

30 years of therapeutic puppet play – roots, growth and branches.
Lecture at the international symposium of therapeutic puppet play,
Friedrichsdorf (D)
Dr. Gudrun Gauda

Dear guests, dear colleagues and friends,
first of all let me say „thank you“ for the great honour to give the opening lecture at this conference. But never a lecture was so difficult for me than today... to separate my personal life from the objective content was nearly impossible. And besides this I'm far from knowing all the possible branches of therapeutic puppet play all over the world. So I decided to take a very personal point of view to illustrate the topics that occupied me over the last 30 years: how is it possible to make therapeutic puppet play popular among therapists? This concerns all questions of networking the solitary artists, of education and publications.

Originally therapeutic puppet play is older than 30 years – but how the very personal introduction of Walter Krähenbühl already showed: for the two of us it dates nearly exactly 30 years that we had our first decisive contact with it.

There was a sort of „germ cell“, building already early root bales. I try to recap it in short terms for my person:

In 1984 relocation of the Gauda-Family from Mainz to Osnabrück. My husband Hansjürgen got a subscription of a hospitality care journal as leaving present from his colleagues. In there an article about the foundation of the German Association of Puppet Therapy.

This was coincidence number one.

I put this article aside. Why? At this moment I had no idea of therapeutic puppet play. My work was basic research in developmental psychology – attachment and bonding processes between parent and child was pioneering work in those years.

In 1985 I started on two new topics: a training in systemic family therapy and at the same time my dissertation – I was not able to decide my further career between practice work and scientific research.

In 1986 I presented a part of my dissertation at the symposium of the International Association of Prenatal Psychology and Medicine in Bad Gastein/ Austria. My later teacher Käthy Wüthrich was a participant of the symposium. After my presentation we talked about it and in the evening we continued our discussion with a glass of wine. She talked about her plans to develop her observations of children in connection with her puppeteer presentations to a special form of therapy work.

I was thrilled by this idea because in my family therapy work I missed non verbal methods suitable for little children. But when I heard that to create puppets was part of this work I rejected the idea. Nothing for me!

Nevertheless: coincidence number two.

In 1987 the faculty of developmental psychology in Osnabrück invited Käthy Wüthrich for a guest lecture. She lived at the Gauda-family and my husband Hansjürgen and our son created the first puppets.

No more coincidence!

In the same year we visited Käthy's home during our holidays. Nobody could resist the charm of the puppets in her house! And finally we participated at the first workshop some days before Easter in 1988. From now on the coincidences became a direction!

My dissertation was nearly finished, also the family therapy training. I made the decision to work practically. In autumn of the same year we returned to the Rhein-Main area and I opened my practice in Frankfurt.

From now on things developed very quickly.

In 1989 nearly all members of the „germ cell“ of the year before visited us in our new home and encouraged us a lot. In the same year I became member of the DGTP.

One year later I published my first book with Käthy and she began her pilot course for a two year curriculum in therapeutic puppet play. Hansjürgen was one of the first persons who attended the class.

In 1991 I visited my first meeting of the german association of therapeutic puppet players. In 1994 we founded our own institute.

In 1996 our first class in further training of therapeutic puppet play began. Also I became chairwomen of the DGTP and left it in 2002. By this occasion I got a very special present: a ginkgo-tree and a sloth (who is called in german a „lazy beast“) that should remind of not working too much and hard ... well.... At this time I was 51 years old.... And now – 16 years later – 13 classes have finished our two-year-lessons, hundreds of persons visited week-end-work-shops in Germany, Switzerland and Austria and especially so many children made a therapy. A lot of them are young adults now and I am very happy to see that some of them work with the therapeutic puppet play themselves now.

You can not wish a better success! But I feel after these 30 years like the sentence of Albert Einstein says: The difference between the past, the present and the future is only an illusion – even a persistant one.

30 years of life passed like a day and always the therapeutic puppet play was in the center of it.

At this point I would like to leave my personal roots and return to the general development.

Roots

I have to admit that many people see roots where I cant see them and on the other side I discovered roots unknown for me before. In this confused rooting system may be some concerning to a neighbour three.

Using hand puppets in child psychotherapy is nothing new and nothing special: I do not know any child psychotherapist who would not have a collection of them in their play room. There is no publication without mentioning them. But most of the therapists do not put them in the center of their work, nor do they describe how to work with them. This is the reason why I do not see neither Virginia Axline (non directive play therapy) nor Violet Oaklander (gestalt psychotherapy) among the roots – even if they often are mentioned.¹ Unfortunately the work of Lauretta Bender and Adolf Woltmann from 1936 is nearly forgotten.²

Bender and Woltmann accentuate the circumstances that in the personally bad provided unit of child psychiatry in the Bellevue Hospital of New York the performances of puppet theater with the following discussions and workshops of little groups of children were one of the most effective therapeutic intervention ever.

Today we underline that the self-playing of the children with the accompanying emotions is the most healing effect. We often forget that to be spectator may also have a curative effect. We have had a lot of discussions in the DGTP magazine about it.³ Woltmann and his colleague Lauretta Bender describe in their article in a very convicing way that seeing a puppet play and work afterwards with these scenes, may also be a therapeutic instrument.

1 Schwager, Jean-Christoph: Geschichte des therapeutischen Puppenspiels. In: Das andere Theater 8/1992, S. 7 - 9

2 Bender, Lauretta & Woltmann, Adolf: The use of puppet shows as a psychotherapeutic method for behaviour problems in children. In: American Journal of Orthopsychiatry. July 1936, 6,3, S. 341-354
3Vgl. Katharina Sommer: Therapeutisches und/ oder Puppenspiel – Versuch einer Differenzierung. In: DGTP Rundbrief, 1997 **and** Hansmartin Caspar: Therapeutisches Puppenspiel aus Schweizer Sicht. In: Figura 20/ Dez. 1997, S. 36/37 **and** Gudrun Gauda: Therapeutisches Puppenspiel – eine Antwort auf eine Antwort. In: Figura 21/ März 1998, S. 30/31

In a similar way the articles collected, translated and published very hard already in 1970 by Hans Purschke,⁴ deal with these questions: to play FOR or to play WITH children? And if to play for children – how can we do this? What kind of scenes may be suitable?

Also the play with children is already described, with self created puppets or others.... The articles date from 1946 to 1969 and are concerned with the same topics as today.

It seems that we have to reinvent the wheel every ten years....

I thank Barbara Scheel very much for leaving me these precious objects.

If we are occupied to discover the roots, we have also have to focus on Madeleine Rambert.⁵ But I have to admit that I was surprised when reading again her book. First of all the German title does not accord with the French one and is a little bit exaggerated: In fact Mme. Rambert is speaking about „the moral and emotional life of children and ten years of psychoanalytic practice“ – as the French title says. (*La vie affective et morale de l'enfant. Douze ans de pratique psychanalytique*. Neuchatel 1949) But only 60 from 190 pages are occupied with the therapeutic puppet play and the way she works with it. It is not a systematic, but rather intuitive description of how she works. But what is new: she does no longer use the classic punch-and-judy-puppets, instead she uses normal family persons as mother, father and children.

The original publication dates from 1949. I wonder what was the publisher's intention almost 40 years later, to give the German translation this new title: *The puppet play in child psychotherapy*.

Especially why publishers are not very interested in therapeutic puppet topics. A subject where I will come back to.

I dug out one other root very ardously and only with the help of Walter Krähenbühl, because I never met her personally. This is amazing because she also is a Swiss working in the 80ies and 90ies and publishing several articles. I regret that the books of Ursula Tappolet⁶ were never translated into German – especially because – in my opinion - she already said some of the main things about therapeutic puppet play:

1. The creation of a puppet is already a therapeutical act itself. It enables a person to bring parts of himself and projections of himself inside out and to look at it with new eyes.
2. In the process of this creative act the therapist is not allowed to intervene and it may take as much time as it needs.
3. The creation of the puppet and the interaction with it are two separate therapy steps with different effects. Not all persons experience it in the same way.
4. The creation and the play are therapeutic processes – effective by themselves even if there is no therapeutic contract in a clinical sense.
5. Even we need no diagnoses, because therapy concerns the whole person.

Unfortunately I do not know any biographic data and all intensive inquiry did not bring more knowledge. So unfortunately I cannot say if she is still alive or already dead.

Growth

Speaking about the increase of puppet therapy I can only include what I'm able to see – this is mostly the German-speaking Europe. I know that there were already publications in the USA in the 70ies and 80ies. All activities from times before the digitalization are difficult to find out.

Even the European publications are not easy to find – I know that already in the issue 44

4 Purschke, Hans (Hrg.): *Puppenspiel in der Therapie* Heft 1 und 2, perlicko-perlacko. Fachblätter für Puppenspiel. Frankfurt 1970

5 Rambert, Madeleine, L.: *Das Puppenspiel in der Kinderpsychotherapie*. München 1988

6 Tappoelt, Ursula: *La poupée au petit nez*. Neuchatel et Paris 1979 **and** Tappolet, Ursula: *Elephantiades – La thérapie par le conte et la marionette*. Neuenburg 1986

from 1974 of the Swiss magazine „Puppet play and Puppeteers“ (the official voice of the UNIMA Suisse) there was a first article about puppet play therapy. Later on there was one special page reserved in every number edited by Walter from number 3/1993 on for a lot of years.

This was the time when the diversity of therapy-methods exploded – but only a small number of experts seemed to be interested in puppet play – specialists and lone fighters for their interests.

This was the situation up to the moment when Hilarion Petzold's first summary was published in 1983.⁷ He was also one of the main persons establishing the DGTP. He regards puppet play as one of the main methods in integrative therapy like poetry therapy or what he calls „Leibtherapie“. A creative way to work with the unconscious parts of ourself.

For me one of the most important points of his theoretical issues is, that he stresses the fact that puppet therapy is a chance to profit from the phantasy-worlds of children and not to censor them, to forbid them or to replace them by „positive cultural values“.⁸

This concerns another often discussed subject in our association: the line between pedagogical and therapeutic work. He accentuates that in therapy all solutions are allowed – independent from the opinion of the therapist – and that the puppet may be a very valuable counsellor.

Concerning me, I cannot imagine the DGTP without Barbara Scheel. She was my first contact in Germany, also co-founder of the DGTP and several years responsible for the already mentioned meetings in Eppingen in her little theater. Later on she was responsible for the UNIMA section „puppets in therapy“ and travelled around the world representing our work. Most of you will know her and those who do not will have the opportunity to get to know her these days. I see her merits especially in not becoming tired of emphasizing the therapeutic value of the puppets and in demanding special ethics in their use in pedagogical or therapeutical context. I will come back later to this topic.

Before I knew Jean-Paul Gonseth's (1921-1999) publications⁹ I met him personally in the already mentioned „Germ cell“ in Buochs/CH at Käthy Wüthrich's home. He was psychiatrist and psychotherapist and the name of the institute he founded tells us already where his theoretical home was: the Moreno institute for psychodrama in Stuttgart. Consequently he called his special method „figurative psychodrama“ and he liked to use all sorts of puppets. He could play with a lot of different things and had a sortiment of old and worn pets in his staff he used with a great amount of humour.

His basic idea was that we move through our lives on two different stages: one outside seen by everybody and representing our social life. And another stage inside where are living a lot of little people (he called them „Nebenwesen“) we once were when we were little children, we want to be in special situations and we often try to oppress because they disturb our regular social life. Inner and outer stage threw in different directions, so that a lot of amazing encounters are possible. The difficulty for us in our every-day-life is to square our outer stage with these rebellion clubs or dreamers.

Jean Paul died in 1999 and his institute was dissolved some time later. Today we find his ideas in some of the branches. I will speak about this later on.

I told already how I first met Käthy Wüthrich (1931-2007) – from time to time coincidences will have a chance!

7 Petzold, Hilarion (Hrg.): Puppen und Puppenspiel in der Psychotherapie. Mit Kindern, Erwachsenen und alten Menschen. München 1983

8 Petzold, Hilarion: Puppen und Puppenspiel in der Integrativen Therapie mit Kindern. In: Petzold, H. & Ramin, G. (Hrg.): Schulen der Kinderpsychotherapie. Paderborn 1987, S. 427 - 488

9 Gonseth, Jean-Paul & Zöllner, Wolfgang, W.: Figuratives Psychodrama. Paderborn 1985

Käthy's original profession was Kindergarten teacher and later on she was a professional puppeteer. She always told that she discovered the therapeutical effect of the puppet first for herself. Later on she observed how children played with the puppets after her performances when they came beyond the stage. But her concept included besides the play from the beginning – similar to Ursula Tappolet – that creating a puppet is equally important as to play with it.

But I just shrank from this, fearing that my skills were not good enough. But one of the big deserves was that she had very good practical ideas and was able to reduce complex processes into very little and manageable steps. So I learned from her not only the technique to model a human figure or an animal in such an easy way that even little children or handicapped people are able to do it, but also how to come to a story avoiding inner and outer chaos. She taught ways to help people that they may profit by their play and in the same time to stay with them in their own story and not to follow the therapists ideas. The method she called „dynamic of the three“ is what a lot of therapeutic puppet players equate with puppet therapy. But the original only means a method to give a very simple structure to come to a story with very confused children as well as with children without any ideas.

(For those of you who never heard from it: the dynamic of the three means a technique by choosing three props, three puppets and one place where the story may play.)

In 1990 our book „Messages from children's souls“ appeared.¹⁰ The little „Kasper“ with the red cap and dress on the title is a sort of trademark from her.

Two years later the book appeared in a netherlands edition by Lemniscaat editors in the very appropriate translation of the title „Puppets play the truth“.¹¹ The interest of both editors Kösel and Lemniscaat only based on the fact that the book was addressed to parents. Only this big field of potential customers made the publication possible.

Also in 1990 Käthy started the first pilot-group for a two year lesson in therapeutic puppet play training. Hansjürgen participated. The official start of the institute with its sponsoring organization followed in 1993.

In the early 90ies she bought a house in the south of France in a very lost village located in the Cevennes where a great part of the lessons took place.

In these years from 1993 to 2000 Käthy and I worked very close together and Hansjürgen and I were strongly involved in the training lessons.

But after 10 years of work with puppet therapy, a great amount of own experience and with my different background as psychologist it became more and more difficult to maintain a common concept. Separation was unavoidable and with the beginning of the year 2000 a fertile continuation of our work was no longer possible.

Käthy's institute for therapeutic puppet play existed until 2004, was still two years with a different management and was closed in 2006.

I will not forget to mention here another member of our „germ cell“ - Klaus Harter was the theoretical head of all of us. Already in 1985¹² he had published a theoretical model where he adopted the ideas of C.G. Jung about a life long development in a lot of different steps combined with a sort of developmental tasks for every step. These episodes were oriented at developmental progressive interaction among two persons, for example mother and child in the first episode, father and child in the second, peers in a following episode or

10 Wüthrich, Käthy & Gauda, Gudrun: Botschaften der Kinderseele. Puppenspiel als Schlüssel zum Verständnis unserer Kinder. München 1990

11 Wüthrich, Käthy & Gauda, Gudrun: Poppen spelen de waarheid. In speel uitdrukken wat je niet zeggen kunt. Rotterdam 1992

12 Harter Klaus: Archetypen im Rahmen der Entwicklungspsychologie. In: Sozialarbeit und Suchtprobleme. Fachblatt des schweizerischen Verbandes von Fachleuten für Alkoholgefährdeten- und Suchtkrankenhilfe VSFA, 1985, 53,4, S. 151 - 188

lovers in young adulthood. The very helpful combination for the puppet therapy is that the „developmental archetype and the encounter archetype“ (these are the terms he uses) appear on our puppet stage so that we are able to see what developmental episode our client is occupied with because we find them all in our staff. He only published his ideas as a book in 2012.¹³ In 2007 Käthy and he published a second book about puppet therapy where he presented his ideas.¹⁴

Branches

At this point I hesitated a long moment.... This is the point where I'm concerned. To speak about myself seems very difficult for me. For two reasons I finally decided to classify myself to the branches. First I belong to the next generation – at least concerning my contact to the puppet therapy. As I already said I'm a latecome in this scene. And the second reason is that I have a different theoretical background. My therapeutic homeland is systemic therapy and the representants of this direction never feared to occupy pragmatically also other theoretical branches. So it was possible for me to see no contradiction among the interpretation of symbols as existing in the interaction of two persons or in the person himself – as Jean Paul did it with his inner and outer stage. The developmental theory of Klaus Harter may be very special, but a transfer to other life long developmental and interactional theories is possible without any problem. For me the most important fact was always that the puppets became my main co-workers.

If I speak of this branche I always speak in the plural. „We“ – this is unseparable my husband Hansjürgen and I. We are coming from very different professions but went the same way since 1988 and dared in 1994 to open our own institute. Maybe some of you wonder about the strange name of „Frankfurt institute for design and communication“ - originally we planned much more than puppet therapy under this roof because Hansjürgen is the artist of the two of us. But very quickly the puppet therapy demanded its place. For us it always was a main goal that the lot of single efforts of people had no longer to stay isolated. Networking people and offering a place where you can meet and learn from one another was very important for us. Our institute gave the possibility for these efforts. At the same time I always stayed a scientist and I know how important publishing is. (See Ursula Tappolet above!)

But I had to learn that there was no great interest for the puppet therapy among the publishers. The first edition of my attempt to write a sort of handbook appeared under the title „Theory and practice of therapeutic puppet play“¹⁵ only because 2001 was the 40th anniversary of C. G. Jungs death. Therefore the editor gave it the subtitle „Living psychology of C.G. Jung“.

A second, revised version was refused by all editors with the arguments: „very interesting subject and very illustrative examples, living language and style, but the target group is too small.“ These were the same arguments for all other attempts. So I decided to publish them as book on demand where they are demanded from a little target group – that means you. So I was encouraged to really declare the „Theory and Practice“ a handbook in 2016. My wish for networking in this field was realised first in 2004 when the DGTP published a little book for its 25 anniversary of foundation.¹⁶ Six years later a summary of articles about

13 Harter, Klaus: Begegnungsmodelle in der Entwicklung des Menschen. Optimale Entwicklung durch adäquate Begleitung. Berlin 2012

14 Wüthrich, Käthy & Harter, Klaus: Das therapeutische Puppenspiel. Ein Spiegel der kindlichen Seele. München 2007

15 Gauda, Gudrun: Theorie und Praxis des Therapeutischen Puppenspiels. Dortmund 2001. weiter: Norderstedt 2007 und Gauda, Gudrun: Königskinder und Drachen. Handbuch des Therapeutischen Puppenspiels. Norderstedt 2016

16 Gauda, Gudrun (Hrg.): Puppen- und Maskenspiel in der Therapie. Frankfurt 2004

working with puppet play in groups was edited.¹⁷

My preferred themes are those breaking thinking borders and showing that puppet therapy does not know any restriction. The small case description about a little girl with severe traumatic experiences¹⁸ brought a lot of contradictions and mistrust to me. A lot of psychiatrists had the opinion that we provoke in a special way traumatic remakes while working with puppets. An Austrian psychiatric director of an institution where I gave a lesson about puppet therapy, said to me „ Do not prick someones trauma!“ just as if the trauma would be a boll and the puppet the needle for opening it. My opinion on this subject is very different: even if a child plays alone with his puppets, a remake of the trauma may happen. But we are able to accompany him, to give a special advice how to handle trigger stimuli and to hold him with our full competence to stay the terrible pictures.

I see here more the fear of the puppet by a lot of therapists, than a real danger that we could provoke a traumatic remake. My results confirm me in this opinion.

To dare to work with puppet therapy with autistic children was not my idea because in my practice there is a lack of autistic children. But in this point also the networking of people helped. André Zirnsak convinced me that it is possible and Anja Herbener and Michaela Kleinrath contributed their parts.¹⁹

I have no lack of ideas for further publications and I still have the hope that once a professional editor will show his interest for our themes and will not regard us as a too small target group not bringing enough money.

It was a long way from the first puppet in 1988 until today. In all the years our lessons found interested teachers for maladjusted children, ergotherapists, social workers and so on. The clinical psychotherapy seemed to perceive us only at the side of therapeutic working – even while working with children. I consider that this changes just these times and I am very happy about it. Just in November 2017 in Berlin a big meeting with behaviour therapists took place with the issue of how to play with children in therapy. And I also was invited to present our work.

Further important branches exist in Switzerland. 2010, three years after the death of Käthy Wüthrich there was the foundation of the „Advanced technical college of puppet therapy“ of the professional association of puppet therapists (FFT). It resides in Olten today and in 2014 an other school in Interlaken opened as private institute. Both schools have their own trade organization. This is important to know, because different to the German situation, they can try to get an acknowledgement by the health insurances. This aim forces compromises from them according to their curriculum and they teach three and not two years as we do in Frankfurt, where we can concentrate us only to the puppet play.

In Germany we mostly find the idea of therapeutic use of puppets among the systemic therapists. But in my opinion it is not always therapeutic puppet play what pretends to be so. One of those who are very near the idea is Alfons Aichinger²⁰ with what he calls „Teilearbeit“ (working with personal parts) and with this he is very near to the ideas of Jean-Paul Gonseth. (He is also a fellow of the Psychodrama and the Moreno-Institute). He works mostly with children with the parts of the person that are involved in a conflict, researching the personal ressources. But he mostly represents them with little wooden

17 Gauda, Gudrun (Hrg.): Therapeutisches Puppenspiel in der Gruppenarbeit. Berichte aus der Praxis. Norderstedt 2010

18 Gauda, Gudrun: Traumatherapie und Puppenspiel. Wie Dornröschen sich selbst erlöste. Norderstedt 2008

19 Gauda, Gudrun & Zirnsak, André: Wege aus dem Labyrinth. Figurenspiel mit autistischen Kindern. Norderstedt 2014

20 Alfons Aichinger: Wofür das Eichhörnchen Handys sammelt – psychodramatische Teilearbeit in der Erziehungsberatungsstelle. In: Informationen für Erziehungsberatungsstellen 1/ 2010 S. 3 - 21

animal figures. A lot of representants of the psychodrama work with puppets, animals and symbols - as Elke Frohn²¹ in Munic does, who originally comes from theatre sciences. Also Siegfried Mrochen and Manfred Vogt-Hillman²² from the „north-institute for short term therapy“ work with puppets in the „Teilearbeit“. The north institute for short term therapy even organized a conference for puppet-therapy some years ago. Unfortunately I could not find any programm or other traces in literature or internet so that I am not able to tell you what they exactly mean, when they are speaking about puppet therapy.

In the review for systemic therapy, number 2 in the year 2000, a Norwegian team²³ represented a work called „hand puppets as reflecting team in systemic family therapy“. They began their article with the following sentence: „Our experience shows that children often are not seen by the reflecting team in family therapy. Our dissatisfaction resulted in searching for new ways for also reaching the children.“

That's the point where the circle closes to my own beginnings.

As a last point I have to mention a special development. And here it is not the question of a special method or a theoretical direction but of the puppet itself. With the so called living puppets from the company „Matthies Spielprodukte GmbH & Co. KG.“ Hamburg, a generation of puppets became a triumph where the puppet recruits for itself. With its living children-faces and its possibilities for moving face and body, it gained the hearts of all adults – but not consequently the children's hearts. When searching in the internet for „puppet and therapy“ I get almost no results, but for these puppets. And as „therapy-puppet“ they conquer the market for therapy objects.

And the consequence is that nearly everybody think that they are able to work with it. But as nearly all faces show provoking children's expressions, the puppet player shows a tendency for provocation and noisy activities. Often with intrigement of the clients feelings. Then, we can no longer speak of therapy.

The clown on the picture at right for example is used in a therapy-group of children with grief and I doubt that in the hand of untrained persons it always will be very empathic.

(Source: flyer and teaching experiences with LACRIMA 2017)

What's the result?

The actual psychotherapy – long time word-orientated – has rediscovered play and creativity. This is very good. But unfortunately most therapists speak of puppet-**techniques** and they act also using puppets as a technique. Rüdiger Retzlaff says in his (in other aspects very good) book „Spiel-Räume“ (play – spaces)²⁴ „Ask the child to show you with his puppet what goes on at home or in school.“ (p.284) Or: „Hey squirrel! What makes you special?“ I doubt that you may get an answer and I hope that we are far above this! Or other therapists speak about ways of „competence orientation“ and „competence expansion“ by changing roles. In all these cases I see the danger that the puppet becomes a pure instrument. But even in the case where the puppet speaks with the child instead the therapist, like in the Teilearbeit or where the puppet presents a group process, there exists the danger that the therapist does the main work and is hidden behind the puppet.

In all these cases (and I could show you much more) **the method is the solution and the puppet the instrument**. But the puppet can much more!

21 Elke Frohn: Tisch-Inszenierungen aus dem ressourcenkoffer. Szenisches Arbeiten mit Objekten in Therapie, Beratung und Supervision/ Coaching. In: Familiendynamik, 35, 3/2010, S. 2 - 9

22 Siegfried Mrochen & Manfred Vogt-Hillmann: Teilearbeit mit Handpuppen. In: Manfred Vogt-Hillmann & Wolfgang Burr: Kinderleichte Lösungen. Lösungsorientierte Kindertherapie. Dortmund 2000, S. 201 - 215

23 Helene Trana, Trude Johannesen & Hanne Rieber: Die reflektierenden Handpuppen. In: Zeitschrift für systemische Therapie, 19, Heft 2/ 2000, S. 68 - 79

24 Rüdiger Retzlaff: Spiel-Räume. Lehrbuch der systemischen Therapie mit Kindern und Jugendlichen. Stuttgart 2008

I see therapeutic puppet play everywhere where the puppet itself does the main work and not the therapist. His job is to offer his knowledge about what the puppet is able to do. But finally it is the puppet that has the direction on the hand of the player – because as the unconscious part of the player it knows clearly better what is needed than the client with his conscious parts of mind or the therapist. The puppet decides the result and is so much more than a methodical aid. Insa Fooker gave her book about puppets in developmental psychology the title: „Puppets: secret whisperer to what humans are“ (Puppen – heimliche Menschenflüsterer).²⁵ That means: the puppet whispers to the client secretly what will happen and what may be the solution of his problem.

My job as therapist is to give a structure, to offer good support or by time to time to offer an idea. I see me as a sort of sparring partner on the rehearsal stage for life. Naturally I need to keep an eye on the emotional state of my client. I have to ensure that the puppet does not ask too much from them. (e.g. in trauma-therapy!) And it is evident that for this job I need a good knowledge about developmental processes – not only in the work with children.

But what may be in a second range is the theoretical context for interpretation of the play contents. I take it for granted that we have a theoretical context and are able to explain the play on this background. But much more important is the relation child-puppet-therapist in a special sort of dynamic of the three. As Irvin Yalom²⁶ emphasises in all his publications: to be empathic is the most important factor of having good therapy results. And if we allow the puppets to get the stage, there is still asked an other dimension of empathy.

But if I demand such a position, I need a lot of trust in the medium and great courage by client and therapist. May be this is the reason why we always remained only such a little group and why we often are forced to defend our work against doubts.

I have the confidence that we may expand. The little ginkgo-tree from 2002 has grown a lot. I learned by wikipedia that ginkgo-trees become older then 1000 years and only expand with new branches when they are 25 years old. Seen under this aspect this one has still some time to grow. Also does therapeutic puppet play.

Concerning me, the „lazy beast“ from 2002 begins to find his place on one of the trees. In the last year we decided to close our institute at the end of 2018 because we become too old and tired. The enthusiasm for the work is not stopped and I am very happy and thankful that I was able to investigate the greatest part of my working life in such a wonderful medium.

Thank you for your patience!

25 Insa Fooker: Puppen – heimliche Menschenflüsterer. Ihre Wiederentdeckung als Spielzeug und Kulturgut. Göttingen 2012

26 Irvin Yalom: Denn alles ist vergänglich. Geschichten aus der Psychotherapie. München 2015, S. 230/231