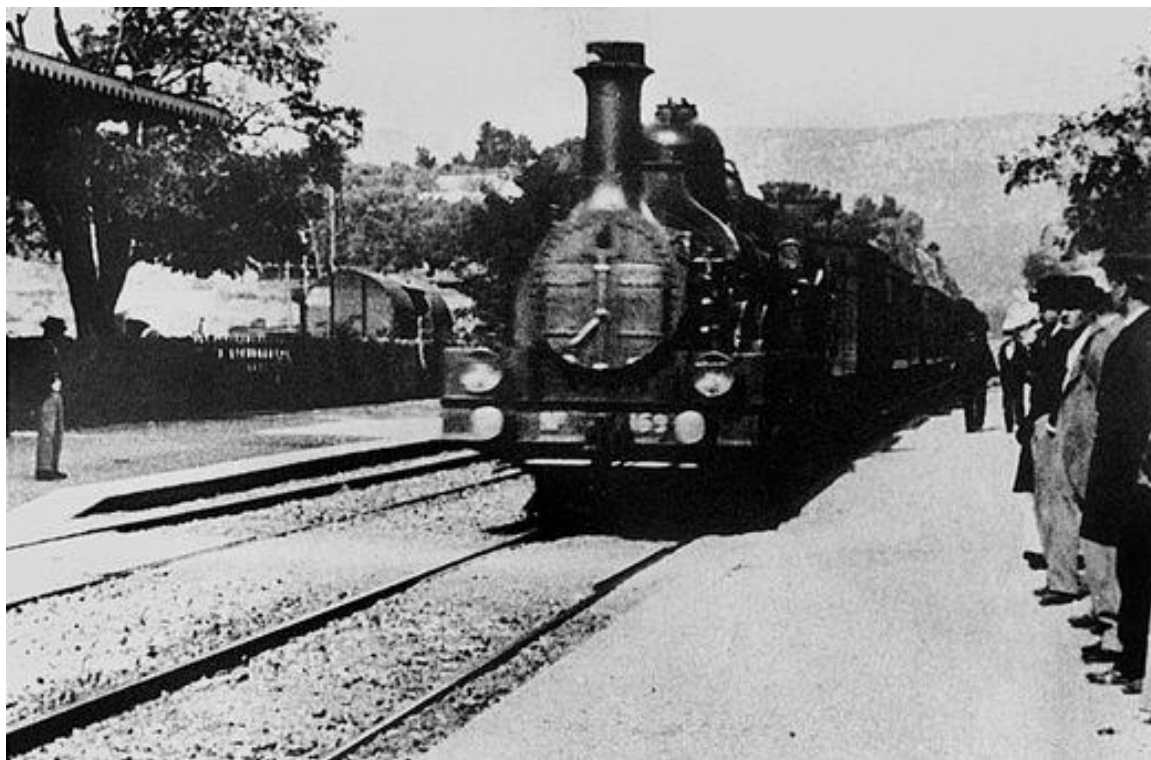
One of the most famous short films "The Arrival of a Train at the Station", Lumiéres, 1895

The French illusionist and filmmaker Georges Méliès (1861-1938) is sometimes referred as the first „Cinemagician". He is famous for leading many technical and narrative developments in the earliest days of cinema. He did not only use such special effects like multiple exposures, stop trick, time-lapse photography, dissolves and hand-painted colour, but also how to cut and clue film and not unimportant, he brought single scenes into simple narratives. Two of his most well-known films are "A Trip to the Moon" (1902) and The Impossible Voyage (1904). (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_M%C3%A9li%C3%A8s)

A Soviet filmmaker and film theorist Lev Vladimirovich Kuleshov (1899-1970) taught at and helped establish the world´s first film school, the Moscow Film School. More important, he developed theories of editing, because for him this was the essence of cinema. He wanted to show, how editing changes viewers´ interpretations of images. He created Kuleshov Experiment, where the order of the frames gave the emotion. Between the shots of the neutral actor were shown various meaningful images, for example a casket, a bowl of soup. This experiment proves, how editing changes viewers´ interpretation of images. Also the same thing works with situations, a natural man standing, once on the background is wedding, once on the background is funeral. It is very similar to object theatre, where the performer do not have to play big emotions. In connection with the situation and objects the viewer understands the meaning and feels the emotions himself. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Kuleshov)
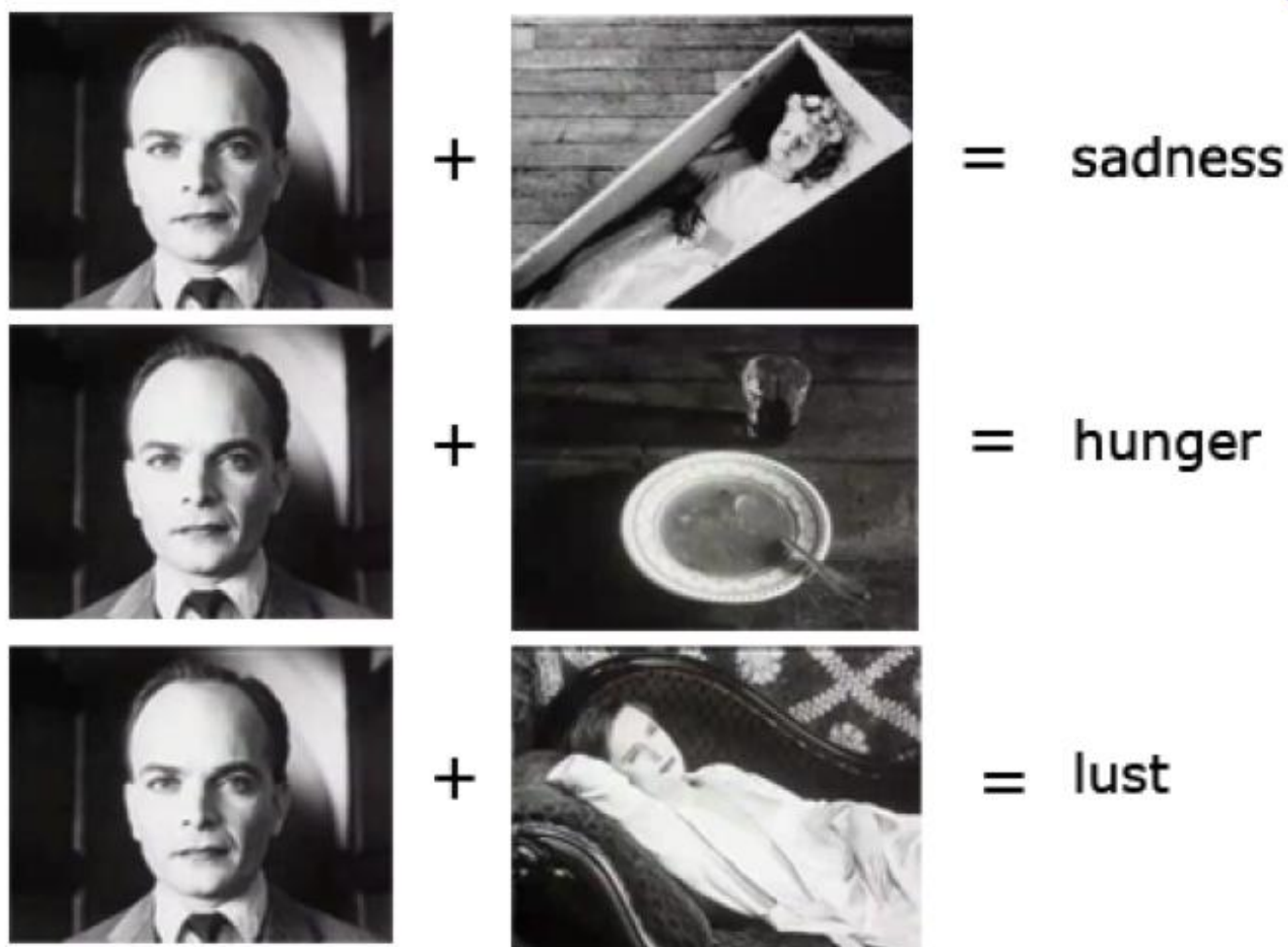
The scheme of Kuleshov Experiment

One of the latest inspiration in the film area is the movement La Nouvelle Vague (The New Wave). Late 1950s and 1960s a group of French filmmakers let themselves influence by Italian Neorealism and classical Hollywood cinema and did something very new. They made radical experiments with editing, visual style and narrative part of a general break with the conservative paradigm. Common was logical shifts, rapid change of scenes, low budget (shootings took place in a friend´s apartment or yard, using friends as the cast or crew), direct sound and

natural lightning. Filming was like documentary type style, equipment was portable and required little or no set time at all. For example for the directors François Truffaut (1932-1984) and Jean-Luc Godard (1930) the aim was not to tell beautiful story but to experiment (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nouvelle_vague). Remarkable parallel with theatre is also the fact of long speeches held directly to the camera. It is distancing effect (Verfremdungseffect), concept coined by German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). It prevents the audience to get passive and leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer. (http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verfremdungseffekt)

François Truffaut with the portable equipment

To take it all together it means the amazing originality, that the movie and object theatre offer, the mental flexibility. Like thanks to the film editing, the

camera opens us different spaces and different times and also binds them, so offers the performer in object theatre the viewer different times and different spaces. Just like film editing, object theatre allows for rapid and frequent changes of scene and scale, all within the same show.

5.2 Dadaism

During World War I and culmination from 1916 to 1922 began a cultural movement Dadaism. It was born out of negative reaction of the horrors of the war, Dada rejected reasons and logic, prizing nonsense, irrationality and intuition. Its purpose was to ridicule the meaninglessness of the modern world. "Dada is the groundwork to abstract art and sound poetry, a starting point for performance art, a prelude to postmodernism, an influence on pop art, a celebration of anti-art to be later embraced for anarcho-political uses in the 1960 and the movement that lay the foundation for Surrealism" (Marc Lowenthal, "I Am a Beautiful Monster: Poetry, Prose, And Provocation).

In the visual arts this was the time for beginning of collage, object became more and more in volume, borders got flurry. A famous and also scandalous art piece Fountain (1917), the porcelain urinal was exhibited by the not political Dadaist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). His idea is to say, that the creative act is not performed only by the artist alone, but also the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by interpreting its inner qualifications and thereby adds his contribution to the creative act. (http://www.arthistory.net/). Just like in object theatre, space for your imagination.

Fountain (1917) by Marcel Duchamp

In the literature it was time to play with words (just like collage) or even with the story – sometimes the end was given before the beginning or there was no end at all. In poetry the visual side was prioritized. The most well-known Dada writer was a Romanian and French poet Tristan Tzara (1896-1963), who developed a very chaotic, confusing, wild language. His aim was to destroy the sanctity of art. His texts are so chaotic and confusing that they may be called verbal delirium. But Tzara found that Dada should stay not understood. He thought that Dada will die if it will be taken seriously. Dada faded away in the beginning of 1920th, or it can be said that it flowed into Surrealism. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dada)
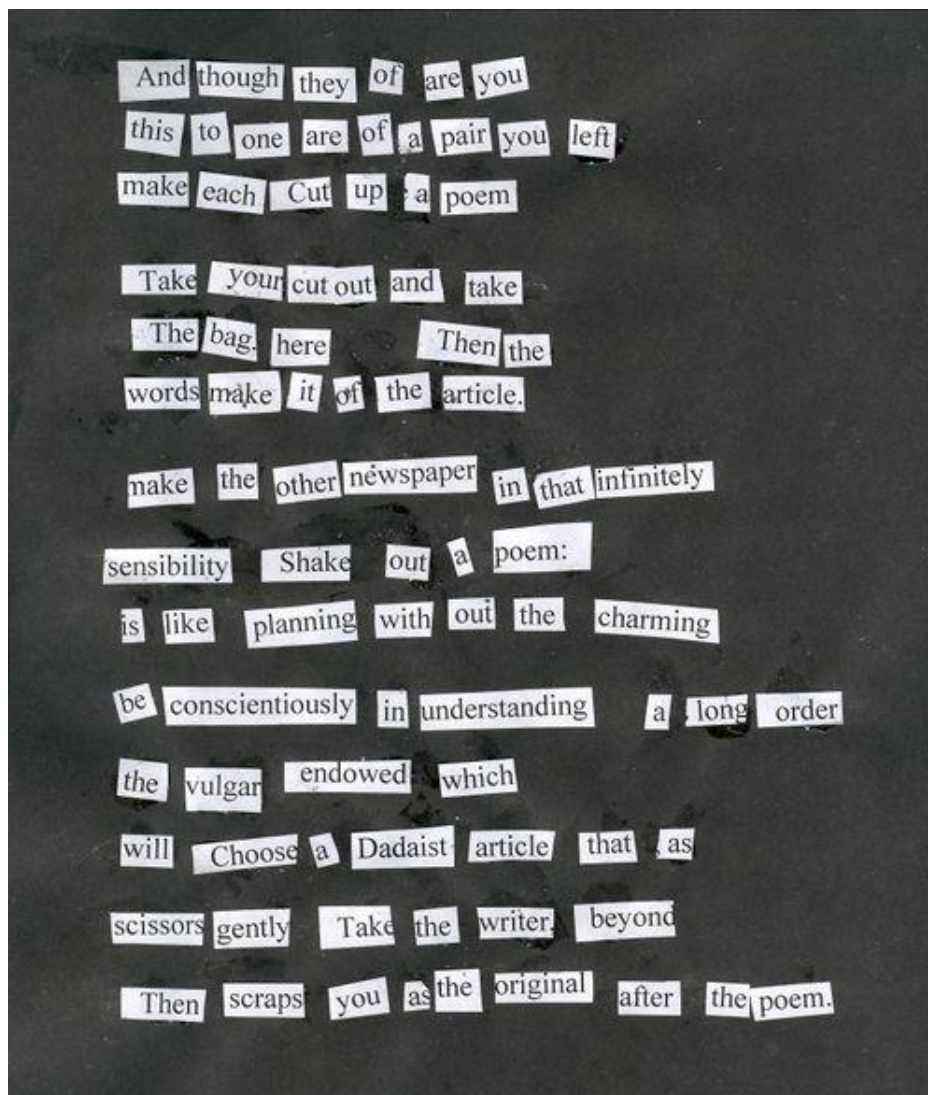
Dadaist Poem by Tristan Tzara

The French novelist and essayist George Perec (1936-1982) can be categorized under surrealists. His novels and essays are often full with experimental word play, lists and attempts at classification, and they have usually melancholic tinge. His most famous novel "La Vie mode d´emploi" ("Life: A User's Manual") (1978), which is considered the core of his all creations, talks about a house. There is a building with many apartments, many characters, their stories are structured like chess table, chess game.

Contains many don´t-know-where starting and don´t-know-where ending stories, which hid a mathematical combinatorics. (http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/book/?GCOI=15647100791040&fa=customcontent&extrasfile=A1261767-B0D0-B086-B660B92775B40523.html)

6 CONCLUSION

Object theatre was born in a situation on the timeline. It started as a counter movement against the rapid social changes and detachment from puppet theatre and developed to artistically high level art form. For this reasons I have written in the introduction of my thesis, that this art form is the most fragile of theatre forms I have met. It has definite reason, its own concept, why the object exists and why the object shall not be used as a puppet. Nowadays, `théâtre d´objet` is not always so clear interpreted, to my opinion it is again and again mixed with the ´found object`. Sadly I think, misinterpretation will spread and deepen but not take over the original. Roots are too strong for that.

For the following generations similarities with the 1980´s could be enormous use of technology and media. Such availability of communication as for example communication through Skype, Facebook and Television change the value of technology exactly the same way as large use of objects changed the value of life, people exchange other people against things. It is and will further on be a subject in theatre but does not have anything to do with object theatre.

Thanks to the exist and development of all the inspirational and very strong object theatre performers and pioneers, I am sure object theatre will not disappear but continue offering pure theatre experience and infecting other people with its simplicity.