

# Puppetry art as framing: learning, interaction and socialization

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Author: Susana Ayala. Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia  
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# Introduction: Java, Indonesia and Highlands Chiapas, México. A comparison

It has been suggested on several occasions that educational proposals linked to art should be culturally relevant and at the same time open perspectives for diversity. In my anthropological research on puppetry in Java, Indonesia and in the Chiapas Highlands in Mexico I have found that this is an example of an art that by its nature can create spaces to socialize knowledge, promote dialogue and interaction between people and, at the same time can be culturally and linguistically relevant, it opens the perspective on different languages and cultural forms.



Author: Susana Ayala. Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia February 16, 2013

# Puppetry for child and adults

In Java the art of puppetry is very old, however, it remains vital. It was declared by UNESCO as Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity and Intangible Cultural Heritage. The plays gather audiences of all ages. During the lockdown due to COVID19 many puppet performances began to be transmitted via streaming through different digital platforms and achieved great audience participation digitally, in many cases they were used to explain the dangers of the pandemic and ways to take care of themselves. This art is transforming to the rhythm of contemporaneity.



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# Puppetry inside and outside schools

In Mexico, puppet plays were used during the mid-twentieth century in literacy campaigns, health education and urban and agricultural development. Nowadays they are eventually performed in spaces inside and outside schools, the indigenous Mayan Tsotsil and Tsletal people have maintained a liking for this art and a deep memory of its impact on community life.



# Aesthetics as a sign of social norms and cultural features

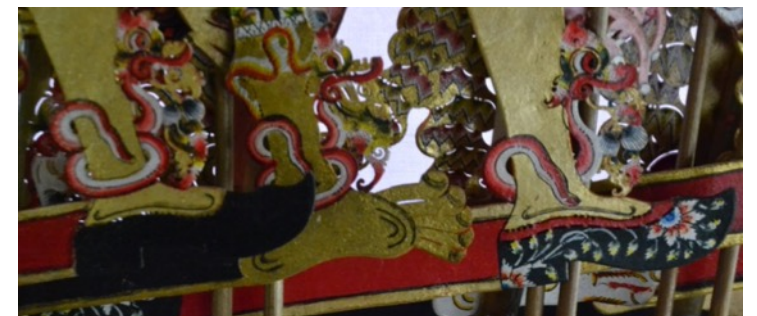
In both studies the puppets have symbolically represented the local aesthetics and the rules of etiquette of social behavior through clothing, gestures, preferences of the audience and therefore the puppets are perceived as close and validated as interlocutors. In Java, the colors of the bodies and faces, the shapes of the eyes, the hands and the clothes of the characters indicate their wisdom and goodness, their nobility and gallantry or their wickedness and obstinacy. In Chiapas, the clothing connects the characters with the identity of the different Mayan Tsotsil and Tseltal communities, which emphasize the way of dressing as a mark of belonging and identity.



Author: Ricardo Pareyón, Tlaxcala, México, 2015



Author: Susana Ayala. Java, Indonesia, 2012



# Puppet plays evoke social concerns that challenge the audience

The plays represent fictional stories and characters, but the scenes reflect themes and situations that evoke real social, political and cultural coexistence concerns. Therefore, people in the audience feel challenged and react by asking questions, making jokes, even discussing or asking for advice from the characters. Another reaction is when people in the audience comment among themselves, during and after the play, about the topics discussed. In other words, puppet plays can be true frameworks for interaction, appropriation and socialization of knowledge and wisdom. In the case of Chiapas, vaccination campaigns were carried out, latrines were installed and literacy processes were initiated as a result of the puppet plays. How could puppetry be rethought for the current contexts where there are still populations with precarious schools, few libraries, few cultural offers, or societies struggling with the aftershocks of Covid-19 lockdown?

# Puppetry art as framing of social interaction and arena of debate

The art of puppetry constitutes a framework of interaction where the participation and socialization of the members of a community establish diverse educational and social practices that can be of coexistence, agency and collective solidarity. This space that can be created by the communities themselves is in constant tension by its very nature and by the political and economic pressures of its national and globalizing environment, however, puppetry is an artistic practice that resists, transforms and maintains the socialization of knowledge, local and global ethical reflections, social values and political norms that have given identity to the Javanese and Mayan Tsotsil and Tseltal peoples. The narratives of the puppet plays, on the one hand, can take up circulating social concerns and bring them to the reflection of polemic themes that can be discussed at the very moment of the play.

# Maintenance, vitality and diversity linguistic preservation

Regarding the use of linguistic resources and verbal art, in both cases the puppet plays have proved to be spaces for the vitality and preservation of the linguistic diversity of each region. In Java, the puppets use the four social variants of the Javanese language, in addition to Bahasa Indonesia, some resources of the Sunda language and other languages of the archipelago. Javanese puppeteers have great verbal skills and even use foreign language resources if there is an audience for it, for example I was told things in Spanish. In the Highlands of Chiapas, the puppeteers and the audience used the Tsotsil, Tseltal and Spanish languages during the plays, and they also encouraged reflection on the importance of knowing, using and respecting other people's languages, even if they are very different. In the puppet plays there is singing, jokes, verbal improvisations, language games that make cultural, artistic and social sense with the local contexts. It opens possibilities for translinguistic interaction in multilingual contexts and for openness to know and value the diversity of languages in monolingual contexts.



# Conclusions: Puppetry as integral and transformative art

- Visual art
- Verbal creation
- Narrative
- Aesthetic and ludic use of language
- Translinguistic interaction
- Musical creation
- Traditional and new art practices
- Adaptability to new technologies
- Interactive communities of learning and socialization



Drawing of a child after watching a puppet show  
Photo Author: Susana Ayala  
Java Indonesia, Agosto, 2013

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