

Wrestling with Marionettes:
Entangled Embodiment and Post-Human Agency in Schnitzler's
'Zum großen Wurstel'

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I

Halfway through Arthur Schnitzler's burlesque comedy 'Zum großen Wurstel', a wrestler, wearing a panther skin and medals, emerges from the audience.¹ His entrance onto the stage of the *Marionettentheater* [marionette theatre] interrupts the ongoing play. He wrestles with the Duke, a marionette and male hero figure. In a short fight the well-known fairground type, who proudly exhibits his abnormal physique, is defeated by a puppet seemingly controlled by strings. The Duke casually throws the wrestler back into the now-agitated audience.² The scene is disturbing

¹ The title of Schnitzler's play is difficult to translate into English because the name of the puppet theatre is based on the 'Wurstel' figure, a colloquial Austrian version of the German Hanswurst or a kind of Mr Punch. Translations include 'The Great Puppet Show' and 'The Grand Guignol'.

² Arthur Schnitzler, *Marionetten*, ed. by Annja Neumann with Gregor Babelotzky, Judith Beniston, Julia Glunk, Kaltërina Latifi, Robert Vilain, Andrew Webber, in *Arthur Schnitzler digital, Historisch-kritische Edition (Werke 1905–1931)*, ed. by Wolfgang Lukas, Michael Scheffel, Andrew Webber, Judith Beniston, reading text of

indeed, as the wrestler drastically places a male body, in its bare physicality, centre stage. Moreover, the wrestling match is part of the Duke's trial of strength, which he performs to assert himself against a second hero in the play. The wrestler's fight with a marionette can be seen to enact a key problem and paradox of the play, which is created through a particular performance technique.

When viewed alongside the sheer physicality of the wrestler, the marionette's victory draws attention to its material body, contrary to the status of the puppet, particularly around 1900, as a figure associated with the concept of semiotic bodies and the staging of universal human nature.³ Schnitzler's comedy also draws on Heinrich von Kleist's 'Über das Marionettentheater' [On the Marionette Theatre, 1801], particularly its mode of presentation as a self-conscious and simulated dialogue. Yet, in Schnitzler's wrestling ring, matters between human bodies and machines are complicated further, as he conceived of the semiotic bodies of his marionettes as hybrids. Schnitzler's marionettes are played by human actors who are suspended on stage by visible wires, set up seemingly to imitate the movement of marionettes. The wrestling scene and its particular performance technique thus re-configure the para-human (the not-human that is beside the human), as the supposed string puppet is seen to be using muscular strength to defeat the wrestler. The wrestling match between human actor and supposed string puppet thus challenges a

Zum großen Wurstel, p. 125, <http://schnitzler-edition.net/edition/Lesetext/WUR/125>

[accessed 19 March 2019]. Henceforth cited as WUR, with page number(s).

³ Florian Nelle, 'Marionette', in *Metzler Lexikon Theatertheorie*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Doris Koelsch and Matthias Warstat (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2005), pp. 190–92 (p. 191).

set of pre-existing binaries, between material and semiotic bodies as well as humans and machines, which become inextricably entangled and called into question in the play. The defeat of the wrestler by a para-human character not only raises questions about the ways in which bodies and meaning are generated on the theatrical stage but also emphasizes the troubled issue of agency, mechanical behaviour and free will.

The scene ends with the departure of the wrestler, who quickly brushes off his defeat. He gets up, blows kisses to the audience and exits (WUR, 126). Here Schnitzler's stage direction points to the play's key problem and to the audiences whom the wrestler woos with his gesture: The 'real' audience, to be referred to as audience A, which is sitting in the stalls, observes the fictive audience, to be referred to as audience B, positioned on an intermediate stage. Both audiences watch a puppet theatre, a tragicomedy, on another stage, to be referred to as stage C, located centrally at the back (see WUR, 100). The theatrical gesture of the wrestler is thus potentially addressed to spectators on the three different stage areas. With this crucial and perspective-changing gesture in mind, I will argue that the dramatic interaction between intermediate stage B and stage C — the puppet theatre with the supposed string puppets — embodies and enacts the mental conjectures and cognitive patterns of audience A, the bourgeois theatre-going audience, in dialogue with Schnitzler's own criticism of the audience, his critics and his creative process.

In contrast to a negative use of the marionette, which stresses the loss of free will and the loss of agency, Schnitzler's cycle of one-act plays puts string puppets to work more creatively. The marionette was frequently used in romanticism, symbolism and up to modernism as an experimental tool for '[die] Neubegründung des Theaters' [the new foundation of theatre] that would overcome illusionist and bourgeois

aesthetics.⁴ In the prelude to ‘Zum großen Wurstel’ — the most substantial in Schnitzler’s cycle of three one-act puppet plays, *Marionetten* [Marionettes, 1906], also comprising ‘Der Puppenspieler’ [The Puppeteer] and ‘Der tapfere Cassian’ [Gallant Cassian] — the Theatre Director announces the irrevocable redundancy or even death of conventional theatre. In this way Schnitzler places his puppet cycle in the tradition of animating a new form of theatre. Of the three plays, it is Schnitzler’s ‘Wurstelspaß’ which reconfigures the subversive *Hanswurst* character in ways that create the most extreme form of meta-theatrical parody in his *œuvre*.⁵ This is partly a matter of placement. Alys George has associated Vienna’s famous Wurstelprater amusement park with Tony Bennett’s idea of the ‘exhibitionary complex’, identifying the Wurstelprater around 1900 as a ‘contact zone’ that served as a spectacle to educate the masses about human anatomy.⁶ Schnitzler’s choice of this boisterous locale for his study of the audience also presents it as a show-case which allows us to learn about the psyche of the spectator and about Schnitzler’s self-conscious creative practice.

Well known as the first author who used interior monologue for an entire novella in the German language, namely *Lieutenant Gustl*, which he wrote in Summer

⁴ Nelle, ‘Marionette’, p. 190.

⁵ Arthur Schnitzler, *Tagebuch 1879–1931*, unter Mitwirkung von Peter Michael Braunwarth et al., Kommission für literarische Gebrauchsformen der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Obmann: Werner Welzig, 10 vols (Vienna, 1981–2000). Henceforth cited as Tb, with date. Here Tb, 11.4.1905.

⁶ Alys X. George, ‘Anatomy for All: Medical Knowledge on the Fairground in *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna’, *Central European History*, 51 (2018), 535–62 (p. 540).

1900, concurrently with an early version of ‘Zum großen Wurstel’, Schnitzler experiments with dramatic setting in a way that parallels this narrative technique by embodying the real audience by an interior play-within-a-play structure. As will be shown, the framing action parodies audience A, and the tragicomedy on stage C embodies their expectations. At the same time, the wrestling match questions how far the practice of the audience is determined and embodied by mechanical or self-determined behaviour. My article examines the entangled embodiment of the real audience in Schnitzler’s ‘Zum großen Wurstel’ by focusing on the mutual constitution of the materiality of bodies and their human and other-than-human agency. I will analyse a set of paradigmatic scenes of boundary crossing in the play. The focus here is on boundaries between humans and machines as well as subject and object, which contributed to the comedy’s reputation as perhaps the most radical of Schnitzler’s dramatic experiments.⁷ As will become clear, acts of boundary crossing, in both spatial and conceptual terms, shed light on the entangled relationship — the crossing of visible and invisible strings — between human and non-human agencies.

In what follows I will first introduce the play through its theatrical apparatus, which Schnitzler kept reworking throughout the creative process. Secondly, I will focus on a scene of revision through the lens of the audience B. Just as the wrestler is thrown off the stage in the scene described above, so the Poet character, who purports to be the author of the puppet play, attempts to remove the *Raisonneur* or commentator puppet by crossing the border between human and puppet theatre and

⁷ See Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer, ‘*Marionetten: Drei Einakter (1906)*’, in *Schnitzler-Handbuch. Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed. by Christoph Jürgensen, Wolfgang Lukas and Michael Scheffel (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2014), pp. 119–23 (p. 122).

cutting some of the commentator's lines. I will examine this scene of on-stage revision in triangulation with the subsequent responses of the fictive Poet and fictive Director to the commentator figure in the third part of the article, before turning to a reworking of the scene by the real author and director in the final section.

Alongside the setup for Schnitzler's dramatic experiment, my theoretical apparatus is based on Erika Fischer-Lichte's ideas regarding the performative generation of materiality and corporeality through processes of embodiment and on Karen Barad's post-humanist, performative theory of agential realism. Barad posits that a so-called 'diffraction pattern', resulting from the meeting of two waves, or the encounter between agents — the Poet and Director for example, is instigated by the 'diffraction apparatus'.⁸ Studying a diffraction pattern not only brings the theatrical apparatus which is imitated in 'Zum großen Wurstel' into focus but allows us to learn something about the creation of the new form of theatre that emerges through Schnitzler's experiment with theatrical physicality. In other words, examining the movement patterns of the agents on stage helps us to understand the pulling of the strings, whether the puppeteer happens to be Schnitzler, the Poet or indeed members of the audience.

Barad's feminist and agential realist framework underlines the importance of including experimental conditions in the analysis of the 'production of bodies and meaning'.⁹ She also argues for a method that includes 'genealogical analyses of how boundaries are produced rather than presuming sets of well-worn binaries in

⁸ See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC, and London, 2007), p. 73.

⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 31.

advance'.¹⁰ Schnitzler's comedy resonates with both claims. It specifically draws attention to its experimental conditions by incorporating characters who are usually excluded from the stage, such as the author and the theatre director, as well as a fictive audience which is placed centre-stage. The plot on stage C, meanwhile, is one of theatrical convention, with the action structured by the second male protagonist challenging the first male protagonist to a duel because he believes that he had an affair with his wife. Not only are the three characters controlled by the extremely ritualized conventions of the duel but they are also intricately entangled in multiple love triangles. Puppet-like convention and experimental border-crossing are thus entwined.

Retrospectively, Schnitzler linked his dramatic experiments with his eminently undramatic world-view. He argues that his rejection of conventional drama motivates his choice of highly stylized genres 'wo Grenzen a priori gegeben —' [where boundaries are given a priori —, Tb, 4.7.1910]. In this way, the play sheds light on how agency emerges, particularly when the pre-existing boundaries of puppet theatre are crossed. Barad defines the 'apparatus' as boundary-making practices which 'cut up the world in particular ways that necessarily and inevitably exclude possible alternatives'.¹¹ Thus, her approach emphasizes exclusions that are equally significant on a conceptual level. A genealogical analysis of the ways in which Schnitzler produced boundaries leads me to a focus on the creative process of 'Zum großen

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 30.

¹¹ Gregory Hollin, Isala Forsyth, Eva Giraud and Tracey Potts, '(Dis)entangling Barad: Materialisms and ethics', *Social Studies of Science*, 47.6 (2017), 918–41 (p. 936).

Wurstel', also by drawing on archival material, including Schnitzler's personal copy of *Marionetten*.

II

The process of composition for 'Zum großen Wurstel' extended from 1899 to 1906. The published version of the play re-enacts core scenes of this process, which saw Schnitzler drafting it in four different genres and reworking it up to five times. Initially, he wrote the play in prose as a conventional *Salonkomödie* [drawing room comedy]. Then in the second stage of the creative process he sketched the thematic complex as a pantomime and a dream play, before choosing the genre of the puppet play and partly transforming it into a verse drama in a third conception. Even after the early puppet version of the one-act play, titled 'Marionetten', was staged in Ernst von Wolzogen's Überbrettl cabaret in Berlin in March 1901, Schnitzler repeatedly revised and reworked the play. In June 1903 he started to adapt the puppet play as a musical drama. This adaptation also shaped the final stage of his creative process, as in Autumn 1904 he transformed the text into a piece of meta-theatre, a burlesque comedy, introducing a second set of characters and incorporating audience responses in the framing action.¹² Schnitzler created a complex network of intertextual references which is led by self-parody, while also parodying his critics' view of his work and lampooning European theatre more broadly. The comedic effect arises

¹² See 'Entstehungsgeschichte zu 'Zum großen Wurstel'', Arthur Schnitzler, *Marionetten*, henceforth references are to individual text carriers, citing the abbreviated identifier in parentheses.

through Schnitzler's 'Flucht ins Marionettige' [escape into the puppet-like, Tb, 12.3.1911] in the third phase of his creative process and the final transition of the play to a *Publikumsgroteske* [grotesque audience comedy]. Schnitzler's choice to animate puppetry for the conventional theatre stage is mainly informed by his fury at commentators who claimed that he was only interested in 'Lieb' und Spiel und Tod' [love and play and death] and that all his characters were variations on Anatol, the sweet girl or the demonic woman.¹³

Despite the frequent changes in genre, the overall thematic structure remained intact throughout the genesis of the play. The most striking change, which went hand in hand with the transformation into a puppet play and a verse drama, is the performance technique that Schnitzler used. Human puppets had previously been explored by the French symbolists, most obviously in Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* [King Ubu, 1896].¹⁴ Schnitzler's main idea was for the puppets to be played by actors suspended by visible wires on the stage. Schnitzler's human puppets would wear make-up to look like puppets and would move like puppets. He detailed how to produce the illusion of human puppets in the stage directions (see WUR_K3_T4_0013). Alongside the human string puppets, Schnitzler also sought to blur boundaries between members of the real audience and fictional characters by

¹³ Arthur Schnitzler, *Buch der Sprüche und Bedenken. Aphorismen und Fragmente* (Vienna, 1927), p. 26.

¹⁴ See Anke Bosse, 'Depersonalisierung des Schauspielers. Zentrales Movens eines plurimedialen Theaters in Moderne und Avantgarden', in *Plurimedialität. Theaterformen der Moderne und der Avantgarden in Europa*, ed. by Anke Bosse, *Études Germaniques* 4 (Paris, 2011), pp. 875–90 (p. 880).

placing actors among Audience A who would play-act as provocateurs. The names of the characters in audience B make clear their roles and the satirical intention of the play. Here the theatrical apparatus is embodied by the Theatre Director, the Poet and three critics, who are called ‘Der Wohlwollende’, ‘Der Bissige’ and ‘Der Naïve’ [The Well-Meaning One, The Biting One, The Naïve One]. Notably, almost the entire cast of audience B, who also include visitors to the Prater amusement park, is male. The enormous physicality of the wrestler, who also emerges from audience B, embodies theatre as a male-dominated establishment. The personnel of the marionette theatre can be grouped into contrasting pairs: the Duke of Lawin is the opponent of the Hero, the Duchess of Lawin has a double in Liesl, who plays the Schnitzlerian *süßes Mädel* [sweet girl]. The Raisonneur as commentator figure and the character ‘Der Tod’ [Death] are vital in this context, with the latter revealing intertextual connections to Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s symbolist drama *Der Thor und der Tod* [The Fool and Death, 1894] (see commentary on WUR, 136).

Over the course of the creative process Schnitzler increasingly emphasizes different ways of embodying and enacting his experience with audience A. His decision to include more characters needs to be understood in the context of his criticism of the aforementioned first staging of the puppet play in March 1901, in which he participated by playing the non-speaking role of a visitor to the amusement park. After the premiere, he commented that there was no communication between the stage and the real audience. His verdict was: ‘verstanden wurde nichts als das ganz Rohe’ [nothing was understood, except for the really crude elements].¹⁵ With the

¹⁵ See Irène Lindgren, *Arthur Schnitzler im Lichte seiner Briefe und Tagebücher*, (Heidelberg, 1993), p. 291.

coarseness of the play Schnitzler was mainly referring to the bare physicality of the wrestling scene. Thus, in the final version he incorporated his experience as a member of audience B into the role of the Poet:

Der Naive. Warum denn? ... warum geht sie denn fort? ... Jetzt könnt' sie ja auf ihre Kosten kommen!

Der Dichter. Das scheinen die Leute nicht zu begreifen!

Der Direktor. Ich hab's Ihnen ja g'sagt. Es geht schief.

Der Dichter. Und jetzt kommt noch der gefährliche Monolog!

Der Direktor. Ihr ganzes Stück ist gefährlich. Mit dem Ringkämpfer hätt's schließen müssen.

[The Naive One. Why on earth? ... why is she leaving? ... Now she could get what she came for!

The Poet. The people don't seem to get it!

The Director. I told you, didn't I? It's all going wrong.

The Poet. And it's the dangerous monologue coming up next!

The Director. Your whole play is dangerous. It should have ended with the wrestler. WUR, 130–31]

Here the Naive One responds with complete incomprehension to the exit from the tragicomic puppet drama of the Duchess of Lawin, the femme fatale figure, who initially fails to seduce the Hero through her erotic charms. The Poet's despair seems to echo Schnitzler's own criticism of the audience which attended the 1901

production in Berlin. And the Director, in turn, favours the physicality of the Wrestler's body as more apt to seduce the audience.

An illustration by Berta Czegka of how Schnitzler envisioned the stage design was published together with the play in the journal *Die Zeit* in 1905 (see WUR_DJ_0003).¹⁶ He reworked the stage design between July 1900 and August 1904, adapting the stage setting of Ludwig Tieck's *Der gestiefelte Kater* [Puss in Boots, 1797].¹⁷ Yet he went well beyond Tieck's dramatic model by placing the *Hanswurst* figure among human actors who are physically attached to wires which seem to manipulate their movement and actions. This dramatic experiment produces scenes wherein boundary-making practices are challenged by frequent border crossings between real audience A, fictive audience B and the hybrid puppet theatre.

III

Once all of the characters of the puppet theatre have introduced themselves in sung couplets, the scene presents two characters who are metaphorically pulling the strings and managing the marionette theatre. Drawing on Goethe's 'Vorspiel auf dem Theater' [Prologue in the Theatre] in the first part of *Faust*, Schnitzler here extends

¹⁶ The image is reproduced at: <https://www.arthur-schnitzler.de/edition/emendtext/10118?edition=J> [accessed 11 May 2019].

¹⁷ See Barbara L. Surowska, 'Sichtbare und unsichtbare Fäden. Über das Schnitzlerische Marionettenspiel "Zum großen Wurstel" und seine Vorlage, den "Gestiefelten Kater" Ludwig Tiecks', in *Von überspannten Ideen zum politischen Appell. 25 Essays zur deutschen Literatur* (Warsaw, 2006), pp. 145–63.

and interweaves the framing action of the fictive audience into the tragicomedy which is performed by the puppets and structures the intermittent commentary of the theatre critics.¹⁸ As audience B, and perhaps also the off-stage audience, grows more and more impatient with the character of the Raisonneur, the Director and the Poet have an argument about him. The Poet decides to interrupt the performance in response to the negative feedback of one of the theatre critics on stage B:

Der Dichter *Zum Direktor*. Mir kommt vor, die Leut' langweiligen sich.

Direktor. Ich hab' Ihnen g'sagt, Sie sollen die Figur hinausschmeißen. Noch heut' vormittags hab' ich's Ihnen g'sagt.

Der Dichter. Könnt' man vielleicht nicht noch jetzt —?... Ich werd' g'schwind ein paar Verse streichen.

Direktor. Aber schnell — schnell — eh's zu spät ist.

Der Dichter eilt nach hinten, erscheint hinten am Fenster und sagt dem Räsoneur etwas ins Ohr.

[The Poet *To the Director*. I get the feeling people are getting bored.

Director. I told you to chuck this character out. I said it only this morning.

The Poet. It could still be done, couldn't it? I'll swiftly cut a couple of lines.

¹⁸ See Anne Bohnenkamp, Silke Henke and Fotis Jannidis (eds.), *Historisch-kritische Faustedition*, with Gerrit Brüning, Katrin Henzel, Christoph Leijser, Gregor Middell, Dietmar Pravida, Thorsten Vitt, Moritz Wissenbach. Beta-Version 3 (Frankfurt a.M., Weimar and Würzburg, 2017), http://www.faustedition.net/print/faust.2#scene_1.0.2 [accessed 3 March 2019].

Director. Well quick — quick — before it's too late.

The Poet rushes to the back of the stage, appears at the window and says something in the Raisonneur's ear. WUR, 113–14]

This scene between the Poet and the Director on the one hand emphasizes what the character of the Unknown Man later identifies as the invisible strings of the on-stage audience by revealing the external and institutional pressures that come to bear on both characters (see WUR, 147). On the other hand, it shows how the Poet attempts to cut the text of the Raisonneur, who is controlled by visible strings. The Poet physically interferes by crossing onto the stage area of the puppet stage to tell the actor who plays the Raisonneur-marionette about the cuts. What we can observe here is indeed a scene of on-stage editing by the author figure. Simultaneously it re-enacts the genealogy of Schnitzler's writing process in that the text of the Raisonneur was subject to major cuts throughout the creative process for 'Zum großen Wurstel' (see commentary on WUR, 113). Furthermore, the cutting scene shows the emergence of the material reality of a performance which is directly shaped by critics from audience B and stage C.

Erika Fischer-Lichte's redefinition of the term embodiment brings into focus the two key strategies of how agency and the body's materiality are created in the cutting scene. Fischer-Lichte's notion of embodiment departs from Helmuth Plessner's distinction between the phenomenal and the semiotic body in that it radically questions the underlying two-world theory which perpetuates the body/mind dichotomy. A phenomenological body refers to 'having a body' or the performer's material body, whereas the semiotic body is created through the actor's

‘representation of the dramatic character’.¹⁹ Fischer-Lichte’s performative approach focuses on how the tension between semiotic and phenomenal body generates corporeality in performance through different processes of embodiment and informs the way in which the audience perceives materiality on stage.²⁰ Fischer-Lichte analysed theatre and performance art in the 1960s and identified four different strategies for generating corporeality. Two of them, ‘reversing the relationship between the performer and their role’ and exhibiting the materiality of the individual performer’s body, are relevant in this context.²¹

Processes of embodiment require interpretation on the part of the audience too. In this way, members of the audience are not only invited to become ‘Schöpfer eines neuen Sinns’ [creators of a new meaning] but also challenge the subject/object dichotomy.²² Looking again at the cutting scene, the Poet’s gesture of saying something in the ear of the Raisonneur puppet reverses the relationship between actor and role. It directs the audience’s attention to the individual material body of the human actor who plays a marionette. The Poet’s move onto the puppet stage complicates the human/nonhuman dichotomy and exhibits the phenomenal body of the performer of the commentator figure. The role of the latter is highly ambivalent as he constantly interrupts and objectifies the play by summarizing the ongoing action.

¹⁹ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*, trans. by Saskya Iris Jain (Abingdon and New York, 2008), pp. 76–77.

²⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 77.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²² Vsevolod E. Meyerhold, in *Theaterarbeit 1917–1930*, ed. by Rosmarie Tietze (Munich, 1974), p. 72.

The Poet's physical intervention also draws attention to the visible strings by which the Raisonneur is suspended. On the one hand the strings configure his status as a para-human agent whose comments are directed by a set of pre-existing expectations, on the other they can be read as a transfiguration of the highly stylized semiotic body and language of the Raisonneur, whose satirical rhymes imitate commentary as a cognitive mechanism.

The Poet's physical interference and his attempt to diminish the role of the Raisonneur draw attention to bodily gesture. The main difference between gestures which are performed in the context of a theatre and theatrical gestures in social life is the moment of contemplation which is evoked through a change of self-perception: 'Im Theater jedoch wird die Möglichkeit eröffnet, auf diese Verführung und damit auf die transformative Kraft der Geste selber zu reflektieren' [But theatre provides us with the opportunity to reflect on this seduction and so on the transformative power of gesture itself].²³ Fischer-Lichte identifies agency which is created through theatrical gesture as being potentially manipulative. The Poet's intervention brings about a role reversal by interacting with the actor's body and excluding part of their semiotic body by cutting some lines. Moreover, it reveals the Poet's own anti-illusionist practice by showing that he does not literally pull the strings. His border crossing and pantomimic gesture of whispering in the commentator's ear embody the responses of the audience B and its role as co-creator of the theatrical event. The Poet's movement and transformative gesture enacts the moment of contemplation where the audience is

²³ Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Gesten im Theater. Zur transformativen Kraft der Geste', in *Gesten. Inszenierung, Aufführung, Praxis*, ed. by Christoph Wulf and Erika Fischer-Lichte (Munich, 2010), pp. 209–24 (p. 223).

invited (metaphorically) to cross the boundary between the auditorium and the stage area, to recognize the commentator figure as their fictive counterpart, and to consider how they are reconfiguring the characters through their co-presence and expectations. Crossing onto the stage area, the Poet's verbal deletion of the commentator character acts as a form of whispered message, passed on from character to character to audience, who are prompted to reflect upon this unsettling gesture that brings forth the human in the theatrical machinery. In this way the Poet's pantomimic gesture is potentially transformative for audiences A and B because it also refers to the spectators' own bodies and addresses them as objects embodied in this scene.

IV

By reducing the lines of the commentator puppet, the Poet aims to silence his critics in the audience too. Yet the commentator puppet reappears on the stage again in the subsequent scene. The return of the Raisonneur who acts against the Poet's ruling calls into question the authority of the master puppeteer and emphasizes the more-than-human agency of the audience. While Fischer-Lichte's performative aesthetics help to conceptualize the agency of the real audience in theatrical performance, their reliance on reflexivity and representation obscures our view of the theatrical apparatus and investigative subject or, in this case, the other agents who are collaboratively pulling the strings. Feminist theorist Karen Barad criticizes reflexivity as iterative mimesis which 'emphasises *sameness* and *separateness*'.²⁴ This tendency to perpetuate the same dichotomies is vital in the given context, as Schnitzler's

²⁴ Hollin et al., '(Dis)entangling Barad', p. 926.

‘lebende[s] Kasperltheater’ [living Punch and Judy show, WUR_BT1_0007] crucially challenges pre-existing hierarchical binaries between human and machine through an intentional act of exclusion that fails.

In her material realist account of posthuman performativity Barad draws on quantum physics and feminist theory. Here I will solely concentrate on Barad’s key concept of intra-activity or the movement of ‘cutting together-apart’, which she uses to explicate the idea of the agential cut as a coming together and emerging from this differently. Intra-actions enact agential cuts by ‘a (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling’ rather than by absolute separations or a prescribed set of patterns. Agential cuts bring into view the mutual constitution of entangled agencies, particularly in relation to nonhuman agents.²⁵

A diffractive reading of Schnitzler’s hybrid performance technique demonstrates that the boundaries and discursive practices which are constituted in the play are real in that they intra-actively produce the material realities of the audience. Barad’s discussion of the idea of ‘intra-action’ through agential cuts explains how bodily boundaries are produced. She proposes ‘a posthumanist understanding of the human in that it defines human embodiment as an enactment of particular human concepts’.²⁶ Hence Barad questions whether human subjects can be enacted. According to her posthumanist approach human subjects in fact remain disembodied.²⁷ Human agency is thus reconfigured through different practices and

²⁵ See Karen Barad, ‘Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart’, *Parallax*, 20.3 (2014), 169-87 (p. 168).

²⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 160.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 154.

can be embodied through both human and mechanical concepts. And the performance practice in Schnitzler's 'Zum großen Wurstel' provides an excellent example of the co-constitution of human and non-human boundaries.

Towards the end of the play the marionettes define their emancipatory agency through particular human skills: 'Die Marionetten. Ei, nun tun wir, was wir wollen! / Reden, singen, tanzen, tollern!' [The Marionettes. Hey, now we can do just what we want! / We talk, we sing, we dance, we romp!'], WUR, 146]. Through their human practices of free play, the visible wires of the puppets are understood to be part of their 'subject' and human agency. The emancipatory act of the marionettes reconstitutes their bodily borders by cutting them away from the puppeteer. This agential cut enacts a boundary-making practice that humorously puts forward particular human concepts and transforms the marionettes into human agents. Yet the play constantly reconfigures the theatrical machinery by questioning the agencies of those who are supposedly pulling the strings.

As demonstrated in the Wrestler scene, Schnitzler's comedy complicates human and other-than-human agency through material entanglements and interactions which reconfigure the boundaries between the agents in the play. Similarly, the Poet's physical intervention in the text-cutting scene turns the commentator puppet into an object of observation. Besides the role reversal which highlights the material body of the actor who is impersonating a marionette, the Poet's practice enacts an agential cut which ultimately changes his creation's bodily boundaries by cutting the string puppet away from the fictive measuring apparatus. The Poet also emphasizes the human agency of the puppet by talking to the actor. When the Raisonneur comes on stage again, despite orders to the contrary, the actor's disobedience enacts yet another agential cut which, in turn, transforms the supposed

puppeteer, controlling him as an object of observation. The Poet in fact also seeks to break free from his close ties to the audience, and the mediating figure of the Director. The latter is not at a loss for criticism when the Raisonneur resumes his commentary: ‘Ja, warum haben S’ ihm denn das nicht g’strichen?’ [Well, why didn’t you cut that bit for him? WUR, 120]. The Poet attempts to maintain artistic agency by responding: ‘Das ist die schönste Stelle!’ [That’s the best part! WUR, 120].

Overall, the cutting scene constitutes multiple agential cuts, which demonstrate that the ‘line between subject and object is not fixed’.²⁸ It enacts boundary-making practices that constantly shift between subject and object and incorporate mechanical concepts into subjects. The Raisonneur puppet as commentator is reconfigured from being an instrument of the theatrical apparatus to an object of observation and subsequently embodies human agency through his return to the stage. The Raisonneur’s disobedience, in turn, emphasizes the ‘puppet-like’ character of the Poet. In the aforementioned revolt of the marionettes it is the Raisonneur and his fellow puppets who stress the Poet’s lack of agency: ‘Marionetten. [...] Ist der Dichter ganz von Sinnen, / Laßt uns unser Spiel beginnen!’ [The Marionettes. If the Poet is quite out of his mind, / Let’s start a play of our own kind! WUR, 146]. It is this entangled relationship between human and nonhuman forms of agency that marks the way in which the fictive Director and Poet respond to the Raisonneur, as Schnitzler’s human marionettes take control of the play.

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²⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

Interestingly, the way in which the real director and the real author responded to the theatrical apparatus in the context of the staging of ‘Zum großen Wurstel’ at the Deutsches Volkstheater in Vienna in 1912 constituted a similar diffraction pattern to the intra-action of the fictive Director and Poet. My diffractive reading of the real apparatus responds to Barad’s argument that the investigative subject needs to be included in the analysis to understand the diffraction pattern. In this context, this involves the entangled relationship between Schnitzler, the real audience and its fictive counterpart, and my own practice as the co-director of his comedy. As mentioned above, the new form of theatre, the entangled embodiment and interior play-within-a-play structure which Schnitzler created in ‘Zum großen Wurstel’, emerges most clearly through his practice of reworking the play. Thus, when he returned to the play for the first joint staging of the *Marionetten* in Vienna on 10 February 1912, his reworking was characterized by extensive cuts which, similar to the practice of the Poet figure that he had created in autumn 1904, he seems to have performed on stage during rehearsals. My discussion of the real theatrical machinery focuses on a scene of role-playing between Schnitzler and artistic director Heinrich Glücksmann, who acted as an advisor for the 1912 staging.

Schnitzler attended rehearsals for all three plays, which started on 29 January 1912 and lasted two weeks. He worked closely with Glücksmann and with Leopold Kramer, who ultimately directed the puppet plays. The collection of Heinrich Schnitzler’s books held in the German Literature Archive in Marbach a.N. contains

Arthur Schnitzler's personal copy of *Marionetten*.²⁹ Most of the pages of the book are annotated in Schnitzler's hand, with different degrees of engagement. Although these annotations are undated, his correspondence with Glücksmann about the changes to 'Zum großen Wurstel' suggests that they relate to the 1912 staging. Schnitzler's letters to Glücksmann indicate that the latter proposed in this staging to remove from audience B two characters who were actually the title figures of recent plays by his friends Hermann Bahr and Richard Beer-Hofmann. In his letter to Glücksmann, Schnitzler concluded: 'Den "Grafen von Charolais" und den "Meister" werden wir also streichen' [We will cut the 'Count of Charolais' and the 'Master' then].³⁰ This exchange between director Glücksmann and poet Schnitzler, in which both seem to imitate their fictive counterparts, can be read as a reconfiguration of the cutting scene in the play, particularly as Schnitzler consciously acts in character in another letter to theatre director Otto Brahm on 15 February 1912.³¹

Schnitzler largely acted on Glücksmann's advice but did not follow it entirely. His cuts are recorded quite expressively in his hand-annotated copy. He completely removed the two anti-illusionist literary characters, *Der Meister*, sourced from Hermann Bahr's comedy of the same title, and *Der Graf von Charolais*, the title

²⁹ Arthur Schnitzler, *Marionetten. Drei Einakter* (Frankfurt a.M., 1906), Deutsches Literatur Archiv, Marbach a.N.: G: Schnitzler, Arthur (Sammlung Heinrich Schnitzler); henceforth cited as WUR_DH1, followed by the scan number.

³⁰ Letter from Arthur Schnitzler to Heinrich Glücksmann, 18 January 1912, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach a.N., HS.NZ85.0001.00835/4.

³¹ *Der Briefwechsel Arthur Schnitzler — Otto Brahm*, ed. by Oskar Seidlin (Tübingen, 1975), p. 340.

character of Richard Beer-Hofmann's tragedy, published in 1903 and 1904 respectively, because both plays had disappeared from the repertoire by 1912 and the audience would not easily pick up the references (see WUR_DH1_0140). Schnitzler himself suggested in a letter to Glücksmann that he could update these two literary characters by drawing on more recent plays.³² Glücksmann's suggestion seems to have been to include Schnitzler's famous character Anatol and his lovers in the play, an idea that Schnitzler rejected. He, in turn, pointed out to Glücksmann that his best ideas would emerge during the rehearsals.³³ His practice is reminiscent of the Poet's scene of on-stage editing in the play.

With regard to the trio of puppet plays, it is 'Zum großen Wurstel' for which Schnitzler made the most substantial changes. In a way similar to his fictive counterpart, he made further cuts to the lines of the Raisonneur but did not remove him entirely. Changes to the text at this point particularly concern the dialogue between the Director and Poet (see WUR_DH1_0111). Schnitzler in fact strengthened their roles. This takes us back to the cutting scene in the play which Schnitzler revised for the production. After the Theatre Director has pointed out that he had suggested cutting the commentator puppet altogether, he voices a telling piece of criticism. Schnitzler added the following line in pencil to the Director's speech: 'Aber so ein Dichter bildet sich halt immer [sic] ein — er versteht mehr wie wirunser einer' [But then a poet like that always thinks — he understands more than we the rest of us,

³² Letter from Arthur Schnitzler to Heinrich Glücksmann, 20 May 1911, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach a.N., HS.NZ85.0001.00835/2.

³³ Letter from Arthur Schnitzler to Heinrich Glücksmann, 18 October 1911, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach a.N., HS.NZ85.0001.00835/3.

WUR_DH1_0111]. The Director's second response to the Poet's suggestion to instantly cut a few lines of the Raisonneur's speech also gains another line in Schnitzler's hand. After prompting the Poet to act quickly, the Director remarks: 'Wenn wir durchgefallen sind, hilfts nix mehr' [If it's a flop, it won't do the slightest bit of good, WUR_DH1_0111].

The manner in which Schnitzler made his revisions and cuts on the hand-annotated copy, frequently crossing out entire pages several times, suggests that he may indeed have changed the text during the rehearsals. The deletion marks seem to trace his thinking process. His additions to the cutting scene at this point also shift the boundaries of the real and fictive theatrical apparatus in at least two different ways. Via criticism of the haughtiness of the Poet and of the timing of his cuts, the Director increasingly takes on the role of the commentator. The Director's remarks allude to Schnitzler's initial comments on the audience's lack of understanding of the staging in Berlin in 1901 by implying that it was the Poet who had lost sight of the plot. In this way Schnitzler performs a role reversal which puts forward and adapts the criticism of the real poet in the play. Reworking 'Zum großen Wurstel' for the 1912 production, Schnitzler revises the cutting scene and the feedback loop it created in audience B in several other ways.

Scenes of on-stage editing provide crucial insights about embodiment and human and nonhuman forms of agency because they delineate particular practices through which the dramatic text and the performance are mutually constituted by the audience and the other elements of the theatrical apparatus. In 'Zum großen Wurstel' these boundary-making practices are enacted when crucial demarcation lines are deliberately crossed. The key binaries which are challenged in the play are those between humans and machines, and subjects and objects, as well as between the

theatrical world and the realities that emerge in the play. If we look at the Poet and the Director as two characters who each drop a stone in a pond and consider how their waves or responses co-create a pattern of effects, the diffraction pattern which emerges through their intra-actions is shaped through constant re-configurations of ontological boundaries. Moreover, the scene with the Wrestler demonstrates a parallel entanglement of human and nonhuman agency, and of apparatus and audience.

The entangled embodiment of the audience became even more evident through my practical experience of co-directing the play at Cambridge University Library in April 2019.³⁴ In blocking the scene in which the marionettes rebel another case of boundary-crossing became clear to me. At the end of the play the Unknown Man, a mysterious figure, enters the stage and cuts the wires of the marionettes. Despite the Wrestler's emergence from audience B this scene exposes the fact that he actually belongs to the personnel of the marionette theatre (see WUR, 99). Even though the Wrestler was situated in audience B he needed to collapse to the ground together with his fellow marionettes.

Just as the wrestling match turns out to be a scene in which two marionettes were fighting with each other, Schnitzler's parody of the reception of his work also reveals the mechanics of his creative process. His practice creates a diffraction pattern of two human marionettes wrestling with each other, which constantly re-configures human and nonhuman boundaries. Audiences A and B are both embodied through nonhuman agency in 'Zum großen Wurstel', not least through the visible strings that symbolize their stereotypical expectations and mechanical behaviour. At the same time, audience B and the marionettes are characterized by their human and animal

³⁴ For details see: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/SchnitzlerPlay> [accessed 11 May 2019].

needs and behaviours, most notably eating, talking and dancing. The same can, in turn, be said of the Director and the Poet, particularly the latter who repeatedly places himself on the stage of the puppet theatre and is mainly directed by the audience. The human actors who are seemingly controlled by strings present the ‘puppet-like’ aspect of audience A. And the disobedience of the Raisonneur shows that the actors are in fact their own puppeteers too.

The wrestling scene re-enacts a crucial parameter of the theatrical world that Schnitzler’s play re-creates and parodies through grotesque bodily practices. It should come as no surprise that bourgeois theatre around 1900 was quintessentially a male establishment, perpetuating practices of patriarchal discourse and competition between men. Yet what emerges in Schnitzler’s dramatic experiment is a new form of posthuman and audience-led theatre: it rejects essentialist ideas about human-ness by showing the intricate entanglement of human and nonhuman forms of agency through transformative bodily gestures that also address the material body of the audience.

It is tempting to position Schnitzler’s anti-illusionist theatrical practice as pre-Brechtian. However, a diffractive reading of his burlesque comedy reveals a much subtler and potentially more subversive practice by creating a theatrical event that fundamentally unsettles the boundaries between theatrical world and reality, speaking far more to post-Brechtian, postdramatic theatre practice, which emphasizes bodily activity and its obstruction and entanglements of reality and fiction.³⁵ Taken by surprise at the power of his play in performance, Schnitzler described the encounter between the real and fictive audience of the 1912 staging of ‘Zum großen Wurstel’ as

³⁵ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater* (Frankfurt a.M., 1999), p. 367.

a 'veritable[n] Skandal' [veritable scandal, Tb, 12.2.1912]. He could not help but comment on a report which disclosed that the real audience had mistaken their fictive counterpart for fellow spectators, interacting directly with the actors on the intermediate stage. In this way they confirmed the materiality and power of the reality produced by the theatrical event and, by extension, by the return of the puppet in Schnitzler's multifaceted theatrical apparatus.