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"Follow your enthusiasm" : the Jim Henson performance aesthetic

Susan Andre George
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aesthetic**

George, Susan Andre, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1993

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**"FOLLOW YOUR ENTHUSIASM":
THE JIM HENSON PERFORMANCE AESTHETIC**

A Thesis

Presented to

**The Faculty of the Graduate Committee of Theatre Arts
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Drama**

by

Susan Andre George

December, 1993

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ABSTRACT

"FOLLOW YOUR ENTHUSIASM": THE JIM HENSON PERFORMANCE AESTHETIC

by Susan Andre George

This thesis investigates the aesthetics evident in the puppet performances of Henson Associates. It examines the aesthetics borrowed and adapted from live and recorded puppet performance as well as the innovations and effects of the Muppet's medium, television. It will examine the behind the scenes choices and techniques that effect the final performance and those seen during performance, such as design and costuming.

There is debate between scholars and puppet performers as to the value of Henson's innovations, and type of commercial puppetry in general. This debate will by no means be the focal point of this thesis, but the major objections are important and discussed. The purpose of this thesis is to reach a better understanding of the relationship of recorded media and technology to the art of puppetry as manifested in the works of Henson Associates, for this kind of theoretical perspective appears to be lacking in this on-going debate.

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1. ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS

Many countries have well-established puppet traditions. The puppet character Mr. Punch, called by many names in many different places, has been performing throughout Europe for over 300 years and has influenced theatre practitioners including Eugene Ionesco and Gordon Criag. Many countries of Eastern Europe, such as Russia, Romania, Poland and Czechoslovakia have a tradition of large state-supported puppet theatres where, "spectacular shows are staged, with scenery coming and going, massed choirs of puppets, orchestra, armies and chorus lines all deployed as in a Hollywood musical" (Hogarth & Bussell 19). China, India, Greece and Java all have shadow puppet traditions.

Puppetry in America has never been as firmly established as it has been in other cultures. Though there have been different forms of puppet theatre in America (Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre and the educational shows that were produced during the Federal Theater Project are two examples), there has never been one that was so widespread, popular, or profitable as the Muppets.

Since Jim Henson's creations first appeared on a ten minute late night adult show in Washington D. C. in 1955 called Sam and Friends, the Muppets have made Henson "a millionaire many times over, with far-flung interests that include merchandising, feature films, a future theme park and more" ("Good Night, Sweet Frog" 98). The Muppets have expanded and flourished to the point where the names Bert and Ernie, Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy have not only become household names, but have the same star status as names like Liz Taylor, Clint Eastwood and Robin Williams. Their appeal crosses age barriers. Children learn their alphabet and numbers with Bert and Ernie, while the absurd and adult humor of The Muppet Show and the puppet-infested Land of Gorch on Saturday Night Live have helped to re-establish puppets into

adult programming. Besides his soft and furry Muppet creations, Henson created strange fantasy worlds inhabited by goblins, giants, Griffins and a wide assortment of other fantastic creatures. Henson Associates have created and manipulated puppets for other filmmakers as well. Henson's creations were used by George Lucas in his Star Wars films, in Little Shop of Horrors and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

The puppetry of Jim Henson Associates is the subject of this paper. It will address the following question: what is the relationship between puppetry and technology as manifested in the aesthetics of Henson Associates? For clearly, the greatest difference between the puppetry of Jim Henson and other puppeteers was his complete exploitation of recorded media and his love of the technology of television. There is no doubt that the medium has and will continue to be an important influence on the very existence of his puppet creations.

This investigation will include an examination of the consequences of recorded media on Henson's puppet and set design, as well as the conventions of television realism that Henson employed and adapted in his works.

While other puppet film makers, particularly in Eastern Europe, preferred to make stop-motion puppet films, Jim Henson successfully and fully (if the American criteria of popularity and profit margins can be used as a measure of success) enlisted and exploited the technology of television (recorded media) and adapted it to create innovations in live-action recorded puppet performance. It is the aesthetics created by Henson's fusing of puppetry, technology and recorded media that are the focus of this thesis.

Special attention will be given to the aesthetics developed and exploited by Henson Associates, as well as those borrowed and adapted from different sources, such as live puppet theatre, live actor performances and other recorded media puppetry.

This thesis will examine the aesthetic choices Henson made, not only in an attempt to utilize his medium fully, but to make his puppet act more commercial and quickly accessible to a mass audience. It will investigate Henson Associates' way of working and the roots from which these practices are derived, as well as Henson's goals and the subject matter of his productions.

This paper will not deal with the use of the Muppets for educational purposes, except as they relate to Henson's goals and those of other puppet theatres. Therefore, any discussion of the Sesame Street characters, as well as other programs specifically designed for children, like Fraggle Rock and Mother Goose Stories, will be confined to their design, manipulation, technology, or contribution to the success of Henson Associates in general, and not for their effectiveness or legitimacy as teaching devices. Nor will this paper examine any of the animated spin-offs of the Muppets, such as the animated series Muppet Babies. The only significance of these shows to the relationship of technology and the puppetry of Henson Associates in this thesis is as yet another testament to their well developed characters and popularity.

As with innovations in any art form there is debate among scholars and performers in the puppet world as to the value of Henson's innovations, and whether they advance, promote and preserve the art of puppetry or harm it. (These are some of goals of the Puppeteers of America of which Henson was a member until his death and, at one point, the president). This debate is by no means be the focal point of this thesis, but several major objections to Henson's puppetry merit examination and will be discussed. The purpose and importance of this thesis however, is not to continue the Henson debate, but to reach a better understanding of the relationship of recorded media and technology to the art of puppetry, for this particular theoretical perspective appears to be lacking in this on-going debate.

A wide variety of materials were used in this investigation. They include photos, videos, live performances, interviews, correspondence, books, articles, and essays that discuss the designs, use of materials, scenic elements, music and subject matter of a variety of puppet theatres and traditions, as well as over fifty Henson works viewed by the author.

To avoid confusion later, when the term Muppet or Muppets is used it refers to the puppets seen on Sesame Street, The Muppet Show, Fraggle Rock and other programs like The Jimmy Dean Show that were constructed at the New York workshop, namely Kermit and his friends.

At this time it should also be mentioned, as Bruce Holman noted in his book, that one of the problems with tracing puppet films is the fact that it is common "practice to translate the title into the language of the various countries, or in some cases assign an altogether different name to the film" (12). For example, a print of a silent Starevitch puppet film viewed by the author was titled The Devil's Ball, but from the description in Holman's book it is the same film he referred to as The Mascot. Therefore, for the sake of consistency the titles used by source materials will be used by the author as well.

A note on the bibliographic notations. When a title appears, but there is no page number or the notation for no number (n. pag.) in evidence it indicates that the source of the information was a video tape.

A note on technical terms. Chromakeying in video is the same process as matting in film, since post-production for Henson's television productions was executed after they were transferred to video tape, chromakey is the most appropriate term to use. However, most of the source materials and quotations use the term mat, or matting, so it will be used throughout this paper as well.

To expedite the reader's understanding of the Muppet Empire, and view the puppetry of Jim Henson in its proper perspective, there are two elements that the reader must be acquainted with from the very beginning. They are Henson's early career, the birth on the Muppet idea, and the types of puppets he created and employed in his performances. One needs to go back to the very beginning and look at the factors, decisions, and elements of pure chance that led to the development and establishment of the Muppet types and empire. These elements will be the subject matter of the rest of this chapter.

EARLY CAREER

James Maury Henson, or as he is known to the world, Jim Henson, was born September 24, 1936, in Greenville, Mississippi. As a high school student from Hyattsville Maryland, (where his family moved when his father, an agronomist for the United States Department of Agriculture, was transferred to Washington D.C.), Henson had no intention of becoming one of the world's best known puppeteers. He only knew that he wanted to work in the budding television industry when he graduated from high school. Henson said:

I was never interested in puppetry, never had puppets, never played with puppets, or *anything* like that . . . I just wanted to work at television when I got out of high school. And puppets were just a way to get into to TV.
(Harris 26)

In 1954 he applied for a job as a puppeteer for a live children's show called, The Junior Morning Show, at a local NBC station in Washington D.C. Henson stated:

It was the early 1950's and I was between high school and college and needed a job. There was this job available for a puppeteer on a local NBC station in Washington D.C. I figured it would be a pretty good job, so I applied for it and got it. The job turned out to be perfect for me. I kept it all the time I was going to school and it served as the

best possible training ground for the things I was to do later. (Current Biography 1977, 200)

At this point he had no experience in building, or manipulating puppets. His closest experience with puppets at that time, in fact, was building sets for the high school puppet club (Harris 26). Nonetheless, Henson got the job and started to study puppet making. Henson commented:

I got books out from the library to see how to make puppets . . . But mostly I evolved my own type of construction, which I think is the reason the stuff looked somewhat different. I pretty much stared from nowhere. (Harris 26)

The Junior Morning Show, for which he was originally hired, only lasted three weeks. Henson continued to do other puppetry work at the station and was soon offered his own show. At the end of his freshman year he was offered a five-minute puppet show, which became Sam and Friends. Sources vary as to the dates of the show, but according to Karen Falk, the archivist at Henson Associates, it ran from May 9, 1955 to December 15, 1961. The format of Sam and Friends was very simple. There was a group of five abstract characters/puppets that would lip-synch to novelty songs and comedy recordings. Henson continued both his studies in commercial design through the department of Home Economics at the University of Maryland, graduating in 1960, and his work as a puppeteer on television. He asked a fellow student, Jane Nebel, who was to become Jane Henson in 1959, to work on the show with him, and the Muppets were born. It was from this meager starting point that Jim and Jane developed their innovative production and performance style. Henson discarded the confines of the proscenium stage that was used for other television puppets shows like, Kukla Fran and Ollie, and worked instead within the confines of what the camera's eye could see, as noted in The Art of the Muppets:

From the outset, there were a couple surprising things about the Muppets. They didn't work on a stage or in a puppet theater: the television set *was* their theater. The performers worked freestanding in the open studio, watching neither the actual puppets nor each other, but following the movements of their puppets on TV monitors . . . This was enhanced by Jim's growing familiarity with the medium and his use of camera tricks and lens changes to exaggerate a sense of movement or an illusion of distance. (Henson Associates n. pag.)

Henson said on several occasions that, "working to a monitor is absolutely essential to our performance and we have virtually no performance without that monitor" (Magid 76). Henson originally started out with one of the standard arrangements employed with most hand puppets, the index finger and middle finger in the head, the thumb serving as one hand and the last two fingers functioning as the other hand, but he soon abandoned this arrangement for the his current arrangement, the thumb in the lower jaw, the rest of the hand in top of jaw, because of the added range of expressions he could achieve in this fashion with his soft flexible puppets (Jane Henson, The Man Behind the Muppets). These facial expressions, which would be lost in a conventional puppet theatre, were readily apparent on the television screen and became one of the trademarks of Muppet performance. As Jane stated:

He [Jim] felt that the puppet face onscreen filled the screen in as important a way as any human face. And that because it was an abstracted face the puppet was really able to do super-human things, or beyond human, or get away with anything. Very early on Jim made Kermit, its one of the very earliest puppets because, as I said, he loved the idea of filling the screen with the face. He made Kermit particularly for the little tiny movements that he could get in the mouth. (The Man Behind the Muppets)

As Jane noted, from the very beginning the demands and advantages of television effected all aspects and aesthetics of the Muppets.

With Sam and Friends, Henson's salary increased from his original \$5 per show to a \$100 per week contract, "which included his cost for puppets, costumes, and sets" (Harris 26). Henson soon learned, however, that the big money in television was in advertising. He started to write and perform commercials for a local brand of coffee, Wilkins Coffee. It was also the first time the Muppets would speak for themselves. The premise of the commercials were quite simple and many of them contained the kind of violent puppet comedy that has been seen in puppet theatre since the days of Mr. Punch, such as puppets exploding, being beaten, or squashed. Henson commented that in the early days the commercials and Sam Friends "were very violent, but at that time we were not thinking about children" (An Evening with Jim Henson). Besides, in the 50's and 60's violence on television and in children's programming was not the prominent issue it is today. So, the commercials were an instant success and, "in terms of popularity, we were the number one commercial in Washington" (Harris 26).

Two elements that have remained an important part of Henson's Muppet act, as well as the non-Muppet creature films, as Henson referred to them, were established at this early juncture in Henson's career. First, Henson, who did not like coffee, could not, with a clear conscience, "simply say 'Drink this coffee'--he substituted off-beat humor for hard sell, in what was to become a Muppet trademark" (Harris 26). The commercials did so well, in fact, that the sales of the coffee rose an estimated 30 percent and the ad agency decided to syndicate the commercial to other coffee companies across the nation (Harris 26). Which leads us to the second work ethic that was established at this time. Henson decided to buy out his contract and "began creating and syndicating the commercials himself" (Harris 26). In this way, Henson could exert the kind of creative control over his work that would become another trademark of the Muppet empire.

Even with the success of Sam and Friends, which won an Emmy for best local entertainment show in 1958, and the money that started rolling in from his commercials, Henson was not content. He wanted to be an artist, a painter. He did not think of puppetry as an art, or permanent profession. It was simply a way to get into television. So that same year, he decided to "go off and paint" in Europe. He left Jane, with whom he was not romantically involved at the time, and long-time friend Bob Payne, to take care of Sam and Friends in his absence. Until his trip to Europe, Henson never dreamed of taking his vocation of puppetry seriously. He stated, "All the time I was in school I didn't take it seriously . . . I mean, it didn't seem to be the sort of thing a grown man works at for a living" (Current Biography 200). After his trip to Europe, however, Henson's opinion of puppetry changed.

In Europe, for the first time, Henson met and saw the performances by other puppeteers, like a Belgian production of Dr. Faustus, which he found both "very strong" and "just gorgeous" (Harris 26). He now saw that puppetry was an ancient art and a legitimate profession for grown men in many parts of the world. He also felt that he could bring something new and vital to the art. He recalled:

I saw it *was* something you can do artistically. But in the United States I [had] never realized it, because there just aren't that many puppeteers here. . . . In Europe *everybody* goes to puppet shows. Another thing, there hasn't been anything new in puppetry in fifteen years. I wanted to see the Obratsov puppets when they were here, because he's the best puppeteer in the world. I was disappointed. Technically, they were beautiful, but otherwise he's quite old-fashioned. (Current Biography 200-201)

With his new found belief in the art of puppetry and how it could be used dramatically and strongly, combined with his live-action approach, which came from his early years of live television, Henson realized he had found "the perfect medium to

take puppets beyond the traditional Punch and Judy proscenium" (Seligmann & Leonard) and into the homes of the twentieth century television audience.

The 1960's brought about guest appearances of Henson's Muppets on shows like, The Ed Sullivan Show, The Jack Parr Show, The Tonight Show, and his major break through, Rowlf the Dog, as regular resident comedian on The Jimmy Dean Show for three years starting in 1963.

This is not to say that Henson did not have other projects as well. Though Henson's Muppets were now seen and known on a national level, he was still not willing, or content, to confine his work, or imagination to the world of his Muppets. For it was the Sixties and he experimented with many kinds of film and performance styles. He said of this time, "I was interested in filmmaking and several different forms of animation. . . . I was painting things and experimenting with a lot of different techniques" (Harris 27). In 1965, he directed and acted in a live action theatrical short called, Timepiece, which was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Live Action Short Subject and received several international film festival awards (Harris 27; Contemporary Authors 209).

Henson continued to write scripts and work on a variety of non-Muppet projects. One such project was The Cube, made in 1968 for NBC, "which was a sort of surrealistic teleplay about a man trapped in a plastic cube" (Harris 27). Henson juggled his Muppet projects and his other works until the phenomenal success of Sesame Street, in 1969, made him turn his complete attention to the Muppets. Henson said:

For quite a while I kept two careers going. . . . My filmmaking stuff was one thing and the television work with the Muppets was something else. . . . With Sesame Street, the Muppets suddenly took off under their own power. We just sort of went with it. (Harris 27-28)

Henson, nor anyone else for that matter, had any idea that Sesame Street would be the huge hit it was and is. Henson decided to do Sesame Street in the same unassuming, almost thoughtless, manner in which he started puppetry in the first place. He did the show because he believed in it, but had no idea it would become the landmark in educational television that it is today. In fact, he almost forgot to mention it to his manager entirely. Henson recalled:

I remember telling him, "Incidentally, I'm working on this little children's show. It's an educational thing and I'm only doing it because I believe in it." There was no thought that it would ever become a big thing. (Harris 28)

But others in the television field had great respect for Henson's work and professionalism. When Joan Ganz Cooney, Children's Television Workshop President, first made her proposal for what would become Sesame Street, she suggested using puppets on the show. Jon Stone, who would become the producer and head writer for Sesame Street, had worked with Henson in 1968 on one of Henson's live action projects for NBC, Youth '68, and he suggested Henson for the job. Cooney recalled:

They instantly said to each other and to me, "Do you think we can get Jim Henson of the Muppets to come in?" Everyone was a little bit skeptical, but they knew him, and went to him, and asked him. They felt so strongly about Jim Henson, that they said if we couldn't get Jim Henson, we will not use puppets at all. That was how head and shoulders he was above any puppeteers in the world, in our view. (The Man Behind the Muppets)

Though Cooney had an idea that the new show would be successful, because of the array of talented people who were signing on to do it, the magnitude of their success was unprecedented and unexpected by all involved. She said:

From that moment we knew we had a real shot at success. I never really doubted, as people signed on, real talented people, and then Jim, you knew you had it. From that

point on it would of almost taken, it would have taken, someone very diabolical, I think, to lose it. To have this kind of success we didn't expect. But certainly, we thought of being successful and knew that Jim would make a huge difference. (The Man Behind the Muppets)

Henson's experience in making commercials was perfect for the proposed Sesame Street format, as Henson recalled:

What they wanted to do was take and use some of the techniques that had been created for commercials and for television and apply them to the preschool kid. No one had ever really aimed any television at these kids And what they found, at least in the United States, these kids spend an enormous amount of time watching television. The thought was, at least, if we can design something for these guys that it will just benefit them. Its not like they ever tried to replace any part of present day schooling, but as long as those kids are going to be watching television give them something that is aimed for them that will be of assistance to them. (The Man Behind the Muppets)

Continually, throughout his career, Henson's reputation, professionalism, business sense, and the performances of the Muppets themselves, would continue to open doors for Henson Associates. Who he was and what he did often preceded him and made the road to success a little easier.
MUPPET TYPES

Another important aspect of Henson Associates' puppetry is the array of different puppet types, sizes, and manipulation techniques they use and combine to create the final performance. The following will attempt to clarify certain Henson puppet types, not in relation to traditional taxonomies, but as unique categories with sub-groups of their own.

There has been a great deal of writing on puppets. Much of it spends a considerable amount of time establishing categories or taxonomies into which the puppets are then placed. However, it becomes clear when looking at these categories

that they fail to cover and include all types of puppets. For instance, some authors, like Beaumont, separate puppets by what Steve Tillis identified in his thesis as "object-control." Beaumont in a chapter entitled "Anatomy," wrote:

All puppets fall into two main groups: round or three-dimensional puppets and flat, or two-dimensional puppets; both these types may be further grouped into several subdivisions.

- Round* 1 String-puppets, or marionettes
- 2 Rod-puppet
- 3 Jigging-puppets
- 4 Glove-puppets or hand-puppets
- 5 Magnetically controlled puppets
- 6 Japanese three-man puppets
- Flat* 1 Paper or board puppets
- 2 Shadow puppets (17)

Still other authors, like Michael Malkin and Bil Baird, separate puppets by a historical or geographic method which is often as limiting as the object-control method. Malkin divides his study of puppets by the country or region they are from. For example his chapters include European Traditional Puppets, Puppets in Sub-Saharan Africa and so forth. Ann Hogarth in Fanfare for Puppets simply listed the following as chapter headings; glove puppets, shadow puppets, rod puppets, and marionettes, which she then elaborated on in each chapter. While the Muppets' success and the look-a-likes that have risen in their wake have led some puppet scholars, like David Currell, to establish them as a new, separate puppet category, including them along side more traditional taxonomies like, "The rod-hand puppet" and the "Catalan glove puppets" (110), it has not clarified the matter completely, if at all. Currell wrote:

Muppet-type hand puppet

These are often a cross between hand puppets and rod puppets, usually with moving mouths. They depend upon the hand for head, mouth and body movements; the hands and arms are controlled in one of three ways: by a rod, as described for rod puppets; by a human hand

inserted into a hollow arm and hand which is part of the costume or by a human hand wearing a separate glove (or mitten) and sleeve. . . . Unfortunately some performers create second-rate imitations of the Muppet characters; the comparison this invites only highlights their own shortcomings. . . . Note: a popular version of this type of puppet has a disproportionately large head and features a moving mouth, which is such a dominant characteristic that these figures are now termed 'mouth puppets'. (110)

None of these taxonomies are very helpful or accurate in relation to the puppets of Henson Associates. Even Currell's attempt can only be used to describe a few of their many creations. Therefore, no attempt will be made here to fit the Muppets into these "traditional," or established categories. Instead they will be organized into their own groups by object control and the technology used to implement their performances. In some cases, as with the full-figure puppets, as Henson referred to them, like Big Bird, there will need to be a discussion of how they developed and became more technologically advanced over the years and from project to project. Whenever possible and to make it easier for the reader to visualize, terms that are common to the previously mentioned "traditional" taxonomies will be used. For example, Kermit will be referred to as a single operator hand and rod puppet.

The varied kinds of puppet types and manipulation techniques that Henson Associates combine to create one performance is an important aspect of their puppetry. The use of multiple puppet sizes and types, each with their individual natures of movement, coupled with Henson's thorough exploitation of recorded media's benefits, adds a variety of depth as well as versatility to Henson Associates' productions. The sets of Henson's productions literally come alive with crowds of singing vegetables, choruses of pigs, dancing chickens, bears and monsters. While working on The Muppet Show, Henson Associates often needed their builders to construct specialty puppets or characters on the spot. Henson also developed basic puppets, called "Whatnots" on The

Muppet Show and "Anything Muppets" on Sesame Street, that can quickly be made into characters by using any of the various eyes, noses, horns, claws, teeth or shapes that are kept on hand for this purpose (Henson Associates n. pag.). As Christopher Finch noted in his book, Of Muppets and Men (1981):

The fact that so many Muppets are built in a day, and used only once being transmuted into yet other new character, which will in turn undergo some curious sea change, has been crucial to the success of the Muppet Show. There have been other puppet stars on television--Kukla and Ollie, for example--to compare with Kermit, Piggy and Gonzo, but no other puppet show has ever provided its stars with such a context, has surrounded them with such a seething tide of vitality. . . . The Muppets' universe, it seems, is infinitely protean. (56)

The first category of Henson creations that will be discussed is the single operator hand and rod puppet. Probably the best known puppet in the world except for Punch, Kermit, is a single operator hand and rod puppet. The operator, "uses his right hand to work the head (including the mouth and occasional internal controls for eye movements, etc.) and his left to manipulate rods attached to the puppet's wrists" (Henson Associates n. pag.). In the case of Kermit there are no internal controls for eye movement. Instead his head is very basic, soft and flexible which allowed Henson to achieve a wide variety of expressions from the Frog. The puppet's legs, if there are any and they are visible, simple hang or are placed in a position that will remain unchanged for the scene or shot. The legs can be manipulated by a second puppeteer by way of another set of rods when necessary (Finch).

There are, of course, additional exceptions to this basic form of the single operator hand/rod puppets manipulation, for instance Kermit has been made to ride a bike and walk, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter. Other characters such as

the Divine Swine, Miss Piggy, Gonzo, Scooter, Floyd and Janice of Dr. Teeth's band are given movement in basically the same way, except that their heads are more elaborate.

Some characters in Henson's non-Muppet creature films are also operated in this manner. For example, the most human-like characters in The Dark Crystal, the Gelfings, Jen and Kira, though they look little like Kermit, were manipulated in much the same way, except additional eye and facial movements were achieved by two other puppeteers using cable controls when required. Additionally, their movement needed to be much more naturalistic, or human. When they walked and ran they could not have the comic bounce we see in characters like Kermit and Gonzo, but needed to move smoothly, realistically. Henson found the only way he could achieve this effect was to hold Jen directly over his head and take very small steps for it to translate correctly on the screen. If he had to crouch at all the movement proved to be unsatisfactory. For long shots of Jen's progress on his journey a "small person" was employed and costumed appropriately (Henson 1983, The World of 'The Dark Crystal').

Another type of Henson puppet manipulation is the "live-hand" puppet (Henson Associates). This category includes Rowlf the Dog, the Swedish Chef, Cookie Monster and Oscar the Grouch, to name a few. All of these puppets require two manipulators at certain times, like when Rowlf plays the piano, or the Swedish Chef is trying to prepare an uncooperative chicken for dinner. The Swedish Chef is more unique in design than some of the other puppets in this group, because he is one, if not the only, bare live-hand Muppet, meaning the spectator actually sees the live uncovered hands of two different puppeteers during performance. These puppets have the performance advantage of fully functional hands, that allow them to pick up objects without assistance. One puppeteer, usually the one giving the puppet its voice and lip-synched mouth movements "works the head with his right hand while his left actually

acts as the left hand and arm of the puppet (Henson Associates n. pag.)." The other puppeteer "operates the puppet's right arm" (Henson Associates n. pag.), leaving the audience quite unaware that they are seeing the much practiced and coordinated performance of two different puppeteers.

Henson Associates also employ:

enormous rod puppets like the fifteen-foot tall Gawky Birds and even bigger Boss Men: enormous, gangly creatures attached by rods to harnesses strapped to the puppeteers' bodies, while they, dressed in black, move invisibly against a black background. (Henson Associates n. pag.)

A similar technique was employed to animate characters in Labyrinth (1986). These puppets are not used as often as the other types of puppets that are described in this chapter, but they can be employed when necessary. Basic rod puppets, like Rizzo the Rat, operated from below "by means of a metal rod which controls all his motor functions, which are rather basic" (Finch 49) are also used to great effect by Henson Associates.

Another type of puppet used is the full-figure puppet, like Big Bird, Sweetums, the Skeksis and many other Henson creatures and monsters. This category of Henson puppet has seen a great deal of change from the basic Big Bird manipulation in which the puppeteer inside, Carroll Spinney, sees through a scrim and extends one arm through the neck into the mouth to the far more technologically advanced Gorgs on Fraggle Rock. Some puppet scholars would not call these puppets at all. These same scholars would argue that hand puppets are not "pure" puppets either, but an extension of the actor/puppeteer, as puppet scholar Henryk Jurkowski pointed out when discussing Fritz Eichler's view of the puppet:

Today his principles are accepted by many authors, but at the time he was alone in reaching one relatively extreme conclusion: that the glove puppet is not to be considered as a 'pure' puppet, for it is actually the hand of the puppet player which is its soul. The glove puppet is thus a 'prolongation' of the actor. Contrary to the string puppet, the glove puppet acts directly, spontaneously, which is why it should be considered as an extension of mime theatre. (Jurkowski 1988 [1979] 21-22)

If this reasoning is applied to Henson's full-figure puppets, they would not be seen as puppets, but actors in costume and mask, or considered no more than characters in suits like Mickey Mouse in Disneyland. Henson Associates consider this class of puppets in the following manner:

These figures are a kind of hybrid, not so much true puppets as costumes to which a puppet head has been attached. The puppeteer sees out of a carefully concealed scrim and works the mouth with any of various hand and rod devices. The eyes, if necessary, can be operated by remote control. These creatures are sometimes half again as tall as the puppeteer inside. (Finch 50)

This paper will not continue the debate of whether these are "pure" puppets or not. That would be another paper in itself. That they are creations of Henson Associates and used in their puppet performances is sufficient reason for their inclusion in this study.

Since the previous quote was written this class of Henson puppet has become far more prominent and technologically complex. More advanced versions were developed for Henson's two feature length creature films, The Dark Crystal (1982) and Labyrinth (1986), and were further advanced to revamp the Gorgs of Fraggle Rock (1983-87). To get a better understanding of the stages and development that led to the Gorgs, one needs to look at some earlier Henson creations.

The simple full-figure puppets, like Big Bird, using their "various hand and rod devices" and remote control eyes were the predecessors of the creatures that inhabit the

world of The Dark Crystal. Many of the full-figure puppets in The Dark Crystal were far more elaborate than the basic Muppets and took several people to operate using cable controls. They were constructed of foam latex with fiberglass interiors that housed the mechanics. The Skeksis, an evil race of beings that are "part dragon, part reptile, part predatory bird" (Henson 1983, The World of 'The Dark Crystal') that are currently ruling the world of the Dark Crystal, were some of the most technologically advanced of the full-figure puppets in the film, taking up to five puppeteers to perform.

The main problem that needed to be solved in relation to the Skeksis, was how to let the manipulator, who was buried inside the voluminous body and costume of the Skeksis, monitor his/her live performance to be certain the results were true to the character and appropriate to the action. With Muppets like Kermit this is fairly easy: you simply place the monitor on the floor where the operator can see it during the action of that particular shot; however, with the puppeteer completely inside the puppet something else needed to be done. Henson decided to build small video monitors into the puppet bodies so the manipulator could watch the performance as he/she was accustomed. While this gave the puppeteers the visual picture and the control that was necessary, it made the Skeksis even heavier and more cumbersome to operate. Though the puppets were designed, as much as possible, to allow the puppeteer to exit it fairly quickly to rest, get air and water, it was still a cumbersome process that made getting a shot the first time very important.

Another link in the development of these full-figure puppets was a character called "Humungous" constructed for Labyrinth. Though there was no one inside this Henson creation, it is included here because it used a remote operator which is one of the innovations later applied to the full-figure puppets. Humungous was to be the largest puppet they had built to date, a fifteen foot armored giant that had to walk and

move its arms. The first one was built of fiberglass with the mechanics inside, but it proved to be unsatisfactory because it could not flex and move as it needed to. Next they constructed one out of polyurethane foam which developed a skin that would flex without looking rubbery. This gave them the steel-armour look they wanted. It weighed, according to Jim Henson, "lots." They used servo motor mechanisms to operator this huge puppet. It would have taken four or five people to operate several years earlier, but with the use of servo-hydraulics it could now be controlled remotely by one operator (Henson 1987, Inside the Labyrinth).

Finally, there are the Gorgs. The Gorgs, along with the Doozers, also from Fraggle Rock, and the dog from The Storyteller series, are some of the most sophisticated creations of Henson Associates. When Franz "Faz" Fazakas, who recently retired as "director of electronic and mechanical design for the Muppets" (Malkin 1986, 82), first started to develop the large puppets of Fraggle Rock, the Gorgs, he "felt that artists trained as mimes were the proper people to move the bodies . . . while puppeteers were the ones best attuned to the manipulation of the facial elements" (Malkin 1986, 84). Instead of having the mimes see through a scrim, Faz fixed the Gorg heads with a fiber optic system, but it did not give the Gorgs the vision they required. He then decided to fix a small camera in one of the Gorg's eyes and set a monitor inside at the mimes' eye level so he/she could see, thereby reducing the time and money lost shooting retakes due to the mimes missing their marks. As Michael Malkin explained:

He ("Faz") installs miniature cameras inside one eye of each figure. The "scanner" of this type of camera is a CCD [Charge-coupled device] device composed of as many individual crystals as there are pixels on a normal cathode ray tube. It is extraordinarily sensitive to light and remarkably efficient at low light levels. The highly shock resistant unit is available as a package from Sony. . . . The mime has a small viewer manufactured by JVC which is

affixed to a helmet inside the head of the figure. The viewing system has to be specially fit to the face of each mime/operator. This combination of miniature camera and miniature monitor functions as a closed circuit TV system. Faz estimates that the video equipment necessary for one head runs about \$2500. (1986, 84)

Since the cameras are at Gorg eye level when the script indicates that the Gorg looks at something, the Gorg eyes are already at the correct sight level. The mime inside does not have to compensate as he/she would if he/she were looking through a scrim or a camera placed at his/her eye level. Henson called this Gorg-Vision and it added reality to the performance and greater freedom to the movement. Of course it also added weight to the head of the puppet. A Gorg head weighs about 75 pounds (Henson 1987, Down at 'Fraggle Rock').

Faz also wanted to improve and enhance what the faces of these large puppets could be made to do. He started working on this problem while filming Emmet Otter's Jug-Band Christmas (Falk) and used it again on The Great Muppet Caper (1981). In Muppet Caper, the Muppets had to do a major production number while riding bikes which would require employment of some kind of remote control system. No one, however, wanted to "sacrifice those qualities of lifelike, emotionally expressive, hand and rod puppet manipulation that are the hallmarks of Jim Henson's troupe" (Malkin 1986, 82). To solve this problem Faz employed his puppet facsimiles or "simulacra." The simulacra looks like the mouth of an unfinished Muppet, or a kitchen oven mitt made of foam rubber and metal. It is on a "tower" or "Waldo." As Malkin noted:

Rather than using joysticks or computer-style mice, what he and his staff have done to create electro-mechanical simulacra of puppets which are used as controller for the ones appearing on screen. These figures are mounted on specially built "towers" or "waldos" as Faz calls them. Although the simulacra are made largely out of machined aluminum, they feel like puppets, look like puppets (sort of) and, as far as the puppeteers are concerned, are

puppets. All of the moveable joints, such as neck, waist, and mouth, are on gimbals. The puppeteer is not conscious of the fact he is operating anything other than a puppet. The "real" puppet at a remote location goes through all the movements that the puppeteer imparts to the simulacrum. (1986, 83)

In tapes viewed by the author, Henson referred to the entire device simply as a waldo, and that is how it will be referred to for the remainder of this paper.

In the case of the Gorgs, the puppeteer, who is usually across the room watching the mime perform the puppet's body, manipulates only the Gorg face. When the puppeteer puts his/her hand inside the glove and moves the waldo, the features of the Gorg across the room move. By opening and closing the "mouth" of the waldo as he speaks, the puppeteer opens and closes the Gorg mouth as well. The puppeteer manipulating the Gorg by remote control also performs its voice (Henson 1987, Down at 'Fraggle Rock').

Another advantage of this waldo (simulacrum) system is the fact that it is completely modular and interchangeable. As Malkin explained:

In addition Faz's entire system is modular, so that any simulacrum can be used in conjunction with any of the different sized remotely controlled figures on Fraggle Rock. It also means that Faz and his crew never have to fix anything during shooting. They can quickly and easily replace any malfunctioning part and repair it back in the workshop where time is far less expensive. (1986, 84)

This device is also used to manipulate the Doozers and to create a character called Waldo C. Graphic from the Muppet television segments of The Jim Henson Hour. (They will be discussed later in this chapter.)

There is yet one more type of full-figure puppet that was used to great effect in The Storyteller (1986) anthology. Though Henson Associates put it in the same category as the other full-figure puppets, it is more like a humanette in appearance than

say Big Bird, or the Gorgs for that matter. One example of this type of full-figure puppet was the giant in "The Heartless Giant" episode. To create this puppet Henson Associates padded the actor's body and put him into the appropriate costume. A mask was then fitted over his head. The actor's eyes fit into eye holes in the mask, making the performance even more realistic than the innovation of taxidermy eyes that Henson discovered when developing the creatures for Saturday Night Live and further developed in The Dark Crystal. By moving his mouth the actor inside the costume controlled the mouth of the mask. Out the back of the costume, unseen by the spectator in the final production, ran an assortment of cables. These were used by several puppeteers offscreen to manipulate the rest of the mask's facial feature movements (Henson 1989, "Secrets of the Muppets").

Three other Henson Associates' puppets deserve to be discussed at this time. One is the Doozer of Fraggle Rock. The Doozers are some of the smallest Muppets. When they were first designed by Faz, they were operated mechanically by hand with levers, but he was unhappy with the quality of the movement and its limited nature. The puppet was so tiny it was difficult to hold it still while manipulating it and the mobility was reduced to a "narrow spectrum of movement" (Henson 1989, "Secrets of the Muppets"). He then decided to apply the remote radio control system that they were using for the Gorgs, the radio glove waldo, to control all Doozer movement. This way the control unit, the waldo, was constructed to the puppeteer's scale while the internal mechanisms that accomplished the Doozer's movement were constructed to their scale, leading to the smoother and wider spectrum of movement that was desired. It also made the movement more realistic and natural, or human-like (Henson 1989, "Secrets of the Muppets"). As Malkin noted:

When a puppeteer uses one of the simulacra, both very large and very small figures can be much more sensitively controlled with reference to their own scales. This adjustment of scale is very important part of what Faz's technique can accomplish. (1986, 84)

The next group of Henson Associates puppets that will be discussed are the members of the OMD, Organization of Muppet Dogs. This includes the simple one and two operator hand puppets, like Rowlf and Miss Piggy's precious little Foo-Foo, as well as the sophisticated Storyteller's dog. The Storyteller's dog was originally performed much like Hoggle in Labyrinth, but was later revamped by Henson Associates.

Hoggle's face contained eighteen radio-controlled motors that controlled the puppet's facial expressions onscreen, which were manipulated by four puppeteers offscreen. At first Henson thought that they would use this puppet head for most shots and use a cable-controlled head for closeups but this was not necessary. Henson commented:

There were about 18 radio-controlled motors inside of his face. Originally, I had thought that we'd have one radio-controlled head and a more elaborate cable-controlled head for close-ups, but we found we were able to get the full movement with the radio-controlled one. In the past, things that complicated were virtually always cable-controlled, but we decided to radio-control it, which gave us a lot more freedom with the character, because now he can walk about the set while we're shooting. (Magid 74)

One of the many difficulties of cable control puppetry utilizing multiple puppeteers, which was also used for many of the creatures in The Dark Crystal, is to meld the performances and skills of multiple puppeteers into one consistent and true action or expression. It requires extensive experimentation and rehearsal. There were five people required to perform Hoggle. Brian Henson was the main puppeteer responsible for the personality of the character. The rest of the puppeteers had to follow his lead and trigger off his voice and movements. The actor inside Hoggle, Shari

Weiser, a small person, performed only the body movements, while Brian and company performed the facial expressions. This is not to say that her job was easy. For example, she had to spend endless hours learning to work with the puppet costume. She had to practice using Hoggle's large mechanical puppet hands which she wore over her tiny hands. The simple action of taking a handkerchief out of a pocket took a great deal of practice and drilling to master. Additionally, the mechanical fingers, which moved when Shari moved her fingers, had no strength "so she couldn't pick up anything, and therefore, everytime she actually had to hold something, we had to use another hand in a fixed position to hold the object" (Magid 74).

This technology was improved for the Storyteller's dog by enlisting the help of a computer. The number of puppeteers needed to operate the dog was reduced to two; Brian, who is responsible for the character of the dog "ringing true" on the screen, and another to handle the back end of the dog:

With the aid of one other puppeteer on the dog's back end, Henson works the front half with his right hand, then operates, through computers, the dog's facial expressions from a remote-control box with his left hand.
(Rothenberg)

To explain this more completely, the servo motor mechanisms of the dog's face were tied into a computer which allowed one person, Brian in this case, to control the puppets facial expressions by using a joystick similar to those used for video games (Henson 1989, "Secrets of the Muppets"). For example, if Brian wanted the dog's face to register surprise he simply moved the joystick to that position and all the servo motors necessary to facilitate "surprise" would be activated. Of course, first they had to experiment to see just what motors would create the desired effect in performance and then program it into the computer. At the Puppeteers of America's 1993 Festival in San Francisco, Michael Malkin told the author that Brian ususally wore the joystick unit on

a belt at his hip and that it had five triggers which he used to manipulate the dog's features.

Another unique puppet of Henson Associates, if it can indeed be called that, is a character that appeared on The Jim Henson Hour's Muppet television segments called Waldo C. Graphic. Waldo is a computer generated graphic. He is also manipulated through the use of a waldo by the puppeteer, but only exists as electronic information on a television screen. Therefore, the waldo device can be used to create motion-capture performances like Waldo C. Graphic's and as a remote control device to manipulate physically constructed puppets like the Gorgs. In Waldo's case, the device is used to manipulate the image once it had been designed by a computer animator. The computer then translates the movements of the puppeteer's hand in that waldo device and converts them into Waldo C. Graphic on screen. The computer does this in real time, so as the puppeteer moves his hand the creature/puppet moves (performs). It is a low resolution picture (image) since that is the best the computer can do in real time. Then they take that recorded low resolution performance and run it through another computer to create a high resolution image. This high resolution image is then matted into the rest of the performance. The process the computer goes through to enhance the low resolution image to high resolution is much like the process stop-motion puppet filmmakers go through. The computer takes each frame, 30 frames per second for television, 24 frames per second for film, and renders it one frame at a time. Rendering in this context refers to the process the computer goes through to create the graphic. The computer must first draw the image in its entirety. This may take seconds or much longer depending on the complexity of the image and the capabilities (power and sophistication) of the computer. When the picture or image is complete the computer communicates with the video recorder that it is done and the frame is ready

to be recorded. After the image is taped the recorder then cues to the next spot and waits while the computer goes through the rendering process again. This process is repeated thirty times for every second of real time performance until the sequence is finished. According to Henson, with the equipment he used, two minutes of Waldo on the screen in "Muppetelevision" took 120 computer hours to create. In this way Henson commented, "you can create a puppet without having to build one" (Henson 1989, "Secrets of the Muppets"). This may be Henson's ultimate puppet. He designed and built his puppets specifically for the all seeing eye of the television camera. Since Waldo C. Graphic only exists as electronic information on the television screen, he is, indeed, the ultimate television puppet, for he simply does not exist without the television screen.

With this thumb nail sketch of the Jim Henson's early history and his basic puppet types established as a point of reference, we can now proceed with the analysis of the effects of recorded media on puppetry as manifested in the works of Henson Associates.

2. PRODUCTION: BEHIND THE SCENES

This chapter will focus on the aspects of Henson's puppetry which the spectator does not see, or is unaware of in the final performance, but are an integral part of that performance. This will include discussion of the conventions Henson took from existing television puppetry and adapted to his act, the Muppets. It will examine how the medium, recorded media, has shaped Muppet design, materials and performance, as well as the effects it has had on scenic design and staging. There will be discussion of the technology employed and developed by Henson Associates in relation to all these categories. It will also examine how this technology, along with film and editing techniques, have been applied to simple Muppets, like Kermit, to augment their basic nature of movement, giving them added versatility and reality in the final performance.

This chapter will examine the objections and criticisms that have been voiced concerning Henson's form of puppetry.

It will also look at how Henson Associates work. Their methods of collaboration with artists, dancers, actors, mimes, producers and sponsors will be discussed as well as the division of labor among the puppeteers themselves. Special attention will be paid to the division of labor that existed between Frank Oz and Jim Henson before Henson's untimely death on May 16, 1990.

Finally, this chapter will explore Henson's intentions and goals, what he wanted people to feel after viewing one of his productions.

CONVENTIONS EMPLOYED AND ADAPTED

Though Henson developed his own style and several innovations, much of his puppetry is borrowed and adapted from conventions of both live and recorded media puppetry. Jim Henson said of his early exposure to puppetry, "As a child I don't believe I had ever been to a puppet show, but I was greatly influenced by the major

television puppeteers" (Henson, "Some Professional Ethics"). Therefore, it is no surprise that Henson's chosen medium, television (and later film), and its conventions have had a great impact on his puppets and puppetry. In fact, as we have seen, it is true that "his first love was not puppetry, but TV" ("Muppet Creator Dies" 94).

Henson, either consciously or unconsciously, included some of the conventions of television in his puppetry. Television and film, from their inception, have had a strong tendency toward the aesthetics of realism. In fact, "the first 'movies' consisted of short scenes of people in everyday activities, and were essentially laboratory tests of the newly-invented equipment" (Holman 20). These conventions of realism have strongly manifested themselves in the puppetry of Jim Henson and "have shaped the way the Muppets exist" (Tillis, July 1992).

Bruce Holman echoes the idea of a tendency toward realism in recorded media puppetry, though he does not find it at all appropriate. He stated in his book, Puppet Animation in the Cinema (1975):

Consider, for example, the striving for greater realism in puppetry. Great effort and ingenuity has been directed towards designing puppets with jointing systems which permit life-like movement. Cast rubber and plastic materials have been developed in order to give puppet faces and hands the appearance of real flesh, even to the point of embedding springs under rubber skins to simulate muscle movement. Presumably the *reductio ad absurdum* of these experiments would be a puppet whose appearance and movements would be undetectable from those of a human actor--with the obvious rejoinder that it would be simpler and probably less expensive to employ a human actor in the first place. (75)

In fact, Brian Smithies, who did special visual effects for The Dark Crystal, installed springs in the legs of the "tall four-legged creatures" Jen and Kira ride to the Skeksis castle, the Landstriders, to add realism to the performance:

Brian Smithies' unit assisted in springing stilt suspension mechanism within the Landstriders' latex legs. The idea was not only to increase the Landstriders' speed but also to simulate muscle movement beneath the "skin." (Chase 55)

The realism of Henson's productions is a point of contention with his puppetry, even in his own mind. He said:

... I think we were part of that whole movement with *The Dark Crystal*, in making puppets into this fairly realistic kind of thing, there's a slight risk that we'll push fantasy in too realistic a direction. There's something about the whole motion-picture thing that's getting too realistic. That bothers me. The medium of film should have the ability to get out of this literalness, or realism. . . .

I've always felt that fantasy should have the ability to go a good deal more abstract, more expressionistic, and anytime I see a film that does that, I think it's really terrific. But we ourselves are getting more and more realistic with our creatures. That's one of the problems with the direction that films are going in. We're getting more and more into the articulation of the lips and so forth. In *Soldier and Death*, we {got} very expressive articulation of the lips. That kind of thing is getting more intricate. It's sort of a high-tech alley that I hope is not a blind alley. All we will get to at the very end is being as expressive as the human mouth. ("Miss Piggy Went to Market" 20-21)

This preoccupation with realism and its conventions, like moving mouths and built in springs, is criticized not just by puppet film fans like Holman, but live puppet performers as well. Most live puppet theatre performers will be quick to state that a puppet need not have a moving mouth to speak. In fact it does not need a mouth at all, nor does it have to be a monster, or man. It need be nothing more than an object that the puppeteer brings to life as a separate entity with either movement, story, or speech. As Jiri Veltrusky noted in his article, "Puppetry and Acting":

As has already been pointed out, puppets do not always resemble the beings that are represented (or any live

beings whatsoever), they are not always set in motion, and speech is not always part of the performance. (88)

For instance, Hermann, one of Theater im Wind's main puppets, has facial features including a mouth, but as he is carved out of wood it does not move as he speaks. Still, when the manipulator, who is the narrator of the story and in plain view of the audience during the entire performance, speaks in Hermann's old high pitched muttering voice and German dialect, instead of his own speaking voice, the words are attributed to the puppet by all viewing the performance. The movement of Hermann's hand though the audience can clearly see that it is the puppeteer's hand placed through one sleeve of Hermann's costume is also attributed to the puppet. As Veltrusky went on to say in the same article, the spectator's ability to oscillate between the visual truth and puppet (inanimate object) performance is often, as with bunraku performance, an integral part of the performance:

For instance, when a prop such as a pestle, a knife, a dagger, or a fan is lifted and manipulated, the operator's hand is seen holding it together with the puppets; yet it is the delicate articulation of the puppet's hand and its delicate manipulation, not the puppeteer's grasp of the prop, that attracts attention. (91)

Other puppeteers, like Paul Zaloom, chose to pick objects from our everyday life to become their puppet performers. At a recent puppet theatre festival at the Joseph Papp Theatre in New York (Sept. 1992), spectators watched as rulers projected by an overhead projector became the skyline of New York and three blenders and a humidifier became a nuclear power plant in Zaloom's high energy puppet performance.

Therefore, the puppet's performance, which is a representation, or caricature of life, is not weakened in any way by the appearance of the manipulator, or the fact that the puppet's lips and face do not move as the human actor's does, but again the difference comes back to the demands of the medium and Henson's concept of puppets

on the television screen. Henson wanted to fill the screen with the expressive reactions of his puppet's faces. Without these facial expressions, their performance would not have the intimacy or freedom that are now integral parts of their performance. Additionally, the attention of the audience would be hard to keep if their television screen was continually filled with wooden and immobile faces to the degree that Henson floods the screen with the emotionally expressive faces of his puppets. Furthermore, the premise of The Muppet Show and the Muppet movies is built on the concept that these puppets are not puppets, but a menagerie of animals (or whatever in Gonzo's case), who are actors, comedians, musicians and daredevils. (This aspect of their performance will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter.)

Therefore, in much recorded medium puppetry as in most animation, lip-synched moving mouths have become the norm. Though this has been promoted and reinforced by the world wide popularity of Disney animation and more recently by the Muppets themselves, who started not speaking for themselves, but lip-synching to records, many other recorded medium puppet performances have employed it as well. Television puppets like Sharie Lewis' Lamb Chop, Howdy Dowdy, and Ollie all have moving mouths. In 1932, Hungarian puppet and fantasy filmmaker George Pal made his first puppet commercial using objects, real cigarettes without features filmed frame-by-frame; that danced to music and was "an instant success" (Hickman 18). Pal recalled that the cigarette company liked it so much that the next natural step was to give them mouths and make them speak transforming them into more than just objects. In the end the cigarettes were humanized and became the prototypes for Pal's Puppetoons:

. . .they [the cigarette company] ordered other films where the cigarettes spoke. So we put little mouths on them--no face yet, just mouths. And then we put faces on them, and put hats on them, and put arms and legs on them. I built wire legs with buttons for feet and made a series of

legs that way. And that was the birth of the Puppetoons.
(Hickman 19)

Moving mouths are seen in live puppet theatre. David Currell's inclusion of a "Muppet-type hand puppet" along with his more traditional puppets attests not only to the Muppet's popularity and impact, but the existence of other puppets similar to them in both live and recorded media puppetry.

Another consequence of film and television's tradition of realism on recorded media puppetry is that it has led to a consistent use of anthropomorphic and representational puppets, which many performers of live puppet theatre find restricting and completely unsatisfactory. Certainly, most recorded media puppetry has stayed clear of the kind of conceptual puppets and the use of common objects as puppets that are often seen in cutting edge live puppetry. A fine example of this kind of conceptual puppet was seen by puppeteers, Ann Hogarth and her husband Jan Bussell, in 1950:

His [Fred Schneckenburger] work was very socially and politically conscious, and his figures were always surrealist. When we first saw them in 1950 they were considered shockingly avant garde by many puppeteers. There was the Bandit, all of whose fingers were revolvers; the politician, whose head split in two allowing a small bubble to emerge; and among many others and perhaps the most moving puppet we have ever seen, the Returned Soldier, whose wounded face was so terrible no one could bear to look at him [...] (64)

While there are many "abstract" monster Muppets whose heritage are questionable, unknown, or fantastical, like Gonzo, (who in one episode of The Muppet Show, expresses his belief in reincarnation and when asked what he would like to come back as next time, he replies, "Who cares? I don't know what I am *this* time" [Finch 37]), most are given human qualities and characteristics. Many Henson creations are representational, like today's Kermit who started his life as an abstract "lizardy" blue-green creature, and Rowlf the Dog. Steve Tillis labeled this lending of human

characteristics to animal puppets "transference." He noted that this is common in contemporary puppetry and particularly in American puppetry. It is not surprising that he used the Muppets to clarify his statement:

The Muppets are perhaps the most famous exponents of this: Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy, for example, are taken by the audience in the same way as are the human puppets Bert and Ernie. It is as if Kermit and Miss Piggy were people who just happened to be animals. (203)

Clearly, even Henson's monsters rarely possess the kind a conceptual power seen in Hogarth's example. Henson consciously made this concession to realism and commercialism in his puppet designs. Most of his early Muppets were abstract, but he felt to be commercial, to make something sell in the television market place, (which was his aim, though puppeteers like Peter Schumann believe this is not be the function of the puppet in our society and to use the puppet in such a way is to demean it), representational puppets were more effective. He stated:

The characters were all abstract then because that was the principle I was working under. I felt abstract characters were slightly more 'pure.' If you take a character and call him a frog--or Rowlf, and call him a dog--you immediately give the audience a handle, assisting them to understand. You're giving them a bridge. . . . There are nice things about abstract puppets and nice things about more realistic ones. But in terms of going commercial, you need those bridges--you need characters like Kermit and Rowlf that are more easily accessible. (Harris 31)

In television, easy accessibility to the widest possible audience base has always been a priority and Henson, who made over 400 commercials, according to Falk, and commercial like segments for Sesame Street, would know this better than anyone. It was when he made this move from abstract puppets to representational puppets that he enlisted the puppet building talents of the late Don Sahlin. At this point he realized his

crude workmanship needed to be replaced by the techniques of a true puppet builder and craftsman (The Man Behind the Muppets). Sahlin and his contributions to the Muppet-look as we know it today will be discussed further later in this chapter.

As Henson himself wrote, he did not simply duplicate the puppetry he saw as a child, but took bits and pieces from many sources, including his own imagination:

From Bil Baird, I was influenced to use large mouths and Disney-like eyes. Sharie Lewis used soft fabric that gave her characters an incredible range of expressions, and she also was a practitioner of the very accurate lip-sync that we use. Burr worked with wonderful personalities and their interplay to create very human reactions.

Later, I read of Sergei Obraztsov, saw Andre Tahon, and began using live hands with the hand-puppet heads.

All of these qualities I observed, and, quite unconsciously, used in creating over a period of time, the style of puppetry that is thought of as the Muppets. Except for an occasional element, however, I don't think our style looks like the work of any of those people. Yet, it's based on their ideas, as well as mine, and, of course, the ideas of all of the various people that work with me: Don Sahlin, Frank Oz, Bonnie Erickson, Caroly Wilcox, Kermit Love, John Lovelady, et al. (Henson, "Some Professional Ethics" 24)

One need only see one episode of The Muppet Show and one Kukla, Fran and Ollie to see that though some components appear in both, the overall production aesthetics are not the same and do not have the same impact on the spectator. There is a marked difference between the puppetry of Henson and the work of the early pioneers of television puppetry. Tillstrom and the Bairds performed both live and recorded media puppetry, however, they did not re-work their shows specifically for their television programs, while Henson rarely performed live and designed his act especially for live television. As Henson Associates noted:

Perhaps the most significant difference between their work and that of the Muppets is that Burr and the Bairds had perfected their art while television was in its infancy, and in their television appearances they continued to work in the manner of traditional puppeteers, allowing the camera to show pictures of what they were doing. The Muppets, however, were children of television, and were born because Jim Henson, their creator, was fascinated by the medium and its extraordinary technological possibilities. (n. pag.)

Henson wanted to explore and exploit the "extraordinary technological possibilities" of the medium of television and it led to innovations in staging and performance techniques. Finch attributed the success of Sesame Street not just to the subject matter, but to Henson's exploitation and knowledge of the medium:

The Muppets were a tremendous success on Sesame Street, partly because they performed wonderful material . . . and partly because Jim Henson had developed a highly original way of staging puppet performances for television. He had taught himself everything he could about lenses, camera angles and special effects, and in particular he had evolved a way of working while watching the image on the television monitors in the studio so that the puppeteer was, in effect, both a performer and a member of the audience--could see exactly what he was doing as he did it. (20)

This innovation in the unseen production techniques of television puppetry gave Henson greater control and the performance a "remarkable feeling of freedom" (Henson Associates n. pag.) that had not been seen in this kind of puppetry before. According to Henson himself, "there are very few things I originated" (Harris 31), but his exploitation of monitor systems, so the puppeteers can see their performances as the audience does, was one of them.

Another convention that Henson enlisted from both television and live puppet theatre is the unseen puppeteer. Petr Bogatyrev noted its historical importance in live puppet theatre:

We know from puppetry's history that the puppeteer hides from the audience, thereby concealing his connection with the puppet. Cultural historians tell us that during the Middle Ages charlatans tried to convince their audience that the puppets were alive. (59)

Jiri Veltrusky confirmed the importance of this convention in establishing the separate identity, or personality, of the puppet character. He wrote:

The widespread practice among puppeteers of remaining invisible during the performance translates a tendency to keep the puppeteer's image in a subordinated position in relation to the puppet's image as a performer or to the directly represented character or to both. (111)

Therefore, Henson's choice to keep the puppeteer unseen during performance can be attributed to the aesthetics of live puppet theatre, television's conventions of realism, and conventions that were already in place in television puppetry. It also helps to maintain the illusion that the Muppets are alive offscreen as well as onscreen, which is an important component of their performance aesthetics.

It is all-important in Muppet performance that the puppeteer remain unseen or the shot must be redone. Muppet personalities, or characters, have been so fully developed through the years that the spectator sees them not as puppets, but as Veltrusky's quote suggests, independent entities. It is such a large part of their presentation and truth on the screen that other television shows have begun to reinforce this convention as well. For instance, Kermit was a guest host on The Tonight Show, not Jim Henson and Kermit, just Kermit. Kermit and Piggy have been guests on Good Morning America and the Academy Awards. Jim Henson recalled one of the strangest occurrences of this phenomenon. He was being given an award for his achievements and Kermit and Piggy were two of the guest speakers. So in effect, Henson not only

had to work on the night he was being honored, but had to say nice things about himself as well (An Evening with Jim Henson).

Muppeteers go to great lengths to remain out of sight during shooting, as the following quote demonstrates:

The first take goes well until almost the last moment. . . . Oz dashes out from behind the flat, grabs a few quick breaths as Animal and the octopus are fitted onto his arms, then--roaring at the top of his lungs, crouched and twirling like a Dervish-- he rushes toward Henson (who is watching his monitor while Kermit, held aloft, is looking the other way and registering astonishment at Animal's frenetic approach). Oz makes his cue on time but, off balance, half stumbles, continues to roar, his eyes fixed on the monitor, stretches his legs wide apart to keep his characters in shot, his face contorted as he acts out Animal's blood lust. Then he spins away from the camera and gasps, 'I blew it!' . . . 'my arm showed,' says Oz, but everyone watches the playback anyway. . . . There is a good deal of spontaneous laughter while it is running, but Frank Oz is gloomy. 'I blew it,' he says again when it's over. Looking down at the floor, he smiles, then shakes his head in annoyance. 'Okay,' he says, 'let's try again.' (Finch 16-17)

This quotation confirms the importance of the invisible puppeteer as a prominent production aesthetic of Henson Associates. It serves as a fine example of the pains that are taken to keep the operator out of the shot in the final performance. It also emphasizes how the medium manifests itself in performance by the use of instant playbacks and monitors.

Not all puppeteers agree with the convention of the unseen puppeteer. In many of the productions at the Puppetry at the Public Festival (1992) and the 1993 Puppeteers of America (P of A) Festival the puppeteers were visible. Though it is particularly unusual to expose the puppeteers and mechanisms involved in shadow puppetry, Ray and Joan DeSilva do just that in their shadow production, The Cat That Walked by

Himself. During the DeSilva's workshop at the P of A festival Ray commented that by exposing the mechanisms of the performance the audience will soon lose interest in them and turn their complete attention over to the story, instead of trying to figure out how the effects were achieved. However, the other shadow puppet artist in the room did not agree. They felt the workings of the production should be hidden. In the Shadow Theatre Company's production, "In Xanadu . . . Invisible Cities," viewed by the author at the P of A festival, the mechanisms of the show were kept unseen. Some of the beautiful effects did make one wonder, even to the point of distraction, how they were accomplished. However, this example is not proof in itself for as many at the festival commented there were problems with the script that were equally distracting.

SET AND LIGHTING DESIGN

Henson's decision to keep the puppeteer and his/her monitor out of the shot has led to innovations in puppet and scenic design. The sets must be built so the puppeteer and his monitor remain unseen during a shot or sequence of shots. Additionally, while many recorded media puppet programs, like Kukla Fran and Ollie, have generally been characterized by "minimal expenditure on sets and production values" (Finch 137), this was not the case on The Muppet Show. As Finch stated, "If an elaborate set [was] needed, it [was] built no matter what the cost" (137).

The "Blue Bayou" set was the most complicated and expensive for the Linda Ronstadt episode of The Muppet Show (1976-80). They erected a detailed, if idyllic, swamp. Besides the detailed realism that is built into this set, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, it had other features hidden from the spectator in the final product. It contained holes and gaps that hide the puppeteers and their monitors, as Finch described:

Built on two dozen platforms and covering an area of roughly 1,200 square feet, it represents a tumbledown

shack in a southern swamp: this might be some forgotten corner of Mississippi or Louisiana. . . Jim Henson, Dave Goelz and Bobby Payne, all of whom are operating frogs, take up positions in a kind of trench--actually a gap, about two feet wide, between platforms--which cuts diagonally across the set and will be invisible to the cameras. . . . Richard Hunt will be operating Janice through a small hole cut in a wall of the shack. Frank Oz (Animal), Jerry Nelson (Floyd) and Steve Whitmire (marimba player) take up their positions in a crawl space under the porch. Joining them there are Kathy Mullen and Louise Gold, operating more Frogs. Two further frogs are the responsibility of Karen Prell, stationed in front of Jerry Nelson. (138-139)

The set for The Dark Crystal was designed in a similar way, but it was far more complex:

The floors . . . were platforms 4" above the studio floor. Henson says that puppeteers standing on the studio floor would "operate the creatures through the platform openings, which would change as panels were taken out and put back in to allow for movement across a given area. Sometimes, huge sections of the floor would break away and the camera would be mounted on a crane on the studio floor, which would put it roughly at the creatures' eye level." (Chase 56)

Yet another example of Henson's employment of elaborate sets and performing techniques comes from The Great Muppet Caper. In this film, Miss Piggy does her porcine version of Hollywood's Busby Berkeley-esque Esther Williams films. To achieve her underwater scenes a huge pool was built on the set and heated to about 90 degrees. Frank Oz then went into the pool with the pig and operated Miss Piggy with the assistance of underwater monitors, lights and cameras (Henson 1989, "Secrets of the Muppets"). To top off this satire of the Follies-type films, a bevy of bathing suit clad female extras were also employed for the large synchronized swimming number of which Piggy was the centerpiece.

Though this is certainly a long way to go for a joke, puppets have always been used to parody and satirize a wide variety of subjects from this rather mundane example to the irreverent creatures and world of twisted politics and moral character created by Henson Associates for Saturday Night Live's "The Land of Gorch" segments, to the high political satire of Spitting Image and Paul Zaloom's object performances.

Other extravagant sets and riggings used for the Muppet movies include the Georgia swamp scene at the beginning of The Muppet Movie (1979). Kermit is sitting comfortably on a log in the swamp playing his banjo and singing, until disturbed by Dom Deluise. Henson, however, was not so comfortable, as he spent three days in the studio underwater in a tank to film the scene:

. . .Henson spent three days in a tank underwater, operating Kermit with an arm thrust through a rubber sleeve extending from the top of the tank. He was aided by a video monitor and a microphone hookup, plus a special effects team in frogman wet suits. ("The Muppet Make It Big" 27)

Many of the location shots took as much work, cooperation, and special effects talent as this studio shot. An example of this is the scene where all the Muppets are in Fozzie's Studebaker:

While Kermit, Fozzie, and Miss Piggy hogged the front seat, with their friends in back, a team of puppeteers squeezed themselves and their video monitors under the dashboard and backseat. The actual driving was done by a special effects man, crouched in the trunk, seeing his way with his own video monitor. ("The Muppet Make It Big" 27)

There were many elaborate sets built for The Dark Crystal, since Henson's idea from the beginning was to create a completely alien world in which no human existed. Henson had "the germ of an idea" and when Jerry Juhl brought Brian Froud's work to Henson's attention, he felt his concept and Froud's style would work perfectly together

(Chase 27). They "started off with a broad idea of what this totally imaginary universe might contain" (Chase 27) and worked from there.

Besides having to construct complete landscapes in the studio, as was done for the "Blue Bayou" number on The Muppet Show, many interiors were constructed as well. Interiors were built for Auhgra's observatory, the Mystic's caves and various rooms in the Skeksis castle. A miniature of the castle was built for exterior long shots. For the transformation of the castle scene at the climax of the film, they built four or five large scale models of different rooms in the Skeksis castle with plaster over a crystalline structure and planted charges inside it. When exploded the plaster would break apart, revealing the beautiful structure underneath the disfiguring rock. It was filmed at high speed, a trick that has been employed in fantasy films for decades. It was used in films like the 1959 fantasy film Journey to the Center of the Earth to film the "dinosaurs" which, "when projected, [at normal speed] gave the illusion of slow motion and, thus, mass." (Rovin 107). In this way the light pieces of plaster appeared to be large pieces of heavy stone. Needless to say, great time and care were taken to set up this shot, since it would be too costly and time consuming to set it all up again to retake the shot (Henson 1983, The World of 'The Dark Crystal'). Clearly, Henson not only borrow conventions from live and recorded puppetry, but fully exploited techniques used in special effects and fantasy films as well.

The latest weekly series to come from Henson Associates and the television branch of Disney, Dinosaurs, is basically a situation comedy, and like a situation comedy it utilizes a few basic sets that are specially sized to the puppets:

There are five or six permanent sets and one swing set. Like most situation comedies, the majority of action takes place in one or two places--in this case, the Sinclairs' home or at Earl's place of business. The standing set for the Sinclair home includes the living room, the kitchen, the

entryway and part of the patio. The other standing set includes the trailer that houses Earl's crusty boss, as well as a forest with a pond. . . . Each of the sets is about fifteen feet tall, so Collins [the director of photography] can shoot from a low angle if necessary. The doors, furniture, and accessories are built large to accommodate the girth of the dinos. (Lee 67-68)

For The Jim Henson Hour, new technology in video and computers were employed to create the sets. The basic opening set was all blue set with one pedestal for Jim Henson and one for the white lion (which is manipulated much like the more sophisticated members of the OMD). The rest of the set started with drawings that were then given to computer animators, who then constructed three dimensional versions of the sets on the computer. They constructed different perspectives of the basic set as it would appear from various camera angles. The puppets and Henson himself simply moved about the practically empty set in front of the blue background. In post-production the blue background is eliminated and the computer generated set is matted in. In the final product the set appears to be behind and around the people and puppets as if it were constructed out of real materials instead of by a computer.

In one segment of this series entitled "The Song of the Cloud Forest," no sets were built. Instead, all the puppets were shot in front of a black or dark blue background. The magnificent and vividly colorful jungle sets of bright to florescent greens, pinks, oranges, yellows, and reds were added later with one of Henson's "new tools [in 1988], an electronic graphics system called the paint box" (An Evening with Jim Henson). He went on to say in "Secrets of the Muppets," that it was designed especially to create graphics for television by using a light pen and drawing the forest (set) right on to the screen. Then it was combined with the puppet's performances to create the finished shots. The puppeteers still employ their monitors to have an approximation of

the shot. All these parts are then assembled and manipulated in post-production to create the final performance.

These high tech "tools" are not cheap. Henson used an Ampex Digital Optics (ADO) system which is one of the most sophisticated DVE (Digital Video Effects) systems available. The cost of a DVE is at least \$40,000 according to Jim LeFever, instructor of Television and Radio at San Jose State University. The paint box system used costs anywhere from \$50,000 up (LeFever). LeFever further stated that new technology and availability are making these devices cheaper all the time, but they were fairly new and expensive when Henson started using them.

Lighting is also an important part of the design of Henson Associates' productions for two main reasons, besides the usual importance of lighting to effect moods and establish atmosphere. First, it is important that the lights are not so hot that the puppeteers inside the full-figure puppets get heat prostration. And secondly, the lighting must not make the puppets appear artificial in the final product. In The Dark Crystal, Oswald Morris, director of photography, chose to keep the rehearsal stage at high temperatures to acclimate the performers and decided to use cooler incandescent lamps instead of arcs. Oswald stated:

. . .the temperature of the rehearsal stage was raised very high to get the performers used to the heat of the big lights we'd use when we actually started filming. We worked at very high light levels, often going to T8 and once nearly to T11, because we wanted great depth of focus. . . . Rather than the arcs we might have wanted, we used incandescent lamps to accommodate the performers. You would have had to trim the much hotter arcs--and risk having the performers pass out in their suits. (Chase 55)

Dinosaurs director of photography, Robert Collins, had a great deal more leeway in his lighting choices than Morris did. Morris' design had to accommodate the

color patterns that were established by the conceptual designer, Froud, while the "cartoonish" quality of Dinosaurs gave Collins a wider spectrum of colors to choose from.

In designing the lighting for the show:

... he fashioned the light source into a sort of Aurora Borealis—colorful and changing. It certainly isn't normal night or day. In Collins' words, 'If we use orange light, it is very orange. If we use blue, it is very blue.' (Lee 68)

Collins had to make sure, however, that his lighting design did not make the Sinclairs look "rubbery" on screen. To eliminate this problem Collins used several different techniques, as noted in Lee's article:

We tried Tiffen filters, soft effects, white Pro-Mist and black Pro-Mist—all kinds of things to get the effect we wanted. We finally settled on black Pro-Mist to take the edge off and still hold the blacks really well. We still have a little bit of steam in the background, but we have eliminated smoke. It was too much hassle. I do think a little steam wiggling in the background gives the scenes extra interest. (69)

Collins' perfectionism and attention to scenic detail is echoed in all of Henson's productions.

These are just a few of the ways Henson and those in his organization had the foresight to hire and use and manipulated the tools of recorded media to enhance and adapt puppetry for the screen.

TECHNOLOGY AND RECORDED MEDIA MAGIC

Even the simplest Muppets require the help of film editing and camera angles to enrich and add realism and versatility to their performances. A sequence as rudimentary as Gonzo answering the phone requires cutting and editing. Since Gonzo does not have functional hands that allow him to grasp the phone's receiver, as live-hand puppets like Rowlf do, a series of shots must be filmed. First, Gonzo is filmed

reaching and placing his hand on the receiver. Then the film is stopped while his hand is attached to the receiver. The camera is then moved to a different angle. This angle is often one in which the body of the puppet blocks the camera's full view of the action. Then the tape is run again and Gonzo has answered the phone (Henson 1989, "Secrets of the Muppets").

The movement capabilities of all the basic Muppets and other Henson Associates puppets are enhanced in this manner. In The Great Muppet Caper (1981) the Muppets ride bikes in Hyde Park. This is not an easy task for a hand puppet, but as Henson said many times, the Muppets are not just hand puppets but, "a combination of a lot of puppetry and a lot of film tricks" (Henson 1989, "Secrets of the Muppets"). Making Kermit ride a bike was accomplished in the following manner. They used a marionette of Kermit in the long shots that was hung above the bike from a crane, since it is "an old and relatively easy marionette trick to make puppets ride bicycles by attaching the feet of the figure to the bicycle pedals" (Malkin 1986, 82). It was intercut with shots of the hand and rod Kermit. When he was the hand puppet, he was filmed while moving along on a dolly.

In the shots where you see Kermit and Piggy both on bikes, the bikes were tied together at the axles and attached by a stiff rod. Then both bikes could be pulled with a single string. This was intercut with pictures of Kermit the hand/rod puppet in front of a marionette Piggy, who was on another bike behind him.

For the scene where the whole Muppet cast was seen riding their bikes together, they tied all the bikes together with rods. The Muppet marionettes were again suspended from a crane and their mouths were manipulated by Faz's radio control system, the waldo. The whole thing was pulled with strings. In the final shot as the

audience watches them ride down the path from behind, the apparatus was pulled by two large tricycles that were far enough ahead that they were obscured in the shot.

This manipulation and use of special effects have been common to live puppetry for centuries, though certainly in the past they were much simpler (cruder) than what a puppeteer can create utilizing the added benefits of recorded media. Veltrusky found examples of this kind of stage trickery as far back as the medieval mystery plays. He wrote:

Complicated actions were sometimes performed by actors or stage hands or both in some medieval Mystery plays to make the audience perceive doves as carrying out an action of their own, or at least to call forth such an action as a meaning. To represent the releasing of the dove and its return with an olive branch in the Noah play of the Chester cycle, two doves, a mechanical device, and some manipulation tricks by the actor were required. The stage direction reads as follows. . . . 'Then shall he send forth the dove, and there will be in the ship another dove bearing an olive branch in its beak. This Noah will send by a rope attached to the mast into his hands.' (84-5)

As already mentioned, live animals or people are often used for long shots that are then intercut with face shots of the puppet. Yoda, Hoggle and the Gelflings are a few examples. Also, as evident in the bike riding example, different sizes and types of the same puppet character are often used. This was true in The Dark Crystal:

Henson is reluctant to reveal exactly how all the creatures were animated or how many versions in which sizes there were of each. He suggests, though, that most of the puppets existed in more than one perspective. Depending on their perspective and what they were supposed to do in a given shot, they might involve either human inhabitants or direct or remote-controlled cables or pneumatics, or a combination. But the shot itself was ultimately determined by what the puppets could be made to do in relation to the camera. (Chase 56)

Brian Henson was not as shy about revealing how many versions of mouse puppets were used in The Witches. In The Witches, directed by Nicholas Roeg, two young boys are transformed into mice by the Grand High Witch herself played by Angelica Huston. Various mouse puppets, along with their live counter parts, were employed to make the audience experience their plight:

There were several mouse models, varied in size, which were used for the film. Life-size mice were used for wide shots, 10-inch-tall triple-scale models that were cable controlled were used for most scenes, and 2 to 3-foot-tall computer-controlled hand puppets were used for closeups. (Martinez)

When the larger mouse puppets were used, as previously noted in relation to Dinosaurs, the sets and props were made to the correct scale as well, so the mice appeared to be mouse size at all times. For example, "When they were shown in a fruit bowl, the fruit had to be five times normal size, too (Burden)."

Several episodes of The Storyteller were assembled with the assistance of an Abekas computer and an Ampex ADO system. This system allowed Henson Associates to mat image over image digitally and manipulate them in a wide variety of ways with no deterioration of the individual images occurring. As Herbert Zettl explained in his book on television production (1992):

. . . digital video lends itself readily to all sorts of manipulation without deteriorating the original material. Although quite complicated technically, the *principle* of DVE is relatively simple. The DVE equipment can grab any video frame at any time from any video source (live camera, VTR, C.G., film, slide), change it into digital information (on-off pulses), manipulate it in a variety of ways, store it, and retrieve it on command. . . . When digital video effects are interfaced with the standard (analog) effects of the switcher, the possibilities for visual effects are virtually endless. (388)

Therefore, Henson Associates achieved greater depth, variety and complexity by matting and manipulating the individual images of their computer generated characters and landscapes. The DVE can also be used, as cited in Zettl's quote, to manipulate and mat images from multiple sources that are not computer generated. This technique was frequently used in episodes of The Storyteller. In "The Heartless Giant" episode it was employed to make the actor in the full-figure puppet costume appear giant in relation to the other human characters. This effect was further enhanced by intercutting shots of a giant-sized hand or foot when necessary, as when the Giant picks up a young boy and the boy speaks to him from that position.

Henson chose to shoot The Storyteller on 35mm film stock then transferred it to video tape where the elaborate post-production work was done. The sound effects used were also added in post-production. Other projects were also shot on film, then transferred to video tape.

The practice of shooting television on film and then transferring it to video for post-production was not a new innovation. Robert Collins (director of photography for Dinosaurs) did it as early as 1969 when he did "Peggy Fleming at Sun Valley," for which he won an Emmy. He stated:

We shot on Eastman Ektachrome and transferred it to video tape, edited it carefully and ended up with a high quality show. I'm not sure anybody was even aware it was done in 16mm. even when we won the award. (Lee 67)

The type of film stock that the work is shot on can have a great effect on the final product as demonstrated in Collins' quote above. To get the "great depth of focus" they wanted for The Dark Crystal, besides using high light levels, they decided to "shoot in the anamorphic Panavision format(1:2.35) . . . to present the background as powerfully as possible (Chase 55)." Since The Dark Crystal was shot entirely at EMI Studios in

London, the makers had a great deal of control over the lighting and sets. Their control was strengthened further by Morris' choice of film stock and the fact that they were working in London instead of California. As Chase pointed out:

Oswald Morris exercised control by shooting on Eastman 5247 stock (instead of experimenting with, say, a Fuji film), because he knew its capabilities. Shooting the entire film at EMI studios, in London, and using familiar Technicolor labs there were other pluses for Morris. "Obviously, you can control the light more easily in a studio than on location, . . .and in England we communicate closely with the labs and have color-timed rushes, instead of the one-light prints you get in California. The color you see in dailies is pretty close to the finished film." (57)

The Dark Crystal was one of the heaviest storyboarded films Morris had ever worked on. To avoid making the movie seem "cutty" Morris stated in the same article, "We went through the whole range of Panavision prime lenses from the widest to the longest focus, but we also zoomed quite a lot" (Chase 56).

Like The Storyteller, Dinosaurs was shot on film and then transferred to tape. "Two Panavision cameras cover almost every shot, and the Eastman 5296 negative is transferred directly to tape (Lee 69)." Collins goes on to explain why this choice was made:

I think the producers wanted the extra quality and long-term conservation that film offers. We are using strong colors and over-exposing the negative to saturate the colors. In the video post they can tone them down if they wish. (69)

Another advantage of recorded media puppetry and Henson's monitor innovation has to do with continuity. As Henson stated:

At all times, with all of our films, we've used a through-the-lens video system. Replaying the tape is not as important as being able to watch it while you're shooting,

although we use the video a great deal throughout for all kinds of things. We use it the way other people would use continuity notes. We match to the previous shot because you can see all kinds of things. There's no argument about which hand was holding a pencil, and you can match the speed of movement from one shot to another. (Magid 76)

At the P of A Festival 93 Jerry Juhl mentioned yet another advantage related to Henson's exploitation of monitors. Juhl explained that there was always a monitor in the writers room during The Muppet Show rehearsals and taping. The writers would often see something in the performance or puppeteers' ad-libbing that they could use as a defining characteristic, "something to hang the character onto," (Juhl) that they could then develop further in forthcoming scripts.

Henson felt the combination of computers, film tricks and puppets was an interesting direction and one that only recorded media could accommodate. His love of technology never allowed him to be satisfied or content with the methods he used before. As Duncan Kenworthy, director of production for Henson International, noted, "What interested Jim 10 years ago does not necessarily interest him today because he's done it" ("A Whole lot more" 25). While Henson noted that he enjoyed experimenting with "the technical stuff," he always stressed that he was not sure the puppets utilizing advanced technology had any intrinsic advantage over the regular hand and rod puppets like Kermit. However, they gave him a chance to design and work with puppets and equipment he had never used before and this kept the work interesting and stimulating for him throughout his career (An Evening with Jim Henson).

Though The Jim Henson Hour allowed Henson to experiment and do darker, more expressionistic productions, ultimately, his experience with the show and NBC was frustrating. NBC put the program in one of its worst time slots, resulting in the program being cancelled after only six weeks, though it was nominated for six Emmys

and won one ("Miss Piggy Went to Market" 18). When he was asked if he would try with the program again he replied, "I don't think so. That was with NBC, and they cancelled us after the fifth show was on the air, so that was a bit of a frustration" ("Miss Piggy went to Market" 20).

Puppetry, even in recorded media and when exploiting all the technology available, has its drawbacks and difficulties. Some of these problems were mentioned earlier, such as the adjustments to the lighting to keep the actors/mimes/puppeteer/dancers from passing out, but there are other difficulties that contribute to the high production costs of Henson Associates' productions. Some of these problems can be handled as easily as adjusting the lighting as in The Dark Crystal example. For instance, the puppets used on Dinosaurs are not as sophisticated as the Gorgs on Fraggle Rock. The actors inside the full-figure puppets often cannot see out. In the case of the father, Earl Sinclair, he "can only see when his mouth is open. While the puppeteer is making him talk, he gets a chance to see where he's going" (Lee 67). The result of this is that the actors sometimes miss their marks. However, instead of retaking the shot, Robert Collins and his crew have learned to compensate during filming:

Once in a while the actors will line up behind each other. They'll come to a mark and miss it slightly and be hidden behind another performer. We try to be ready to slide the camera sideways and adjust to those changes. It requires that both cameras be on a track or dolly, ready to correct alignment problems. (Lee 67)

Since "the cast and crew completely fill Stage 10" where Dinosaurs is filmed, Collins decided to light the entire set from the catwalks to avoid the lights being in the way or overturned by the actors in their suits during shooting. He stated in the same article:

I had to sort out the lighting style, trying to do everything from the greens [catwalks]. I didn't want any light stands on the floors, to avoid problems with the suit actors and their tails—smacking stands or yanking cables. I tried to do all the lighting from up high. You know, movies used to be shot with high angle light. With the creatures, it's fine because their facial expressions are not as demanding as an actress', for instance. (Lee 68)

In a 1983 Starlog article, Gary Kurtz, producer of Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back, and The Dark Crystal, pinpoints one of the biggest problems faced when shooting a picture with more Henson creatures than humans:

The challenge of making The Dark Crystal was intriguing. I was excited at the prospect of a film in which there are *no* human beings, in which fantasy creatures have to come alive for the audience. It's one thing to have Yoda or E.T. inter-reacting with a lot of human actors, where you can hide the problems: you can always cut away, you don't have to show very much, you can keep the creature in the dark. There are many ways to avoid those technical problems and we use them all the time normally. But, when you've got 90 minutes with *just* creatures--no people—they must be believable on the screen or you won't enjoy the story. (Hutchison 19)

As Jim Henson noted, each shot is like a special effects shot and so many people are involved that a variety of things can easily go wrong at any moment:

The characters in The Dark Crystal are a great deal more complicated than anything we ever did on the Muppet films. Technically, they're a lot more elaborate and virtually every shot in the movie is like a special-effects shot. Some scenes required up to 45 people to shoot, so there was a lot that could go wrong. . . . We shot lots of stuff we couldn't use. If it looked just slightly false, we had to throw it out. (Morgan 4)

Another drawback related to Henson's type of live action puppet productions versus the more common stop-motion puppet films is also mentioned in the quotation above—the large amount of well trained personnel required to perform and capture the

shot on film, as well as the cost of doing so. Many would say that Henson's form of live-action film puppetry defeats the purpose and reasons many filmmakers turn to puppet films. Most stop-motion puppet films are cheaper to make than live action films since they can be completely animated and filmed by a small staff. Furthermore, some puppet filmmakers believe that live-action films should be left to those who do them best, live actors. This, as Bruce Holman noted in his book, is how Czechoslovakian filmmaker, Jiri Trnka, felt about puppetry in film:

From the beginning, I had my own conception of how puppets could be handled—each of them to have an individual but static facial expression, as compared with the puppets that by means of various technical devices, can change their mien in attempt to achieve a more life-like aspect. In practice of course, this has tended not to enhance the realism, but rather conduce naturalism. . . .

Puppet films stand on their own feet only when they are outside the scope of live-action films—when the stylisation [sic] of the scenery, the artificially heroic look of the human actors, and the lyrical content of the theme might easily produce an effect both unconvincing and ludicrous or even painful. (76)

Holman seems to completely agree with Trnka's beliefs:

In other words, a puppet is a puppet. He is neither a live actor nor a cartoon film character, he is unique and in a medium of his own. To force puppet animation beyond its point of efficiency by over-elaboration, or to waste carelessly the potentials which puppets possess are violations of the principle of poetic economy. (76)

Holman's book was written before Henson made his first feature length motion picture.

It would be interesting to know if Holman would still agree with his statement.

The main reason Henson worked in a live action format again relates to the medium; the Muppets were specially developed for live television, where they could easily make appearances on commercials, specials, talk shows and variety shows. This

added to their exposure and contributed to their popularity and success. It also helped in the establishment and development of their unique personalities. Furthermore, it would appear that the television screen is their natural habitat in view of the fact that critics and the public have found many of the films, including The Dark Crystal, Labyrinth and The Muppet Movie, lacking. Several factors may contribute to this including financial considerations, time, the number of people involved and the sophistication of the puppets. When working on television, with fairly simple puppets, the puppeteers often ad-lib in character, which adds spontaneity and often leads to new ideas that are then incorporated into the performance. This is a luxury that the feature film's economics cannot accommodate. Each scene must be carefully worked out in advance, especially when multiple manipulators are required for additional eye and facial movements. The entire crew cannot be held up while two characters ad-lib lines to each other. It would be far too time consuming and expensive.

Henson's exploitation of cutting edge technology is another aspect of his puppetry that other live puppet theatre performers often find unacceptable. Though many of Henson's puppets are technologically advanced, Henson always worked to keep the puppeteer's performance, the character, the center of attention not the technology. It was important to him, and still is to Henson Associates, that the technology is not an end in itself. He said:

All of the technical stuff we do I think of basically as designed to get a better performance. . . even when we have all of that radio controlled stuff, all it is really meant to do is to take a puppeteer's single performance more dimensional. It's always the performance! You've got to start with a very talented performer in the first place, and all of the rest of that stuff is just icing and gravy--though not at the same time. (Magid 76)

Indeed, Henson does not use technology for technology's sake. One indicator of this is the fact that not all the new full-figure puppets Henson Associates are currently using and building contain the kind of technology that the Gorgs represent. As noted earlier, the puppets on Dinosaurs do not utilize this technology. Furthermore, the video system used for the Gorgs was applied to Hoggle, but proved ineffective and was removed. As Henson explained:

We found when we first started to shoot with Hoggle that the whole video vision was not good, it didn't work well for her [Shari] at all. It took us a little while to discover that, but she ended up looking through the mouth of the character instead. (Magid 74)

Basically, Henson used any combination of traditional puppet design and manipulation styles, television conventions, film techniques and technology he needed to achieve the final performance he desired. He has used tricks and traditions of both live and recorded puppetry, fantasy filmmaking, video and special effects, and computer technology, whatever would work, because that was what intrigued him personally. He was not trying to replace the puppeteer with waldos or computer programs, as some puppeteers would argue, or demean the puppet as a symbol by making it a tool of commercialism, but simply adapt it to the format he was working in, television. Even Faz, the technical wizard himself, does not feel his job was to make robots, but only to enhance Henson's type of puppetry, as Malkin noted in his article:

Faz feels that while puppets controls have been evolving for centuries, they only began to reach their maturity--particularly for television and film--with the advent of solid state circuitry. Although from his point of view, it would be easy enough to create convincing robots, or realistic, Disney-style audio-animatronic figures, Faz's primary goal is always to enhance Henson's style of hand puppetry. His specific contribution is the development of electro-mechanical controls systems, which allow hand

puppeteers to control their figures with maximum sensitivity and minimum physical or psychological adjustment to the systems themselves. (1986, 84)

There are many puppeteers and scholars that would disagree with Malkin's conclusion. In a letter to the author, Steve Tillis made this point quite clear. At the Puppetry at the Public festival, (at the Joseph Papp in New York 1992), after Brian Henson had demonstrated the manipulation of puppets by using a waldo, a member of the audience commented that he longed for the days of the "good old-fashioned puppeteer" (Jan. 1993). There are many objections to the use of waldos to produce animation and "puppet" performance. A major reason people object to devices like waldos is that they are afraid they will make the traditional puppeteer and animator unnecessary, obsolete, or will force them to become knowledgeable about this new technology, whether they want to or not, to find employment.

Besides using waldos as Henson Associates does for the Doozers and Gorgs, they can also be attached to actors, whose movements are then translated, like Waldo C. Graphic, into electronic images (information) on the television screen. In this way, as Steve Glenn, vice president for new business development for SimGraphics, stated, "With a waldo, an actor doesn't have to learn how to puppet" (Robertson 43). It is not too difficult to understand why puppet artists would object to this aspect of motion-capture, since it allows non-puppeteers, individuals that have little or no knowledge of the puppet, its history, or function to create puppet performance.

Though there is fear among puppet artists that motion-capture will put jobs and puppetry in jeopardy, Carl Rosendahl, president of Pacific Data Images (PDI) the company that helped Henson create Waldo C. Graphic, does not share their fears. He stated:

I don't think [motion capture] is the ultimate solution for moving every character. It lends itself well for very

human characters or puppeted characters. I love Kermit and I love Mickey Mouse, but they have different movements. (Robertson 44)

Rosendahl further commented that motion capture technology is currently neither quick or cheap enough to replace conventional animation or puppetry (Robertson)

However, motion capture undoubtedly will be used more frequently by animators as time passes. Large companies, like Disney, that were once afraid of employing any kind of computer graphics technology are now starting to realize its advantages. It will be some time before the hardware and software are readily available and at affordable prices, but as with everything related to the computer industry, eventually these systems will be relatively affordable and abundant. However the question still remains, will these devices replace or make the traditional puppeteer or animator obsolete? Steve Williams from Industrial Light and Magic, who gave the symposium "Technical Developments in Film Puppetry" at the P of A Festival, made statements that indicated that while puppets were used to solve some of the special effects problems in Jurassic Park it was not necessary. He implied that all the effects could have been accomplished with computer generated graphics. Graham Walters, senior animator at PDI does not see motion capture as a direct threat to animators or puppeteers. Instead he sees it as a new art form that will attract those who find it interesting, or fascinating, as Henson did. Walters said, "I don't see it as better or worse. Instead, it's a new art form" (Robertson 44). Additionally, as with all things in our lives there will always be people who chose to create their art or products, be it gardening, jewelry making, puppetry, or animation, in traditional, or folk ways.

Besides the opposition to the use of waldos, computer generated "puppets" and graphics and motion capture, there are other objections to Henson's style of puppetry.

Practicing live puppet theatre performer and teacher, Peter Schumann, does not approve of Henson's form of puppet performance. In fact, it is not an overstatement to say that Schumann and puppet artists like him believe that Henson "set the art of puppetry back a hundred years" (that is a direct quote, but the source requested to remain anonymous). In his article, "The Radicality of Puppet Theatre," (1990) Schumann clearly made his bias known:

Modern puppet theatre suffers from the tape recorder just as much as it suffers from foam rubber. As in so many other examples of 20th-century inventiveness, the genius of engineering also seeds the virus of decay. (37)

Schumann's works are commonly of a social or political nature. He believes that puppetry should be returned to its roots, to the people. In his opinion puppetry's true function is as a folk art through which the common man can effectively satirize and criticize the institutions of power. He stated at the beginning of his essay:

It [puppetry] is also, by definition of its most persuasive characteristics, an anarchic art, subversive and untameable [sic] by nature, an art which is easier researched in police records than in theatre chronicles, an art which by fate and spirit does not aspire to represent governments or civilizations, but prefers its own secret and demeaning stature in society, representing, more or less, the demons of that society and definitely not its institutions. (32)

He views the movie and television industry as a tool of our brainwashing society that the puppet should not be part of. He finds much of recorded media and commercial television puppetry equally offensive and counterproductive. He wrote:

The puppeteers' traditional exemption from seriousness-- (e.g.) from the seriousness of being analytically disciplined and categorized by the cultural philosophy of the day-- and their asocial status acted also as their saving grace, as a negative privilege that allowed their art to grow. The habitual lament of modern puppeteers about their low and ridiculous status is unfortunately disrespectful of

their own art, or proves an impotent attempt to market their work as so-called serious art. (The physiognomy of modern puppetry is often a sad example of this impotent seriousness, especially where animals are portrayed with the jolly stupidity of chew-gum advertisements, adding the creatures' fateful features to the already existing set of human stereotypes, defunct physiognomies, really, meant to be cute but desperately sarcastic at heart.) (33)

Schumann is not the only puppet artist who objects to television puppetry. As

Eillen Blumenthal noted in her article, "Serious Puppets," (1989):

Among some delegates, success itself seemed suspect. In a conference session about media, puppeteers who'd just spent three days bewailing the impossibility of getting mainstream attention and support spoke about *Sesame Street*--the show that's brought mainstream attention and support to puppetry--as if it were somehow part of the enemy Establishment. The TV people "have a lot of money and we have none," said one Venezuelan delegate, 'and so very often we lose our finest actors. We have shows like the Muppets, but nothing where the puppeteer shows his feelings." (In fact, Jim Henson not only has introduced a generation to the expressive genius of puppetry but supports other puppeteers through his foundation.) (23)

To take Blumenthal's comment one step further, performers like Schumann, Roman Paska and Hanne Tierney, who all share similar views on the function of the puppet in our society, performed at the festival sponsored largely by The Jim Henson Foundation, a non-profit organization to benefit non-Muppet puppetry, which would not exist if it were not for the Muppets. The Foundation, in fact, printed and sold (at the very reasonable price of \$5) a collection of conference papers that contained the articles in which these performers criticize Henson's form of puppetry. Still, many puppeteers have and will continue to see Henson and his puppetry as part of the enemy ranks.

Another objection to Henson's puppetry, as noted by Schumann and others above, is that it adds fuel to the idea that puppetry is "kid stuff" and not an ancient art

requiring serious consideration. This may be one of the biggest and most universal objections regarding Henson's body of work; that his puppets are cute, fuzzy, cuddly creatures that continue to foster the concept of puppetry as an art for children and therefore ill-equipped to function as a vehicle for serious drama and political or social statements. The effects of this concept may be felt strongest in America, a country that has never had a firmly established puppet tradition. Indeed, for many Americans the term "Muppet" has become synonymous with puppet. Though Sesame Street was and continues to be a great success for Henson Associates, it has certainly contributed to the image of the Muppets as children's entertainment. This "kiddy" label is, undoubtedly, owing in part to the preconceived notion many people have that fantasy films, including those employing puppetry, animation, and science fantasy like those made by George Pal, Steven Spielberg, and George Lucas, are child-like by nature. This point is made in a Starlog article written about The Dark Crystal:

The same narrow-mindedness which has dogged science-fiction and fantasy film seems to be tagged to different artistic mediums as well: Live-action films are for adults; animated films, for children; puppets, for infants. . . . Animated films are not an inferior storytelling medium just because networks grind out endless Saturday morning schlock for the kiddies. The Disney empire exists today because of the great power of the animated film. Puppets face that same prejudice. (Hutchison 20)

That puppets face this prejudice daily is obvious and Henson's work has added to this perception, but to say that films like Henson's and Pal's, several of which contained strong anti-war statements and imagery, have nothing to say and totally lack substance is unfair. They may be gentler statements or images than those of Starevitch, Svankmajer and Schumann, but no less important because they are presented in a positive way.

Barbara Eden, who was in the Pal films The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm (1962) and 7 Faces of Dr. Lao (1964), commented on this point in relation to Pal's films and his characters:

George did have a wonderful sense of humor. And his characters, even the dark side of his characters, had a message. They weren't frivolous, and they weren't light, light characters. They always had a message and he got that across in a very positive way. And they could be terrifying, these characters, but they always had a positive side. (The Fantasy Film Worlds of George Pal)

Henson took a similar approach in his creature films. In the final scenes of The Dark Crystal, Henson made his cinematic statement about good and evil. After Jen repairs the Dark Crystal, Henson's most debauched and grotesquely evil characters, the Skeksis and the gentle mystics physically recombine to form the shining creatures they were before the shard was shattered and their evil and good sides separated. The film makes an additional statement as well. Though the mystics are wise, gentle, nurturing creatures, their lack of motivation and desire make them ineffectual beings living in a slow moving dream. The Skeksis, however, for all their back biting and pettiness, possess the ambition and vision that drives them on and brings them very close to attaining their evil goal of complete domination over their world. In this film it is not a simple case of good destroying evil, but a struggle to reestablish a state of balance between the good and evil traits that exist in all of us. Henson commented:

One aspect of the film that I particularly like is the fact that our evil creatures, the 'Skeksis,' and our wise, sort of 'mystical creatures,' are both part of the *same thing*, which is the culmination of the story. This is not a story where you kill the bad guys, but instead re-institute harmony, a separate harmony. . . . And philosophically, I think there's more to creating harmony and completeness than there is in destroying evil! *That* aspect I like very much. (Krista 42)

Basically, both of these filmmakers were making films that had something to say and they chose to say it in a gentle, positive way. It may simply have to do with their personal natures; both men were constantly referred to as gentle, unassuming men by those who worked with them, though some state that Henson had "a streak of madness running through him" (Current Biography 1977, 202), and this seems to have manifested itself in their films. Furthermore, their films tend to deal with large, basic issues of morality, instead of specific political or social issues like Schumann's works. Therefore, their films become gentle parables rather than the cutting political and social satire that has been a part of folk and street puppetry since Mr. Punch first appeared. This "gentleness" can be attributed in part to the medium as well. Mainstream film and television rarely possess the cutting edge commentary that is a distinguishing feature of much folk and street theatre.

FINANCES

According to Contemporary Authors, Henson co-founded Henson Associates, the "television and film production company," in 1957 (208-09), another source's date differs and stated that the first company was called Muppets Inc. According to Karen Falk both sources are partially right—"Muppets Inc.'s incorporation date was 1958." Regardless of the date, by the 1960 Jim and Jane had formed a corporation, were married and making a good living with their puppet act. Henson put much of the money back into his company as noted in Current Biography (1977):

By the latter year [1969] Henson was grossing about \$350,000 from his commercials and other television work, but his overhead came to almost half of that amount, and two-thirds of the \$25,000 fee for a thirty-second commercial was plowed back into production costs. The net amount of money that he took home came to approximately \$40,000. (201)

Clearly, large budgets combined with the unheard of amount of creative control Henson was able to maintain, have contributed to the world wide success and maintenance of high production standards in the works of Henson Associates. They have continued to find sponsorship and contracts that allow them sufficient amounts of money and artistic freedom. Artistic freedom was something that Henson was lucky enough to have from the very beginning. He stated in relation to Sam and Friends:

We'd try some really way-out things. I was convinced no one else at the station ever watched the show because there was never a complaint of any attempt at censorship of any kind. (Current Biography 1977, 200)

In the early seventies, when Henson Associates were looking to widen their scope and begin other projects, they were hampered, but not stopped, by the "kid stuff" label:

between 1969 and 1972 four Muppet specials were produced for ABC, CBS and the Hughes Television Network, and during the first half of the seventies various packagers approached Henson with the idea of producing a syndicated series, but, as Executive Producer David Lazer puts it, "We thought syndication was a dirty word." (Finch 20)

As Finch went on to explain, ABC showed the most interest, since it was trying to boost its poor third place ratings at the time. A pilot was commissioned and broadcast in 1974 as The Muppet Valentine Show. It featured Mia Farrow, but it failed to draw a large enough audience to convince the network to take on the project (Finch 20). In 1975 ABC tried again and another pilot, this time without a guest star, was aired as The Muppet Show: "Sex and Violence":

Again, however, the ratings were not what the network had hoped for, and ABC informed Henson Associates that it was not prepared to make any commitment to a Muppet series. "Our pitch," says David Lazer, "for presenting the

Muppet case to the networks was that this was a family show, a show that would appeal to all age groups. The network didn't feel that it was possible for us to reach both children and adults." With ABC out of the picture, Henson Associates entered into discussions with CBS. CBS concurred with ABC's opinion. (Finch 20-21)

Though syndication was still a "dirty word" at Henson Associates when Abe Mandell, who was then head of ITC Entertainment, the American division a ACC, Lord Lew Grade's entertainment corporation, approached them they listened. His idea was to sign the Muppets syndicated series and place it in:

the prime-time access period, that slot from 7:30 to 8:00 p.m. which is not controlled by the networks. Mandell had discussions with the executive officers of the five CBS-owned and -operated stations, each located in a major market, and had been given a clear indication that these stations were enthusiastic about carrying the Muppets in prime-time access. With those stations committed to a Muppet series, it could be taken for granted that others around the United States would follow. In the United Kingdom, *The Muppet Show* would be put out over the airwaves by Lord Grade's own ATV company. (Finch 21)

Henson Associates realized that Lord Grade, with the entertainment empire he had built, could "offer the same kind of production facilities and financial backing that could be expected from a major American network" (Finch 21). When negotiations actually began with ITC, there were two non-negotiable points in the minds of Henson Associates. They were, not surprisingly, budget and creative independence. They did not want to be under financed or artistically controlled. Henson Associates requested:

...a guarantee of a budget that would ensure high production values, along with a promise of creative independence. . .(By the fifth season the show cost in excess of \$250,000 an episode to produce. The promise of creative freedom has been scrupulously adhered to.) (Finch 21)

Lord Grade said in an interview that he knew little about Jim Henson before their first meeting, except that he was a very talented professional:

I knew he was talented based on what I saw on the screen, because it needed some kind of genius to figure out how to do those things. And when I met Jim Henson, and the word genius is a word that is very often used loosely, but I think both Jim Henson and Frank Oz, who is his close associate, are geniuses. (The Man Behind the Muppets)

Lord Grade was well aware that all the major American networks had turned down the Muppet project, but said he still had no reservations at all:

None at all. At that time all we were doing was taking a chance on 24 episodes. I had no idea, and it would be foolish to say that I did, that it would be such an extraordinary phenomenal success. We made 120 episodes, which went to every country, virtually every country in the world. (The Man Behind the Muppets)

Furthermore, when asked about the agreement (contract) he had with Henson he replied, "I don't need an agreement. I don't remember if we ever had an agreement. We just discussed the deal and we shook hands" (The Man Behind the Muppets). Grade only imposed one major condition, the show had to be filmed in England. "In return, there would be enough money for Jim Henson to indulge in the kind of detail he loves" (The Man Behind the Muppets). Lord Grade commented:

If you believe in something you have to go through with it, doesn't matter what it costs. That's the entertainment business. You have to have a feel. You have to have a hunch. You just can't simply go by words. If you read the script, you can't just go by the words of the script, you've got to visualize what can happen. (The Man Behind the Muppets)

Lord Grade "visualized" what the major American networks could not and soon regretted. He trusted the talents of Henson and Oz enough to take on the project with

no written contract and was well rewarded. Later he would be involved with the production of the Muppet movies as well.

This kind of belief in Henson and in his puppetry, as mentioned in chapter one, has been a constant in his career. It helped him gain the funding he needed to produce his works. Joan Ganz Cooney recalled many things about Henson, including his talent and shrewd business sense:

He's many things. Jim is a idealist, a business man, a real business man. He can look at his organization, himself, and his work and function as if he were an objective agent handling that. . . . He is an extremely shrewd personal manager of himself, his organization, and his people. . . . He's, of course, an entertainment genius. . . . He's quiet, unassuming as a person to meet, but he has a very, very strong sense of self and of talent. (The Man Behind the Muppets)

Budget and artistic freedom have remained a constant in Henson's organization. When an audience member asked Jim Henson why there had been no more "creature films," he replied that neither film was successful enough to have anyone want to pay for a sequel. He stated that The Dark Crystal worked quite well and was "medium successful," but that Labyrinth did not do at all well in this country, but did very well overseas (An Evening with Jim Henson). The Dark Crystal cost \$20 million to make according to Chase's article in Theatre Crafts and \$25 million according to Morgan's article in The Cable Guide, while at the P of A Festival 93 Frank Oz set the final price tag at 26 million dollars. Also according to The Cable Guide the film was "warmly received by movie critics and audiences" (5). It must be mentioned at this time that this appears to be a huge overstatement. The reviews of The Dark Crystal and Labyrinth that were read by the author were luke warm at best. Duncan Kenworthy was quoted

as saying, "Dark Crystal was a flawed masterpiece. It broke new ground, but the script was weak" ("A Whole lot more" 25). Kenworthy further stated in the same article:

the company has learned from that mistake and has taken definite steps to ensure that the episode is not repeated. The organization now has access to a whole range of writers, he states: "Agents are sending us their best talent." (25)

Henson was then asked what it cost to produce one of his shows. He shied away from this question saying that he did not like to discuss money in relation to his works, but that they were always expensive, usually more expensive than expected. He went on to say "strictly off the record" and "if any reporters were there he'd deny it" that The Storyteller series was one of the most expensive and cost between half a million to a million dollars per episode. He said most episodes were closer to the 1/2 million dollar mark, coming in at six to seven hundred thousand dollars per episode. The cost of these productions is one of the reasons Jim Henson productions have several different sources of financial support. Henson stated:

With our television material, we try to design coproductions because the stuff we do tends to be more expensive than U.S. [distributors] will give us as a licensing fee. For *Storyteller* [a half-hour show seen in the U.S. as part of *The Jim Henson Hour*], we probably had about \$400,000 from NBC per episode, and we picked up another \$250 to \$300,000 from the U.K. ("Miss Piggy went to Market" 18)

Fraggle Rock is another example of a Henson Associates coproduction. It is coproduced by Henson Associates Inc., Canadian Broadcasting Company and HBO in the United States. Henson commented that "all this stuff ends up expensive" and sometimes they have to work something out with the English studios. Working things out in the way of financial support was another of Henson's gifts. The article with Kenworthy elaborated on this point:

Furthermore Kenworthy explains that Henson's creative ability is complemented by his ability to put resources together in a way others have not been able to: "Jim is fortunate in being able to raise money on what, after all, is seen as minority programming." ("A Whole lot more" 25)

Dinosaurs weekly budget has taken The Storyteller's place as the most expensive television show produced by Henson Associates and is considered by Collins, to be "a lot of special effects for little money" (Lee 66). The article stated that, "at a record-setting price of a million dollars per episode, corporate expectations are high" (Lee 69).

The sheer cost and expertise required to use many of the materials employed in constructing Henson's puppets is yet another area that raises objections from other puppet artists. Schumann expresses his distaste for expensive puppetry and specialized materials as well as his desire to keep puppetry true to its folk and ritual roots. He wrote:

Puppetry is conceptual sculpture, cheap, true to its popular origins, uninvited by the powers-that-be, its feet in the mud, economically on the fringe of existence, technically a collage art combining paper, rags, and scraps of wood into kinetic two- and three-dimensional bodies.
(38)

A puppeteer interviewed by the author in September 1992, who has worked with Schumann, remarked that all the puppets in his latest show were constructed out of materials he found in the streets of Manhattan. Though this is certainly a challenging and intriguing idea, again the medium and the goals of these artists must be taken into consideration. While making cheap, socially relevant puppet performances is important to many puppet artists, what interested Henson was the advantages and

advances in recorded media, puppetry, computer technology, and materials to give his characters added life on the screen.

WAYS OF WORKING

As we have seen, there are many reasons for the consistently high production standards and continuity of puppet design and visuals in the works of Henson Associates. This section will discuss some of the working habits enlisted by Henson Associates that contribute to and sustain these standards.

One of these factors is the people that Henson found and hired to work around him from the very beginning. He had a unique knack for finding people who possessed a strong background in puppetry and, in many cases, film puppetry as well.

When Henson arrived home from his eye opening trip to Europe, he began to seek out other American puppeteers. Henson started to surround himself with people of great talent and knowledge. He met the late Don Sahlin at a Puppetry Festival in Detroit in 1960, while Sahlin was working for Burr Tillstrom. Henson asked Sahlin to help him with the construction of his first non-abstract puppets, two dogs for a dog food commercial, one of which was Rowlf. Sahlin joined the Muppets full-time "about a year later" and "for the next dozen years or so built virtually all of the Muppets" (Henson Associates n. pag.). Sahlin's skill became one of the driving forces behind the "Muppet look" (Henson Associates n. pag., Harris, Juhl).

A puppet must be the essence of the character it is to play. Its character traits should be visible in its physical form. "The puppet will look unnatural if given human proportion; it is the variations on such proportions that are important in creating a caricature which will be dramatically effective in the puppet theatre" (Currell 66). It is this caricature in features and representation that the puppet builder is striving for. In

this aspect the Muppets follow traditional conventions. This is made clear by the way that Henson and Sahlin developed the puppets:

"The way Don and I used to work," Jim recalls, "is that I would generally do a little scribble, which Don would call the 'essence' that he was working toward. Don had a very simple way of working, reducing all nonessential things and zeroing in on what was important. It was this simplifying process of Don's that was the major factor in creating the basic look that people think of as 'The Muppets.'" (Henson Associates n. pag.)

Because of Sahlin's strong background in puppet design and construction, it is not surprising that he was able to capture the essential and filter out elements that would make the Muppets dramatically ineffectual.

Sahlin's efforts with Tillstrom were not his only credentials, however. He had also worked as a puppet animator for Project Unlimited, the company that George Pal repeatedly employed to construct and animate the puppets for films like, Tom Thumb (1958) and The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm (1962), both of which Sahlin worked on. Therefore, Sahlin already possessed knowledge about the demands of Henson's chosen medium when he joined the organization.

By the time of Sahlin's death in 1978, the Muppet workshop had grown a great deal. The new designers and builders had "absorbed his (Sahlin's) influence" (Finch 50) and were more than equipped to carry on.

In 1961, at another Puppetry Festival in Carmel, California, Henson was to meet a man who would become a key member of his troupe, Frank Oz. At the time, however, Frank was still in high school, so Henson hired Oz's partner Jerry Juhl instead (Finch, Harris). In 1963, at the age of nineteen, Oz joined the Muppets and together "their talent and skill are, need it be said, essential to the art of the Muppets" (Henson Associates n. pag). Frank was from an acting and puppeteering family and had been

performing since he was twelve years old (Henson Associates n. pag). On many occasions, Henson has called Frank the greatest puppeteer in the world and also the reason The Muppet Show and the Muppet Movies were funny (Finch, Henson Associates, videos). Together they have co-directed films, like The Dark Crystal, and created the superstar personalities and love affair of Miss Piggy and Kermit the Frog.

Co-directing can be very complicated on any film, especially those as technically challenging as The Dark Crystal, but their years of cooperation and mutual respect made this kind of collaboration possible. Another reason they made such a good team was the fact that their personal strengths were in different areas of production. As Henson commented on in relation to The Dark Crystal:

We'd talked things out so much that by our shooting date we were very much in agreement. . . Yet we each have our strengths. Frank's are in the area of character development, and mine are slightly more visual-- choreographing a camera movement, framing a shot. (Chase 57)

Henson went on to say, "Generally, I think that Frank is very good at the dramatic shaping of a scene and performance" (Morgan 4). Henson and Oz's personalities seemed to contrast and complement each other perfectly. Where Jim is often referred to as low-key, soft-spoken, unassuming, not unlike Kermit, Frank was the one that was always questioning and taking the critical standpoint. Finch noted:

Puppetry, as practiced by this company, is an extremely complex business, yet Henson has a way of making even this look easy. Partly this is a matter of experience, but chiefly it is a matter of style, a reflection of Henson's psychological makeup. Frank Oz is as experienced as Henson, and is probably the most gifted puppeteer of his generation, yet his style is the opposite of effortless. Oz seems to shake a performance out of himself and his characters, like a dog worrying a bone. Henson's

approach has more in common with a dog wagging its tail. One tends to overplay, the other to underplay.

Both do what they do superlatively well and the chemistry between them is extraordinary. They are one of the great teams of the entertainment world, deserving of being mentioned in the same breath as Laurel and Hardy, or Rogers and Astaire. (65)

Oz's constant critical eye and questioning nature, his striving for perfection, allowed Henson the freedom to sit back and listen to everyone's suggestions without always having to raise the critical view and voice doubts. This made Henson's job as the man with the final word much easier. This is not to say that their relationship did not have its ups and downs, but they managed to keep things working and running smoothly nonetheless. As Henson said:

Certainly there would be times when our relationship wasn't great, but much like a marriage, it *is* a long-time relationship! We know each other very well! It's very hard--there's a fine line; but Frank is a marvelous guy. He's fair; he's a very funny man and a *brilliant* performer. (Krista 44)

The joined talents of these two men offscreen were as powerful a part of the Muppets as the relationships between their characters Kermit and Ernie (Henson) and Piggy and Bert (Oz) onscreen.

When Oz joined the Muppets, Jerry Juhl was allowed to concentrate all his energy on writing for the Muppets. Since that time, Jerry Juhl has been head writer for The Muppet Show, and written for the Muppet films including their latest, a Muppet version of "A Christmas Carol" (1992). Having a writer who knows how to write effectively for puppets is a great asset, but having one that has written for the same characters and who understands them as well as Juhl does is practically unheard of. His familiarity with the Muppets has helped in the development and consistency of their individual personalities. There is no doubt that his contributions as a writer,

combined with his understanding of the puppet/puppeteer relationship, helped to shape the Muppets' personalities as much as Sahlin's contributions shaped them psychically. Juhl is quite aware that a strong script can greatly enhance puppet performance. He also believes that the "only reason we care about fiction at all is character" (Juhl). Therefore, his intimate knowledge of the characters has influenced his entire approach to writing scripts for the Muppets. For example, at the P of A Festival Juhl said, "the writer needs to know all the characters, sometimes ever better than the performers." He went on to say that character development "is a major and important part of his work" (Juhl). Sometimes the process is a collective effort involving the writers and the puppeteer. In other cases the character starts with the writers and then the puppeteer "must make it his own"(Juhl) in performance. He emphasized that the "relationships between the characters must be established and consistent." Finally, the characters must be put into conflict with either "themselves, others, or outside forces." These "situations must be developed to bring the characters out" (Juhl) even more completely.

Having a writer that is familiar with puppetry and puppet theatre had other advantages as well. There are very few authors who write specifically for puppets and what puppets do best. There have been some very prominent writers throughout history that at some point in their careers wrote for puppet theatre, including Maurice Maeterlinck, Alfred Jarry, George Sand, Le Sage, Fuselier, Sheridan, Foote, Garcia Lorca and Michel de Ghelderode, (Jurkowski, Proshan), but none of them made a career of it. It was usually done as a protest against what they perceived as inadequacies of the live actor or the actor's egotism interfering with the play as written. Nonetheless, other than the plays written by these writers, there is a significant lack of quality adult puppet

plays published or written in the English language. When such a book is located, the plays are usually aimed at children. As Tillis commented in a letter to the author:

I laughed when I read that you searched in vain for scripts. There are very few published puppet-theatre scripts, and most of those are for kids. . . . Almost everyone ends up writing his or her own script.

One of the reasons that the Saturday Night Live (SNL) segments did not work, in both the mind of Henson and Lorne Michaels, producer of the show, was because the scripts never really worked for the inhabitants of Gorch:

"I don't like anything we did on that show," said Henson. "I loved the characters. I loved the look of them. But the scripts never worked; we never *made* them work."

The scripts were written by different SNL writers and were "boring and bland," according to Henson "They were writing really good things for themselves, and normal sitcom stuff for us. 'The Coneheads,' for example, is great stuff, and *that's* the kind of material we should have been doing." (Harris 28)

Michaels was aware of the problem and changed to different writers in an attempt to save the Gorch segments and incorporate the characters into the rest of the show as well, but it never really worked out and Henson and company left after the first season for England to do The Muppet Show. Michaels recalled:

The writers tended to be more verbal and didn't quite have the facility for knowing how to write for the sort of physical action that the Muppets do so well. (Harris 28)

Since there seems to be a lack of writers equipped to write for puppets, the abilities of an individual like Juhl become priceless, even if not perfect every time (reviews of the latest Muppet film indicate that the script was weak). Additionally, as head writer, Juhl, like Sahlin, influenced and trained others in the art of writing for the Muppets.

Just becoming a puppeteer for Henson Associates takes years, talent and patience. It can take anywhere from two to five years to train a person to become a muppeteer. It can take a year for a trainee to learn how to work with the monitors properly. Then they start with minor characters, and then, when they are ready, they begin to perform major characters (An Evening with Jim Henson). Muppeteers are found and trained much as a baseball team sets up a farm team. Periodically, Henson Associates holds auditions out of which they select several people who are placed in a workshop (farm team) situation where training is ongoing. When an individual is ready, he/she is moved up to the majors, so to speak, and replaced by a new puppeteer trainee. Henson Associates' work has been made easier in recent years. There are now other puppeteers working in local television and utilizing Henson's performance techniques, thus cutting the time required to train a new puppeteer by at least a year (An Evening with Jim Henson).

In the examples above (Sahlin, Oz and Juhl), it is clear that Jim Henson handpicked these people carefully and developed a working relationship with them over many years. When finding personnel or cultivating new working relationships, Henson and his organization took the same amount of care. He was careful to pick individuals who had experience, if not in puppetry on film, then with fantasy film making, people who enjoyed the challenge of films that required special effects and technically difficult shots. A fine example of this was his choice of Gary Kurtz (Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back) as co-producer for The Dark Crystal. Kurtz had always been a fan of the fantasy genre. He said:

I've always had a great love for fantasy and science fiction. I enjoyed it, both in film and literature, when I was growing up. Also, my generation is part of the *first* space generation—beginning with George Pal's Destination Moon in 1949 right up to seeing man land on the Moon.

As far as fantasy goes, I think the cinema is an ideal medium for presentation of fantasy material--It's a way of visualizing something that's really impossible to do in real life. (Hutchison 19)

Henson first approached Kurtz about the project when Kurtz engaged Henson to help bring Yoda to life in The Empire Strikes Back (Yoda was performed by Frank Oz in the film).

Another example of Henson bringing in people with the exact expertise he needed was his hiring of Dick Smith for The Dark Crystal. Dick Smith, "the wizard responsible for special effects in The Exorcist and Altered States" (Chase 54), was brought in to teach Henson's builders how to utilize foam latex. Smith stated:

Perviously, they hand-scissored their puppets out of solid blocks of polyfoam. I came in for a few weeks to train them in the use of foam latex. (Chase 54)

Additionally, Stewart Freeborn, "the man responsible for animating the creatures in the Star Wars cantina sequence, also advised the Dark Crystal people" (Chase 54).

Furthermore, Henson often used the same people from project to project, as was the case with The Dark Crystal. Henson shot The Great Muppet Caper after he had begun preparing for The Dark Crystal using the same core team. The team he assembled for The Dark Crystal learned a great deal about staging requirements on The Great Muppet Caper. That is precisely why Henson used them on the Muppet film. They included Oswald Morris, the director of photography, Brian Smithies, who did special visual effects, and Harry Lange, who was production designer. This way Henson's key people were "a really tight unit by the time we began shooting Dark Crystal" (Chase 56-57).

This kind of training process manifests itself in many aspects of a Henson Associates production. As Robert Collins mentioned in relation to his project,

Dinosaurs:

Our suit performers are some of the best in the industry. They've done most of the significant work in this type of show for years--like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, The Muppets TV show and Dark Crystal. The people with experience help the younger ones learn the tricks that will improve their performance. (Lee 67)

Collins, like Henson, is a seasoned television veteran with "thirty-six years in film and television" (Lee 66). When assembling his crew, he also kept the peculiarities of the show in mind, and hired crew members who had experience with these kinds of special circumstances, or had worked well with him on past projects, as he explained:

The idiosyncrasies of the show required Collins to take extra care in choosing his crew, but in the case of his gaffer, the decision was an easy one. 'Howard Ex is my gaffer,' he states. 'We've worked together quite a lot for 10 years. I knew his temperament would be right for this show.

Bob Schoenhut handles the closeups and Ed Barger is responsible for the master shots. 'Ed is a specialist. He's got a lot of experience shooting puppets. For instance, he did "Captain Eo" for Disneyland. He is used to watching for mismatches and cables sticking out the backs of suits. Bob had done a lot of animal stuff and is good at chasing creatures,' Collins jokes. (Lee 69)

Even Brian Froud had an artistic connection to the Muppets before he and Henson teamed up to create the creature films. He said, "I'm a great fan of the muppets and I always have been, and occasionally I designed things that I felt were an [sic] homage to the muppets" (Magid 73).

Froud mentions another crucial element of Henson Associates working style, collaboration. He stated:

In a way, you have to submerge your ego, though ego's very important. It's a happy collaboration effort and I really enjoy working with all the different crafts people. The importance they bring to the project because of all their various skills you must allow to come through. You can't say, "No, my way us the only way," you have to allow their input. . . . People work directly from my sketches, and I supervise every step along the way. (Magid 73)

Collaboration, team work and the submergence of one's individual ego have always been a large component of Henson Associates work ethics. Jerry Juhl and Dave Goelz commented at the Puppeteers of American Festival that Henson "set up a community of very different people" which contained a great deal of "creative generosity" that allowed them to "work, develop and create." For The Dark Crystal, there were teams of builders and actors set up to work on each group of puppets. The teams took great pride in their creations and each team wanted their creature to be ready and look the best. As Gary Kurtz noted:

Creature design and fabrication was done in a unique way. Normally a person designs something and it is executed by many others. In most of the cases here, the original designer would do his own clay sculpting, carry through to his own mold making, and even on to the finishing texture work, and in some cases, even his own costume sewing with help from many others, of course. He supervised the project right through from beginning to end and it turned out to be much more satisfying to the individual designers and their entire team. (The World of 'The Dark Crystal')

This kind of team, or troupe approach to puppetry in film and live puppet theatre is not unusual, neither is the use of the same crew personnel. Czechoslovakian puppet filmmaker, Jiri Trnka, as early as 1946, was making films in the production team mode. As Bruce Holman noted, "using a production-team method of working, he trained other puppet film-makers who worked with him" (37).

George Pal often used the same personnel when making his fantasy films, like the team from Project Unlimited (Wah Chang and Gene Warren's company) and Chesley Bonestell, who did the space art or was technical advisor on several films, including Destination Moon (1950), When Worlds Collide (1951), The War of the Worlds (1953), and The Conquest of Space (1955).

So, again it is clear that what Henson did with his organization had roots in both live and recorded puppetry, as well as fantasy films. Obviously, Henson and those hired for other Henson Associates' productions, like Dinosaurs, all believed in using the right tool, or person, in this case, for the job. Therefore, his style of working was not really an innovation as much as it was an amalgamation of the tried traditions that came before him. Of course, Henson also had the financial backing necessary to employ the best in the business.

GOALS AND MOTIVATIONS

As we have seen, Jim Henson's goals and motivations were pretty clear. First, of course, like most people he wanted to make enough money to support himself and his growing family. Television and puppetry were the way he decided to do this. He was drawn to both these art forms at an early age because of the amount of control they offered. Control translated to performances that appear to have a great amount of freedom. It also gave Henson the chance to be involved in every aspect of puppetry and television, as He commented:

When you do puppets you can create the whole show yourself--write it, perform it, direct it, design it. Everything. It's a whole thing, a mood. It's a way of saying something I guess, and a lot of people want to say something. But I don't start out to say things. I try to keep it first of all entertaining, and then humorous.
(Current Biography 1977, 202)

This quotation also points out three important components of Henson's motivations and the current existence of the Muppets; entertainment, control, and a message. Henson's combination of puppetry and recorded media allowed him to create completely new worlds as he did for the world of The Dark Crystal and the Land of Gorch segments. It also permitted him to make Muppet magic appear in the real world as he did in the Muppet movies—one example being the scene where the Muppets ride their bikes through Hyde Park.

Though Henson's original intentions were simply to entertain, later in his career, though entertaining still remained important, he too wanted "to say something." His works, especially in The Storyteller series, that drew much of its subject matter from old folk tales, were parables, parables of substance that he hoped would permeate the spectator's consciousness as he/she was entertained. This was his intention in the second of his creature films as well. He stated:

One of the more elaborate aspects of Labyrinth is its multileveled screenplay by Terry Jones, based on a story by Jim Henson, which reflects a rather unusual bent in its director's taste: a desire to create a film of substance. "I like a film to be about something and to relate to life," Henson elaborates. "This film is really about a young girl growing up, and how much of that shows up in the film almost doesn't matter, though it's what we had in mind when we put it together. To me, it's vaguely about taking responsibility for your life, because a lot of kids, a lot of *people*, don't take responsibility for their lives and they don't realize that they're the ones making their lives whatever they are. Sarah's favorite expression in the film is 'It's not fair!', which is merely saying that something else is to blame!" (Magid 79)

This is an intention that appears in other fantasy films as well, though many are often very cynical. One fantasy filmmaker that always held and promoted a hopeful outlook was George Pal. Pal faced many setbacks and hardships throughout his career

and life. He witnessed the rise of Nazism. While working in Germany in 1933, he was personally investigated by the Gestapo simply because he was a foreigner (Hickman 19). Once in America Pal's hardships did not stop. A few days after he returned from filming The Brothers Grimm in Europe, his Bel Aire mansion burned to the ground. Besides the house Pal lost "thirty years of mementoes, including such priceless items as the miniature time machine" and "scripts and sketches on his upcoming projects" (Hickman 146). He said in relation to the fire:

It was sad. . .But you have to develop an attitude and talk yourself into it. You have to believe there is a new page in the typewriter, and there you start over again. Anyway I'm much better off. I'm here in this country, I am an American and I am alive. You have to take the bad with the good. (Hickman 146)

Pal remained undaunted throughout his career and his films were always filled with hope. Pal often made changes to his source materials when writing the screenplays to further emphasize his intentions, as he did when adapting H.G. Wells' novel The Time Machine (1895). Rod Taylor, who played the time traveler in The Time Machine (1959), recalled how Pal adapted Wells' original work to carry his message:

We played the time traveler as H.G. Wells with not so many of the cynical thoughts that H.G. Wells had. We injected George's ideas of anti-war, a world in the future that would have no war. And then combined with his fantasies, and, of course, that wonderful little machine was George's own idea. (The Fantasy Film Worlds of George Pal)

Though Pal was under constant financial and time pressure from the Hollywood studios, something Henson never had to contend with, he worked constantly to make quality pictures and did not resort to pumping out schlock, or cynical messages. As Hickman noted in her book (1977):

Unlike many Hollywood filmmakers, who simply crank out pictures to make a fast profit, George Pal believes in fantasy. He is a dreamer, a romantic in an age of cynicism. In his films, good always triumphs over evil. He likes happy endings. (17)

Henson, his characters, and his works also possessed the same sense of innocence and lack of cynicism. He, like Pal, chose to create positive films. Henson stated:

I've always tried to present a positive view of the world in my work. . . . It's so much easier to be negative and cynical and predict doom for the world than it is to try and figure out how to make things better. I feel we have an obligation to do the latter. (Freeland 63)

It may not be overstating the case to say that Jim Henson actually believed in the kind of magic that is born of imagination, work, talent and luck, the belief that almost anything is attainable and possible, if not probable. The Muppet Movie's story is similar, in many ways, to the actual success of the Henson's Muppets. At the end of the picture when the assembled mass of Muppets, many of whom were not in the film, sing, "Life's like a movie, write your own ending. Keep believing, keep pretending, we've done just what we set out to do! Thanks to the lovers, the dreamers and you!," it is likely that we are actually hearing Henson's true voice as well.

3. PERFORMANCE: ON THE SCREEN

This chapter will explore the elements of Henson Associates' puppetry that are seen in performance by the spectator. It will discuss the effects of costume, design, both of the puppets themselves and sets, character (personality), and the subject matter of Henson Associates skits and features. It will also investigate the use of the live actor, or bridge character, in Henson Associates productions. There will be continued discussion of the consequences of and reasons for Henson's use of the conventions of realism.

A convention Henson borrowed from established television puppetry was the use of the live actor as a bridge character to the audience. In one of several early pilots for The Muppet Show there was no guest star, or bridge character, but by the time it went into syndication the bridge character had become an integral part of the show's formula, which carried over into The Jim Henson Hour, The Storyteller, and other Henson productions. In relation to the use of the live actor combined with his puppetry, Jim Henson stated:

People working with puppets is an interesting situation. Burr Tillstrom with Kukla and Ollie had Fran out front. And Fran worked as a bridge character between the audience and the puppets. In Fran's case she actually was a bridge because there was a stage with her in front and the puppets behind it. We find that is the function people have. On The Muppet Show it was very important to have a live person and the person is reacting to the characters and believing in them and it helps the audience believe in them. In some ways you need that person in there. In Labyrinth we decided to put people in it. Follow it through with the young girl. A parent may believe in pure puppetry, but most of the audience needs that live person much of the time. (An Evening with Jim Henson)

During the run of The Muppet Show, Henson and Jerry Juhl, the head writer, were not in full agreement as to the true importance of the guest star. Juhl felt that the audience tuned in to see the Muppets rather than the guest star. He said:

From the writers' point of view the Muppets have to be more important. They give the series its continuity. People tune in week after week because Kermit and Piggy and Gonzo and the rest are real to them. The viewer cares about what is going to happen to those characters. That's what makes the show work. (Finch 96)

Executive producer of The Muppet Show, David Lazer, commented on the effects and importance of guest stars, "the guest stars are a vital part of our shows. They add texture each week and motivation for us, for the writers and performers. And they're a lot of fun to work with" (Henson 1981, Of Muppets and Men).

Both sides are well taken and the disagreement led to the guest stars remaining part of the show and becoming more established as the Muppet movies and other shows were produced, but not at the cost of obscuring the Muppets. Furthermore, the guest stars can and have added versatility and variety to the show. On The Muppet Show the guests could perform things that they would not be able to do regularly. For instance, how many chances would Beverly Sills get to tap dance in an opera as she did on The Muppet Show, or Rudolf Nureyev to dance with a pig? Even Juhl was forced admit that some of the guest stars (he mentions Harry Belafonte and John Cleese in Finch's book) were very helpful in creating the final episodes they were in, though he feels they were exceptions, not the rule (Finch 101). Though Henson's first feature length creature film, The Dark Crystal, had no humans, the Gelflings, who started out very animalistic in Froud's first drawings, ended up very human-like in the film and served as the bridge characters. In Labyrinth, as mentioned, he returned to using live actors and animals with puppets. The Muppet movies and Fraggle Rock also employ live actors. The Storyteller series, particularly the "Myths" collection, is primarily live actors with a "sprinkling of puppets" (An Evening with Jim Henson).

A bridge character performing with puppets is a tradition found in live puppet theatre as well as recorded media puppetry. Thomas Green and W.J. Pepicello made this point clear in their 1983 Semiotica article:

In certain cases, humans may assume some definable role in the action of the puppet performance. Contemporary examples abound. The performances of Jim Henson's 'Muppets' on the televised *Muppet Show* and *Sesame Street* and in two motion pictures, *The Muppet Movie* and *The Great Muppet Caper*, characteristically juxtapose human and puppet actors. Traditional puppet theatre often utilizes a mixed cast as well. (155)

In live performances, where the puppet's voice or language is so distorted that it is unintelligible to the audience, the bridge character also serves as interpreter. Petr Bogatyrev also commented on the live actor as an integral part of traditional live puppet performance. In the Russian folk comedy "Petrushka," he noted, the musician, who is a live actor "fulfills two functions: he is a living actor carrying on a dialogue with Petrushka and he is a link connecting the audience and the puppet Petrushka" (66). At the Puppetry at the Pabic Festival (1992) many of the performances used live actors. In fact, the Czechoslovakian group, Theatre Drak's performance of Pinokio, employed only one puppet, Pinokio himself.

The live actor believing in the puppet's reality as an individual character onscreen or stage helps release the spectator's, particularly the adult spectator's, disbelief and feelings of foolishness in taking a doll as a living thing. This effect of the bridge character is well dramatized in the 1953 film Lili starring Leslie Caron. In the film Lili functions as the bridge character in front of the proscenium much as Fran did for Kukla and Ollie. Furthermore, it is her belief in and interactions with the puppets that assists the audience to suspend their disbelief and allows for improvisation (ad-libbing) that strengthens the carnival act.

Additionally, for those uninitiated to puppet theatre, the live actor's behavior helps them learn and accept the conventions by demonstration. Therefore, it seems safe to say that the convention of the bridge character is a well established aesthetic in Henson's puppetry as it has been in other television and live puppetry and will remain so as long as the puppet's personalities are not obscured in the process.

DESIGN

According to Henson Associates there are four factors that have been developed and combined to create the Muppet look and performance:

During this time [1958] Jim and Jane (they were married in 1959) began to evolve the style that we now recognize as particular to the Muppets. There are four basic aspects of this style, four elements that when combined create these unique creatures: their design, their fabrication, their performance, and their interaction with the media through which they perform. (n. pag)

The effects of their "interaction with the media" has been discussed at length. Now the elements of design need to be addressed. The puppets of Henson Associates have a distinctive look that is all their own, be they the creatures that were developed for Saturday Night Live, The Dark Crystal, or The Muppet Show. As Henson Associates noted, "Although the characters that appeared on 'Saturday Night Live,' for example are markedly different from those on 'Sesame Street,' they can all be in the same room at the same time and somehow none seems out of place" (n. pag.). It is no accident that the puppets are "markedly different." It was a conscious artistic choice that Henson Associates made. As Caroly Wilcox, who has been with Henson Associates since the beginning of Sesame Street and runs the New York shop, explained to Finch:

. . . she tried to ensure that *Sesame Street* characters, even the recent additions to the cast, remain simple and "cartoon-like." The majority of puppets built for *The Muppet Show* are relatively complex and anthropomorphic.

Establishing this contrast has been a clearly defined artistic policy. (50)

This contrast has continued and been further defined with the establishment of the Creature Shop in London, where the puppets for the creature films, The Storyteller series, and other non-Muppet projects were constructed. The puppets produced by this shop tend to be more realistic and technologically advanced. As Henson noted:

In London, we have what we call the creature shop. The creature shop has done the characters of *Storyteller*; they did the characters for *Labyrinth* and *Dark Crystal* and *Dream Child*. It's more film-oriented, it's more high-tech, it's more into that realistic detail.

In our New York base, we're more oriented to the Muppets. We're doing all the *Sesame Street* characters there, and the *Fraggle Rock* characters were all built there, so New York tends to be sort of soft and fuzzy and London tends to be more hard-edged. ("Miss Piggy went to Market" 20)

Henson's puppets are one of either two extremes. They are either cartoon-like "whatevers" like Gonzo and other various "monsters," extreme caricatures like Dr. Teeth, the cool musician, and Miss Piggy, or they are extremely realistic, though often fantastical, like the Skeksis and the Gelflings with their naturalistic eye, facial and body movements. As demonstrated earlier, Henson always tried to keep this Muppet productions separate from his other endeavors. With the establishment of the Creature Shop, this separation was made even more clear. Another factor that certainly contributed to this separation was Henson's wish to make a clean break away from the Muppets and their built-in children's audience to create the darker, more adult oriented works that are commonly made by European puppet filmmakers like Jan Svankmajer and other filmmakers like the Brothers Quay, as was his hope with The Dark Crystal.

Part of the reason that the design of the Muppets is so distinctive is the choice of materials used. One of the reasons this choice was made has to do with Henson's early

background. He was concerned with creating puppets that, "he felt were best suited to the television screen," as Henson explained:

Maybe it's because I didn't know anything about puppets when I started. I doubt if I was influenced at all. Also, each puppet was designed specifically for television. . . . The TV screen is right there, three inches away from you, so I've tried to get as much expression into each face as possible. A painted expression on a doll is Ok in a show where the audience is fifteen feet away, but on TV you have to put life and sensitivity into a face. (Current Biography 1977, 202)

The choice of materials, and design in general, were effected by the omnipresent "demands of the medium," as Finch goes on to explain:

. . . Muppets are--with few exceptions--extremely flexible so they can be more expressive in close-ups. Contributing to this flexibility is the use of new materials, such as Styrofoam and synthetic pile fabrics. Synthetic dyes also contribute to the character of the Muppets by producing colors that are especially effective on the phosphor-dot screen. (48)

An expansion of this list of materials would include the following; sheets and blocks of polyurethane foam, turkey feathers, fake fur, fleece, Teflon tubing, ping-pong balls, fiberglass, Malaysian rubber, and foam latex that can then be flocked, painted, dyed, sewn, sculpted and glued to create puppets. The use of these materials and the unforgiving eye of the camera have and will continue to lead to innovations and research in construction methods and materials. For The Dark Crystal Henson Associates engaged many different kinds of craftspeople. They used "jewelry makers, wood makers, people who worked in latex foam, other wood carvers. You name it, and we used it. Casting in plastics, casting in bronze, all those crafts we used" (Henson 1983, The World of The Dark Crystal). Some of the "puppet builders have become chemists, working constantly on the development of new foam compounds that will

better suit their very particular requirements" (Henson Associates n. pag.). They are constantly testing and searching for materials that are durable and light. There are no real rules that govern the construction of these puppets, but an overriding philosophy exists that relates to their medium and operation. "A muppet should be constructed to 'weigh the least, move the most, and be very strong'" (Henson Associates n. pag.). A fine example of this appears in The Man Behind the Muppets video. Henson was testing the latest version of a dogish looking puppet, he explained to the builder that it needed more flexibility in the muzzle. She asks if he would like puppet's nose flexible enough to make a sniffing movement and Henson simply replied, "Yeah. Sure. Of course."

Clearly, the demands of the medium control the design aesthetics of Henson's puppets resulting in the puppet's faces and bodies having, as Henson mentioned repeatedly, "life and sensitivity" onscreen. The materials Henson chose to use, foam and soft flexible materials, not only assisted the puppets to mimic, or parody the small, but important facial expressions we have learned to expect, understand and translate from years of watching closeups of television actors and cartoons, but were important because of their intrinsic properties as well. As Tillis noted in his thesis:

The exercise of imagining familiar puppets with altered material-signs demonstrates the importance of such signs. One of the many reasons for the success of the Muppets, for example, is that their supple faces are not only capable of expressive motion, but are also rather comforting for their very softness. If characters such as, say, Bert and Ernie were made, with precisely the same features, but of a lustrous metal, or of leather, or even wood, the effect of the material-signs would be substantially altered. (200)

The detail and appropriateness of the materials, including feathers and fake fur, used for either caricature or realistic puppet designs adds to the believability of the fantastical

creatures of Henson's worlds. As American puppeteer and scholar Paul McPharlin wrote:

[M]aterials may be used for their own visual and tactile qualities, glass, copper, and feathers for transparency, malleability, and lightness, either for fittingness to the design of for symbolic quality. (qtd. Tillis 199)

Therefore, if the 14-foot man-eating Griffin that appears in an episode of The Storyteller series and in the beginning credits of The Jim Henson Hour, is covered with feathers it is not only appropriate to this puppets design, but adds relative reality and credence to an image that the spectator may already possess about the mythical Griffin.

Additionally, Henson's use of such a wide variety of materials added versatility to his puppet designs and expanded the market for his creations larger. His company could be employed to make soft, cuddly, endearing puppets to sell commercial products or to make realistic, even grotesque creatures to solve special effects problems in films and television.

The added facial and body flexibility of both types of Henson's puppets, and advances in the design of the puppet's eyes along with their strong characterizations, have made many of their on camera reactions as expressive and "real" as the live screen actor's, especially extreme and comic television characters like Edith and Archie Bunker, the Cramdons and Rosanne and Dan Conner. Certainly, much of what the television viewer responds to and knows about a character like Archie Bunker is learned from his facial expressions. In Archie's case the viewer can actually read his feelings and opinions as they play across his face in closeup. They become a direct line into his interior landscape. His double-takes, asides, rolling eyes and lifted eyebrows give the viewer as much information about his feelings as the words he eventually manages to utter. Henson, therefore, in an attempt to exploit the conventions and intimacy that are

an established part of television viewing used materials that allowed his puppets to mimic what the live actor's face conveys when framed by the looking-in-from-the-outside perspective of the television screen.

This move away from the wooden puppet has not only occurred in recorded media puppetry, but live puppet theatre as well. Petr Bogatyrev noted:

Marionettes and other puppets from the modern theatre are often interesting because of the material they are made of. Puppet makers somehow find material that most clearly expresses the puppet's nature, and in the modern theatre they rarely resort to making dolls from wood. (58)

Henson found the materials that most "clearly express" his puppet's natures as puppets of television and his inquisitive mind.

There is another element unique to puppet performance that helped Henson and indeed all puppet performance to be accepted by the audience and, in Henson's case, then allowed the spectator to suspend their disbelief and utilize the television conventions they were familiar with. An audience member realizes that a puppet is not truly alive, but views it as both an object and a life within the confines of performance. Many puppeteers and scholars have written about this phenomenon and though they call it by different names, they all see it as an important element peculiar to puppet performance. Tillis investigated this phenomenon, which he referred to as "double-vision," in his thesis. After examining what other scholars have written and observed, he summarized double-vision in the following manner:

The process might be called "double-vision," for, in the course of the performance, the audience "sees" the puppet, through perception and through imagination, as an "object" and as a "life," in two ways at one time.

There is a constant tension within this double-vision created by the puppet, between the puppets as "object" and the puppets as "life": each is inescapable, and yet each contradicts the other. The puppet is and is not

that which [it] seems to be. Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Japan's most important Bunraku playwright, who helped to define the Bunraku style around the turn of the eighteenth century, writes:

"Art is something which lies in the slender margin between the real and the unreal. . . . It is unreal, and yet it is not unreal; it is real, and yet it is not real." (qtd. in Brecht 1988b: 706)

The art of puppetry most certainly lies in this "slender margin," for the audience's acknowledgement of the puppet, through perception and imagination, sets up a conflict between the puppet as object and as life. What might be called the ontological status of the puppet is always within the margin of doubt; its place in that margin is its most distinctive characteristic. . . . Thus, double-vision, with the puppet simultaneously being "object" and "life," is the defining characteristic of the puppet; it is also the basis for a synchronic explanation of the puppet, for double-vision exposes the audience's understanding of what is an object and what is life, creating the pleasure of a profound and illuminating paradox. (135-137)

As one can see, it was not only Henson's puppet design and attention to detail, but double-vision, and television's convention of extreme characterizations that lend relative (recorded media) realism to the works and puppets of Henson Associates.

As with so many other aspects of his work, Henson further augmented and emphasized double-vision by adding yet another layer to the audience's perception of the Muppet characters. Henson on The Muppet Show and in the Muppet's movies often stressed the duality (reality and unreality) of the characters by showing them either backstage, as on The Muppet Show, as their true selves juxtaposed against their performers/actors persona, (Dr. Bob, First Mate Piggy). In the films they often drop character and talk to each other not as Kermit and Piggy the characters that just met in the world of the film, but as Kermit and Piggy as the audience knows them from The Muppet Show and multiple guest appearances. Additionally, Kermit and company very rarely refer to themselves as puppets, but often as the animals they represent. In

an unaired episode of The Jim Henson Hour, "The Secrets of the Muppets," their puppetness was revealed, though they did not like it one bit and denied it to the end. Gonzo and the rest urgently ran around saying, (paraphrased here) "No, not the P word. He's not going to say the P word. (Gasp!)" Gonzo finally told the audience that Henson was not telling the truth nor in complete control of his faculties. Gonzo emphatically stated, again paraphrased, "Don't listen to him, he's demented." There is another example from The Muppet Show again involving the Great Gonzo, as Malmquist noted in his article:

There was the unforgettable time Fozzie decided to do a marionette act and ended up under his creation's control. And Gonzo thought the concept of puppets was ridiculous. "Who wants to watch dolls wiggle?" he wondered. "Wiggling dolls is weird. It might even be sick." Responds Kermit: "I didn't have the heart to tell him." (30)

In this way Henson delicately built his character's identities, and in true puppet tradition style, also pointed up and poked fun at the very conventions that made their existence possible.

One innovation in construction brought about specifically by the demands of Henson's medium is the "Henson stitch." Most Muppets are sewn together and a seam, even down the middle of the face, in the conventional puppet theatre would be of little concern since the audience would not be able to see it. This is not the case with the Muppets' medium. Therefore, Don Sahlin devised the Henson stitch:

He railed constantly (but good-naturedly) about Jim Henson's insistence that it was possible to sew two pieces of cloth together so it wouldn't show. Finally he found a way to do it, and down the middle of the nose of Kermit the Frog runs a seam that is as nearly invisible as such a seam can be. Don dubbed it the "Henson stitch." (Henson Associates n. pag.)

The fleece material's qualities (called Muppet fleece in a recent Puppeteers of America newsletter) themselves help to hide the seams as well.

The eyes have been called the window to the soul and are a very important tool of the film and television actor. It is equally important to Muppet performance for the overall look of the puppet onscreen, and as a tool of the puppet as actor. Henson Associates made this point perfectly clear:

Perhaps the single most important aspect of the Muppet look is the set of the eyes in relation to the nose and mouth. the Muppet people call this the "magic triangle": correctly positioned, it creates a central focal point essential to bringing a puppet to life in the eye of the camera--and therefore the viewer. (n. pag)

The "magic triangle" was also developed and refined by Don Sahlin.

The eyes of Henson's puppets are a very important factor in Muppet performance, and in the creature films as well, as Alex Thomson, cinematographer for films like Ridley Scott's Legend and Henson's Labyrinth, noted:

The main trouble with the muppets was getting light into their eyes. It's really strange, I didn't cotton onto it immediately, but unless you see their eyes, their expressions diminish a hell of a lot. That's why I had to try to train a lamp on them, which is something I did myself. For Hoggle and especially Ludo, I had to actually walk around with a hand held lamp which I kept shining in their faces to try to get it into their eyes. Of course, it's always a compromise, because when they look away, I'd need to have a light for each position. (Magid 69)

In the case of certain characters the design of the eyes has made a big difference in their performance and character development onscreen. This was the case with the Great Gonzo, as Dave Goelz noted:

Toward the end of the first season we were doing a scene on the backstage set and Jim said, "We need more energy from Gonzo." For some reason I over-reacted--it was just

one of those things that happen on set—and Gonzo got a big laugh. That began to crystallize something for me. Between seasons, back in New York, I built a new Gonzo with an eye mechanism that enabled him to look excited. That helped me develop the "up" side of Gonzo's character, and Jerry Juhl and the other writers picked up on it. (Finch 37)

Brian Froud began his pre-production sketches with the eyes of the characters. Froud and Henson felt the correct eye design was so essential to the characters in The Dark Crystal that some of the eyes used in the film took over two years to develop (Henson 1983, The World of 'The Dark Crystal').

Besides the importance of the correct eye design and placement, the puppeteer, as with all of Henson's use of technology, is the crucial element. The design and technology of the eyes are greatly enhanced by the craft of the puppeteer. This is the case with Miss Piggy, whose basic design does not include eyes that open and close. However, through the masterful manipulation of Frank Oz, the spectator is sure that Miss Piggy's eyes are functional, and that she frequently bats them at her amphibious heartthrob:

Viewers tend to forget that there is no real Kermit or Piggy, and in fact write in to say how much they love the way the shameless pig bats her eyes at her frog. In fact, Miss Piggy's eyes are unbattable: illusion is created by Frank's intimate and instinctive understanding of how a slight twist of the hand and a pregnant pause can convince a wide-eyed watcher that the world's favorite *cochon fatal* has just fluttered her lashes at the Frog of her Choice [sic]. (Henson Associates n. pag.)

Animal is another example of both design and manipulation combining to create the puppet's personality. Not only do Animal's eyes open widely and close completely to achieve multiple levels of excitement in the character, but his mouth is very large and runs all the way across his face. His bottom jaw is lined with large sharp fang-like

teeth. Animal's appearance, his costuming (which will be discussed later in this chapter), patterns of speech, usually single words, or sentence fragments, and his manipulation all add to his unique personality. As Finch noted, "In Oz's hands [Animal] is constantly panting, growling, flexing his wiry anatomy, chomping at the bit" (77). Henson always felt the expertise and training of the puppeteer, with the assistance of the monitors, was the most important part of Muppet performance. He stated:

Considering that many of the Muppets can only open their mouths, the angle at which the head is held, how it's moved in relation to the body, or where the puppet is looking creates the expressions. It's all in the way you hold a puppet. Five degrees of tilt can convey a different emotion. (Harris 31)

The color of the puppet is another consideration in its design. Certain colors seem to have universal meanings for people. In some puppet traditions the color of the puppet gives a great deal of information about its nature. This is the case in traditional Javanese puppet theatre where it can indicate the puppet's nature or mood. Steve Tillis noted the importance of color as an aspect of design in his thesis. He wrote:

This other variable is color. In certain traditions, the color of a puppet's face or costume can have communicative meaning. . . . General associations of certain colors with certain emotions, such as red with fury, are, no doubt, almost universal. But it seems rare for color to be codified to the degree that it is in the Javanese shadow theatre, where it has specific, rather than general, connotations. In that it can have such associations, however, and in that it can be subjected to codification, color is another, if not universal, variable of puppet design. (202)

Henson's puppet designs use color in the general sense. We see it in the red fiery design of a puppet like Animal, who is always on the brink of frenzy, and in the

mellow blue of a character like Zoot, who rarely speaks and is extremely mellow, almost to the point of being terminally asleep.

As previous noted, television and film have been strongly connected to the conventions of realism, and have played an important part in the puppetry of Henson Associates. As with Disney's animation, Henson Associates bring in live animals, observe their movement and then attempt to recreate it with their combination of puppetry, technology and film editing techniques. For the wide shots, walking and running shots of the members of OMD, live dogs are employed in the same way that "small people" were used for Yoda, Jen, Kira and Hoggle. When live dogs are used as in Labyrinth, or other Henson Associates' productions, great care is taken to match the puppet and the dog. For a puppet dog named Jo-Jo on The Jim Henson Hour, a live dog named Bamboo was used. They used photos and video tape of the live dog and sculpted the head. They made sure to match "the fur and the flesh to the foam and the fabric" (Henson 1989, "Secrets of the Muppets"). They even matched the color of the teeth. Once the head was complete, the mechanisms that facilitate the facial expressions were added. This certainly adds realism to the members of the OMD, since at times the puppet is replaced with the real dog, thereby exploiting the effects of animals in performance as well.

Many of the phenomena that occur in puppet performance such as transference and double-vision also occur when a spectator watches an animal on stage. The dog on stage does not act, he simply reacts as a dog would. The spectator interprets the dog's reactions as if it had an understanding that it is acting in a play, though the spectator also realizes, as he realizes the puppet is merely an object, that the dog is simply a dog and has no understanding of its role as actor. Bert O. States commented on this phenomenon in his book Great Reckonings in Little Rooms (1985):

Nonetheless, an animal following its own inclinations can be used to great effect on the stage. In productions of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* Launce's dog Crab usually steals the show by simply being itself. Anything the dog does--ignoring Launce, yawning, wagging its tail, forgetting its "lines"--becomes hilarious or cute because it is doglike. The effect here is comic because it is based on a *bisociation*, in Arthur Koestler's term. We have an intersection of two independent and self-contained phenomenal chains--natural animal behavior and culturally programmed human behavior. The "flash" at the intersection, equivalent to the punch line of a joke, comes in our attributing human qualities to the dog (a wagging tail is a signal that the dog understood; a yawn is a signal that it is bored); but beneath this is our conscious awareness that the dog is a real dog reacting to what, for it, is simply another event in its dog's life. (32-33)

Thus, Henson carefully combined design, materials, manipulation and film techniques to construct his characters and their life-likeness. He exploited, either by choice or chance, various conventions and phenomena already present in the theatre experience, thereby adding another layer to his puppet's realism and another ironic twist on how they effect the spectator's perception.

This intercutting of live animals or small people in costumes to give added freedom and therefore reality to the performance and image of the character as a live being is, in Paska's opinion, yet another element of illusionist puppetry that corrodes the "puppet-as-object." He wrote:

Like the illusionistic theatre, illusionistic puppetry has found its greatest potential for realization in the cinema, where the puppet can enjoy an ontological status equal to the objectified human actor. But in the cinema, with its aura of ambitiously heightened realism, the specificity of the puppet is often smothered by its frequency of exchange with mannequins, masks, automata, stop-action animation figures, dummies, robots and other staples of the animation, fantasy and horror genres. In the service of a comprehensive cinematic illusion, the image of the

puppet *character*, often created only in the cutting room as an assemblage of physically dissociated pieces, supersedes the value of the puppet as a discrete object or *thing*. (Compare this with the fabrication of a human character through the artificial combination of principle actor, body and stunt doubles, speaking voice, singing voice.) (62)

Henson definitely enlisted cinematic conventions and the cutting room to enhance his "illusionistic" (realistic) style of puppet performance. Instead of relying on "masks, mannequins . . . dummies and robots," as Harryhausen did for characters like Calibus in Clash of the Titans, Henson made his performers into puppets that were still dependent on the puppeteers artistry to bring them to life on the screen.

Henson Associates not only study animals to add realism to their puppet's design and movement, but use whatever source may make itself evident. While making The Dark Crystal, Henson used the hand movements of special effects man, Dick Smith, as a model for the hand articulation of the Skeksis:

The manipulative skills of Dick Smith, who lost a finger in a film set mishap over a decade ago, were studied by the engineers of the Skeksis's [sic] cable controlled four digit hands. (Chase 55)

Another manifestation of realism is seen in Henson Associates' scenic design. One example again is the swamp set for the "Blue Bayou" segment of The Muppet Show with Linda Ronstadt. The set was dressed in detailed realism utilizing both fabricated and "real" plants. As Finch noted:

the set incorporates three pools filled to a depth of several inches with water (they are lined with plastic material and sandbags) on which float leaves and real lily pads. The largest of the pools also accommodates a flat-bottomed rowboat furnished with oars and fishing rods. Elsewhere there are broad expanses of real turf, from which sprout real ferns, reeds and swamp grasses. Half a dozen cypress trees rise from this man-made bog. Their naturalistic trunks are made of plastic foam supported by wooden armatures. Real lichens nestle in their gnarled roots. The

overhanging branches are real too, but the Spanish moss that clings to them is synthetic. (138)

This kind of realism is seen in the sets of the creature films as well. In The Dark Crystal, the sets were dressed with real plants along side synthetic ones and others that were actually puppets. In both Labyrinth and The Muppet's Christmas Carol, entire towns were constructed in cinematic realistic detail to accommodate the puppets' scale. The towns were stylized to a degree, especially the one in Labyrinth, but they were still made to be complete and non-abstract in nature. Though the one in Labyrinth was certainly distorted in expressionistic style, as were many of the sets and devices used in The Storyteller anthology, by and large the sets contain the kind of detail common to television's looking-in-from-the-outside realism.

COSTUME

Costuming has been an important part of many live puppet theatre traditions, as Thomas Green and W.J. Pepicello noted:

In addition, body type, size of appendages, and the general proportions of the body parts give clues to the puppet character's nature. The same is true for the clothing worn by puppets, for example oversized bow-ties or undersized hats or pants. Traditional puppetry is rich in examples of this sort. (151)

Costuming is also an important part of the aesthetics of Henson Associates' puppetry where it can "give clues to the puppet character's nature," and transform the puppets into other theatrical characters. Costume is very important to any Muppet that is playing another theatrical character, like when Rowlf plays Dr. Bob in "Veterinarian's Hospital," or Miss Piggy plays First Mate Piggy in "Pigs in Space." They were also important in storybook episodes of The Muppet Show, when Kermit and company portrayed the Merry Men of Sherwood Forest, or Lewis Carroll's characters from Alice in Wonderland. Perhaps the most important use of costume in relation to the Muppets,

however, is as a clue to the nature and development of the persona of the puppet character. In the case of the "Whatnot," puppet costume becomes all important; it makes the puppet. As Amy Van Gilder, who was in charge of the London studio for four years noted, "For me, though, the most enjoyable thing was taking a 'whatnot' and turning it into a cowboy or an Arab or whatever the script called for" (Finch 56). In this case costume as well as eyes, teeth, and mouths, becomes important in defining the character. Other examples of costuming reflecting the essence of the puppet's character include Animal's metal collar and chain and Gonzo's various dare-devil outfits. In general, Henson's increased use of anthropomorphic puppets on The Muppet Show also increased the importance of costuming (Finch).

When it comes to costumes, the Queen of Costumes is the exquisite Miss Piggy. Her fully accessorized outfits themselves have become a symbol of her character. Henson Associates are well aware of this and give as much attention to her wardrobe as any other aspect of the production. Calista Hendrickson, the main costumer for The Muppet Show:

. . . points out, for example, that she dresses Miss Piggy as if Piggy thinks she is thirty pounds lighter, a touch that helps confirm the personality of a character who lives such a rich fantasy life that she is utterly unaware that she is overweight. "Miss Piggy doesn't try to hide her flaws," says Calista, "She doesn't see them." (Henson Associates n. pag.)

According to Finch:

It is Henson's policy that costumes should not be overwhelming, but--given a character like Miss Piggy-- Calista Hendrickson, the chief costume designer for *The Muppet Show*, has not felt herself to be under any serious constraint. Nothing is likely to overwhelm Miss Piggy. The challenge is to match her own soaring imagination. (50)

One need only watch one of the Muppet movies to see the importance of costuming to Piggy's character. For example, in The Great Muppet Caper, the pig, not unlike Ginger Rogers in the Rogers-Astaire films, has a different outfit for each scene she is in. She is dressed in everything from stylish suits with hats, bathing suits, and evening gowns to a motorcycle jumpsuit and helmet. Her shoes, usually heeled pumps, are always color coordinated to match each outfit. Many of her costumes are lavender in color, of course, and to Frank Oz's recollection she has never performed without her lavender gloves and emerald cut amethyst ring, which he noted was a gift she received "p.k., per Kermit" (Oz).

All of these costuming details enhance Piggy's ambitious, temperamental, vain, even unreasonable, yet vulnerable nature and mannerisms in the same way they have added to characters like Betty Davis' in All About Eve (1950) and Joan Collin's in Dynasty. Seeing Piggy with her hair perfectly coiffured, clad in stylish color coordinated outfits and bedecked in jewels and furs, as Davis' and Collin's equally temperamental characters were, helps the audience to quickly grasp and accept certain important aspects of her character and add realism to her onscreen persona.

Costuming is equally important in revealing and expressing personal characteristics of the puppets in the creature films, where costume can become a shared and understood symbol for the strange creatures of these fantasy worlds. An example of this is the costuming of the Skeksis in The Dark Crystal. The Skeksis wore multiple layered ornate clothing and "clunky rock jewelry" (Chase 55) that was a reflection of their station in their hierarchy. In one scene after the death of the ruling Skeksis, the Chamberlain, performed by Frank Oz, and the General challenge each other to a symbolic battle to see who will now be the head of the Skeksis. When the Chamberlain loses, he is stripped by the rest of the Skeksis and banished. The stripping scene is very

powerful and obviously as an important and integral part of Skeksis' life as the challenge and the battle, thus giving added insights, depth and reality to their world and their characters. Frank Oz commented:

'I think its a terrific scene. I love the idea, as Jim and Brian and I talked about, these Skeksis have layers and layers and layers of clothing. In essence its their jewelry, its their hierarchy. The more lace and jewelry and things, the prouder they are of themselves. (Henson 1983, The World of 'The Dark Crystal')

It becomes evident that costuming has been and will continue to be a important characteristic of the puppet in live as well as recorded media puppetry, as it is in live actor performances. As Tillis noted:

The material-signs of the puppet can, but need not always, include the costume of the puppet. Adachi quotes a Japanese costume-maker, "in Bunraku, the puppet is the costume, the costume is the character" (Adachi 1985: 119). This overstates the case somewhat . . . there are forty different types of heads for Bunraku puppets, carefully distinguished by their features. If the costume were, indeed, the character, there would be need for such elaboration of the puppets' heads. Costumes are, however, a fundamental part of most puppets' design[.] (200)

To summarize, it is apparent that costume enhances many aspects of Henson Associates' puppet performances. Like Henson's move to more anthropomorphic puppets to "immediately give the audience a handle, assisting them to understand" (Harris 31), costuming helps the audience by exploiting their knowledge of other television and film character types or stereotypes, thus strengthening the effects of transference, and giving additional clues and insights into the puppet's individual personalities.

CHARACTER

An important element of the Muppets onscreen is their diverse and well developed personalities and idiosyncrasies. In fact at the P of A Festival 93, Jerry Juhl and Dave Goelz (Gonzo, Traveling Matt) agreed that the establishment and consistency a Muppet's individual characters may be the most essential component of Muppet performance. Therefore, it is not surprising that muppeteers, like Oz, take a great deal of time filling in the biographical histories of many of their puppets, as a live actor trained in the Stanislavski method might do, even though the details of the characters' life may never be revealed onscreen. As just discussed, costume plays an important part in the characters onscreen representation, but mannerisms and fetishes are equally important and revealing. The fact that puppets, including Henson's, are reduced to the essence, or a caricature, of the characters they represent increases the importance of their visual image in general. Or as Veltrusky wrote:

The puppet performance is quite another matter in this respect. Here the stage figure and stage action have only such qualities as are needed to fulfill their semiotic function; in other terms, the puppet is a pure sign because all its components are intentional. (79)

Henson felt that the Muppets needed their own series to truly come into their own. He commented:

Sesame Street made us realize we would never be able to do what we wanted to until we were on regularly. . . . There's no way you can develop characters or get deep, complete personalities without doing them regularly over and over and over again. (Harris 28)

The Muppet Show allowed Henson Associates to do just that, since the program was seen in 106 countries, was dubbed in five languages and had a following of 235 million

world wide (The Man Behind the Muppets), giving the Muppet characters and Henson the international recognition and popularity they desired.

Examples of character traits and mannerisms abound in the world of the Muppets and can help the puppeteer as well as the audience get a firm grip on their individual personalities. Gonzo, who has already been used as an example of how design affects a puppet's personality, can be used here as well. Gonzo, as most people who watch the Muppets know, has an odd and insatiable attraction to chickens. This part of his characterization, as with so many other aspects of the Muppet empire, was a happy accident. The puppeteers did a great deal of ad-libbing while working on The Muppet Show. In one episode, Kermit and company are auditioning chickens for a dance number. None of the chickens turned out to be suitable for the number, but as they are leaving Gonzo (Dave Goelz) ad-libs, "Nice legs!," and so his fetish was born and another layer added to his character.

Gonzo's love of chickens along with the daredevil feats and love of danger that Juhl and the writers added became "hooks", as Juhl and Goelz referred to them, into Gonzo's character. Once these foibles were established and Gonzo's eye design modified, Goelz simply needed to "continued his [Gonzo's] inappropriate behavior" (Goelz).

Another example is, of course, the wide range of facial expressions that Kermit the Frog displays; his scrunched up face, his gulping in the throat, and when his is aroused to anger, which is not easy to do, or happiness, his frantic arm waving, head thrown back and wide open mouth. These mannerisms are every bit as expressive, extreme and "real" as the expressions of live actor television characters like Ralph Cramdon's fisted "to the moon Alice," Archie Bunker's double takes and Roseanne Conner's dead pan stinging come backs and pregnant pauses.

Since Henson's death, Steve Whitmire has had the thankless job of manipulating Kermit. Whitmire made it quite clear that he does not attempt "to sound exactly like Jim Henson" (Owen 36). In the Muppets latest Christmas romp, yet another version of A Christmas Carol, the trademark Kermit expressions were not in evidence to the degree they usually are in his performances. They were also missing in Jim Henson's Muppet-Vision 3D at Disney/MGM Studios theme park in Orlando Florida. Though the 3D effects were some of the most advanced and engaging ever viewed by the author, Kermit's time on the screen was kept to a minimum and his performance rather listless. This lack of his trademark expressions, though they may go unnoticed by the children in the audience, or adults who have not seen the Muppets in performance that often, to many fans the difference is quite noticeable. One cannot help but reflect during performance that Kermit was Henson's puppet from almost the very beginning of his career and Kermit's best performances were with Henson as his manipulator. However, knowing the level of professionalism of Henson Associates' puppeteers, in time Whitmire will, hopefully, become more relaxed and familiar with the puppet and his character and his performances will improve.

Miss Piggy, of course, is the most obvious example of complete characterization and how characters, not unlike Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author, can take on a life all their own, lives that even their creators did not expect. Miss Piggy started her life as just another pig in the chorus who stepped forward to sing a solo in a song entitled "Temptation." While singing she shamelessly flirted with Kermit, and thus their relationship began. There was no getting Piggy back into the chorus line and she soon emerged into the super glamor star she is today (An Evening with Jim Henson, Finch). Oz, as he does with most of the characters he plays, developed a complete biography for Piggy. This combined with her design, costuming and

mannerisms, including her sweet "Kissy, Kissy" voice and her devastating karate chops, have become symbols of her character that the audience has learned to expect. Once Piggy's character began to crystalize there was no stopping the ambitious Pig. As Finch noted:

Frank Oz's virtuosity and energy brought her to life, yet once she had been given the gift of life she grabbed for the strings of destiny with both lavender-begloved fists. . . . To bring a puppet to life, that puppet must be given a personality, and that personality becomes a self-contained and self-sustaining entity. Unless . . . everyone concerned . . . adheres to the behavior patterns dictated by that personality, the character will not ring true on screen. In Miss Piggy, Frank Oz and the writers created a character who passionately wanted to be a star; having done so, they had to give her the opportunity to prove herself. (Finch 34)

Besides her outrageous mannerism, design and costuming, guest appearances add to Piggy's, as well as the rest of the Muppets', character development and reality onscreen. One such example was Piggy and Kermit's appearance on the Academy Awards. When Piggy discovers that they are only there to explain the rules and not host the show, she is enraged. Since she has spent a great deal of money and time on her dress, hair and make-up, she refuses to leave the stage until she is given a closeup, which she eventually gets. This reenforces her reality onscreen in two ways. First, it is consistent with the persona that has been developed on The Muppet Show and in the Muppet movies thus adding to her character's continuity. Second, by having Piggy and the other characters refer to events that happen to them off screen, it contributes to the illusion that they possess complete, normal lives, just like the members of the audience, which of course they do not.

Vocal characterization is another important element in the development of the all important puppet character. Tillis identified speech as a separate sign-system in his

thesis. Here it will be included as another aspect of the puppet's character. There are three main points that Tillis' made about the speech sign-system that relates to the Muppets. First, as in traditional puppetry, Muppet performers employ "vocal characteristics . . . over and above its phonemic and syntactic structure" (Elam qtd. Tillis 238). All the muppeteers vary their "loudness, pitch, timber, rate, inflection, rhythm and enunciation" (Elam qtd. Tillis 238) to fit the Muppet they are currently manipulating. Frank Oz constantly exploits vocal characterization when performing Piggy. When Piggy wants something, he employs her sweet little "Kissy, Kissy" voice. When her ire is raised however, this facade is quickly dropped and Oz switches to her loud, strained voice that usually culminates in a hardy "Hi-Yaaa!" as some poor, unsuspecting Muppet receives a vicious karate chop from the temperamental star of Muppetland.

Besides contributing to the development of character, vocal variation is necessary, as in traditional puppetry, because a single puppeteer often manipulates several puppets in a single performance. Therefore, varying of vocal quality reduces confusion and helps the audience to identify the characters by their voice as well as their appearance. The best example of the varying of these vocal qualities would be to compare Fozzie's self-effacing voice to the raucous calls that issue from Animal, which are both performed by Frank Oz.

Tillis discussed the second aspect of vocal variation that concerns the Muppets, by quoting Frank Proschan, "exaggerated parodies of stereotypical speaking styles, elaborated far beyond what is necessary to differentiate the characters" (qtd. 241). This aspect of the speech sign is fully exploited by the Muppet performers. Animal serves as a fine example. His character, "who is part carnivorous beast, part physical

manifestation of pure libido" (Finch 77) is evident in his vocal characterization, as Finch made note of:

Even the way Oz has this uninhibited creature pronounce his own name--"An-i-mal," three distinct syllables, the last made to rhyme with "snarl"--is a statement of a kind of primitive life force. Several of Oz's characters are prone to rage, but Animal takes this to extremes. . .His appetites are so close to the surface as to be practically coincidental with it. ("Wo-man! An-i-mal like wo-man") They define his entire existence. (77)

Thus, Oz's (Animal's) vocal characterization becomes an "extreme parody" of the id driven wildman.

Finch's quotation above exposes the third variable of the speech sign that relates to the Muppets. Speech allows for "added attraction of fuller characterisation [sic] and entertaining repartee" (Bocek 191), as we have seen already in the Miss Piggy example.

The Stanislavskian approach to Henson Associates' puppet characters is employed in the creature films and for characters Henson Associates developed for other filmmakers, like George Lucas. For Yoda, as with his other characters, Oz took a very Stanislavskian approach to the role as he told David Hutchison:

I went through the script of Star Wars and Empire, writing down all the things that Yoda knew about Luke, what Luke knew about Yoda, what Yoda knew about Darth Vader, The Force and Obi-Wan. . .Then, I assembled all of these pages into a biography of Yoda. I did this research to help me become comfortable with him. I did all the things that *any* actor does when creating a character. You want to know about a character's pet peeves, what he likes to eat, what he knows about this person or doesn't know about that person.

The more you *know* about a character, the more comfortable you can be when you are actually shooting, since there are so many technical things to think about then, that you *can't* be working on character--you must have that already locked away inside. (82)

Therefore, again we see that while the technology was intriguing to Henson and contributed to the performances, it is the puppeteer/actor that must create the character fully and believably. Dave Goelz commented at the P of A Festival that all aspects of the puppet must ultimately contribute to the persona of the puppet. He stated that the "design must contribute to the character," including the "color, shape and hair" (Goelz). He went on to say that character often dictates the puppet's "movement style" and "speech" as well. Consistency of character is so vital in the opinion of Henson Associates that it has fostered a work ethic within the organization. That ethic, rule, or way of working, if you prefer, is that each puppet character is always performed by the same puppeteer "except when two" of that puppeteer's characters are "on stage at once" (Goelz). In fact, one of the many snags that developed in the Disney deal had to do with Disney's inability to understand that the relationship between a particular puppet and puppeteer was sacred in the minds of the Henson Organization. As David Owen noted in his article:

For example, it is virtually an article of faith at Jim Henson Productions that a puppet and its performer are indivisible. . . . Some of the Henson people seemed to feel that Disney had plans to dub voices and use puppeteers less as individual performers than as interchangeable animators. They were worried that in Disney's view Muppets were simply characters--an idea alien to Henson. (35-36)

It becomes very apparent that the puppeteer and his/her understanding of the puppet's character is the most important element of Henson's puppet characters, not as Schumann would attest, the technology. It is the performers responsibility, with the help of the designers and writers, to find the design elements, as with Gonzo's eyes, or fetishes as with his lust for chickens, to give the puppet individuality and life. The puppeteer needs to find these "pet peeves" or "hooks" to establish the puppet character

so it is not lost among the throngs of other puppets and live actors that it will share the screen with. This must be done, in Oz's opinions, before shooting begins because the technical demands once shooting starts are too great to allow the puppeteer to be preoccupied with character development.

SUBJECT MATTER

Henson's choice of subject matter followed a wide range of traditions seen in both live and recorded media puppetry. Sesame Street and Fraggle Rock are both meant to entertain children as well as educate children. Puppetry has been used for educational purposes in many countries of the world. In the United States in the 1930's as part of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Theatre project professional as well as educational puppet shows were produced. As Malkin noted:

As an adjunct to the performing troupes, puppeteers developed various kinds of educational extension programs. Only some of these activities were financed by the Federal Theatre. Work in educational puppetry was sponsored primarily by the W.P.A. jurisdiction. These projects involved helping hospitals, churches, museums, settlement houses, playground supervisors, and teachers' organizations make and perform with puppets on an amateur level. (1977, 182)

Puppetry has been used to educate in other countries as well. As Dezso Szilagyi noted:

The achievements of Hungarian puppeteers between the two World Wars were due to teachers rather than artists. Puppeteers inspired with educational aims visited the schools with puppets they had made themselves, putting on dramatized stories. (8)

Recorded media shows like Shari Lewis' usually teach some kind of lesson, or moral. As in one episode of "Lamb Chop's Play Along," in which "Lamb Chop wished she weren't so small and she was magically transformed into a life-sized costumed character and eventually grew to the size of a giant parade balloon. The segment ended

with Lamb Chop waking up to the realization that she's fine just the way she is" (Stockman 3).

The scripts for The Storyteller anthology were either derived from Greek myths or traditional folktales and the creature films, though not specifically based on known legends, were formulated with these types of works in mind. The concept for The Storyteller, according to Henson, came about in the following manner:

Some time ago we got to wondering what it would be like to combine ancient Eastern European folktales with the visual punch and pace of today's music videos, and that idea gave birth to our series The Storyteller, starring John Hurt. (The Jim Henson Hour)

Steve Barron, "who is a brilliant director, and did wonderful music videos" (An Evening with Jim Henson) worked on The Storyteller series and helped Henson realize his concept on film. The style, filming and overall look and mood of the segments created for The Storyteller, some of which were aired by NBC as part of The Jim Henson Hour and others that were not seen here, but in England, were very different from both The Muppet Show and the creature films. These segments were far more expressionistic and abstract. The shifting from the hearth of the Storyteller, played by John Hurt in all but the Greek myths series and his dog, to the action of the stories is handled in such a way that the spectators begin to feel that they are actually being taken along on a journey with Hurt that only exists as it is spoken. Time and space as we know it in everyday life is suspended in these stories. For example, in "The Heartless Giant" episode all the characters of the tale are looking down a well for the Giant's heart and the Storyteller's dog, who is not in the story, joins them and looks down into the well with them. In another episode when the lead female character has a flower and drops it, it does not land at her feet in the world of the tale, but at the paws of the dog in front of the Storyteller's hearth. When the Storyteller speaks of the people in one story

celebrating, the audience sees the celebrating masses passing by the Storyteller's window in silhouette.

Silhouettes, like shadow puppets, are used to solve the problems of showing the characters of the tales on their journeys. There are vases and urns decorated with drawing of people and animals which come alive and become characters in the tale. In "The True Bride" there is a tapestry behind the Storyteller. As he tells the story the True Bride walks across on the tapestry and experiences the events he is narrating. In this way the scenes of the tale and the telling are merged so that the flow of the story is uninterrupted and the spectator is drawn into the world of the tale and the world of the Storyteller as well. Besides the beautiful and flowing rhythm this gives the productions, it has a practical application as well. It eliminates many of the problems that would arise from trying to depict, in realistic detail, all the fantastic worlds and events of the folktales being told. As Jim Henson commented:

The stories we were telling were traditional folktales, and they could never be depicted literally because there's a lot of traveling and meeting giants and going to far countries. So we had to do a lot of storytelling through different shortcuts. There were a lot of interesting visual ways of telling the story. We did certain portions in silhouette, and other times we would just have the storyteller (played by John Hurt) *tell* the story instead of literally showing it. ("Miss Piggy went to Market" 20)

There are innumerable examples of live puppet performances that are based on myths, folk tales and fantasy in both modern and primitive (religious and popular) live puppetry. One example was at the Puppetry at the Public Festival in New York. Chinese puppet artist Yang Feng performed "episodes of the centuries-old Chinese folk stories featuring the Monkey King and the pig Ju-Ba-Jye" (Puppets at the Public).

In recorded media puppetry and puppet animation in fantasy/science fiction films myths, folk tales and the fantastic have always been exploited. One example of the exploitation of mythical characters is the fact that three of the best known fantasy filmmakers, George Pal, Ray Harryhausen and Jim Henson have all done their own versions of the Gorgon Medusa.

Throughout history puppetry has been the perfect medium to bring the fantastic to life, since the puppet does not need to don an extravagant costume or make-up to become a character like a witch, satyr, or devil, it is simply built that way. The puppet does not have to assume the role; he is custom made for it and exists as a life only in the performance of that role. It is one of the things puppets do best, and in most cases easier than live actors. The centuries long popularity and performances of live puppet shows like Dr. Faustus and Macbeth, which has been frequently and successfully performed by puppets, attests to their usefulness in solving casting problems. The use of puppets as a solution for technical problems in fantasy films, including the original King Kong all the way up to the modern Gremlins is further evidence of their utility in recorded media.

Puppets have been frequently used in variety shows, though rarely, if ever, have they been the ones running the show as they did on The Muppet Show and "Muppetelevision" segments of the Jim Henson Hour. Jurkowski commented on the puppets use in variety shows:

Trick puppets complemented the popular theatre productions. They included metamorphosis puppets and circus puppets, and were usually presented at the end of the performance. . . . These were not dramatic characters; rather they skillfully imitated circus acts. However, in the nineteenth century some puppeteers (Brigaldi, Bullock) used trick puppets to create a special kind of theatre, the variety puppet show (Speaight 1955: 242-260). In this

theatre, trick puppets were complemented by many of the elements of live variety shows. (1983, 139)

Henson's use of puppetry for the traditional purposes of parody and satire have already been discussed in chapter two. Therefore, it is clear that Henson's subject matter was not so much innovative as traditional in nature though often the traditional aspects of his subject matter was not appreciated. For instance, many of The Muppet Show skits were based on the same kind of ridiculous and strange violent humor seen in folk puppet shows like Punch and Judy in England, Kasperek in Czechoslovakia, and Russia's Petrushka, where the puppet characters may be beaten, squashed, or in Henson's case, blown-up. In some episodes the puppets literalized songs, as they did in the very beginning on Sam and Friends. One such instance was a skit built around "You Get Under My Skin," in which a monster puppet eats another puppet and we can see the eaten puppet trying to escape from under the larger monster puppet's skin. Another example was "Take All of Me," in which one Whatnot puppet sings the song to another while removing all of its body parts and presenting them to its beloved. Allen Malmquist commented on this as a shortcoming that occurred primarily in the first season of The Muppet Show. He wrote:

Early shows relied on bad jokes, the appearance of bizarre creatures, and reverse role skits, such as Ruth Buzzi singing *Can't Take My Eyes Off of You* to the trollish Sweetum. There was also a constant fall-back to simple, violent gags--count how many times little creatures got eaten or blown up in the first season.

But spurred on by the top-flight writing of Jerry Juhl and his staff, and the ad-libbing of Jim Henson and his equally talented crew of puppeteers, THE MUPPET SHOW changed. (30)

Henson's inclusion of such skits was simply not a case of under developed writing, but of utilizing the conventions of traditional puppet subject matter which often includes extreme, comic violence and total absurdity.

Therefore, while Henson often used subject matter that had proved itself throughout time, in different cultures and puppet traditions, his innovation was bringing them alive through a modern medium, television. What made it interesting and in many cases seemingly seamless, like Kermit the Frog's face, was his understanding of the medium and his thorough exploitation of twentieth century recorded media technology.

REALISM AND THE MUPPETS

Throughout this paper references have been made to the conventions of television realism that Henson used and adapted. At this time, further clarification is needed, as well as additional discussion of how and why this realism effects the spectator. What is meant by realism in this instance is the conventions of television realism that the spectator has experienced through years of exposure to the medium. In the opinion of solo puppet artist Roman Paska, there are two basic groups of puppet artists the "illusionists" or realists like Henson and all cinematic puppet artists and the "primitivists" like himself and Schumann. Paska wrote:

The most visible sign of the puppet's ongoing relationship with the theatre in the west is its thirst for realism.

Realism in the theatre means the illusionistic tradition (referring to the illusion of reality or the real), a tradition that began with the development of perspective and the Italian proscenium stage and exploded with the fusion of performance and photography in the cinema. The cinema promptly usurped the role of the theatre as the principle purveyor of illusory reality; since when, the theatre has chosen to survive by letting go.

Recent trends in puppetry, like the "theatre of objects" movement, represent the most recent in a series of efforts by puppeteers to liberate their art from mimetic narrative and the illusionistic tradition. But the majority of puppeteers, like the majority of actors, cling nostalgically to illusionism in character representation.

(61)

What Henson did was similar to what the puppet builder does to create a dramatically effective puppet. He took simplified, yet extreme television and film emotional reactions and stylized them in his puppet performance. For example, in a Laurel and Hardy movie, when they are frightened, they may indeed shake in their shoes, or when a cartoon character is scared his entire body will shake and quake. Henson used these conventions to his advantage. In The Muppet Movie, Mel Brooks' mad German scientist is about to fry the amphibious hero's brain. Kermit, who is facing the camera practically straight on, shrinks down and starts to shake with fear. The audience interprets this as a fearful reaction, not so much because one may shake after a frightening event, but because he/she has learned the meaning of that onscreen convention. Another example of the live actor screen convention utilized by Henson is the image of the wild, mad man's eyes, often done in closeup in suspense films like Alfred Hitchcock's and television shows like The Twilight Zone and The Fugitive. Henson parodies this kind of closeup frequently for his monster puppets, especially Animal. There are many examples of tight closeups on Animal's face as he preforms his trademark physical facial reactions, which include the complete closing then wide opening of his eyes and mouth before uttering one of his monosyllabic lines, or eating some nearby piece of furniture or stage dressing.

As discussed earlier, one of the reasons the eyes of the puppets, especially in the creature films, are so important is because of their human-like ability to register emotional reactions. That is why Henson Associates constructs the puppet's eyes with simplified versions of many of the movement capabilities of the human eye. As Henson noted in The World of 'The Dark Crystal' video:

The eye movement was created and operated in a variety of ways. Some of it was radio controlled, some was operated by cables. We usually had them going side to

side. We usually built in a blink, a widening and narrowing of the eye. So much of the personality is dependent on that. And you read the changes in emotion through the eyes.

Therefore, as with so many other aspects of his puppetry, Henson chose to exploit the conventions of recorded media reactions to engage the spectator quickly and deeply. It is his puppets' ability to effectively portray (mimic) these conventions of realism that has made them believable to audiences, and in many cases likable and human. Henson obviously saw his puppets' ability to mimic humans as a benefit, but other puppeteers do not agree. Paska wrote:

Narrative, mimesis, representation: all "orthodox" aspects of puppet theatre in the West. Little human simulacra illustrating human quirks through the imitation of human poses and gestures. Mimicry and parody as the twin peaks of the puppeteer's art.

The bright side of the picture has been the reasoned defense of puppetry on naturalistic principles: Puppetry as a 'humanistic,' socially redeemable practice because, through the representation of human foibles, the puppet holds the mirror up to man.

The shady side: the parodistic puppet shares its bed with trained monkeys, pigs, dogs, elephants, dancing bears and every other circus animal that relies on human mimicry for theatrical effect.

Only the puppet is an *uber-monkey*, being more high tech. (60)

Brian Henson clearly sees the "bright side" as one of the levels that puppets, and the Muppets, function on. He stated:

They (the spectators) can't be objective. . .(about) bigotry, racism, or any of that stuff (when actors perform) . . .because it relates too closely to them—they're blind to a lot of it. But I think you can play relationships between characters with puppets. You can be sure that your message gets across. (Martinez)

The Stanislavskian approach to character taken by muppeteers like Oz also contributes to the manifestation of realism in Henson Associates works, or in Paska's view, all "illusionist" puppetry, and especially puppetry in the cinema. He wrote:

In the contemporary world of puppetry, puppeteers differ mainly in their attitude towards character. "Illusionists" (or "illusionaries") focus on representation, treating their puppets as independent characters; "primitivists" ("primitives") focus on presentation, treating their puppets as interdependent objects (sacred or otherwise).

Like the illusionistic theatre, illusionistic puppetry has found its greatest potential for realization in the cinema, where the puppet can enjoy an ontological status equal to the objectified human actor. (62)

The difference between the "illusionist's" approach to puppetry and the "primitivist's" is much like the difference between live theatre practitioners who follow the "method" and those who are trained in the improvisational manner. As with live theatre practitioners both groups feel, to different degrees and extremes, that their way is the most appropriate, or only way, just as artists like Schumann feel their form of puppetry is superior to Henson's.

Another proof that Henson Associates productions, as well as other fantasy films, by and large must work within the established boundaries of learned conventions of television and film realism emerged during the preview screening of The Dark Crystal. Gary Kurtz recalled:

One problem in fantasy films is that everybody speaks English, or if the movie is set in a foreign country, everybody speaks English with an *accent*. It's a convention of the medium. The only film to break away from this tradition in any significant way was *Quest for Fire*--and on a lesser scale, *Caveman*. *The Dark Crystal's* script specified languages other than English for some characters. . . . A version of ancient Egyptian was selected

for the evil Skeksis, but when we previewed the picture, we discovered that the audience was unhappy with it.

There wasn't anything in the scenes that you missed by *not* understanding the dialogue. Everything that you perceived visually--the attitudes of the characters and the intonations--conveyed the scenes' meaning. . . . But the audience felt that they were missing something, that maybe there was something else in the dialogue that they weren't seeing visually. It bothered them. So, we relooped the dialogue and changed it into English. (Hutchison 1983, 19)

During the screening in fact, Henson and the representatives of Universal Pictures were "stunned by the number of walkouts and the overwhelmingly negative audience response" (The Cable Guide 5). The film was never a big success. If there were any low points in Henson's career, using the criteria of fiscal returns and popularity as a basis of measurement, two of them were the creature films, though The Dark Crystal did eventually make back the money spent on it (Falk). Though Henson enjoyed the experiences, loved the films and never regreted making them, their inability to attract a large adult audience contributed to Henson's works retaining their children's entertainment label. The early death in America of The Jim Henson Hour and The Storyteller segments was another low point for the same reasons. These segments were skillfully and beautifully executed and were certainly sophisticated enough to engage the adult audiences that patronize fantasy/science fiction films and have endlessly supported television shows like Star Trek. Many of the puppets, like the little demons in "The Soldier and Death" episode were of the darker style of the creature films. These segments still contained the detailed of television realism, all the way down to the demon's little cloven feet, claw like finger nails and fang teeth, but as discussed earlier, they were presented in a more expressionistic style. Since the series was placed in a traditionally poor time slot for NBC and was cancelled so quickly, (though it recieved critical acclaim and six Emmy nominations), we will never know if this darker side of

Henson's work would have lasted or made a significant impression on television puppetry in America and therefore, the attitude of Americans toward puppetry in general. However, what we do know, is even Henson could not work too far outside the conventions of recorded media realism as the failure of the original Dark Crystal sound track proved. It would seem that Henson, like other filmmakers in main stream American film, must subject and adjust their works to the established conventions and codes of recorded media.

Another purpose, or reason, for the detailed realism in Henson Associates' productions is again borrowed from the fantasy film genre. It helps to lure the audience into the strange worlds of these films. The mundane realism helps the audience assimilate the bizarre events to come. George Pal commented on this aspect of his film The Time Machine:

It is very difficult to believe it, that the time machine works, but if you put it in the past, around the turn of the century, and then you travel through time, and you show the change of women's clothes, which was a very easy way to tell the change, war, etc., people say, "Hum, that's happened." Because you go into the distant future where the little blond people are terrorized by those ugly Morlocks from down below, you know, that is a little far-fetched, but I think that was the key to it. (The Fantasy Film Worlds of George Pal)

Henson shared Pal's belief that the ordinary could be used as a vehicle to draw the spectator into the far-fetched. As noted in relation to the Gelflings function in The Dark Crystal:

Hence the humanlike qualities of the gelflings that are heroes of the tale. Henson grants that they aren't as flamboyant as many other characters, or even as interesting. "But they serve as a bridge to the audience," he said, stressing that their very ordinariness helps to

orient the viewer in the bizarre and sometimes
nightmarish "Dark Crystal" world. (Sterritt)

Clearly, Henson's most outstanding innovation, besides his exploitation of a through the lens monitor system, was his ability to integrate conventions from many different styles of live and recorded puppetry as well as conventions of television realism. He was willing and eager to try different things. If they proved unsuccessful he was not deterred from continuing to experiment, explore and push the parameters of his medium and its conventions.

4. THE MUPPETS AND OTHER RECORDED MEDIA PUPPETRY

There is a great deal of difference between other puppet films and the films of Henson Associates. The most important being that most, if not all, other puppet films are stop-motion instead of live action. Many of the puppet films that are not stop-motion are simply recordings of live performances that were not adapted specifically for recorded media, but as with the early television performances of Baird and Tillstrom, designed for live theatre and then committed to film for posterity's sake. As we have seen, some puppet filmmakers like Trnka feel that live-action films should be left to those who do them best, or at least most effectively, easily and cheaply, meaning the live actor. But because of Henson's early orientation to puppetry on live television, his approach has always been live action in nature. This fundamental difference affects many of the aesthetics that appear in the finished product, including the puppet design, type and manipulation techniques employed. These differences as well as the elements that are shared by both Henson Associates and other puppet films will be the focus of this chapter.

Frame-by-frame photography (stop-motion) or "trick-films" have been made since the movie camera and flexible film replaced the rigid plates used in the late 1800's.

As Holman wrote:

Soon the possibilities of using the motion picture as a public entertainment device were exploited. The success of the new medium spread rapidly, creating a demand for entertainment films. Among those which delighted audiences were the "trick-films," in which optical effects and cinematic sleight-of-hand were used to produce magical illusions. A favourite technique involved stopping the camera in the middle of an action with the camera shutter closed, then moving the actor to a new position on the set and continuing the filming. When the film was projected the actor appeared to pop magically from one spot to another. Some of the best examples of

this and other trick-film techniques can be seen in the films of Georges Melies and the Pathe brothers. Since the basic technique of animation was known from earlier animated drawings it was a logical step to introduce the practice of exposing the film one frame at a time to produce trick-films of inanimate objects moving. (20-21)

According to Holman, the first puppet films were a natural growth from these early trick-films. He noted, "In 1908 Arthur Melbourne Cooper, an Englishman, produced a film using live actors and trick-film techniques called *Dreams of Toyland*. Children's toys were animated to produce what may have been the earliest example of puppet animation" (21). Therefore it is clear that the stop-motion puppet film has a long history.

Just as these early filmmakers exploited and explored the advantages of this new medium, Henson exploited and explored the advantages of the new medium of his day, live television. This basic difference between live-action and stop-motion creates a great difference in the design of the puppets used. Henson made his puppets out of soft flexible materials that were best suited to his medium, utilizing materials that would allow for the tiny movements that mimic the facial expressions of the live actor. These materials could also help hide seams that would be of no concern in the puppet theatre but can be clearly and easily seen by the unforgiving eye of the television camera and therefore the spectator. In stop-motion puppet films, however, the puppets used are usually of three basic types or designs as Holman noted:

The first, which might be called the animated toy, has a body carved or moulded from solid material such as wood or plastic, with flexible or jointed arms, legs, and head added. These are usually painted, with costume details added for decoration. George Pal's puppets were of this type. The second are those puppets which have articulated armatures within a padded body. . . . The costume covers the padding, and the exposed hands and face are made of wood, rubber, or plastic and are painted

to resemble flesh. . . . These are sometimes referred to as "classical" puppets, or as "Czech" puppets since this has been the type generally used in Czechoslovakia. The Third type is the moulded puppet, which is made by applying a flexible rubber or plastic body over an articulated armature. (56)

As mentioned earlier, the puppets in Trnka's films had one wooden facial expression that they maintained throughout the entire film. Trnka created the illusion of different facial expressions through the use of lighting and camera angles. George Pal, on the other hand, had multiple heads made for his puppets, each forming a different vowel shape. The different heads would be changed between frames. David Pal, who worked on several of his father's films as a puppet animator commented:

This is how the cycle heads that my father invented originally worked. They were all on different vowels and you would replace the heads with each sequence that you wanted to make a word, or a voice. (The Fantasy Film Worlds of George Pal)

Clearly, none of these puppet designs resemble Henson puppets in any significant way. Though Pal's innovation gave his puppets a wider range of expressions, they still lacked the life-likeness and intimacy that Henson Associates' puppet designs possess. Henson's choice to utilize variations on hand puppets in itself added intimacy and charm to their performances. As Steve Tillis noted:

The hand puppet, with its diminutive stature, can scarcely help but seem charming and playful. We have seen that the psychological associations arising from its toy-like size can have a substantial impact upon its audience. We have also seen, in our English consideration of the hand-puppet Punch and Judy performances, how Punch is allowed great liberty to say and do things that would be unsupportable in live [actor] theatre; they might be equally unsupportable if said or done by puppets of greatly larger size. (196-197)

Actual objects have been utilized as "puppets" in many stop-motion puppet films. As Holman noted:

In addition to humanoid figures, puppet animators have turned to an incredible variety of materials and objects for use as "puppets." Sticks, stones, match boxes, hardware, and plasticine clay have all been animated. The master of the was Starevitch. Tin cans, egg shells, pieces of straw, and scraps of rags come to life to attend the devil's ball in *The Mascot* (1934), where they dance to an orchestra of stuffed toys, rubber balls, and balloons. An actual chickens skeleton with the bones threaded on flexible wire is a masterpiece of the grotesque, and a set of crystal wine goblets which hop about on spindley legs provide a classic piece of imagery as they fight by smashing themselves against one another. Satan, the host, is knifed by an apache puppet and bleeds sawdust, while the apache throttles a stuffed monkey who had just abducted a drunken toy ballerina. (58-60)

Though Henson often builds puppets that look like objects, several examples include Favog from "The Land of Gorch" segments that was designed to look like a sacrificial altar and Marjorie, "The All Knowing Trash Heap" of Fraggle Rock, he has not, in the works viewed by the author, used everyday objects such as those listed above or utilized by live puppet theatre performers like Zaloom. Though in Henson's early live actor films and shorts like The Cube and Timepiece objects like doors, clocks, bones, and rooms play important roles in the plots, this practice is not apparent in his puppet works. Henson does parody, in effect, the use of such mundane objects by making puppets that are anthropomorphized versions of mundane items, such as singing vegetables and other food items, though none of them possess the grotesque, macabre effects of a dancing chicken skeleton, or as Jan Svankmajer used in his film, Alice, pieces of meat that move of their own volition from one cooking pot to another.

Another aspect of live puppet theatre that has carried over into the puppet film is the use of transformations. Puppets are a great asset in subject matter where characters must be transformed into other beings. Svankmajer uses transformations in Alice to great effect. In the croquet scene the croquet balls are actually pin cushions with pins sticking out of them. They are then transformed into small furry live animals that appear to be hedgehogs that proceed to wander off. The croquet mallets are flat cardboard cut-out puppet flamingos. Alice's flamingo mallet turns into a actual live chicken when it is her turn to play. These types of transformations are rarely seen in Henson's works. However, in "Hans My Hedgehog," an episode of The Storyteller, every night the enchanted Hans literally sheds his hedgehog skin and every morning he dons it again to become his beastly self. He does not turn into a real hedgehog, however, but a humanette puppet like the Heartless Giant character mentioned in chapter two. More traditional forms of transformation, like the one in Neville Tranter's solo puppet performance, in which an old, lecherous transvestite doctor character transforms into a huge black spider, are rarely evident in the works of Henson.

There are many basic elements and concerns that are shared by both Henson Associates and other puppet filmmakers. They include the scale of the set, the use of the detailed conventions of realism, lighting, sound and the camera. The scale of the set in relation to the puppets' as we have seen, is very important. The sets for Dinosaurs were built to accommodate the girth and height of the Sinclairs and their friends. The towns and villages in Labyrinth and The Muppets Christmas Carol were slightly scaled down for the puppets. This same kind of scaling down particularly must be done for the sets and props of the stop-motion puppet films, since the puppets used are usually quite small. This scaling down is also a component of many live puppet performances as well.

Lighting is an important element of any theatrical production to set mood and make sure the spectator sees what he/she is suppose to see. In both Henson's and other puppet films "There is generally a greater need to use lighting to emphasize depth and texture in the puppet set" (Holman 68). As you will recall, this is why director of photography Oswald Morris used such high light levels for The Dark Crystal and Alex Thomson had to hand light the puppet's eyes in Labyrinth. Many stop-motion puppet filmmakers, like Trnka, whose puppets' faces remained unchanged throughout the film, used lighting to reflect emotional changes in the puppet character and overall film.

Holman wrote:

Because the dramatic abilities of puppets are limited compared to live actors, the use of lighting to augment dramatic effects is an important consideration in emphasizing the significance of the actions. It is useful to study the films of Trnka for examples of dramatic lighting in its best applications. In *The Emperor's Nightingale* one may note that darkness is as important as light is setting the maintaining the mood of many scenes. The sequence in which Death comes to claim the Emperor is played in half-light or less. Death would be less menacing and the Emperor less pathetic if the set were fully lighted [sic]. The morning scene which follows is flooded with bright light, signifying the Emperor's new outlook and his appreciation of life. (68)

Though Henson Associates' puppet faces are far more animated than either Trnka's or Pal's, they still need to be lit properly and carefully if the desired effects are to be captured on film.

The stop-motion puppet filmmaker has far less freedom than the live-action filmmaker when it comes to camera movement and angles. Holman observed:

Since the frames of film are being exposed individually the puppet animator does not have the live-action cameraman's freedom to pan, tilt, or move while the camera is running. On the contrary, the animation camera

must be absolutely stationary during the time of exposure since movement during the relatively slow shutter time would blur the picture and would cause the image to shake when projected. If camera movement is required--for example, panning to follow a puppet walking across the set--the moving of the camera must be done gradually between exposures. . . . Additionally, since the puppet and the set are miniatures the camera's motion must be scaled-down correspondingly. An additional complication may arise if the camera motion is too quick: in live-action film the background is usually blurred during fast camera movements although the audience rarely notices this; in animation the background in each frame is sharp and clear. A quick camera movement can produce an annoying staccato-effect known as "strobing." . . . It comes as no surprise that camera-movement in puppet films is the exception rather than the rule. Usually the camera is placed securely before the set and remains stationary during the scene; this results in a somewhat static quality in puppet films as compared to contemporary live-action films. (64-66)

This is not to say that different stop-motion puppet filmmakers have not found ways to adapt camera movement to great effect, but most keep camera movement to a minimum. Henson, of course, did not share this problem. Additionally, by using live actors in suits, live animals, and remote control puppets or puppet faces, instead of cable controlled ones, as he did for Hoggle in *Labyrinth*, he increased the amount of freedom and camera choices open to him.

While, Henson used his monitor system as a way to check for continuity in his productions, the stop-motion puppet filmmaker, at least of the past, did not have this advantage. His/her only record other than "notes, script, or story-board" (Holman 51) was memory. The stop-motion puppet filmmaker historically has been far more "isolated-in-time" (Holman) than a live-action puppet filmmaker like Henson.

The sound track and vocal characterization can be an important element of the puppet performance. The dichotomy set up between the human voice and the

object/puppet has been the subject of much research and debate, however, this investigation will not spend a great deal of time rehashing it. Instead, it will be concerned only with the comparison of how sound and vocal characterization are used in Henson's and other puppet films, as well as their effects on the spectator. The important thing to remember is that for centuries puppet artists have found it necessary to modify their voices to make it suit the stature and personality of the caricatured puppet.

Though speech is not always required in puppet performance, it allows for "added attraction of fuller characterization and entertaining repartee" (Bocek 191), making them seem more complete and real to the spectator. Trnka, in his first puppet films, did not have the puppets speak, but soon realized that speech could add a great deal to his films and puppet characters. Bocek wrote:

After experiences when filming Old Czech Legends, to which [puppet dialogue] had added such a powerful effect, he could not resist the temptation to develop it further. He now realized that he needed to make his puppets speak in order to infuse new life into them. Prior to this film he had used words only with caution. (191)

Certainly, speech was not an important element of any film in the silent era, but with the advent of sound puppet filmmakers had yet another way to engaged the audience, to give their puppets added appeal and yet another handle that the spectator could grasp and relate to quickly. Many puppet filmmakers still kept speech to a minimum. George Pal in his Puppetoons usually kept the puppet dialogue simple and reduced to a minimum letting the images of the puppets on the screen do the talking for him. He frequently used a narrator type of arrangement, as Henson did in The Dark Crystal. Musical numbers abound in the puppet works of Pal, Henson and others. The

puppet, many puppet artists have commented, has a special affinity with music and the musical instrument. Hanna Tierney wrote:

And, then, there is also its [the puppet's] peculiar affinity with music.—A puppet is, after all, a mechanical instrument. On a musical instrument the musician plays sounds that have previously been organized into melody; with a puppet the puppeteer plays movement that had previously been organized or choreographed into expression and gesture. Theoretically one could compose the gestures of a group of puppets into concerti, sonatas, or even symphonies, following the principles of music.
(30)

Indeed, Pal seemed quite aware of this fact and much of his puppet animation included the animation of puppet instruments, as in "Tubby the Tuba" and "Jasper in a Jam." Henson often has his puppets playing instruments and performing as musicians and, of course, he also has his fanciful animated instrument puppets like the Mup-a-phones. In the Starevitch film Holman identified as The Mascot, Starevitch also has his eerie puppets playing instruments.

There are two major points that have to be addressed by the puppet filmmaker in relation to puppet dialogue and the rest of the sound track as well, synchronization and whether the puppet's mouth will move when he speaks. In the case of Henson the puppets' mouths move with the same kind of precision seen in the performances of Shari Lewis' soft faced puppet Lamb Chop. During the filming of The Dark Crystal the puppeteers, who did not always perform the final voice used in the film (as was the practice on The Muppet Show, Sesame Street, and other television productions), performed the dialogue, then the final sound track was taped and added in post-production. The practice of adding the sound track in post-production gives the puppet filmmaker added freedom and reduces the chances of time lags between the action and

the sound. Timing and synchronization of dialogue can be such a problem that many puppet filmmakers avoid it entirely, as Holman noted:

If timing of the sound is not critical, it may be preferable to shoot the film first and record the sound later. If the sound is to be post-recorded, the animator has considerably more latitude in handling the puppets during the filming, and greater spontaneity is likely to result.

In addition to the problem of synchronisation, the introduction of dialogue into a puppet film raises the question of whether or not the puppets' mouths are to move as they speak. If they are, either articulated jaws of multiple heads with differing mouth positions must be used. If not, the effect may look stilted or the audience may have difficulty determining which puppet is supposed to be talking. . . Considering all the problems inherent in using dialogue in puppet films, many animators have concluded that it is simpler and often more effective to eliminate dialogue altogether and rely on pantomime, music, and sound effects to convey meaning. It is probably easier for the audience to derive meaning from the film by watching the action on the screen rather than listening to involved dialogue. (71-72)

Though it may be true that leaving out puppet dialogue solves many problems, problems that can be solved as Svankmajer and Pal did with narration, Holman's statement that it is easier for the audience to simply watch to "derive meaning from the film," is not supported by Henson's experience with the original sound track of The Dark Crystal. Whatever the draw backs, dialogue not only adds depth of character, but helps the audience understand the action on the screen and, in some cases, the motivations for the character's actions as well.

As mentioned throughout this investigation, the puppet does not live by the same rules as a live person does. For instance, when Punch beats his wife or his dog to death the act is not seen as negative, but comical. The puppet is allowed certain licence for extravagances that might not be accepted if performed by the live actor. Henson

was well aware of this fact. As Jane stated, the puppet can "get away with anything" (The Man Behind the Muppets). However, Holman and Jane make another point that is important, it is because these puppets are abstractions, or caricatures that they have greater license than live performers. Holman elaborated further on this point and on the importance of design consistency as one of its components. He wrote:

If Punch beats his dog to death on stage the audience laughs not because they are cruel, but because it is understood that this is merely an expression of Punch's testy temperament and the death of the dog is incidental to the point of the episode; it is equally well-accepted that the dog may come to life in a later scene and bite Punch from behind. Such actions are disturbing only if one forces a conscious return to reality, or an element in the drama is so grossly out of context that the spell is broken. (For example, the introduction of a very realistic stuffed dog instead of the puppet-dog in the beating scene.) (72)

Therefore it is important for the style of the complete production, (including sets, puppets, etc.), or "context" as Holman called it, to be consistent and quickly established so the spectator can orient himself/herself and know what set of conventions will be used in the performance. This holds true for Henson or any puppet filmmaker. The establishment of "context," or continuity, can give hints to the nature of the characters themselves. While Holman commented that "puppets are not likely to become Stanislavsky method-actors, the motivations for what they do and how they conduct themselves are derived from the situations in which they are depicted," we have seen that muppeteers in fact do use the method approach and it has added greatly to their credibility, reality and consistency of context.

In many puppet films viewed by the author the actual personality of the character, or individual puppet, is not as important as its function in the overall work, or the stereotype it represents. For instance, in Alice, the spectator learns little about the

Mad Hatter and the Door Mouse as individuals. They continue to carry out their actions no matter what happens around them and that appears to be their function, the purpose of their characterization. As Cohen commented:

He [Svankmajer] sees the tea party as the absurdity of life in Eastern Europe, or anywhere a bureaucracy gives people the runaround. East Europeans will probably catch more of Svankmajer's hidden references than a Western one, but one will not be confused if they don't catch them. (47)

This is true of some of the works of Starevitch as well, but in Henson's work the character is often all important. Though Paska infers that this emphasis on the character is apparent in all illusionist and cinematic puppetry it does not seem to be the case, or at least is an over statement, in relation to some of the surreal early silent puppet films and even some of the puppet films of George Pal. In Tulips Shall Grow (1942), which is basically one of Pal's puppetoon anti-war films, the individual characteristics and details of the puppet lovers, Jan and Janette's, personal lives are not centrally important, in fact we know little about them except that they are young and in love. What is important is the innocence, hope and rebirth that they, and the tulips, represent in the film.

There is another element that many, if not all, these puppet films have in common, the use of detailed realism. As we have seen in Henson's works, the conventions of television, or recorded media, play an important part in the overall effect of the film on the spectator. The use of this realism can help to draw the spectator into the strange events and places to come, as well as giving he/she clues to the characters and the world of the production in general, clues he/she needs to gain a quick understanding of the work and adapt to its format, or conventions.

In many cases "the details and degree of finish given to puppets sets and stage-properties must be better than that necessary for live-action sets. Since the camera will be quite close to the set, any flaws will be enormously magnified on the screen" (Holman 62-63). Additionally, "stage properties must also be made to scale; and their design in accord with the style of the film" (Holman 63). The expense and time involved to create these sets and props for stop-motion puppet films can be proportionally as expensive as those constructed, or created by computers for Henson's works, since many puppet filmmakers work on very limited budgets. Czechoslovakian puppet filmmaker, Bretislav Pojar, recalled the detail and expense of the motorcycle he used in his film, A Drop Too Much:

Pojar mentioned that the miniature motorcycle used in *A Drop Too Much* was built with such attention to detail that it cost nearly as much as a real machine. (Holman 63)

The realism in these films may be very stylized, but always there is special attention to detail. The stylization can be used to great effect by the skillful puppet filmmaker. For instance, in Pal's Tulips Shall Grow, the realism employed in very fairy tale like. The flowers, streets, and windmills are colorfully and perfectly set out across the landscape. The lovers look like animated Hummels and the sky is blue and bright. All the windmills move and have all the contrasting decorative trim one associates with the idyllic image of Holland's country side. Even the flowers grow and bloom before the spectator's eyes. Pal sets this up carefully to contrast it later with the mechanical inhuman attack of the Screwball Army, (whose soldiers are literally made of screws, bolts and balls of metal), and the devastation they bring.

Another example of detailed realism is evident in a film titled The Wizard (the filmmaker is not noted on the print viewed by the author). In this silent film, which takes place aboard a sunken ship, the filmmaker shot the opening under water

sequence through a aquarium filled with live fish, but the conventions of realism do not stop there. The rooms in which the story unfolds are full of the accumulation and particularization of realism. Like Faustus' study there are books everywhere and all matter of objects including rooms filled, like Frankenstein's laboratory, with vials, beakers, and glass tubes filled and bubbling with strange liquids of various colors. Even the face of the wizard has a life-likeness when contrasted with the wooden faces of some puppets like Pal's Puppets.

Another technique used that contributed to the life-likeness of the Wizard was the intercutting of longshots of the puppet with closeups of a live actor's hands, particularly when performing some intricate task such as pouring liquids from one vial to another, or writing with a feather quill pen at his desk. Therefore, not only is the exploitation of the conventions of realism a long time practice of the puppet filmmaker, but so is the use of film techniques such as intercutting to create the complete puppet character, thus adding reality to the performance in the eyes of the spectator.

Henson, like Disney, often observed animals and people and simplified the movements carefully to retain as much of life-likeness as possible. This is true for stop-motion puppet animators as well. Puppet animator and builder Jim Danforth, who worked on several of Pal's films including The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm (1962) and 7 Faces of Dr. Lao (1964), did exactly this, even when animating fantastical creatures like the dragon in "The Singing Bone," segment of The Brothers Grimm. Hickman noted, "In order to perfect his animation techniques Danforth studied human and animal movements. On weekends he would go to the zoo and watch the animals in their cages" (142-143).

Similarities between Henson's career and style of working to create puppet performance and those of other puppet filmmakers abound, as do the differences. The following paragraphs will briefly look at some of these similarities and differences.

As mentioned earlier, Henson, throughout his career, has surrounded himself with very talented personnel. This holds true for other puppet filmmakers as well. Pal, for instance, had many people working on his Puppetoons who would become some of the leading animators and special effects people in the movie industry including, "Willis O'Brien (the genius responsible for the special effects in *King Kong*), Ray Harryhausen (animator of such classics as *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*), and Wah Chang and Gene Warren (who later created the Oscar-winning effects for *The Time Machine* and other Pal films)" (Hickman 26), not to mention Don Sahlin, who would go on to become Henson's master puppet builder. As noted earlier, Trnka "trained other puppet film-makers who worked with him" (Holman 37), including Bretislav Pojar, whose film *A Drop Too Much* (1954) won the Grand Prix award at Cannes (Holman 39).

As we have seen, making any puppet film takes a great deal of time and in many cases money. *The Dark Crystal* was in production, including pre-production and post-production, for five years and cost 26 million dollars according to Frank Oz. *Alice* took two years to make after funding was found, but Svankmajer had been developing the idea for quite sometime (Cohen). According to Holman it took Starevitch a total of ten years to finish his sixty-minute film, *The Tale of the Fox*, and Russian puppet filmmaker Alexandr Ptushko took three years to finish filming *The New Gulliver* (52). By 1945 Pal's Puppetoons cost approximately "\$25,000 each for eight minutes worth of animation and involved an average of twenty weeks of planning, then six weeks of actual production" (Hickman 24-25) with a staff of forty-five people. One of the main

reasons the Puppertoons took so long to make had to do with the processing of the film at the time. As Hickman explained:

One reason the Puppertoons were so slow in production was that each frame had to be exposed three times. Unlike modern color processes, which use one negative, the old Technicolor process used three separate negatives of red, green, and blue. In shooting live action the camera had three strips of film running through it simultaneously. But in animation only one negative was used. A filter wheel, divided into the three necessary colors, was mounted on the front of the camera. each animated frame was exposed three times, one for each color. (25)

Most puppet filmmakers simply did not have access to the money and resources that Pal and Henson had at their disposal. Many worked with the money and equipment that they could scrape together in very hard times, as Hermina Tyrlova did when the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia. Holman commented:

When the Nazis entered Czechoslovakia, Dodal [her husband] was forced to emigrate, and Tyrlova was left alone. However, being a woman of exceedingly strong character (her early life had been a succession of tragedies), Tyrlova was determined not to give up filmmaking. She purchased a second-hand camera and began making a film from Ondrej Sekora's book "Freda the Ant." (33-34)

When puppet filmmakers do get funding for their productions it is quite common, as with Henson, for them to receive and seek funding from multiple sources. For instance, the funding for Alice came from several sources. When Keith Griffiths, who produced the films of the Brothers Quay, saw Svankmajer's work he was determined to help Svankmajer obtain the funding to realize his dream and make his first feature film, Alice. Cohen noted:

Svankmajer told them that he had long dreamed of making a film version of *Alice in Wonderland*, which would

be his first feature film. To turn this into a reality, Griffiths teamed up with Havas [another filmmaker, originally from New Zealand] to find financial backing that would allow Svankmajer to create his unique version with a great deal of creative freedom. Money for the film came from England's Channel Four (the Brothers Quay's chief sponsor), a TV station in Frankfurt, West Germany, and a private investor, Condor Features, in Switzerland. (47)

It becomes clear that puppet filmmakers, like other artists, must work as hard to find backing as they do to actually capture their vision on film, or as Ducan Kenworthy put it in relation to Henson, these filmmakers must raise money for an art form that "is seen as minority programming" ("A Whole lot more" 25).

Indeed, puppet films and puppetry in general reside, as Schumann said, "economically on the fringe of existence" (38). Artistically puppetry is often viewed as existing on the fringe with some scholars stating that it is simply an offshoot, or part of the live actor theatre, while others argue that it is a separate art form of its own. Paska stated the parameters of the debate nicely. He wrote:

Puppet theatre in the West has been largely dependent in (and derivative of) the dramatic actors' theatre. But apologists and defenders of the art who hope to legitimize puppetry *as theatre* by citing its similar nature as a composite theatrical form (using Craig's variation on Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*), are only asking to board a sinking ship.

If puppetry is an art form in its own right (or at all) according to modernist criteria, it has to manifest qualities that distinguish it from the theatre in general--qualities both inherent and unique that define its essential "puppetness." (Even if the puppet itself is only implied or virtual, as in the hand mime or object theatre.) (61)

The unique, obscure, or specialized nature of puppetry, whatever one chooses to call it, contributes to the congregation of talent seen in the works of Pal, Henson, and Trnka. Since there are fewer puppet performances than live actor theatre performances,

and they draw a fairly specialized audience, those with the desire and talent seem to find each other. They find each other by and large because puppeteers, particularly at festivals, are friendly and open. They will gladly tell and show almost anyone who asks how they constructed their puppets or achieved a certain effect. Jero Magon, longtime puppeteer and Puppeteers of America's 1992 recipient of the President's Award for his life long contributions to puppetry, commented on this fact:

It's like a convention of people interested in puppetry with the finest puppet artists available, with students who come to learn more about puppetry through watching performances and work shops. The staff, the faculty, they're not secretive, you know, they're very open. They'll tell you all their secrets. After every performance they come out and explain just how everything was done. In that sense it's very educational. It's not like just going to a puppet show, but you're going to an educational experience where you have the artists available. You can go over to any one of them at any time and talk to them and ask them questions. So, in that sense, it's a valuable experience. Many people, many professional puppeteers, have gotten a lot of their experience and training by going to these annual festivals. Some of them told me that they've been to every one of them. (P of A Assortment Reel#1)

Indeed, as mentioned in chapter two, Henson met Don Sahlin, Jerry Juhl and Frank Oz through this type of puppetry festival.

This is not to say that all puppet filmmakers are open and willing to share their secrets. One exception to this rule in modern stop-motion puppetry is Ray Harryhausen, who is very secretive about his Dynamation technique, as noted in a Cinefantastique article:

We spoke to Ray Harryhausen in his double-locked workroom in the Pinewood special effects complex. Working again in his usual veil of secrecy, the only indications of his work on film were the xeroxed storyboards, oil painted production illustrations of major

scenes. . . . The only model in evidence was a beautifully-crafted one of Pegasus, the winged horse, which is to be used for longshots. Other models are still in the process of being made. Harryhausen is well known for not wishing to discuss his work in detail, particularly in the formative stages of a film's production. (Childs & Jones 27).

Still most puppeteers are ready and willing to share and discuss puppetry with other artists and scholars. This undoubtedly is one of the reasons that puppetry, especially in the United States, has continued to survive "on the fringe" in its many and diverse forms.

Financial backing and censorship are two additional elements that have effected puppet films. Henson put much of his early profits back into his company. Furthermore, ever since he bought out his contract and started marketing his own commercials in the sixties, Henson Associates has sponsored, to varying degrees, their own productions. We have also seen how Henson's reputation for professionalism and his finished works helped to open doors for him and have allowed him sufficient budgets, as well as a great deal of creative freedom. George Pal also had a great deal of freedom and sufficient funds when making his Puppertoons films for Paramount, though this was not always the case with his feature films. Pal recalled:

We were our own masters. We didn't have to get this approval and that approval, the way you do in feature motion pictures. All I had to do was pick up the phone to Paramount and tell them we had an idea, and they said, "Go ahead." It was wonderful. (Hickman 25-26)

This kind of freedom was not shared by many European puppet filmmakers, especially in Eastern Europe during the Nazi occupation, nor in countries like Czechoslovakia where the film industry was funded and subject to state approval. Holman stated it simply, "It must be remembered that in Soviet-monitored countries

film directors do not always have as great a latitude for selection of stories as do those in the West" (42).

Henson never experience the constraints of powerful outside censorship or artistic restrictions. Svankmajer and filmmakers like him, however, have dealt with censorship throughout their careers. In fact, censorship curtailed Svankmajer's filmmaking from 1974 until 1982 when he made a short film titled "Dimensions of Dialog" (Cohen). Cohen wrote:

In 1973, a critic in Prague called his work "pessimistic" and "individualistic," which apparently means that his work is neither good Communist propaganda or cinema that glorifies the state. Although he has made 15 films between 1964 and 1973 and had won international prizes and critical acclaim, the Czechs decided they could "do without" his talents for a few years. (47)

If it had not been for the efforts and "discrete" maneuvering of Griffiths, Havas and the rest of the producers, Alice may never have been made. Cohen noted:

Since the director was being discouraged from working in film, the producers had to find a way for him to work "discretely" on the two year project without interference. Money and film stock was channeled to Svankmajer and his small freelance crew through a multimedia from licensed by the Czech government. Originally and officially, they were paying the firm to produce a program entitled *Demystification of Time and Space*, directed by Svankmajer, but the project somehow evolved into *Alice*. (47)

Though filmmakers in America do not have to face the kind of complete censorship that Svankmajer met in his career, few have had the relative financial freedom and creative control that Henson Associates have experienced and maintained since the first company was established. Henson rarely had to bend his works to the time schedules and financial constraints of a major Hollywood studio, as other

fantasy/puppet filmmakers like Pal did. Pal was always trying desperately to attain backing for his projects. Often the quality of the finished work was effected by the demands, whims and interference of studio heads, small budgets and unexpectedly shortened time schedules. Two examples are Destination Moon (1950) and Atlantis, The Lost Continent (1960). Pal recalled his frustration while making Destination Moon:

"We actually considered it a 'documentary of the near future'--not science fiction really." Others involved with the production, particularly the financial backers, were not so sure. They began to lose faith in the project and tried interfering. "Rupert was released," Pal remembers, "and it didn't do well at all. We were already shooting *Destination Moon*, and everybody thought it was going to flop." (Hickman 42)

Their interference went as far as sending down script revisions during filming, as Robert Heinlein, who Pal hired as technical advisor, recalled:

There was a lot of trouble with the script. The backers kept trying to change the story and the dialogue. I remember one day we were given purple revision sheets. Mr. Pichel, the director, got his and looked them over. He stopped everything right then and there and said, "Who had revision sheets this color?" Several of the key people on the set held them up. "Well," said Mr. Pichel, "here's what you do with them." And with that he tore the pages in half and threw them on the floor. (Hickman 42)

The situation was even worse on Atlantis. The studio made Pal start filming with a script that everyone knew was not ready. He recalled:

My regret is that we didn't have an extra few months to work on the story, because we really weren't ready for production. But that was during a writer's strike, and MGM had nothing ready to shoot, and the whole studio was at a standstill. So the said, "This is good enough, let's go." Daniel Mainwaring is a very fine writer, but he needed more time.

The MGM executives realized while we were shooting that the script wasn't good enough, and they

tried to doctor it. But you can't doctor this type of film during production. They came in with suggestive pages that were worse than what we had. (Hickman 127-128)

Additionally the budget was so small that Pal had to use footage from another film to complete it, but as with so many things in his life, Pal tried to make the best of a bad situation, as Hickman noted:

Despite the lack of preparation Pal tried to make the best of a bad situation and produced the best possible film. Hampered by a small budget (he had originally wanted to produce an expensive epic) he was forced to cut corners everywhere and even had to use stock footage from *Quo Vadis*. (128-130)

Though the major studios do not have the power they once had, they can and do still exert pressure and control over filmmakers. This is evidenced by the new trend of many modern directors to release a "director's cut" of their films, as Ridley Scott did this year with Blade Runner.

Clearly, in terms of finances and creative freedom Henson's circumstances were and remain individually unique for any filmmaker in any country, culture, or puppet tradition.

Subject matter, as discussed earlier, is another element that other puppet films and Henson Associates works have in common. Like Henson's early puppets, Pal's Puppetoon's were first developed and used in commercial advertisements. Many other stop-motion puppet characters have been conceived and utilized in this fashion including Poppin' Fresh, the Pillsbury Doughboy, Speedy Alka-Seltzer character, Mr. Peanut, the MD Twins, Hans, the Chocolate Man, Snuggles the fabric softener bear and the many characters of Christmas specials like Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer.

Many puppet films have been made specifically for children audiences. Czechoslovakian puppet filmmaker Hermina Tyrlova made most of her films with children in mind, as Holman noted:

Most of the nearly forty works she has produced can be enjoyed by adults, but are intended specifically for children. . . . "I am as happy when I succeed with films as another woman when she knits a pretty jumper for her child. I knit my films to please children. . . . I have no family and my creative work replaces it." (34)

As mentioned in chapter three, puppets in recorded media and live puppet theatre have been used frequently here and abroad for educational purposes well before the phenomenal success of the Muppets on Sesame Street, as well as for vehicles of parody and satire.

While few of Henson's works contain pointed political or social satire, one exception being "The Land of Gorch" segments on SNL, many other puppet filmmakers have exploited the puppet well for this purpose. Karel Zeman, a Czechoslovakian trick and puppet film director, created Mr. Prokouk, an Everyman character, who "lampooned hoarding, superstition, bureaucracy and inventions which do not work" (Holman 39).

Many of the puppet films that came out of countries occupied by the Nazis, not surprisingly, have anti-Nazi, or anti-war themes. Trnka made several films on this subject. He made an animated (cartoon) movie titled The Chimney Sweep (1946) and in 1965 he made a puppet film, The Hand, that "has been interpreted as a grim allegory of the Czechoslovakia's situation" (Holman 39) under Soviet domination. Hermina Tyrlova completed an anti-Nazi, anti-war film in 1947, The Revolt of the Toys. Pal made several films of this nature including the aforementioned Tulips Shall Grow and Bravo Mr. Strauss (1943). In fact, the Screwball Army, Pal's parody of the Nazis, was

one of his most successful creations (Hickman 26). In Bravo Mr. Strauss, the Screwball Army arrives to devastate the Vienna Woods, when a statute of Johann Strauss comes to life and with his violin in true Pied Piper fashion leads the army to the Danube River and its destruction. Again the film ends on a positive note of hope, as does Tulips Shall Grow, the narrator "tells us that it was only a dream, but adds: 'Dreams have a way of coming true. . . .'" (Hickman 27).

This hopeful outlook on life and politics that we see in the works of Pal and Henson are not shared by all puppet filmmakers. In Alice for instance, the outlook is very grim, indeed. Though Griffiths stated that Svankmajer usually avoided politics this was not the case in Alice. Cohen noted:

Griffiths says Svankmajer is chiefly an artist and that his inventive images are based on dreams, childhood memories and a highly active imagination. He rarely touches on politics, but in *Alice* certain scenes have special significance to the artist. The trail over the stolen tarts resembles the Stalinist trails of the 1950's when innocent people were forced to confess the made-up crimes and were forced to read their absurd confessions to newsreel cameras. He sees the tea party as the absurdity of life in Eastern Europe, or anywhere a bureaucracy gives people the runaround. (47)

In Alice, Svankmajer creates a nightmarish, dark Wonderland full of sharp objects and threatening puppets that constantly pursue and try to attack Alice. Many of them are made out of what appears to be the actual skeletal remains of various animals combined with other animal skeletons, or common objects to make strange new animals with bulging round eyes and jaws that move in jerky, disturbing movements. One such creature is a combination of a miniature bed frame and skeletal bird wings, legs and talons. As Holman noted, the movement of stop-motion puppet's features can become grotesque and Svankmajer (as does Starevitch in his films) exploits this effectively to

add yet another layer to the disturbing elements of his nightmare Wonderland.

Holman wrote:

On some puppets the features are made moveable, similar to those of very sophisticated marionettes, with hinged jaws, rolling eyes, and the like. However, while this works well in the puppet theatre where the audience is seated some distance from the stage, the close-up view provided by the animation camera often renders this effect stilted or grotesque. (58)

From the very beginning the images in Alice are violent and distorted, transformed images of reality. A fine example is when the white rabbit, which is a taxidermy rabbit in a display case in Alice's room, decides to free himself. He tugs and tugs to get his front paws loose. Finally one then the other comes free displaying the long, rusty nails that were used to secure them to the case, but not before his chest rips open from the effort and sawdust falls out. (Later he is seen eating a bowl of sawdust to refill himself). After releasing his limbs, he bites the nails off with his long yellowed teeth and leaves. Cohen cited this and other examples of the disturbing images in Alice.

He wrote:

Alice is full of enigmatic images that stay with you long after you have seen the film. Eggs hatch and terrifying skeletons of baby birds walk away from the shells. A mouse starts to cook a meal on Alice's hair after setting a campfire. The rabbit is first seen as a stuffed animal in a glass display case. He comes alive and slowly breaks free of his confines in a violent and disturbing manner. (46-47)

Others include canning jars filled with eyes of all different sizes and bagels with nails in them, knives, scissors, nails and pins appear in many scenes and often sticking out of food. Svankmajer "sets his film in ancient rooms and worn-out stairways" (Cohen 46). He fills this world with "noises of ticking clocks and water dripping" (Cohen 46). The closing scene typifies the violent and disturbing images and gestures

in Alice. After Alice has returned from her trip in Wonderland she notices that the rabbit has not yet returned to his display case. She finds the large scissors that the rabbit keeps in a drawer in his case and with a threatening opening and closing of the huge, ancient scissors, an intensely peeved look on her face we hear her voice-over say, "He's late as usual. I think I'll cut his head off, said Alice to herself" (Alice).

In this movie we do not see a hopeful outcome, or a character regaining hope. It is as if Alice's nightmarish adventure through Wonderland does not improve her character or give her new hope for the future, but teaches her that the way to survive is to use power and violence to dominate and threaten others.

The difference between the optimistic outlook of Pal and Henson compared to the more sombre themes apparent in the works of Starevitch and Svankmajer cannot simply be explained as a by-product of the political and social systems they lived under, the devastation of the Nazi regime, or political and artistic oppression, but of the personal nature and beliefs of the individual filmmakers as well. Though certainly the aforementioned factors have some effect on the artists and thus their works, if it were just a product of the reoccurring political upheavals that much of Europe has experienced, then Pal's films would contain the same themes, and as we have seen they do not. Therefore, as with all art forms, the themes that run through puppet films are as individual as the people who make them.

It has become evident that many of the works of European puppet filmmakers, like Svankmajer, Starevitch and the later works of Trnka, are darker, macabre films and shorts that often contain disturbing, violent, and nightmarish images that deeply effect the spectator. These works are not the kind of charming puppet films and shorts, like those made by Lou Bunin, Tillstrom, the Bairds, or Henson, for that matter, that are appropriate for children. As Cohen wrote:

Any parent taking a young child to see Jan Svankmajer's *Alice* is in for trouble—despite the assurance of the film's opening line: "Alice thought to herself, now you will see a film made for children." These words are spoken by a pair of pink lips that completely fill the screen. (46)

Certainly, one does not expect to see Henson Associates producing a work that points up the absurdity of the McCarthyism or of life in general. Nor have any of Henson's works produced the intensely grotesque and disturbing images seem in Svankmajer's *Alice*, or Starevitch's *The Mascot*. This is not to say that Henson has not touched on the grotesque and the macabre. Several episodes of *The Muppet Show* contain bizarre segments. One such episode, not surprisingly, was the one that starred Alice Cooper, which of course had musical numbers such as "Welcome to My Nightmare," in which Alice dances with a exquisitely manipulated ghost puppet. The Muppets version of the Jabberwocky is surreal in nature. One need only see the video "Gonzo Presents Muppet Weird Stuff," to see that there is much that is bizarre, surreal and absurdly violent in Muppet performance, such as the scene where Fozzie Bear is manipulating an uncooperative clown marionette the eventually takes the control of his strings away from Fozzie. Again, however, these performances are tempered with either humor or acceptable puppet violence, and by Henson's sense of taste and overall optimistic outlook on life, just as Svankmajer's comment on his life and his country's politics, Henson's films carry the hopeful themes of his American dream come true.

This is not to say that Henson was not interested in and did not pursue making darker, more adult-oriented works. Certainly *The Dark Crystal* and *The Storyteller* series, particularly the Greek Myths collection, were much darker and sinister than his other works. Among the most stunning and macabre images are the rolling and pathetic eyes of the entombed Minotaur in "Theseus and the Minotaur" and the

writhing snake coiffure of the hideous Medusa and the physical appearance of her "sisters" in "Perseus and the Gorgon."

Though Henson strove for this darker aesthetic and accomplished it in the works mentioned above and others mentioned elsewhere in this paper, they never received the widespread distribution or exposure that his Muppet creations have. In fact, and unfortunately, many people are completely unaware of these works and therefore the range of Henson's puppetry techniques, puppet designs, exploitation of subject matter, and ability to create darker harsher worlds in addition to the soft, furry and friendly ones that so many people in different countries have grown to know and love.

Though Holman stated in his preface that stop-motion puppet films are a separate and unappreciated art form, it is clear that they have much in common with Henson's live-action puppet productions and live puppet theatre as well, such as detailed realism, scaled down sets and consistency of context.

What is important to note is what they do not share. The puppet's design, construction, and manipulation are completely different. While many stop-motion puppet filmmakers and live puppet theatre artists often employ mundane objects in their puppet performances and fully exploit the effects of transformation, Henson Associates rarely, if ever does.

Because of his live-action approach to recorded media puppetry, Henson had far greater latitude when it came to the use of the camera. He can fully exploit the use of camera angles, different lenses and tracking shots, that the stop-motion filmmaker cannot.

The importance of the individual character in the Stanislavskian sense is of varying importance in the stop-motion films discussed in this chapter, while it is always important, if not essential, in the works of Henson Associates.

Lastly, we have seen that censorship (and political climate) has greatly effected the works of many European puppet filmmakers while having little significant effect on the works of Henson Associates.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is not surprising that the medium Henson chose effects every aspect of his puppetry, since he selected the medium before he even knew that puppetry was how he would achieve his dream to "work at television" when he "got out of high school" (Harris 26). Naturally, he adapted his puppets' design right from the start to fit the conventions of television, such as the expressive closeup and detailed realism. He also borrowed conventions such as the large eyes, lip-synched mouth movement and the unseen puppeteer from other puppetry he saw on television. His appreciation of the technology of television led him down ever newer roads in the development of materials and manipulation techniques for the medium.

Henson was not the first television puppeteer to use monitors. Burr Tillstrom "also worked with a monitor to the side," but primarily "he worked behind a scrim, with his hands in front, watching the puppets from behind," (Freeland 63) while from the beginning they were an essential part of Muppet performance. His employment of cutting edge technology, including the full exploitation of monitors and miniature cameras and the development and refinement of the radio control system, the waldo, as a means to animate puppets, were innovations in recorded media puppetry. In fact, "Faz Fazakas, Brian Henson, Dave Houseman, Peter Miller and John Stephenson were winners of a 1992 Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences scientific and engineering award for the development of the Henson Performance Control system" (the waldo system) (The Puppetry Journal 19) and it was this technology that some say Disney wanted to improve their audioanimatronics system (Owen, Selph).

Henson was one of the first people outside the computer industry interested in working with motion capture systems as a means of creating the ultimate television puppet, like Waldo C. Graphic. As Robertson's article noted:

Although still largely experimental, some of the first experiments with using human motion to animate 3D computer graphics characters can be traced as far back as the mid-1980s.

Around 1985 to 1986, the late Jim Henson approached Digital Productions (DP) with the idea of creating a digital puppet, according to Brad deGraf, then head of technical direction for the Hollywood production company. (39)

Henson's live-action approach in itself was an innovation in recorded media puppetry. His live-action approach and the added freedom that could be achieved when the cable control system was replaced by the remote control waldo system made Henson's puppets' movement far more realistic and sophisticated than the stilted motion that is evident in the works of puppet animators like Ray Harryhausen. Furthermore, to a film audience that has become accustomed to sophisticated special effects, computer generated graphics and the realistic movement and appearance of creations like the creature in Alien and the Terminator, Harryhausen's stop-motion creations appear archaic while Henson's live-action creations like Yoda and the Skeksis do not.

The "Henson Stitch," the "magic triangle" (both developed by Don Sahlin) and Muppet fleece are just a few of the media influenced construction innovations apparent in Henson's works.

In addition to these innovations, Henson found that to assist the spectator in entering the world of his television puppets, to make them more commercially viable and quickly assessable to the mass television audience, he had to move to more anthropomorphic puppets and exploit the traditional benefits of the bridge character. Through costuming and characterization, Henson enhanced the effects of transference and used established recorded media conventions of realism to his advantage.

In a strange way Henson's puppetry is uniquely American, not just because it exploits television and its understood conventions fully, or because it is a symbol of free enterprise and the self-made-man, but because, like Americans themselves, it draws on, and is an amalgamation of a multitude of traditions, styles and cultures.

There are many objections to Henson's work within the specialized circle of puppeteers and scholars. The largest being that the Muppets help to reinforce the stereotype of puppets as "kid stuff," a label that Henson never completely lost.

The expense of Henson's puppet productions, the number of well-trained people needed, as well as the specialized crafts and materials used are also criticized. Since many puppet artists truly exist on the economic "fringe," as most folk arts do, the expense alone makes Henson's puppetry elitist, at least to a degree.

Henson Associates use of puppetry is as a tool of commercial television and film, instead of as a socially and politically empowered folk art. To many puppet artists, like Schumann, this makes Henson's brand of puppetry blasphemous at best. Indeed, Schumann and others (like so many other people at large), have a poor, or low opinion of television and therefore of puppetry that uses television as its vehicle.

Henson's puppetry, because the narrative nature of recorded media, develops the puppet character to the point where its significance as an object is often obscured.

These objections also identify Henson's puppetry as the perfect example of recorded media puppetry, even in the opinion of those like Paska, who feel it is a much too confining realm for the puppet.

In the opening pages of this investigation the statement was made that America has never had a firmly, or widespread puppet tradition, clearly that is an overstatement. Though it is true that America has never had the kind of political,

jeering street puppetry that gave birth to Punch and his counterparts in other countries, it has had a long tradition of puppetry in mainstream recorded media.

Even if one dismisses puppetry's long tradition as an educational tool on television, it has still had a long and healthy career in commercials and film. Puppetry and puppet techniques have been used in television commercials for years and still are today. Henson's commercial puppet characters are just part of the list that includes Snuggles, The Zip-Loc Man and Speedy, the Alka Selzer boy. Stop-motion puppet animation has been used in countless American Christmas specials and in cartoons like Gumbi and David and Goliath.

Besides puppet film shorts that were commissioned, as Pal's were, and shown in movie theatres in the 1930s and 1940s, puppetry has frequently been exploited in films with difficult special effects requirements and fantastic creatures. From the original King Kong (1933), to the Star Wars Trilogy, to 1993's Jurassic Park techniques in stop-motion and hand puppetry have been employed by filmmakers. It is true, however, that these puppets have lost much of their significance as objects in their service to the conventions of recorded media. Many audience members would find it hard to identify the puppets in Jurassic Park from the computer generated graphics. Even if it is true, as the speaker from Industrial Light and Magic indicated, that it was not necessary to use puppets, Spielberg and company for whatever reasons chose to use them nonetheless.

It is this type of puppetry that Henson selected and fully exploited with some of the highest production standards in the industry. He was concerned with creating the fantastic, which is a traditional function of puppetry, in a modern medium that would hide the mechanisms which were used to construct it. This may indeed demean the puppet as object and the role of the puppeteer, for how is one to appreciate the artistry of the puppet's design or the virtuosity of the puppeteer if one is unaware of seeing a

puppet performance? This is where Henson's early success with Sesame Street and his identification as a puppeteer has benefitted the plight of the puppet.

Henson's early success with the relatively simply designed Muppets and the identification of Henson Associates as a group of puppeteers has helped the public to recognize and identify puppets, not only in Henson's works, but other films as well. Henson's name associated with a special effects oriented film like The Empire Strikes Back alerts the spectator to the fact that a puppet will appear in this work. Therefore, when Henson broke new ground as he did with The Dark Crystal and The Jim Henson Hour and contributed to works like the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Little Shop of Horrors, it stretched and heightened the spectators awareness, understanding and image of the puppet and what it can accomplish when employed.

Whatever the objects were and are to Henson and his puppetry, he has done a great deal for the art not only by giving it world wide exposure through his productions, but by supporting other puppet artists through grants and festivals funded largely by The Jim Henson Foundation, a charitable organization that was established in 1982. Cheryl Henson wrote in the program notes for Puppetry at the Public, for which she was executive producer:

My father, Jim Henson, loved the art of puppetry and its unique ability to communicate beyond conventional words and images. In 1982, he formed The Jim Henson Foundation to encourage American puppeteers to create innovative, contemporary puppet theatre (Playbill 31).

Finally, to say that Jim Henson established an American puppet tradition, would be an overstatement. To say that he created some of the best, most sophisticated and ground breaking performances and some of the most well-known puppet characters that exist in America's recorded media puppet tradition, would not. In his unique way, if objectionable to some, Henson helped advance, promote, and preserve the art of, at

least, recorded media puppetry. As Representative Thomas M. Rees (D. Ca.) stated at a congressional session on June 14, 1976:

Mr. Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to a most imaginative American, Jim Henson, creator of one of the Nation's best known television shows, "The Muppets."

Mr. Henson's delightful creations . . . such as Kermit the Frog; Rowlf, the most loveable mongrel; and Fozzie Bear, to name a few, are among the best known characters on television. They are uniquely able to communicate every range of human emotion to their audiences. . . . Jim Henson's talent is a national asset, one to be cherished and enjoyed by Americans of every age for years to come. ("The Muppet Show" 14)

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