

Framing the Fantastic:
Animating Childhood in Contemporary Kazakhstan

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Dedication

*To Vlad and Evgenii, who have gone,
and to the children from my time at Hope House,
who have gone home.*

Acknowledgments

This is an attempt to mention everyone who made this project come to life, who pulled the strings or showed me how, or who lent a turn of phrase that I ventriloquated. The actors at the puppet theatre shared their time, their behind-the-scenes rants and antics, tea and chocolates (and Soviet champagne) with me, week after week, month after month. They, along with the directors, let me watch them when they were bored, tired, or struggling, teaching me not only about puppetry but also about play. The women in the props department taught me how to stitch cloth onto foam while sharing scandals and jokes, the carpenters shared their plans for new projects with me, and the sound and lighting crew let me join them in the crowded booth. Director Orazaly Akzharkyn-Sarsenbek gave me free reign to do my research, from the beginning musing that perhaps our meeting was no accident, and at the end assuring me that, whatever happened with my research, all he wanted was for me to be happy.

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Note on Transliteration, Transcription, and Translation Conventions

Throughout this dissertation, I use USBGN/PCGN (USBGN 1994) conventions for transliterating Kazakh and Russian Cyrillic into Roman/Latin spellings, outlined below. While Kazakhstan has expressed plans for shifting Kazakh to a Latin-based alphabet in the future, the exact system to be used has still not been settled, with the *k* and *kh* in Kazakhstan subject to alternative spellings in Anglophone texts (Kazak/Kazakstan and Qazaq/Qazaqstan). I maintain the most commonly used spellings of *Kazakh* and *Kazakhstan*. With people's names, I have omitted apostrophes where soft signs occur, because they frequently occur at the ends of names, such as in Aygul', which then makes possessive messy in English, and because when friends transliterate their own names into the Latin alphabet, I have never seen them use this. In certain cases, with the names of famous figures, such as Stanislavskii or Meyerhold, I rely on spellings used in published texts in English (though various spellings of the former can be found in English). When transcriptions and transliterations of Russian and Kazakh will appear in italics, with the language used designated before or after each quote or transcript appears. Where code mixing or switching appears, Russian appears in italics, with Kazakh both italicized and underlined.

	Kazakh	Romanization		Kazakh	Romanization
1	А а А а	a	22	П п П п	p
2	Ә ә Ә ә	ä	23	Р р Р р	r
3	Б б Б б	b	24	С с С с	s
4	В в В в	v	25	Т т Т т	t
5	Г г Г г	g	26	У у У у	ü
6	Ғ ғ Ғ ғ	gh	27	Ү ү Ү ү	u
7	Д д Д д	d	28	Ү ү Ү ү	ü
8	Е е Е е	e	29	Ф ф Ф ф	f
9	Ә ә Ә ә	yo	30	Х х Х х	kh
10	Ж ж Ж ж	zh	31	Һ һ Һ һ	h
11	З з З з	z	32	Ц ц Ц ц	ts
12	И и И и	i	33	Ч ч Ч ч	ch
13	Й й Й й	y	34	Ш ш Ш ш	sh
14	К к К к	k	35	Щ щ Щ щ	shch
15	Қ қ Қ қ	q	36	Ъ ъ Ъ ъ	"
16	Л л Л л	l	37	Ы ы Ы ы	y
17	М м М м	m	38	І і І і	i
18	Н н Н н	n	39	Ь ь Ь ь	'
19	Ң ң Ң ң	ng	40	Э э Э э	é
20	О о О о	o	41	Ю ю Ю ю	yu
21	Ө ө Ө ө	ö	42	Я я Я я	ya

Figure 1. Kazakh Cyrillic Romanization conventions (U.S. Board on Geographic Names Foreign Names Committee 1994: 47-48).

	Russian		Romanization			Russian		Romanization			
1	А	а	А	а	а	18	Р	р	Р	р	r
2	Б	б	Б	б	b	19	С	с	С	с	s
3	В	в	В	в	v	20	Т	т	Т	т	t
4	Г	г	Г	г	g	21	У	у	У	у	u
5	Д	д	Д	д	d	22	Ф	ф	Ф	ф	f
6	Е	е	Е	е	e, ye ¹	23	Х	х	Х	х	kh
7	Ё	ё	Ё	ё	ë, yë ²	24	Ц	ц	Ц	ц	ts
8	Ж	ж	Ж	ж	zh	25	Ч	ч	Ч	ч	ch
9	З	з	З	з	z	26	Ш	ш	Ш	ш	sh
10	И	и	И	и	i	27	Щ	щ	Щ	щ	shch
11	Й	й	Й	й	y	28	Ъ	ъ	Ъ	ъ	"
12	К	к	К	к	k	29	Ы	ы	Ы	ы	y
13	Л	л	Л	л	l	30	Ь	ь	Ь	ь	'
14	М	м	М	м	m	31	Э	э	Э	э	e
15	Н	н	Н	н	n	32	Ю	ю	Ю	ю	yu
16	О	о	О	о	o	33	Я	я	Я	я	ya
17	П	п	П	п	p						

Figure 2. Russian Cyrillic Romanization conventions (U.S. Board on Geographic Names Foreign Names Committee 1994: 93-94).

Notes

1. The character e should be Romanized ye initially, after the vowel characters а, е, ё, и, о, у, ы, э, ю, and я, and after й, ъ, and ь. In all other instances, it should be romanized e.
2. The character ё is not considered a separate character of the Russian alphabet and the dieresis is generally not shown. When the dieresis is shown, the character should be romanized yë initially, after the vowel characters а, е, ё, и, о, у, ы, э, ю, and я, and after й, ъ, and ь. In all other instances, it should be romanized e. When the dieresis is not shown, the character may still be romanized in the preceding manner or, alternatively, in accordance with Note 1.

ABSTRACT

Framing the Fantastic examines the social and material processes of imagination, co-constructed by children and adults in institutions of childhood in the city of Almaty. This dissertation shows how make-believe endeavors create and maintain relations with present and absent others, these creative processes nonetheless part of the sensory, material worlds in which people live. This project examines how people animate both objects and humans – bringing them to life or compelling them into action, revealing the ways citizens – including children – become involved in shaping and creating ideologies of childhood and futurity.

In Almaty, the former capital and largest city of Kazakhstan, children appear in public life, adults valuing child performance as a source of entertainment and as a pedagogical method. Meanwhile, adult artists use puppetry to socialize young children, a form of entertainment that became institutionalized under Soviet times in urban centers around the USSR. According to local puppet artists, the medium of puppetry offers a material instantiation of essential qualities that make these animated objects ideal forms for children to understand abstract qualities, such as good and evil.

Based on participant observation and the analysis of video collected over the course of 24 months of fieldwork, *Framing the Fantastic* examines the rehearsals and performances of a government-run puppet theater alongside the daily activities of a temporary, state-sponsored home for preschool-aged children, called Hope House. Parents placed children at Hope House with the promise of resuming care for them when the children were old enough to begin school.

Fantasy played an important role at Hope House in two ways: First, children and teachers, in play and in daily lessons, imagined and anticipated life outside Hope House, these fantasies often centered around the children's family homes, to which they would return. Second, due to the complex network of state, corporate, and nongovernment sponsors providing material support for the home's functioning, a regular influx of visitors meant that children became adept at singing and dancing for visiting adults. These performances offered outsiders evidence of the children's abilities in a context of frequent stigmatization of institutionalized children.

At the puppet theatre, a massive renovation of the theatre's building prompted an overhaul of the troupe's repertoire. An influx of new directors gave rise to new techniques of animation, which they linked to larger-scale questions of the theater's role in reaching audiences in twenty-first century Kazakhstan. Attempts to change modes of artistic production highlighted tensions within ideologies of performance as both work and play. The processes and discussions surrounding animation and de-animation, moreover, reveal these endeavors as both intimate and hierarchical, as actors move through other bodies or treat their own bodies as instruments of manipulation.

This dissertation reveals the intersensory and intersubjective processes through which children and adults give life to characters and to stories, and the ways these processes create, alter, or maintain social relations. It examines slippery relationships between humans and nonhumans, and between "play" and "real," as actors distribute and accept agency, responsibility, and sentimental attachments. It rejects common separation of childhood and children — or of ideology versus lived experience — to show how these projects of animating childhood shape children's experiences and their relationships with adults. In contemporary

Kazakhstan, children become symbols of futurity, offering the possibility of social transformation, while also anchoring nostalgia for adults' own pasts.

Introduction

Vignette #1: Aynura Looking Out

The children play carefully on this day. They wear special clothes, new jeans for the boys and denim skirts with white knit tights for the girls (the kind that always fall down). Two young women, with long black hair and large digital cameras, are visiting the children of Hope House.

Saltanat Apay, the teacher of this group of five-year-olds, has just reprimanded Aynura, in muttered tones, for getting a splotch of mud on her knee. Now Aynura, looking sorry, carries a blond doll in a pink and white dress by its arm, over her shoulder, to the other side of her group's small playhouse. She places the doll inside of a rolled up carpet, then pulls it out, by the hair and by its body, and sets it rather roughly on the ledge of the playhouse window. She looks down at the doll's right hand, its fingers curled in, and imitates the position with her own hand. She holds the doll by the ends of its hair and looks off to the side. The doll dangles over the edge of the playhouse.

On the other side of the playhouse, a few children from the group gather in the front to have their pictures taken, afterwards pleading with the photographers to view the results. Aynura picks up the doll and hugs it to her chest, the doll's legs hanging off the end of the ledge, and a shutter snap is audible from outside of the frame. A second photographer has joined us. The doll's unkempt blond hair covers Aynura's mouth. Her eyes, which went flat when Saltanat Apay scolded her, are unchanged by the pose. A second after the shutter snap, Aynura puts the doll back down onto the ledge.

Vignette #2: Animating Bare Hands

In a small performance space, an assistant director and a professor of puppetry sit in the front row, watching two puppeteers, Gūlvira and Koralai, animate a puppet of Farrukh Zokirov, lead singer of Uzbek folk rock band, Yalla, popular throughout the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s. As Farrukh sings along to the canned music, waving his hands, Ulbolsyn, another female puppeteer, dances around him. Gūlya Apay, assistant director, gets up to show them how the puppet's arms should be moving at different moments.

Gūlya Apay tells the puppeteers to put the puppet down and go through the actions themselves for one turn. Farrukh the puppet is seated at the end of the front row, facing the puppeteers, as they move back to their place at stage rear. Standing next to each other, Gūlvira moves her right hand as Farrukh's should, and Koralai raises and waves her left arm as if it is Farrukh's. Gūlvira, in charge of Farrukh's head, sometimes holds her left hand in the air where the puppet's head should be, gripping nothing, then opening and closing the space between her thumb and fingers to show how he sings.

In another take, they start from the beginning with their heads down. In order to practice raising the puppet's head when he comes to life, Gūlvira takes Koralai by the ponytail, at the back of her head, and pulls on it to raise her head up, also raising Koralai's arms as if it is the puppet's. Once they have agreed upon all of the motions the puppet will make during the first part of the song, they retrieve him from his chair and start again.



Figure 3. Aynura with doll.



Figure 4. Koralai as puppet.

These scenes, and this dissertation, unfold within government-run institutions for children in Almaty, Kazakhstan: Hope House, a temporary group home for children under seven years of age, and the state puppet theater in Almaty. This dissertation is about how children and adults animate — bring to life — objects and others, using fantastic frames to reshape the real. These animated bodies, in turn, create imagined characters and worlds. Outsiders, including absent parents and state supervisors, render fantasies into sites of multiple agencies and voices that laminate onto these bodies during acts of animation. Fantasies are both made from matter and are made to matter. Objects anchor imaginary worlds and shape them in important ways.

Part of the intrigue of puppets is their movement from inanimate to animate, but it can go the other way – animation can suddenly cease – or the inert can stay the way it was found. Aynura, deflated by her teacher’s censure, holds the doll limply, as a prop, waiting for the visiting photographers to get the shot they need, without showing a lot of care for the humanlike object or attributing it much agency. Sometimes animation is too much work. Puppeteers sometimes argue that it is the viewer who brings objects to life, but this possibility can be augmented or deterred by those holding the immobile body or pulling its strings.

These projects of animating childhood take on special significance in contemporary Kazakhstan. Historically, institutions of childhood have highly valued performance by and for children as a pedagogical tool, placing special emphasis on the abilities of performing objects, such as puppets, to embody essential truths for children’s socialization. At the same time, ideologies of children as the future, which artists and children animate, take particular relevance in contemporary Kazakhstan because of increasingly urgent questions surrounding the social, economic, and political future of a nation maintaining a precarious stability.

Below, I offer an overview of this project’s relevance to ideologies of childhood and futurity in contemporary Kazakhstan. Next, I lay out the theoretical stakes of the project and its contribution to interrelated lines of inquiry that frame my approach to animation within this ethnographically situated analysis. I draw from literature on participant frameworks and on the framing of interactions — particularly of fantastic ones — to examine how human and nonhuman actors create characters and narratives that emerge out of and have effects upon their social, material, and political environments. The animations described here occur across modalities — so that, while work on voicing and ventriloquism undoubtedly shapes this project — this ethnography calls attention to the role of sense and sentiment in distributing agency. As relationships form or transform through these endeavors, this dissertation attends to the slippage between human and nonhuman and subject and object. It follows the precarious positions of children, puppets, and dolls in movement between these categories. After this theoretical overview, I offer an account of my methodological approach within my fieldsites, followed by an overview of chapters.

Animating Kazakhstani Futures

Within these institutions and in public life in Kazakhstan more broadly, children serve as potent symbols of the future — for questions of kinship, cultural heritage, and nation. While “children are the future” serves as a common cliché in plenty of societies, this dissertation shows the ways that children are recruited into animating such ideologies through their performances for adults and through state-sponsored entertainment geared toward child audiences. Moreover, these ideologies take on special significance in contemporary Kazakhstan, where President Nursultan Nazarbayev has held power ever since Kazakhstan emerged as an independent country

following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Kazakhstan has been called an “accidental” country, as the last republic to declare independence from the Soviet Union, even after Russia, (Olcott 1997, Dave 2007). Nazarbayev has been credited for maintaining a delicate balance in leading a multi-ethnic nation that many feared could collapse into discord or fragmentation after achieving independence (Dave 2007, Schatz 2000, Suny 2001) – what Martha Brill Olcott describes as an “ethnic tinderbox” (1997: 201). The seeming precarity of the new nation came from its lack of a Kazakh majority. Soviet policies of forced collectivization and resettlement – leading to famine, disease, and flight to neighboring Mongolia and China – along with war and imprisonment, resulted in reducing the population of Kazakhs by more than half, during the first half of Soviet rule: in 1915 there were reportedly 6 million Kazakhs, while even in 1959 (14 years after the end of World War II), the Kazakh population was only reported at 2.8 million (Sarsembayev 1999). In 1989, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhs comprised 39.7% of the total population of the republic, with 37.8% of the population ethnically Russian and with the last quarter comprised by over a hundred other ethnicities. Moreover, while Kazakh language and culture remained symbolically important to ethnic Kazakhs throughout the Soviet period, by 1989, 62.8% of the total population and 75.3% of the urban population of the ethnically Kazakh population of the Kazakh SSR reported fluency in Russian language, while less than 1% of Russians claimed to speak Kazakh (Smagulova 2008: 445).

Since achieving independence, this ethnic and linguistic situation has shifted as a result of a number of trends and policies, including Nazarbayev’s encouraging Kazakhs to return from Mongolia, China, and other countries (Diener 2009, Kuşçu 2013, Werner and Barcus 2015), and other ethnic groups’ “return” to their titular nation-states, including Russians to Russia (Glushkova and RFE/RL 2016, Peyrouse 2007). Other policies geared toward maintaining a

balance between promoting Kazakh language and culture and maintaining a commitment to Kazakhstan as a multi-ethnic state include Nazarbayev designating Kazakh as the state language, while Russian remains an official language and the primary language of business (Dave 2007, Smagulova 2008), along with his decision to move the capital from the southern city of Almaty to a more central location, discussed below.

Widely regarded by outsiders as an authoritarian leader, Nazarbayev nonetheless stands out in the region for the political stability and economic growth that citizens credit him with providing. Insiders and outsiders alike have classified him as offering a more moderate form of authoritarian rule, compared to neighboring Central Asian countries (Isaacs 2010). Other scholars have noted how crucial Nazarbayev's discourses highlighting the nation's economic growth have been to his maintaining legitimacy among Kazakhstani citizens, which has suffered during times of economic crisis (Omelicheva 2016). Themes of development, modernity, and futurity play a key role in these narratives that Nazarbayev and his elite supporters emphasize in their narratives of Kazakhstan as a post-Soviet success story (Kudaibergenova 2015). Widely known as "Papa" in Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev offers a patriarchal rule that promises continual growth of the nation (Isaacs 2010). The precarity Kazakhstan faced at its independence has not retreated, however, as political scientists and local informants alike express concern over what a post-Nazarbayev Kazakhstan will bring, a concern that grows more urgent as the leader continues to rule well into his 70s, with no named successor (Beacháin and Kevlihan 2013).

While perhaps reliant on overt nationalistic ideology and spectacle than Karimov-era Uzbekistan (Adams 2010), Nazarbayev-era Kazakhstan has nonetheless cultivated ties with international communities through displays of soft power that use spectacle for diplomatic effect. Despite two unsuccessful bids for Almaty to host the Winter Olympic Games — most recently

for 2022, with the slogan, “Keeping it Real” — the city hosted the Asian Winter Games in 2011 and the Winter Universiade in 2017. I was in Almaty only before and after each of these events, but both left traces on the city’s landscape, and friends there saw these events as offering international recognition for the city, telling me it was a shame that I had missed them, even though I met no one who had attended any of the festivities.

When Nazarbayev elected to move the capital from Almaty to a more central location in 1997, he transformed the formerly tiny city of Akmola (called “Tselinograd” during Soviet times) into Astana, in order to prevent the northern regions with majority ethnic Russian populations from breaking away. Kazakh simply for “capital,” Astana’s establishment and branding involved more than simply moving government offices there, but rather a “master plan” of promoting it as a global, modern city (Bissenova 2013). Often compared to Dubai or Las Vegas, the city has gained increasing renown for spectacular architecture, such as the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, a large glass pyramid structure that has inspired conspiracy theories about the illuminati, and the Khan Shatyr, a giant transparent tent, both designed by British architect Norman Foster. Additionally, the capital city has been a center for projects of soft diplomacy, hosting in 2017 both the Syrian peace talks and the EXPO-2017, a World’s Fair-type event themed around the topic “Future Energy.” Amidst all of this growth, scholars have noted that everyday citizens — residents of Astana and Kazakhstanis from other areas who come to visit — experience the city with a mixture of wonder and alienation (Bissenova 2013, Koch 2014). The city of Astana proved important to the identity of Kazakhstan even in Almaty. Despite the fact that the movement of the capital resulted in a loss of a certain amount of power, adults often talked to children about how their capital city of Astana was one of the most beautiful cities on earth.

Despite the loss of status as capital city, Almaty remains the largest city and business capital of Central Asia. While it was not the site of the same level of state-funded architectural projects, wealth has become concentrated here, as in other urban spaces in Kazakhstan, yet social programs for citizens have disappeared. Soviet programs aiding parents, in particular single, working mothers, were reduced or disappeared with Kazakhstan's independence (Alexander 2007). These changes, along with large-scale economic blows such as the financial crisis of 2008 and the currency devaluations of 2014-2015, have brought a number of challenges to lower-income families. I discuss these issues in greater detail in Chapters 1 and 4, especially insofar as they affect questions of children being placed in institutional homes, such as government-run children's homes.¹ In Almaty, most of my friends and other acquaintances readily admitted that what they had was not exactly a democracy, but that it worked. They admitted that their lives could be better, but also recognized their social, economic, and political situation as being preferable to the poverty of neighbors such as Tajikistan, and feared the political instability of Kyrgyzstan.

1. Throughout this dissertation, I use the following terms to refer to various types of group home care provided by state and private entities, most of which are approximate translations of the terms most commonly used in Russian language in Kazakhstan and how they are frequently translated into English in other writing on the topic: State-run homes for children 0-3 years of age are "baby houses," (*dom rebēnok*). State-run homes for children 4-18 years of age are "children's homes" (*detskii dom* or *detdom* for short). I strive to use these terms as much as possible because the term "orphanage" often leads to the mistaken assumption that most children residing within such sites lack one or both parents, where as the majority are what some call "social orphans" — children in need of care due to a range of social problems. In some cases, the state has taken children out of homes due to abuse or neglect. In others, parents have given up their rights due to poverty or for other reasons. Government-funded boarding schools for children 7-18 years of age, where children live throughout the week but sometimes go home for weekends or holidays, are referred to as *internat*. I use this term, rather than "boarding school," to avoid readers confusing such sites with the system of elite, private residential schooling that we find in the US in the twenty-first century ((Of course, the US also knows a history of stigmatized state-funded residential schooling, such as those that existed to assimilate Native American children into "mainstream" culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Adams 1995)).

Performing Nostalgic Futurity

In speeches at Hope House and at the puppet theater, and through media such as city billboards, Kazakhstani adults construct ideologies of childhood as existing in a timeless, apolitical, and universal space. Such discourses enable these realms to become potent sites for constructing visions of Kazakhstan in the twenty-first century, with frequent descriptions of children as sources of hope. Nonetheless, such discourses break down, even among those who most frequently espouse them: directors at the puppet theater would frequently complain about how childhood in Kazakhstan was changing with, for example, children's new obsessions with technology. Their call for the puppet theater to adapt to changes in their audiences recognized a mismatch between their (supposedly universal) art and the interests of (supposedly universal) children in contemporary Almaty.

Farrukh, the puppet *Gūlvira* and *Koralai* animate in the second vignette, is from a band most active in the 1970s. Charged with entertaining and enchanting Kazakhstan's youngest members of the public through these animations, puppeteers offered fairy tales and fantastic characters familiar to most of them from their own childhoods. During my fieldwork, however, the artists and directors struggled to imagine a new future for the theater itself. Different artists — puppeteers and directors alike — described the theater, and Kazakhstan's art scene more generally, as stuck in a Soviet past, unable to move beyond the repertoire they had developed in socialist times. Even as they presented scenes and stories designed to engender wonder, to inspire children's dreams, they moved through the theater full of uncertainties about their own futures and the theater's place in it.

As with discourses of childhood, people in Kazakhstan construct ideologies of art as timeless, universal, and apolitical. They connect the two realms of the fantastic and the childish by describing childhood as a fairy tale space and time. Spectacle and stories do more than cover

up or distract from more serious political action; the fantasies created at these sites themselves manifest and transform power-laden relationships between actors at different levels. Scholars of Russian and Soviet theatre and theatricality have highlighted the many ways public spaces became transformed into political stages (Clark 1995). Mass spectacles, such as director Evreinov's staging of the reenactment of the Storming of the Winter Palace with 8,000 participants (Deák 1975), blurred the lines between performers and audiences in the name of incorporating everyone into performance as participation in revolution, with mass spectacles maintaining appeal into post-Soviet times in Central Asia (Adams 2010). Meanwhile, Soviet legal and theatrical spaces imitated one another, with portrayals of courts on stage and screen, alongside theatrical terminology describing the real action of Bolshevik and Stalinist "show trials" (Cassiday 2000, Fitzpatrick 2005, 2006). Theatricality moreover came to define particular groups, such as Roma, such stereotypes persisting well into post-Soviet times (Lemon 2000).

My fieldsites highlight ongoing contradictions and complexities surrounding image and reality, duplicity and sincerity, and surface and substance in post-Soviet Kazakhstan that are far from straightforward dichotomies. These concerns, too, emerge from older concerns surrounding sincerity and authenticity (Lemon 2000), blurred lines between art and reality (Lemon 2004, 2008, 2009), and how people bring together sense and sentiment in characterizing Cold War people and places (Fehérvári 2013, Lemon 2011, 2013). Everyday fantasies of childhood help construct images of the future of Kazakhstan. These endeavors of animation act as exertions and interactions of power at various levels within state institutions.² Hierarchies in terms of power, influence, and inspiration go beyond a simple adult-child configuration to include directors supervising teachers and children monitoring one another. Yet this project considers the

2. See Dubuisson (2009, 2010, 2014) and Nauruzbayeva (2011) for accounts of complex political relationships between sponsors and artists in Kazakhstan.

productive potential of institutional spectatorship and power (or of surveillance and discipline) in shaping social relations (Foucault 1988, 1995), as it examines how groups and individuals transpose themselves into other bodies. This approach traces the lamination and accumulation of powers through bodies, rather than considering particular actors the pure puppets of a definitive master.

Scholarly attention to Soviet fantasy has often concentrated on utopian visions of socialist futures (Buck-Morss 2000, Stites 1989), highlighting gross disparities between visions of the future and actual unfolding of events. However, we should not mistake Soviet and post-Soviet fantasy and spectacle as always existing at a distance from reality. Science and science fiction mutually informed one another in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Without this relationship, there would be no rocket and no space travel (Clark 1995, Siddiqi 2010, Stites 1989). Dreams of Soviet middle-class consumption may have been less grand, but played no less an important role in shaping relations between citizen readers and the state, as Vera Dunham points out, “In Stalin’s time — and even in Stalin’s worst times — the regime was supported by more than simple terror” (Dunham 1979: 13). It was also supported by middle-class, middlebrow fiction, which cultivated citizens in its own way. Moreover, science fiction offered both sides of the Iron Curtain to imagine not only other times and places but also to envision Cold War others and the sensory and material environments in which they lived (Lemon 2011, 2013).

Puppet theatres for children, offering mostly fairy tales and songs, seem to offer a benign example of state use of art in post-Soviet cities, yet puppets have been inherently political since the founding of state puppet theatres all over the Soviet Union under Stalin in the 1930s, including in Kazakhstan, to offer political pedagogy to young and mass audiences. The puppet theatre, during my fieldwork, often touted the universality of puppetry as a language that all

children innately comprehend. Nonetheless, hosts' introductions to shows often featured explicit reference to President Nazarbayev, descriptions of the capital city of Astana as the most beautiful city in the world, and expressions of gratitude to government officials for making the theatre possible. At the same time, businesspeople and state representatives attended performances and other special events at Hope House at least in part in order to create images of themselves as benevolent benefactors through carefully coordinate photo ops or television news reports, so that images of the children alongside sponsoring adults helped to form public image — and imagination — of economic and political elites.

Frames at Play

Framing the Fantastic shows how people distribute agency to give rise to fantasies and characters and the implications such endeavors have for social relationships in the institutions where such endeavors unfold. In doing so, it contributes to work on the semiotics of play and fantasy, along with the anthropology of childhood, art, and materiality; in following these activities, it moreover highlights the interplay of sense, semiosis, and sentiment as such endeavors unfold. I discuss the overarching theoretical concerns in the following sections.

Many different objects can be treated like dolls and puppets – pillows and flowers (Ellis and Hall 1897) or a piece of candy (Williams 2014) – but artisans and toy designers craft puppets and dolls to resemble living things – giving them faces, limbs, and clothing – which encourage people, in turn, to treat them as such. They give them certain features that help people manipulate them to bring them to life through movement: Tabletop puppets often resemble dolls or stuffed animals, but might include a short rod on the back of the puppet's head so that the puppeteer can hold them up from behind. The materiality of such objects can also get in the way

of fantasy, however, especially when they fail to match the range of movements of human bodies. Children at Hope House frequently got frustrated with the limited movement of doll legs and would sometimes refuse to play with a doll after trying at length to get it sit up on its own. In Vignette #2, above, the artists make the Farrukh puppet take a seat. He faces them while they work without him, anticipating their animation of him by waving their own arms.

In Vignette #1, back in the playhouse, behind Aynura, one photographer moves into the playhouse to take pictures of another girl, Tamilya, who holds a toy helicopter. Two boys, Maksat and Nurlan, approach. Nurlan stands close to the photographer to watch her, while Maksat edges in front of Tamilya to try to get into the shot. The photographer shoos him away. Nurlan takes a toy car and holds it up to his eye, making it into a camera. Maksat poses with his soccer ball for the pretend camera of his friend. With this, the two boys, pushed out of one camera's frame, make their own frame, albeit a fantastic one. Nurlan transforms the toy car, ready to capture a friend's pose.

Frames not only contain but also enable particular semiotic relations between inside and outside (Gal 2002), whether the frame emerges from the boundaries of a camera lens (Lutz and Collins 1991) or from the gates of the institutions themselves (Goffman 1961). "The dwelling as a built structure materializes ideal boundaries between inside and outside," writes Fehérváry. This dwelling then becomes a site expected to fulfill various capacities of shelter and comfort. Nonetheless, "The degree to which a house/home fulfills these capacities varies tremendously" (2013: 13). As people recognize particular material and metadiscursive frames *as* frames that hold certain people, activities, or ideals in or push others out, these frames become themselves infused with metadiscursive significance. At my sites, institutions frame distinction between inside and out, child and adult, performer and spectator, play and real, human and nonhuman, in

ways that have implications for relationships of responsibility and belonging. But such distinctions are subject to shift.

These processes of framing and animation, which emerge in play and fantasy, inform and are informed by the institutions where the processes are centered. Aynura and other children were spending their first years in Hope House, their parents having agreed to return for them by the time they were old enough to start school. While living at the home, teachers and children envisioned and thus anticipated the children's return to their family homes outside Hope House. In the meantime, they found themselves frequently asked to pose and to perform. They sometimes tried, in playful or serious ways, to shape how they were seen and by whom. Other times, the performance shaped their play and fantasy.

Taking Play Seriously

Play and fantasy are embedded in questions of power and identity: Bakhtin lauded the potential of the carnivalesque to turn hierarchies upside down (1984[1940-1946]); such inversions can also act to reassert these hierarchies, however (Seizer 1997). Maksat and Nurlan's playful frame lacks the same possibilities for durability or circulation that the visiting photographer's offers. When Gūlvira takes Korlai by the hair, she risks pulling too hard and upsetting a balance in their work together. Struggles surrounding power, identity, and social ties unfold in children's play, as well (Beresin 2010, Goodwin 1990, 2006). Play makes it possible to imagine change, whether on grand or everyday scales, informing relationships between co-present participants in these frames, along with forging or reforming relationships with absent others.

Fantasy offers unlimited possibility, while all remains unattainable so long as it stays within the bounds of mere fantasy. This unclear relationship between play and "not play"

threatens this project with being dismissed as insubstantial or trivial, yet I work to show, throughout, how meaningful these endeavors are for people.³ Notions of framing have proven useful in considerations of how play and fantasy emerge and their relationship with events of activities framed by most as “not-play” or even “real.” Bateson (1955) addresses the semiotics of play as essentially meta-communicative, but also as standing in a paradoxical relationship with the phenomena it was referencing: the play bite refers to a “not play” bite. The latter might never have occurred, but if it had, it would have been experienced and reacted to differently. It would have hurt, might have drawn blood, and might have provoked a real bite in return.

Sometimes a fantastic occurrence can yield physical, emotional reactions, such as when we forget that a movie is make-believe and find ourselves crying at a sad moment or throwing our popcorn on our neighbor because we are frightened. Bateson describes the “metaphor that is meant” – the sign coming to bear the power of what it represents as an intrinsic quality – as a denial of difference between map and territory, describing this as the “the dim region where art, magic, and religion meet and overlap” (1955:188). Questions surrounding relationships between symbols, objects, belief, and sociality inspired seminal texts about just these topics – especially magic and religion – by Malinowski (1935), Mauss (1954 [1925], 1972 [1902]), Durkheim (1976 [1912]), and others. Unlike art or play, standardization and institutionalization of magic and religion stabilize these relationships, making them resistant to change.

Bateson’s “metaphor that is meant” occurs where these spheres overlap, according to Bateson, implying that art *as* art should offer pure metaphor. Nonetheless, at Hope House and at the puppet theater, people use fantasy to create lasting change in understandings of the world and

3. Gell, introducing the girl and her doll, anticipates readers will find such an example “trivial,” but defends it by comparing it to the art of adults (Gell 1998: 18). The child becomes interesting because she is like adults. To a certain extent, this project pulls a similar trick, though the children receive equal space.

behavior withing it. The puppet theater used fairy tales to teach child audiences about good and evil, while teachers at Hope House often cultivated less fantastic, but still largely imagined, worlds of the non-institutional home with a mother or father. They told fairy tales during lessons and encouraged the children to act out such fantasies for adult audiences. Children, in turn, would reenact and elaborate on such games or invent their own narratives. By carrying out these acts of animation, children and adults moved through one another, worked to see the world from different perspectives, and transposed themselves into other bodies. They not only offered representations of ideal childhoods or fairy tales to their audiences, but they moreover solicited one another's participation in enacting these ideals.

Artists have concerned themselves deeply with how and what fantasy can achieve. Shklovsky (1917), Meyerhold (1969 [1911-1912]), and Brecht (1964 [1936]) sought to create new awareness of extant situations by using art and theater to make familiar perspectives strange to viewers. Such techniques of “estrangement,” “theatricality,” or “V-effect,” in various ways, promised to show the world in a new light, empowering viewers to respond to the world using this new understanding (Jestrovic 2006). Projects to transform orientations toward space and time, which thrived in prerevolutionary avant-garde art, became useful to Bolshevik efforts after the revolution to realize total social transformation, which would require new ways of seeing (Clark 1995). These projects of total social transformation, moreover, highlighted the possibilities that children in particular presented to revolutionary projects, discussed below.

Others, writing on theaters and spectators, considered the crowd as an entity with a power unto itself that could be harnessed not by waking audiences but by entrancing them, from crowd theorists of the nineteenth century to the writing of Artaud on the theater as plague in the twentieth (Artaud 1958, Jannarone 2009, Le Bon 1982, Mazzarella 2010, Moscovici 1985).

Spectatorship itself is an embodied act. Artaud highlights the physiological reaction of theatrical experience, for audiences as well as for performers (1958). Though it emerges rather implicitly in Bateson's essay, the playful nip, actions taken for or against an actual flag, or crying over a movie all highlight that fantastic experiences are material, and are experienced through embodied reactions. Bateson describes play signals as "metacommunicative" signs, but they are also haptic, visual, or auditory.

These sensory aspects lead Bateson to dwell more on their relationship to some prior "mood signs," but these examples should remind us of the substance of fantasy, as play emerges between people in the world. Puppet artists create imaginary characters through painstaking work with wood, foam rubber, glue, and fabric, and puppeteers will practice a single movement dozens of times in order to make a goose's hop from the floor onto a box look – if not effortless – as if the effort came from the wood-and-foam gander, and not from the puppeteer standing behind it. Imaginary worlds comprise complex social and material fields. Goffman's writing on "primary frameworks" investigates the ways that people classify situations in everyday life (Goffman 1974). These classifications allow us to draw from past experience to anticipate how an interaction will unfold. In this way, we imagine our encounters with others as they are happening — though our interlocutors can upset our expectations. Teachers at Hope House and directors at the puppet theater constantly reminded children and artists of expected bodily and social comportment within particular scenarios, demarcated by space and time, instructing children to sit with their hands folded at their desks when it was time for class or reminding puppetry students to walk out onto the stage in an "actorly" manner.

The Child's Play Meets the Actor's Art

Framing the Fantastic engages with questions of fantasy and animation as categories broad enough to encompass both play and performance. People might carefully distinguish play from performance and value these differently. For example, a game on the playground and a puppet performance might include much of the same content — a story, say, about a family of goats and a thieving wolf — but only the puppet actors will get paid (or, usually, applauded) at the end. Attention to “framing” requires attending to the constitution of particular events *as* performance, rather than simply looking at the contents of the performances themselves. Institutions, the built environment, and verbal and aural cues can “key” an event as performance or verbal art (Bauman and Briggs 1990, Briggs and Bauman 1992, Hymes 1975) and others as mere play. At other times, people value the playfulness of performance and the entertainment value play can offer. These frames compete, too, such as when a rehearsal veers from the script. An observing director might see this improvisation as a productive experimentation or as a waste of everyone's time.

I examine the playful and theatrical endeavors of children and adults side-by-side. Though the children more often engage in free play, and the artists receive greater recognition for their performances, animations occur through play and performance at both sites. Work on the anthropology of performance has produced a rich body of theory and ethnography since the emergence of the ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1975, Bauman 1975), performance studies' interest in thinking of ritual and theater together (Schechner and Turner 1985, Turner 1982), and interest in everyday “performativity” in shaping social and political relations and identity (Austin 1962, Butler 1990). Despite Bateson's classic article describing the paradoxes of “play” and Turner's own stated interest in treating theater and ritual as “serious” forms of play,

anthropologists' interest in performance, performativity, and animation tend, nonetheless, to prioritize these activities as "serious" (and interesting) when adults carry them out, leaving it to anthropologists of childhood to study children's play (Schwartzman 1978, Sutton-Smith 1995, 1997) – which remains relatively marginalized within anthropology (Hirschfeld 2002).

Anthropologists of play and developmental psychologists have reason to focus primarily on the play of children, as these endeavors certainly pose plenty of questions surrounding children's social, linguistic, and cognitive development, along with the ways children's social spaces work differently from adult-only settings. Developmental psychologists continue to investigate how children create make-believe scenarios and how they understand distinctions between real and make-believe differently from adults.⁴ Studies of children's play have noted the role of such endeavors in shaping social relations between peers (Harness-Goodwin 1990, 2006, Schwartzman 1978) and with family members of different ages (Youngblade and Dunn 1995). These studies, along with seminal work in language socialization (Ochs 1988, Schieffelin 1990), have worked to show the social, cultural constitution of language and self through young children's interactions with others (Vygotsky 1986).

Many have highlighted links between children's play and adult art — including Bateson, Turner, and early twentieth century Russian theater director Evreinov (1927). Some see children's play as a key precursor for creative processes that develop later. Singer, a psychologist interested in adult daydreaming, argues that children's play prepares children for later daydreaming and private narratives, cultivating the subjunctive realm of the "possible" (1995).

4. See Lillard (1993a, 1993b, 1996, Ma and Lillard 2006) for studies of children's understanding of pretend play *as* pretend, while DeLoache (e.g. 1987, 2011), has studied how children's symbolic capacities develop, including their understanding of objects or symbols as symbols, rather than objects. Taylor (1999, Taylor et al. 2013) has persuasively argued for the robustness of imaginary companions in children's lives than previously reported in literature, offering a study of the imaginative worlds of children as richly populated with invisible interlocutors and social stuffed animals.

Sawyer argues that in preschool children's pretend play, they develop the social and linguistic skills necessary for improvisational interactions with others later in life (1997). Despite mentions of such similarities between child and adult creativity, scholars tend to focus on one or the other. Vygotsky, the early twentieth century Soviet psychologist known mainly for his work on child development, was perhaps surprisingly dismissive of children's artistic efforts. He emphasized the import of play and art in cultivating emotion, but held that children lacked sufficient technical skill to produce art (disagreeing, on this point, with Lev Tolstoy) (Smagorinsky 2011, Vygotsky 1971[1925]).

The interactions I examine show ongoing interplay between children and adults — and between categorizations of adulthood and childhood. These age groups and life stages mutually inform one another, rather than positing a neat teleology between children's play and another activity that it becomes (such as high art or internalized daydreaming). The goal is not to collapse all pretense together, but to see what can be gained from sustained examination of points of contact and difference. Children's play might bleed more quickly into non-play and thus offer a site in which frameworks shift at a rapid pace. Meanwhile, adults' construction of make-believe worlds for children offers insight regarding the ways childhood itself becomes an important fantasy for adults. Children become icons of futurity, offering at once the possibility for change and the assurance of stability and continuity through reproduction.

The puppet theater and the children's home become important sites where ideologies of childhood and fantasy — and thus fantasies of the future (of Kazakhstan) — emerge. Differences in ideologies and expectations surrounding childhood and adulthood shape how play and animation unfold. In order to get a performer to stand in the correct position, a teacher might shape a child's body, rather than engaging in an extended discussion of the mental process that

should motivate a child to move in a certain way. Directors less frequently manipulate adult actors' bodies, and such acts might surprise actors. Beyond the scale of these interpersonal relationships, these ideologies bear consequences for children and for the ways the state and other bodies support their care or demand their performance in different sites.

Ventriloquy and Other Animations

Gūlvira uses Koralai's head in place of the puppet's, so that while the puppet is a stand-in for a real singer, the humans become stand-ins for their puppet. These exercises help the puppeteers gain a new understanding of what the puppet is supposed to be doing. They also require trust between the two puppeteers, in order to animate a third body as a single entity. At the puppet theater, artists asserted that in order to animate a puppet together, they had to become a single "I."

Framing the Fantastic examines animations of objects and of bodies as processes in which multiple voices (Bakhtin 1981, Hill 1995, Irvine 1996) and agencies (Enfield and Kockelman 2016, Gell 1998) emerge, sometimes competing with one another and other times overlapping, merging at one turn and diverging at the next moment. While recent anthropology on fantasy and non-fantasy have largely turned to new media to argue for the reality (and materiality) of the "virtual," this ethnography examines practices of play and puppetry, which scholars and Kazakhstani puppet artists alike describe as universal and timeless, but which nonetheless emerge from historically, politically, and materially specific conditions. I am especially interested in how objects get treated as social beings — and when such attempts fail — and how similar processes render persons more like objects. How do dolls and puppets get treated as persons, and why do children so often get treated like objects? Certain bodies become

especially likely to act as media for ventriloquism (Inoue 2011), these conditions deriving from and indexing relationships of power.

Recent work on animation has made use of Goffman's theorization of participant frames as an alternative to simple speaker-hearer dichotomies, with media such as multiple-player online games (Manning 2009, 2013, Boellstorf 2008) or COSplay (Silvio 2006) revealing the ways people distribute agency to multiple bodies or figures, along with the ways multiple individuals might be working together to animate a single figure. A related body of literature in linguistic anthropology has taken up Bakhtin and Voloshinov's work on voicing, heteroglossia, and reported speech to consider how, within a given utterance, multiple voices emerge and collide. In writing on the internal dialogism of the novel, Bakhtin invites us to think about the author as a kind of ventriloquist: "The author does not speak in a given language (from which he distances himself to a greater or lesser degree), but he speaks, as it were, through language, a language that has somehow more or less materialized, become objectivized, that he merely ventriloquates" (Bakhtin 1981:299 [1975, orig. written in 1930s]). Linguistic anthropologists have used this work on dialogism to consider the emergence of multiple voices in spoken interactions — some framed explicitly as performance or verbal art, while others emergent in conversation (Hill 1995, Bauman and Briggs 1990, Irvine 1996).

In developing these primary frameworks for everyday situations, Goffman also theorized interactional frameworks (1974). These move beyond speaker-hearer roles in interactions to include absent (or present, but merely distant) authors and principals, present (but more or less powerless) animators, along with different types of hearers or listeners, ratified and unratified. As Irvine (1996) shows, these roles are subject to complex laminations, so that as a griot animates the song of nobility, popular characterizations of the griot as volatile also leak into the

performance. No griot is a pure conduit for a message, any more than a child performer is ever merely animating adults' ideologies (see also Agha 1998, Irvine 2011). Moreover, Hill (1995) and others (e.g. Shoaps 1999, Mendoza-Denton 2011) have used Bakhtin's (1981) writing on heteroglossia to demonstrate how multiple voices emerge within a single speaker's utterance, and how contrasting voices constitute one another through processes of stylization and citation (Inoue 2003, Keane 2011). Scripts and playbill lists of roles and responsibilities might suggest a straightforward designation of who says and does what on and offstage, but theaters involve no less complex laminations of voices and roles (Lemon 2000: 151). Puppet artists not only manipulate and ventriloquize inanimate objects; they, moreover, find themselves subject to multiple powers of direction, suggestion, or inspiration in the ways they move, speak, and even think about the work they do.

In my dissertation, I caption the overarching concerns surrounding the emergence of voices and figures as animation, rather than focusing on voicing or ventriloquism, because the latter terms tend to draw more attention to the words themselves or the vocal qualities as the primary modality through which particular figures emerge. In describing the animation of figures through human and nonhuman actors, I attend to the multiple modalities through which these participant roles emerge and become laminated onto others. Nonetheless, at particular moments, questions of "voice" in a literal sense become important to projects of animation and to creating a character (Nozawa 2013, and see Chapter 3). Through animation, people manipulate objects and others, bringing to life other characters using their own bodies, and imagining oneself in the body of other things or bodies enacting fantasies. Writing on puppetry has influenced recent anthropological approaches to analyzing new mediated forms, such as avatars and anime (Manning 2009, Nozawa 2013). New media and technologies have provoked anthropologists to

pose questions surrounding the ways sociality shifts when it unfolds via screens and networks, highlighting important differences in configurations of participant roles (Manning and Gershon 2013, Silvio 2010). Boellstorff (2008) persuasively argues against dismissing online worlds as “virtual.” There are, nonetheless, differences in sensations experienced by tactile animations of bodies that differ from those of digital animations. Children and puppet artists alike grapple with and exploit various dimensions of the material objects (and bodies) they animate. When a boy places his Spiderman in his own bed, the shape of the plastic hands – forefinger, thumb, and pinky up, middle and ring fingers curled in – matters less than the softness of the bed as the boy tucks in his doll and kisses his forehead.

Considering the animation of objects such as puppets and dolls also puts this work in conversation with a range of literatures concerned with the agency of objects and other issues of sociality, materiality, and consumption (Appadurai 1996, Gell 1998, Latour 1993, 2005, Miller 1991, 2010). Gell’s discussion of objects of art as agentive includes brief mentions of girls’ relationships with dolls as an example he assumes will be readily available to most readers, one he defines as an “archetypal instance” of the agency of art (1998:18), insisting the only reason we are reluctant to recognize the similarities between art and dolls is that we find it offensive to be compared to a (female) child. Despite his insistence that we recognize this similarity, the girl and her doll are not, in the end, sufficiently interesting to merit more than this brief mention from Gell, either. Gell’s insight on relationships between objects as iconic indexes of sentient beings and human relationships have certainly served as an inspiration for this project. Writing of volt sorcery, for example, Gell writes:

We suffer, as patients, from forms of agency mediated via images of ourselves, because, as social persons, we are present, not just in our singular bodies, but in everything in our surroundings which bears witness to our existence, our

attributes, and our agency...Vulnerability stems from the bare possibility of representation, which cannot be avoided. (1998:103)

The possibility of representation presents a risk to one's person, as those images or extensions of self become vulnerable to attack. Yet they also offer opportunities for an enduring presence, despite absence, that people exploit when they give one another gifts (Mauss 1954) or share images of one another. The creation and distribution of images emerge within power-laden relationships, so that a visiting photographer can shoo one child out of the camera's frame and can later distribute the images produced according to her discretion. However, children and adults use images and other iconic indexes of absent persons to anchor those relationships, whether they become representations of family members in roleplaying activities or distribute pictures or videos to family members.

Why Children (Are) Like Puppets

Throughout this dissertation, I am interested in how objects get treated as social beings — and when such attempts fail — along with how persons get treated as objects. Certain bodies become especially likely to act as media for ventriloquism (Inoue 2011), these conditions deriving from and indexing relationships of power. Ngai theorizes “animatedness” a racialized affective category in the US, whose “exaggerated and emotional expressiveness..seems to function as a marker of racial or ethnic otherness in general” (Ngai 2007:94). Drawing from Chow's (1992) “Postmodern Automatons,” she notes that processes of animation – and automatization – render animated bodies more object-like, and that certain bodies are more susceptible to such animations than others. Bernstein (2011) traces how materials act as “scriptive things” to perpetuate violent play with black dolls and to equate such dolls with

unfeeling black bodies. While, as Bernstein points out, children play an active role in perpetuating the objectification of certain persons, they are also frequently subjected to being treated as objects by adults. The alleged potency of puppetry, according to puppet artists in Kazakhstan, emerged in part from similarities between puppets and children. They said puppets offered a world at a scale or perspective that better matched the child's world. At Hope House, teachers dressed children up to sing and dance as dolls and puppets brought to life for adult audiences. Children and puppets often find themselves subject to manipulation in quite literal ways, as adults pick them up or push them out of the way.

The coupling of children and puppets might seem natural to Western audiences. In the US, most personal experiences with puppets come from childhood memories of TV puppets, from *Howdy Doody* to *Sesame Street*. Nonetheless, American puppetry includes early twentieth century experimentations with puppets as avant-garde performing objects (Bell 2008) and enduring use of puppets as protest objects, especially with Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater (Schumann 1991). Both of these movements in some sense take advantage of the marginality of puppetry as an asset, rather than a liability. In mainstream theater, such as Broadway productions, puppets for adults — in shows such as *The Lion King*, *Avenue Q*, and *War Horse* — have remained the exception that prove the rule, their use of puppets for adult plays receiving note because, most assume, puppets are for children.

This coupling of puppetry and child audiences is far from a universal truth, however. Javanese shadow puppetry, Wayang Kulit, plays a central role in feasts and ceremonies, these performances lasting all night. The daytime shows, where children are the primary audiences, lack in prestige and are a setting where novices can practice and hone their skills (Keeler 1987). In Taiwan, animated puppetry, a remediation of traditional puppetry for television, is likewise

primarily targeted toward adults (Silvio 2007). Traditional Kazakh puppetry, *orteke*, was performed in conjunction with traditional music and was considered part of Kazakh shamanistic traditions. Even the Russian puppet *Petrushka*, eventually sanitized by Soviet institutionalization of puppetry, came to Russian carnivals as a bawdy, satirical form of popular entertainment (Kelly 2007, Shershow 1995). Among early twentieth century avant-garde theater circles in Europe (including Russia), directors such as Meyerhold drew inspiration from Craig's (1914) call to consider the actor a kind of "über-marionette." Rather than the performing object being parasitic on the human actor, Craig argues for humans to take cues from these objects.

Kazakhstani artists and citizens, like Americans, naturalize connections between puppetry and childhood, but this connection emerges from the particular historical evolution of uses of puppetry and ideologies of childhood within Soviet Kazakhstan. As Shershow (1995) has pointed out, puppetry's historical association with popular culture in Europe renders it susceptible to association with other devalued types — namely, women and children. Hierarchical relationships of power and size often create regimes in which differences in size become iconic indexes of power, processes of erasure naturalizing the marginalization of miniatures (Stewart 1984), marionettes (Shershow 1995), or cute objects (Kinsella 1995, Merish 1996, Ngai 2005, Silvio 2010) as trivial (see Irvine and Gal 2000 on iconization, erasure, and fractal recursivity). These objects, in turn, come to stand for femininity and immaturity.

Animations involve bodies — especially small, cute bodies like puppets and children — articulating or enacting utterances or gestures that come from somewhere else. Puppets offer an explicit division between at least two participant roles, whether we define them as author and animator or simply puppeteer and puppet (Goffman 1974, Irvine 1996, Manning 2009). The distancing between originator and message enabled by such a division was useful on fairgrounds

and at carnivals. Pulcinella, Punch, Guignol, or Petrushka could get away with subversive social and political messages that live actors could not (Kelly 1990). At the same time, the size of puppets made them ideal for travel, so that one puppeteer could carry and animate a whole troupe of characters from within a portable theater (Proschan 1981). This mobility enabled the spread of Pulcinella as far west as England (where he became Punch) and as east to Russia, where he became Petrushka (Kelly 1990). This same freedom of movement — along with Petrushka’s notorious willingness to stand up to the establishment — made puppets ideal vehicles for spreading propaganda around the newly created Soviet state in the years following the Bolshevik Revolution (Smirnova 1963).

Socialization was always a key objective of Soviet puppetry. While in the beginning, these performing objects were used to socialize adults as well as children, the task of educating children during the early years of socialism played a key role in justifying the need for puppet theaters, as explained in a Russian-language history of early Soviet puppetry:

The theater finds itself with tasks of the incarnation of new ideas and with that, new relationships between people. All the more urgent, given the demand of the times: the theater for children should become in full measure that scaffolding that raises complex, alarming questions of modernity. (Smirnova 1963: 164, trans. by author)

By the time I began my fieldwork in the early 2010s, the Almaty puppet theater — by then one of several state puppet theaters in Kazakhstan — had a repertoire of 20 or so plays, in Russian and in Kazakh. These were all geared toward young audiences, visiting schools and children’s hospitals during the week and welcoming families each Saturday and Sunday. When discussing puppetry, puppet artists often emphasized the magic that puppetry presented to children, so that their role is not only pedagogical but almost mystical, in terms of puppeteers’ descriptions of their power to enchant children with the animation of inanimate objects. The theater’s trust in the

importance of puppets to children comes, in part, from their theories about children's imaginations as more powerful than adults'. In order to understand ideologies of puppetry in relation to childhood, it is necessary to consider the aesthetics and ideologies of childhood as part of their lived reality. The ideological role of childhood ends up informing the ways adults construct large-scale policies and institutions for children and the ways children are expected to behave on an everyday basis.

While children's size and vulnerability lend easy comparisons between puppets and children, another important component in ideological constructions of childhood in Kazakhstan is their potential and futurity, especially in political discourse surrounding childhood. Pedagogues in early twentieth century (pre-Revolutionary) Russia engaged in spirited debates surrounding novel methods of childcare and education, in many ways anticipating the experimental educational methods implemented in early Soviet years (Kelly 2007).⁵ Scholarly attention to Soviet childhood (especially preschool-age childhood) has concentrated on Russian contexts, particularly Moscow and St. Petersburg, where much experimentation was initiated and where there exist more records of such programs (Kelly 2007: 32).⁶ Following the Bolshevik Revolution, pedagogical planners hotly debated proper methods for rearing children, as proper socialization of children was to play a central role in the transformation of society, as discussed in Chapter 4. As these grand plans shifted, families — particularly mothers — became (re)incorporated into state projects of bearing and rearing future Soviet and post-independence Kazakhstani children. Nonetheless, government institutions such as puppet theaters, schools, and

5. Histories of Central Asia have focused more on the ways Soviet policies worked to reshape women's positions in Central Asia (Doi 2002, Kamp 2006, Massell 1974, Northrop 2004).

6. While an historical account with more attention to Central Asia would provide helpful contextualization of this ethnography of contemporary childhood in Kazakhstan, it is unfortunately outside the scope of the present study. The most relevant scholarship in this regard has mostly highlighted the development of schooling in the region under Soviet rule, e.g. Ewing 2002, Schatz 2000).

residential institutions such as children's homes, orphanages and boarding houses (*internat*), continue to play an important role in rearing Kazakhstani children. Each of these sites promises to nurture, in various ways, children's physiological and moral development.

Moral discourses surrounding children's consumption within these sites create tensions between childhood and materiality that are not easily resolved. Kelly cites ongoing debates in child education throughout the post-Stalinist period in Russia between proponents of indulgent versus disciplinary approaches to childrearing: "As in the Stalin years, this was expressed in attitudes to self-control versus the right to consumption" (2007: 142). Children's and adults' uses and understandings of objects at each site offers particular insight on childhood consumerism in Kazakhstan. The puppet theater's work rests on the idea that playful objects (puppets and toys) help children understand the world and are thus necessary, yet they expressed ambivalence toward children's consumption of new media. At Hope House, teachers offered children new media as a pedagogical tool, but their ownership of objects played out in a strikingly different manner than that of most children in Kazakhstan, with almost all toys collectively owned. Gifts from parents became exceptional objects that indexed intimate relationships. With the vast majority of objects with which they interacted, however, children often engaged with them momentarily and then moved on to other things. Thus, while their understanding and uses of consumer goods plays an important role in their social-material worlds, many of the processes implied by "consumption" or "ownership" become irrelevant at Hope House and at the puppet theater.

Double-Sited Research

Puppets and children — objects that come to life and persons who get treated as objects — can illuminate one another’s worlds in various ways at these research sites. I juxtapose them in order to highlight commonalities, pairing them in each part. This threatens to distort relationships in the name of similarity. Puppets and dolls are called the same name in Kazakhstan — *kukly* in Russian and *qūyrshaq* in Kazakh. Nonetheless, I try not to lose sight of important differences in the ways animation emerges at each site. In the first episode of the still popular Soviet-era animation *Cheburashka*, Cheburashka and others work to build a House of Friends (*dom družey*). The verb *stroit*, to “build,” plays a prominent role in Soviet calls to “build socialism.” The Soviet Union, of course, knew many houses, with major cities often boasting a House (or Palace) of Culture (*dom kul’tury*), of Writers (*dom pisateley*), and of Pioneers (*dom pionirov*). These were social gatherings spaces for special events and also hosted clubs of different sorts. The House of Pioneers might offer classes for language learning or art. The other kind of house evoked by this narrative, however, is the *detskii dom* or *dom rebēnok* — “children’s home” or “baby house” — the latter term reserved for state-run homes caring for infants, 0-3 years old. These institutions for children – Hope House and the puppet theatre – play an important role in the post-Soviet landscape of urban children’s culture, shaping and regulating relationships between children and the state. Shifts and continuities in relationships between these entities emerge through each site. At the same time, these project reveal that the goals of such institutions is not only to care for or entertain children, but moreover that proper education of children can ensure the proper building of society for the future.

The puppet theatre and Hope House in different ways reflected official state policies toward balancing linguistic and cultural promotion of Kazakh alongside discourses of multinationalism. While Kazakhs now comprise 63% of the total population of Kazakhstan, 75%

of them speak Russian (Zharkynbekova et al 2015). While 97% of Kazakhs claimed Kazakh as their native language in a 1989 census (Smagulova 2008), in urban centers such as Kazakhstan, Russian dominates in most aspects of daily life. I met many Kazakh during my fieldwork who claimed to speak little or no Kazakh. While the President urges the population to become trilingual – in Russian, Kazakh, and English (Suleimenova and Tursun 2016) – one socialization study suggests that even parents who wish for their children to be bilingual in Kazakh and Russian often speak Kazakh to their children only when they are babies, and then switch to Russian once the children begin to talk (Smagulova 2014). At Hope House, established in the post-independence period, all groups spoke Kazakh except for one mixed-age Russian group, whereas at other children’s homes I visited around Almaty, Russian dominated the everyday lives, despite directors’ assertions that they were bilingual institutions. At the puppet theatre, most of the actors were ethnically Kazakh and were fluent Kazakh speakers, in addition to being fluent in Russian. While all artists performed in both Russian and Kazakh-language plays, and while rehearsals often took place in Russian, a surprising number of artists expressed a lack of confidence in their Russian when talking with me. For a city like Almaty, where Russian language still dominates daily life, Kazakh was used far more at each institution than I anticipated ahead of time.

I often split my days between Hope House and the puppet theatre in order to stay updated on daily developments. I might spend a morning at the children’s home, followed by an afternoon at the puppet theater, or vice versa, depending on what was happening at each place.⁷ At each, I spent the first couple of months only observing daily activities before I began

7. I gathered supplemental information by visiting private preschools and puppet theaters, spending time with archives on the puppet theatre, and attending other events related to children and puppets around the city. For seminal work on multi-sited ethnography, see Marcus (1995).

recording with my video camera. At the beginning, based on my initial interactions trying to get access to each site for my research, it seemed the puppet theater would be more open to my observation and recording of their daily activities. They were, after all, performers. Based on how difficult it was to get permission from both IRB and from local authorities to work at the children's home, I anticipated reticence from the teachers and directors regarding my daily presence, especially with my camera. To my surprise, the puppet theater grew puzzled at my continual presence at rehearsals as they rehashed the same play, day after day, not understanding what could possibly be interesting after having seen it once or twice. I tried to explain that I was interested in learning how they worked and how they animated their puppets; but especially in early months, when they were rehearsing old productions without a director, they would insist that rehearsals consisted merely of "remembering." Moreover, the stage created definite boundaries between the framing of performance and not performance, so that when they finished a scene and were discussing it, actors not working on a certain scene might come up to talk to me, notice the camera, and ask, "What are you filming this for?"

Meanwhile, at the children's home, the children and adults who worked there were rather inured to observation, both from outside visitors and from directors and peers visiting for open lessons. Video cameras in the classrooms meant that my camera did not present a new sense of surveillance. Nonetheless, teachers and children gently invited me to leave during their mealtimes, and I complied. Teachers requested that I not show the director any moments when the children were shouting or fighting with each other – though the director never asked to see any of the videos.⁸

8. Throughout the dissertation, I use pseudonyms for the children and for the staff and directors at Hope House, in order to protect their privacy. I do this despite the fact that the director's only request was that I not include the children's last names. The children, in many ways, lived a public life, as will be shown in the dissertation, their

There were important differences in my position and role at each site. The puppet theater had already designated a space for audience members. I could sit in a theater seat in front of the stage and watch without looking out of place. At Hope House, there was no proscenium between the children and me. When I was only observing and not recording or when I set up the camera and walked away from it, I usually sat on the floor in the playroom to be at the children's level. I became part of the play space, fair game for being asked to fix a doll's leg or to become a kind of plaything myself (discussed in Chapter 6). Outside on the playground, where the children were more spread out and moved around from one place to another, I usually kept my camera in hand and had to make choices about what or whom to film at one moment, which was always at the expense of other events and other children. Sometimes the children seemed to perform for the camera; sometimes they ignored me. Often, as I was filming children playing in one place, other children would yell for me to look at and film them. I tried to comply, however briefly, even if it meant losing a moment of children engaged in pretend play that I found more interesting than the feat that the children wanted me to observe and record — a pile of leaves that they had swept up or a great height to which they had just climbed. I can't describe many of these events as "naturally occurring" because my presence interfered. Nonetheless, their calls for me to "look" offered insight regarding which moments or feats they found meaningful. They showed me some things that they wanted me to see; they hailed me at moments when they wanted to be recognized.⁹

images frequently appearing in the press. At the puppet theatre, artists were enthusiastic about my research bringing greater international attention to their work. However, I use pseudonyms or omit names where artists discuss potentially sensitive information.

9. See Evans 2008's chapter on trading Pokemon cards with kids as a way that exchange serves to highlight objects that are meaningful to children.

Adults at the children's home seemed at first content to leave me to observe the children, sometimes taking advantage of my presence by asking me to mind the children while they attended to other duties. One day, a teacher asked me to copy a wolf mask to make another for an upcoming performance. The next week, her colleague had me draw scenes of children playing outside in each of the four seasons, each time adding details that were out of place, which she used in one of her lessons. They gave me little art projects periodically afterwards, sometimes to be used as a visual aide in the class or a prop for a performance – and sometimes, perhaps, to be passed off as the work of a child. Later, it was my camera that was able to produce useful images, as they began to ask me to record and share with them performances, open lessons, and other events that they could then distribute to the children's parents.

It was only in the second year, when the directors began stressing the children's need to learn Russian, that the teachers also realized that English would also be desirable, given President Nazarbayev's command that all of Kazakhstan be trilingual in Kazakh, Russian, and English. However, I was loath to take on the authority implied by the role of teacher. I taught them using games and songs and didn't get upset if the children didn't listen. If they got out of hand, I relied on their real teachers to step in and discipline them. I wanted to maintain a position somehow between the children and the adults, so that the children would do things around me that they wouldn't do around the teachers or aides. In this, the children readily complied. The teachers were forgiving of my soft approach to teaching. Teaching had the benefit of finally putting me in the position of performer, as I became charged with holding the children's attention long enough to teach them the names of a few vegetables and was even recruited to

participate in a teacher's "open lesson."¹⁰ The teacher's goal was to show off what the children knew of English, but it also meant that the visiting teachers and directors were, for a change, watching and evaluating me. I began giving lessons not only to my group (by then the oldest group of Kazakh-speaking children), but also to the second-oldest group and to the Russian-speaking group (a mix of children aged four to six years old). The lessons cut into the time I could spend observing, and during that year I began observing my group's morning lessons, as well as spending more time observing and recording their music classes and performances for guests. I was often teaching English to one group while another group was playing. During this period, I saw less of the children's free play. Thus, my research time there as a whole is in some ways uneven, but I got to meet more children this way and to compare their social dynamics with one another and with me.

At the puppet theater, I had at first hoped to learn the craft of puppeteering. However, the students I observed were in their final year. They told me that they had already learned to animate all forms of puppetry, and they spent the year rehearsing for their final show. My job, as a researcher and observer, it seemed, was simply to watch. A surprising number of puppeteers were reluctant to do interviews with me, referring me instead to senior puppeteers, who more often conducted interviews for the press. I found these interviews to yield short, simple responses. Their answers resembled one another and seemed tailored to shorter interviews that television crews or journalists regularly asked them to give. Directors were more willing to grant me lengthier interviews, to discuss theories of acting or puppetry, and to admit to struggles and uncertainties. I experimented with asking puppeteers to interview one another, thinking this might lead to more interesting questions than those I had been offering; the puppeteers

10. These periodic assessments, involving directors teaching and watching a lesson and offering critical feedback, have theatrical aspects in themselves, which I discuss in Chapter 1.

immediately turned the interview into a parody. When I would ask sincere questions about their craft and the puppeteers offered playful replies, I was often unsure if this came from a refusal to take seriously their profession or my research. In hindsight, I see their playfulness showed its own kind of commitment.

In the theater, then, I was mostly quite passive and silent, my interactions with the puppeteers consisting of daily small talk about their families, current events, or short conversations about how a rehearsal was going. I eventually spent time apprenticing in the room where the props artist and seamstresses worked. This work offered its own insight on gender and object relations, though I only touch on these observations peripherally in the present manuscript. It was difficult, at times, to do nothing in the puppet theater, to watch and record, day after day without contributing to the shows themselves. The payoff came, however, with the puppeteers' and directors' willingness to forget I was there, and to carry on with their rehearsals, even during moments of doubt, trouble, and tension. They worked through these moments without worrying about whether what they presented to me was really worthy of being seen in the same ways they intended their final performances to be seen by real audiences. While the notion of audience as passive is often an ideology against which theorists of theaters have bitterly struggled, it became useful in enabling certain kinds of observation. Yet the ways my position varied from place to place and depended upon whom I was observing shows that in such an ethnography concerned with frames of play and fantasy, I need to consider my own role in establishing or shaping particular frames.

Overview of Chapters

The dissertation is divided into four parts, weaving back and forth between the two sites to examine processes of animation at Hope House and the puppet theater on various levels. In Part I, institutions animate spaces and times of the future – the family home and the modern, renovated puppet theater. In these spaces of displacement, acts of imagination anticipate, and in this way animate, the children and actors’ return to these permanent spaces that will enable their proper future development. In Chapter 1, “A Second Home,” I examine how fantasies embedded in everyday interactions at Hope House cultivate children’s imaginings of the “first home” of the family. I offer evidence for children’s uptake and elaboration of these themes of family and home outside Hope House. Teachers at Hope House socialize children to conform to certain expectations and routines within the institution; at the same time, however, the temporary nature of the home charges teachers with the additional duty of preparing the children for life outside of the institution, in their family homes and in school. Hope House thus acts as substitute that cannot replace the first home, and must therefore create images of it, along with other aspects of life beyond the institution, using games, lessons, and songs.

In Chapter 2, “Indefinite *Remont*,” I look at the Almaty State Puppet Theater’s effort to imagine its own future and its place in Kazakhstan as a center for children’s entertainment and pedagogy in the twenty-first century. I examine the puppet troupe’s efforts to revamp its repertoire during a period of their displacement while the theater building was undergoing massive reconstruction for almost a year. I use archival materials on the puppet theater to examine how ideologies surrounding puppetry in the region make it a medium prone to mobility. I argue that debates surrounding the theater’s renovation pivoted around – and therefore highlight – efforts of Kazakhstani artists to reimagine and reinvent themselves and their art in the twenty-first century.

In Part II, I look at how actors and children animate characterological figures through their own bodies. In Chapter 3, “Rubber Stamps and Compelling Foxes: On Animating Figures Naturally,” rehearsals for a masked musical, in which the director encourages a more “natural” approach, raise questions regarding the place of the puppet theater in relation to twentieth-century debates in Russian theater, in which puppets were often invoked as inspiration for human actors, but theorized in different ways. I examine the interactional architecture of the rehearsals themselves as encouraging actors to imitate one another, with multiple actors preparing for the same role, while the play itself is an adaptation of a Soviet-era animation. Certain characters emerge through intertextual, intersubjective endeavors, suggesting that actors often model their animations after one another, but these forms are under constant modification.

In Chapter 4, “Nothing to Hide,” I examine how children’s performances index ability. These performances, I argue, respond to stigmatization surrounding institutionalization in Kazakhstan and the surrounding region. Stereotypes depict orphanages as imperiling children’s innate potential. Frequent performances frame children’s interactions with adults from outside Hope House, while they also affect social relations within the home. I argue that the home’s insistence upon having nothing to hide nonetheless created hierarchies in which some children were fit to be shown. Others, less adept at performing, risked being seen by the teachers as potential “bad subjects.”

Part III examines the work that goes into (and comes out of) animating inanimate objects. In Chapter 5, “Hiding In Plain Sight (Part 1): Doubles,” a puppet production gives rise to new orientations to self and divisions between what puppeteers term “first I” and “second I.” As a new director works to shift this division in order to make artists stop hiding, the puppeteers come to make explicit certain moments of animating puppets while erasing others. Meanwhile, as

puppeteers work to use their puppets and their own bodies as instruments of performance in new ways, onstage tensions seem to parallel offstage debates regarding responsibility and belonging.

In Chapter 6, “You Are A Doll,” I examine scenes of children playing with dolls, along with other ways that objects such as gifts acted to index relationships and to anchor absence in material presence. Because of the complex nature of Hope House as temporary home, children there hold two truths in mind regarding the home and the adults around them. In play, moreover, they hold two truths, in terms of the reality of the objects and the role they play in fantasy.

Part IV focuses on ways people use various technologies of fantasy and framing to conjure absent others. In chapter 7, “Reanimations,” I return to the puppet theater’s production of *Kashtanka*, here examining how puppet artists and directors highlighted themes of memory, death, and freedom in their production of the play. I consider how puppetry involves ongoing play between de-animation and re-animation. Like the Aesopian language used in Soviet fairy tale writing and films (Losev 1984, Zipes 2011), the story of a lost dog gets loaded with deeper personal meaning and political significance — yet such messages remain acknowledged by a few, raising questions regarding the legibility of transpositions.

In Chapter 8, “Technologies of Framing,” I examine how techniques and technologies that frame representations of experience also shape social relations themselves. Not only do they influence the play and performance that they purport to document and represent, but they also become textual or visual artifacts circulating in the world, mitigating or mediating absence and — in their creation — anticipating those absences before they occur.

These chapters sometimes begin with a scene from my fieldwork, but they also often include a story, a fairy tale that the puppet theatre was staging or that the children were told. I mostly refrain from literary analysis of the stories themselves, but I include them because these

stories formed part of the lives of the children and adults I studied. As they animated objects and figures, puppeteers, children, teachers, directors, and parents all lived in some ways inside these narratives, understanding one another by enacting these tales.

Part I: Animating Institutions

Chapter 1: A Second Home

The Goats and the Wolf

There is a game the children play, over and over. Their teacher, Aygul Apay, had them show it to me shortly after I arrived. She played it with them, they played it on their own, and sometimes they asked to play it with me.

There is a mother goat and her kids. The mother goat must leave the house to go to the market. She warns her kids not to let anyone in while she is gone, and she leaves. A wolf comes along, knocks at the door, and says, “It’s your mother, let me in!” Sometimes when the children play, the kids at first refuse the wolf, saying, “You’re not our mother! She doesn’t sound like that.” The wolf goes away, but quickly returns, disguising his voice by speaking in a falsetto, “It’s your mother, let me in!”

In some versions of the story, the wolf must next show his paws, and then disguise them, as well. But the children at Hope House don’t know this part, so they fail to follow the fairy tale rule of threes (Propp 1968: 74). In fact, the kids often admit the wolf even before he has disguised his voice. Letting the wolf into the house is the most exciting part.

The wolf growls, and the kids scream. The wolf takes a couple of kids away with him, pushing their backs against a nearby tree, where they remain pinned, as though tied to it.

The mother returns home, and the kids who evaded the wolf run up to her. Their distress becomes the mother’s grief, as they recount their run-in with the wolf and the loss of their

siblings. The mother, having played this game before, often leaves the house before hearing their story to the end. She already knows where to look for the wolf. She frees her kids without much trouble, and the game starts over, with a new wolf and a new mother goat.

Introduction to an Interruption

The game of the goats and the wolf always ends happily. Maisa played the mother with the greatest passion. Maksat played the cruelest wolf. Olzhas tended to answer the door the fastest, almost as if he wished to be captured. They would play until everyone had had the chance to be the wolf or the mother, and then they lost interest.

At Hope House, no one had taken the children away. Parents — usually single mothers — had placed them there voluntarily, but temporarily. The stigma surrounding single mothers had declined in recent years,¹¹ but this didn't correspond with government programs to make life in Almaty affordable or easy for single-parent households. Friends who were single parents complained that the stipends they could get from the government hardly offset the bus fare for the multiple trips they would have had to take to hand in the necessary paperwork (see Heyneman and DeYoung 2004 on post-Soviet shifts in government support of early childhood in Kazakhstan). Hope House was designed as a planned interruption in the life of children with their parents, but they were children, so they could not live for these years in suspended animation. They had to get on with their lives, but could not get too far. This chapter is about how Hope House framed itself as a second home, as an institutional time and place that would nurture the children as they grew and developed but would never replace the family life that lay

11. In Almaty, it seems, the stigma was less than in other parts of Kazakhstan: One friend who became a single mother moved back home with her parents in another town. She was open to her friends in Almaty about not having been married, but to certain relatives and friends in her more conservative hometown, she told them she had been married and was already divorced.

outside. This process of framing Hope House in contrast to the first home involved speaking about and imagining specific orientations toward space and time — the institution of the present and the home of the future — that children understood and elaborated through diverse semiotic, embodied practices in their classroom and in play.



Figure 5. Model of Hope House.

The children in my group were between four and five years old when I started in the fall of 2012; by the beginning of the second year of fieldwork, they comprised the oldest group, and some of them had already begun to go home. They had all been placed at Hope House when they were one to two years old. According to research on infantile amnesia, children’s first years will recede gradually from memory. As five-year-olds, they might remember these first years, but would not be expected to keep the memories by the time they were 12 or 13 (Madsen and Kim 2016). Psychologists continue to study reasons behind infantile amnesia and the implications it carries for broader understandings of memory (Howe 2008, Meltzoff 1995). There are exceptions

to this general expectation, especially when infants experience trauma. Early exposure to stress seems to make young brains behave more like mature ones, the heightened cortisol levels actually aiding the encoding of memory, based on studies of infant rats separated from their mothers (Callaghan and Richardson 2012). The amount the children at Hope House recalled of their time at home with their parents was unclear; however, their teachers cultivated an ongoing imagining of their family homes, animating the home through games, stories, and lessons, and inviting children to recite stories about their parents as if they were true, modeling for children how they should take for granted certain truths: that they had parents and homes to which they would return, that they were passing time in Hope House in the meantime, and that in the meantime, their teachers were giving them everything they could.

The teachers go by *Apay*, their first names coming before this title (e.g. *Gulym Apay*). Children and adults alike use *Apay* in Kazakh as a term of respect, for teachers or for older women of authority.¹² Most groups spoke exclusively Kazakh; the one Russian group used first name and patronymic (e.g. *Ivana Ivanovna*). At more traditional, permanent children's homes I visited in Kazakhstan, teachers were all called "mom" (*mom*), sometimes with their first names after (e.g. *Mom Gulym*). Directors were still "Mom," but also received a patronymic. At Hope House, teachers continually reminded the children that they had mothers (or fathers, but usually not both), that they had another home, and that they would go back to this home someday soon. Hope House was to be their home, but it was to be their second home. Their first home lay outside. It existed in the past and in the future.

Goffman notes that institutions such as orphanages, prisons, and monasteries, characterized as "encompassing to a degree discontinuously greater than the ones next in line,"

12. It can also be translated as "aunt," along with other terms in Kazakh, varying by region.

are not set up to replace the world outside them (1961:13). Rather, “They create and sustain a particular kind of tension between the home world and the institutional world and use this persistent tension as strategic leverage in the management of men” (*ibid*). He notes that the encompassing nature of such places often includes high walls, locks, or even natural barriers such as surrounding water or forest to cordon spaces off. Goffman wonders, however, if orphanages and foundling homes should not be included as total institutions. Children who are born into such environments, he imagines, could know no “home culture,” “except in so far as the orphan comes to be socialized into the outside world by some process of cultural osmosis even while this world is being systematically denied him” (*ibid*). Without an understanding of “outside,” he reasons, the tension between inside and outside cannot be upheld.

However, at the Hope House, it is not through osmosis that children inside the children’s home came to know of the outside world, but through media, through their lessons, through visitors, and through occasional excursions outside the gates of their home. They may have had a limited, and somewhat inaccurate, idea of how the world worked, but the cultivation of these ideas was no less important to their socialization and education within the children’s home. The tension between the children’s home and the (often imagined, rather than remembered) “home world” certainly served as a powerful force in the children’s lives. Materials and other mediating technologies produced and sustained this tension; additionally, the teachers and children cultivated this tension through their everyday imagining of the outside, through lessons on language and time, and through games and stories of first homes and returning to them.

The morning routine

It is about 10 o'clock. The children, ages 5-6, have helped their teacher, Saltanat Apay, to move the tables and chairs from the room's periphery to the center. Five tables face the front, two children at each table, sitting perpendicular to one another. There are nine children, just over the usual eight-child-per-group-limit, following the consolidation of three groups into two. Saltanat Apay has two boys, Marlin and Yerlan, trade seats so that Yerlan is in front, next to Nurlan. Marlin sits with Aynura, whose thumb is wrapped in gauze. Behind them sit Bekzhan and Naziliya. On the left side, closest to my camera and to me, Zhamilya and Tamilya, the twins, sit together. Aruzhan sits behind them, alone. Light pours into the classroom from the large windows to the children's right side. In front of the windows sits a table full of plants, each with its own label.

Saltanat Apay passes out pencil boxes, reminding them, "We sit quietly." When Saltanat teaches, her voice lilts rhythmically, the volume ranging from a mutter to a boom, and she repeats herself often. Nurlan, apparently unhappy with having his friend Marlin switched out for Yerlan — a new addition to their group, whom the teachers quickly identified as something of a problem — quietly slaps Yerlan's arm out of his space. Yerlan's open mouth sits somewhere between displeasure and amusement (Imagine being sprayed with a hose). Saltanat repeats, "We sit quietly," as the kids straighten their pencil boxes to sit along the edge of the table. The tables are a light brown imitation wood, with red metal legs. The floor is a red patterned carpet. No visitors being expected today, the children wear everyday clothes of bright sweaters and jeans or sweatpants.

Saltanat asks the students, "How do we sit?" They fold their hands on the table, the left hand over the right elbow, their various responses amounting to, "We put our hands to get ready for school." Aynura points out the extra chair at Aruzhan's table. Saltanat Apay returns it to the

back of the room. She reminds the students to raise their hands when answering a question, and she begins.

Saltanat announces that they will be studying math today. Yerlan asks her, cutting into her own announcement, “Apay, what kind of lesson after?” Saltanat looks straight at Yerlan but ignores the question. She continues in her large voice to say that they will be studying expressions of time (*uaqyti baghdarlau*).

She asks them what this means, “time expressions.”

Nurlan offers, “Morning.”

Saltanat builds off that. “What did you all do this morning?” she asks.

Their answers, at first, are varied and muddled, their adherence to the rule of raising hands before speaking spotty, at best. Sultanat gives them a hint — *Uyqydan* — “From sleep —” and they finish, “we got up.” Saltanat straightens the pencil case in front of Nurlan. Nurlan’s chair faces forward, and he looks ahead, at the teacher in front of him. Yerlan, his table mate, faces sideways, toward me, but he looks back at Aynura, sitting at the table behind him. She manages, more effectively than the others, to answer Apay’s questions or to finish her sentences.

“In the morning we sit in the lessons, what’s that time?” Saltanat continues. “Now we go out for a walk, go outside, and look around at everything. What’s that time?” The children join her as soon as they can, especially at the end of each sentence, where the verb always goes, and the verb endings are predictably *myz/miz/byz/biz*, thanks to vowel harmony and consonant assonance. Together, their voices draw out the second-to-last syllable in the verbs, the tone dropping leading down to the last syllable and bouncing back up at the end.



Figure 6. Classroom.

Tangerteng sabaq otip zhatyrmыз

In the morning lesson sit we are

In the morning we are sitting in lesson

Qazir biz seruenge shyghamyз

Next we for a walk we go out

Next we go out for a walk

Dalada serüendep aynalamyzdyng bärin baqylaymyз

Outside walking our surroundings everything we look at

Walking outside we look around at everything

Saltanat and the children together effect a predictable lilt, a poetic repetition the children know from folk tales. She goes through the entire daily routine:

“At one o’clock we come back into the group, eat our meal. What time is that?”

“Noon.”

“You said it right. We go to sleep again, get up from sleep. That’s the time, that’s ‘evening time’ (*keshki uakhyt*), we say. ‘Afternoon time’ (*tüsten keyingi uaqyt*). ‘Afternoon time’ (*besin uaqyt*) we say. Having gone outside and played again, we come in, wash up, eat the evening meal. What time is that?”

“Evening (*kesh*).”

Bekzhan calls out, “Apay, then we eat yogurt, right?”

Saltanat continues: “We lay down to sleep. That’s night, right? Good job.” She adds, to Bekzhan, “You’re not allowed to speak.”

She turns their attention, now, with her plastic, pencil-sized pointer, to the card she has placed on the whiteboard. It contains four landscapes, one below the next, of four different times of day. In the first three, the only difference is the placement of the sun, relative to the horizon and to the single tree on the left. In the last frame, the sky is dark blue, and there is the moon overhead. When she went through the daily routine the first time, she sometimes looked or even pointed at the picture, but she never explained, explicitly, the connection between the drawing and their own daily activities that they described. Now she asks them to label each picture with the time of day it represents.

Having gone through the pictures on the board, she passes out individual cards, which they are to order according to when they occur in the day, and not based on what they see on the

board (as these are out of order). This is not clear to them all; they copy what they see on the board. Some of them have been given duplicate cards of the same time of day, and are consequently missing other times.

Zhamilya quickly arranges her cards and asks, “Apay, is this right?” Before Saltanat Apay can look, Zhamilya’s twin sister Tamilya insists that she’s wrong and tries to rearrange them for her. While Saltanat is checking other children’s cards and redistributing them as she finds duplicates and missing cards, Zhazira Apay, vice director, has entered quietly. She wears a white sheath, a thin red belt, high heels, and red lipstick.¹³ She goes around to some of the children, helping Aruzhan first, then Yerlan. She pets the children’s heads as she passes them. She says something quietly to Saltanat and leaves again.

The activity finished, Saltanat tells them to pass the cards up to the front — *tez tez tez* — “fast, fast, fast.”

Institutional Time

The lesson emphasizes the regularity of the children’s days at Hope House, though they face continual interruptions. In order to keep something of the regularity intact, teachers often urge the children to work faster so that they will not fall behind. Both Saltanat Apay and the children’s other teacher, Aygul Apay, often tell the kids to work *tez tez tez* — a pace the children are to attempt not only when getting ready or tidying up, but also in actual moments of drawing,

13. In packing for fieldwork, I prioritized jeans and funny shirts, thinking these would be more practical in my work with children. I was surprised to find the teachers and directors at Hope House usually wearing dresses or professional slacks, even though they frequently tended to the garden, raked leaves, or shoveled snow while the children played outside. Zhazira Apay tended to look the most glamorous, in heels and bright colors. The helpers, who handled all of the main cleaning chores, dressed more casually.

writing, or trying to think of answers to questions. Aygul Apay uses it when directing me, too, to fetch a hairbrush from the cupboard and bring it to her, or to mend a dress before a performance.

Regularity creates ritual in institutions. It can provide stability that children find comforting (Greenberg 2000); yet Rockhill (2010), in her ethnography of orphanage life in the Russian Far East, worries that the rigidity of such routines diminishes children's individual agency and makes it difficult for caregivers to see the children as persons. The children must learn to eat quickly, or their food will be taken away from them before they finish. Caregivers who have to worry about adhering to strict timetables become overwhelmed by all the tasks that must be accomplished, so that "instead of individual children, she [the caregiver] sees bodies to dress, bottoms to wipe and mouths to feed" (184). In examining the spread of "the drill" across institutions in the nineteenth century — from the church and military and into other areas, Classen too sees institutional routine as both ritualistic and dehumanizing, the religious character of the early practices giving way to turning workers' bodies into machines. School served as a key site where the state sought to instill "strict adherence to a standardized set of bodily practices" (2012: 171) into the masses. A former boarding school (*internat*) resident who ended up in prison complained to Rockhill, "There is no *vospitanie* in the *internat*.¹⁴ All you know is to come there at feeding time, like an animal" (2010: 185). Children learn only some kind of patterned behavioralism, according to this testimony, which dehumanizes the children, turning them into animals, rather than machines.

14. *Vospitanie* – which could be glossed as "rearing," "moral education" or "care" – is a term in Russian loaded with moral and political significance in the former Soviet Union (Rockhill 2010, and see Chapter 4). *Internat* refers to a system of state boarding schools, somewhat similar to children's homes (*detdom*), but with children often spending weekends or holidays with families. It was an option some parents considered when their children aged out of Hope House as a way for the government to continue to provide food and care for their children, but without the parents losing custodial rights.

At Hope House, adult caregivers — the teachers and helpers — had fewer children per group than many orphanages typically featured in studies of Eastern Europe. Visitors and field trips interrupted their daily routines, yet these interruptions in some ways served to make the emphasis on routine and scheduling that much more important, so that all sense of order would not fall apart. Considerations of institutional scheduling focus on the repetition of it, the regularity, and the ways the regularity becomes ingrained into bodies of inmates (Goffman 1961, Foucault 1995). “Hurry up and wait” is a phrase thought to have originated in the US military around 1940 (Ammer 2013: 225), an erratic pace from dependence upon circumstances beyond one’s control. Verdery (1996), in conversation with Zerubavel’s (1976) work on schedules and timetables, describes the “etatization of time” in Ceausescu’s Romania, which involved various ways of the state seizing time from citizens – through irregular work hours, forcing them to queue for food, or making them schedule their daily or seasonal (agricultural) activities around availability of fuel or electricity.

Kazakhstani state institutions were a far cry from the particular invasiveness of Ceausescu’s Romania, but institutional irregularities often influenced routines of work and socializing at the children’s home and at the puppet theater.¹⁵ At the children’s home, directors often expected children to be ready for guests at 10:00 am, only to find themselves sitting in costume in their classrooms for an hour. A doctor might interrupt a lesson to instruct the children

15. For example, at the puppet theatre, in the atelier where the women made costumes and added the soft elements of the puppets – foam, fabric, or papier-mâché atop the structural bases made by the male carpenters in the workshop next door – workers were often dependent not only on the male carpenters to complete their work first, but also often had to wait for the theatre to procure funds so that they could purchase necessary fabrics and other supplies. Thus, there would be extensive lulls in work – for weeks or months. Sometimes the women used these periods to rest and socialize, doing Sudoku puzzles or taking naps in the middle of the day. Other times, they became industrious and made clothes to sell as a private side business. When the work arrived, they often had to rush to complete it, working over the weekends or during holidays in order to complete all puppets and costumes in time for a premiere.

to go down to the doctor's offices, where oxygen cocktails awaited them.¹⁶ Teachers lined the children up quickly so that they could make their way down to consume these cups full of pinkish bubbles before all of the oxygen popped and floated away. The constant risk of the schedule being thrown off by outside factors perhaps gave urgency to keeping the schedule wherever possible. Children learned to move through their exercises and on to the next ones quickly, quickly, quickly.

As Saltanat Apay puts the children's cards away, she touches Yerlan's head. The teachers have been using touch — petting his head or holding his hand — to keep his attention, which wanders quickly and gets him into trouble. Women who work at state homes for children have a reputation for coldness, for withholding affection (Fujimura et al. 2005). An orphanage supervisor, quoted by Kelly (2007), explains why: “Of course, you couldn't treat them affectionately. Because if you tried that, the other thirty, and you had thirty-five of them in a group, would start getting jealous, and then a fight would break out, and then you'd have a *mêlée*, and that would be it” (264). At Hope House, teachers were often more ready to kiss the cheeks of a child from another group than their own, but they sometimes held their own children's hands. If Yerlan received more of this treatment, it was less because he was their favorite than because the teachers struggled, that fall, to keep him engaged and to soothe him (which comes to the fore in Chapter 4).

16. These cups of bubbles, made with a special machine, are used by pediatricians in Russia and Kazakhstan to promote children's respiratory and digestive health (Borovik et al 2007).

Orphanages as iconic postsocialist institutions

Life at Hope House involved particular orientations to time and space, to social and material environments. Like some other “total institutions” described by social scientists, Hope House came to constitute a particular kind of world that always looked outside itself. Unlike so much literature on orphanages, however, I characterize this world not as one of deprivation and lack but existing in a complicated semiotic and sensory relationship to the world outside it. Journalists and other writers, including psychologists and ethnographers, tend to hold up Eastern European and Eurasian orphanages as emblematic scraps (Laszczkowski 2015) of socialism, characterized by rigidity, greyness, bureaucracy, and emptiness. These characterizations come through in writing that stresses the rigidity of time within spaces devoid of sensory input.

Classic work on “total institutions,” such as Goffman’s work on asylums, similarly focuses on uniformity within the sensory and material environment, which erases difference between inmates. Property dispossession deprives inmates of personhood:

“Once the inmate is stripped of his possessions, at least some replacements must be made by the establishment, but these take the form of the standard issue, uniform in character and uniformly distributed. These substitute possessions are clearly marked as really belonging to the institution and in some cases are recalled at regular intervals to be, as it were, disinfected of identifications.” (Goffman 1961: 19)

Dispossession breaks down the boundary between self and institution, further enabled by loss of privacy and the institution’s seizure of information about the inmate. Socialization into a total institution involves, according to Goffman, a loss of self, and personal property is a key element in this process.

Ethnographers of post socialist orphanages emphasize the lack of children’s private possessions, and the likelihood that the few that children have are likely to be stolen. Children’s surroundings are “bare” (Fujimura 2005: 3, Rockhill 2010: 178), with particular toys kept

inaccessible to the children. Certain toys might be kept off-limits for different reasons — some being reserved just for show (Fujimura 2005), others — stuffed animals — kept from the children out of fear of infection (Rockhill 2010). Even “communal” goods were scarce, and those that were available they depict as worn, shabby, and sad: “The plastic toys, having been washed in chlorine on a daily basis, have lost their color and fail to attract the children’s attention...the same few toys are used again and again” (Rockhill 2010: 181). The children have toys, but lacking color and variety, they fail to offer a varied sensory environment for the children. The colorless toys serve as iconic index of the state institution, which serves as a metonym for the grey remnants of post-Soviet bureaucracy, a doubly-nested attribution left over from Cold War characterizations of socialist coldness (Bakic-Hayden and Hayden 1992, Fehérváry 2013, Irvine and Gal 2000, Lemon 2011, 2013).

Accounts of what orphanages lack emphasize privation far beyond the material, however. Psychologists’ and pediatricians’ studies of children reared in orphanages — from early twentieth century studies of American foundling homes (Bakwin 1949, Chapin 1915) to post-Cold War studies of Romanian and Russian children’s homes and adoptees from institutions (Nelson 2007, Rutter et al. 2009, St. Petersburg-USA Orphanage Research Team 2008) — commonly frame the developmental challenges faced by institutionally-reared children as the result of deprivation at a number of levels. Institutionalization entails, according to these studies, a profound insufficiency of nutritional, social, emotional, linguistic, and sensory stimulation.

I question not the main arguments — that early institutional experiences of children profoundly impact their development. However, such studies tend to focus on what the children are *not* given and on measuring the damage incurred by such lack, whereas we have considerably less work on the series of early traumas that such children often face. Most children who end up

in a children's home, whether abandoned by parents or taken from them by the state, first experienced some early hardship that led to their placement within the home in the first place. Next, someone leaves the child in the home or takes the child from their parents — in many cases another traumatic event. Even when all involved believe they are providing a better life for the child, the next stages can be experienced as a disorienting loss, as highlighted in recent accounts by transnational adoptees (Kim 2010, Yngvesson 2010).

I bring up accounts of orphanages as institutions of deprivation in an effort to understand how sense and sentiment become intertwined or conflated in these accounts, and to question whether the bleaching of toys necessarily equates to an emotionally or even sensorily “sterile” environment. As other anthropologists of postsocialism have pointed out, affective, sensory, and symbolic relations overlap and stand in for one another in complex ways in writing about materiality and sensory environments. In her ethnography of socialist and postsocialist aesthetic regimes in Hungary, Fehérváry uses gray as a qualisign that evoked “a whole array of impressions and sentiments” (2013: 1, and see Peirce 1955 on qualisigns). Those looking at Eastern Europe from a Western lens associated the color gray with the grim sparseness that contrasted starkly with capitalist landscapes, so full of colorful commodities. For Eastern European intellectuals, on the other hand, grayness acted as iconic index of political repression. While Fehérváry recognizes the importance of grayness as a qualisign that infused a range of materials — concrete, skies, faces — with political and moral significance, other notable aesthetics abounded in socialist Hungary, with the state hardly oblivious to consumer desires but actively working, at different points, to cater to such demands.

These transnational studies of institutionalization – which have involved collaborations between local and international researchers (as occurred with the Bucharest Early Intervention

Program [Zeanah et al 2006] and the St. Petersburg-USA Orphanage Research Team projects) – comprise part of international discourses surrounding institutional care and transnational adoption; and dramatic stories about atrocious orphanages feed off of and feed into wider stereotypes about Eastern Europe and postsocialist spaces (Cartwright 2005). Sensations and sentiments can get intertwined in impressions of groups and places, as Lemon highlights in examining Soviet and post-Soviet qualic signs of Russia and Russians (2011, 2013), so that material shortages in Soviet Russia became coupled with attributions of Russians as stoic, deprived of emotions and of the pleasures of capitalist consumer goods. Tropes of unsmiling Russians circulating in the West eventually became one way Russians, in turn, began to see themselves.

Outsiders who had lived and worked extensively in Kazakhstan sometimes faulted their continued reliance on orphanages as evidence of continued entrenchment in Soviet-era practices that emphasized bureaucracy and surveillance. Kazakhs, meanwhile, emphasized their hospitality as a defining characteristic, while children growing up in state-run homes marked a breakdown of social relations to them. According to traditional practices, many believed, Kazakhs should be able to rely on fostering and adoption within extended kin networks, rather than placing their children in orphanages. In the past, siblings, especially brothers, would sometimes adopt one another's children and make no mention of this to the child. It was also common for grandparents to adopt a grandchild, especially the first born; and during my fieldwork I met several couples who were caring for their grandchild for the first five or six years, until the child was ready to start school. Kazakhs often expressed surprise and dismay to learn that the majority of children at the institutions I visited in Kazakhstan were, in fact, Kazakh.

Rates of institutionalization were gradually decreasing, but the process of reducing the stigma surrounding domestic adoption was slow. People in Almaty often told me that the love between an adopted child and adoptive parents could never be the same as the love found in biological families. Friends and taxi drivers alike frequently warned me of the dangers of adopting: when the child is grown they will abandon you, for there will be nothing holding you together. “Abandoned” is one common way that Anglophone literatures describe children who find themselves growing up in orphanages and similar institutions (Fujimura et al. 2005, Nelson et al. 2014), implying a certain amount of agency on the parents who have “abandoned” these children. Other literature uses “social orphans” to avoid any confusion about the fact that, in most cases, children living in “orphanages” in Eastern Europe have one or two living parents. The term “social orphan” can also suggest that it is often not that an uncaring parent deliberately abandoned the child, but rather that social systems of support have failed these families (e.g. Rockhill 2010). In Kazakhstan, the official term (used by the Ministry of Education’s Committee for the Protection of Children’s Rights) offers a somewhat more agnostic, albeit cumbersome, description of these children as, “child-orphans, and orphans left without the care of parents” (*deti-siroty i deti, ostavshikhsia bez popecheniya roditeley*).¹⁷ Each of the terms in some way alludes to a child who has experienced a loss, one that, according to many living in Kazakhstan, will lead to future ruptures and other problems.

While outsiders to Kazakhstan tend to characterize children’s homes as icons of socialist grayness and as evidence of the country’s continued reliance on Soviet-era bureaucracy, the process of “de-institutionalization” — of reducing the numbers of state-run homes and children living in them and replacing the system with one relying more on private families, whether with

17. <http://www.bala-kkk.kz/ru/node/376>

parents or extended kin or with non-kin — presents a web of bureaucratic relations of its own.¹⁸

Moreover, persistent focus on orphanages as sparse, gray spaces devoid of social or material stimulation overlooks the range of institutional homes in former socialist spaces.

The Sensory World of Hope House

There are different ways to make a children's home, to put it together. On one hand, one could make a conscious effort to map structural similarities to family homes. SOS Kinder Villages, an international organization founded in Austria after World War II, puts together a small collection of houses in an area to comprise a village, each staffed by a “mother” and a few “aunts.” Children live in a group of other children of a variety of ages, so that they come to see themselves as brothers and sisters.¹⁹ State-run homes of the “family type” exist in Kazakhstan, as well, and in government reports on institutions in the country, these types of homes are listed separately.²⁰ One I visited in East Kazakhstan had been given the “family type” official designation because the children were grouped in staggered ages, even though they lived together in one large building that looked like a school from the outside.

One could, on the other hand, organize space and people not according to what will most closely replicate family homes, but rather to maximize efficiency—where children live in cohorts according to age groups, with a centralized kitchen and canteen, so that all cooking and eating takes place in one space. Kazakhstanis often criticized this aspect of children's homes most sharply. Such institutions cut off any relationship between the children and the food they were eating or where it came from, rendering them incapable of cooking once they got out.

18. See Matilda Stubbs (forthcoming) on the paper trails of American foster children.

19. http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/7cc3a214-e0ba-4bb2-a3e8-fc63e269eb18/CVM_en.pdf?ext=.pdf

20. The Committee for the Protection of Children's Rights calls them “children's villages of the family type” (*detskie derevni semeynogo tipa*) <http://www.bala-kkk.kz/ru/node/377>

According to this common perception, what is efficient within the group home creates a handicap when children get out. The efficiency of such operations need not necessarily depersonalize the relationships within such homes, however. Even if the state doesn't consider such traditional homes to be "family type" homes, many of the children do. Older children and young adult "graduates" (*vyпустniki*) of larger children's homes in Almaty told me they considered one another brothers and sisters. The structure of homes may play a part in how social relations unfold within them, but they do not necessarily determine them.

Hope House was something of an innovation, founded in the 1990s as a temporary home run by the state, apparently the first of its type in Kazakhstan, with other baby houses (*dom rebenok*) in the city eventually including "hope" wards for infants and young children whose mothers visit regularly and plan to take them home eventually. Unlike the family-type children's homes, the children at Hope House lived in same-age cohorts. It was smaller than conventional children's homes I visited, consisting of one large, yellow, two-story concrete building with various wings and entrances. Around the building was a path, large enough that the home's van or other vehicles could circle around it if necessary, but they were usually parked near the entrance. The path mostly served for group walks outside. Beyond the path, play areas encircled the house, and beyond the play areas, the whole space was enclosed by walls and fences, with a guarded gate leading out to the street. The entryway was adorned to make it clear right away that this was a space where children lived. On the path leading up to the main entrance, flowers — sometimes real, sometimes fake — accompanied large cutouts of children, animals, and seasonal decorations. Inside, hallways were lined with photographs of children on various occasions, standing or being held by prestigious guests who had visited over the years; children's artwork (some of which was probably executed by teachers); patriotic posters; and plaques from

organizations that had supported the home over the years. On the ground floor were the main offices, doctors' stations, and some of the specialized classrooms. Special classrooms on the first and second floors included the music room, the physical education room (with equipment for climbing and swinging indoors, and an indoor pool in the back that only functioned during summer months), the computer room, the Montessori room (which housed special, educational toys, each consisting of a puzzle of sorts with a single solution, which children were to discover on their own), and the sensory room (where the children lay on soft furniture and watched a show of lights play on the ceiling while the psychologist spoke soothing messages to them in a soft voice).

Each group had a name and a collection of rooms for itself.²¹ Group rooms included a small room leading to the outside (or downstairs, if they were living upstairs), where they should leave their shoes, a cubby room (where each child had a locker for coats and other outside gear), a bathroom, a classroom/playroom, a small kitchen with a sink and refrigerator (to be used for storing things and washing dishes, but all the cooking was done in the first-floor kitchen by a kitchen staff), a small dining room, and a room for sleeping, with eight bunk beds arranged along the wall and a couple of large wardrobes where all their clothes were kept.

The classroom/playroom was a large, open room surrounded by shelves with toys, books, art supplies, and school supplies. Around the room were labels and short explanations in Kazakh of what each "center" was and what aspect of development it promoted. There was a sand and water table — to promote sensory experience, the label explained — though I never saw the children play with sand or water there. On the shelves were collections of rocks, feathers, and

21. They used the Russian word *gruppya* (when speaking Russian or Kazakh) to refer both to the group of children who lived together and to the space designated as theirs. If I was with my group of children in the music room, and the teacher didn't want me there, she would tell me to go and wait in the *gruppya*.

leaves that were part of the science center. A large section of the back classroom made an area for imaginative play. It included a rack with dress-up clothes, a play oven, a cash register, and a play video camera. Play food was arranged on a table, and dolls sat on a ledge against the wall. Higher up on the shelves were dolls and action figures still in their packaging. Every room had a flatscreen television, hooked up to satellite and a DVD player. The TV featured the logo of the corporate sponsor that donated the technology, a multinational corporation.

Children accessed indoor toys only with adults' permission, and only during certain times of the day. They had free play in the morning and afternoon, but their morning playtime usually took place outside, weather permitting. It was afternoon playtime that I visited regularly, at first, to see how they engaged with toys. I was surprised to find that, despite the wide variety of toys, puzzles, and other materials available for the children, teachers usually instructed them to get out certain items, certain blocks and puzzles, day after day. Some puzzles were matching games with only one correct solution, but the children would invent their own uses for the cards and pictures. Other materials were more open-ended — blocks of wood and plastic. Rockhill (2010) writes that at the children's homes she observed, blocks were the toy of choice because they were easy to clean and difficult to break. At Hope House, they had the benefit of leaving children the freedom to make whatever they wished. Trends would emerge among the children, however, so that one day the large, colorful interlocking blocks might be used to make imagined cities, while the next week they turned into automatic weapons (*avtomat*).

During indoor play times, the teacher and helper often spent part of the time in the kitchen area, drinking tea. The children were free to do what they wanted with the materials allowed them, but there was an order to this that the children understood and followed, so that their classroom, even as playroom, was a much more fine-tuned machine than the kindergarten

classrooms of the same age that I visited in Almaty. At Hope House, teachers restricted how many different toys could be out at one time. Once a teacher asked me to take down some of the wooden blocks, of different shapes, from the shelf. When I put them all on the floor, the kids corrected me: I was only supposed to take down 20 or so at one time. When I put them away, the children helped me arrange them more attractively. The children would sometimes ask to switch one type of toy for another. They would first put away whatever toys were out before getting out something new. Sometimes a teacher or helper would let the kids play with the toy cars, but only on the condition that they play sitting down. Otherwise, the kids might run across the room.

Indoor play time was neither the sad, stark space of traumatic deprivation described by so much literature; but neither was it the chaotic cacophony of the playtimes I observed at the inexpensive, but private preschool I observed in downtown Almaty, where children used their own dolls and action figures, brought in from home, to create elaborate pretend play scenarios with one another. The children at Hope House weren't incapable of such liveliness, as evidenced by their play during P.E., outside, or when left alone with me as the sole authority figure in earshot. They simply understood the rules and followed them. They were disciplined, and the teachers worked hard at keeping them engaged, but not overstimulated.

Their play spaces were colorful, full of materials with which the children could engage in a variety of sensory and imaginative endeavors. Bright curtains, mosaics of seeds, and animated shows on flat-screen televisions provided qualic counters to western images of post-socialist orphanages offered through journalistic and academic writing. Hope House was hardly exceptional to other children's homes, at least in Almaty. Baby houses I visited in Almaty often featured bright playground equipment and rocks painted red, with white polka dots. These motifs were hardly Western imports, but were rather part of a mixed Soviet-Kazakh aesthetics of

childhood, which sometimes incorporated American characters such as SpongeBob alongside the wolf from the Soviet animation *Nu, pogodi!* or the contemporary Russian animation *Masha i Medved*. Hope House was a complicated material and social environment, where children and adults nonetheless engaged in frequent imaginations of other material, social configurations.

Before and after, inside and out

Saltanat Apay moves the card with the pictures of times of the day to the left, saying, “Now we understand times of day. Now we’re going to learn the meaning of words *boryn*, *deyin*, *sheyin*.”

As she says the words, all having to do with relationships in time, she waves her pointer down with the last syllable of each of them. She begins to introduce *boryn* first, but interrupts herself to see what’s wrong with Naziliya’s eye. Later, it will get treated for some kind of infection, but for now, Saltanat resumes. She points to the illustration she has put on the board — illustrations of animals — and begins, “*Boringhy ötken zamanda*,” her voice trailing with the last syllable. This phrase, like “Once upon a time,” commonly begins folktales in Kazakh. “What was there?” she asks.

Nurlan uses the same lilting prosody as he offers, “*Ayu*” — “A bear.”

Aynura offers, “Animals.”

Saltanat Apay asks, “What folktales (*ertegi*) do we know?”

Aynura guesses, “*Baūyrsaq!*” She is correct. Named after the traditional Kazakh balls of fried bread, it is the Kazakh version of the Russian folktale, *Kolobok*, about a runaway ball of dough. Yerlan and Nurlan fiddle with their pencil cases, while Saltanat Apay begins retelling the story of the *baūyrsaq*: once upon a time there was a grandmother and a grandfather. Her voice

booming, her yellow plastic pointer raised, she leans down toward the table in front of her.

Nurlan puts his hands up to his face, as if to protect it. Apay simply moves the pencil case to the far edge of the table, away from the boys, continuing her recital of the folktale. Without finishing it, she puts up another picture.

The light from the window creates a glare on the whiteboard that erases everything from the video. It is something else about a grandmother and grandfather. The children guess correctly that it is “*Shalqan*,” the story of the giant turnip, also a Kazakh version of a Russian tale, “*Repka*.” In this story, a family — consisting of grandma, grandpa, grandson, granddaughter, dog, cat, and finally, mouse — pull a large turnip from the ground.

Saltanat offers another example, not a folk tale: “For example, once my mama came and brought me a toy. For example, you can say.”

Aynura raises her hand to offer her own example. She stands up to say, “Once my uncle Baqytzhan came and brought me toys.”

When parents visited, they often brought something for their child, and sometimes offered a treat to share among the group, such as a packet of crackers or cookies. The toys and other non-consumable objects the parents gave their children held a special status (see Chapter 6). Aynura’s mother placed her here when she was still a baby, just under a year old. Aynura and Aruzhan came here around the same time. Now in the oldest group, they have been here the longest. Aynura’s mother works as a teacher in another city, in central Kazakhstan. Aygul’ Apay complains that she visits rarely. I only met her once, and never met her uncle.

Children placed here are constantly encouraged to remember or to imagine remembering interactions with family members. Hope House might act as a kind of interruption to the state’s desired trajectories for the children living here, trajectories of growing up in family care and

eventually going out into the world, but in the meantime, institutions rely on rituals and repetition, broken up by visitors from the outside such as parents and other family members.

The next word is *keyin*. Aynura tries first, but has mistaken *keyin* for *keyim* — “my clothes,” and offers, “I put on my clothes.”

“*Keyin! Keyin!*” both Saltanat Apay and Nurlan yell back at her. Like *boryn*, *keyin* can function as a postposition (*boryn* working like “ago,” *keyin* working like “after”) or it can stand on its own as an adverb describing a more general relationship between two times (*boryn* meaning “once,” *keyin* describing “later”).

Nurlan tries to offer an example. He speaks quickly, as if nervous his turn will be taken away. “Apay, later we’re going outside.”

During my first year observing them, Nurlan was one of the quiet ones. Maksat dominated, with Nurlan as his sidekick, but Maksat has since left Hope House. Whereas most children go home to live with their parents, and this is the goal, Maksat has gone to live in *internat*, a residential school.

Saltanat Apay, rather than telling Nurlan why his example sentence is incorrect, looks from him to the rest of the group and launches into another example, a correct one: “For example you and your mother are at the toy bazaar, yeah? You’re at the store. You say to your mom, ‘Mama, buy this thing and give it to me please.’ You say to your mom. In your mama’s pocket there’s no money left. ‘My child, later I’ll buy it for you, OK?’ she says.”

Balam saghan keyin satyp berey

My child for you later buy give

Zharay ma

OK is it

As she says “*balam saghan keyin*” — “My child, for you, later” — the last word being the focus of the lesson, she puts her hands on Yerlan’s forehead. He smiles. When she says, “OK?” he looks up and answers, “OK” (*zharaydy*). She looks straight ahead at the other students, not at Yerlan, and continues.

“What word did she say? ‘*Later* let me get it,’ she said. What word does she use?”

Nurlan tries again: “Apay, let me say it. I go with my mom to the store. ‘Mama buy this for me.’ My mama says there’s no money. ‘Then *later* I’ll buy,’ she said.”

As Nurlan speaks, Yerlan again reaches for his pencil case. Saltanat Apay, her eyes on Nurlan, intercepts Yerlan’s hand and holds it, gently. She places it in front of him, parallel with the edge of the table, takes his left hand and folds it over the right one.

“Right,” the teacher agrees. “So, *boryn, keyin*’s meanings you understand, right?” By the time she has finished saying this, Yerlan’s hands have come unfolded again. His fingertips crawl on the desk. The other children are raising their hands to offer their own examples, but Saltanat Apay is moving on.

Later, I asked my research assistant about Nurlan’s first use of *keyin*. I didn’t understand what was wrong with it. In Nurlan’s example, she explained, he was definitely going to go outside at a certain time, in a couple of hours. Saltanat Apay’s example was better because the mother didn’t know exactly when she would have money to buy the toy. It is a word to be used to describe time vaguely, to describe an uncertain time in the future, when Nurlan will go to the bazaar or the store with his mother and she would have the money to buy him a toy. “Later” is an important time for children at Hope House because the children are constantly reminded that

they will go home later. Later, they will go to school. Later, they will live with their mothers or fathers.

The next word is *deyin*. The teacher calls on Aynura to offer an example. Aynura begins, “With my mom, the two of us—With my mom, the two of us, having gone to the bazaar—” As she hesitates about how to finish her sentence, Nurlan says something about *keyin*, that Aynura trying to make a sentence still using *keyin*. Saltanat Apay asks, “But how do you understand the word *deyin*?”

Deyin means “before,” “until,” or “to.” There are infinite possibilities for Aynura to finish the sentence she has started with a correct use of *deyin*. However, because she begins describing a familiar example, Saltanat and Nurlan assume she will finish it in a way better suited for *keyin*.

Saltanat Apay offers another example: “For example, in this group” — that is, in the collection of rooms where their group now lives, the space where the oldest group lives — “before you, who was here?”

The children in the group have moved up since last year, quite literally. Last year, my first year with them, we were on the ground floor. This is the preparatory group. The students name the children, all they can think of, who were there last year, who were the oldest children then. They have gone home now. Teachers don’t often talk about the children after they leave, though sometimes their pictures remain in the classroom or in the halls.

Once Upon an Institution

How many fairy tales do we know about orphans, half-orphans, the abandoned and the adopted? Is it possible to tell the story of Hope House as if it came from a book with princess on the front? Here is the story, in broadest of strokes, of how a place like Hope House came to be:

Once upon a time, the Bolshevik Revolution promised to liberate children from bourgeois upbringings, by creating ideal children's homes and children's cities. There, children would be socialized into socialism, and they would be the ones to teach the adults how to be Soviet (Ball 1994, Kelly 2007, Kirschenbaum 2001). But then came the Civil War, famine, another famine, and World War II. And there were just so many orphans. Children from one part of the Soviet Union were crammed into trains and shipped to other regions, to be placed in orphanages there. These, too, were soon overcrowded and underfunded. The state had to appeal to the "backward" mothers from whom they had initially sought to save these revolutionary children, encouraging women to keep their own children and to adopt others' (Kirschenbaum 2001, Stronski 2010). In orphanages during World War II, children became so famished that they ate the buds off the trees in the spring. Afterwards, they would recall a hunger so severe that they felt like wild animals (Green 2006).

After World War II ended, there were fewer orphans and more food, but no more great efforts to liberate children from nuclear families. As early as 1936, the Soviet government, concerned about population loss, reinstated its ban on abortion, after having become the first country in the world to legalize abortion on demand in 1920 (Michaels 2001).²² The abortion ban came alongside financial incentives and public honoring for women who have large families, which "served as the cornerstone of the state's pronatalism campaign" (321). The state stopped

22. While Kazakhs had fewer abortion during this time than ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan, Michaels notes that the trend in increased abortion during the 16 years of initial legality matched Russians, with gradual increases over the years and reductions in "back alley" abortions.

prosecuting doctors for performing abortions after Stalin's death, and abortion became legal again in 1968, but the tactic of offering women social and material incentives in order to boost the birthrate has continued into Putin-era Russia (Rivkin-Fish 2010) and Nazarbayev's Kazakhstan (Lakhanuly and Farangis 2015).

The total institutions created to care for war and famine orphans remained the dominant government solution for caring for children without parental care in the Eastern Blok, while the United States and Western Europe shifted towards alternatives to orphanages over the course of the twentieth century, such as foster care, adoption, and welfare in the US (Crenson 1998). Material conditions improved after the 1950s in Soviet orphanages, but the children who lived there became increasingly stigmatized — often because of the presumably marginalized backgrounds of their parents (Kelly 2007). At the end of the Cold War, social, institutional, and economic upheaval created new conditions of disorder and hardship in Kazakhstan, leaving mothers and their children especially vulnerable (Heynemen and DeYoung 2004). Public preschools and work-site daycares closed, inflation made it increasingly expensive to feed children on average salaries, and government support for mothers failed to keep pace with inflation, nullifying the effectiveness of such support. Children continued to grow up in orphanages and other types of residential care. International adoption increased through the 1990s and peaked in the mid-2000s; increasing uneasiness about the fates of children adopted abroad, especially in the United States, led to a temporary moratorium on all outside adoptions while Kazakhstan came into compliance with the Hague Convention. Kazakhstan briefly reopened adoptions to the US, but then issued an explicit ban on adoption to the US following a scandal surrounding the ill-treatment of adoptees from Russia and Kazakhstan (Lillis 2013).

Hope House was an institution borne out of a commitment to supporting the family home as the ideal place for children to grow up. With aid from the state and outside sponsors, teachers and administrators worked to create an environment for children in which they “give them everything,” the teachers would often remind me, and would then list the things that Hope House provided: food, clothing, toys, activities, and lessons. At the same time, this had to be a temporary place for the children to pass through; it had to be contrasted with the children’s homes so that they would not forget that their family home was their proper place, their first and final home.²³ From the inside, Hope House needed to animate the home that lay outside, to cultivate children’s imagination and anticipation of their eventual release and their return to a place they may not remember, but which was nonetheless their proper home.

In order to remind children of this, the teachers frequently incorporated mention of the mamas and papas into example sentences, math problems (Barker 2017), and other scenarios. One day, Aygul Apay asked the children what professions their mothers or fathers had. Many didn’t know, but knew that their mother worked, and that this meant she couldn’t visit during the week. Aynura knew her mother was a teacher in another town. Miras’s father was a builder. Another girl’s mother worked at a store.

23. Contrasts between Hope House and permanent institutions were never articulated directly to children, but were implied when visitors came and lauded the efforts of the home – emphasizing the “hope” the children had in their impending return to their families – rather than discourses of institution-as-family that children and employees at permanent children’s homes emphasized to me or national discourses of family (see Green’s 2006 work on Soviet efforts to make sure “There will be no orphans among us!”). In other ways, the home was somewhat ambiguously situated as an institution: My first year, a teacher, Zhanel Apay explained to me that in Kazakhstan, Thanksgiving was traditionally a day when the children’s homes would celebrate by offering gratitude to the state for providing for them, but that year – 2012 – for the first time, Hope House would not be celebrating because, they were told, they were not really a children’s home. The following year, nonetheless, they did celebrate.

Music Class

After their lessons, the children go down to the music room on the first floor. The girls — four or five of them, practice a dance with wooden cups. Naziliya, not part of this dance, sits to the side, moving her own arms toward and away from an imaginary cup that she holds in her hand.

All of the kids sing and dance to a song about Almaty. The teachers place Bekzhan and Yerlan in the back and the better performers in the front. Bekzhan tries to follow the actions. Yerlan is always a full step behind everyone else when they move side to side. He sometimes watches the other kids. Other times, his head tilts completely up to the ceiling, or he looks behind, and out the window, as he continues dancing.

Next, Aynura has a solo. The others sit at the small chairs to the side, except Yerlan, who has been made to sit at the front, beside me, in the large chairs where visitors sit. Watching through the camera's viewfinder as I film, he directs me to zoom in — first on Nurlan, then Marlin, then Saltanat Apay. He says "hello" to whomever the camera has in its focus.

The music teacher, Sabina Apay, stands between Aynura and the camera, her back to me, and models the way Aynura should bend and move her arms up and down, twirling her wrists as she sings. Aynura sings along to a CD that has both the instrumentation and the original vocals, so that she sings along with the artist (Toheghaly Tūreali).

Mom and Dad

You cannot believe the days

Which passed away as a wind

You are worrying about your child

As he did not come from far away

Aynura holds a microphone with her right hand. Her left thumb, wrapped in white gauze, is in a constant “thumbs up” position. A few days earlier, when I filmed their lesson, the thumb had been wrapped in a bandage and had a rubber band at the bottom. She had complained of it hurting and eventually started crying, quietly, during class. Aygul Apay had promised to take her to the doctor later. Aynura was not a child who cried often. By this year, very few of them cried, except sometimes Yerlan. Now, with her thumb bandaged more robustly, but lacking the rubber band, she continues to act as a leader to the other children. She was selected to collect papers and pass them out during their lessons, though the bandage made it difficult.



Figure 7. Aynura singing.

As Aynura sings a solo to a mother and father, the kids off to the sides sing along. Even Yerlan sings at the chorus. He sings loudly, like he is joking, but maybe he is not. Naziliya keeps singing the longest, even after Bekzhan accidentally pinches her fingers between two chairs.

In chapter 4, I deal at length with the children's rehearsals and performances as ways they are socialized to animate figures of ideal childhood for adults. Here, I wanted to include the music class in the children's day because it was a rather sad song. It marked, to me, a rare moment in which the children — led by Aynura — were invited to articulate a longing for the first home through this performance. Kazakhs often characterized their traditional music as sad, but the children at Hope House more frequently sang or danced to stately anthems honoring Almaty, Astana, or Kazakhstan or upbeat, poppy tunes about being a child and playing with toys. Aynura sings to her teacher, to the other children, and to me, while addressing a mother she has not seen for some months and a father she might not have ever met. She sings a song in which she comforts her mother and father, making the same promises of reunion that the teachers promise to the children.

A Band Forms, Then Disbands

After music, it is time to go outside. It is a bright, warm, early fall day. Patches of grass are still green, but leaves, having fallen, need to be gathered. The helper sets to sweeping the leaves with a broom, putting them into buckets and carrying them over to the far end of the yard, to throw them over the fence. Tamilya and Aynura immediately take up brooms and help. Saltanat Apay takes aside one boy, then another, to work with each one individually on memorizing lines for an upcoming performance. Her voice, and the voice of whichever boy is working with her, can be heard offscreen throughout.

The rest of the children are free to wander, to play, or to work, as they wish. The adults occupied, the children are more or less unsupervised, even when I record them. I have little

authority, and the camera forces me to focus on one thing at a time, so that I miss most of what is happening outside the frame until someone begins to shout or cry.

Zhamilya and Nurlan chase bumblebees and other insects. Behind the playhouse that belongs to their group, there is a hole in the ground. Zhamilya peers down into it and insists there is a dog down there, a real dog.



Figure 8. Looking for a dog.

Nurlan walks past, carrying a toy helicopter, about two feet long. He holds it vertically, by its tail. In his other hand is a piece of straw from a broom, which he moves back and forth in front of the helicopter. He plays it like a musical instrument, like a violin or a *khobyz* (a traditional Kazakh instrument played with a bow), and sings a song that sounds like nonsense. He pays no attention to me at first, but he wanders instead to the back of the yard, where Tamilya gathers leaves.

Still behind the playhouse, near the hole, Zhamilya squats down and picks up a rock. Yerlan takes off his baseball cap and holds it out, as if to catch it. Instead, Zhamilya drops the rock in front of her, and Yerlan drops the hat in front of him. I don't understand everything that goes on in the children's world.

Nurlan wanders into the background of the frame, poking a tree with his piece of straw, still singing quietly. In front of the camera, just a few feet away from me, Aruzhan pops up. She is new to the group, so the camera and I are new to her. She begs me, "*kureiinshi*," "Please let me see." She wants me to turn the viewfinder around, so that she can see what I am filming.²⁴ When I do it, she says "wow" and calls Nurlan over. Nurlan also says "wow." He resumes playing and singing, but now performs more loudly, more spirited. Now he performs for the camera.

Aruzhan calls Tamilya to see. She takes her place on the other side of Nurlan, until Nurlan accidentally pokes Tamilya in the mouth with his bow. She complains and moves away. Aruzhan, too, moves out of the frame. Nurlan commands me to film and plays with increasing gusto. He throws down his bow and turns the helicopter to a horizontal position. He begins strumming it with his hand: it is suddenly a guitar or a *dombyra* (another traditional Kazakh instrument, rather like a lute). He moves the helicopter from his left hand to his right, making it vertical again, but continuing to strum. He picks the bow back up, switches from one hand to the other, the whole time singing what was nonsense to my assistant and to me: "Ala bali pa pa aha la la ua fa fa fa..."

24. I was often reluctant to do this for the children because it tended to lead to them posing for the camera, rather than playing, and it meant that I couldn't see if I was cutting off their head or otherwise badly framing the shot, but I sometimes complied, and also played back some of the videos I had just shot, in order that they would understand that I was taking videos of them, since most visitors took photos.



Figure 9. Nurlan strums helicopter.

He finishes with a grand stroke, puts his hand to his chest and lowers his head, the traditional bow for Kazakh boys. Nurlan, having finished, comes over to see himself, but the camera now shows Yerlan, who peeks into the hole behind the playhouse, at the alleged dog. Nurlan asks to see the video, and the clip cuts away so that I can replay it for him. Zhamilya and Nurlan want to play together. They go to the cupboards in the playhouse to seek out instruments.

Outside, children are freer to take whatever toys they want from the cupboards in their playhouse and to do with them what they please. Among these toys are broken vehicles, train tracks that lack a train, and dolls and stuffed animals that are dirty or broken. Sometimes, the broken objects invite more inventive uses than when they were intact, as it becomes less obvious what their shapes are meant to resemble. Certain affordances break down, and the children discover new ones. Nurlan finds a blue rectangular object that looks like it was once one of those magnetic boards for drawing and writing, but the whiteboard with the magnets and the magnet

tools for drawing are all gone. It is now just a piece of blue plastic, with grooves in the middle where other parts have fallen off, and a small hole in the corner. Zhamilya has a miniature pinball game.

Back behind the playhouse, Nurlan props one foot on a play tractor, which he uses as a kind of stool. Both he and Zhamilya hold their respective plastic rectangles vertically, in their left hands. They beat them with their right. Nurlan sings a song that is nonsense. Saltanat Apay is just to the right of them, dictating to Marlin the words he should repeat until memorized. Zhamilya and Nurlan's choice to perform right next to their teacher and classmate's rehearsal is a rather poor one. Saltanat Apay does not tell them to stop, but rather she leads Marlin by the hand around the corner of the playhouse. As she moves, Nurlan pauses in his playing to shift from standing with his leg propped on the tractor to sitting down on it. Zhamilya has no tractor stool, so she squats down next to him. Nurlan resumes singing and banging on his instrument, while Zhamilya examines the inner workings of her own.



Figure 10. A short concert.

Nurlan falters in his song. The boldness he displayed earlier, with the helicopter, seems to have diminished, perhaps because he noticed Saltanat Apay’s annoyance at their impromptu concert in her rehearsal space. Zhamilya follows suit, also losing her nerve in their performance. Nurlan has become more confident recently, but neither of them is usually chosen to sing solos like Aynura. Zhamilya bangs on her toy a couple of times, first on top and then on the side, where there is a button for the pinball apparatus, so that she transitions from playing it as an instrument to playing with it as a toy. As Nurlan stops his own song with an “oy,” he smiles shyly. He holds the blue piece in front of his mouth, and then brings it up to cover his whole face.

He finds the small hole in the corner and puts his eye up to it. He says “Meghanne Apay” and waves to me. Zhamilya, perhaps just now noticing that they have stopped playing music, rises and stands in front of Nurlan. Nurlan looks at her through the hole, as Zhamilya again turns

her toy vertical and bangs on it a few times. Nurlan lowers the blue plastic from his face and says something to Zhamilya that I can't make out, for Saltanat Apay's dictation dominates from behind. Zhamilya drags her instrument on the ground and walks away from him, Nurlan calling to her as she leaves, "I'm like Meghanne Apay!"

"You're like me?" I ask.

He switches from Kazakh to Russian to answer, "This is my camera" (*eto moia kameru* — he is just starting to speak a bit of Russian, so he makes some mistakes that he wouldn't make in Kazakh). He says to me, "*Snimite kamera*," by which he could either mean that he wants me to film (*snimite kameroy*) or that he wants me to lower the camera (*snimite kameru*). Since I am already doing the former (filming him), I do the latter, as well: I squat down to his level. He counts, in Russian — *raz, dva, tri* — pushes an invisible button on his blue rectangular camera, and lowers it. He turns it around, and within this blue rectangle is a smaller blue rectangular shape to which he now points. My picture is there, according to his game, and he is showing me. He gets up so that I can show him the pictures I've taken of him, in return. The video ends.



Figure 11. Nurlan with camera.

After Nurlan has looked at the footage of himself, he looks at it and says to me, “And you’ll take this to America and show it to people and tell them, ‘This is my friend Nurlan.’” I tell him that this is exactly what I will do (except I will change his name). Nurlan takes the piece of blue plastic and holds it in front of him, by both hands, and says he is driving a bus, and we are going to America. We only make it a few feet before Nurlan notices an insect on the ground. He calls Zhamilya over to look at it. Saltanat Apay announces that it’s time for them to go in.

The children’s play has a rhythm of its own, quite different from the routines dictated by institutions and adults. Researching children’s play requires adjusting to frequent breaks and interruptions, abrupt transitions in mood or in pretense. A new topic, theme, or object usurps the attention of one or more children, and the game shifts. Sometimes it shifts away and then returns, as in the case with the insects, which captured Zhamilya and Nurlan’s attention at the beginning and only regained it in the final seconds of their outdoor time. There is a loss in alignment that

gets regained, as well, between Zhamilya and Nurlan, initiated in this episode with their chasing insects, reimagined in their brief formation of a band, lost when Nurlan shifts alignment to mirror my camerawork, and regained with their shared hovering over this insect (Goffman 1979, Du Bois 2007, Lempert 2008). The children go inside, and I go home for the day.

I return on Thursday, two days later. I arrive late for the lesson, sweating from hurrying up the hill to the home. Saltanat Apay does not stop to greet me. I begin filming as they do their between-lesson exercises in a circle to the side. Saltanat Apay is asking them about fairy tales.

They take their seats. One of the helpers has been assigned to sit behind Yerlan, to keep him on task. He sits again at the front, but the others are in different spots. The twins are not together. There are only four tables today, and Marlin sits alone. Naziliya and Nurlan are missing. I remember Naziliya's eye was giving her problems last time I was there. She will return, by the next time I visit, with cotton in her ears and spots of bright blue gel on her face from the antibiotic that they used.

I begin to worry that perhaps Nurlan has gone home. As soon as the lesson ends, Saltanat Apay confirms it. Tuesday, the day he entertained me, playing a broken helicopter as a musical instrument and driving a broken Magnadoodle to America, was his last day. When I express regret that Nurlan is gone, Saltanat Apay will ask me why I should be sad. He is supposed to go home. They're all supposed to go home. It's what everyone wants there. Besides, they are used to it.

Aygul Apay says similar things when the children go home, but she keeps in touch with the mothers. She will assure me, in the following weeks and months, that she has heard from Nurlan's mother, that he is doing well in school. She will note that Nurlan was quiet, but that he

was smart, that he knew how to observe, that he watched and learned before acting because he was thoughtful. This is as close as she will come to admitting to me that she misses him.

Chapter 2. Indefinite Renovation: Traveling and Toiling Puppet Troupes of Past and Present

Morozko, a Tale of Cold

Masha lived with her father, stepsister, and stepmother in the woods. Masha did all the work; Pasha was bored and had particular food cravings. The stepmother doted on her born daughter, while the father was kind, but old and ineffective. They had a little dog with a bit of a mouth on him.

One day, Pasha craved berries, so the mother sent Masha into the winter woods to gather some. She met a bunny and a fox, whose hands and throat were cold, so she gave them her mittens and her scarf. She accidentally woke a bear from hibernation, and as he shivered in the cold, Masha gave him her coat. She was left with only her dress. Then Ded Moroz appeared before her in the forest. To reward her generosity, he gave her a new coat and new gloves, trimmed with silver and fur, and a magic sled to get back home. Pasha, the sister, was quite jealous.

Introduction: Winter is Extraordinary to Remember

In June of 1940, N. Amori, Director of the Republic Theater of puppets of Kazakhstan during its first years, wrote a letter to the Head of the Department of Artistic Affairs of the NRK SNK KAZSSR.²⁵ Amori begins by describing the size of the collective, which consists of a

25. The National Republic of Kazakhstan Soviet of National Comissars of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (*Narodnaia Respublika Kazakhstana Sovet Narodnikh Komissarov Kazakhskogo SSR*).

Kazakh-speaking troupe and a Russian-speaking troupe. He outlines their repertoire and the range of puppets they have been learning to use. He emphasizes the growth of the collectives in the past few months, but adds that “they could grow more if not for the lack of space.” He continues:

“For the fifth year the Republic Puppet Theater bunks (*nochuet*) in one place and another: the Pioneer Home, the Higher Theater, again the DKA²⁶ — and now again...we are going to the Uighyr theater.”²⁷ The constant displacement presents problems for the theater’s development, as it acts as a constant disruption. Moreover, the conditions in which the artists must work are untenable: “Winter, spent in the DKA is extraordinary to remember: the cold, the dirt...the frustration of spectacles despite the distraction of the DKA meetings nearby...Because of the lack of means of the direction of the Uighyr theater it wasn’t possible to lead the theater to an appropriate state and it wasn’t even possible to build a shed for the sets, and because of that the conditions of our work in the theater is very bad, the sets department works on the street, the scenery and props end up under the rain, the actors rehearse in the basement...only their love of theater and their wish to serve the children prevents the workers from leaving the theater.”

The theater waits, and the director pleads, for the Soviet government to save them from this state of constant exposure to the elements, from this intolerable shuffling from one site to the other. Director Amori concludes by proposing a space where they might move permanently. With a space of their own, they could finish the year with performances on the live stage (*na*

26. Almaty Palace of Culture (*Dvorets Kul'tury Almaty*)

27. State Central Archives of Kazakhstan, Fond 1241 – Kraevoi kukol'nyi tear Kaz. ASSR, Opis' 1, Delo 39

zhivom planu) — that is, without puppets. With that, he proposes, a children’s theater would be born.²⁸

The theater founded in 1936. Amori’s letter, written in 1940, doesn’t mention the larger context of hardships facing Soviet Kazakhstan during these years: forced collectivization created famine in the early 1930s, which resulted between 1.5 and 2 million Kazakhs fleeing (Brown 2007) and, in 1933, approximately 61,000 destitute children, orphaned or abandoned by parents unable to take care of them (Pianciola 2001). The lost population was replaced by “special settlements” of forced deportees in the mid-1930s and early 1940s – *kulaks* and ethnic Germans, Poles, Ukrainians, Koreans, Chechens, and other populations living in borderlands and therefore deemed possible enemies of the people (Brown 2003, 2007, Kim 2008, Viola 2007). The puppet theater was not the only group grappling with forced movement in Kazakhstan at the time.

Compared to famine, gulags, and massive child homelessness, the puppet theater’s plight seems trivial, yet the stakes of children’s entertainment under Stalin were high: Soviet children’s literature first saw a blossoming of experimentation and collaboration between poets and artists such as El Lissitsky and Mayakovsky during the 1920s, followed by the arrest of several prominent children’s authors in the early 1930s, including OBERIU authors Daniil Kharms and Aleksandr Vvedensky. Samuil Marshak – one of the most beloved Soviet authors of children’s books and plays – reportedly saved from execution by Stalin himself, who reportedly said, “He’s a good children’s poet” (Budashevskaya 2013: 27). The founding of puppet theaters around the Soviet Union in the 1930s – not unlike the flourishing of children’s literature the decade before –

28. Amori uses the acronym TIuZ — *Teatr yunikh zriteley* — Theatre for Young Audiences — that continues to be used today. Almaty has a Russian-language TIuZ, named after the early twentieth century founder of children’s theatre in Russia, Natalia Il’ichna Sats, and a Kazakh-language youth theatre, named after Soviet Kazakh writer Gabit Makhmutovich Musrepov.

offered new opportunities for children and artists alike, yet relations between state representatives and artists needed to be handled carefully.

More than 70 years later, some of the same issues of space and shelter again plagued the Almaty State Puppet Theater when I began my work there in 2012. A massive renovation project displaced puppet artists, puppet makers, and puppets alike. The mobility of puppets proves sometimes an asset, but other times puts puppet artists at a disadvantage. During their banishment to a rehearsal space at the city zoo, on the edge of town, the artists likewise bemoaned the state under which they were expected to work, dealing with uncomfortable spaces and insufficient facilities and equipment. Despite all this, while the actors awaited the reopening of the theater for proper work conditions, the state bodies that funded the theater identified the actors themselves and their work as a remnant of the theater's Soviet past, as badly in need of renovation as the building itself. The artists' work became a way of animating an imagined puppet theater of the future. While the children at Hope House, during their own temporary displacement, imagined the first home that lay beyond the insular world of their second home, the puppet theater found itself on the outside, looking forward to the time when they would be let back into their building, where it would be warm and dry and they would have the things they needed.



Figure 12. Puppet theater under renovation.

Efforts to remake past productions and to plan new ones became intertwined with discussions of new models for the theater and its workers. Throughout this process — both when the artists struggled without direction in insufficient conditions and when higher officials got involved in processes of remaking them — discourses of the love of art and the artists’ dedication to children framed the process as a moral obligation. In this chapter, directors and artists struggled over proper expectations of the artists’ work habits and dedication, in part because of performance’s ambiguous status as both work and play at the puppet theater.

Peripatetic Puppets Through Time

The figure of the long-suffering artist is hardly unique to contemporary Kazakhstani puppetry, but what is specific to puppetry is the double-edged sword of mobility. Because puppets are smaller than (adult) people, several of them can be put into a box and moved from place to place with less expense than a troupe of the same size of actors (Proschan 1981, Shershow 1995). Pulcinella shows usually consist of a single puppeteer, sometimes accompanied by a musician who translates Pulcinella's altered voice to the crowd. The mobility of puppets has lent them to traveling great distances, so that Pulcinella shows were able to spread all over Europe as part of traveling carnival acts (Kelly 1990, Shershow 1994). Bolsheviks used puppets as agitprop to travel around the new Soviet Union shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution (Kelly 1990, Smirnova 1963).

Puppets' portability and their roots in popular culture played an important role, too, in the Almaty puppet troupes' activities during their first years. As of 1940, the theater consisted of eight actors in the Russian-language troupe, eight in the Kazakh troupe, and four in a newly formed marionette troupe.²⁹ Besides their shows in Almaty, they toured the vast area of Kazakhstan, playing shows at schools, factories, and collective farms, for children and adults alike. They were the sole government puppet theater in Kazakhstan during those years – though in 1941, Amori wrote a letter complaining that – although before setting out on tours, the theater always asked if there were already puppet theaters in the towns they would be visiting, and they were assured there were none – his troupes had, on various occasions, had clashes with other puppet theaters. For example, “In NovoKazalinsk [present-day Ayteke Bi] our troop clashed with a new troupe of Appolo and Little People [*liliputami*], works at schools, offers special daily

29. State Central Archives of Kazakhstan, Fond 1241 – Kraevoi kukol'nyi tear Kaz. ASSR, Opis' 1, delo 44.

séances, price of tickets 1 ruble. Who gave them permission is unclear, our people haven't seen their work, but people are saying that he doesn't have actual little people, but simply small children.”³⁰

Amori objected to these rival theaters because he found them to be inappropriate for the causes that their own theater was supposed to be fulfilling – of socializing children and civilizing the masses. There were plenty of areas in Kazakhstan that lacked theaters of any type, however, for many of the spectators living in remote areas of Kazakhstan, they were the first form of theater of any sort that these workers had seen. The enthusiasm of novice spectators toward the puppets presented to them comes through in the early collections of audience reviews, as they ask for the puppet theater to return to play for them soon and often, and even suggest they would like to create their own puppet troupe.³¹ They also make suggestions for themes they would like to see in future shows, during these early years, whereas in subsequent years the reviews become more formulaic, congratulating the theater and encouraging them to come again.

The institutionalization of the puppet theater occurred gradually over the course of the twentieth century in the Soviet Union. While the first puppet artists listed in the archives of the Almaty State Puppet Theater mostly had no background in puppetry, and only some had training in theater of any sort, their training became institutionalized in art institutes and academies. By the time I was conducting my fieldwork, most puppeteers had received three or four years of training specifically in puppet acting. Moreover, over the course of the twentieth century, more puppet theaters and children's theaters were founded around Kazakhstan. The puppet troupe now traveled mostly for special invited shows in other cities or to participate in national or international puppet festivals. While historians of puppetry often cite the benefits of puppetry

³⁰ State Central Archives of Kazakhstan, Fond 1241 – Kraevoi kukol'nyi tear Kaz. ASSR, Opis' 2, delo 5.

³¹ State Central Archives of Kazakhstan, Fond 1241 – Kraevoi kukol'nyi tear Kaz. ASSR, Opis' 1, Delo 1. 1936

being that a single puppeteer can animate several puppets in the same show (Proschan 1981: 528), the Almaty puppet theater had approximately 30 puppeteers on staff, along with a large team of carpenters, seamstresses, and props personnel to make and repair puppets, sets, and costumes. There was a stage manager devoted to caring for the puppets, brushing their fur, keeping them clean, and putting them away in their proper place when not in use. The peripatetic nature of puppetry was certainly part of the puppet theater's history, but they mostly only ever traveled as far as to schools, hospitals, or shopping malls to perform within Almaty. They hardly performed at all that fall, unable to rehearse or even to access their puppets easily, which were in storage in a different building. They avoided their regular visits to institutions where they were used to performing on-site.³² They experienced their removal to the edge of town while their building was under renovation for close to a year as difficult and disruptive.

The Winter of Their Displacement

On a day in December, 2012, I arrived early enough to catch part of the puppet students' classes; they studied at the art academy but had their classes on puppetry in the same space as the theater rehearsals. The class let out early, and I sat down with the five students for tea. I offered them *bauyrsakh* (Kazakh balls of fried dough) that I had brought. As puppeteers trickled in, complaining about the cold and about the inconvenience of having to take two or three buses from their neighborhoods to this rather remote corner of the city, I offered them *bauyrsakh*, as

32. Even during the "World Puppet Carnival" that took place shortly after my arrival, the troupe performed for the opening ceremony and for a scheduled street performance, along with accepting a special award at the closing ceremony, but they were not allowed to compete in the carnival. I saw very few of them at any of the visiting theatres' performances and none of them at the social events surrounding the carnival. This all seemed more related to an ongoing controversy surrounding the administrative director's relationship to the administrators overseeing the theatre (which then resulted in a complicated relationship between the administrative director and the artist), but nonetheless created an awkward situation in which a city's celebration of puppetry seemed to exclude the city's own government-employed puppeteers.

well. They asked if I had made it, though I served it from the supermarket bag with the price label clearly printed on it. “Oh yes, I made them myself,” I said. They spread this joke to all who came in after.

The winter of 2012-2013 was the coldest winter in 50 years, everyone told me. In December, it got down to -30 or -40 C (probably only -30, but -40 was more impressive because there, Fahrenheit and Celsius meet), and didn’t get above freezing during the day for a couple of weeks. During that time, the puppet theater rehearsed in a small hall at the city zoo, on the edge of town, near Gorky Park. The hall was heated, but not especially well. Most of us kept our coats on indoors. The stage consisted of a slightly raised area in one corner. The rest of the room was filled with theater seating. Long tables lined the walls.

Rehearsal began 30 minutes late, as usual, after some reprimand from Gūlya Apay, the assistant director. There had been no head director for many years. One puppeteer was missing, so another stood in for her. Puppeteers not occupied with the rehearsal sat in the theater chairs where I sat. They played with their phones or chatted to one another. Gūlya periodically shushed them. When the puppeteers asked the imaginary child audience a question, Gūlya Apay voiced the children’s predicted replies. By noon, the artists started muttering *obed* — “lunch” — under their breaths, though lunch was supposed to begin at 1:00 pm.

For the first time I had seen, they went through the entire play of *Morozko*, from beginning to end. When the puppeteers described the play to me, they emphasized to me that they had done the play, years earlier, and they were simply trying to remember it by going through it again and again. In this way, whereas futurity becomes an important orientation for rehearsals at the puppet theater and at the children’s home, these repetitions also act as an embodied process of remembering past performances (Samudra 2008). Their way of

emphasizing to me, and to directors, that this was simply a process of remembering, of reminding themselves, of what to do, often seemed like an act of downplaying the creativity of their work or the extent to which they could do something unexpected or new, while reassuring others – especially the directors – that their having mastered the play in the past ensured their regaining it through practice. As they worked to remember, they framed their goals as simply retrieving something that had been temporarily lost.

At the end of it, Gūlya Apay and the sound technician, Baqyt Agha, got into a heated discussion about their need for microphones at the theater where they would eventually perform *Morozko*. The play was part of their New Year's program, the *yělka* (pronounced "yolka"), which included a puppet play and a program of games and songs in a foyer. The children, who came dressed in costumes of their own, interacted with Ded Moroz ("Father Frost," their post-Soviet Santa), his granddaughter Snegurochka, and other characters. Because their theater was under renovation, they would be performing at a concert hall, closer to the center than the zoo and much larger than their cramped space here. The theater, it seemed, wouldn't be providing the troupe with mics, and the puppet theater had no money in the budget, at present, to purchase such equipment in time for the performance. This was an unacceptable situation for all of them. The puppet artists got involved in the yelling, as well. Maral kept saying that everyone needed to do their own job. She and the others complained about not having an adequate studio space, and about how the quality of the show depended upon the quality of these conditions.

Finally, Gūlya Apay sighed and announced "lunch." The tension dissipated as they began putting water on the multiple electric kettles they had brought, rearranging the tables on the side, pulling up chairs on each end, and spreading out the food they had brought. Gūlya Apay turned to me, smiled, and said, "First we yell at each other, then we eat together!" I had given away the

only food I had brought — the bauyrsakh — but the artists gave me tea, bread, and jam. Then, for a reason I didn't understand, they brought out a bottle of Soviet champagne (*sovetskoe shampanskoe*) and toasted: to us, to our work together, and to a microphone.

The next week, during the rehearsal at the zoo, I stepped out to use the bathroom (Another feature of the zoo space that drew complaints from the artists was that we had to go outside, downstairs, and around to a different entrance to the same building to use the bathroom). When I returned, I found myself walking into a special meeting of some sort. The administrative director, Madeniet, was talking to everyone. I first met Madeniet in 2012, and it was his openness that had played a role in pursuing the theater as a research site. He had mentioned the renovation back then, but had promised it would be complete by the time I returned for my long-term fieldwork, just in time for it to be a central site for children in Almaty. Since I had begun observing the puppeteers' rehearsals at the zoo, I had rarely seen him visit the actors. The administrative offices were on the other side of the building, even farther away than the bathroom.

Now, he was speaking quite excitedly to the actors – about the development of Kazakhstan, the Expo scheduled for 2017, and Nazarbayev's plans for the development of the country. He said that 20 years ago, who would have imagined that they would have developed as much as they have, to the extent that an American graduate student would come to study their theater. He said that he, as director, supported everyone's efforts to learn, and that my presence was evidence of this. He encouraged them to study, to take courses in St. Petersburg or go to America. He promised to help. Gūlya Apay made a speech about how the conditions were terrible there. The bathroom was outside. It was cold. But despite these conditions, they were getting ready for the New Year's program.

For the administrative director, the nation's progress was the theater's progress, and the theater's improvement should match Kazakhstan's. He promised to support the artists individually in their quest to learn and to travel, though for now, as an institution, they found themselves forced to work in a marginal space, under undesirable conditions. Gūlya Apay framed their work not as full of possibility, but rather as one in which they struggled to continue despite deplorable conditions. The director invoked a wealth of possibilities — of education, of futurity, and of hope. These discourses achieved new urgency in later months, leading up to and following the theater's reopening. For now, the artists spoke mainly of getting by, of enduring despite removal, and of remembering past acts, words, and motions. They focused on reanimating the past for new audiences.

Catching voices

After the meeting ended and the administrators left, the puppeteers began rehearsing *Morozko*. Because they had no microphones, they would have to use pre-recorded sound. Rather than recording their own voices, they used a recording from years ago. Other theaters use pre-recorded sound on a regular basis; the Almaty theater preferred not to, complaining that it made the shows more artificial, that it took away from the experience of seeing a live puppet show. Moreover, most of the time when I saw shows with canned sound, viewers might not immediately have noticed, because these were often shows with marionettes or rod puppets, animated from above or below, so that the puppeteers could hide behind a curtain from the audience. *Morozko*, on the other hand, was a show with tabletop puppets. The puppets looked more or less like dolls or stuffed animals, 12 to 18 inches tall, with handles on the backs of their heads and bodies, so that the puppeteers held them from behind, taking the puppet's hand into

their own in order for the character to wipe her brow or hold something. The puppet artist is always visible, their hands moving in intimate coordination with the puppet, rather than separated by string or hidden by the fabric of the puppet gown or the curtain. The puppeteer's face is always visible, as well.



Figure 13. *Morozko*. Father and dog.

Moreover, their version of *Morozko* included, at the beginning, a prologue, which offered a kind of meta-framing to introduce the show. The puppeteers, under the direction of Ded Moroz, took out a great box full of the puppets and distributed them to the artists, the puppets coming to life as they were handed from one artist to another before finding their home with one particular puppeteer. In divvying up the puppets, Ded Moroz (played by Vlad) called out the name of the artist assigned to each role. As they came forward, each puppeteer responded first as puppeteer (responding to Vlad's call with "Here I am!"), and then switched voices, into the character they were to animate. This kind of prologue, in which roles are announced and distributed and in which actors often speak directly to the audiences, is recommended for puppet theaters to

employ in early Soviet texts as a way to engage child audiences (Agienko and Poliakov 1927). Despite later insistence by Soviet historians of puppetry that socialist puppet theater shared none of the bourgeois approaches to puppetry that fascinated early twentieth-century avant-garde theater directors across Europe, this type of prologue shares a playful breaking of the fourth wall with *commedia dell'arte* traditions (Rudlin and Crick 2001) that Meyerhold employed:

The prologue and the ensuing parade, together with the direct address to the audience at the final curtain, so loved both by the Italians and Spaniards in the seventeenth century and by the French vaudevillistes, all force the spectator to recognize the actors' performance as pure play-acting. And every time the actor leads the spectators too far into the land of make-believe he immediately resorts to some unexpected sally or lengthy address *a parte* to remind them that what is being performed is only *a play* (Meyerhold 1969 [1912]: 127, emphasis in original).

At the puppet theater, the troupe used these prologues for some plays, but not others. At times, I found these prologues – and breaks from the main action in the middle of a story, to engage children in games – to be drawn out to the point that they became tedious. However, productions that employed such techniques often seemed to keep child audiences more engaged than those that jumped into the story and mostly maintained the fourth wall throughout. Children were less fidgety and more likely to call up to the actors or puppets to “watch out,” even getting angry when a puppet failed to heed the children's warnings. Such prologues thus form a crucial time for improvisation during puppet shows, but this improvisation was severely reduced with the canned sound.

Because they were working with canned sound from years ago, even the names Ded Moroz called out were not all the names of the present actors. As the actors came forward to claim their puppets, they first lip synced to animate the puppeteer they had replaced; then they lip synced their puppet's lines. While a ventriloquist “throws” their voice into the body of the

dummy, these puppeteers worked to “catch” the voices pre-recorded by others, so that it would look, ideally, to the audience as if they were articulating each line in real time. Yëlka season begins in December and usually ends, in Kazakhstan, just after Russian Orthodox Christmas, January 7. During this period, they would perform two or more shows per day, with no days off. For a few of the *Morozko* performances, puppeteers replaced one another so that an actor could have a break. One day, Arai replaced Gulym as Masha, the lead character of the good little girl. She barely moved her mouth to most of Masha’s lines, but concentrated instead on moving the puppet appropriate to the action at hand. Afterwards, she bragged that she was able to do this without having rehearsed the role even once.

The canned sound may have meant that a puppeteer could more or less follow along without rehearsing, but it also required the performers to keep precise track of the moment of each utterance in the recorded version so that their lips and the puppets’ actions would match. In addition to the puppeteers, Adlet acted as a helper, handing props to the puppets, such as when Pasha says she wants some dumplings (*varenniki*) and then changes her mind about them because they’re cold. As Adlet brought these out and took them off again, he would play with the food and pretend he wanted to eat it. Only he – who played the human role of an onstage non-role, without lines, had more leeway for playful improvisations. While puppeteers, including those at the Almaty theater, insist that the most important thing is for children to be looking at the puppets, they nonetheless acknowledge that they are performing alongside their puppets and not exclusively through them, as they don colorful outfits and makeup and interact with the puppets they are animating.



Figure 14. *Morozko*. The helper tells a secret.

It was during the *yëlka* that I first started recording the artists. Because the theater's lack of activity during the first few months had stalled the first months of my research, I eagerly began the *yëlka* season by attending every performance, several times a day, and recording at least once per day. The artists noted that this seemed excessive, as they did the same show each time. I insisted there were little details in the shows that changed each day, subtle differences that I would find and later analyze. Perhaps this will someday be true. But watching the show each day, after having watched them rehearse it for weeks, I didn't, at the time, see many differences from one show to the next. I still don't. Instead, the repetition and the canned recording created a relatively fixed, consistent show. The artists' main innovations occurred during rehearsals when *Gūlya Apay* was absent, and the puppeteers became freer in their interpretation. The father puppet, momentarily controlled by another puppeteer, could become rather lewd in his behavior toward the other puppets.

Despite the predictability of the play itself, after each showing of *Morozko*, the children and artists gathered in the foyer outside the theater for the *yëlka* activities, which were a little different every day.³³ The performers always followed the same program, but the children brought surprises to which everyone had to react. For the *yëlka* (and, often, before their regular shows), a certain contingent of the artists dressed up in full-body costumes of animals or animated characters, such as Sponge Bob. The goal of these roles is less to entertain children with a spectacle of some sort but rather to engage them, to encourage them to dance or sing. The name of this role is *animator*. As in other languages and other countries, animators are not always costumed characters but might be youths working at a summer camp. Their job it is to get children to participate enthusiastically in whatever organized fun they have prepared for them. Their goal, here, is to animate the children. At the *yëlka*, there were several animators dispersed among the children, helping make sure they stayed in a circle around the tree, with space for Ded Moroz and other characters playing out a small drama for the children in between the games and songs. In this program, Erkesh, a senior actress, played an evil woman who claimed to have diverted Ded Moroz. Everyone fears he won't be coming to see them, but he does.

33. *Yëlka* is both the Russian word for Christmas tree and the word to describe the program of songs and games around it that occur at children's theatres, schools, and other sites for children. Christmas trees were imported to Russia as early as the rule of Peter the Great in the 17th Century. Under Soviet rule, they were at first banned, but eventually revived, along with other Christmas traditions, but converted to New Year's traditions, along with the figure of Ded Moroz (Kelly 2009).



Figure 15. Ded Moroz dancing to "Gangnam Style."

At the yëlkas, girls dressed as princesses or Snegurochka, boys as pirates or Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Both dressed as animals. They sang songs, danced Gangnam Style with Ded Moroz, and played relay race games in which boys and girls were always pitted against each other, the boys always seeming to win. Still, the addition of children brought a host of contingencies into the performance. A child might take a special liking to the actor dressed up as a penguin and follow her around. Another human-sized animal might scare a child and make him cry. On one day, the artists' own children all came. Arai, dressed as a human Christmas tree, had to sing and dance with her toddler perched on her hip. Yeloqa and Aydan's eldest daughter sang a solo on this day, while Maral and Altay's five-year-old boy mostly sulked next to the window, too shy to participate.



Figure 16. *Yëlka*. Audience participation.

Then we eat

While I tried to get the puppet artists to discuss their work in relation to their own childhoods, their memories of puppets or of playing with toys, they tended to brush off any notion that their work might be infused with some nostalgia for childhood. Instead, however, they frequently cited their love of entertaining children. The artists certainly became more energetic when performing for the children than they were when rehearsing at the zoo for only their colleagues and me. Nonetheless, they also loved to play for one another, often becoming more energetic when they improvised puppet interactions not suitable for small children than when they rehearsed the same script day in, day out. They were able to draw out energy from one another, to animate one another the way they had become skilled at animating the children at their shows.

When the *yëlka* performances ended, the artists informed me they were having a New Year's banquet. It was already a week after the New Year (and only one of them would have

celebrated Russian Orthodox New Years the following week), but they had been performing too often to celebrate sooner. They collected money from each of us ahead of time to cover the cost of food and drinks for the whole evening. It was a lot of money for me, and certainly a much larger percentage of their monthly income. Maral told me to wear something sexy (*seksual'no*), or the doorman wouldn't let me in. I wore a dress that I had hand-sewn myself. It was large, gray, and went down to my knees, just above my boots.

The restaurant was near the train station. I arrived on time with my date; Gūlya Apay noted that all the old people showed up first. We were seated with administrators, including Gūlya Apay and her husband, one of the vice directors on the administrative side who had a special fondness for American cars. Each round table had bottles of vodka and cognac for the toasts. Every time we toasted, we took a shot. Only eventually did I realize that the woman next to me wasn't drinking to the bottom every time.

They made me give a toast in Kazakh; then played a New Years song in English to which my date and I were supposed to sing along, but we had never heard it before. The puppeteers knew it well and sang. They held a dance contest, and chose six or seven couples to participate. My date and I were quickly eliminated. With each song, as the competition narrowed, the puppeteers become more elaborate in constructing a narrative to accompany their dance: A man shows up drunk at a restaurant and begins dancing with the waitress; a flashy couple enters a club in fur coats and spends the whole time looking at their cell phones. The music revue, their most frequently performed show before the renovation, consisted off similar narratives set to song, carried out by their puppets. At the end of the night, my boots were broken from the dancing.

That winter, and throughout the night of toasts, the artists highlighted the difficulty with which they worked, and prided themselves on their abilities to find ways to be joyful, to play, and to perform, despite these hardships.

Indefinite Renovation

In contemporary Almaty, residents often made jokes about certain spaces being under constant repair – *remont* – and about those repairs always taking longer than expected. This characteristic of eternal renovation was not unique to contemporary Kazakhstan, however, but was a wider trope in Soviet culture: In one episode of the Soviet animation, *Cheburashka*, “Cheburashka Goes to School,” the villainess, Starukha Shapokliak,³⁴ goes around playing tricks on Cheburashka’s best friend, the Crocodile Gena, by hanging a *remont* (“repairs”) sign on the elevator of his building, then on the door to his apartment. When she decides to copy Cheburashka’s idea of going to school, however, she is as dismayed as the rest of them to find yet another “*remont*” sign on the door to the school. This one is real. While the school director pouts on the stairs, the older woman makes a new sign, which she places over the old one: “*SROCHNII REMONT*” — “QUICK REPAIRS.” She goes inside with her pet rat, Lariska, where the repairmen sit, playing cards. The old woman and her rat scare the repairmen into completing the repairs quickly. This was another late Soviet trope that extended into contemporary Kazakhstan – that these repairs were slow to be completed because of someone or other’s incompetence, laziness, or lack of funding.

During the early years of the puppet theater in Almaty, however, the problem was not a space in need of repair, but a lack of space from the beginning that took decades to materialize.

34. Old Lady Shapokliak, the surname from the French *chapeau claqué*, the black collapsible hat she always wears.

According to archival reviews and reports, the Almaty puppet theater continued to perform throughout World War II, despite still working without a space — or, rather, they had a space, but only on Sundays, “and not every Sunday.”³⁵ While they had to move from place to place, traveling outside the city to perform in other regions of Kazakhstan proved difficult without reliable transportation. This created special problems for the Kazakh-language troupe, Director Amori complained in a report from 1945, because “there’s nowhere to work here, since in the city there are only two Kazakh schools, who have seen the repertoire of the Kazakh troupe” (*ibid.*). The Kazakh troupe’s repertoire consisted, at that time, of only two plays. They had no space to rehearse new shows. Amori also complains that in the summer they had been made to perform in the park on hot days, and without a proper square for such shows.

That same year, at the end of World War II, the children’s theater (or TIuZ — Theater for Young Audiences, as it is commonly called in Russian) that Amori had envisioned years earlier was founded in Almaty by Natalia Sats. Sats, daughter of composer Ilya Sats, had worked in Moscow children’s theater from an early age. In 1937, she was sent to a gulag, with her husband, for five years. Upon her release, she came to Alma-Ata (as Soviet Almaty was called) to found the children’s theater there. Eventually, she returned to Moscow to found the Moscow State Children’s Musical Theater, which is – like the Russian-language TIuZ in Almaty – now named after Sats, who is frequently mentioned as a remarkable cases of post-gulag rehabilitation (Adler 2012, Cohen 2012). Sats’ role in establishing children’s theater in the Soviet Union remains nearly as legendary as Sergei Obraztsov’s role in establishing puppet theater (Viktorov 1986). A gap in the puppet theater’s archive — followed by mentions in 1966 of the puppet theater as a newly-formed offshoot of a puppet troupe that had been part of the Sats theater — together

35. “...i to ne kazhduyu nedelyu.” F. r. 1241, Opis 2, Delo 46, 28 September 1945.

suggest that the TIuZ absorbed the puppet theater for two decades (1945-1966), until the puppet theater was finally given a space of its own.

Before the renovation during my fieldwork, the Almaty State Puppet Theater was a bright yellow building. This was the theater I first encountered during my preliminary fieldwork in the city in 2011. People who have spent time in Almaty often know the building, even if they never saw a show there, because of its central location on Pushkin Street, just between Panfilov Park and the Green Bazaar. Because of the Rakhat sweets factory next to the bazaar, the air often smelled like chocolate. When I returned in 2012, the theater looked like it was in ruins. Instead of a simple remont sign on the door, as in Cheburashka, a small billboard on the wall surrounding the construction site offered an image of the newly-renovated theater that was this site's future. They would replace the old yellow facade, which had been at once cheery in its color and Soviet in its use of concrete (Fehérváry 2013), with glass and stained wood. The glass would give it a light, modern feel, while the dark stained wood would give it a more traditional look, like a log cabin (though yurts tend to define traditional Kazakh architecture).



Figure 17. Future theater, left, and a past repertoire, right.

Pricing the Priceless Theater

The renovation would still not be complete for some months, but the New Years banquet, late as it was, marked a turning point for a number of changes in the theater toward their internal renovation. A number of administrators joined the artists at the banquet, but the administrative director — who had encouraged the artists to dream big, to go to St. Petersburg, to study in America — was conspicuously absent from the festivities. I had to leave the next day for visa issues. When I returned, the artists were all on break and difficult to reach.

I convinced Gulym, the puppeteer who had played Masha, to come over for an interview. She brought a friend; they showed me catalogues of Chinese herbs they were selling as a side business. Puppetry didn't pay well, and many of the artists had second jobs of some sort. When I tried to move on to do the interview, Gulym wanted to make sure I had permission from the director.

I said of course. I had had permission from him since the previous year.

She said, “The *new* director?”

I said, “The *new* director?”

The artists had been on break since I left, yet quite a lot had happened.

When I sat down with the new director, he first said simply, “You have my attention.”

Orazaly was a middle-aged man with an impressive background. He had studied in Russia, had been stage director of a dramatic theater, and had overseen productions of children’s film and television programming. I nervously rushed to explain my research, but Orazaly quickly assured me that he was open to my work, and used the opportunity to describe the universalism of art and the opportunities our relationship presented to everyone (not unlike his predecessor had done). He said that there were no borders when it comes to art. There are borders when it comes to politics, but not art, because art is all one language — the language of the soul.

He took the occasion to give his impression of the puppet theater and his mission to improve it. He confessed that he was new to the puppet theater and didn’t know a lot about this particular theater, but he did know that it was in bad shape. They didn’t have any great spectacles to show, at present, because the previous director had not managed the theater well. The previous director had come from the world of music, not dramatic theater, so how could he know how to manage one. They needed a stage director (a *rezhissër*, whereas he was a *direktor*, an administrative director). In February or March, a director from the Obraztsov Puppet Theater, the greatest puppet theater of Soviet times, was coming to visit, and hopefully he would stay to work with them permanently.

Orazaly had a vision for the theater. Part of this vision was making tickets more expensive. If you pay only \$2 to see a show, he explained, you don’t appreciate how much work has gone into it. The mentality of people in Kazakhstan, he complained, was they that didn’t value the arts. This needed to change. He planned to raise the quality of shows to the point that

the cheapest ticket would cost \$10. Low ticket prices were characteristic of Soviet theater, as a way of opening up the theater to working-class audiences (Rudnitskii 1988). Soviet planners may have expected the theater to civilize the masses, but these new audiences in theaters resulted in complex relationships between ideologies of theatricality and performances of everyday life (Kaminer 2006). In post-Soviet, independent Kazakhstan, theater prices to government-run theaters, especially those catering to children, were still low enough that troupes seldom made a profit from ticket sales, but instead relied heavily on government support. Orazaly would later develop this theme — that in order for audiences to value art, they needed to be made to spend money on it. Art might not have boundaries, but it did have a price.

Orazaly said that perhaps it was no accident that we had met. We meet the people we are supposed to meet. He cited Tolstoy for writing that we live until we are seven years old and then spend the rest of our lives looking for our childhood. He quoted Alexander the Great, who, on his deathbed, said he wanted to be buried not with his hands crossed over his chest, but with his palms facing outward, symbolizing how much he had given. He said he was a slave to the arts, and that the only important things in life were what you leave behind — through your children, your grandchildren, and the work you do.

Here, Orazaly highlights the ways ideologies of childhood shape the work of the theater. Children as emblems of futurity and of legacy play an integral role in personal work ethos of the director. Though he sees as part of his mission as administrative director raising the value of art by raising the price of tickets, he nonetheless adheres to a vision of himself as materially impoverished by his devotion to the arts, calling himself a “slave” to the theater, not unlike the puppet artists’ highlighting of their own physical suffering in the name of their work. The role of

children is to receive the legacy so generously handed down to them by their beneficent ancestors.

Audiences needed to learn to pay more in order to appreciate the theater, but this should not be mistaken for greed on the part of those providing it. Raising the ticket prices would mean increased costs for families, of course, but Orazaly saw this as proof of families' commitment to the arts and a way to socialize children to value art, as well. Historians of American childhood note increasing pressures for parents to index affection toward children through consumption in the twentieth century (Zelizer 1985, Cook 2004). Zelizer argues that the rise of sentimentality surrounding childhood coincides with a decrease in children's economic value to households because of labor laws, followed by the increased cost of having a child. Twentieth-century Soviet sentimentality of childhood may have placed less pressure on parents to buy things, but creating ideal children's worlds nonetheless often relied on consumption, as well. Under Khrushchev, the flagship store for children – *Detskii Mir*, “Children's World,” opened in 1957 in Moscow. While the original store in Moscow has since changed its name, Almaty's downtown still features a multi-story *Detskii Mir*, though it has to compete with the toy stores of newer shopping malls. In the theater as well as in the children's home, children's consumption gets loaded with moral import. Administrative officials argued that the puppet theater's duty was to offer children a rich sensory, semiotic world, even if it required parents to make sacrifices in order to buy more expensive tickets, artists to work harder to make better shows, or educators to work harder at institutions to create stimulating spaces for them. For the puppet theater, already several months into their displacement at the zoo, renovation was only beginning.

The Performance Review

After another trip to Bishkek to sort out visa issues, I returned to find the artists back to work, more fervently than before. There was a notice on the door at the end of the week, they would be holding an *attestatsiya* — a performance review. They would perform for a panel, who would make recommendations that could lead to salary increases or decreases. Some feared they could even lose their positions. The puppeteers worked that week with Gūlya Apay, Serik Agha, the professor of puppetry at the art school (who had been the professor of many of the puppeteers when they were young students), and Renat, a young choreographer who worked for some months with the puppetry students and puppeteers. They rehearsed individual scenes from their entire repertoire, designed to give the board of judges a sense of the range of abilities of the artists under review.

Many of the puppets were still in storage. They rehearsed without them, holding up their hand as if a puppet sat atop it, or manipulating the air in front of them, as if a marionette dangled below. At times, they moved their own bodies as if they were the puppets. Gūlya and Serik gave specific feedback on how to make a particular movement look more natural or lifelike, Serik bluntly describing a puppeteer's animation simply as “bad” (*zhaman*). They showed the puppeteers what they were doing badly and how to do it correctly, whether a puppet was bouncing up and down too vigorously when walking or sliding across the floor too easily. They engaged in “bodily quoting” sometimes used by choreographers (Keevallik 2010), but with imagined or real objects attached to these bodies. As the week progressed, the puppeteers began changing into workout clothes as soon as they arrived, rather than working in their dressier street clothes all day, as they had before. They stopped asking for lunch to begin or for a smoke break. They began to practice on their own, rather than only when told to do so.

I arrived on the day of the performance review to find the space modestly transformed: A row of the theater seats had been removed to make more room at the front. A table had been put in front of the first row and was adorned with bottled water, glasses, and a centerpiece of flowers befitting the seriousness of the occasion. When I saw a coatrack by the door, I hung my coat on it, but Erbolat, the vice director and Gūlya Apay's husband, told me this rack was only for members of the jury. Off to the side, a curtained area had been constructed so that the puppeteers wouldn't have to change costumes in front of the audience – as they had, for months, simply had to change clothes in the back row of the hall, without any privacy.

The jury members took their seats, and the director stood before them. He read a decree (*prikaz*) introducing them to the proceedings and explaining the four areas on which the artists would be evaluated: plasticity, singing, choreography, and acting. Orazaly added that all this was to be taken into account alongside the actor's relationship with the puppet, and that this was the most important. Orazaly added that while this was a test, every day is a test.

The artists' revue lasted almost two hours, filled with musical numbers, dramatic excerpts from different shows, and Adlet's introduction of a new puppet he had bought in Russia, a padded, oversized costume of a belly dancer. The director got up to take phone calls. The commission (*komissia*) sometimes clapped at the end of a scene or a number, but mostly they did not. At the end, the director announced that they would adjourn to the administrative side of the building and would return in an hour. I imagined myself waiting anxiously with the puppeteers for the results. The director came over and asked me how I thought it had gone, and I said I thought they had done really well. He said he had thought it was really bad. The numbers were all outdated and would mostly have to go. He invited me to the administrative side for the deliberations.

We had to walk outside and along the side of the road to get to the administrative entrance on the opposite side of the building. We went up to a room where the props department usually worked. Today, a table was set in the middle, filled with traditional Kazakh snacks and chairs all around. An assistant to the director served us tea. The commission included teachers and directors of puppetry, along with administrative representatives from the city's department of culture. The director said what an honor and a pleasure it was to have everyone gathered together. He announced that they would not be discussing the individual performers because — as they had all already agreed — among each of them they saw potential and, most of all, a love of puppetry.

The first member of the commission who spoke remarked at how little had changed since he had last visited the theater for one of these reviews. They all quickly agreed that what the theater needed was a real artist-director (sometimes using *khudozhnik*, sometimes *rezhissër*) to oversee the troupe, to lead them in creating new plays. I was asked to give my opinion, but only managed to say how honored I was to be there, and how I loved the puppet theater. A woman who was new to the puppet theater, overseeing it as part of her duties with the department of culture, admitted that she was not an artist, and new to this genre of theater, but she had studied in the Czech Republic, which knew an exceptionally vibrant puppet culture, and she knew enough about the theater to know that the quality of some of the puppets was unacceptable. She said they were sad, and for this reason should not be shown to children. While some of the others had focused on finding ways to make the theater's plays more modern, more current, to connect to today's generation, she said that she had no problem with using old plays. There were some that could be relevant for centuries. But the quality of everything they did should offer something beautiful to the children, or the children would not come to the theater.

I was quite surprised by her condemnation of the puppets, for when I had first asked the puppeteers what made their theater special, they had responded, “The puppets.” They explained that they had a very special master who had been making the puppets since the 1970s, and he gave them all kinds of abilities to move their eyes and mouths, and the puppets were so beautiful that they had won a prize at a festival in the Czech Republic a few years ago. With the exception of Adlet’s rather grotesque belly dancer, purchased in Russia, all of the puppets were made by Evgenii and another young carpenter named Kolya. Natasha, who had joined Evgenii just a few years later, was now head of the props department, where they added the soft elements to the puppets, was equally revered by the puppeteers and other workers as a shy, but gifted artist.

When it was the director’s turn to speak, he again quoted Tolstoy, about how a person lives seven years, and after that is constantly searching for his childhood. He said he wanted to advertise this to people: “Come here to seek your lost childhood.” But for this they needed to be able to impress people, to make children’s eyes light up with wonder. He worried that some children could dance better than the dances the puppet troupe offered in their repertoire.

They agreed, at the end, to pass everyone, and that their next step was to find a real stage director. Artists had treated the review as a test of their individual ability that would potentially result in recognition, monetary remuneration, or some kind of punishment. Their evaluators had treated it, instead, as a test of the theater troupe as a collective. The work of the puppet theater became, with this, infused with a moral obligation for them to improve. Orazaly’s description of every day as a test recalls literature on performance emphasizing the risk inherent to performance. Framing an activity as performance invites evaluation from those positioned as audience (Bauman 1975, 1984, Keane 1997, Yankah 1985); yet his calling on them to see every

day as a test involves themselves taking on the position of evaluating themselves, of seeing themselves from the outside, a practice that others will elaborate when working with them later.

Though the commission had emphasized the importance of bringing something new into the theater — and this would be repeated throughout the coming months of rehearsal for the grand re-opening — the troupe would nonetheless continue to rely heavily on past performances, as remembered by their bodies through years of practice. Puppeteers' everyday practice relied on memory as a base for the work they were doing, as a pool of knowledge and experience from which they drew their expertise. Anticipation — looking forward to the day of the re-opening and the opportunity to perform for an audience after such an extended pause — acted as the impetus that moved them forward. The themes that Orazaly would continue to evoke as they prepared for this event imbricated ideologies of childhood into this dual orientation of looking backwards and forwards at the same time. Children represented futurity and the legacy of what would come after, while Orazaly also saw the puppet theater as having the potential to draw adults into a nostalgic journey backwards. This would, nonetheless, require the puppeteers to offer something new to audiences.

Only their love of theater

The performance review was held near the end of January. The re-opening was originally scheduled for Nauryz — the Central Asian new year celebration that, in Kazakhstan, begins March 21 and unfolds over three days. With repairs to the building continually delayed, the puppeteers performed for Nauryz at a shopping mall. They performed their old songs and puppet dances from their music revue, *The Holiday Continues* — their most performed show before the renovations began — on a stage in the mall's upstairs food court.

The Holiday Continues – renamed, for the opening, simply *Puppet Show* (*Kukly Shou* in Russian, *Quyrshaq Duman* in Kazakh) – is undoubtedly indebted to Obraztsov’s own *Extraordinary Concert* (*Neobyknovenniy kontsert*, also translated as “Unusual Concert”). The Concert premiered in 1946, has been televised and toured all over the world, and is often described as one of the most famous puppet shows of the twentieth century (Goldovsky 2004). Despite everyone’s assertions, at the performance review, that sweeping changes needed to take place at the theater, the puppet theater opted mostly to modify old musical numbers for their grand re-opening. In order to transform these numbers into something bright and new, they worked with Renat on new choreography for themselves and the puppets. Eventually, they brought in Kuba as the new full-time stage director (*rezhissër*). He wasn’t the director from Moscow whom Orazaly had promised, but he did have a background as a stage director and as a puppet artist. For the re-opening after the renovation, he introduced no new numbers, but he and Orazaly instead offered general feedback on their performance styles and execution.

Throughout this period, and for the year of new performances in preparation afterwards during my fieldwork, different directors struggled to motivate the puppeteers to work harder or better, in various ways — to get them to arrive on time, to be more disciplined about beginning to rehearse before the directors had even arrived, and to take responsibility for themselves and their own self-improvement. The kinds of ideal performers that the directors worked to cultivate might, at first, fit into narratives of cultivation of neoliberal selves after socialism (Matza 2009). Orazaly made explicit connections to a market-oriented shift the theater should be taking when discussing his plans for the theater — both with me and with the actors. He shared his plans with them for raising ticket prices. He talked about how they needed to be working toward an American model of “art business” (using English to describe this model). He told them that an

American actor might receive \$10,000 for a single show. He didn't explain if this was for a single performance or for a show's entire run, how long this run was, or what percentage of American actors actually made such a sum in theater work. He seemed to be taking Broadway as his model for how the American art business worked, likely informing his decision to stage a musical without puppets for their big new premier.

In contrast to Orazaly's descriptions of rich American actors, most American puppeteers I met (along with those from Western Europe and Australia) marveled at the size of the Almaty troupe and that they were all salaried employees. Most of the puppeteers I met from non-post-socialist countries work without regular salaries or their own spaces. They rent spaces for temporary shows, play a lot of birthday parties, and toured around to festivals. Because they need to be mobile and to make money from their shows (not being able to rely on government funding), they plan shows that are small in scale and in personnel. The Almaty puppet theater had more than two dozen actors, a dozen workers in charge of making sets, puppets, and costumes, and sets, and a dozen administrators. Once they got their theater renovated, they would have two different performance spaces, a large foyer to greet the children, and a small cafe.

When the actors, after Orazaly's speeches about \$10,000 shows for Americans, joked with me about how I should take them with me back to America so that they could become stars, I tried to explain to them how visiting puppeteers from non-postsocialist countries saw the Kazakhstani puppet theaters as extremely fortunate to have government support and regular salaries. Most of them struggled to make a living and made choices about the types of puppet shows available to them based on their financial constraints. I tried to explain that the government didn't offer the same support for the arts that they found in Kazakhstan. Still, the puppeteers seemed to take Orazaly's description of his vision for the future of the theater as a

promise that if they worked harder, their wages would increase. As it was, their salaries were quite modest for Almaty standards of living. The puppeteers tended to be married by the time they were in their mid-20s, many of them to one another, and had one or more children. Many of them looked for side work in the entertainment industry — on television, or serving as hosts (*tamada*) or deejays for parties or clubs — or found other side incomes, such as Gulym's Chinese herbs or other direct sales.

On the one hand, Orazaly worked to motivate the artists to work harder by promising American-style salaries as rewards. At the same time, he lauded American work ethic as one driven by “fear.” He told me he admired this about us; I admitted that fear indeed induced me to work when I lacked desire. He said that the problem with the artists at the theater in Kazakhstan was that they had no fear. Orazaly also mentioned, at least to me, that the size of the troupe was too large, while an overseeing administrator criticized the theater for employing way too many administrators. Nonetheless, I saw no cuts to staff or artists at the theater while I was there.

The approaches Orazaly advocated were not so new to post-Soviet Kazakhstan, as socialist projects also relied on discourses of self-transformation, discipline, and responsibility (Kharkhordian 1999, Hellbeck 2009). Orazaly connected these goals of increased motivation and work output to a new orientation toward an imagined theater that was American in its approach to theater as a business. Yet he also continued to rely on appeals to artists as belonging to a vocation that required constant sacrifice.³⁶ The previous director had gotten in trouble with the artists for promising bonuses and never granting them. The actors often found themselves promised monetary remuneration for their work that never materialized. They were expected to improve their work out of sheer love for their work, for their art. The contradiction inherent in

36. Barish (1981) argues that the theatrical prejudice increased with the professionalization of theatre work in the seventeenth century.

expectations for the artists' work emerges in part from ambiguity regarding whether performance lies in the realm of work or play — or if the two are mutually exclusive — and how to navigate such murkiness.

Performance as Work or Play

Throughout my fieldwork at the puppet theater and at Hope House, directors, teachers, artists, and children treated rehearsals and performances sometimes as playful endeavors that gave them pleasure to practice, perfect, and perform; at other times, however, performance became work that required discipline, restraint, and even suffering. The ambiguity of performance as a kind of disciplined play or a playful job gave rise to expectations surrounding the nature of rehearsal and performance that sometimes came into conflict with other assumptions surrounding the same activities. The efforts of the puppet theater during this period of renovation provide examples of such moments: directors would encourage actors to work harder, to study abroad, to arrive earlier and not ask when they were allowed to leave. They told the actors that, in return, they would receive greater compensation for their labor. More often than not, however, they ended up encouraging artists to work through hardships by resorting to ideologies of art as a cause for which one must suffer and in which one thus engages voluntarily, out of love for the art, rather than the promise of a paycheck.

Freedom is often a central component in classic definitions of play, such as in Huizinga's assertion, "First and foremost...all play is a voluntary activity. Play to order is no longer play: it could at best be but a forcible imitation of it" (1949[1944]): 7). Huizinga connects this characteristic of play as free to the second characteristic, that it "is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life"(8). In order for it to be voluntary, it must be separated from real life. He bemoans the

increasing difficulty in distinguishing between the two in the twentieth century. Anthropologists have disputed the universality of the work-play distinction, such as Watson-Gegeo's (2001) observation of Kwaracae children engaging in "adult-mode" activities, in which they are, in fact, working, but do so in a playful imitation of adults, so that their work is a kind of fantasy. Goodwin and others working on play have argued for the seriousness of play, in regards to the work it does in shaping social relations (1985) and in poetic features of children's language use (1990). Vygotsky argued that when objects stand in for other objects, this action serves a key moment in semiotic development, serving as a concrete pivot for the gradual separation of object and meaning (1978:98). Soviet educators at different points argued against hard-and-fast distinctions between work and play in order to justify the kindergarten as a worthwhile socialist endeavor (Kirschenbaum 2001). This tension between work and play often forced teachers to creatively cast certain activities as "work" that they had previously thought of as play. Building blocks became valued for fostering children's abilities to engage in collective tasks, for example. "Conflating work and play reinforced the proposition—as essential to socialists as to progressive educators—that the impulse to create and to cooperate constituted a fundamental component of human nature" (73).

Performance at the puppet theater and at Hope House was a space where play and work blurred. Successful performance was meant in itself to be satisfying, but excellence relied on increasingly high expectations surrounding the commitment of teachers, directors, children, and puppeteers to work and suffer for the sake of these performances. Tokumitsu (2015) points out, in recent writing on the "Do What You Love" mantra in the twenty-first century, that an ethos of working out of love for your craft, rather than from a desire for a paycheck, can become an easy way for others to exploit the labor of those of us who do what we love, dangling the hope of

eventual compensation before artists, unpaid interns, overworked adjunct professors, and creative and intellectual-types, more generally (see also Hunnicutt 1988, 1996, 2013). This discourse moreover obscures inequalities that make it far more feasible for certain individuals to do what they love, due to privileged positions regarding race, class, gender, and ethnicity.

At the puppet theater, the conflation of performance as both work and play also served to identify the types of workers the puppeteers were and how they should be treated. Directors would describe them as child-like, at once offering a compliment and an insult. It was their love of children and childhood that kept them connected to their audiences; but the directors also often reprimanded them as if they were children, yelling at them when they arrived late for rehearsal, when they were talking instead of listening, or when they arrived on time but sat around doing nothing so long as an authority figure was absent.



Figure 18. Artists play around.

Orazaly frequently stated that he wanted the puppet theater to be a place where adults would come to rediscover their childhood. While popular Western psychology in the latter half of the twentieth century advocates looking within to find the child (Missildine 1963,

Capacchione 1991), the puppet theater — like other sites seeking to attract children and parents — appeals to the idea that hidden childhoods can be rediscovered within spaces of institutionalized imagination. It appeals to adults to use their children and children's interests as a provocation to look backwards, even as ideologies of childhood rest in orientations toward the future, with children themselves representing the nation's hope. Children should look at the world as full of possibility, while adults are to use ideological spaces of childhood to look back and remember this way of seeing the world, as full of possibility. This might seem to stand in tension with ideologies of childhood as a space or time of social transformation, and perhaps it does. Nonetheless, children and childhood can stand for these seemingly contradictory notions at once, representing both the possibility of change and the promise of continuity, the comfort of repetition through replication.

Orazaly focused on the childhood that the audience should find at the theater, as spectators. The actors were there to animate the child within, to create the conditions necessary for adults to rediscover their childhood and for children to nurture their theatrical instincts (Evreinov 1927). At the same time, they were to work at their play more intensely than before, to cultivate their own love for the theater and for children that had motivated them to stay on through a difficult winter of long bus rides to a cold rehearsal space. In the year that followed the preparations to reopen the theater, different directors continued to work to cultivate or reform the artists' work ethic — to work harder, more seriously, and yet more creatively. The artists needed to work harder at the playful medium to which they had dedicated themselves. In different ways, the directors described how tirelessly they worked as artists as a way of modeling for them the dedication that they should be showing at all times, even after they had gone home.

During the spring months between the performance review and the reopening, the troupe's act did transform — subtly, but significantly. They worked the most on choreographing three numbers: a “Gypsy” number in which Arai, a young puppeteer, danced as the central character and eventually transformed into a puppet; a Michael Jackson number in which a puppet transformed into a live dancer, Gūlvira; and a final “flash mob”³⁷ dance in which all the actors danced in colorful T-shirts, with no puppets at all. As much as the directors complained that the actors weren't disciplined or serious enough about their work, the playfulness with which they approached certain numbers did serve as a motivating force. For the “flash mob” number, in particular, the puppet artists began to practice the steps with one another before rehearsal had begun or during breaks, and other staff, such as Aliya, from the props department, began to practice the number with the artists. By the time they performed at the re-opening, it seemed I was the only one incapable of following these steps, though I did try, at home, when watching the videos of their rehearsals.

37. They used the English term for this, though it didn't involve any kind of effort to bring a coordinated spectacle to a public space, the way we might usually think of flash mobs. Rather, the actors all wore simple jeans and T-shirts, *as if* they were not in costume and at a theater.



Figure 19. "Gypsy" dance.

Re-opening

The theater reopened on June 1, the International Day of Children's Rights. The yellow concrete building had been transformed into the bright facade of glass and wood that had been displayed on the billboard in front of the theater throughout its reconstruction. The entrance gave way to a large, sunny foyer with colorful paintings of familiar animated figures. The opening performance, *Puppet Show*, opened with two young adult actors, brought in from outside the theater, dressed as children – the girl with pigtails on each side of her head, the boy in a letter jacket, both in short pants – surrounded by actors dressed as life-sized puppets. On the day before the premier, after their final run-through, Orazaly criticized them for not being lively, for not using their whole bodies to show how alive they were. He instructed the makeup artist to be sure to put "childlike" makeup on the young performers – without giving details as to what this entailed. Notably, the young adults playing child actors did *not* seem to alter their voices in any way – by making them higher, more giggly, or breathy – as the puppet theater actors tended to do

when animating child characters (see Chapter 3). The special young adult hosts of the reopening, instead, spent much of their time onstage marveling at the theater itself, mirroring for young audiences the sense of wonder they were to experience when encountering the puppets.

At the grand reopening, the puppet artists' families were there, which included lots of children, along with representatives from the department of culture. The theater was full for both performances. The child actors repeated Orazaly's Tolstoy quote — about only living until seven. They invited everyone in the audience to come to the theater to rediscover their childhoods.

In their rehearsals, they also had lines, near the end, in which the boy describes the theater as a fairy tale island. The girl responds, "I want Almaty to become a fairy tale city."

"But who would be the most important wizard³⁸ of the city?"

"But there already is one," says the hostess, Arai, coming onstage from stage right in her pink evening gown, joined by Adlet, in a tuxedo, who explains that the wizard of this fairy tale city is the mayor of Almaty. This text got cut before the opening.

Shortly after the grand reopening, the theater was forced to close to the public again; structural problems with the building made it unsafe, in the case of an earthquake. The actors and administrators had left the zoo behind. They would continue to rehearse within the new space, even if it was still technically under renovation.

38. They use *volshchnik*, as in *The Wizard of Oz. The Wizard of the Emerald City* (Volkov 1939), an adaptation of the Baum novel (1900), was published the same year as the American movie, and was quickly adapted into a puppet play, one of the first performed by the Almaty's Russian troupe.



Figure 20. New theater, on opening day.

Conclusion: And their wish to serve the children

The puppet artists, during the winter and spring of their displacement, worked to imagine a new space for themselves inside the theater they had known before, working with new management but most of the same puppets, songs, and costumes from before. For the grand re-opening, they offered many of the same numbers as before, which consisted primarily of puppets representing different ethnic groups. Their use, in these numbers, of stereotypes rather than language or plot, relied on an essentialism that they cited as key to the kind of pure form that puppetry represented. Puppeteers emphasized to me the importance of stark contrast for children – that they should be shown absolute good and bad with little ambiguity. Though they often cited this as a technique especially suited to children, it was also one that echoes theatrical traditions of *commedia dell'arte*, a seventeenth-century form of popular entertainment between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries that Russian Symbolists discovered and reinterpreted at the

turn of the twentieth century. I examine the puppeteers' use of essential typifications in animating new roles in the next chapter.

While the puppet theater worked during this time to strengthen existing numbers, rather than offering a program that was totally new, they also began rehearsing new shows for the first time in decades. New directors promised new possibilities for the puppeteers to explore the value of working at their play. They should offer something new, but familiar enough for their parents or grandparents who came with them to retrieve their own childhoods. Although it was supposed to be infused with a kind of playfulness, their work also became infused with moral injunctions — not to present sad puppets or acts that the children could do themselves, but to enchant them, to provide an island of fairy tales and perhaps to transform the city into a fairy tale city. The actors never received \$10,000 for a single show. Ticket prices went up slightly, but they continued to struggle to make a profit from ticket sales. Orazaly's discussion of theater as art business continued as he staged a musical, discussed in the next chapter. The business of entertaining children was infused with the obligation of the artist to understand children and to create childhood onstage, audiences young and old.

Part II: Animating Bodies

Chapter 3. Rubber Stamps

The Golden Chick

Here is the story: There is a wolf, masculine and stupid, and a fox, feminine and cunning. One day the fox comes to the wolf with a story and a plan. On a nearby farm, there is a golden egg. The wolf should steal it; they will hatch it and raise the chick into a hen. This magic hen will lay all the golden eggs they could ever want.

So the wolf steals the egg, and the fox persuades him to sit on it, instead of her (cunning foxes, apparently, lacking maternal instinct). When the egg hatches, the chick thinks the wolf is its father, and mistakes the fox for its mother. When the wolf is taking care of his baby chick, however, he realizes that this chick will not grow up to be a hen, but a rooster, for the chick is male. The wolf protects the chick from the fox and stands up to her when she finds out the truth. In the end, they go off together, father and son.

This is a story of adoption and adaptation. A wolf makes a chick into his own child through acts of care and education — of *vospitanie*. We might think of other similar stories from our own childhood, and indeed there are similar stories of adoption across species, in Soviet animation and Russian and Kazakh folk tales, from Buratino (Soviet Pinocchio) to Masha and the Bear. In this chapter, I look at processes, onstage and off, of adoption and adaptation as techniques for creating characterological figures. Through imitation and repetition, actors pick up and adapt one another's ways of animating characters with their bodies and voices. Their director works to make them act more “naturally,” but does so within a production whose generic

and material constraints encourage stylized and even hyperbolic acting. As I examine the director's efforts to break certain ingrained habits he saw the actors as having formed, I consider directorial efforts as pedagogical products that — especially in the puppet theater — reveal an implicit theory of childhood. That is, breaking habits requires a return to the blank slate that children represent. As with this manuscript as a whole, I am working to show how childhood serves as a theory of the possibility of social transformation.

Staged Figures

The Fox, played by Arai (Kazakh), Maral (Russian), and rehearsed by Ulbolsyn

The Wolf, played by Bolat in both languages, and rehearsed by Baqytzhan and Vlad

The Chick, played by Gūlvira (Kazakh) and Elmira (Russian), and rehearsed by Koralai

Chorus of Wolves

Chorus of Foxes

Frogs

Butterflies, the only puppets in the play

Introduction

At the end of April, the puppet theater is still in the zoo. The reopening of the theater is still a month away. While they prepare the musical numbers for the revamped *Puppet Show*, they also plan to premiere new plays. One will be directed by Kuba, the new stage director, but will not premiere until that winter. One will be prepared by an outside director during the summer, while I am away. For now, the administrative director, Orazaly, has decided to direct a new production. This endeavor lay outside his job description, but his background included stage

direction for adult drama theater. Not yet ready to direct puppets, he has chosen instead to adapt a Soviet animation, *The Little Chick*, into a live action musical. The actors will wear masks.

As Orazaly begins his rehearsals of the play, he creates a situation that requires actors to copy one another in various ways. At the same time, he pushes them to work toward a “natural” style of acting that would at least seem to require a more personalized approach of internalizing character and then externalizing it onstage. Rather than critiquing these two facts as contradictory, I am interested in how they unfold through Orazaly’s discussions and during the rehearsals, and how we can find traces of different debates and theories surrounding approaches to naturalism and style in twentieth century Russian and Soviet theater of which Orazaly and the others are all, in different ways, products. The tension Orazaly has deliberately created between likeness and difference – both by rotating lead roles and by rehearsing Kazakh and Russian versions simultaneously – compels actors to study one another intently, to see themselves and one another as different versions of the same animal. Moreover, I situate this production within the historical context of Soviet and post-Soviet children’s entertainment in Kazakhstan – across media. Each character becomes identifiable through interdiscursive links to previous iterations of similar figures, the recognition of a voiced and embodied animation of a particular character relying on its similarity to these dominant types.

Orazaly decries a “rubber stamp” technique in which every voice, movement, or character is too much the same; in contrast to this, how to act “natural” often remains unclearly defined. Acting techniques depend on multiple factors — genre, text, the materiality of costumes and masks — and emerge through actors’ work with one another. Resultant productions may have less to do with what is “natural,” than with what has been naturalized and recognized as natural within a particular logic of post-Soviet *skazka*. Childhood serves as a key trope for

directors seeking to un-train and re-educate actors; yet the actors' own work offers insight on their own understandings of how fairy tales work for children.

Logical Boxing: The Energy of Performance

On this day in April, still in the zoo, they read through the play, the actors seated in the theater chairs. Baqyt, Maral, and Elvira, sitting in the front row, read through the lead roles of wolf, fox, and chick, respectively. The other artists who are in the running for these roles sit near them. They form part of the chorus of foxes and wolves who respond in unison at different points to the lead utterances. Farther back, where I sit, are those not up for the lead roles. They will be cast as chorus foxes or wolves, as dancing frogs, or as puppeteers of the butterflies — the only puppets in this show. In my videos of these read-throughs, they cannot be seen, but their chatter can be heard. Orazaly and his assistant Dina occasionally shush them from the front.

At the front of the room, where the stage is, Orazaly and Dina sit at a small table. The bottle of water lends an air of officialdom to the table. Orazaly is fairly quiet during the Kazakh read-through, leaving it to Dina to correct mistakes in the actors' texts. The actors' voices are often faint. They face Orazaly, their heads bent down to read their texts.

They are about to switch from the Kazakh to the Russian version. Before they begin, however, Orazaly addresses them, quietly. He says it's about to get more complicated. Tomorrow they will start blocking their movements onstage. He notes that they seem tired, and he understands why. He asks, do you know why a boxer gets tired? Someone ventures a guess that I cannot hear. He says no, but that's kind of right. He says that the boxer is fighting, fighting and the more he fights, the more tired he gets, if he moves incorrectly. But if he moves correctly,

he doesn't get tired. The same for them, he says: if they move incorrectly, if they lose the logic of the action, they get tired.

Orazaly repeatedly appeals to logic as key to the style they should employ. When they arrive at the part where the wolf and chick meet each other, Orazaly stands up. He begins pacing, his hands in his pockets. The chick, newly hatched, asks the wolf to educate her (*vospitivat'*). "Educate, but how?"³⁹ the wolf asks.

"Don't be afraid," Gūlvira, the chick replies.

Orazaly cuts in. "No, here, you see, the most important — to educate. How can a wolf educate? He might be the opposite, the most destructive, you understand? All that's educated, all that's correct, all that's lawful — he's the opposite, destroying everything. Understand?" he asks Vlad.

Orazaly resumes talking about the logic and how its lack will make them tired. "Already the logic, you understand, in this, in the melody of the words, the logic is embedded, and it's not correct...and it goes away...and it leads to the other side. Understood, right?"

This appeal of engaging the logic of the text in order to determine the inflection to be used in uttering a line presents the text as in some ways already suggesting the inflection to the reader. Jakobson cited an assignment of Stanislavskii's for an actor to utter a single line — *segodnia vecerom* (this evening) — forty different ways (1960), illustrating how the emotive function of language is often conveyed through nonlinguistic means. Here, Orazaly argues that the context of the play narrows the range of possibilities of an utterance. It must fit within the frame of the action more broadly. Tensions arise at different times throughout my research

39. "*Vospitivat'?* A kak?" See Rockhill 2010 for discussion of *vospitanie* as a term both morally and politically loaded in Russian, translated also as "rearing" or "raising," as it describes the guided development of the child as a whole person. While teachers of primary schools are called *uchitel'*, teachers at children's homes and kindergartens are *vospitateli*.

regarding directors' efforts to compel artists to arrive on time, to stop talking, and to be generally more responsive and responsibility. Yet here, Orazaly's concern about the actors' fatigue suggests that working better need not entail working harder. If they managed to find and follow the logic of the text, and to understand what Stanislavskii termed the "through action" or "through line" of the character and the overall plot (see Carnicke 2008), the correct movements and intonations would naturally follow.

Orazaly connects the "logic" of the play to a "natural" way of voicing the text, which may or may not relate to "naturalism" as a generic classification for the play's style. The chick asks the wolf to think of a name for her. Orazaly cuts in and implores Gūlvira — and all of them — to speak "naturally" (*vestestvenno*), to add some nuances, lest she end up speaking "monotone" (*monotono*). The logic of Orazaly's own direction defines a "natural" way of speaking as one that includes nuances and thus avoids becoming "monotone," thus providing us with a series of metapragmatic descriptors for how the actors should and should not be voicing their characters. In this chapter, I unpack Orazaly's own appeals to "logic" and speaking "naturally" as explicitly opposed to a "rubber stamp" delivery. I point to ways these terms were important to different schools within twentieth century Russian theater, as they debated how to achieve "naturalism" or when to reject it, producing a range of schools espousing modes of theatricality or stylized acting. Is there a way for an actor to animate the role of a talking chick naturally?

In particular, I examine the genre of *The Golden Chick* (as a children's musical) and the interactional frame of the production itself within this bilingual theater in contemporary Kazakhstan. These factors inform the ways actors animate characters. Set characterological types animated by the actors cannot be reduced simply to a kind of bad habit, even if these styles fit

Orazaly's definition of *shtamp* and get described by outsiders as hyperbolically cheerful in a way they find distasteful. The childish chick, the gruff wolf, the glassy fox must be understood within the logic of wider semiotic ideologies of childhood and animation in contemporary Kazakhstan.

***Shtamp* to Style: Different Ways of Acting (Un)naturally**

When Orazaly tells Gūlvira to speak naturally, she asks for clarification: "So, think up things on the fly, something like that, right?"⁴⁰

"Well, of course, that's improvisation," Orazaly answers. "I'm just saying, be natural, like in life. Then everything works out." In other words, she should stick to the script, but correct delivery requires imagining how she would say her lines "in life."

Orazaly describes the progress of students he has taught. From the first through the fourth course, he works to preserve their naturalness,⁴¹ even as they learn their theories. He says you can pass through the "meat grinder" (*myasorubka*) of Stanislavskii and all the other theories and still, through all that, be yourself. He asks them to think, as they read through, to ask "What? Why?" and assures them that everything will be easier.

Orazaly cites Stanislavskii as an icon of theoretical work that risks eroding the natural energy of the acting student, even though gross oversimplifications of Stanislavskii tend instead to accuse him, instead, of a kind of slavish naturalism.

As Carnicke (2008) has shown, understanding Stanislavskii is a more complex endeavor than many might acknowledge, whether dismissing him or pledging to employ his "method"

40. "Skhodu pridumat' *siakhty da?*"

41. Here, I use "naturalness" as a calque for *yestestvennost'*, which he seemed to use more than the loaded term *naturalizm*, sometimes used pejoratively in the early twentieth century in contradistinction to the more stylized theater of such directors as Meyerhold. Though some overgeneralizations contrast Stanislavskii as proponents of diametrically opposed commitments to naturalism versus conventionalized or stylized theater, both were far more complicated (Carnicke 2008, Lemon 2014, Meyerhold and Braun 1969).

wholeheartedly. His work with actors and other directors, his legacy in subsequent generations of directors, and ideas as experienced through his writing – each of these aspects of Stanislavskii has a complicated history, both in the Soviet Union and in the US. While the Russian and English versions of *An Actor Prepares* (1936) were both heavily edited — each for different reasons and resulting in two very different texts — Carnicke points out that another difficulty Stanislavskii faced was in translating the tacit, embodied nature of his work in acting into writing. Finally, Stanislavskii’s ideas were under constant development, not designed to put anyone through the meat grinder. On the contrary, his interests included a complex orientation toward, mind, body, and soul and an interest in Symbolism and Yoga. Stanislavskii often gets oversimplified in both the American focus on emotion memory and with Soviet emphasis on physical training.

Of course, this does not mean that Russian (and Kazakhstani) directors use Stanislavskii to focus only on physical training. Whereas American focus on “emotion memory” calls on actors to look deep inside themselves to pull out emotion, Lemon (2008) describes Moscow acting students’ use of Stanislavskii’s call to work within the “given conditions” of a text. The teachers at the school constantly probe the students with questions such as, “What happened before?” “Where is she (the character)?” (236). The action onstage unfolds within a context of given conditions. These conditions help to determine the logic and must be brought to life within those conditions. The given conditions of a play such as *The Golden Chick* require Gūlvira to imagine that she is a baby chick, newly hatched, meeting her father for the first time. Orazaly doesn’t call on her to explore deeply what it is to be a chick, but he does frequently cut in to add supplementary lines, not meant to be spoken by the actors but meant to be thought by them when delivering the lines they have, in order to aid the actors in understanding the logic of the text.

The goal of understanding this logic is to avoid the monotone he fears they develop too quickly in inhabiting their characters. In contrast to a “nuanced” performance, Orazaly warns the actors against developing or falling back on *shtamp*, or a “rubber stamp” style of performing everything the same way. He describes *shtamp* as a frightful sickness. Puppet artists and puppet students rarely discussed theories of theater, but when I asked what they read as students, they usually mentioned Stanislavskii (1936), Obraztsov, father of Soviet puppetry (1950), and Edward Gordon Craig, stage designer and theater theorist who wrote of the actor as an “uber marionette” (1914). Stanislavskii characterizes *shtamp* and warns against it in *An Actor Prepares* (1936). Written as a fictionalized account narrated by Kostya, a young acting student, the book describes the lessons of a wise teacher, Tortsov (both characters different versions of Stanislavskii), for a class of acting students. After watching a scene the students have prepared, Tortsov categorizes each of their greatest mistakes. One student’s acting is mechanical, the origins and methods which are *shtamp*. “With the aid of his face, mimicry, voice and gestures,” Tortsov explains to Grisha, “the mechanical actor offers the public nothing but the dead mask of non-existent feeling” (1936:24).

The opposite of *shtamp*, according to Orazaly’s direction, is a way of speaking “naturally,” focusing largely on voice for the read-throughs in anticipation of blocking movement later. Stanislavskii’s Tortsov, meanwhile, describes the naturalization of *shtamp*. He outlines the ways that modes of diction, speech or movement become icons of the emotion, character, or epoch depicted. “These ready-made mechanical methods are easily acquired through constant exercise, so that they become second nature” (25). When the narrator of *An Actor Prepares*, Kostya, an absolute novice to acting, wonders how he could already have required *shtamp*, Tortsov ensures him that young children manage to be socialized into the use of

clined acting even before real play. However, such habits are more easily expunged than entrenched mechanical acting.

While Stanislavskii's text describes a number of problems the acting students face — *shtamp*, overacting, and the “exploitative” acting employed by one of the young women — Orazaly focuses more specifically on *shtamp*. He tells the actors a story about directing a famous actor at the Kazakh-language dramatic theater in Almaty. Everything this actor did carried an unmistakable *shtamp*. Watching the actor in rehearsal, who played the ghost of a father addressing his son, Orazaly said to him, “Take away that voice, speak normally! That’s your son!” Here, the logic of how to speak comes less from the text, per se, but should emerge (naturally) from the emotion a father is expected to feel for his son.

After working with him a month and a half, Orazaly tells the actors, he finally removed the actor’s *shtamp*, to the surprise of the other artists and to the delight of the actor himself. The actor kissed his forehead after each rehearsal and ran up to shake his hand on the street, he was so grateful. When the premiere arrived, however, the actor’s habits in front of the audience overpowered all the director’s work. The actors, listening to Orazaly recount the story, laugh in anticipation. “His *shtamp* was activated in front of the audience. This button turned on all by itself.” Orazaly begins reciting the actor’s lines in Kazakh — “But my dear, my child, I tell you...” in an exaggerated lilt.

“Monotone” might imply an overall lack of variation in pitch or tone; the prosodic tendencies of Gūlvira’s chick voice consisted, instead, of a sing-song tendency she shared with most of the actors animating characters. This style lacked not internal variation, but rather variation across utterances. It was consistent — too consistent — within her role as the chick, and in fact adhered across roles in different puppet plays and animations, particularly when

actresses voiced child-like characters. The voices of the chicks in *The Golden Chick* matched those used by these same actresses and others for the voices of Masha (of *Masha and the Bear*), Little Red Riding Hood, and the granddaughter in *Koza Dereza*, along with the voices of certain cute animals, such as rabbits or pigs.

The director's choice to use an actress to play the chick, even though we soon find out that the chick is male, follows the Soviet tradition of casting actresses as male children. Wolfson, writing of the Soviet Central Children's Theater in Moscow, argues that the use of female actresses as male children in Soviet children's theater creates a world in which "childhood is imagined as fundamentally asexual," and creates a "fundamental malleability" surrounding the identification of other as self (2008: 188-189).

In order for such identification to take place, however, the audience must first recognize the actresses as children – whether male or female, human or animal. In both Orazaly's and Stanislavskii's descriptions of *shtamp* as "mechanical," actors inhabit the habitus of the figure of "actor," and this is the role they played, rather than the specific role assigned to them. However, as Keane points out in his discussion of voice, "stylistic variations must be recognizable to the interlocutor as voices...the indexicality which allows one to identify the formal features of a stretch of discourse as a voice depends on a potential or postulated resemblance involving some more durable or systematized imagery, such as habitus (Bourdieu 1984)" (2011: 174). For each character, an actor must employ enough internal consistency that the character can be recognized as such, and must resemble some other familiar characters in order to enable audiences to make certain assumptions about the character's type (Silverstein 2003, 2005). Keane highlights this indexical relationship between voices in considering Hill's (1995) analysis of the many voices

that inhere within a single utterance by a single speaker, Don Gabriel. These voices become distinguishable from one another through contrasts to each other.

But the recognizability of a voice as belonging to a character likewise requires audiences to recognize the actor as that character. Gelman's work on children as "essentialists" (2003) highlights how quickly young children use their knowledge of the world to make assumptions in novel situations. In order to be legible or recognizable as a "chick," Gūlvira employs prosodic qualities that she and others frequently use in order to voice children. Thus, this "monotone" offers a way for Gūlvira to inhabit the role of a youthful character. Her way of speaking may not be "natural," in the sense that Orazaly recognizes it as distinct from how Gūlvira would talk in an everyday situation, and many might argue that it sounds dissimilar to how children "naturally" speak. However, the prosodic qualities she employs have been naturalized to the point that her way of voicing the chick sounds similar to the way other actresses reading for the role voice it.

Here, Orazaly describes *shtamp* as taking on an agency of its own, as a button that turns on by itself. Habitus compels an actor to deliver lines in a pre-programmed style that becomes iconic of no particular character, but only of the figure of the actors themselves. Establishing that this is bad and wrong is one thing, however. It leaves open the question of how one is to act differently. There is a range of possibilities open to the actors. This is perhaps especially true because — although Orazaly implores them to act "natural" — they are enacting a scenario that is highly fantastical (with talking animals and golden eggs). A musical fairy tale for children, this combination of genres likewise brings with it a certain set of aesthetic norms that tend toward exaggerated styles.

The *Shtamp* of the Puppet Voice

In this same read-through, Orazaly discusses the potential of the voice, shifting from the chick to the role of the fox, noting that it calls for a bit of an “alto.” He cast roles, he says, according to the actresses’ vocal potential for that alto. Orazaly is accustomed to working with stage actors, animating characters with their bodies, while these actors primarily animate objects. In both media, the voice does important work in creating the character. Yet, as scholars have noted, puppeteers often use particular techniques in voicing their puppets. Sergei Obraztsov, great populizer of Soviet puppetry and head of the Moscow State Puppet Theatre from its founding in 1931 until his death in 1992 (Goldovsky 2004), writes in his memoirs about discovering the peculiar techniques employed by the puppeteer when he meets Zaitsev, an elderly puppeteer who had done *Petrushka* shows in pre-Revolutionary times. Zaitsev uses his regular speaking voice for all the secondary roles — the police officer, the landlord, and so forth.

In contrast:

For *Petrushka* himself he spoke with a squeaker, that is to say, not with his own voice (when you use a squeaker the vocal chords do not function)...And if one reflects, one gets a surprisingly dialectical interchange of conceptions. The conventionalized human speech on a shrill squeaker combined with the conventionalized puppet becomes a ‘natural’ puppet-voice, while the natural human voice in combination with a puppet voice becomes conventionalized...the conventionalized and the natural are interchanged. (Obraztsov 1950: 119)

Obraztsov repeatedly articulates points of play between “natural” and “conventional” in the puppet theater, such as when he notes the comic effect of his small puppet drinking from a real bottle. This can create a surprise for the audience, he argues, though it should not be overused. As a figure, the puppet can only be “imagined to be” (Goffman 1974: 526) if its voice is just as different from human voices as its body, according to Obraztsov. The puppeteers at the Almaty theater never use a squeaker (or “swazzle,” as most English-language literature usually calls it), even when animating the *Petrushka*, who sometimes acted as host of their variety show.

However, perhaps this difference in form — the explicit break between bodies of puppeteer and puppet (what we might term “principal” and “animator,” using Goffman’s [1974] terminology) — similarly required the puppets to create a clearer break between their voice and the puppet’s. Without the swazzle, puppeteers must use other vocal techniques to create a vocal conventionality that would match the physical conventionality of the puppet. This would then make explicit the separation between principal and animator.

Proschan (1981) argues that the division of the human actor into puppet and puppeteer has a number of consequences, but the most important consequence lies in the area of speech. “The folk puppeteer’s task is to give life to inanimate objects,” he goes on, “through motion and through sound. Nothing is more essentially human than speech, and to give objects the ability to speak is in some real sense to make them live” (529). Obraztsov argues that voice modifiers, such as the “squeaker” used by Zaitsov, work to strip the human qualities of the puppeteer’s voice so that the strangeness of the voice matches the strangeness of this miniature version of humans coming to life through movement. Proschan offers various other possible explanations. One of the most obvious is that the swazzle voice is inherently funny, and especially delights children, who are most often the target audiences for puppets and who, according to many — including the linguist and folklorist of the Prague Linguistic Circle, Petr Bogatyrev — understand puppets at a higher level than adults (Bogatyrev 1983).

The swazzle distorts the voice to make it far more difficult to understand what the puppet is saying. This calls our attention, according to Proschan, to the extent to which “speech itself is redundant” (1981: 540).⁴² Puppet acts in Kazakhstan frequently feature musical numbers without

42. Though voice acting – and dubbing – are incredibly important in feature-length animations, animated shorts – especially those featured in festival circuits or nominated for Academy Awards – frequently minimize the amount of dialogue and narration. They convey their narrative instead through the action, often accompanied by music, or

dialogue, such as their *Puppet Show*, or the final performance for the puppetry students. With some of these, a story plays out through the music: for one number at the final show of the students of the Zh. Elebekova Republic College of Estrada and Circus (in Russian, *Respublikanskiy estradno-tsirkovoy kolledzh im. Zh. Elebekova*), a group of the female students adorned long, white gloves to make ballerina legs. The legs first moved up and down in disciplined formation to *Swan Lake*. When the teacher walked out, they changed the music to “Gangnam Style” and danced wildly. Wordless plots often revolved around simple courtship between a male and female puppet. Other times, there was little to no discernible plot, consisting more of a show of virtuosity and surprise, such as when a Michael Jackson puppet turns into a human (female) dancer.

Furthermore, the work the audience has to do in order to understand what the puppet is saying makes the act of viewing into a more active, creative endeavor for audiences. Acting as a translator between audience and Pulcinella, there is often an interlocutor with whom the puppet engages in a dialogue, who helps clarify what the puppet has just said. In Pulcinella/Petrushka shows I have seen that feature this second human, a female singer-musician interacts with the puppet and with the audience and sings songs between acts. Obraztsov points out that Zaitsev only uses the swazzle for the main character, Petrushka, and not for the other puppets. For these other characters, Zaitsov “scarcely changed the timbre of his voice, just faintly disguising it with accent. Quite unconsciously, probably, simply according to the tradition of the style, there was in Zaitsev’s own intonation something of a third person, a touch of the intonation of an elocutionist” (1950:119). In other cases, the puppeteer stands outside the booth and converses with Pulcinella, who is inside but attached to the puppeteer’s hand. However it is achieved, then,

using nonsensical sounds to stand in for dialogue, as in the award-winning 1973 Soviet animated short, *Island (Ostrov)*, by Fyodr Khitruk.

puppetry often pushes artists to create rather extreme vocalic contrasts between the conventionalized voice of the main puppet and the more natural voice of the musician, the other characters, or even the puppeteer *as* puppeteer. This contrast helps map the human voice onto the puppet body.

Unlike puppet theaters described by Proschan — in which one puppeteer usually has to animate multiple characters in a single show — the Almaty puppet theater employed a comparatively huge troupe of artists. In any given show, a single puppeteer would usually voice no more than one part. However, the problem of the body-voice split remains, so that in order to match the voice onto the puppet, a puppeteer somehow distances the voice of the character from the voice they use offstage. In fact, in many of their shows, they will alternate between delivering lines within the story as the voice of the puppet and talking directly to the audience as a puppeteer, as they did at the beginning of *Morozko*. In the puppet shows of the Almaty puppet theater, the fourth wall is tenuous, at best. Artists acting as puppeteers would frequently shift into their “human” voices to address the children in the audience, narrating the story to them or even asking them questions (such as where another character has gone).

The cartoonish voices of the puppet artists might, then, be quite different from the *shtamp* of the dramatic actor Orazaly describes in his anecdote or from the *shtamp* Stanislavskii describes in *An Actor Prepares* (1936). As discussed later in the chapter, the genre of the children’s story supports a particular logic and accompanying aesthetics onstage.

Theatrical Children

In coaching the artists at the Almaty theater on how to approach vocalization for this play in which they will act on stage, rather than with puppets, Orazaly asks them to strip any preexisting color from their voices:

I want you to understand, kids (*rebyata*), now, we must start — it's necessary — from zero. From absolute zero. As absolute, limpid, clean water. Then from there we add in drops. We'll add other colors: blue, yellow, and then in the end result, it turns into a range of colors. But I always say an actor should be a white canvas. When you approach your work, an actor should be an absolutely white canvas. If you already have a blue canvas, if you put red on top you don't get red but you already get a different color...an actor should be an absolutely white canvas and he should draw—draw the role...

Orazaly turns to Maral, the third fox, who had just been reading the Kazakh version.

“You know? You already make a claim. You, as a canvas, are already somehow red, and then I have to do double work. It's necessary for me to remove that color. You understand?”

Obraztsov explains that in reciting Chekhov or Krylov at a concert, an elocutionist will not “alter his voice completely...he will only ‘color’ his voice, he will remain an elocutionist, he will not become a ventriloquist” (2001 [1950]:119). In this way, the elocutionist laminates the voice of the character onto the voice of the elocutionist, while the swazzle enables cleaner erasure of the puppeteer's voice. Quoting another's speech involves regarding that speech as “belonging to *someone else*” (Voloshinov 1929: 116, emphasis in original); nonetheless, these words come into contact with each other in a manner different from dialogue, as the words of the speaker are “inner” words, resulting in an active, dynamic relationship between reported and reporting speech, whether direct, indirect, or quasi-direct (118). Voloshinov describes this relationship at the level of words; Bakhtin describes the “zone” or “sphere of influence” that the “voice” of an important character has in the novel, which can extend “beyond the boundaries of the direct discourse allotted to him” (1981[1985]: 320). Both focus on literature, rather than

thinking about how the sound emitted by an individual human – the literal voice – acts as an index for that individual or emblematic of a characterological type or quality (Keane 1999, Harkness 2011, 2013). Anthropologists have taken up Bakhtin and Voloshinov’s writings on voices, reported speech, and heteroglossia, to study the dynamic relationships between voices that inhere in personal narratives (Hill 1995), in verbal art (Irvine 1996), and in individuals taking up phonological features that come to index a particular persona (Mendoza-Denton 2011). The complex relationships that unfold between or among voices in acts of ventriloquism have provided an apt metaphor for anthropological considerations of voice and voicing. When people speak for – or through – other bodies, pure conduits are rare or impossible.

Orazaly employs metaphors of clean water and a blank canvas to describe the ideal beginning of an actor approaching a role, with the coloring only coming in gradually, as they become more familiar with the given conditions of the play and the role. In working to remove the preexisting color from Maral’s voice, Orazaly suggests some prior state in which each actor’s voice was clean and pure. It becomes the director’s job to take the actor back to that place, much as he worked to undo the *shtamp* of the actor at the dramatic theater.

Stanislavskii points out that even young children evince their understanding of *shtamp* when they play-act roles in exaggeration. For him, training involves developing a new consciousness regarding habitus, regarding the actors’ abilities to see themselves from the outside, in addition to understanding the internal logic of the character and the given conditions of the piece being performed. Orazaly, meanwhile, speaks of a pre-*shtamp* actor or student to which he wishes to return the artists of the puppet theater. He seeks to strip the voice of all habit. This fantasy of the ideal actor/student as a blank canvas parallels adults’ fantasies of children as blank slates (Bernstein 2011, Kincaid 1998), which serves as a powerful trope in American

figurations of children as pure or innocent. These ideologies play an important role in cultural constructions of morality, justifying various measures taken in the name of protecting children or preserving their innocence. Early Soviet projects sought to harness children's pure potential for social transformation before their corruption by backwards adults (Ball 1994, Kelly 2007, Kirschenbaum 2001). Part of what adults work to preserve in children is not simply a morally pure state, but also the potential for growth and development that plays another key role in ideologies of children as promises of futurity (discussed in the next chapter).

Despite Stanislavskii's assertion about children as evidence of the early hold of *shtamp*, he nonetheless reportedly imparted on Natalia Sats his vision for a children's theater in which children themselves would be trained to perform, in order "to ensure the freshness and boldness of the performers' perspective" (Wolfson 2008: 185).⁴³ Orazaly seeks freshness from his actors, as well. Stanislavskii's contemporary, Nikolai Evreinov, saw children's play as evidence of the "theatrical instinct." "Theatricality is an instinct, and, in spite of all attempts, we cannot get rid of it. Yet, for the simple reason that we do not cultivate it, we are cursed with a superlatively bad and tasteless form of theatricality. We are actors just the same; yet, instead of being good actors we are rotten actors..." (1927: 108). Evreinov famously cultivated his own life and his own character as part of "his own private play" (Carnicke 1989: 11). A notorious opponent of realism, his goals were quite different from the "natural" ways of speaking that Orazaly seeks. Evreinov instead cultivated childlike play as a way of life, wearing outlandish clothes and playing mischievous tricks on his friends: Mayakovsky stopped by one morning, apparently angling for a free meal. Evreinov invited him to stay for breakfast, then described in detail the meal they were

43. Sats, on the other hand, saw adult actors performing for children as the only way to ensure that the theater would be a "fully professional" one (Wolfson 2008:185).

going to eat. When the maid walked into the room empty handed, Mayakovsky realized that it was just another of Evreinov's pranks (Carnicke 1989).

Childishness was a double-edged sword at the puppet theater. Renat, a choreographer who worked with them for a few months, liked to joke, with a hint of derision, that there should be no problem making sense of my two field sites because the puppet artists were, basically, large children. Orazaly and the other directors who worked with the artists tried different techniques to train the artists to become more disciplined or more open to new techniques that sometimes resembled teachers' attempts to instill senses of discipline and personal responsibility into the children at Hope House. Directors' techniques sometimes encouraged artists to nurture their childish playfulness and other times sought to undo their immature bad habits.

Essentializing Children

Orazaly's office, on the second floor and in the corner of the new building, had two walls consisting almost entirely of clear glass. In front of his desk is a long table, where we sit down across from one another, the camera at one end, his empty, high-backed black desk chair at the other, light filling the space behind it. The table is shiny, reflecting our hands as we talk.

Orazaly's hands move more than mine. The light slightly pulsates with the oscillations of a fan somewhere, out of frame.

I ask Orazaly about the relationship between the interest of early twentieth century avant-garde theater in puppets and the puppet theater that eventually developed in the Soviet Union. Official histories contrast them as having totally different aesthetics and goals, and I ask if he agrees.

My question is long. He leans his arm on the chair next to him, looking down, as he begins to formulate his answer. He begins by admitting (*chestno govoria*) that, coming from the dramatic theater, he sees the puppet theater as limited, in many ways. Everything that, at one time, seemed controversial — Vakhtangov, Stanislavskii, Meyerhold — turned out to be misunderstood, before its time. This was the difference between genius and talent. Twenty-five percent of the population might be talented, but a genius was ahead of their time. He gives Bulgakov as an example. Genius speaks not simply to contemporary questions but to human ones. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as he sees it, they should be making a synthesis of everything, of all different styles. He quotes Socrates's paradox — I know that I know nothing — and cites Rousseau regarding human progress. He says he doesn't know how to compare the twenty-first century with the beginning of the twentieth, but that they should use all means useful, that as artists they are responsible for the world, to tell a tale (*skazka*) to all the world, to all the children of the world.

I ask, then, if this means the Kazakhstani puppet theater has no need to find a way to differ from others. It is I who introduce the unit of nation-state in regards to the puppet theater's identity, in part because people frequently ask me about what distinguishes this puppet theater from all the others in the Soviet Union. I am looking for him to help me find an easy answer to the "Why Kazakhstan?" question. The previous director stressed the individuality of each theater: each artist is unique, thus each puppet theater is unique. Orazaly instead begins with the universal, answering that all children are the same. *Deti odni*. If you put together, in a kindergarten, let's suppose, American, Russian, and Kazakh children, in three days they will speak the same language. They have no language. They have no differences in nationality. Thus, all audiences are the same.

Orazaly continues: when a child is small, we say to them, there is good, and there is bad, but good always conquers evil. He says, we must give the child a fairy tale, we must give them wonder (*darit' chudesa*) so that they will grow up to be a good person. He goes on that the only point of distinction should come from the director (*rezhissër*, the stage director), that the director must feel their own talent. If they don't feel they can present it to the world, they shouldn't do it at all. Everyone must choose their own way. But at the same time, for the growth of the Kazakh theater, it is true that we need, first, a Kazakh theater with Kazakh tales, then tales for the whole world, and then Russian tales. Orazaly charts a desired cultural hierarchy for the theater to follow: the national character of the Kazakh theater through Kazakh tales, followed by a universal theater for the whole world, with Russian coming in only after that. I interpret this as an indirect admission that the Kazakhstani theater had, for too long, been dependent upon Russia for its theatrical repertoire and that this must change. This is despite the fact that, for theater theory and training, directors still relied heavily on Russian institutions and defined themselves according to the line of Russian directors from whom they inherited their technique. Orazaly has mentioned having arrived at Stanislavskii through Nikolai Efros.⁴⁴

I ask about this idea that artists had at the beginning of the twentieth century (drawing especially from Craig 1914), that the actor should be like a puppet, should look to the puppet for inspiration for their own work. He answers that he wants eventually to make puppet shows for adults, for adults have left childhood behind. He says that when they had the opening, recently, he watched the children in the audience and realized that the puppets are real to the children. Puppets and children understand one another. Children are closer to puppets than they are to us because they are on the same level. We can't understand children or puppets the same way they

⁴⁴ Thomas (Efros and Thomas 2006) describes Efros as “one of the most important and influential” successors of Stanislavskii (17).

understand one another. Adults writing about children are like men trying to write about the psychology of women; they simply can't understand it. He has an idea for a play about the world according to puppets, because to see the world through the puppet's eyes is to see the world through the child's eyes. And whoever understands children will understand the world.

Orazaly was not someone who had made a career of trying to understand children. He had been trained to act in, and then direct, dramatic, academic theater for adults. In his early 60s when he was made director of the puppet theater, his career had included some work overseeing children's television, but had been mostly involved in academic theater for adults. He had devoted his life to making art, for the most part through government cultural institutions of Kazakhstan. Throughout the interview, Orazaly continually raises or works through tensions between defining particular characteristics of art or artistic performance as universal, as essential to some group, or as completely individual. Stylistically, as he sees it, they should be striving for synthesis of different styles, studying and taking from these different points of reference to create a piece that has universal appeal to children, who are universally the same. The individual genius of the director is what makes each piece unique, but this individual genius should be able to speak to a universal audience – of children.

Appealing to universal audiences at a government puppet theater in Kazakhstan, moreover, meant finding a way to appeal to children while also producing something that would interest their parents. This was a goal that most directors who passed through the puppet theater shared in their discussions of what puppet theater should be. They would describe children as their toughest critics because of their willingness to shout out or leave in the middle of a show if they were bored – or simply to walk out. However, when I would ask about the target age group for an upcoming show, they would often say that they hoped it would interest viewers of any

age. They took seriously how children would (and did) react to certain moments or to certain plays, but their desire to draw adult audiences as well, implied that if a show was of truly artistic merit, adults would appreciate it as much as the children.

Style Across Voices

In this configuration, the individual director creates for a universal audience. The character – animated by human and nonhuman forms – mediate this interaction. The purported unity of the audience renders them an already-known entity, so that it is the responsibility of the director, along with performing objects and persons, to offer the unexpected. Orazaly stresses the importance of the director in making any show unique, and writing on acting and drama by directors often focuses on relationship between director and actor. In addition to interpreting or animating the work of directors and authors, however, the artists are also in dynamic relationship with one another. As Orazaly talks to the actors about the color of their voices, shifting from chick to fox, he first gazes at Ulbolsyn, the actress presently reading that role, but then adds — shifting from Russian to Kazakh — “Arai, are you listening?” Arai sits just behind Ulbolsyn.

Orazaly speaks at great lengths about the danger of *shtamp* and his mission to rid them of it and to add color to the blank palate or clear water of their voices drop by drop. However, they not only soon began blocking, but also added music, written by local composers. Several artists involved with the project complained that they disliked the music. Eventually, they added the costumes and masks. The foxes wore shiny orange and pink polyester satin. The wolves wore blue and gray denim. The chick was bright yellow and orange. Orazaly talked about color as a metaphor for the gentle nuances to be employed by the actors, yet they continued to add visual

and sonic elements that were far from subtle, and over which the actors had little or no creative control.



Figure 21. *The Golden Chick*. Wolf with foxes.

Moreover, the interactional framework of the rehearsal process — with multiple actors rehearsing the same role in different languages — combined with the intertextuality of the medium and genre, overdetermined the characters’ animation as characterological figures that offset Orazaly’s pleas to be “natural” when inhabiting these roles. What is lucky about this production, Orazaly tells the actors in one rehearsal, is that there are three lead roles. They can watch one another and learn from one another’s mistakes. It is unclear whether he means that the fox, wolf, and chick can learn from one another, or that the three actors reading for each role can learn from their counterparts. In private, Orazaly admits to me that he is putting off making a final decision regarding the casting because he believes the competition created through the delay compels them to work harder at their roles. Orazaly expects the actors to learn from one another’s mistakes. Another possibility, however, is that they come to imitate one another in

what they perceive as strengths. They are to follow one another and listen for Dina and Orazaly's impromptu changes to the text. When they begin blocking, the actors competing for the lead who are not onstage should watch and note the movements of their counterparts so that they are ready to take on the role when it is their turn.

Meyerhold imagines two different types of direction. The first, which he accuses the naturalists of employing, places before the audience a triangle, with the director at the head (and closest to the audience), coordinating the efforts of the author and actors. Meyerhold describes the director as a kind of conductor, in this configuration, depriving both actor and spectator of any creative role.⁴⁵ The second, which he advocates, is the theater of the "straight line," in which the play passes through the author, director, and actor to the spectator. Both of these configurations overlook the multiple ways that actors draw from one another, from past roles, and from other texts and other media in developing the voices and styles they ultimately use to animate a role (1969[1905-1939]). Any production involves intertextual, interdiscursive, and inter-indexical processes of borrowing from a past character or creating contrast in relation to another role (Inoue 2003, Lemon 2008, Silverstein 1976). *The Little Chick* brought these elements to the fore, as the actors were compelled to imitate one another, even as they competed for the same roles. Wilf (2012) points out how the education of artists often involves a meticulous copying of masters. Chumley (2016) draws our attention to the ways that creativity can itself solidify into a style that is no less conventionalized than the norms against which artists identify themselves. The production of *The Little Chick* unfolded within larger inter-indexical

45. Winter (2000) describes the potency of the figure of conductor in mid-nineteenth century Victorian England, particularly in its parallels to highly theatrical shows of mesmerism, in which mesmerists conducted instrument-like minds.

and interdiscursive currents that rendered particular styles of animating roles impervious to attempts at stripping voices of color.

In a return visit to the puppet theater, I was in Orazaly's SUV on the way to a banquet for Women's Day. We were stuck in traffic. Orazaly was telling me about his work teaching acting to the students at the art academy. I asked whose work the students read – Stanislavskii, Meyerhold, others? He said they only had one system, the pure system of Stanislavskii. When I asked about him about which texts about puppetry they read, he said he didn't teach the puppetry (*kuklovozhdienie*) – another director did. Orazaly called back to Anton, the new stage director, who was trying to sleep, what the students read about puppetry, in terms of a system. Anton replied that it's all pure Stanislavskii. I asked if they read about Obraztsov, Simonovich-Efimova and about the history of Soviet puppetry, and they both said of course, of course the students know all of that, but when it comes to the system of acting, it's the same, whether on the live stage or with puppets. It's all the same. Nonetheless, each production is distinguished by particular social, material, and embodied processes through which it emerges.

Transcription and Translation

The actors copy their scripts by hand. They are given only one copy as a group, which they pass around and copy by hand. The process of writing it out helps them learn their lines, they say. As they read through, Orazaly occasionally makes changes to the script, which they all should note. Transcription from one hand to the next does not — or should not — change the text itself in any way, but writing everything out by hand acts as a way for the artists to adopt or adapt the text — making it their own — through an embodied process. They learn the words in

their own handwriting, listen for changes, add the blocking, and eventually perform without the text.

Rehearsing the play with multiple actors rotating in the lead roles, however, meant that the other actors had to watch and listen to someone else performing their role and needed to note the blocking or subtle changes in the text that occurred to Orazaly as they read through the text. In this way, the actors had to commit to memory lines and movements before having the chance to pronounce or perform them. Watching one another became a process of seeing themselves onstage and imagining or anticipating their own delivery of the same lines. I could sometimes see the actors in the wings performing the lines the actors onstage delivered — not only for this production, but in their preparations for their performance review, as well. The children at Hope House did this, too, when sitting on the sidelines and watching other children rehearse.

The director's decision to rehearse both the Kazakh and Russian versions also required the actors to translate constantly; if a change was made to the Kazakh text, they needed to make sure to edit the Russian version, as well. The Almaty State Puppet Theater was always a bilingual theater, originally with two separate troupes but eventually absorbed into one troupe that performed in both languages. The theater offered the public an equal number of Kazakh and Russian shows each weekend. *Puppet Show* consisted of musical numbers in Russian, Kazakh, English, and other languages, so that the only translation necessary was the intermediary text, sometimes performed by a live actor, sometimes performed by a swazzle-less Petrushka with a high voice. Many of the other shows had a Russian and a Kazakh version. The Russian-language shows consistently drew larger audiences, and, according to Orazaly, the children at the Kazakh-language shows tended to be less active audience members. His explanation for this was that Kazakh-speaking audiences were not “socialized” to come to the puppet theater in the same way

as the Russian-speaking Almatians were. This seemed to be changing when I returned in 2017, with Kazakh-speaking audiences rivaling the Russian-speaking ones both in numbers and in their engagement with the actors. Finding plays in Kazakh was always a difficult task, however. Early directors at the puppet theater lamented the scarcity of Kazakh-language plays for children, forcing them either to repeat their limited repertoire or to translate Russian-language texts. Directors working there during my fieldwork cited similar issues. The only traditional Kazakh tale that premiered during my time there was *Aldar Kose*, about the eponymous folk hero who also inspired the first and only play of the Kazakh troupe's repertoire during the puppet theatre's first years.

Though based on a Russian text, by presenting the Kazakh and Russian-language versions of *The Golden Chick* simultaneously, Orazaly resists a staging in which the Kazakh is merely a translation of the Russian version. Instead, the two versions materialize and evolve together, an addition to one text entailing a translated amendment to the other. Even after the text of the play in each language had solidified, the bilingual production of the play involved a number of ongoing adjustments. Orazaly initially cast potential actors in particular roles for *The Golden Chick* based in part by his original impressions regarding their relative comfort in Russian versus Kazakh, but later adjusted some of those when he realized that one actress actually spoke Kazakh more easily than Russian. The addition of the music presented another complication. The musicians first wrote all of the songs in Russian and then translated them into Kazakh. For the opening number, the pack of wolves perform a hip hop number that, they complained, worked far better in Russian than it did in Kazakh. Some of the artists requested keeping it in Russian, even though one of the most vocal critics of the Kazakh version spoke

more Kazakh than Russian on a daily basis. The director eventually had the songwriters rework the Kazakh version to make it easier for the artists to perform.

Leading up to the premiere, Orazaly was undecided regarding which version he would premiere first at the international puppet festival held in Almaty in the following fall. The visiting theaters included several troupes and judges from the former Soviet Union, including Russia. Russian would be intelligible to the largest number of visiting audience members (and the predominant language of most of the theater's local spectators, as well). However, Orazaly ultimately decided to premiere the Kazakh version because, he explained to me, "I am a patriot." He decided this very late, however. Up until the premiere, the artists continued to take cues from one another across the versions.

As the roles solidified and the characters developed, the voices gained prosodic similarity. Though Orazaly had described the desired fox's voice to be something of an "alto," the actresses both came to use a melodic glassiness that ranged from deep, low tones to high falsetto notes in a single sentence. The chicks, meanwhile, were a bouncy nasal, not unlike Gūlvira's "monotone" during rehearsal. Gūlvira and Elmira often punctuated the ends of sentences with a two-beat giggle — "he he" — the second higher than the first, almost like a hiccup. The wolf spoke with a gravelly voice that resembled other wolves', such as that of the wolf in *Nu, Pogodi* (a heavy smoker). The chorus of foxes and wolves, often speaking or singing in unison, came to match the voices of the leads, as well. The result was an internal consistency of the voices of each animal that canceled out much variation between different artists.

Perhaps each of them happen to come to understand the "logic" of each line in a similar way, with the help of the director, but it also seemed to result from their process of constantly needing to watch and listen to one another from offstage. I was out of the country when the

director cast the final roles, so I wasn't privy to his justification for his final decision. Ultimately, he chose Maral and Arai as the Russian and Kazakh fox, respectively, with Elmira and Gūlvira as the Russian and Kazakh chick. Bolat, meanwhile, ended up with the role of the wolf in both languages. Vlad, who had been reading for the role of the wolf in Russian, was given assistant directorial duties and sometimes ran the rehearsals in the director's stead. In the cases of the fox and the chick, the voices in each language, though played by different artists, bore striking similarities to one another.

This was less a matter of *shtamp* — in the sense of a mechanical, habitual onstage style — but, rather, an outcome of these interindexical processes of observation and imitation of those sharing an artist's role and of contrasting against the other two main roles. Moreover, Orazaly encouraged them to watch and copy one another, even as he also told them to find their own way to animate the role. In June, when they had begun incorporating movement and music — but still have multiple actors competing for each role in each — Orazaly told the actors to keep looking for the logic, to keep working with the character. He told the actresses reading for the chick that they should be the sun all the time. Meanwhile, the fox, he said, should be a dream role for any actress, because she can do anything. He told them that they have to find a way to make their outside and their character match so that the two will come together when they later don their masks. “Each of you has your own character,” he told the actresses reading for the fox, yet in the same rehearsal he encouraged them to continue watching each other and to take from one another whatever they saw was working. Others have noted the prominence of copying in creative processes (Chumley 2016, Wilf 2012), yet the actors are expected to find a way to incorporate such practices into other methods that include striving for an individualized approach that brings out elements of their own character.

Interdiscursive Essentializing

Watching and comparing need not result in similarity; puppeteers could have instead used comparison to cultivate a voice that contrasted with their linguistic counterparts (Lemon 2004), which then raises the question as to why the artists would seek to imitate one another when animating a character. However, animating a character that sounded like other characters of a similar type enabled the troupe to create a figure onstage that cohered with their understanding of the genre and audience of children's theater. There is no intrinsic reason that "children's theater" should be a genre; adult theater includes a whole range of genres, after all. But Soviet and post-Soviet ideologies surrounding children and the types of entertainment best suited for them resulted in a stylistic coherence that consistently contrasted with adult theater. Puppet artists in Kazakhstan often argued that the puppet offered a pure form for children to view. Consistency freed the audience from having to interpret ambiguity. An early Soviet text on puppetry urges those creating puppet theaters to emphasize contrast as much as possible (Agienko and Poliakov 1927). In a later Soviet text, the author denies the ability of the puppet to convey the same psychological depth that a human actor can, but argues that the puppet's form has its own advantages:

"But significantly better than the human-actor, the puppet can show more brilliant, characteristic highlights of man in their more general expression. In order to utterly typify any property of man, it becomes necessary for the artist occasionally to show in specific situations from that man as a medium of expression, to give human characteristics to an animal. We know these animals: lions, donkeys, pigs, foxes, factual expressions of man, we meet them in folk sayings, in tall tales, and in fairy tales...Not one actor can express humanity in general, because he is himself a man. A puppet can do this. Specific because she is not man" (Smirnova 1963: 6).

Orazaly and the puppet artists may have had little interest in Craig's theories of actor as *uber marionette*, and in fact, this envisioning of the actor as passive overlooks the many ways the puppet is involved in a dynamic process with puppeteers (see Posner 2014 on Simonovich-Efimova's theorization of puppets as vibrant objects). And they may have asserted that the process of creating a role is all the same, whether they worked with masks or without, with human bodies or puppets. And there may have been many principles and techniques that they took from human theater and applied to their work with puppets. Nonetheless, if such ideas could move from the human stage to the puppet one, so, too, could certain aspects of puppetry move into ways of animating live action, including this commitment of creating characters that conveyed human qualities in a purer, more general form.

Meyerhold argued against using techniques of naturalism for plays that required a different approach as part of the "theater of mood." In these, he included works by symbolists such as Maeterlinck, but also Chekhov, who, he argued, unified certain aspects of realism with the theater of the mood through the poetry of his plays. It would be fair to say that *The Little Chick* is quite different from that of *The Blue Bird* or *The Seagull* (their shared bird themes notwithstanding), yet the "mood" of the children's musical is indeed a mood, even if it tends toward exuberance, with shiny costumes, relentless music and cartoonish voices.

Moreover, the theater relies heavily upon stereotyping as an effective pedagogical tool. When preparing for the reopening of the puppet theater, the musical review featured rows of "Eastern" belly-dancing women, black mustachioed Armenians, and "Gypsies" sleeping in a huddle around an imagined campfire. Rehearsals for these numbers gave way to discussions between directors and artists surrounding the "natures" of various groups being represented by puppets or humans. For the Armenian number, directors reminded the puppeteers to keep in

mind the character of “Caucasians,” and the importance that a group of (dancing) Armenian men would place upon the entrance of a girl. In preparing Arai for her lead dance in the Gypsy number, the director demanded that she show, through her eyes in particular, that she was wild and could not be tamed. The composition of the puppets in many of these numbers presented cultures as uniform. The puppeteers wielding the marionettes might be a mix of men and women of different ages, but the puppets themselves usually all had the same bodies, costumes, hair, and faces. Even minor variations, indexing the artistry and handiwork of the artist who made the puppets, were diminished or erased through the puppeteers’ uniform manipulation of the puppets as the Armenians spun around, the Eastern women shook their hips, or the Ukrainians flipped. Puppeteers, when first describing the purpose of the puppet theater to me, characterized puppets as purer embodiments of particular qualities, ideal for socializing the children because they could offer figures of pure good and pure evil — or of “pure” Armenian, “Gypsy,” etc.



Figure 22. "Armenian" number.

Time and translation alter the content of folk tales, but the structure of elements and plot lines remains consistent enough that Propp could offer an analysis of the Russian fairy tale as a closed system (1928). Propp compares 449 fairy tales in order to arrive at their “morphology,” by which he means “a description of the tale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole” (1968 [1928]: 19). He argues that while the tales exhibit a great deal of variability in the *dramatis personae*, the repetition of functions is “astounding,” which “explains the two-fold quality of a tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and color, and on the other hand, its no less striking uniformity, its repetition” (*ibid.* 20-21). Propp’s structural analysis of fairy tales omits the cultural context in which they emerged, but the repetition of particular figures across stories and across media, targeted at children, creates a momentum of its own. Child audiences quickly learn to expect wolves and foxes to behave a certain way, as soon as they appear on the stage, even if they have never seen this particular play (Gelman 2003). Puppeteers exploit and cultivate this aspect of consistency in children’s stories, drawing them into the action by introducing an action, repeating it, and encouraging children to guess what will happen next. For example, stories like the Russian folk tale “The Turnip” – *Repka* – offer a simple action – trying to pull a turnip from the ground, but build the action by adding more and more characters pulling at it: grandfather, grandmother, granddaughter...As the action repeats and builds, the narrator encourages the audience to repeat the description of the actions again and again – “they pulled and they pulled” (*tyanut-potyanut tyanut-potyanut tyanut-potyanut*) – and the audience becomes part of the storytelling.⁴⁶

46. Audience interactions were common in early Victorian-era theatre particularly among working-class theater audiences (Winter 2000); it was over the course of the nineteenth century that theatres worked to fix audiences in place – changes which directors like Artaud (1958) quickly sought to undo. Among storytelling routines of certain

Repetition occurs across stories, as well. The characters in *The Golden Chick* are staged figures that draw upon past typifications of the same, or similar, staged figures. The fox and the wolf feature in a number of other Russian folk tales, adapted into films and puppet plays for children. Staging a play with a fox and a wolf within this post-Soviet context, in which children and adults have gone through their lives saturated with images and sounds of wolves and foxes, puts the production into an interdiscursive relationship with such past iterations of these animals. For example, in Mikhail Kamensky's "Wolf and Calf" (1984), a coughing wolf wearing blue jeans steals a calf, which he plans to eat when it is full-grown. The fox insists that they eat him right away, but the wolf insists that they must wait for the animal to get bigger and bigger before slaughtering it. In the meantime, the wolf grows attached to the calf, while the calf grows into a mighty bull, able to charge right over his would-be consumers. Whether or not the puppeteers or child audiences are familiar with the 1980s animation of the same story of the *Zolotoi Tseplenok*, we can expect them to have some familiarity with tropes of the crafty, feminine fox and the dim-witted wolf. Wolves abound in the puppet theater's repertoire, which includes *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Three Little Pigs*. The past iterations of these animals don't entirely dictate how each of the lead characters should look, sound, or move, but they do shape audience expectations and actors' own imaginings of the character. When Orazaly tells them to "talk normal," "like in real life," it begs the question, "In whose life?" The lives of the fox and the wolf extend far beyond the text of the play, into other texts and into other media.

The figure of the chick isn't an especially popular one in the repertoire of the puppet theater or in Soviet animation, but the voices the actors ultimately employ are nonetheless quite familiar, as they essentially voice the figure of the child. There are different child voices in

families, too, children are encouraged to comment on the action or to participate in the narrative event in their various "ways of taking" from storybooks (Heath 1982).

Soviet animation. Some are soft-spoken, breathy, and lisping. A similar voice is often used for soft, shy animals like bunnies and Cheburashka, and this soft-spoken quality appears in puppet plays in which a good sister – e.g. little blonde Masha in *Morozko* – is contrasted with a spoiled one – e.g. round-cheeked Pasha. Another popular child voice is the boisterous child. It has a sing-song quality that becomes nasal when going higher (rather than giving way to a falsetto). The lead in the puppet theater’s *Little Red Riding Hood* has this voice – in both Kazakh and in Russian – as does Masha in the popular Russian animation *Masha and the Bear* (Kuzovkov 2009). This is the voice both actresses ultimately use for the chick, the playfulness implied in it serving to win over the gruff, world-weary wolf in a dynamic not unlike that of Masha and the Bear, a popular folk tale whose recent animated Russian form has become an international success.

Recent work on animation, cuteness, and branding has highlighted the ways that the simplicity and consistency of animated characters enable the movement of such characters into different spheres of sociality, media, and economy (Manning 2010, Nozawa 2013, Sherouse forthcoming, Silvio 2010). To take a branded example, Hello Kitty appears on television and computer screens, airplanes, in toy stores, and on the curtains of Hope House. Nonetheless, even characters from specific animated series can serve as tokens of broader types (Silverstein 2005). The wolf in *Nu, Pogodi* is known simply as “Wolf,” and the rabbit is simply “Rabbit.” Particular voices, even when they are voicing characters not explicitly tied together as the same, can, through iconic resemblance, serve to cite these other figures to link them together. Even if children have not seen or heard all of the intertexts of children’s stories and animations that adult puppeteers know, they will have seen other animated (feminine) foxes, (masculine) wolves and (childish) chicks, on stage or screen or in storybooks.

Masked Movement

In Stanislavskii's *An Actor Prepares*, Tortsov says the mechanical actor offers only a "dead mask of non-existent feeling" (1936:24). If *shtamp* creates a kind of mask, the actors' wearing of actual masks for this production could heighten the importance of the characters' voices, as Orazaly works to emphasize during the read-through. The characterization of the fox as an essentialized feminine character of cunning, rather than some particular fox, became further solidified with the addition of masks. The lead fox and wolf had elements of their costumes to distinguish them from the chorus, but the masks unified the animal personas and required unity among the artists. In my interview with Orazaly, I asked if he worked with masks before, and he said no. I described the importance of movement motivated by the masks in Lecoq's theater (Lecoq et al. 2002). Orazaly said yes, it's *plastika*, to which the artists had devoted sessions. He said he was working with live actors, rather than puppets, because for him to work with puppets would have been a kind of dilettantism — though he was always interested in trying new things.⁴⁷ He was interested in masks because, for a dramatic actor, the eyes were the most important part, but they would not be visible. He had come to the realization that masks were interesting for children because they understood the fantasy of it.⁴⁸

When the artists began to wear the masks, just a couple of weeks before the show premiered, they complained not about how the masks hid their faces from the eyes of the audience, but rather about how the masks blocked their own view of the stage and of one

47. The only puppets in the play were butterflies, which he saw as a symbol of the beauty of nature that we no longer felt.

48. When teaching at a nursery school in the US, one child in our threes group drew a simple face and called it a mask. An adult helped this child, then more of them, cut out eye holes and put them on as masks. About half of the children were wearing these masks before we realized the mistake we had made: when the children saw their peers wearing masks, several of them believed they had actually changed faces, and they began to cry, frightened of one another.

another. Because the masks obstructed their peripheral vision, they had to turn their heads completely in order to see who or what was on each side. The choreography of the foxes and wolves took on new importance; it was more difficult to feel where the other actors were onstage. They needed to practice more disciplined coordination in order not to run into each other. Moreover, the uniformity of their faces — as foxes or as wolves — made any variation in their poses more obvious, so that they needed to work harder to cultivate unity. After so many months of watching each other carefully, they could no longer see or hear each other well, but needed to keep constant images of where each character was on stage at all times – using their other senses, as well. Though they did complain about their sight being suddenly impaired by the masks, we should keep in mind that, as puppeteers, they regularly employed haptic techniques to manipulate their puppets from below, above, or behind. The results of this work from the audience’s perspective usually remained hidden from them, just as they were hidden from the audience. Grappling with obscured vision onstage for the musical, however, these risks unfolded at a larger scale.



Figure 23. *The Golden Chick*. Wolf and chick.

Conclusion: The Aesthetics of *Skazka* as Theory of Childhood

In the interview, Orazaly goes on to talk about the musical theater as a turn to a model of theater as “art business.” There need to be spectators buying tickets. That’s how he got the idea for doing a musical. It’s a light genre, which people like. It allows them to forget themselves. He worries about how easily it will be accepted by the Kazakh mentality. Kazakh music, he says, is sad.⁴⁹ He defines the musical as an American genre, and wonders, then, how it will work here. He says that in American culture, “everything is OK.” If you ask how someone is, you don’t expect someone to answer honestly, but Kazakh culture is completely different. He says that when he was in Russia, he saw a big musical that was well done, but it was like watching a cartoon.

If directors are unique and audiences are universal, there is little room for nationalism or other groupings, in terms of audience or artist types. The director has often said, to me and to

49. Others have noted to me, as well, that compared to other music in Central Asia, Kazakh music is the saddest.

others, that art has no boundaries, knows no language, the same way children know no language. Yet, when we get into discussions of the musical as a particular genre, nationality does become an important question, as a kind of national aesthetics comes into question. Moreover, this aesthetic contrast — the happy-go-lucky American style of musicals versus the sadness of traditional Kazakh music — becomes a trope of interactional and intersubjective norms, as well. Americans will tell you everything is OK if you ask them, but Kazakhs are completely different.

The theater's repertoire leading up to the renovation in fact frequently incorporated music, from the song Masha sings at the beginning of *Morozko* to the total reliance on music for *Puppet Show*. The question of lingering Soviet aesthetics or interactional norms never enters the conversation, despite the fact that Orazaly has studied in Russia and has adapted a Soviet-era tale for his production. Musicals, in fact, became popular in Soviet film with the technological advancement of sound in film productions, and by the latter half of the 1930s emerged as “the perfect vehicle for the depiction and promulgation of the Socialist Realist utopia” (Taylor 2016: 141). Taylor focuses on “love intrigues” (143) of the era and the specificities of Soviet characters involved in these, rather than on more fantastic musicals for child audiences. However, in the 1930s and 1940s Soviet authors and filmmakers were adapting children's stories from the West around the same time they were being released in the US as live-action or animated musical films. For example, Aleksei Tolstoy adapted Italian author Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883) into *The Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino* (1936), a novel for children that was adapted for the screen as early as 1939, a year before Disney's *Pinocchio* was released, with multiple animated and live adaptations over the following decades. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Baum 1900) was released as an American musical film in 1939. That same year, Aleksandr Volkov published an adaptation of Baum's novel, *The Wizard of the Emerald City*

(*Volshebnyk izumudrogo goroda*). Its adaptation into a puppet play featured prominently in the Almaty puppet theater's repertoire by 1941.⁵⁰ Children's theater in Almaty still relies heavily on musical comedies, musical fairy tales, and similar genres as staple genres for their young audiences.

There was, however, something compelling about the scale and accompanying aesthetics of Broadway musicals that struck Orazaly as qualitatively different from outdated Soviet musicals. Questions of nationality and stage aesthetics came up frequently during international puppet festivals, in which puppeteers from various parts of the world performed. Puppeteers from Europe and the US in particular would note to me the aesthetics of the post-Soviet theaters as consisting most typically of a particularly bright, loud, "la la la" aesthetics, as one European puppet artist characterized them. They marked less of a contrast between happy and sad, and more one of a gentle touch, a softness, versus a kind of in-your-face sound and look that they saw as characteristic of the Soviet school. This "Soviet" or even "typical Russian" style that outsiders described to me regarding their take on post-Soviet aesthetics did not apply to all puppet theater they had seen in former Soviet spaces. Not all Russian or post-Soviet theaters were equally "Russian" or "Soviet," as both outsiders and locals were ready to credit Kazakhstani, Russian, or other former Soviet theaters with being more "European" or with doing something interesting specifically because they differed from European or "Soviet" tendencies. However, local and international puppet artists alike would use "Soviet" to describe aesthetic tendencies they perceived as left over from the past. This, in turn, erases geographic and temporal differences among the vast network of Soviet theaters that developed in the twentieth century.

50. F.r. 1241 14. Republican Theatre of Puppets of the Kazakh SSR of the city of Alma-Ata, Opis' 2, Delo No. 8.

Despite frequent criticism of the so-called “Soviet” style of animating, Orazaly’s dream of creating a musical that would compare to a Broadway musical corresponded with a commitment to creating a world of wonder for children that was hardly new. At Hope House during my first winter, I was in the director’s office when she got a phone call. When she returned, she told me that it had been a reporter on the phone who wanted to do a story debating about whether New Years celebrations should be abolished because they had become too commercial. They had wanted to know her opinion of it. She had told them that of course they should not get rid of New Year’s. It’s a fairy tale holiday, she said, and children needed more fairy tale in their lives. It was our duty, as adults, to give them that fairy tale.⁵¹

Goffman (1974) distinguishes between “natural” and “staged” figures, the former describing bodies “with an ongoing personal identity” that “emit on their own what is attributed to them” (524). He admits that within any given situation, a natural figure will be playing a particular role, but there is a difference between the natural figure’s expected constancy within an ongoing identity, as opposed to the fictive nature of “staged figures.” While the natural figure speaks as originator and animator at once, the staged figure comes about through the work of many different individuals, at different stages in preparing the acts and statements delivered by the staged figure. In order to understand how figures are produced, we need to attend to the social, material, and semiotic processes that mediate – and thus influence – representation (Manning 2013, Manning and Gershon 2013).

Besides this difference in the way such a figure is produced, there is also a difference regarding how audiences or interlocutors receive them. Goffman admits that the distinction between who can and cannot be “imagined to be” varies across cultures and across age groups,

51. She used the word *skazochnii*, an adjective from the noun *skazka*, often used in children’s plays and songs to describe an event or even a day as fantastic or magical.

so that a child, seeing an angel onstage, might see this as a representation of a real entity that exists (526). Nozawa argues for thinking about particular characters and processes of their becoming (“characterization”) as at once fantastic and real — real insofar as people live with them and as them on an everyday basis (2013). Such a move would pull us toward a “character-centric” perspective (25). In the case of the characters animated in the puppet theater, understanding the puppet (or masked character) requires understanding it as occupying a place in a special world in which logic and characterization operate differently, in more extreme terms. The body of a puppet in an Armenian song collapses at once the idea of a dancing Armenian character and the stereotyped character of all Armenian people. This is also a fantasy, but one that carries implications for how people are received and treated.

These idealized bodies are animated by human forms, too, such as Arai as a Gypsy dancer, or the masked characters of *The Golden Chick*. This commitment to *skazka* by adults at the puppet theater and at Hope House gave adults a different sense of what was real and what was possible for children. It encouraged children to imagine the existence of entities such as Ded Moroz, cunning foxes and stupid wolves. The puppeteers claimed that their mission was to show children a world in absolute terms of good and evil. Puppets offered an ideal form, according to the artists, because they were less nuanced, less complicated, and in this way purer. In this way, the musical may have seemed totally new to Orazaly, but it fit into the puppet theater’s aesthetics and the ideologies of childhood that drove it.

Chapter 4. Nothing to Hide

Dancing Dolls

We were supposed to go to the puppet theater on this morning, but the children had guests of their own to entertain. Teachers dressed the older girls, five to six years old, in traditional Uzbek costumes, while a group of three- to four-year-olds donned tutus and curly wigs in bright green and yellow — mostly boys, as the size of costumes and children determined who was cast for this number. They paraded outside in spandex and tulle. After the children had, as usual, waited on the adults so that the ceremony could begin, visiting representatives and Hope House directors exchanged opening greetings. The children watched, clapped, and chanted “thank you” when prompted. The visitors presented their gifts to the children — new tricycles, scooters, and balls — followed by a struggle amongst the children to get a first ride. Before any of them could go far, however, the adults made the children set the new vehicles aside so that they could each take a balloon and then release them into the sky at the same time for a photo op. The younger children, watching the balloons float away and realizing they were not coming back, began to cry. Everyone moved to the carpet that was to serve as a stage.

It was time for the children to perform. The non-performing children sat on benches around the carpet, the adults behind them, and the teachers arranged the toddlers in their tutus in place on the carpet. The song was about dancing dolls. Dinara, age four, stood in the front. As the leader, her wig was green instead of yellow. The other children followed her actions, for the

most part, only when the lyrics of the song reminded them when to squat and when to stand. One child shook his head furiously, as if trying to fling his wig from his head. The older girls did their Uzbek dance. The visitors clapped and quietly slipped out of the yard.



Figure 24. Toddlers in Tutus.

Introduction: Showing off at a model home

At Hope House, children performed frequently and for a range of visitors. On this day, it was a group of representatives from a local business organization who had come to donate toys; the children's performance was a way of thanking the sponsors for their donations.

Representatives came from the Department of Education that oversaw the home. Parents visited on special holidays. Volunteers came from the pedagogical institutes to entertain the children.

Hope House usually greeted all of them with a performance of some sort. On my first visit to the home, the children donned costumes of hen and chicks and Kazakh warriors, sang and danced for me, and then offered a puppet show. Sometimes the visitors entertained the children, as well.

On this day, the organization had hired circus performers. Other shows sought to edify the

children, such as when a group of vegetarians used stuffed animals to put on a puppet show about healthy eating. It had been in Russian. Few children had understood what was happening, but they seemed to enjoy the puppets, nonetheless.

When I asked about doing research at Hope House, the director responded, “We would be happy to have you here. We have nothing to hide.” When I asked, months later, if it was alright for me to begin filming the children, she showed me her computer monitor. She could see all of the classrooms at once, thanks to the security cameras. She said again, “We have nothing to hide.” In this chapter, I am interested in the ways that Hope House, as an institution, was especially compelled to show, again and again, that they had nothing to hide, and how these constant showings acted to animate the children to portray ideal roles of childhood for their audiences. Children played a prominent role in public life in Almaty, and pedagogical routines relied on repetition, rehearsal, recital, and appraisal. Nonetheless, residential institutions such as Hope House particularly valued performance and performativity of childhood by children, as stigma surrounding child institutionalization⁵² raised the stakes for showing they had nothing to hide, and that children were meeting the norms of healthy development.

The children’s shows for outsiders seemed, at first, beside the point of my ethnography of the children’s home. These were the songs and dances they did for everyone; my goal as an ethnographer was to discover — and eventually, to uncover, for readers — the everyday lives and understanding of the world of children about whom so many assumptions have been made by outsiders. For this, I wanted to look at their play. Performances offered little evidence of the children as persons, as creative individuals, or as agents. The frequency of their rehearsals and

⁵² While “institutions” related to children could include schools, theatres, and other sites, I use “institutionalization” to refer more specifically to the placement of children in long-term residential facilities such as children’s homes and *internat*.

performances, however, fundamentally shaped their interactions with the adults who coached and directed them and with the other adults who visited to spectate. Visitors came far more often than the children left the grounds of the home. Performances framed the majority of the children's interactions with the outside. These performances were very much a part of their everyday lives and of the world they were coming to understand.

Analyzing the importance of performance at Hope House requires doing away with a frequent division between ideologies of childhood and the everyday reality of children's lives. Wanting to get at the secret, private worlds of children can reveal aspects of their worldview that adults otherwise miss. However, by assuming a separation between images of ideal children and the activities of actual children, we can overlook ways in which children get called upon to perform ideal images of children for adults. Children and childhood play a significant role in public life in Almaty, stemming both from Soviet-era practices of promoting the government's role in raising children and from new commercial sites inviting children and families to engage in play and consumption.

After theorizing the aesthetic, semiotic properties that emerge in children's performances as cute, competent children, I examine the role of performance in the children's daily lives at Hope House and the broader valuing of children's performance in the region as a socializing method. Besides the fact that such rehearsals and performances occur more frequently at institutions such as Hope House, I argue that these performances have especially high stakes at such sites, where prevalent stigmatization leads adults to expect institutionalization to produce damaged children, or "bad subjects" (Kulick and Schieffelin 2004). Common stereotypes raise the stakes for the children to perform well. Ideologies of childhood in Kazakhstan underpin aesthetics of children as icons of both vulnerability and potential. In performing well, children at

Hope House and similar institutions prove to outsiders that they are not damaged — that they can still represent hope for the future — in addition to displaying their need of care and affection. Performing children distribute responsibility and sentiment to spectating adults, animating them to engage.

Cultivating Child-Friendly Cities

In post-Soviet, urban Kazakhstan, childhood played an important role in the public landscape. Parks, businesses, and yards of socialist apartment blocks invited children to gather, in addition to the multiple children’s theaters around the city. Within larger city parks, children’s parks (*detskii park*) had been constructed as miniature Luna Parks, with games, rides, and other attractions available for a fee. Since May 2012, Almaty has held the UNICEF designation as a “Child Friendly City,” a program designed to encourage local governments to ensure the rights of children in the city.⁵³ As James and James (2004) have pointed out, United Nations’ conception of “the child” as a single – or universal – entity can result in problematic application of universal rights of children to specific cultural settings. Certainly, what makes a friendly child friendly varies from city to city. This celebration of — and capitalizing on — children’s play offers more evidence for Rockhill’s assertion that children’s upbringing (*vospitanie*) remained a public affair well after socialism in the region (2010). Yet this did not always mean “public” in the sense of free and government-funded. Despite UNICEF’s aspiration for cities such as Almaty to ensure designated rights to all children, Almaty was certainly friendlier to children and families of certain means and abilities than others. Soviet-era apartment block playgrounds often languished, depending on residents’ willingness to maintain their upkeep. New shopping centers

53. See <http://childfriendlycities.org/overview/what-is-a-child-friendly-city/> and <http://www.balakk.kz/en/node/1529>, last accessed March 10, 2017.

included indoor children’s play areas, with playground equipment and ball pits, along with art centers and petting zoos, to attract parents with children on cold winter days. Trendy restaurants offered free classes – in English or art – on weekend afternoons, the expectation being that parents would consume food and drink while their children took advantage of the free classes.

Such spaces encouraged children into public spaces when they were not at home or school. Images of children played an important ideological role in other ways, however. These spaces for children — some constructed as part of Soviet city planning, others emerging in more recent commercial spaces — exist alongside images of children that have long served as potent political symbols of state paternalism and the future of the nation. Images of Stalin with non-family children that featured large in the propaganda of his time (Kelly 2005b) looked not unlike billboards I encountered in Kazakhstan during my fieldwork, featuring photographs of President Nazarbayev surrounded by children. City billboards would also feature blown up photographs of children’s own drawings, along with information in the corner with the young artist’s name and age, celebrating children not only as recipients of government care but also as contributing to the visual landscape of the city.



Figure 25. Child art on display in Almaty, 2017.



Figure 26. Billboard in Almaty of Nazarbayev with youths.

In addition to images of and by children, Hope House’s commitment to song and dance fit into a broader trend of adults celebrating children’s performances in Kazakhstan. At kindergartens around the city, parents periodically gathered to watch their children’s *utrenniki* (morning programs), which consisted of songs, dances, and poems recited, similar to those that visitors viewed at Hope House. For public holidays, such as June 1, International Children’s Day, or September 1, The Day of Knowledge (and first day of school), stages in parks, squares, and malls featured child and adult performances. Before performances began at puppet or children’s theaters, animators not only engaged the children in games but also solicited young volunteers to perform, spontaneously, a song or poem. At Esentai Mall, the new luxury shopping center that opened during my fieldwork, a “Baby Model” competition featured children, 5 to 14 years old, parading down a leopard-print staircase, singing and dancing for a panel of judges to win cash prizes.



Figure 27. Shopping mall playground.



Figure 28. Apartment building playground, taken on the same day as the shopping mall picture, in March 2017.

Cute Children and Other Emblems of Hope and Pity

When visitors smiled at the hapless, dancing toddlers, when teachers took out smartphones to record a five-year-old swinging his hips to a pop song, or when the six-year-olds crouched down to greet the toddlers or even tried to hold them on their laps during a concert,

each of these bigger people was confirming the cuteness of the smaller children in different ways. Studies of cuteness are growing, both through experimental work (in psychology and ethology) and in cultural studies (particularly in studies of *kawaii* culture in Japan). Cuteness is emerging as a science and an art. These studies begin with the premise that children or babies are cute. In 1947, German ethologist Konrad Lorenz proposed *Kindchenschema*, or “baby schema,” a set of characteristics of typically cute babies. He argued that humans and other animals with helpless young had become hardwired to respond to these characteristics — large eyes, round heads, large foreheads, small noses and mouths.

Scholars taking up this research have used the schema to argue that we have evolved to be attracted to cuteness, even at a young age, and across species. Finding evidence of both continuity and variability across age and gender (Aradhye et al. 2015, Borgi et al. 2014, Sprengelmeyer et al. 2009), ethologists, psychologists, and biological anthropologists have expanded this insight in a number of directions: Do adults find babies of their own race especially cute (Proverbio et al. 2011)? Do children like baby animals (Borgi et al. 2014)? Which factors of cuteness — childlike behavior, imitation of adults, adults’ protective feeling toward children, and children’s physical attributes — operate most strongly in adults’ perception of cuteness (Koyama 2006)? While some of these studies apply cuteness outside of childhood, others engage in trying to sort out the chicken-egg relationship between children and cuteness. Babies define cuteness, it seems, but what exactly is it that makes them so cute? Orphaned young children and baby animals stand to benefit, in particular, from cuteness, argues Hrdy (2009). By attracting adult attention, they solicit affection and care from adults other than their parents. In order to elicit this care, babies’ faces act as sensory traps. Humans and other mammals are

programmed to find pleasure in looking at babies. This relationship promotes alloparenting, or parenting by adults other than mothers.

The faces of cuteness vary cross-culturally and historically. They appear not only on children's bodies: aesthetic regimes of large eyes and small mouths spread into ideal femininities, with *kawaii* culture in Japan (Koma 2013, Kinsella 1995, Okazaki and Johnson 2013), for example, and in cute brand logos in Taiwan (Manning 2010, Silvio 2010), and proliferate through the bodies of cute objects — dolls, toys, washcloths (Ngai 2012). As the children perform these ideal figures of childhood, they often perform *as* objects that have come to life — the dancing dolls at the beginning of the chapter, the Buratino number that became popular that same year. It is not only that commodities borrow from the aesthetics of childhood in order to appear cute, but that the cuteness of objects, children, and baby animals serve to mutually inform one another, raising the cuteness bar ever higher. Children are cute, but children dressed as baby animals are *really* cute.

Late Soviet animation and commodity culture prominently feature cute characters still consumed by Kazakhstani families during my fieldwork. Cheburashka, in particular, serves as an enduring icon of late Soviet cuteness. He could be found in classrooms and at toyshops, alongside American toys and cheaper knock-offs. In Eduard Uspensky's original book, *Krokodil Gena y ego druz'ya*, the narrator introduces the characters as having been his favorite childhood toys. Cheburashka, we learn, “was made in a toy factory, but they made him so badly, that it was impossible to stay who he was, a rabbit, a bear, a cat, or even an Australian kangaroo? His eyes were large and yellow, like a feline's, his head round, rabbit-like, and his tail short and puffy, like you usually find on a teddy bear” (Uspensky 1965). His parents told him Cheburashka was a beast unknown to science, and the narrator feared him at first, but gradually became accustomed

to his strange appearance. He came to love him no less than the Crocodile Gena and the plastic doll Galia. In the animated adaptation, Cheburashka is described as looking like a “defective toy.” While Crocodile Gena and Galia the plastic doll become unambiguously animate in the adaptation, Cheburashka continues to operate somewhere between the statuses of person and thing, found in a box of oranges, then invited to attract customers in a storefront.

As mentioned in the introduction, Cheburashka, Gena, Galia and others, a group of friendless individuals works together to build the House of Friendship. They become friends in the process, so that when they finish, they decide to use the space, instead, to open a kindergarten. Cheburashka volunteers to serve as a toy for the children to play with. The animated Cheburashka (Kachanov 1969, see Figure 29), offers viewers – and consumers of products made in his image. Because he is smaller than most of the other characters, he looks up at them with his big eyes, his tiny mouth often a small circle under his tiny triangular nose. In this frame, Genia and Galia have just looked for *Cheburashka* in the dictionary, but cannot find a definition of him there. He looks up at them and asks, “Does that mean you won’t be friends with me?” Of course they will.



Figure 29. Still from Cheburashka (Kachanov 1969).

Cheburashka wants friendship, education, and to become a good Soviet citizen, to be educated, to serve as a Pioneer. Beumers argues that “Cheburashka appeals to children’s innate instinct to protect the weak, the poor, and the underprivileged—groups that do not exist in the perfect Soviet society...By making fun of the absurdities of the Soviet system through the alien creature Cheburashka, Kachanov [the animator] allows a distanced and ironic view of reality” (2008: 166). Rather than a simple commodity, Cheburashka alternates between cute object, willing to be put on a shelf and admired or played with by children, and an active citizen, working to construct socialism (despite the fact that he not only arrived from abroad and could not be classified in any way). He offers a compromise between the two types of objects constructivist Arvatov described just after the Bolshevik Revolution: the passive objects of the bourgeois, which can only be arranged on the shelf, and the production-oriented, dynamic objects that would destroy passive consumption and help build communism (Arvatov 1997, Kiaer 2005).

These points of comparison between cute objects and cute children can draw our attention to ways people form attachments to objects and to how adults sometimes treat children as if they are objects — to be admired for the aesthetic pleasure they offer, or to be picked up for photographs and then put back down. However, the difference between cute children and cute objects is that adults expect children to grow up. Fishzon argues that the queer temporality of Brezhnev-era animations such as *Hedgehog in the Fog* (Norstein, animator, 1975) respond to “the loss of narrative coherence and futurity, the never-to-arrive communist promise” of late Soviet stagnation. As a little hedgehog (with round little eyes and mouth, his needles disheveled and pointing every which way) makes his way through the woods, he wonders what would happen if he descended into the fog, and he does. Instead of futurity, according to Fishzon,

animator Norstein offers viewers instead, “a voluptuous present, rich in possibility and feeling...providing a revitalized time and space where one could desire and hope again” (Fishzon 2015: 572). While children’s culture under Brezhnev celebrated “chronology-stopping spaces and nonreproductive corporeality,” these distortions in time offer the opportunity for audiences to “imagine a more enchanted life, brimming with potentiality” (*ibid.*: 598). The fog, moreover, acts as a device to create uncanny effects, the lack of visibility making the familiar strange to the hedgehog, so that previously benign creatures suddenly frighten him (Jentsch 1906, and see Chapters 5 and 7 on the uncanny).

While these imagined spaces of distorted temporality might resist tropes of chronology and reproduction, the children watching such animations have no choice but to grow and age. Cheburashka today is more or less the same Cheburashka from Soviet days, even in the recent Japanese remake (Nakamura 2010). Cheburashka and Norstein’s animations continued to appear frequently on Kazakhstani television during my fieldwork, and images and figures of Cheburashka still appeared in toy stores, at the bazaar, and in the classroom at Hope House. Unlike the seeming agelessness of these animated figures, the children who first viewed these animations in the 1960s have grown up. Some have children or even grandchildren of their own now.

This bears on ideologies of childhood in a way that goes beyond considerations of cuteness as an aesthetics of vulnerability. Children should grow, mature, become less vulnerable and more able to care for themselves and others. Children should thus display potential for this growth, even when they are small. When the children at Hope House performed for visitors, there was little to no narrative: Some little chicks dance around a mother chick. Some girls in pink dresses love their dolls. A boy in a white suit loves Almaty. The performances told the

visitors the same story, over and over, the story of Hope House: Once there were children who had nowhere to go. They were brought to a place called Hope House, where they were fed, clothed, and taught to do things, such as sing and dance. Give them another year, and they will go home to live happily with their parents. They will grow up. They won't always need you.

Public childhoods, private children

As an ethnographer of childhood, children's performances seemed at first like a distraction to the real stories of the children, of who they were and how they lived. This concern was born out, in part, of a larger trend in the anthropology of childhood to get at the private worlds of children, to reject ideologies of childhood as hiding some deeper truth about the children's lived experiences. Seminal ethnographers of childhood and children's language have offered a glimpse at children's "hidden" (Goodwin 2006) or "private" (Bluebond-Langner 1978) worlds. These works and others have revealed important contrasts to adults' assumptions about children, offering accounts of children's participation in or understanding of the world. Some anthropologists have compared common perceptions of language among racialized class groups to the reality that ethnographers observe within children's peer groups (Goodwin 1990); others highlight differences in norms at home that create varying expectations for interactions at school (e.g. Heath 1982).

Cultural and historical studies frequently emphasize that the images, aesthetics, and ideals associated with childhood are constructed by adults and projected onto children (Jenkins 1998), ignoring children's realities and often telling us more about adult fantasies of childhood (Scheper-Hughes and Stein 1998). Such constructions of childhood have repercussions for how adults treat children, but myths of childhood innocence cast children as passive, blank, and

apolitical, ignoring ways in which children often prove themselves to be savvy consumers (Chin 2001) or experts of children's culture (Bernstein 2011). History and ethnography of Soviet childhood have emphasized divides between the cult of childhood projected via popular propaganda and the difficult realities many children faced throughout the twentieth century (Creuziger 1996, Kelly 2007).

This division of labor — between those who study children and those who study childhood — or a tendency to point to a mismatch between the two, has perhaps served to romanticize the private worlds of children for ethnographers of childhood, such as I did when embarking on my fieldwork at Hope House. I saw their constant rehearsals and performances as interruptions to my real work of examining the children's "free" play, until I noticed that the teachers had begun discouraging me from observing the children's music lessons. They would send me, instead, to wait in their classroom while they rehearsed and performed for much of my first year there. I would tend to the non-performing children in the classrooms. I mended costumes or made props for their shows and classes. During rehearsals, left in the classroom alone, I offered to help assistants with cleaning chores, an offer they usually declined. Bored in the classroom by myself, I began to wonder if the performances were more interesting than I had first thought, if I shouldn't try harder to view the rehearsals.

This curiosity emerged, in part, from a worry that the teachers were, in fact, keeping something from me. As Lemon (2000) points out in her ethnography of Roma in Russia, when studying a population often characterized as enigmatic and misunderstood, such as Roma or, in my case, children, scholars themselves can fall into the trap of wanting to pull the curtain away to reveal the backstage for the reader, when a more rewarding task might turn out to be studying

how the perceptions of curtain or stage — and the backstage implied — come into being in the first place.

In many settings, ethnographers might associate children with private spheres because of their association with mothers and the domestic spheres often accorded to women (though Gal 2002 warns against a simple alignment of women/domestic/private). However, in a variety of settings, children were involved in the creation and circulation of images of childhood by animating these ideal figures through their performances (Goffman 1974, Hastings and Manning 2004, Irvine 1996). This didn't mean that the children who performed well *were* ideal children, but that they took on roles as characters of cute children (Nozawa 2013). With bright costumes and cheery songs, they offered aesthetic displays of childhood, which included tropes of helplessness (a mother hen caring for baby chicks), unclear divisions between objects and persons (dancing dolls, puppets come to life), or innocent nationalisms (skits dramatizing friendship between Kazakhs and other ethnicities alongside patriotic songs). Children's various performances enact characteristics of childhood that cultural studies scholars have argued are projected upon children through popular images.

In various ways, the children perform the cuteness that is suspected of being constructed by adults, for their own pleasure. Butler writes of gender as a performance that is always in some sense citational, relying on past iterations, but with no origin point. The ideal or authentic performance is never quite attainable (1988, 1990). As other scholars have noted (Bernstein 2011, Woronov 2007), Butler's performativity can be useful in thinking about the effects children's performances of childhood have on the world, rather than taking them as passive recipients of normativity. However, even as children at institutions of Hope House perform childhood in explicit and implicit ways — putting on costumes for singing or playing on

equipment while visitors follow them with cameras – the temporality of childhood itself influences the way a correct performance is achieved. Correct performance of childhood involves expected trajectories of development that children need to show they are following. Performance should have transformative effects, as children should constantly be transforming into more competent beings.

Teachers often complained that frequent performances — especially when guests arrived late or unannounced — tired the children out and disrupted their schedule. However, at least some of the children loved performing. Maksat, for example, would dance for the teachers, helpers, and other children at recess, the adults recording with their phones as he offered his rendition of “Gangnam Style,” complete with repeated utterances of something that sounded close enough to “hey sexy lady.” One day, the music teacher rushed into the classroom, saying they needed a last-minute replacement for the “Kara Zhorgha” dance. She grabbed Nurlan by the wrist and rushed out. Maksat crossed his arms, looked at the floor, and muttered to himself that he knew the “Kara Zhorgha.” Their rehearsals and performances sometimes wore them out, but they also served as a source of pleasure and pride for the children and the teachers.

Pedagogies of Performance

The teachers, too, saw the performances as more than a tedious task. They were not only disruptions to the regular business of the home but also played an important role both in pedagogical strategies and in the children’s play. When they watched television, they were supposed to sit on the floor and be still and quiet. Sometimes, however, when a song like “*Qara Zhorgha*” came on, the teacher would tell them all to get up and dance. They would comply, and then be told to sit back down, once the song was over. In addition to the programs they prepared

for guests, the teachers planned and staged programs just for the children to mark holidays or other special occasions, the teachers themselves often dressing up and costumes and memorizing lines for special skits for the children. Because the only men employed at Hope House were guards, drivers, and repairmen, Aygul Apay played the role of Ded Moroz for their yëlka at New Years, even though the children attended multiple yëlkas outside the home and welcomed visiting groups who put on such shows for them.

Their daily lessons had elements of performativity (generating effects [Austin 1962]) and of theatricality (in the sense of involving rehearsal, execution, and evaluation), too. Every few months, each teacher offered an open lesson (*otkrytie zaniatiya* in Russian, *ashyq sabaq* in Kazakh): directors and other teachers came into the teacher's classroom, or she and her children went into the music room, and all would observe as the teacher taught a lesson to her children, each lasting around 20 minutes. Afterwards, the children would wait in their bedroom with a helper while the teachers and directors discussed the lessons they had just observed. In preparation for these, teachers made special visual aides, sometimes recruiting me to help with a drawing or chart or even using my video camera. They tended not only to plan the lessons carefully ahead of time, but moreover to rehearse them with the children, asking the children sample questions on the topic they would be covering. For an art lesson, Aygul Apay made sure the children knew the difference between a landscape and a portrait. She also had them practice making pictures with specific components. Sometimes such thorough preparations before the lessons seemed to take away the spontaneity or creativity that they were supposed to be encouraging through their teaching of a subject such as art. One day, Aygul coached Zhamilya on how to paint a watercolor landscape, making her try, again and again, to paint a boat the correct size in the middle of the page. As Aygul showed her repeatedly the correct proportions of

the boat to the size of paper, emphasizing that she needed to work fast, before the water dried, other children gathered around to declare the picture bad, shaking their heads. Finally, Aygul gave up and let Maisa try.

However, the repetition to the point of correct execution — whether the children were painting a landscape on command, dancing to a song they had practiced for weeks, or simply sitting in their seats with their arms properly folded like schoolchildren — led the children to take pride in their correct performance and their abilities to carry themselves with increasing maturity and self-control. By the time they were in their last year at the children’s home, teachers regularly asked them, at the beginning of classes, “How do we sit?” and reminded them that these were the rules they would be expected to follow next year, when they were back in their family homes and attending school. Their correct performance as future schoolchildren corresponded with their movement out of the children’s home and into the family home. While most of the younger groups had fun names like “The Chicks” or “The Stars,” their group was more commonly referred to as the “preparatory group.”

With each lesson, they were prepared for life at school, away from Hope House, and in the world. Certain lessons encouraged children explicitly to take on the role of schoolchildren while also imagining them as leaders and as citizens. For one, Aygul Apay modeled the entire lesson after a popular television quiz show for Kazakhstani schoolchildren, *Leaders of the Twenty-First Century*. She made a game board with categories of questions, pre-recorded videos of other teachers asking questions to be played to the children on their television during the quiz, and incorporated natural materials to “test” the children’s abilities to distinguish different smells. She rehearsed many of the questions with the children ahead of time to ensure that they would answer the majority of them correctly. She also had them dress up in outfits modeled after the

traditional school uniforms worn around Almaty, along with badges that I helped her make and staple to their shirts that said “Leader of the Twenty-First Century” in Kazakh.

When it was time for the group to give their open lesson, Aygul allowed me to record it — it was the first time one of the teachers allowed me to do this. The directors and other teachers sat on one side of the room, and Aygul played the role of teacher and quiz show host. After the children filed in, wearing their white shirts and navy blue skirts or pants, the girls wearing white hair pom poms, Aygul first asked them to go around and say what they wanted to be when they grew up. They wanted to be teachers, cooks, and drivers. She emphasized to them, at the beginning and at the end of the lesson, that they were the leaders of the twenty-first century. At the end, she rewarded them all with gold medals (with chocolate inside). In another open lesson on citizenship, Aygul showed them what real money looked like, passing around a bill of her own for them to inspect. She also explained to them what identification cards were and had made each child a play ID card.

In these ways, the teachers rehearsed and enacted lessons for audience evaluation, while also instilling in the children a sense of their belonging out in the world, as citizens of Kazakhstan and as its future leaders. On a follow-up trip, Aygul emphasized to me that all of the children from this group had indeed gone on to be leaders at their schools.

Everyday performances of childhood

Not all of the children were equally invested in performing ideal figures of childhood. Some were more content than others to be placed in the back. Zhamilya and Tamilya, the twins, rarely chosen to perform, did their own dances together. Children offered their own

performances of childhood, which ranged from less-than-ideal to dangerously close to being recognized only as the bad subjects that served as cautionary tales in ideals of socialization.

There was, for example, Yerlan, the boy in Chapter 1 whose head Saltanat Apay kept patting during their lesson, and whom the music teacher made sit by me, instead of with the other children, while Aynura practiced her solo. Yerlan, throughout that second year of my fieldwork, was having a hard time. Here is a scene of Yerlan in the classroom, in which I cannot decide if he's doing cuteness badly or doing badness cutely:

Aygul Apay takes her vacation in the fall, and on this day Miriam Apay substitutes. There are nine children, between five and six years old. I don't know Miriam Apay, but I saw her give an open lesson the previous spring, with a younger group. The director told Miriam Apay that she wasn't sure what to do with her. They had let her try teaching various ages, and she didn't seem to be particularly good with any of them.

At the beginning of their lesson, the children recite Kazakh poems with actions before sitting down to start the lesson. She doesn't tell them where to sit, and they fight for the seats they prefer. Yerlan ends up in the front, next to Aynura. The children sit and wait rather patiently as Miriam Apay goes through books in the back to find what she wants to do with them. Yerlan and Aynura point at the pictures on the board and talk about them. Some children put their heads on the table, their hands folded in front of them as they should be. They stay in their seats until the lesson begins.

Miriam Apay has put the tables too close together. When Aynura stands up to answer the first question, she puts her hands on the tables on each side of her and, without seeming to even notice what she is doing, swings her body back and forth as she talks. When she goes to sit back down, Yerlan has scooted over into her seat. She pinches his cheek to make him move back. He

merely smiles and tries to help her climb over him, before he finally scoots over. In the back, Naziliya is talking to the teacher about the rain bringing fruits and vegetables, while Yerlan is playing with Aynura's hair. He stands up not to describe the weather during the fall (a topic that comes up repeatedly in their lessons that fall), but simply to swing between the desks. Miriam Apay takes him by the hand and leads him back to where Aruzhan sits, in the corner, telling them to switch seats. Yerlan's face looks pained, but he is used to getting moved around. The lesson continues, Miriam Apay putting some pictures on the board, reading from a book. The children wiggle in their desks, Marlin plays with the zipper on his shirt, and Yerlan rubs his eyes and picks his nose.

Finally, Miriam Apay gets out some large, colorful paper cutouts of fruits and vegetables. The children get excited. Yerlan asks if they'll each be given one. She begins to spread them out on the table in front of Aynura and Aruzhan. The other children get up from their seats to get a closer look. Once up, Yerlan cannot bring himself sit back down. He swings between the desks, as do Zhamilya and Marlin. He goes back to his seat, but he kneels on it. Then he stands on his chair and looks off to the right. As if having discovered a previously unknown island, he declares, "Children, there are books!" Now Zhamilya is standing on her chair, too, to try to see whatever he sees. Yerlan climbs from his chair to the bookshelves next to him, and back again.

The camera turns toward Miriam Apay, who is explaining how the children should arrange the fruits and vegetables on the board, which ones go on the top row, which in the middle. She is interrupted by a noise, offscreen, a thumping — like, for example, the sound of a chair toppling over, followed by a cry — "Aaaah" — from Naziliya. Miriam Apay calls for Altyn Apay, the helper, to come in from the kitchen. The camera pans back to the back corner, where Yerlan is returning his chair to its proper place. Naziliya glares at him.

Yerlan looked not unlike a human form of Cheburashka. With his large head and small body, his wide-set green eyes and small, smiling mouth, he checked off many of the cuteness criteria listed as part of the baby schema devised by Lorenz and elaborated by others. Cheburashka got his name from the verb *cheburakhnut* — “plonk” or “topple” — because, when a fruit vendor finds him in a box of oranges at the beginning of the story, the unidentifiable creature is so sleepy that whenever the vendor sits him on the edge of the box, he topples over. Cheburashka’s enormous head, his face hairless but surrounded by brown fur, gets orange peels stuck to it. The fruit vendor takes him to the zoo, but the zoo has no place for him because they cannot identify what kind of animal he is.

Yerlan has been identified as a child of the Hope House sort and has been brought here to live, yet he and his brother have been passed around to different groups as they try to find teachers who can tame them. Aygul Apay has told me that they have placed Yerlan in her group because she is the best teacher, and if anyone can help him, it is she. Some days, Yerlan is merely mischievous, and the teachers react merely with frustration or annoyance. Other days, Yerlan cannot get himself to finish a task when all the others have. He gets in his own way, folding a paper unevenly, but more or less correctly, and then unfolding it again. He begins to construct a garage from the blocks, as the teacher has assigned them to do. He steals extra blocks when the teacher isn’t looking, but he’s never satisfied with the result, so he keeps dismantling and rebuilding. The teachers want to move things along, to make him move faster, faster, as is their habit. The other children have become used to this, and they do their best to comply. They mostly just pout to themselves if something doesn’t turn out right. When everyone criticized Zhamilya’s watercolor painting, she simply moved away from the group, her head hanging low. Yerlan, on the other hand, is not too old to cry out, to yell, when a teacher takes something away

from him or laughs at his art project. Some days I bring stickers or temporary tattoos for the children. On the days when I don't, Yerlan will say to me, "I don't like you." Some days, I see certain teachers make a face at Yerlan, and he flinches, covering his face. I worry about what happens when I am not around.

Aygul Apay blamed Yerlan's behavior on his mother, who, according to Aygul, had rejected him. Aygul didn't mean that the mother had rejected him by placing him in Hope House; all the children's parents had done this, and the home saw this placement as a strategy for keeping, in the long run (Weiner 1992). She said Yerlan's mother had made it clear to him and to all of them that she didn't really like Yerlan, and that she much preferred his (fraternal) twin brother, who had been in the group with Yerlan briefly, but was quickly moved to another because they were each difficult, and were impossible together.

I never met Yerlan's mother, but the teachers blaming her seemed better — for Yerlan's sake — than if they had blamed him. Instead, as impatient as they got with him, they were also able to pity him. In their most frustrated moments, they also lamented that he was clearly very smart, but just wouldn't listen. There was a sense that potential lay within him, as prone as he was to climbing on the furniture or taking another child's seat. Yerlan's frequent outbursts were effective ways of getting adult attention. Teachers looked at him more often, held his hand and patted his head. But there was also a sense of urgency in needing him to reach a certain peace, in getting him to perform in line with the rest of the children, before he went home. The treatment of children in Kazakhstani primary schools and the use of discipline there lay beyond the scope of my fieldwork; but the mere fact of Yerlan's having spent time in Hope House — and the risk that his mother, after taking him out of there, might ultimately place him in a more permanent state institution instead of keeping him at home with her and with his brother — form part of a

broader context of the stakes of performance at institutions such as Hope House. Because people see orphanages and similar institutions as producing bad subjects, I argue, it is all the more crucial that such homes display their children's ability to outside audiences.

Rearing Bad Subjects

Teachers worried about Yerlan throughout the year, his inability to perform effectively indexing, to them, deeper emotional issues and putting him at risk of not realizing his future potential. Kulick and Schieffelin (2004) have argued that, in studies of language socialization, we should look not only at the development and reproduction of normativity, but that we must also consider the possibilities of the emergence of “bad subjects” (Althusser 1971: 169) as those who have defied expectations or norms or failed to learn them. Mead noted not only norms but also exceptions in her studies of enculturation, but often labeled such cases as “deviant” and attributed difference to psychological issues outside the scope of anthropology (Mead 1963). Exploring the “dual indexicality” of socializing utterances — that the expression of a norm simultaneously manifests the inverse — enables us to think about how socialization processes result in a range of subjectivities, rather than measuring the successful acquisition of norms (Kulick and Scieffelin 2004, Kulick 2003).

Children growing up in orphanages or other homes for children are, for various reasons, not expected to succeed. Throughout the 1990s, mass media reportage in the West of abuse and neglect in post-socialist, Eastern European orphanages and in homes for children with disabilities presented such subjects as “waiting children” (Cartwright 2005) – waiting for Western parents to swoop in and save them through transnational adoption. Adoptions from Kazakhstan to the United States peaked in the mid-2000s. They were on the decline when, in 2012, a scandal in

Russian-language media broke surrounding a ranch for “deviant” children where two Kazakhstani adoptees were being held, prompting Kazakhstan to ban adoption to the US. The ban has remained in effect.⁵⁴

In addition to television and newspaper reports on such institutions, Western researchers of child development also turned their attention to such sites to study the effects of institutional conditions on children’s mental, physical, social, and emotional development (e.g. Nelson et al. 2014, Rutter et al. 2007, The St. Petersburg-USA Research Team 2009). While researchers involved in these studies work to get policy changes implemented to improve the lives of the children they study, they also offered support to stigma attached to institutionalization by stressing the impaired abilities of children relative to their never-institutionalized peers. The shortcomings of orphanages are seen at times as the failure of the state to care for its children properly; yet they also serve as an affirmation of the importance of a positive home life, with mother and father.

Other anthropologists have noted the stigma that accompanies a child’s designation as “orphan” (Freidus 2010, Hunleth 2013), their images bound up in local and international discourses regarding kinship ties, need, and aid (Dahl 2014). In Kazakhstan, it was less the designation of “orphan” (*syrota* in Russian, *zhetim* in Kazakh) that anchored discourse surrounding institutionalization and child welfare, as much as *detdomovets* — from the common local term for orphanages, *detdom* (from *detskii dom*, “children’s home”). People, including those who worked in children’s homes, spoke of growing up in an institution as a disadvantage to children. Part of the problem, they claimed, lay in the children’s limited experience in the

54. Stryker’s (2010) ethnography of post-adoption therapies reveals the extreme measures American adoptive parents have taken in the name of “rehabilitating” children after having been adopted out of institutional settings, particularly from postsocialist orphanages.

outside world, but another contributing factor was that children had to contend with outsiders' prejudices against them. In cases where orphanage children went to school with non-institutionalized children, parents worried about the children stealing or negatively influencing their own children. In contrast, most people who worked directly with the children worried not that they were dangerous, but rather that the children were too sheltered from the world. Having been brought up in a system that was completely different and cut off from the outside world, people often complained that the children didn't know how to do anything for themselves when they got out. They lamented that such children were only capable of institutional life and that this was why they would ultimately end up back in institutions of other sorts -- whether in the military, prison, or mental hospitals.

These stereotypes of post-institutional children failing to integrate into life outside of the institution often work under the assumption that their upbringing was the sole difference between them and their never-institutionalized peers. However, as Rockhill (2010) points out, children "graduate" from children's homes or similar institutions into the adult world at a time when others their same age are still relying on their families for support. Young adults who have just finished high school will often continue, in Kazakhstan, to live with their parents or to receive financial assistance from them if they go to another city to study. Children graduating out of a children's home technically have a right to some kind of housing, but the bureaucratic process is complicated, and they have trouble navigating it. Descriptions of orphanage graduates as less capable than their non-institutionalized peers, then, might be misleading or overstated, as they are not exactly going out into the world on a level playing field.

Hope House worked to show that the children were happy and healthy, in need of sponsors' support but also assuring them that the institution was functioning and that the children

were growing and learning. When sponsors visited Hope House, they, in turn, animated a particular kind of figure as sponsors. As in the day of the dancing dolls at the beginning of the chapter, men and women in suits representing organizations would come to make speeches about hope and childhood, to clap and smile at the performances, and to have their pictures taken with the children. Whether or not these visitors held doubts regarding these children's impaired abilities in the future remained somewhat opaque.

A rare instance in which I was made privy to the negative evaluation of a visiting outsider occurred at a different children's home, a more traditional orphanage. Two groups were visiting that day — a group of Korean youths and a group of local volunteers. First, the Korean group performed a dance routine to English-language Christian rock. Next, the children at the orphanage, dressed in costumes, sang and danced for their visitors. After the kids performed, we went inside for lunch. They gave us a tour of some of the children's rooms; they held up their favorite toys for us to see. In the cafeteria, I sat with the local volunteers at one table; the children sat a smaller table next to us. One volunteer, a young man keen on practicing his English with me, pointed to the children and said, "You know, these kids here, they're wolves." When I protested, he insisted that although the children might seem nice now, they would become fiercely competitive when playing games and would only care about winning.

It was a rare and extreme assertion, yet it marked a convergence between the children's performance and stereotypes that children of such backgrounds could not be trusted, that they were not what they seemed, and that they had something to hide. Literature, film, and television programs from Europe and the US offer ample evidence of fascination and fear regarding the dangers of improper socialization, through stories of "feral" children and violent institutional conditions. These include nonfiction accounts of wild children such as Genie (Curtiss 1977) and

Victor (Malson and Itard 1972), along with horror films of homicidal post-institutional children (such as the 2009 film *Orphan*, dir. Collet-Sera). Russian-language television news programs about children with “Mowgli Syndrome” (*syndrom maugli*) link children’s neglect – being left to socialize more with dogs, birds, or sheep – to broader social problems after socialism, such as parental alcoholism, neglect, or abandonment.⁵⁵ Such cases, along with descriptions of orphanage graduates as incapable of living independently as adults, serve as extreme cautionary tales, the ultimate bad subjects of stunted development that pedagogues at Hope House and other institutions needed to prove their children would not become. Performance was a useful way to show that children were capable, yet such showings of ability were not immune from raising doubts in suspicious audience members.

Festivals of Creativity and Kindness

Every year in the spring, the Palace of Schoolchildren hosts the “*Meiirim* Festival of Children’s Creativity” (*Meiirim festival’ detskogo tvorchestva*), a showcase of song, dance, poetry recital, and musical ensembles. *Meiirim* means “kindness” or “pity” in Kazakh, and was used as the name of the festival, whether texts or hosts used Russian or Kazakh. The festival consists of two stages. First, a daylong program allows each group of children to take the stage from ten to thirty minutes. This initial program takes place at the Palace of Schoolchildren – the Pioneer Palace of Soviet days. The festival is comprised entirely of children from the various special institutions around the city. The school for the blind’s ensemble of musical instruments played a few numbers, and then one of the teenage boys offered a poetry reading. A group of

55. E.g. “Mowgli Children, documentary investigation.” *Deti-Maugli, dokumental’noe rassledovanie*. 3 August 2012. TV Company Sovershenno Sekretno.

children from the school for the deaf danced. A high school-age girl from one of the boarding schools sang a Celine Dion song.

The goal of the festival is not simply to showcase the children's talents or to celebrate them, but to judge them, complete with a jury. Only the "best" will get to perform alongside professional artists at the opera theater a few weeks later. At the same time, there is a certain ambivalence surrounding the festival, regarding how the children should be celebrated for abilities while taking into account (diagnosed or presumed) disabilities. It is called a celebration of children's creativity, though the children have little input in what they say, sing, or wear. Jury members judge the children based on ability, but the festival is structured to include only children who are growing up in special institutions. A journalist reporting on the 2015 festival writes: "Looking at these kids, you forget that the majority of them have developmental issues. They simply want to prove to themselves and others that they too can do what their peers can do" (Umarekova et al., 2015). By "peers," we must assume that the authors are referring to the never-institutionalized children, who likewise serve as the control measure for psychologists' evaluations of institutional impairment. Rather than positing the goal of the festival to showcase the special talents of particular children that render the performers special or even exceptional, the goal of this festival was for the children to showcase abilities that we presume their "peers" already have.

Though the journalist argues that the audience forgets the children's developmental issues when viewing their performances, Bakhit Ospanov, president of the sponsoring fund, is quoted in the same article as admitting that the children's issues in fact make it difficult to judge them: "Some of the children don't see, others don't hear...there are children with impaired memory, and there are simply orphans from children's homes...Bringing them together and

evaluating them according to a single criterion of creativity is difficult” (ibid.). The article underscores ambivalence surrounding institutionalization, ability, and performance in Kazakhstan. Viewers of the festival want to compare the children to one another, but they find it difficult.

Institutions, such as those represented at this festival, create order among bodies. Comparison through ranking helps to establish and maintain such order (Foucault 1995: 146). Psychologists and other scientists have published countless comparisons of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children, but they usually use this systematic comparison to try to close such institutions. They compare children in institutions to never-institutionalized peers using standard systems of measurement, including physical growth, IQ, language development, and attachment style. Here, the judges faced a very different task of trying to rank the children according to their creative abilities and to compare them to one another. In studies of orphanages, never-institutionalized peers serve as the control for normal development. At Meirim, there is no child who is truly normal, in this sense, so the children’s presumed goal, according to the writer of the article, is to “pass” as a normal child (Butler 1988, 1990). The sponsor focuses on the task of judging the children in relation to one another. This internal comparability proves complicated, as each child who performs has been placed in an institution of some sort because of some difficulty – whether physiological, developmental, relational, or economic. The uncertainty surrounding the evaluation of these children relates to overarching ambivalences toward children’s institutionalization in Kazakhstan that have yet to be resolved. In the meantime, the institutions celebrate children’s abilities, rather than hiding them away.

In addition to proving ability, however, these performances are sentimental spectacles that distribute agency and responsibility by building sentimental ties. Agency emerges over time,

and it gets distributed at different scales. As Kockelman argues, “[A]gency may be shown not to necessarily (or even usually) adhere in specific people: the ‘one’ in question can be distributed over time (now and then), space (here and there), unit (super-individual and sub-individual), number (one and several), entity (human and nonhuman), and individual (Tom and Jane)” (2006: 13). Even as the children’s animations of childhood render them characterological figures of childhood through their distillation of aesthetic and sentimental properties of childhood, they are also indexes of the adults’ attributed responsibility. Hill and Irvine (1993) argue that looking at responsibility helps identify attributions of agency. Questions of responsibility are doubtless crucial to understanding the children’s performances, but “responsibility” has a dual indexicality, as responsibility can be used to talk about cause or about effect. If we ask who is responsible for the children’s presence onstage — or for their residence at Hope House in the first place — we might answer that the parents who chose to place them are responsible, for they were the ones who made this choice. By placing them at Hope House, however, they are calling upon the state — and upon individuals representing the state, from the Department of Education overseeing the budget to the cooks who prepare their food — to take on some of this responsibility. This is a future-oriented responsibility (though some might also blame the state for not having provided mothers other options, such as public kindergarten for all or greater financial support for struggling parents). Corporate sponsors and teachers might not see themselves as the cause of the children’s plight but as, nonetheless, taking on a duty to the children, assuming at once agency and responsibility for the children’s wellbeing.

Advocates of child-centered approaches to pedagogy might criticize these performance-centered models for calling the festival a celebration of “creativity” when the children, in fact, have little say over the numbers they perform or how they execute them. In these exchanges and

distributions of sentiment and attachment, they act as interpreters and animators of roles that require an ability to imagine themselves as audiences will see them. In my second year of research, the children and their music teacher prepared intensely for the festival, rehearsing a series of acts, totaling about 20 minutes. Before the children came out, the assistants laid a carpet in the middle of the stage to help orient the children (perhaps the same one that served as the outdoor stage for their visitors). The program began with a four-year-old in a white suit singing a patriotic number while his peers, in sailor outfits, marched behind him holding Kazakhstani flags. The toddlers did the dancing dolls number. Anya, a girl from the Russian group, recited a poem about her grandmother. Yerlan participated in none of these acts. In order to fill time between these numbers, however, Hope House needed an emcee (*tamada*). For whatever reason, they chose Yerlan. I had seen the children preparing for the show, but hadn't known about Yerlan's role until he walked out onto the middle of the stage in a tiny tuxedo. As he took the stage at the Children's Palace, he held the mic in his hand and spoke into it, dead serious, reciting formal Kazakh poetry about the fatherland with his low, raspy voice. He had to exit and enter repeatedly between the numbers, each time becoming more confident, making sure to stand in the spot marked off for him on the carpet with a piece of tape, holding the mic with one hand and gesturing confidently with the other, with as much confidence as Aynura had shown in the music room.

For the concert at the opera theater, the jury chose the acts in which the children animated inanimate objects: the middle group (mostly around five years old) performed a dance from *Buratino* (the Soviet adaptation of Pinocchio), while the younger children would dance behind them in their doll costumes. In addition, Yerlan was asked to assist in hosting the show. For this performance, instead of walking out by himself, he was accompanied by the main hostess for the

night, an elegant Kazakh woman in a long evening dress. He only came out to chat with her for one interlude while they set up chairs for a musical ensemble. Whereas he had looked fearless hosting by himself at the Children's Palace, he looked shy that evening in the opera house. Perhaps it was the full audience, the darker lighting, or the fact that it was past his bedtime. The hostess kneeled down to him, putting the microphone up to his mouth and coaxing him to speak his lines. The stage assistants for the evening — who looked like high school volunteers — gave him a stuffed lamb as they accompanied him offstage.

Conclusion: Animating Audiences

While the government founded and funded Hope House, the home also relied heavily on private donations from nongovernment and corporate sponsors. As a result, the home had a vested interest in welcoming outsiders on a regular basis. These guests often came bearing gifts. The relative material wealth of Hope House likewise meant that the directors and teachers were eager to show off their facilities and the children who lived there. The director boasted to me that their classrooms were nicer than most public preschools in the city.

The majority of children's interactions with the "outside" world at Hope House consisted of interactions with state or private donors, whether through representatives' visits — where children invariably performed — or through children's less frequent visits to city parks, theaters, or shopping malls. Anthropologists writing on fraught but inevitable relationships between artists and sponsors in Kazakhstan have highlighted the risks and rewards artists face in aligning themselves with the politically powerful (Dubuisson 2017, Nauruzbayeva 2011), as they risk accusations of inauthenticity (Lemon 2000), or of having been "bought" (see Rogers 2006 for a discussion of patronage relationships of *khozian*). Sponsorship creates certain responsibilities for

these donors, creating a relationship that gives rise to risk on both sides. On the one hand, children seem to represent an uncontroversial group for donations, as discourses downplay political aspects of childhood through descriptions of children as innocent and childhood as a universal human right (James and James 2004).

However, children's homes – traditional or new – were not the only possible ways to invest in childhood, for private sponsors or for the state. By the end of my fieldwork, teachers at Hope House worried about the future of the home, and of their jobs, as state representatives were telling them that there should be no children's homes of any sort in Kazakhstan. The children at Hope House – especially the ones in the public eye at performances, greeting visitors, and smiling for photo opportunities – bore a certain responsibility for engaging sponsors and the state and for convincing them to continue to invest in Hope House. Moreover, teachers faced pressure to show that they were effectively fulfilling a role that was inherently complicated. The primary adult with whom the children interacted, the children acted as an index of the teachers' pedagogical abilities, as well as suggesting the promise of children's future success.

The hostess's smiles, the audience's gentle laughter at Yerlan's shyness, and their enthusiastic applause when he delivered his lines and exited the stage suggested that, whereas his seriousness in his earlier performance had rendered him an effective animator of words beyond his years, this performance was in its own way effective because it allowed for more of Yerlan to leak through (Irvine 1996). In his successful performance at the opera theater, by combining shy smiles with ultimately competent delivery, Yerlan embodied the role of the good child in his willingness to reveal both vulnerability and potential, central sentimental and aesthetic components of the figure of the cute child in Kazakhstan. It was a similar combination that the children wearing tutus and dancing as dolls evinced — a willingness to be animated by adults, an

ability to imitate, but with a measure of spontaneity (shaking their heads, pulling at their tutus) that indexed a youthful spirit and an emergent self, underneath the curly wigs.

That spring, Yerlan's behavior sometimes got better, and sometimes got worse. He got worse, especially, when his mother took his twin brother home early, leaving Yerlan at Hope House by himself. In class, he would frequently announce that he didn't like whomever was around him. He would add that he did not like his brother, and that he did not like his mother. His successful performance didn't solve these problems, but the teachers and assistants remarked how well he had performed, and this seemed to help them see his potential in a new light.

The pervasive performances of children for adults at Hope House play an important role in multiple processes at once: They show sponsoring spectators that the children are progressing along ideal trajectories from vulnerable cuteness to increased ability. They assure spectators that they are not in danger of becoming the incapable post-institutional young adults that such sites are criticized for producing. They act as intersubjective processes – of observation, imitation, repetition, showing, and spectating – that come to shape children's valuing of rehearsal and performance. Finally, through their successful performances, they secure the future engagement of adults, whether through daily attention within the home or financial support from outsiders. Children's performances act as sites where children distribute, through their poems and dances, agency, responsibility, and sentiment that have implications for adults' future engagement with them.

Part III: Animating Objects

Chapter 5. Hiding in Plain Sight (Part I): Doubles

One fine evening the master came into the room with the dirty wall-paper, and, rubbing his hands, said: "Well. . . ."

He meant to say something more, but went away without saying it. Auntie, who during her lessons had thoroughly studied his face and intonations, divined that he was agitated, anxious and, she fancied, angry. Soon afterwards he came back and said:

"To-day I shall take with me Auntie and F'yodor Timofeyich. To-day, Auntie, you will take the place of poor Ivan Ivanich in the 'Egyptian Pyramid.' Goodness knows how it will be! Nothing is ready, nothing has been thoroughly studied, there have been few rehearsals! We shall be disgraced, we shall come to grief!"

Premieres sometimes agitate directors. On the day before the opening of *Kashtanka*, a series of events caused the director, Kuba's, nerves to unravel. Some of the actors had been traveling and therefore arrived late for the rehearsal. The lights crew had just started working with them, and their timing was off. One of the actors kept doing only what he was told, failing to understand how to go beyond that. *Kashtanka*, the lead dog puppet, had stiff legs. When she was supposed to lie down, one of them relentlessly stuck up in the air.

Kuba called in the head props artist, Lyuba. As a young woman, she had left her job as a cook in the 1970s to take a job making puppets because she had heard the hours were better. She had been working at the theater ever since. A tiny woman in her 60s with short, red hair, Kuba towered over her as she explained that she hadn't been the one to make those legs. Kuba insisted that it didn't matter if she had made them or not. As the head artist in that department, she should have been overseeing all aspects of the puppets and should have been attending rehearsals to

inspect how each puppet was moving. Lyuba replied that no one had told her to come to the rehearsals.

Kuba began to shout. “No one should have to invite you!” he insisted. “You are an artist, and you should take the initiative to come in and see your work. You should have looked at it and said, ‘Kuba, I’m not satisfied with how this puppet moves. I’m going to take it back and make it better.’”

Lyuba asked for more specific direction on what he wanted her to change about it. This, too, angered him. He described the dog’s leg as “pornographic,” and left it at that. When Kuba left to find Orazaly, the administrative director, Lyuba appealed to the actors to show her more what was wrong with the dog.

I shrank in my chair, for I had made the legs.

Introduction

This chapter theorizes animation as a process of shifting relationships between self and other – examining where and how we draw such divisions, and how we recognize distances between the two. It examines a play whose production the actors described as “completely new” for them — not because they encountered new forms of puppetry or even a new play — but because the director’s way of calling their attention to themselves, their work, and their puppets, created new intimacies that potentially threatened previous ways of engaging with objects and audiences. The intensity of this effort gave way, I argue, not only to new ways of working, but blurred lines between narrated and narrating events (Bauman and Briggs 1990, Seizer 1997, 2005). Attempts at motivating or inspiring another body into action involved identification with it and transposition into new points of view. In this way, animation does not only involve

bringing to life something previously inert, but also breathing a new or different way of being into already living social actors.

A relationship of animation is rarely, if ever, a simple dyad between puppet master and puppet, but involves layers of forces that sometimes work in opposing directions. The efforts of one participant are sometimes intercepted or altered by others or interrupted by material constraints. Objects give rise to new interactions between actors: A series of conflicts arises when a lifeless leg sticks up in the air when the dog attached to it is supposed to be sleeping.

I focus here on tensions that arose during a production of *Kashtanka*, an adaptation of a short story by Anton Chekhov, published in 1887. The play was a favorite among Soviet puppet theaters (Kelly 2007); yet in its adaptation at the Almaty theater during my fieldwork, the actors saw Kuba's way of working as totally new, both in his style of directing and in his efforts to train the actors to orient themselves in new ways toward their own bodies and the puppets. The puppet stage became a site of doubling, transposition, and psychic uncertainties between actors, puppets, directors, and other artists.

The animation of the puppets involved energies far beyond the work of the puppeteers. Key to this process were also offstage directors, not only Kuba, the stage director, but also Anuar (artistic director), Orazaly (administrative director), and Natasha, a guest director, who would later stage her own play with the troupe. Masters — onstage and off — compel and inhabit other bodies, through words and actions, through threats and promises, inspiring hopes and fears. Psychologist Vygotsky highlights the relational process through which self develops (1986, 1998, see Ochs and Schieffelin 2012). Approaching language from a literary perspective, Vygotsky's contemporaries in Soviet Russia, Bakhtin and Voloshinov, also stressed the emergence of voice from within fields of voices in contact with one another (Bakhtin 1981,

Voloshinov 1986). These texts, written in the 1920s and 1930s, became key for linguistic anthropologists in the 1980s and 1990s (Bauman and Briggs 1990, Briggs and Bauman 1992, Hill 1985, 1995, Irvine 1996) worked to show how culture, as a dialogic phenomenon, emerges (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995). This work has followed the ways distributions of agency and responsibility (Hill and Irvine 1993) give rise to the creation of new figures, and the ways these figures emerge in relation to one another are part of stance-taking moves (Hill 1995, Keane 2005). As participant roles become laminated upon one another, roles can merge but can also break down (Irvine 1996, 2011). Recent work on “distributed agency” continues to call analysts of social action to move away from taking for granted individual agency as the unmarked form (Enfield and Kockelman 2016). Persons’ and objects’ material forms invite and shape these processes. Art objects – especially those with features resembling eyes and mouths, indexing interiority, become agents by eliciting engagement (Gell 1998).

In the next section, I offer a synopsis of the narrated event – the story of “Kashtanka” – to help orient the reader as I offer examples from the rehearsals leading up to the premiere of *Kashtanka* during my second winter of fieldwork. I describe how the puppeteers previously described their work of animation and how Kuba sought to shift distinctions between the “first I” and “second I,” in order to help the puppeteers come out from “hiding” behind their puppets. As they worked through the scenes, certain moments that gave artists the most trouble led to new relationships of identification. Even as Kuba called on artists to use new divisions between first and second “I” to gain new perspective on their actions, he both identified with the masters onstage and encouraged them to identify with him as an artist, and thus to copy his way of working. In *The Golden Chick*, humans wearing masks inhabited the role of essentialized figures that play on tropes from past Soviet animations and puppet productions. Children at Hope House,

in their doll, chick, and Kazakh warrior costumes likewise transform themselves into characters. These specific characters at the same time acted as a sub-category in these performances of ideal childhood. This chapter investigates further what it takes to animate an object, to transform a thing into a character, and how these animated objects thus transform social relations among animators at different levels.

The story of Kashtanka

A young dog, a reddish mongrel, between a dachshund and a "yard-dog," very like a fox in face, was running up and down the pavement looking uneasily from side to side. From time to time she stopped and, whining and lifting first one chilled paw and then another, tried to make up her mind how it could have happened that she was lost. (Chekhov 1999 [1887]: 70)

At the start of the story, Kashtanka recalls the events of the day. Her master, the volatile cabinetmaker, had grown progressively drunker as they made their way to his clients, stopping for drinks along the way. Soldiers' marching distracted them both, and Kashtanka got lost in the shuffle. She finds herself in front of a doorway, where a kind man happens upon her. He takes her in, gives her a place to sleep and better food than she ever had at home, and renames her *Tëtka* ("Auntie"). She lives in a room with a gander, Ivan Ivanich, a cat, Fyodr Timofeyich, and a pig, Havrona Ivanovna, all of whom perform with their master in the circus. Her new master, it turns out, is a clown. After some time, she responds to her new name, and the memory of her first home fades.

Life at this second home becomes comfortable, but tedious. When the animals and the second master leave every evening for the circus, Tëtka is left alone with a nagging melancholy, and with visions and sensations that make her whine with nostalgia. Eventually, the clown begins

to train Tětka for the act. She learns to stand on her hind legs like a human and to sing with the music. The clown declares her an undisputed talent.

This moment of promise is interrupted when, one night, as the animals are getting ready for sleep, Ivan Ivanich lets out a cry, then another. The master enters and sees the gander is dying. The dog can feel death in the room, as the master laments the gander's passing. In the morning, the porter comes and disposes of the animal's corpse.

The goose's untimely death hastens the dog's debut at the circus. The clown brings out a large bag and sets it down. He announces to the audience that his grandmother has just died and left him a great inheritance. He peers in the bag to examine his new wealth, and shouts with glee at reuniting with his long-lost relatives: his uncle – the cat – and his beloved Tětka (Kashtanka). After clown and cat dance, it is time for Tětka to sing.

Just then, the dog hears a familiar voice calling out a familiar name: "Kashtanka!" The dog dives into the crowd and is tossed from one spectator to another until she has made her way back to her former masters, the cabinetmaker and his son, Fedyushka. They walk home together, her first master cursing her:

Fedyushka walked beside him, wearing his father's cap. Kashtanka looked at their backs, and it seemed to her that she had been following them for ages, and was glad that there had not been a break for a minute in her life.

She remembered the little room with the dirty wallpaper, the gander, Fyodor Timofeyich, the delicious dinners, the lessons, the circus, but all that seemed to her now like a long, tangled, oppressive dream. (1999[1887]:88)

What is a Puppet? Characterization and Materiality

Nozawa, in arguing for a greater theorization of characters and characterization, first asks, "How do people live with characters?" but quickly shifts to the question that interests him more: "How do people live *as* characters?" (2013: 6) In studying the work that goes into

animation at the puppet theater, I find directors, actors, and other artists to be constantly grappling and playing with the possibilities of living *with* and *as* the characters onstage. Moreover, in their various roles as creative professionals, they devote their days to trying to see the world — the work they do, the characters they create and with whom they live — from other points of view.

This social work of animation is no less an ongoing exercise of exploring relationships between materiality and perception, between thinking of a puppet as a social being and thinking of one's own body as an object or an instrument. Puppets and the humans who animate them each bring their own abilities and limitations to encounters of animation. Pulcinella plays, for example, often include Pulcinella's girlfriend, his landlord, a dog, and a police officer, but only one puppeteer with two hands (the puppeteer voicing all these characters, not unlike Bakhtin's [1981] characterization of Dostoevsky and of the novelist, more generally). The puppets only appear two at a time, unless one of them is dead or being carried in the dog's mouth. When the puppeteers work with the tabletop puppets of *Kashtanka*, they sometimes call attention to their roles as animators: they wheel out boxes with the puppets inside onto the stage, pull them out for the character to come to life, or step away from them while they sleep. At other moments, they hide the work they do by interacting with the puppets as if they are entirely separate. They sometimes live with, sometimes as, and sometimes through the characters that have been assigned to them (Manning and Gershon 2013, Lemon 2017 on the hidden divisions of communicative labor).

As directors work through and with the artists under their charge, animations forge and alter relationships of intimacy and power. At the same time, all of this animation is carried out so that an inanimate body will come to life in the eyes of a spectator. Forces of animation do not

only involve movement into objects in order to compel them to move a certain way, but also require artists to consider how they will compel audiences to view the objects as animated.

Setting the Stage

<i>Character</i>	<i>Human or Puppet</i>	<i>Animator/Actor</i>	<i>Appearance</i>
<i>Narrator</i>	N/A	Usually Bolat, occasionally Baqytzhan or Vlad	N/A
<i>Kashtanka (also goes by Tëtka)</i>	Puppet	Bolat	Small, reddish dog
<i>Luka Aksandrovich, Carpenter, First Master</i>	Human	Vlad	Late nineteenth century Russian peasant: black cap, flowing white blouse, black pants, large black boots
<i>Fedyushka, the carpenter's son</i>	Human	Aydan	Dressed like father, but without cap
<i>Clown, Second Master</i>	Human	Baqytzhan	Large black coat and fur collar, except when performing as clown, in which case, red nose and large trousers
<i>Ivan Ivanich</i>	Puppet	Maral, with help from Altay	Gander, soft and gray
<i>Fyodr Timofeyich</i>	Puppet	Koralai	Cat, soft and gray, tail curling up like question mark
<i>Havrona Ivanovna</i>	Puppet	Yerkesh	Pig, large, gray, soft
<i>Assistants</i>	Human	Altay, Ulbolsyn	Blue denim trousers with suspenders, black shirts
<i>Audience</i>	Human	Various	Blue denim trousers with suspenders, black shirts

The Set:

The piano is a synthesizer encased in stained plywood. A set of double-doors on wheels moves around during the play, mostly used to enter or exit the home of the Second Master. It is made of the same stained pink and green plywood as the piano encasement and is shaped in a curvy Art Nouveau style. The puppeteers wheel out boxes with the puppets inside, and the puppets perform on top of them. Made of a heavier wood, they are stained the same way as the other elements. They also serve as the table of the Second Master, and the box in which Fedyushka hides Kashtanka from the carpenter, in other scenes. In the back, on the wall, there is a moon, three quarters full, the last bit fading into the black curtained backdrop.

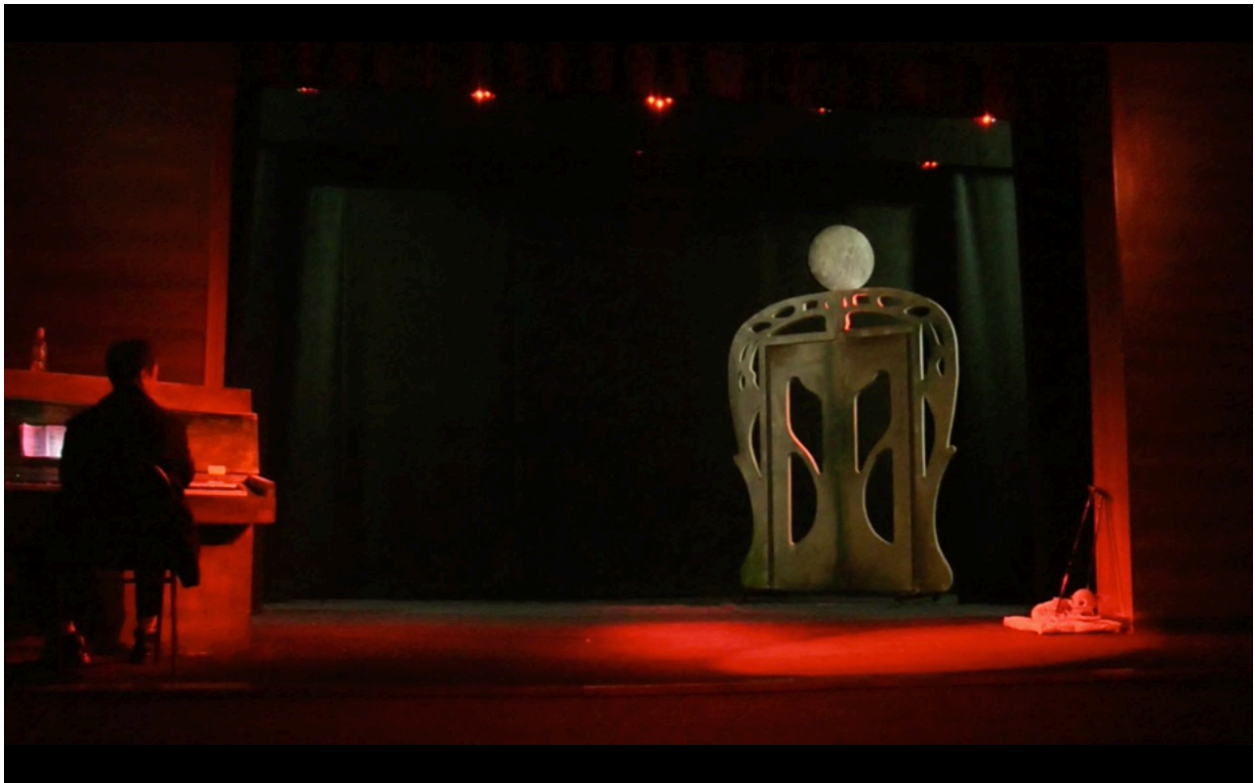


Figure 30. The set of *Kashtanka*.

Traps: No Audience, No Show

It is two weeks before the premiere, two weeks before Kuba's blow-up regarding Kashtanka's legs and other issues. In the new, small hall at the puppet theater — a flat, empty floor of blue carpet with a stage a couple of feet off the ground — Kuba has gathered a few of us to watch their first run-through (*progon*) of *Kashtanka*. Orazaly, his assistant Dina, and the carpenters who constructed the sets and the bases for the puppets take their seats. The seamstresses, who have been working to add foam and fabric to give the puppets their shape and who have been constructing the costumes for the humans, remain working in their studio (not having been invited to this run-through, as Lyuba would later complain).⁵⁶ A group of first-year puppetry students bring in chairs for themselves. Kuba yells for them to get seated faster — “*bystree, bystree.*”

When we are settled, Kuba stands in front of us, not on the stage. He thanks us for coming and admits, “Some don't have costumes — the clown — some things aren't right...so why have I invited you here? I believe that...the basic — one of the basic elements of the show is the audience, and if there's no audience, there's no show...Therefore your participation today is very important, for us to make our conclusions.”

He adds, “But the right to agree with your opinions I keep for myself.”

Igor, the pianist, walks out, through the set doors connected to no walls. He sits down at the piano and begins to play a slow, sad tune, in a minor key.

Bolat walks out from the right wing with Kashtanka, not walking the dog puppet but carrying her at the end of the two rods he will use to control her. Hovering over the ground as they move into place, she still lacks ears, paint, and fur. Her legs are nothing but green nylon

56. It was late November, and the seamstresses and carpenters were working overtime to finish the sets, puppets, decorations, and costumes for both *Kashtanka*, set to premiere at the beginning of December, and their upcoming *yëlka*, which included a giant dragon's head with eyes that lit up.

rope with a knot at each end. Her head, with its long nose, curls up in a circle to be hugged by her tail. Bolat brings her in front of the double doors. Very gently, he sets her down. She then comes to life, trembling from the cold.

She curls her tail in closer, and Bolat kneels down to look at her. He looks up at the audience and begins to narrate, his voice soft, as if not to wake her:

“Molodaya ryzhaya sobaka...”

“A young, reddish dog...”

In his adaptation of the original story, Kuba takes some liberties with the content of Kashtanka’s dreams, but the narration is often extracted word-for-word from the original text:

“A young, reddish dog — a mix of a dachshund and a yard-dog — very similar in face to a fox, tried to account for herself: how could it have happened, that she got lost? She remembered how she had spent the day, and how she ended up, after all, on that unknown sidewalk.” With that, the pianist shifts abruptly to a bouncy ragtime theme. Assistants wheel the doorway back to upstage right, and Bolat and Kashtanka disappear into the right wing.

The next scene is a flashback of the events leading up to the dog getting lost: the carpenter, dressed all in black and with a black hat, kicks one of the doors open and walks through, turning around to Kashtanka, who barks through the doorway while the spirited music continues to play.

“Kashtanka!” says the carpenter, Kashtanka’s first master, as if surprised to see her. “Well, let’s go,” he assents, waving his arms. She jumps through the door, continuing to bark at her master, jumping on him as he shoos her away. He raises his hand, as if he is about to strike her, but instead looks up at the audience. Luka Aleksandrovich/the carpenter/Kashtanka’s master/Vlad, temporarily takes up narrating, describing himself in the third person:

“The clients of Luka Aleksandrovich lived terribly far, so that, before going to each of them, the carpenter needed to, various times, stop into a pub and fortify himself.”

Vlad “fortifies himself” by drinking glass after glass of clear liquid, handed out by the Assistants, who move the boxes around and shout “cabbage” and “carrots” to create a bazaar atmosphere. Kashtanka begins jumping up on her master again, excited by the chaos of the city streets. Vlad grabs her by the throat and shouts as he chokes her: “If...only...you...croaked..of cholera!”

With the first scene, *Kashtanka* moves the viewer into the world of puppets more slowly than in other puppet shows. Instead of filling the stage with a team of larger-than-life puppets, as they did for their grand reopening, *Kashtanka* begins with a single puppet, a small dog surrounded by a loud and confusing world of humans. As the day progresses in this first scene, the stage becomes increasingly frenzied for Kashtanka. Artists wheel the boxes around, shouting, while Kashtanka continues barking, trying to keep up with her master. The noise only subsides when the carpenter periodically stops at a box to take another drink. His toasts often curse Kashtanka: “You, Kashtanka, are an insect of a creature (*suschestvo nasekomoe*).” He laughs at his own joke. “And nothing more (*I bol'she nichego*)!” His speech increasingly slurs. He pauses after the first syllable of each word, as if he’s forgotten how to finish it, and it becomes more difficult for Kashtanka to keep track of him amid the ruckus. He wanders offstage, and the assistants onstage urge Kashtanka to follow.



Figure 31. *Kashtanka*. Military procession.

The Assistants take black boots from the boxes, put them on their hands, and begin stomping them on the box tops in time with a military song, led by Baqytzhan. The carpenter stumbles out and is startled when he almost runs into the military procession of bodiless boots. Kashtanka barks wildly and tries to march with the boots, but gets in their way, and they begin to kick her. She gets booted off to stage left. The carpenter salutes, then stumbles off to stage right. As the Assistants throw the boots back into the boxes and move them offstage, the music changes from the upbeat march to a murky minor key. Kashtanka reappears onstage, running around and barking in search of her master. The stage is bare except for Kashtanka, who runs around in despair.

Now Kashtanka is back where we started, at the art nouveau door on an unknown street, barking at it for a few seconds, the sad theme playing as Kashtanka's despondency sets in. Bolat, kneeling beside the curled up dog, looks up at the audience and resumes narration:

“When it became totally dark, despair and horror consumed Kashtanka. If she had been human, she probably would have thought —” Here Bolat stands up, and Kashtanka lifts her head, both Bolat and Kashtanka facing the audience: “No, to live like this is impossible! I must shoot myself in the head.” Kashtanka puts her tail to her head and Bolat makes a clicking sound. The audience laughs.

What is Animation? Hiding and Unhiding

From the first scene, the play stood out for the theater — the live musician, the simple sets. Most of the performers wore the same thing: black button-up shirts and pants made of dark denim, wide-legged and with suspenders. Only the two masters and the boy had special costumes. The previous spring, I had spoken with Kuba when they were still working on the adaptation of the short story and doing read-throughs. At that time, he said his main goal for the production was to make the actors less afraid. He wanted them to “stop hiding behind their puppets.” This goal of un-hiding surprised me, in part, because analyses of puppetry often describe puppeteers as shy actors. They are said to hide behind puppets or dummies in order to let these animated objects say and do things they wouldn’t dare.⁵⁷ Like magicians in France (Jones 2011), puppeteers often construe a narrative of a shy youth who uses magic or puppetry as a safe medium through which to interact with people, the socialization into these roles eventually transforming them into confident performers and more confident adults. Puppetry and magic

57. For example, puppet artist Paul Mesner claims, “Many puppeteers are shy,” so the need for attention is unnecessary (2006: 34). Basil Jones, co-founder of the renowned Handspring Puppet Company, in a video for the National Theatre website, describe puppeteers as “shy actors,” the puppets acting as “masks” and “emotional prosthesis” that stands in front of the artist and between them and the audience. <http://www.handspringpuppet.co.za/handspring-people/> In a book about parenting after a divorce, psychologist Joseph Nowinski (2010) suggests that parents might encourage their shy teenagers to take up puppetry, explaining, “As it turns out, many successful puppeteers are shy people. But by speaking through a puppet they are able to overcome their shyness. If they do this long enough, there is a spill-over effect into the social arena” (187). Puppetry serves as a safe, intermediary social space in various therapeutic uses of it.

transform objects by making them appear and disappear or come to life and return to inertness; the process also molds the puppeteer or magician.

The puppeteers I met in Kazakhstan, however, never described shyness as a reason for pursuing puppetry, nor did they see themselves as hiding behind their puppets. Onstage and in day-to-day interactions, the actors seemed far from scared to show themselves. Instead, they described themselves as ultimate performing artists because, they argued, the puppet theater required a wider range of skills than a dramatic theater did. Besides their skills in manipulating the puppets, they pointed out to me, they also had to know how to dance, sometimes to sing, and to act onstage.

Moreover, different puppet shows required actors to be shown or hidden in various ways. When working with rod or hand puppets, controlled from below, the actors were often hidden behind a curtain. This curtain served not only to hide the actors but also provided a ground for the puppets, who would otherwise be floating in the air. With marionettes, such as those in the *Puppet Show* that they revamped for their reopening, the puppeteers wore sparkly white suits, lots of makeup, and smiled at the audience. In their adaptation of *Aladdin's Lamp*, people turned into puppets and vice-versa. Even archival descriptions of the Almaty puppet theater from the 1930s mention a mixture of puppets and human performance (*na zhyvom planu*, “on the live plane”).

When I initially asked puppeteers at the theater about how the process of animation works, they spoke rather matter-of-factly about transposing their “self” into the body of the puppet. The puppet becomes a “second I” (*vtoroi ia*), they said. When the transformation is successfully carried out, said the puppeteers, the audience doesn't look at them. All eyes are on the puppet. Professors and students of puppetry at the two art schools in Almaty corroborated

these accounts. Kleist describes the line of gravity between puppeteer and puppet as “nothing less than *the path of the dancer’s soul*” (1982 [1810]: 212, emphasis in original). For the puppeteers, there is no reason to hide because if they successfully transpose themselves into the “second I” of the puppet, audiences will only regard the puppet and forget all about the human animating it.

In observing the rehearsals leading up to the premiere of *Kashtanka*, however, there was something different about the ways the actors moved from one role to the next onstage. Many of the puppet artists of *Kashtanka* had to constantly transpose themselves into the puppet and withdraw again as they shifted roles, or they had to distribute themselves and multiply into multiple selves. One moment, Bolat voiced Kashtanka’s bark as the puppeteer; the next he regarded her with concern. Altay shifted between acting as a kind of on-stage assistant — bringing food for the animals — and alternately acting as a second puppeteer to the gander, controlling his wings while Maral manipulated the head. Obraztsov often employed techniques of interacting with the puppets as he animated them; the Pulcinella puppeteers do this at the beginning of their shows; and this is of course a staple of ventriloquist-dummy interactions. While interactions between Pulcinella and puppeteers usually serve to frame the drama between the puppets, the interactions between ventriloquists and dummies comprise the act itself. For *Kashtanka*, there is frequent play between narrated and narrating event that often occurs subtly, without words, such as when an actor steps away from a sleeping puppet or regards it with surprise. They sometimes treat the puppet as an already living thing, making invisible the work they are doing to bring to life, even as they call attention to themselves as actors onstage through their expressiveness.

While the puppeteers had described a “second I” as housed squarely in the puppet, Kuba instructed them to treat their own bodies as the “second I.” At times, this boundary work unfolded in explicit ways, as actors approached or detached from the puppets they animated. When they did this, their human bodies became characters interacting with the puppets or with each other. Other times, the two “I’s” were to be thinking about different things and to possess different understandings of the scenes unfolding: In two scenes showing the animals’ morning routines, Kuba urged them to emphasize the internal contrast in Kashtanka’s attitude toward her life there. In the first scene, Kashtanka is enchanted by the gander’s singing and eats rapaciously. In the second, a month later, she is bored and annoyed by it all. The “first I” knew something that the “second I” didn’t — the scene that was coming — and by keeping this in the mind of the “first I,” Kuba told them, they could play up the contrast (see Vakhtangov and Malaev-Babel [2011:22-25] on Vakhtangov’s technique of “affective emotion,” wherein the “spiritual radiation” of a character requires the actor to remember “I am an artist”).

Upon hearing Kuba direct this shift in the placement of the “second I,” I asked him if this meant the puppet was a “third I,” gunning for a Peircian triadic theory of puppetry. But he said no, the puppet was an extension of the “second I.” The body and the puppet, like a violin to a violinist, these were all instruments, he explained. Diderot theorizes the actor’s body as working much like a puppet’s, in that an actor moves the audience through a series of calculated facial expressions and movements of the body. He writes: “his talent depends not, as you think, upon feeling, but upon rendering so exactly the outward signs of feeling, that you fall into the trap” (Diderot 1883: 16 [written in the eighteenth century and published posthumously in 1820]).

Diderot’s paradox – that emotionally moving an audience requires an actor to work in the most calculated manner – influenced Meyerhold, whose biomechanics, and his interest in

puppets as a metaphor for the actor, did not involve an emptying out of the actor's interior, or a treatment of the actor's body as a mere instrument. Rather, he sought to connect as closely as possible the interior process with the most precisely effective movements. This was always part of an effort to see oneself from the audience's point of view (Meyerhold and Braun 1969 [1921-1925]). Lemon explains: "The actor was always to remain aware of her duality as both artist and object of art, and to do this must develop the ability to 'mirror' the self and others. To act while simultaneously seeing the self and the action from the outside—and also to respond to others and to the outside" (2014: 16). Meyerhold saw his theory of theater as empowering the actor, rather than rendering her a conduit for the director's vision: "The actor's art consists in far more than merely acquainting the spectator with the director's conception. The actor will grip the spectator only if he assimilates both the director and the author and then gives himself from the stage" (1969: 51). Directors and other forces behind the scenes create particular relationships with their actors, who are not mere instruments of the director but interpreters, according to Meyerhold's theater "of the straight line," their interpretation mediating the experience that unfolds between the actors and spectators. Selves move through one another, creating a complex movement of energies.⁵⁸

By calling on actors to see themselves from the outside, Meyerhold also highlights the work of the spectator in the realization of the performance. Kuba, in welcoming us to the run-through, emphasized our import as audience members. "If there's no audience, there's no show." Animators and theorists of animation have stressed the work the viewer does in bringing objects

58. Lemon (2013) describes an exercise among Russian acting students in which they must maintain a taut thread between one another, as a way of learning to feel one another, intuitively. For the puppeteers, this need to feel one another becomes especially important when they animate a single puppet together, in which case they say they form a unified "I." Yet they must constantly feel one another onstage, whether they are acting as human characters, animating puppets, or both at the same time.

to life. Teri Silvio defines animation as “the projection of qualities perceived as human—life, power, agency, will, personality, and so on—outside of the self, and into the sensory environment, through acts of creation, perception, and interaction” (2010: 427). This emphasis on projection in some sense moves us away from thinking about the work that puppeteer does in moving the puppet and towards a theory of puppetry in which audiences animate by regarding of the puppet as alive. Even when puppet artists are not so explicitly splitting the roles of puppeteer and puppet, as they are in this production, I have met many who insist that a puppeteer’s focus on the puppet is important. They should look at all times on the puppet, rather than out to the audience. Onstage, humans interacting with the puppets model ideal direction of gaze for the viewer in the audience — toward the puppet.

This is the “trap” they set for the audience, as Diderot describes (above). Gell sees traps as art. He writes: “These devices embody ideas, convey meanings, because a trap, by its very nature, is a transformed representation of its maker, the hunter, and the prey animal, its victim, which among hunting people, is a complex, quintessentially social one” (1996: 29). In working to formulate new ways to engage the audience and to engage with their own work, Kuba and the artists worked to imagine stage and audience in new ways.

Imagining audience engagement by anticipating their work of projection in making a show come to life is not the same as rendering the staging of the show a democratic process. Kuba suggested that he would solicit the feedback, afterwards, of the students, carpenters, and others in attendance. After run-through finished, however, Orazaly approached him immediately. They walked out, discussing the play in hushed tones. The students and puppet makers filed out of the hall after them and went back to their workshops or classes.

Making the “second I” strange

Vlad’s drunken performance always drew laughs. Sometimes he fell down at the sight of the military procession. Sometimes he slapped himself to finish his own sentence. This scene was the most polished, and afterwards Kuba worked through it the least. The second master — played by Baqytzhan, the kind one, the clown — did not have it so easy. In the final days before the premiere, Kuba gave notably more direction to Baqytzhan than to the others — more than he gave to Bolat, who acted both as primary narrator and puppeteer to the title character. I suggest that this attention was in part motivated by the parallel Kuba established between himself and Baqytzhan, treating the actors as “his” like the animals belonged to the character, and because Baqytzhan becomes, in turn, central to Kuba’s project of ending the puppeteers’ hiding.

This moment — of the second master, Baqytzhan, meeting Kashtanka — produced ire in Kuba in rehearsals: Kashtanka is trembling in front of the door. The sad music is playing. The second master steps out in his top hat and fur-collared coat. He nearly steps on the dog, causing her to yelp and to jump back, to the right. Baqytzhan looks off to the left.

Baqytzhan kept looking off to the side, rather than directly at Kashtanka, no matter how many times Kuba told him not to. “The first point of emphasis should be that it’s unexpected,” Kuba explained in the penultimate rehearsal. “And after that, the emphasis should be that you’re in love with her from first sight. And immediately your thoughts go to the perspective that you’re going to make a performance with her. That’s why you name her ‘Aunt’ (*Tëtka*).” Kuba recites the line that comes near the end, in which the second master introduces the dog to the world of the stage as Tëtka. While Kuba explains this, Baqytzhan walks off, ready to repeat his entrance until he gets it right.

Baqytzhan’s voice could be booming at times, but there was a warmth to it. Crouching down, he smiles at Kashtanka, asking if he hurt her, telling her not to get angry as she growls at

him. Kuba urges him to be natural, to put on his gloves as he talks to her. Only now, as he asks where her master is, should he look around. He crouches down, asking what they are to do. Kuba tells Baqytzhan to be thinking it over. The second master happens to have some food in his pocket, which he offers to her. Seeing how eagerly she takes the morsels and how easily she stands on hind legs to beg for more, he decides to take her home. He says to her, “Come with me. Maybe you’ll come in handy.” Walking offstage, he continues to call back to her, “Let’s go!”

Poidëm!

The same word her first master used to call her out of the house that morning compels her to follow this new master to a new house. In this moment of meeting, Kuba will explain to Baqytzhan, he already knows he will be using the dog in his show later, that he will name her Tëtka, even though in following scenes he is still thinking it over. Though it is the first home that Kashtanka will eventually choose, it is the second master who is the hero, in terms of the human roles, his relationship with the animals complicated, as he both cares for them and uses them, whereas Kashtanka’s first master seemed to do neither, but simply permitted her to tag along with him and perhaps occasionally fed her some scraps.

To set the next scene, the doorway moves back. An assistant wheels out a box that is dressed as a table: a white cloth, a decanter of drink, a small glass, dishes, and a napkin, folded to stand up. This second master walks through the doors in a bathrobe and pours himself a drink. He sits down, unfolds the napkin, and tucks it into his robe to cover his chest. Kashtanka enters after him, watching him from across the room. The master begins to eat, then takes one of the dishes — a small bowl of stainless steel — and sets it onto the floor. Kashtanka approaches cautiously at first, but then begins to eat ravenously. This was a point on which Kuba would coach Bolat — that the dog is rapacious when she gets to the bowl. Repeating “rapacious”

(*zhadno zhadno*), he shows Bolat how to animate this, taking the puppet from him. In Kuba's control, Kashtanka inserts her snout into the bowl with enough force to push it around nearly overturning it.

The new master remarks, "All the same he feeds you poorly, your master."

After sleeping in that room and dreaming of her first master, it is morning. Bolat yawns and stretches, then resumes narrations about Kashtanka's impressions upon awakening, alone, in this strange new space. After exploring the room, Kashtanka makes her way through the door and offstage. The doorway is wheeled aside, while Maral and Koralai push large wooden boxes out with their puppets, the gander and the cat, resting on top.

The gander, Ivan Ivanich, awakens first. Maral controls the head and back of the puppet, and Altay manages his wings. The goose wakes the cat, who reluctantly begins to stir, with Koralai's help. The bird and cat preen and lick themselves while Kashtanka makes her way onstage and wanders around. Upon noticing the dog, they abruptly stop their morning grooming routines and crane their necks to follow her movements. She sniffs around the room, oblivious to them. When she finally looks up and notices them on their boxes, there is a pause, as the animals regard one another silently. Then a cacophony of squawking, barking, and rawrrrrring ensues. The master rushes in, yelling, "Quiet! Quiet! To your places!" He reprimands the goose and cat and tells Kashtanka not to be afraid, assuring her that these are "a good public" (*khoroshaia publika*). He asks what they name the dog, then, and sits down on the gander's box to think.



Figure 32. Kashtanka meets Ivan Ivanich and Fyodr Timofeyich.

They rehearse this scene many times, trying to work out the master's way of dealing with each of the animals. In early rehearsals, the master works to quiet all of them, but Kashtanka doesn't understand his commands and continues to bark after the others have quieted. The master continues yelling at her to quiet, but eventually gives up. One day, having rehearsed the scene a couple of times, they are about to move on, when Kuba cuts in, as if just realizing something: "In fact, with Kashtanka you need to scold her *less*." He explains, "Usually you scold your *own* more" (*obychno bol'she rugayesh'sya na svoikh*).

"Da da da da," Baqytzhan agrees.

"And for those you're used to it's already more dangerous, right?"

"Da da da da."

"If some new actors come in," Kuba elaborates, "I'm going to scold them less than you. You I know better. You're mine" (*svoikh*). Some of the actors smile at this, while others are busy

looking at their puppets. *Svoy* is a reflexive, possessive pronoun that indexes a relationship belonging between the grammatical subject and object of a relationship, but it is also used without an object that is possessed to refer broadly to people one thinks of as one's own — or as “our own.” It signals a relationship of closeness.

Here, Kuba describes their relationship as analogous to the relationship in the narrated event in a way that presupposes a relationship of *svoi* — of belonging — between himself and the actors, despite his relative newness to the theater and the novelty of the style they all insist he has brought in his directing. This was the same day when Kuba blew up at the actors, along with other artists, such as Lyuba, who may not have recognized their relationship with Kuba as one of “*svoy*.”

The dog is not yet *svoi* to the actor, but now the new master will bring the dog closer, as he contemplates the name he should give her. The master sits down on one of the boxes, and the gander and cat gather on each side of him. The master looks up to the ceiling, deep in thought; the animals imitate. The gander and the cat whisper suggestions into the master's ear. The master dismisses the former with a shake of his head; the cat's suggestion makes the master laugh and declare, “Fyodr Timofeyich!” He waves his hand. The three resume their upward gaze, while Kashtanka waits. A moment later, Baqytzhan waves his index finger and says, “*Vot schto*” — “That's it! You'll be *Tëtka*. Understand?” he asks, smiling, rising from the table, and leaning down to Kashtanka. “*Tëtka!*” He walks offstage, calling behind him a third time, “*Tëtka!*”

He has renamed Kashtanka “Auntie,” for reasons that become apparent in the final scene at the circus. Kuba insists that even from the very first moment the master sets eyes on the dog, he has an idea to incorporate him into his act and therefore the name *Tëtka* is instrumental to this

plan. All the same, choosing a name that acts as a kinship term — “Auntie” — plays a role in the process of drawing her in, of making her *svoy*.⁵⁹

While the act of naming the dog creates a closeness by establishing an indexical link between Tëtka and her new master, Kuba created an iconic indexical link between himself and Baqytzhan by likening the master-animal relationship to the director-actor relationship. The actors are *svoi* to the director, while the master stands in for the director on the stage. This second master played by Baqytzhan is, moreover, the human character given the most stage time. If Kuba wanted the actors to stop hiding behind their puppets, this would require new orientations and practices surrounding their own bodies and boundaries between selves and others. Kuba struggled to push Baqytzhan away from repetitive or superfluous gestures, to master each scene by emphasizing contrasts between one moment and another.

While the old masters — the carpenter and his son — resorted to violent threats or torturous teasing (Chekhov describes the boy’s habit of putting meat on a string, waiting for the mutt to swallow, and then pulling it out again), the second master’s methods offer a chance at civilization for the animals. Kuba was, himself, a new master with new methods. He often explained to me that his way of directing was one of reasoning with the actors, rather than telling them what to do. He insisted that he saw them as equals who were capable of understanding the process; the actors agreed with this appraisal of his style. They claimed — when talking to me about Kuba when he was absent and when talking with Kuba before a rehearsal — that his approach was completely different from any they had known before. They called this approach “completely new” and “European.” These actors offered no descriptions of the ways previous directors worked with them, but when directed primarily by the assistant director during the

⁵⁹ *Tëtka* is, of course, not only used for kin. The appellation conveys both respect and affection (see Friedrich 1979).

winter, certain artists complained that her way of directing consisted too much of yelling at them and telling them they were bad. Artists working on *Kashtanka* said they felt they were treated with greater respect than ever before.

In the following scenes, *Kashtanka* watches the master work with the gander and cat, along with a sow, Havrona Ivanovna, as they rehearse a series of tricks. The original story of *Kashtanka* is reportedly based on an anecdote the renowned clown Durov recounted to Chekhov, about a time he found a lost dog and took her in. Durov was famous for his animal acts at the beginning of the twentieth century. After the Bolshevik Revolution, he claimed that these tricks could contribute to the building of socialism:

In May 1919, the animal trainer Vladimir Leonidovich Durov also assigned a pedagogical role to the ‘new healthy art of the circus,’ which he claimed would contribute to ‘the urgent enlightenment of the popular masses.’ Durov considered this ‘key to the successful building of socialism, and he attempted to contribute to this project himself by literally transforming the circus ring into a ‘model school.’ (Neirick 2012: 44)

Durov’s shows supposedly served as a pedagogical model. Teaching tricks to animals civilizes these beasts and becomes part of a process to civilize the masses. Chekhov published “*Kashtanka*” 30 years before the Bolshevik Revolution. Like *Petrushka*, the circus was a pre-Revolutionary genre of popular culture that survived through its ideological adaptation for Soviet agendas. In post-Soviet Kazakhstan, Kuba interprets *Kashtanka*’s eventual return to her first master as a rejection, ultimately, of some of the terms of such a relationship between master and trained animal (discussed in Chapter 7). He encouraged the actors to go beyond doing only what they were told and to think about the show when they were offstage and outside the theater.

Kuba highlights the interaction between trainer and trainee as one that creates intimacy, that makes others *svoikh*, over time. The puppet theater’s production of *Kashtanka* and the

emotional intensity that builds in the final days, however, serve as reminders that these pedagogical movements can become intensely personal, as actors and directors get closer to one another. This closeness can bring both comfort and risks, just as Kuba mentions that he is more likely to yell louder at his own people.

Uncanny Puppets

In this production of *Kashtanka*, actors, directors, and objects make one another familiar and strange — through indexical processes of animation and iconic processes of identifying doubles. Puppets and other objects that come to life — automata and robots — very much inspired theories of the uncanny. Theorizations of the uncanny continue to prove productive for scholars considering the ways artists, audiences, and others might feel affinities or antipathies regarding animation of the inanimate. Ernst Jentsch sparked interest in the uncanny in his (1906) essay, which defines the uncanny as a state of “psychical uncertainty.” Jentsch suggests that dolls, automata, and wax figures are especially likely to produce an uncanny effect because they create uncertainty about whether they are alive or dead, animate or inanimate. Nonetheless, the uncanny can occur in a host of situations, and Jentsch notes that the same situation will not be uncanny for everyone. A situation might produce an uncanny sensation for a person in one instance, but not in another. Anthropologists of animation have found Jentsch’s original essay productive for considering relationships between humans and nonhumans, whether these nonhuman others take puppet shapes (Bell 2015, Cappelletto 2011, Gross 2011) or online avatars (Manning 2009, Manning and Gershon 2013).

Freud (1919), unsatisfied with Jentsch’s explanation of psychic uncertainty to define uncanny sensations, goes to great lengths to explore the German word for the uncanny, *unheimlich*, and its relationship to its opposite, *heimlich*, that which is familiar and that which is

to be kept hidden away. The proximity of these two terms, which appear to be opposites but which he reveals to be quite closely connected, leads Freud to see the uncanny as a feeling that arises when we are confronted with something familiar, yet strange. Ultimately, he connects the paradox of the familiar/strange to infantile fantasies and fears that have been long repressed (i.e. castration). Despite its rather unsurprising conclusion, Freud's essay offers more examples of ways the uncanny can arise, including repetition, coincidence, and dismembered limbs. These are useful for drawing out other tensions between the familiar and the strange in puppetry and in the theater more broadly.

Freud offers the example of the double as an uncanny coincidence. The theater is itself a kind of doubling of reality (or of a possible other reality, such as Artaud describes (1958)), a frame parasitic on the "real" that offers viewers the opportunity to observe and perhaps note coincidences between the staged action and their own lives. The puppet, moreover, often acts as a double to a human counterpart. As an iconic index of a person — like dolls, robots, and other objects made in human likenesses — the puppet comes to life at certain points and leaves it at others. In an essay designed to help prevent roboticist from making robots that would alienate consuming publics, Mori (1970) charts the increased affinity that humans supposedly feel as a nonhuman object more closely approximates human likeness — but only to a point. When a robot or other human-like object resembles humans too closely, he argues, there is a sudden drop in humans' feelings of affection toward it. This "uncanny valley" is where we find objects that make humans uncomfortable because they cause humans to question the boundaries between human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate. Jentsch notes that "true art" avoids excessive imitation and, in this way avoids producing such uneasiness, unless that is its goal (1906: 10).

Mori wrote this essay when the humanoid robots against which he warns were only beginning to be designed, and his placement of objects on the uncanny valley came largely from his own reactions to different phenomena. In a recent interview, Mori praised scientific research being done on the uncanny,⁶⁰ but argues that even if scientists track use brainwave activity to track the rise of uncanny sensations, this fails to explain why people experience this eerie feeling at such moments (Kageki 2012).⁶¹ Jentsch and Freud's essays allow for individual variability concerning when the uncanny arises, yet we should expect cultural variation, as well, regarding who or what is familiar or strange to whom. As Goodman (1972) notes, the very recognition of similarity depends upon the perspective of who is classifying two things as similar to one another; anything could, potentially, be familiar, yet strange. The emergence of similarities as relevant to a given perspective requires considering how interactions between subjects and objects unfold.

Discussing puppets with a New York-based artist, he complained that popular culture had made American viewers afraid of puppets. This was something they needed to “get over” or “work through,” because he used puppets and clowns in his theater, targeted at adults. I asked if there was anything intrinsic to puppets that might have acted as both a source of inspiration for him and of fear for others, but he resisted any quick psychological explanation. He insisted instead that horror films featuring puppets and clowns had created this fear and continued to exploit such tropes. I want to take his call seriously in order to consider the intertextual chains and cultural preconditions that shape how or why people classify puppets in various ways.

60. See Epley et al (2007) and Severson et al (2016) for psychologists' work on measuring factors leading adults and children, respectively, to anthropomorphize various nonhuman entities.

61. <http://spectrum.ieee.org/automaton/robotics/humanoids/an-uncanny-mind-masahiro-mori-on-the-uncanny-valley>

In Kazakhstan, I never heard anyone express an aversion to puppets (whereas this has been a common confession Americans and Europeans have made to me when hearing of my research); they more often classified them as a childhood pastime and were rather surprised that I was interested in them as an adult. Puppets find themselves at the interstices of dichotomies beyond familiar/strange and animate/inanimate. In Europe (including Russia and Kazakhstan), puppets waver between high and low culture, at times dismissed as the medium of the masses and best suited for children, and other times lauded as exemplary objects to be utilized or copied in avant-garde theater (Kelly 1990, Shatirishvili and Manning 2012, Shershow 1995). While essays on the uncanny usually focus on the feeling of dread that arises when encountering uncanny phenomena, they can more broadly serve as invitations to examine relationships between the familiar and the strange, to look for moments of psychical uncertainty, and how these emerge.

In considering the uncanniness of puppets, we should keep in mind differences in perspectives of children and adults. Jentsch argues that the uncanny is far more likely to arise among children because there are so many aspects of the world that are a mystery to them. But stuffed animals coming to life is not one of them. The activity of animating an inanimate object is a familiar pastime for many children, including those of Kazakhstan. Puppeteers in Kazakhstan, in fact, described the puppet world as less frightening to children than the real world because of its reduced scale. A man dressed as a wolf would scare a small child, they said (though they included in their repertoire plays in which men dressed as wolves); but a puppet wolf is more obviously not real, and therefore less frightening.

In puppet plays I have seen in Kazakhstan, France, and other countries, very small children might draw back if a puppet approaches them. But they will also, during plays —

especially in small, intimate theaters — try to climb onto the stage during the play and to hold the puppet in their arms after a show. The puppets of *Kashtanka* only approximated their live animal counterparts in certain respects. They looked and felt more like stuffed animals, thanks to the artistic director's choices of fabric and texture. Though roughly the same size as their real-life counterparts, the grey jersey covering of the cat, goose, and pig, and the exposed beige thread used to stitch them together, exposed their constructedness in a muted palate. The dog was ultimately painted brown and then adorned with scant bits of red, orange, and yellow yarn as a kind of shabby fur. She had the oversized, circular eyes of cartoon animals.

Puppeteers in Kazakhstan told me that puppets held special powers over children because children believed the puppets to be real, to be really alive when animated. They think the puppets are magic, they explained to me. As kids get older, the magic wears off. While Kuba originally resisted specifying a recommended age group for *Kashtanka*, saying it could be for children and adults of all ages, he later advised it be seen by children 12 years or older – whether because of the first master's drinking or the gander's death, later on. This pre-adolescent age was, according to many puppeteers, just after the time when children became more skeptical, less ready to see the puppet as alive, and more likely to call it out as some kind of trick. If Kuba was going to engage them, he was going to have to set a different kind of trap.

Embracing Roles and Responsibilities

Kuba told the actors that while they were all taking smoke breaks, he was always thinking, always working, so that work becomes not simply something you perform externally, but rather something you are doing all the time as part of your interior work as an artist. In this way — as with his discussion of the role of the “first I” anticipating the work of the second — he

encourages the actors not only to work differently, but to think about their work differently, to be constantly thinking about future scenes as a way of also reflecting on the present. In discussing his way of working with the actors, Kuba did not simply tell them what to do, but called on them to take more responsibility to consider what they should do, to ask themselves about this on an ongoing basis.

Anthropologists have found discussions of responsibility a useful site for investigating matters of agency as something that emerges from social interactions. Hill and Irvine point out, “The attribution of responsible agency is seen as an interpretive process that is creative, drawing on the symbolic forms taken by the interpreted behavior, its social setting, its cultural matrix, and the motives and knowledge of witnesses (Hill and Irvine 1993: 4, see also Laidlaw 2011 on agency and responsibility). Yet what happens over the course of these rehearsals is a complex distribution of agency that does not always result in agreement regarding where responsibility should be assigned. On the one hand, Kuba’s insistence on artists taking responsibility for their roles involves an expectation that they not be the mere animators of the directors’ commands. Their work in transposing themselves — and Kuba’s transposition of his own perspective onto that of the characters or even of modeling his work process for the artists as if this were something they should follow — engendered a method of working together in which a human body, such as Baqytzhan’s, could easily become at once a “first I” for Baqytzhan and a kind of “second I” for both Kuba and Baqytzhan. At the same time, Kuba seemed at once to impart on the artists — all of the artists, including Lyuba — his own method of working for them, which

they should adapt, and yet expected them to accept him as their master. The belonging implied by incorporating others into one's group of *svoy* did not do away with hierarchy.⁶²

I get nervous watching videos of the rehearsal leading up to the moment Kuba explodes about the pornographic leg. Before Kuba began to get angry about the puppet, when he was more worried about the lights or Baqytzhan's entrance, the dog's foot falls off. It sits in the middle of the stage for a moment. Bolat, Kashtanka's puppeteer, notices it before Kuba does. He puts it into his pocket without saying anything. In the next scene, Kashtanka's feet are all intact. I never found out whether Bolat replaced the foot himself or swapped one dog out for the second Kashtanka, used in the dream sequences. He saved, at that moment, the puppet makers (and me) from Kuba discovering the puppets were falling apart the day before the premiere.

After Kuba's explosion at Lyuba about the dog's leg, he returned with the administrative director, Orazaly, and they called in some of the staff in charge of securing funds for supplies they needed to buy before the premiere. Anuar, the artistic director and a good friend of Kuba's, was there, as well. When Kuba complained about the state of the stage when he had arrived in the morning, Orazaly yelled at Anuar — that he should have taken care of that. Anuar insisted that he was busy with other things. The administrative director said that Putin and Nazarbayev were the busiest men in the world, but they always found the time to do what they needed to do. Anuar said he quit and walked out. At that point, I got nervous and stopped filming. A minute later, deciding this interaction was too good to be missed, I resumed.

Orazaly, apparently unshaken by Anuar's sudden resignation, then yelled at the people who were supposed to have secured the funds for the necessary purchases. They began to blame someone else. He said, "This is what we call 'gypsy telephone.' You have to learn to take

62. See work on Marxist feminism for concerns on power relationships within families, such as Bryson (1979) and Reed (1970).

responsibility for yourself, rather than always blaming others.” He then, more calmly, appealed to everyone to understand their roles and responsibilities and to do those things without being asked.

Vlad was playing the first master (the carpenter), but also working as assistant director. As such, he had been implicated in Orazaly’s account of all who had failed to carry out their responsibilities that morning. In stark contrast to the boisterous drunk he played onstage, Vlad quietly asked if they could take a five-minute break. He said he felt they were all quite shaken by the whole event, and could use a few moments to collect themselves before resuming rehearsal.

The five-minute break turned into an hour, as it often did. Lyuba and the others worked on the dog’s leg. Kuba, the actors, and the pianist returned to the hall to resume rehearsal. Using a signal that I didn’t catch, Kuba and the actors began clearing the furniture to the walls of the room. With invisible brooms, they began sweeping, from the walls toward the center. Once they had all made their way to the center, they pulled together to pick up this large, invisible mass that they had accumulated through their invisible sweeping. Walking together, they carried it out the door of the performance hall, through the foyer, and out of the building. The pianist and I followed behind them, watching. We looked at each other in wonder – eyes large, jaws slightly dropped – as neither of us had seen this behavior at their rehearsals before.

They returned to the hall and stood in a circle. Afraid to intrude on the intimacy of the exercise, but assured, by now, that everyone was calm, I resumed filming. In their silent circle, they looked at one another, smiled, and began, one by one, to hug each other, slowly. Still standing in their circle, the director calmly gave advice to each actor, and the rehearsal resumed. Later, when I interviewed the director, he explained that he was glad about what happened

earlier. It was a necessary part of the process. This whole play, he said, is part of an ongoing process that he hopes will continue long after the premiere.

Conclusion

Not unlike the children at Hope House, *Kashtanka* finds herself in a second home, with a second master, the first appearing as a fantasy or a dream. First and second homes and masters define one another, in an interindexical relationship (Agha 2005, Inoue 2003), the characteristics emerging as *Kashtanka* interacts with each of them. In the narrated event and in the narrating event — the drama onstage and off — we find chains of relationships that resemble masters and pets, between humans and objects and directors and actors (and in nested hierarchies of directors). These relationships sometimes arrange themselves in a fractally recursive manner (Irvine and Gal 2000), with modes of working and styles of staging becoming iconic indices of hierarchies of “European” versus “Soviet.” At other points, trying to map relationships of power as resembling another one can obscure important distinctions. Kuba and Orazaly both gained status from having worked and trained in Russia and cited eminent late Soviet directors as having profoundly influenced their work (Kuba cited Georgii Aleksandrovich Tovstonogov, Iurii Petrovich Liubimov, and Anatolii Aleksandrovich Vasil’ev), so Kuba’s production was not a flat rejection of Soviet-era directing. Arguing that objects have agency can lead to dangerous overgeneralization ignoring the complexity of how they gain agency, through whom, and how this attribution of agency to objects can affect the agency of others. Praising puppets can elevate our esteem of performing objects, but can also threaten to reduce human actors to docile masses of flesh. The assertion can threaten to flatten our consideration of agency altogether, rather than illuminating it. But the process of proliferation of master-pet or puppet-puppeteer relationships enabled other transpositions of self into other bodies, whether we see these transpositions as

enabling others to control others, to animate them, or simply to imagine and thus to understand other points of view.

When *Kashtanka* makes her debut at the circus, the actors mirror the audience as they stand in two rows, facing the audience, looking not at the clown as he takes the stage, but instead staring rather blankly ahead, clapping and laughing in unison. It is the most uncanny moment, as the human forms become strangely mechanical in their uniformity, in the blankness of their stare, and in the way they double the real audience, as if they are watching us or showing us the trancelike way in which we watch, laugh, and clap. Then *Kashtanka* breaks loose and upsets everything. As *Kashtanka* makes her way through the audience of actors, each of them takes turns animating the dog, even as they pretend that she scrambles quickly out of their control, searching for the arms of her first masters, the carpenter and his son, who are calling her by her original name: “*Kashtanka!*”



Figure 33. *Kashtanka*. Faces in the crowd.

In the staging of this play, processes of doubling, distributing agency and assigning responsibility create affinity between persons and objects through transposing self onto or into others. In Chapter 7, I examine this same production to highlight themes of memory, freedom,

and death that emerged as central to the story and the production. The themes that emerged in the narrated and narrating event — in the play and in its production — are key to understanding relationships of belonging and separation that became so crucial to acts of animating, at the puppet theater and at the children's home. These processes give way to relationships of belonging through one another that people use in order to maintain ties in the face of absence.

Chapter 6. You Are A Doll

Zhanel Apay told the children that when the camera was running, they shouldn't say bad things to one another. Out the window of their ground floor classroom/playroom, through the gauzy curtains of dark yellow and a Hello Kitty pattern, snow covered the ground and filled the trees.

There were eight children in the group that day, all around five years old. They dumped a bucket of blocks on the floor. Offscreen noises included Olzhas crying, Maksat demanding blocks, and Maisa whining. In front of the camera, farther back and more difficult to hear, Tamilya and Zhamilya, the twins, played with dolls. Zhamilya's doll was thinner than the other, and consequently looked older, though she was also slightly shorter. Zhamilya herself was the slightly bigger of the twins.

Zhamilya used the blocks to make a long, flat surface and laid her doll flat on its back. Then she made a box with one end open, filled it with smaller, loose pieces, and worked to bury her doll's feet at the bottom of the box, in this way helping the doll to stand up. While she worked at this, Tamilya alternately dropped her doll, propped her up against the kitchen set, and dangled her off the ground by a strand of her hair, like a marionette. She looked at her doll and said, *Sen quyrhsqsyn*. "You are a doll."

Introduction

In this scene, the twins seem to vacillate between treating their dolls as things and as persons. When Zhamilya creates a box to help the doll stand up, it is as if she recognizes, on the one hand, the doll's iconic resemblance to a type that likes to stand up — humans — but on the other hand notes the object's limitations in being able to stand, and thus works to construct a means for supporting this endeavor. When Tamilya tells her doll, "You are a doll," she at once interpellates the object as a doll, as a toy, which is not the same as a person, and yet she treats it as an interlocutor by addressing it. The dolls become a special kind of social object for the twins.

In this chapter, I work through the problems and possibilities that dolls present for thinking through relationships between objects and persons — and between children and adults — at Hope House. These relationships, and the interactions that unfold between human and nonhuman actors, often involve moments of ambiguity that are not simply too messy to figure out but actually offer a kind of strategy of holding together multiple meanings, multiple truths. This ability to hold multiple truths is in fact one of the most important things that playful objects offer, and that children are, in fact, adept at exploiting.

I also started with this scene, in part, because I wanted to start with the twins. They were not the only twins at Hope House⁶³, but the ones I knew the best. Zhanel Apay said they were quite small for their age when they arrived, but had grown quite a lot since then. Tamilya was still the smallest in the group, though they were not the youngest. It wasn't clear if they were fraternal twins who looked quite similar or if they were identical twins who had developed differently. Tamilya, the smaller one, had a longer face. Zhamilya had fuller lips, darker eyes and

63. In fact, the rate of twins placed in Hope House was 17.5%, far higher than the national average of less than 1%. I could find no larger studies or statistics on likelihood of twins to be placed in orphanages, foster care, or put up for adoption, but giving birth to multiple children at once creates additional costs of time, energy, and money for their care, which might explain an increased likelihood for mothers (especially single mothers) of twins to place such children in state care.

eyelashes. Both had long, dark hair, which the teachers always kept in neat braids or ponytails. Zhamilya's was darker and thicker. I never saw Tamilya have any health problems, but when they divided the children according to who had been deemed healthy enough to partake in daily ablutions — running outside in bathing suits and throwing water on themselves, even on snowy winter days — and who would stay in, Zhamilya went out, while Tamilya remained inside, with a couple of others. I had trouble remembering which one was which, at first, but after a couple of days had no problem. I could see who was whom just by looking at their faces, without having to resort to a birthmark or to compare them to one another. New teachers and helpers were the same, though even when they knew them well enough to distinguish them, teachers often referred to them as a unit, calling them “Tamilya-Zhamilya” — with no “and” (*men* in Kazakh) in between — or using their surname to caption them both. They weren't inseparable or indistinguishable, but people treated them as a unit.



Figure 34. Zhamilya offers Maisa a different doll.

Tamilya warmed up to me quickly, insisting on holding my hand when we walked outside or were coming back in. She tended to tarry along the way, stepping in puddles or in the snow. Zhamilya kept her distance, at first. This chapter is about children's attachments to and through dolls, but it is also about the complex relationships that developed between adults and children at this second home. The temporary nature of the home might have discouraged teachers from acknowledging their own attachments to the children, but attachment and affection were inevitable, albeit complex. The children's care for their dolls doesn't function as a perfect icon of parental or teacher relationships to children, but these doll-child interactions nonetheless often create a space for exploring the different ways that people can mean different things to one another, and the ways they can form attachments without necessarily replacing others.

In this chapter, I first show how dolls and other toys act as a special kind of object with agency, and how children move in and out of play frames or work with both frames in mind at once. Because of the semiotics of interactions with dolls and other toys, I argue that the significance of toys emerges through these interactions, which are nonetheless influenced by powerful ideologies surrounding who should play with which toys and how. These ideologies themselves emerge from a number of different concerns surrounding toys, so that toys — and dolls especially — are overshot with morally-loaded significance, ranging from the types of toys that are appropriate to the morality of giving good toys to children, along with how children should treat these objects. These discourses infuse children's objects with meanings that can in some ways illuminate or even anticipate how children will engage with them, but they can also draw attention away from how children ultimately play with toys. My research reveals a range of possibilities in children's interactions with dolls. In the last section, I return to this idea of the two truths that play offers, the two frames. Here, I consider how this ambiguity helps the

children of Hope House engage with adults who are not their mothers, but who nonetheless act as important providers of care.

Objects in Play

One day, Maisa was hanging tinsel on the classroom's little New Year's tree. An adult walked in and told her to sit down and watch television with the others. She sat down and resumed her activity, carefully hanging invisible tinsel on an invisible tree in front of her. Children don't need objects in order to play, but the materiality of objects can shape play, nonetheless. As mentioned in the introduction, Bateson's (1955) "Theory of Play and Fantasy" highlights the paradoxical relationship between a play frame and some other moment or action which it both represents and doesn't, or which both exists and does not exist. That is, when animals play fight, the playful nip refers back to a real bite that doesn't really exist (182). With playful objects, such as dolls, we often recognize them as referring to some kind of real thing — but that real thing may or may not actually exist.

The children at Hope House often play with pretend food, putting plastic fruit into a little plastic coffee maker and stirring it around, pouring it for me into a plastic cup, and telling me that it is tea. Because it is hot, I should blow on it. Other times, they shaped their hands as if holding something and handed it to me, telling me it was *baūyrsaq* (the balls of fried bread I had shared at the puppet theater one day). In the children's play, there are different ways that the physical and imaginary are always in play with one another, whether the remembered real *baūyrsaq* influences the ways children cup their hands or whether I hold an actual plastic cup in my hand and blow on it as if it had actual liquid inside. The toys' materiality sometimes shaped and sometimes got in the way of imaginary activities. When Tamilya saw a doll that looked

especially baby-like, she often immediately voiced the baby's crying, sometimes bringing it over to me to comfort it. When Maisa couldn't get a doll's legs to bend so that they could sit, it was she who started crying, out of frustration. Zhamilya offered her a different doll, but Maisa was too upset to play anymore. Other times, when children play together, one child's imagined actions upsets their playmate so much that children have to move outside of play frames in order to debate or negotiate the terms of their game (Sidnell 2011). This movement in and out of play frame assumes a clear distinction between the two, but these frames get blurred or are allowed to coexist, too, such as when Tamilya talks to her doll as a doll.

Transitional Objects

While this chapter notes ways in which toys and other objects shape or anchor social relations at Hope House, I also treat dolls as a special genre of playful object. The children at Hope House played with a range of things, including "open-ended" toys such as blocks that could be made to resemble something but didn't necessarily resemble anything unto themselves, and iconic toys such as play food, toy cars, and a few toy guns (which were usually kept in a special cabinet and only rarely taken out — most often by the children, in the absence of authoritative adults). Toy cars and toy guns are miniaturized versions of instruments used by humans — the toy versions not working in the same way as the real ones. Dolls, as toy humans, have the potential to represent the children themselves or to represent others with whom the children have social relations. Children might talk to a doll, they might speak through the doll, or they might use a doll as an instrument to hit another child.

Dolls sit at a key intersection between human and nonhuman. In *Art and Agency* (1998), Gell mentions children's play with dolls as a seemingly "trivial" example of a way that objects

become social beings, arguing that these dolls are “truly remarkable objects” because of the importance granted them by small girls (18). On the one hand, Gell’s statement naturalizes and universalizes generalizations about connections between girls and dolls and is based not on any noted observation of girls’ actual play with dolls or studies of children’s dolls (which reveal surprising variation in how different children take them up or engage with them). On the other hand, he helpfully brings together children’s play with dolls and adults’ engagement with art objects. Both involve humans treating nonhuman objects as social beings. He notes particular features that, when added to objects, make them more likely to be treated as such. Namely, the addition of orifices, especially eyes, creates a sense of interiority that enables intersubjectivity and interaction, so that “there is no definitive 'inside', but only a ceaseless passage in and out...it is here, in this traffic to and fro, that the mystery of animation is solved” (148).

Dolls interest Gell for their ability to come to life, to be treated as social beings, inviting intersubjectivity. For others, it is the type of social beings they can become and the ways these objects can anchor or shape other social relations with other humans that becomes key. For example, one day I asked Maisa what her doll’s name was, and she answered that it was named “Meghanne.” It was only Meghanne, as far as I saw, for that day, or for that moment, and probably only became Meghanne as soon as I asked. In my observations, children name their dolls far less often than adults expect (I have seen many other adults in the US and in Kazakhstan ask children what a doll or stuffed animal’s name is, only to receive a puzzled look from the child). However, Maisa’s answer still made me wonder what it might mean in regards to my relationship with her. In this way, dolls can serve not only as an icon for another human (who may or not really exist) but also as a medium for social relations.

The framing of an activity as play places the playful action as somehow real and not real. This ability is key to the development of metacommunication, without which, Bateson argues, human culture would be impossible. In addition to playing an important role in the evolution of human communication, developmental psychologists have argued in different ways about its significance to other aspects of children's social, emotional, and linguistic development. Vygotsky focused on the symbolic function of toys. As physical objects standing in for real things, they become important intermediary points as children develop capacities for symbolic thinking, so that "an object (for example, a stick) becomes a pivot for severing the meaning of horse from a real horse. The child cannot as yet detach thought from object" (1978: 97). The importance of the object as a pivot point between the meaning of horse from the real horse occurs, according to Vygotsky, around preschool age. In this way, Vygotsky contends that children first understand the concrete, the physical, and later come to understand the symbolic. This aligns with Vygotsky's commitment to prioritizing the outside world — the social and material — as shaping the child's self, rather than beginning with the child's interiority, as Western psychologists have tended to do (see Piaget 1926 and Vygotsky 1986). It acts as an embodiment of the metacommunication, "This is play."

While Vygotsky noted toys' function in helping children conceive of a split between object and meaning, British psychologist D. W. Winnicott saw them as enabling understanding of the split between the infant's self and their mother. Winnicott theorized how infants come to recognize and accept reality through the use of "transitional objects" (1971: 3-4). These objects — or parts of objects (a corner of a blanket, a teddy bear, or a doll) — stand in for something else (the breast, or the mother), but are also real, and this is key. For the child, the transitional object specifically acts as something outside inner reality but not as far beyond their control as the

mother. Winnicott is more interested in the intermediary character of the object than the object itself, and in the process of the transition between inner, subjective conception and perception of the outside. This “transition” is never really complete, that adults, too, are constantly negotiating between these worlds. Monuments and other public objects can serve to anchor private grief that can be experienced collectively (Oushakine 2009).

There is, however, a more or less ideal relationship the child should have with the object, for Winnicott: what begins as object relation should lead to object destruction. When the object survives destruction, the child can use the object — a skill which then enables people to learn to use other people productively (Bechdel 2012, Johnson 2008). Hope House offers a complicated context for considering children’s relationships with objects and with mothers, each in their own terms: children have few or no belongings of their own at Hope House, and their mothers are mostly not only beyond their control but exist completely outside their direct experience for weeks to months at a time. There are objects that mothers leave with their children, and to which the children attach special importance, but not all of them have such objects, and while Winnicott’s theory of object destruction seems to assume children will hate the object but not actually destroy it, many of the children’s objects did get destroyed, discarded, or lost.

Not having been trained as a psychologist or having worked with the children in such a capacity, however, I see little use in trying to consider the potential pathologies of children’s relationships to objects or their mothers that results from children’s placement in such a home. I would like, instead, to study how the interactions between social and material conditions within Hope House shape and are shaped by imaginative play with objects and others. Examining children’s play within such an institution offers a way to learn how children within institutional conditions use fantasy to imagine life outside, which enables research on early childhood within

institutions to move beyond constant comparison with never-institutionalized peers (see Chapter 4). Some of what emerges will be specific to the status of the home as a temporary residence for children – so that children at Hope House are perhaps more frequently encouraged to imagine life outside of, and before and after, Hope House. I never spent enough time at more traditional children’s homes to know how they generally addressed issues of who their parents had been and why the children had ended up in a permanent institution, but when I asked at one home how they discussed such issues with the children, a director answered, “We don’t talk about things like that. It’s too sad for the children.”

I invoke Winnicott’s theory of transitional objects and children’s use of them because it calls our attention to the potential for objects to anchor interpersonal relationships. Play, like these objects, stands in an intermediary relationship between inside and outside (Winnicott 1971: 51). Materialized, enacted fantasies enable reality testing that extends beyond mother-child relationships.⁶⁴ Children use play and play objects to relate to caregivers and peers, by interacting with these objects and through them. People at Hope House used objects and other people to fix their hair. For example:

1. Maisa cares for her doll, gently stroking her hair, offering her blocks of food, putting cream on her face and painting her nails and toenails.

2. Zhanel Apay tells Maksat to come over so that she can put a ponytail holder into his hair and he can be a girl. She does the same with Nurlan. They both have hair too short for even the tiniest ponytail. Nurlan especially dislikes this.

3. When the children are supposed to be watching TV, rather than playing: I sit down in front of Zhamilya, who stand in front of me with play scissors. As she styles my bangs and

64. Anthropologists of childhood have taken American psychologists to task for overemphasizing the mother-child dyad as universal (Ochs and Schieffelin 1994).

smooths my hair behind my ears, Maksat and Maisa see what she was doing and come over. Maksat takes a stethoscope from the shelf and trades it with Zhamilya for the play scissors. He cuts my hair from behind while Zhamilya checks my heart. Maisa gives me a shot. Zhamilya announces we will have tea. Other children, unconcerned with my grooming, begin to take toys from the play kitchen area, as well.

Altyn Apay, a helper, walks through the room to the bedroom, carrying clean laundry. As soon as they sense her presence, the kids casually back away from me, hiding their toys behind their backs or setting them down. They stand, rather awkwardly, in front of the television. They wait until Altyn Apay is in the bedroom before they resume playing with the toys, and with me. Maisa touches my front and my back, dressing me in invisible clothes. The boys try to take blocks from the shelf, but I tell them to ask permission from Apay. They run into the bedroom and return, having received the teacher's permission. The children leave me to dump blocks onto the floor.



Figure 35. Spiderman and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle getting ready for bed.

Children dress and undress dolls, feed them, and care for their bodies as if they are human. The teachers and assistants at Hope House do these things as part of their duties caring for the children. When Zhanel Apay “fixes” the boys’ hair against their will, for her own amusement, she plays with them as if they are dolls, an act at once of control — Nurlan frowns to show he doesn’t like it, but he doesn’t swat her hand away because she is a figure of authority — and of affection. She does it to tease the boys, and not as some punishment for an offense. When the children fix my hair, give me shots or put pretend lotion on my face, they treat me at once as an object of their care and as a kind of living doll. They know they are not really cutting my hair or injecting anything into my bloodstream; these are, moreover, actions that they normally carry out not on other adults or even on other children but on the passive dolls. They sometimes test my willingness to act as an object: They sandwich bits of my hair between interlocking blocks, so that they hang around my head, like curlers. They laugh and call for the teachers and helpers to see how ridiculous I am. Sometimes they pull my hair or push the needle into my skin, and I have to tell them it hurts. Occasionally, in doctoring me, they pull at my clothes, and I have to tell them to stop. They know what is allowed and what is not. They suspend certain actions when another adult walks through, and with this they recognize that I am a different kind of adult, one whom they can feel safe treating like a certain kind of doll.



Figure 36. Author getting hair and nails done, along with health check-up.

Oushakine (2009) argues that for the Altay mothers who have lost sons to war, monuments to their sons act to anchor their personal loss in a tangible object. At Hope House, children are constantly coping with a loss that is emphasized as temporary. The adults around them offer care without replacing the first home from which they have been temporarily displaced. Objects can serve as a placeholder for absent others. Children, here, learn to form temporary attachments to objects and to people. I don't want to study their play from a perspective that charts it as healthy or pathological, but rather to see what we can learn from looking at how the children learn to use objects and people in fleeting moments that might eschew stable definition. These objects, nonetheless, serve to anchor children's attachments to present and absent others.

Objects' iconic relationship with other objects or with people get exploited at one moment and overlooked in the next. Play can provide an exploration of affordances of the physical in the name of the fantastic. In Chapter 1, Nurlan took a broken toy and first played it like a musical instrument, then put it up to his eye and mirrored my camera with his own. He established alignment first with his friend Zhamilya, and next with me, through his highlighting

certain points of iconic resemblance between the piece of plastic and the role he made it play in his game. Because it was hard and flat, he could scrape his hand across it as if it were a stringed instrument or slap it as if it were a percussion instrument of some sort; because of the tiny hole in the corner, he could look through it as if looking through a camera lens. In some ways, the breaking of an object opened it up to a wider range of uses.

The dynamism of play and toys lends them to carrying multiple meanings at once. A host of factors influences which ideas, fantasies, or persons they anchor. Ideological regimes can dictate or predict children's play, but there is always room for moving outside those expectations. Whether children comply with or defy adults' expectations in their play with objects, these expectations nonetheless impart play with significance, even when these ideologies narrow our view on the possibilities of play.

Toy Stories: The Social Life of Moral Objects

In this section, I outline some of the ways that dolls become nodes in debates infused with morality regarding which toys are good, and what toys are good for. People treat dolls as moral objects; this power of dolls emerges in different ways: 1) People believe that dolls can shape children's play (and thus shape children). 2) Toys can anchor absent others. 3) The quality of objects can index the status of the relationship, the giver, or the receiver in ways that can strengthen or weaken relationships. 4) Children's treatment of their own toys can act as a proxy for their treatment of others, so that adults will evaluate a child's mistreatment of a toy as comparable to violence against other humans.

Bad Dolls

In the children's classroom/playroom during my first year at Hope House, in one corner near the real kitchen is a play kitchen, with play food, a coffee maker, and a play cash register. On the shelves behind these are dolls, kept in packages, not to be taken out. There are other dolls which are usually lined up along the ledge behind the play kitchen, taken out with the teachers' permission. One day, Maksat holds up a leg that has fallen off a doll, and says to Zhanel, his teacher, "Apay, a leg!" She tells him that dolls are for girls.

Her assertion surprised me because Olzhas, another boy in the group, a few months younger than the other boys, often played with the girls and the dolls. He was sometimes the father, and sometimes the baby.

When children and dolls come together, the iconicity of the doll — its resemblance to humans — often shapes the ways people expect children to play with it and the ways children actually do play with it. There are other toys — such as toy guns — that likewise receive a great deal of attention in regards to their potential for shaping children's attitudes and actions outside the play frame, but dolls are different because they have the possibility to represent the child playing with it. It can become a "second I" in a way that a toy gun cannot.

It is at least in part because of this possibility – that a doll can represent the child who plays with it – that dolls have received a great deal of attention from adults regarding how dolls should look, what they should (or should not) be able to do, and who should be allowed to play with them. It is true that Olzhas sometimes told the girls that they shouldn't play with the cars, but debates about dolls know a particularly entrenched and prolonged history of controversy. On the one hand, the most sustained concerns have been whether "fashion dolls," such as French fashion dolls of the nineteenth century or Barbie in the twentieth, encourage girls to focus on consumption and physical appearance, and whether girls should instead be given baby dolls so

that they will learn to be good mothers (Peers 2004). Such debates assume a number of things — that dolls are for girls, that girls and women must primarily choose between these two roles, that being vain and loving consumption is bad — but also that dolls have the power to dictate to children how they will take them up. That is, people assume that if a girl plays with a doll that looks like a teenager, their pretend play will largely follow “typical” teenager pastimes, such as shopping, flirting with boys, and talking about how “math is hard” (as an early talking Barbie complained). Moreover, people assume that the girls playing with such hyper-feminine objects will then become hyper-feminine teenage subjects. Scholars have highlighted both how dolls are part of larger cultural scripts that children are adept at learning, so that it is not dolls alone that shape how children’s play with them will emerge (Bernstein 2011); they have also shown that children often defy or expected engagements with dolls, marking white Barbies as black by changing their hairstyles (Chin 2001) or engaging Barbie in queer doll relations during play (Rand 1995). Children at Hope House too sometimes articulated certain opinions about who should do what with certain objects, yet they were also ready to ignore such rules.

Adults worry not only about how dolls look, however, but also how they feel and what they can do. These qualities influence dolls’ uptake, as well. In nineteenth-century America, women advocated for dolls that were soft and thus easy for children to pick up and carry, whereas male-dominated doll industries sought to make use of new technologies to create walking, talking dolls. Thomas Edison spent a great deal of time and money working on talking dolls that never succeeded, in part because their hard bodies were cold to the touch and too heavy for little children to pick up (Forman-Brunell 1983). Around this same time, pedagogues at an international toy congress in Russia discussed the dangers of walking, talking dolls and French dolls that encouraged consumption, arguing that the technologically advanced dolls impinged on

children's imaginations, and that the French dolls would encourage girls' vanity (Ellis and Hall 1897, Peers 2004). Such disputes about the types of dolls that are best for children — and for which children — dominated discussions of dolls among parent groups, pedagogues, and academics alike throughout the twentieth century (Kline 1993, Cross 1997, Rogers 1999). In the twenty-first century, new advances in interactive dolls, which link to smartphone apps and store children's responses in the cloud, raise new worries about privacy, along with reviving old objections to the ways the toy's voice impinges on the imagination of the child (Jones 2016, Vlahos 2015). These arguments often ignore not only how children actually play with them, but also how they become part of other relationships outside that of the child and the toy.

Bad Presents

Moreover, these debates often focus on the representational aspects of the dolls, worrying about what kinds of women or girls they most resemble and drawing conclusions based on this about how girls will engage with these dolls or interpret their significance in connection to their understandings of themselves. Another aspect of the potential of toys to be — or do — good or bad, especially from children's perspectives, comes from the materiality of the toys themselves. This is sometimes lost in discussions of children's consumer culture in the late twentieth century. Sociologists, focusing especially on American contexts, highlight the interrelationship between television shows and advertising targeting children with “commoditoys” that always keep children wanting more (Langer 1989, 2002, Kline 1993). According to these analyses, children consume toys in order to buy into a group that is always changing. Such condemnations of the influx child consumerism often assume a number of privileges (of money, time, and childcare) that enable families to choose between engaging in endless fulfillment of children's consumer

demands versus limiting children's exposure to advertising in order to curb their desires (Seiter 1993). That is, in working-class families, mothers often need to rely on television or other electronic devices to occupy children's attention because they are busy.

Such analyses also take for granted that the ephemerality of toys is market-driven, rather than a product of differences in the materials with which certain toys are made or how they are put together. I had owned fake Barbies as a child, and differences in size and shape of bodies sometimes they could not all fit into standard Barbie clothes (e.g. Some, like Barbie's younger sister Skipper, had flat feet and couldn't wear high heels). However, I was unprepared, when shopping for toys in Kazakhstan, for the remarkable difference in quality of the knockoff toys available for children. For New Years my first year in Kazakhstan, I wanted to give the children each a present, some variations of the same thing, so that each child would receive something equal, but unique. Toys at toy stores were too expensive — real Barbies costing upwards of \$50. I went to the bazaar, where I would be able to afford seven toys, along with gifts for the teachers, helpers, and directors. I ended up with four fake Barbies and three toy cars. I don't recall what led me to choosing such gendered gifts; it probably seemed like the easiest choice. Sometimes, the toys from the bazaar came in boxes imitating the boxes of the authentic branded toys, while other times they had English words printed all over that didn't quite make sense or contained spelling errors. The toys I bought came in the most modest packaging of clear plastic bags.

On the last day I visited before the holiday, I handed out the toys, without paying attention to which toys were given to whom (other than my unfortunate adherence to gender stereotyping). I thought that all the cars were the same, but one of them was a police car, which Maksat received. Olzhas, upset with his merely civilian automobile, tried to give back the car I had given to him, demanding that I should give him a police car or nothing. I told him I had no

more cars, and no more money. He took the grey car and tried to play with it, but the bearings on the rear wheels were loose, so he couldn't do the wind-up action that the other cars could. Nurlan didn't complain about being given a plain car, even though the rear wheels kept falling off. The first time this happened, I fixed it for him. The second time, he insisted on doing it himself.

With the dolls, it turned out everyone but Zhamilya had received a small hairbrush with her doll. Instead of asking that I get her a new one, Zhamilya simply complained a few times that she didn't have a brush. She watched me look through the bags to no avail, until she was satisfied that it hadn't somehow fallen out. She went to play with her doll, borrowing others' brushes enough that she didn't seem to mind not having her own. Aynura demanded that I return her doll for another because she didn't like the doll's hair. I took the rubber bands out so that the doll's hair was loose, instead of braided, and Aynura was satisfied. When I did this, I realized the dolls' hair wasn't threaded all over their plastic scalps – as they were for a real Barbie – but had hair just around the edges, so that when they took out these rubber bands, each doll had a large bald spot in the middle.

Zhamilya's doll's leg kept falling off. I kept putting it back on for her, but while the Barbies (and fake Barbies) of my childhood had legs of a solid plastic that could bend, albeit with effort, at the knees, these doll bodies were all made of a soft, hollow plastic. Their joints were fragile. The more I worked to put the leg back into place, the more the doll's butt got misshapen, and the more easily the leg fell out. The dolls talked to one another for a minute, but then Tamilya's went to sleep. Because Zhamilya's couldn't do much, for risk of its leg falling off, soon they were all lying on little shelves in front of the mirror. Maisa played with hers the longest. She sat in front of the vanity, brushing the doll's hair and talking to her about how pretty she was.

Eventually, the kids played with other toys, as well, including the doctor kits. Aynura used the play scissors to cut my fingernails, but then cut off an entire finger. She insisted that I lie down, and others bade me keep my eyes closed because I was supposed to be sick. I was supposed to be watching the whole group, so I quickly said I felt better and sat up.

I wished I had given them nicer toys. On the other hand, the teachers didn't give gifts to the children and didn't make enough money to do that. It would have been awkward to give better gifts. The children already understood there were differences between the teachers, the helpers, and me. The following year, I made the kids capes, each with the first letter of their name on the back. For the first few minutes, they all pretended to fly around the room. Then one of the girls pulled the cape over her head, using it to frame her face, and said, "I'm a grandma" (*men azhemyn*). The other girls all began to do this, as well, speaking in creaky voices and bending over when they walked. This was apparently more fun for them than acting like superheroes. As with the cars and the fake Barbies, I didn't see the capes after I gave them to the kids. Zhamilya thanked me the most for the doll, even though she had received the worst one, and she began to talk to me more often when I visited.

Toys as anchors of absent others

In my first fall (before my New Years gift mishap), after lunch, as I was changing from shoes to slippers before entering the classroom, I heard a sound of contact, like a hand slapping against skin. When I walked in, Tamilya and Zhamilya were both crying, especially Tamilya. A helper, Gulym Apay, a tiny, middle-aged woman with short hair, was with them. They sat and watched a Chinese soap opera on the television. I sat on the floor, behind the children. The children knew they weren't supposed to sit on my lap. They would only do this when no teachers or helpers were in the room with us. Zhanel Apay came in, and Gulym filled her in on what was

happening in the soap opera, hushing the children when they tried to interject. Zhanel Apay directed the children to get out the blocks, and they were allowed to begin playing. Maisa asked if she could get out her doll. When Gulym Apay saw this, she asked Zhanel if it was OK. Zhanel Apay explained that it was Maisa's doll, given to her by her mother.

Volunteers and sponsors often brought stuffed animals and passed one out to each child, as if the stuffed Tigger handed to Nurlan at the end of a sponsor's visit was then destined to become his forever. After visitors left, teachers collected the toys and treats and made decisions about which were for the children's collective play, which would be kept in packages and displayed, and which would be kept in a cupboard and reserved for special gifts. On special occasions, such as New Years, these were the gifts teachers offered me. They also gave children toys from these reserve stocks on the day they went home. The only toys the children possessed were those given to them by visiting family members. Parents varied in how often they visited and what they brought their children when they did. Children were always quick to tell me if their mother or father had given them a toy.

I sat next to Maisa to see how she would play with the doll, a fake Barbie named "Happy Girl," according to the box. Happy Girl's hair was orange. It was a better quality fake Barbie and had come in a box with phrases printed on it that were in English but with strange phrasings that I failed to write down (e.g. "Beauty nice fun time!"). The inside of the box was decorated to look like the interior of a house. Maisa first dressed the doll in a long, orange gown. I asked where she was going. Maisa said she was going to rest. She laid the doll down and covered her face with an orange flower that had also come with the doll. She narrated something to herself, something about, "In the morning." As she changed the doll's dress, I asked what her name was. She said it was "Meghanne." I asked if this was where Happy Girl lived — in the box. Maisa said that she

lived in the house that was pictured on the wall of the box's interior, a little framed picture of a house on the hill that might have been a castle.

After a while, she put the doll away to play with Aynura. They made food with the blocks. Nurlan came over and rang an imaginary doorbell. Maisa corrected him: the doorbell was on the other side. He rang it, she answered it and let him in. Once he was in, however, they paid little attention to him. Tamilya came, and I opened the invisible door for her. She walked up to the girls and said "hello," but Maisa saw that Tamilya held an accessory of Happy Girl's box — a piece of flat, pink plastic that Maisa used to smooth the doll's hair and dresses. She grabbed it from Tamilya's hand and gave it to me, asking me to do something with Happy Girl and her things. I started to put everything back into the box and put it away for her, but it turned out what she wanted was for me to put a stuffed bunny on top of the doll, to protect or conceal her.

The toys given to children by their family members came with special rights and responsibilities. Children could keep them out at times when all other toys needed to be put away, but it was the child's job to take care of them. Maksat's mother gave him a remote control car around this time. When the other toys were put away, Maksat still got to play with his remote control car. Olzhas, who rarely played with Maksat or the other boys, really wanted to play with that car. One day, when Maksat was playing with the car in the playroom, the teacher called him into the bedroom. Olzhas took the opportunity to seize the remote from the table and begin to drive the car around. When an adult caught him and told him to put the remote down, he picked up the car and let it drop violently onto the floor. For his own birthday, Olzhas received a Spiderman and a couple of other action figures from his own mother, the kind with special features like buttons in the back to make parts of the body light up. These features got broken

quickly. But I have video of Olzhas taking his Spiderman and putting it into his own big bed, resting the superhero's head on a pillow made of blocks.

Other gifts from parents disappeared almost instantly. One day, when I arrived, I found the twins with their mother in the foyer. This was where parents visiting their children usually hung out. It was the first time I had seen the twins' mother. The girls had mentioned to me that she worked during the week and sometimes came on Saturdays. Altyn Apay, a helper, was with the other kids. Olzhas was crying, saying he wanted his mom. His face was buried in the carpet. When I asked how they were, Maksat said he wasn't good. He nodded toward Olzhas and added that he wasn't good, either. When Zhanel Apay came in, she went over to Olzhas to find out what was the matter. She led him to the table and got out a Spiderman coloring book/sticker book and some colored pencils. She directed the other kids to get out the blocks and puzzles. Maisa got out her Happy Girl. They left the TV on but started to play.

At first, only Olzhas had sticker access. Maksat and Nurlan asked him for some, which they put on the backs of their hands. The stickers gave Nurlan the power to cast webs and turn cartwheels. He did several, sometimes wheeling into the blocks, almost tumbling into the other children, before Zhanel Apay noticed him and told him to stop. Olzhas called me over and gave me stickers. Aynura got one, too. Then Olzhas decided she shouldn't be Spiderman because she was a girl and was supposed to be a princess. He eventually rescinded the stickers he had given to me, as well.

Tamilya and Zhamilya came in with an apple that their mother had given them. They asked Altyn Apay to cut it in half so that they could share it, then they went back out to their mother. After their visit had ended and their mother had left, they returned to the room with a bunch of coupons, which they shared with the other kids. Maisa was especially keen on getting

some. She smiled, looked at them, and called them “money.” Altyn Apay said, “Let me see those.” She took them from Maisa and examined them. Altyn Apay was around 60 years old, with a baby grandson whose picture she liked to show me on her phone, and a son who worked as a guard and repairman at the home. She moved a bit slowly, and was the only helper who didn’t mind letting me lend a hand with cleaning chores when the children were in music class. Showing her gold teeth as she smiled, she explained to Maisa that this money was bad. From around her neck, she took a small purse, and from it she took a 500-tenge bill (the equivalent of about \$3.50 at that time). She said, “This is money. This money (meaning the coupons) is no good.” She looked around to see who else had the coupons and took them away, as well. The twins protested that their mother had given the coupons to them, but Altyn Apay threw them into the trash, explaining that it wasn’t real money. No one seemed to care much, except of Maisa, who started to cry. I looked for something to distract her. I noticed that Happy Girl’s shoe was missing. I found it and said, “Whose shoe is this?” Maisa replaced the doll’s shoe.

I didn’t understand why it mattered to Altyn Apay that the coupons weren’t real money. Little in the room was “real,” from the automatic weapons the children made from blocks to the dolls they treated as babies. Altyn Apay might have been worried that fake money and real money would be particularly difficult for the children to distinguish, as both are simply pieces of paper (though Kazakhstan often wins prizes for having especially beautiful paper currency). People in Kazakhstan often worry that orphanage children understand very little about how the world works outside institutions, a problem that becomes especially grave once they are supposed to be responsible for their own finances when they age out. But at five years old, their peers growing up in family homes are unlikely to be savvier in managing money. Most likely, Altyn Apay simply saw these bits of paper as a mess that she would eventually have to clean up.

For some time, until I revisited my notes from that day, I remembered it wrong. I remembered the twins crying. It made more sense to me, because the coupons were from their mother. Other children's visits from parents often yielded new toys, such as Maisa's Happy Girl. The twins' gifts from their mother were more often fruit, along with, sometimes, a packet of crackers to share with the other children. The gifts of food would be consumed and then disappear.⁶⁵ True, the toys the children received from their families often got broken faster than the communal toys, but the food gifts were the most ephemeral. The twins could have kept the coupons in their pockets or their cubbies and held onto them longer. But they shared them with the other children, and then it was Maisa who cried. The fantasy was important to her. She most often talked to invisible interlocutors, and she most often cried. The twins had shorter attention spans. They could accept the loss of one game and move on to another one more quickly. Perhaps, too, they had been happy to see their mother, and perhaps having one another helped them manage the loss of these papers that invited a fantasy and had come from their mother.

When the teachers gave children (and me) toys to take home and when parents left toys for the children, these gifts acted as a tangible index to social relations threatened by those who are coming and going. Whenever they gave me things and wanted to insist I take them, the teachers would repeat, "*Na pamiat', na pamiat'*" – "For memory, for memory." For the children, these gifts find themselves not in a complex system of exchange, as in the *kula* (Malinowski 1961, Mauss 1954), nor are they precious heirlooms that must be kept in the family and are therefore handed down, generation by generation (Weiner 1992). Parents give objects to their children and leave. Children then lose these objects, or the objects break. And the children have little to offer in return to their parents, except for their occasional performances for parents on

65. The entrance to the group listed foods that parents could and could not bring – no candies, no fruits or vegetables, no juices or sodas – but teachers generally permitted fruit, crackers, and cookies.

holidays, if the parents manage to visit. But these small gifts, performances, and other tokens act as a reminder of the promise that the parents will return to the children, and that the children will return to stay with the parents.

Toys and children serving one another

While debates over toys tend to stress adults' (parents' and manufacturers') responsibilities toward children in managing the types of toys they should be given, adults charge children with certain responsibilities for caring for their toys, suggesting not only that toys can feel, but also that they have secret relationships — friendly or antagonistic — with one another. One day, I was filming a lesson taught by Saltanat Apay, in my second fall there. It was the morning when I was just realizing that Nurlan was missing and not coming back (chapter 4). The first lessons focused on letters and writing. She explained the difference between a word and a sentence. When asking for examples, she explained to the children that they needed to think faster.

Then Saltanat put up a new picture and asked what the children saw. “Toys,” they answered. She had their attention.

“Who plays with toys?” she asked.

“Children,” they answered.

“What kind of toys do you know?” she asked.

They had no problem, now, coming up with answers quickly, especially as Saltanat Apay took toys from the table behind her and placed them on the table in front of her. “Ball,” they offered. “Bear, doll, car, ball, computer.”

As she placed them on the table where Aynura and Yerlan sat, the small, orange and yellow teddy bear fell to the ground. Zhamilya hurried to pick it up and hand it to Saltanat Apay. When it looked like Saltanat Apay had finished moving toys from the back table to the front one, Zhamilya said, “Apay, we need the ball, too.”

Saltanat Apay looked at her, making her eyes bigger and moving her lips, but I couldn’t hear what she was saying. Zhamilya lowered her eyes and smoothed her hair behind her ear with her hand.

“Apay,” said Yerlan, apparently wanting to say something, but he stopped himself and waited for the lesson to continue.

Saltanat asked the children to identify all of the objects, and they did. These were objects they’d probably been able to identify correctly for several years already. Next, she told them the material each one was made of, and then she asked what their favorite toys were. Bekzhan, who often had trouble following lessons, shouted across the room that he liked the ball.

Saltanat Apay continued the lesson. “Now children, look, what do all children do with toys?”

“They love toys,” the children answered.

Apay didn’t deny this, but she added, “All children break toys.”

“They get taken outside,” the children added. Often, broken toys became outdoor toys, kept in the shelves of their outdoor playhouse.

“Now,” Apay continued, “these toys, amongst themselves, at night when you’re sleeping in the bedroom, they talk to one another. When you go off to sleep, they talk to each other. For example, this toy got broken.” She walks over to the side and brings back a car with a broken window. “Let’s say this car... You go to sleep in the bedroom, it’s quiet there, and then they start

to talk. You've seen toys like this in cartoons. You know, right? They all, when the kids come, sit still, they lie like that, but when you go off to sleep, they shake off their lifelessness, they turn to one another—”

“They talk,” the children offered.

“So this car is talking to this one, mocking it.” On the table, the yellow car and the red car faced one another. She poked the red car, the one with the broken window. ““Ey, red car, look at your window. It's broken. That Bekzhan doesn't like you. That's why your car is broken.’ That's what the yellow car says to the red car, making fun of it.”

Her voice got loud. “For example, if your nose is running you make fun of one another about your appearance, right?”

“Yes,” the class confirmed.

“Toys are like that, too,” Apay explained.

“It's bad,” Aynura observed, smiling.

“Toys are like that! Like, you dress badly, in those clothes, you make fun of each other, right? That's what toys do, too! So then what does every child need to do correctly to every toy? It's necessary to love it.”

According to Saltanat's lesson, the toys cannot be relied upon to love one another, and weakness leaves them vulnerable to attack from their peers. She naturalizes tendencies of peers to pick on one another for their faults, rather than agreeing with Aynura that it's bad for them to make fun of one another. Because toys are, in this way, vulnerable to one another's criticism, it is up to the children to love the toys by not damaging them. Saltanat draws parallels between the children and the toys as susceptible to being made fun of for their faults — implying that the

children, like the toys, require a certain amount of care. However, she doesn't specify who might be responsible for ensuring that the children don't get broken.

Saltanat Apay opened the book she had been holding in her hand and began reading aloud the story that had served as a pretext for this discussion of toy care. In the story, the toys did not make fun of one another, but fought over whom their owner, Sania, loved most. A dove intervened and asked each one, "Who among you really loves Sania?" All of the toys assured the dove that they loved the girl who owned them. Saltanat broke from the narrated event to assure the children that if she asked the classroom toys which of them loved the children, they would all answer, "Me! Me! Me!" as well. The dove in the story then warned the toys that they needed to help Sania, or they risked getting thrown away or donated to someone else. The dove reminded the toys that Sania couldn't possibly play with all the toys at the same time. The toys stopped fighting, and this was the end of the story.

Saltanat Apay didn't dwell on the dove's threat that useless toys would be thrown out or given away. At Hope House, children were the recipients of donations, and as they outgrew certain toys in their classroom, it was the children who left — moving from one group to another — while the toys stayed behind, to be played with by the next children, or taken outside, if they got broken. The book's story places the responsibility on the toys to make themselves useful — and therefore lovable — or they risked obsolescence, but Saltanat Apay again reminded the children of their responsibility to love the toys properly. She asked the students if they had a lot of time to play with toys. They answered, "A lot."

"You don't have a lot of time," she corrected them, then reminded them of all the other obligations they had during the day — lessons, music, mealtime. "What do you need to do to toys?" she asked. "This one, should you break the window, should you throw it out?"

“We shouldn’t,” the children answered.

She took a babydoll, one with a huge head who wore a hat, which the children sometimes liked to put on their own heads as a joke. Removing the hat, she asked, “This hat, should we throw it around?”

The children agreed that they should not.

“Wearing this cap, it’s pretty,” she showed them, then took it off again.

“But how is it now, with the hat gone?”

“Bad,” said the children.”

“It doesn’t have hair. But wearing the hat it looks nice, right?”

In consideration of toys in the classroom and those in Sania’s playroom, there is no mention of the toys’ origins, whether they are donations from a charity or gifts for Sania’s birthday from her parents, and thus no indexical tie between these objects and other persons. The social relation is purely between the children and the objects. In Saltanat’s story about the classroom toys, the children need to love these toys by not damaging them. In the one she reads, the toys must love Sania by being useful to her.

In both stories, the time constraints on toys is an everyday time. Sania cannot play with all of her toys at once; they must await their turn. The children cannot play with their toys all the time. This differs from other narratives about the lifespan of toys, including Winnicott’s anticipation of transitional objects gradually losing their importance and getting forgotten, in which childhood itself is fragile because of its temporary nature. This is an important difference between children and toys. The child changes; the toy does not, or should not. The child should grow, while the toy can only decay. The stable iconicity of the toy in the face of a shift in its use can make it a potent symbol of nostalgia for lost childhood. This was what the director of the

puppet theater anticipated in his dream of making the puppet theater a site of recuperating that childhood. Childhood is supposed to be ephemeral, whereas toys' decay is a kind of tragic abuse. According to Altanat Apay, to love toys is to protect them. She appeals to the children to show kindness to the toys out of pity for their vulnerability.

On Not getting attached

Eventually, the children at Hope House age out and go home, while the teachers stay behind. Children's attachments to adults are no less complex than their precarious possession of objects, both in regards to the frequently changing adult caregivers at Hope House and in relation to their parents. On the day I heard what sounded like a slap, and then found Tamilya and Zhamilya crying, I debated going to the director to tell her I suspected Gulym Apay of hitting the children, but I shrank from the discomfort of making an accusation when I had seen nothing, definitively. I had only heard. Perhaps Tamilya and Zhamilya had been fighting with each other, but this wasn't what it looked like. I considered whether I should talk to one of the teachers, rather than the director, or if I might try to gather more evidence and then talk to someone. Time passed, and I eventually realized the helper had left the children's home. Because the helpers rotated every three days, and sometimes got moved to different groups, and because I was there four days a week but not on an entirely consistent schedule myself, it was hard to keep track of the helpers' rotations. I thought it was only coincidence that I didn't see her. It was some time before I was convinced she was not working there anymore.

Psychologists studying the effects of institutional (orphanage) rearing have frequently looked at children's attachment styles after institutionalization and the long-term affects of

institutionalization on their relationships with others, such as Goldfarb's early, influential study of children who spent their first years in extreme deprivation. While the cognitive disabilities were the most profound effect, she also saw the children as socially and emotionally impaired: "...although indiscriminatingly and insatiably demanding of affection, they had no genuine attachments. They were incapable of reciprocating tender feeling, and their meager love potential was associated with the absence of normal tension in situations which would ordinarily arouse such tension" (1955: 108-111). Goldfarb's work on the topic was influential in shaping not only policies surrounding institutionalization but also in theories of attachment in psychology (Bowlby 1966). Anthropologists have questioned some of the universal claims posed by theorists of attachment (Adams 2013, Harwood et al. 1997), but for researchers of orphanage rearing, children's attachments to adults (or lack thereof) in post-institutional settings (such as international adoption) have continued to function as an important index of the damage done by institutionalizations. Often these studies focus on the results of institutionalization, such as Rutter et al. (2007), which characterizes children's readiness to accept new adults as "disinhibited attachment," rather than Goldfarb's earlier description of children's "meager love potential."

A rare study of children's relationships with adults while still living in an orphanage — and an experiment in modifying and improving these relationships — suggests that children benefit from both qualitative and quantitative changes in caregiving staff. A team of psychologists trained caregivers to be more attentive and child-oriented. They also modified the rotation of staff so that children interacted with fewer caregivers on a weekly basis and over the course of the two years of the study (St Petersburg-USA Orphanage Research Team 2008). While other interventions work to move away from institutional models entirely (Nelson et al 2014), the authors of the St Petersburg study argue that global events such as war and famine

will continue to necessitate group care, so it is worth finding ways to provide better care for children under such conditions.

Hope House offered a more intimate child: adult ratio than many larger orphanages, and the teachers stayed with groups fairly consistently. However, the rotation of helpers meant that children found themselves regularly cared for by a number of different adults each week.

Although their setting was far from the overcrowded orphanages more commonly studied, the children still had to learn to navigate a complex social field of adult caregivers. One of the symptoms of post-institutional children's disinhibited attachment is an "indiscriminate friendliness" (Tizard 1978). At Hope House, children regularly came into contact with visitors for whom they were expected to perform, and who might pick them up for a photograph and put them back down. The children became used to this. Their relationships with adult employees at the home were far from the dyadic mother-child bond emphasized in attachment theory.

Nonetheless, they sought out and gave affection to certain adults over others. They discriminated in regards to their attachment, but still had to show a certain amount of flexibility and resilience.

The system of multiple caregivers helped ensure that the children were not, at least, left with any caregiver I suspected of being less than ideal for a prolonged period of time. But children also had their favorites. Maksat, for example, doted on Zhanel Apay, the first teacher of their group I met there. On my first day, in the fall, she confided in me that she was pregnant, but not showing yet. Some of the teachers knew, but not the children. As the winter wore on and she began to show, she often spoke with me, in Russian, about feeling sick or tired, or needing to pee all the time. Maksat often insisted on holding Zhanel's hand when they walked from one place to another. He would hug her, whether she was sitting in one of the low chairs or standing up, so that he only reached her waist. Zhanel Apay sometimes accepted Maksat's affections, but other

times shook him away. When she was quite obviously showing, she told me how surprised she was that Maksat had pointed to her belly and asked her if there was a baby inside. She wondered how he could have known, since she still had said nothing directly to any of the children about it. I guessed it was because he spoke Russian the best in the group, and she supposed that explained it.

One day, a couple of months before Zhanel was due, it was her last day at Hope House. This was when the children finally were told she was leaving. She planned to take two years of leave. The children in the group were in their penultimate year, which meant they would all leave before her return. That afternoon, she had tea with the other teachers in the bedroom, while the children played in the classroom. There was not, as far as I could tell, any kind of ceremony for her saying goodbye to the children. She said she would come to visit, but I never saw or heard of her visiting. She ended up taking another job.

She was replaced first by Saltanat, then, in the spring, by a new teacher, who had just finished her degree. The new teacher couldn't tell the twins apart, and the children tended not to obey her. By the following fall, when I returned after a few weeks' summer absence, the new teacher had been moved to work with some younger children, and Saltanat was working with my group permanently, along with Aygul Apay.

Being a toy

One day — the day the children were cutting my hair, but then pretended to watch TV when another adult walked through — Tamilya took the babydoll with the large head, whom she voiced at a higher pitch than her own, already quite high. Olzhas announced that he would be the doll's papa. Tamilya brought the baby over to him, and he held the baby. The blue hat continued

to fall off the doll's head. Olzhas regarded the doll and declared it a beautiful baby (*ademi bope*). On the television, a DVD of the late Soviet animation *Nu Pogodi* was playing – Wolf chasing Rabbit. Tamilya regained control of the doll, voicing a high-pitched squawk. She hit the doll's head and gave it to me to rub, asking, “What is it? (*Ne boldy*)” Tamilya held the doll so that it could scoot away.

Olzhas looked up at me, I smiled at him, and he laughed for a long time. I smiled and asked, “What is it?”

He laughed again and said, “You're a really funny person.” (*Khyzykh adami syz ghoi*)

“I'm funny?” I asked. Olzhas turned back to the television to laugh at a snake in the cartoon, and I got up to play with Tamilya and her doll.

The children's concentration shifted back and forth between the imaginary worlds they created with their toys and those they watched onscreen. At one point, the show grabbed all the children's attention: something frightening was happening onscreen. They froze as they watched for a moment, until the character — the wolf or the bunny — was only sleeping. The children sighed in relief and went back to playing.

The children's ability to recognize primary frameworks (Goffman 1974) included an ability to distinguish between different kinds of adults and their authority over them, whether they showed this by ignoring a new teacher's commands or by backing away from the toys, and me, when another adult entered. In my own relationship with them, I was a funny person. I was there to observe their “naturally occurring” play, which in theory meant directing none of their activities, with minimal participation. In reviewing the videos from their play, I see that I put myself in the midst of them so that I could understand what was happening better, in part by knowing the children better than if I had only ever observed footage of them. Even if I was not

much of an authority figure, I did interfere, however, more than I realized at the time. In one instance, I asked Aynura what it was she had made with the blocks and she replied, “I don’t know. An automatic weapon (*avtomat*).” Because she seemed unconvinced, I pushed my own agenda — social objects — and suggested it looked like a robot. She began to animate it as a robot, and it danced with Maisa’s Happy Girl. I did this, in part, to cheer up Maisa on the day her fake money had been taken away, but it also pushed Aynura’s play in a certain direction.

Teachers or mothers

In the last scene I examine in this chapter, I also meddle, asking questions when I should leave things alone, but the inappropriateness of my questions helps reveal certain assumptions I carry when I watch the children’s play.

On a beautiful day in May, just a few days before I am to leave Kazakhstan for the end of my fieldwork, a boy stands at the threshold of the playhouse, holding up a bag of toys he’s pretending to sell. They get snatched away by another boy, making him scream and cry. Both have to sit in the playhouse for a few minutes to calm down. Later, they play together with broken cars, especially interested in their batteries.

Another group of boys make food in hollowed-out shells of toy cars, conflating the play with the real by eating the grass they have been so carefully stirring with sticks. Two girls, Toghzhan and Naziliya, who don’t know each other well because Toghzhan has just joined this group from another, have been regarding one another slowly. Naziliya wants Toghzhan’s fake Barbie, to whom Toghzhan has been administering medicine. Naziliya acquires a My Little Pony. I suggest that the pony might have some relationship with the doll.

Later, the two girls sit, side by side, at the bottom of the slide. Children in Kazakhstan are to cover their heads outside, year-round, but Toghzhan and Naziliya have taken off their floppy, round spring hats and have placed them in their laps. Toghzhan lays her fake Barbie on top of her cap. Naziliya makes her hat into a hammock, where she places her My Little Pony inside, pinching the hat at the top. They rock their dolls back and forth, the pony nestled inside, the Barbie perched atop her cap cradle. The girls sing a lullaby together.



Figure 37. Girls rock babies to sleep.

Having rocked their babies to sleep, the girls stand up and set their dolls down at the foot of the slide. Toghzhan begins to walk away. Naziliya puts her foot higher up on the slide, grabbing onto it, as if to scale up. Toghzhan, in the fierce whisper one uses in the presence of a sleeping child, warns her not to. Naziliya pays no heed. Holding onto the slide, she works to shift her weight from her left foot, on the ground, to the right one, on the slide. She loses her balance and falls to the ground, knocking her hat and horse off the slide in the process.

Naziliya quickly jumps to her feet, smiling sheepishly, and dusts herself off. Aynura, having seen this from where she is sweeping a few feet away, climbs onto the slide and imitates Naziliya's fall, laughing. Naziliya corrects her, reenacting her loss of footing more accurately. Aynura returns to her sweeping, and only then does Naziliya replace her My Little Pony at the bottom of the slide. Unfazed, she tries again to scale the slide, this time without knocking anything or anyone to the ground.

The girls go to another part of the playground equipment and run their hands over it, tapping the bars. I ask them what they are doing. Naziliya says they're doing work. Toghzhan announces it is 2:30, and they run back to their dolls.

The scheduling reminds me of Hope House's routine, along with the fact that they were doing work while the children were sleeping. "Are you teachers?" I ask.

Naziliya explains that Toghzhan is a teacher (*tarbieshiler* — "caregivers," the term for teachers at a children's home or kindergarten), while she is a helper (*kumekshi*).

Toghzhan — younger by a few months but clearly in charge of the game — corrects her. "We're both mothers!" Naziliya wastes no time in making this adjustment. She points back at Kaiser, who sits on a low wall behind them and who has been trying to join their game for some time, with little success, until now, as Naziliya adds, "And he's the father."

In a whisper, I begin to ask if this is a home or a children's home, but I stop myself and let them return to their play. The girls "paint" their dolls, taking small twigs, dipping them into a container, and tracing the lines of the dolls' faces. They use the Kazakh verb *boiau*, meaning "to color" or "to paint" with the Russian noun *kraska*, or "paint."⁶⁶ My research assistant insists that

66. The girls are likely unaware of the latter word being Russian, as it was a common borrowing in Kazakh, and they declined it as a Kazakh noun. Some children, such as Maksat, knew more Russian than others, while it seemed to me that Maisa and Nurlan especially began experimenting with using Russian more just before they went home to

when they say they are painting the dolls, they are saying that they are putting makeup on them, even though I always heard the puppet artists use other terms — *grym* (for stage makeup) or *kosmetika* (for everyday cosmetics). Either way, their way of making up their dolls, of painting them, extends beyond their faces, as they trace the lines of the doll and pony bodies.

The girls announce their dolls' ages to one another. First, Naziliya says hers (the pony) is five and a half. Toghzhan says hers (the fake Barbie) is six and a half. Naziliya adjusts her pony's age to six and a half, as well. The babies, who have been rocked, laid down for a nap, and fed, are slightly older than the girls themselves are at present. They are the same age as Aynura, the oldest girl in the group, yet they wear makeup to go to the children's park.

There are many different ways one can care for another, for a toy or for a child. You can be careful not to break them. You can give them medicine, fix their hair, or paint them with makeup. You can feed them. The girls feed their dolls the same stuff the boys fed themselves and me earlier. Toghzhan gathers grass, while Naziliya chooses leaves for her horse. Toghzhan has, at this point, two mouths to feed. Yerlan has given her a stuffed mouse, as well. She sets both on the slide and, standing in front of them, leans over, puts grass up to their mouths, and then throws the grass away behind her. Naziliya crouches in the grass next to the slide and offers leaves to her pony. Every so often, she disposes of the already eaten leaves by hiding them underneath the slide.

Kaiser — the babies' father — comes over with the bag of toys on his back (the one that he and another boy had tussled over earlier) and a ball in his hand. Toghzhan warns him, “*Tigizbe! Tigizbe!*” — “Don't touch! Don't touch!” She shoos him away from the dolls. She climbs on the equipment for a minute and comes back. Kaiser stands over the dolls, looking

their mothers. It seemed as if they were practicing this code to use on the outside, but I don't have enough data to confirm this.

down at them. Toghzhan takes a cloth from her pocket to wipe her doll's face. Kaiser pats the doll's face after Toghzhan. Toghzhan sits down again with her doll, and Kaiser attempts to sit next to her, but she moves and commands Naziliya to sit down with her so that there is no room for him. He tries to squeeze in anyway, but she tells him to sit over there, pointing somewhere outside the frame of my camera. She tells him the bag of toys he possesses are for the babies. When the girls again put their dolls to sleep, Toghzhan puts her finger to her lips, leaning over, in a raspy whisper, shushing Kaiser, "*Tynysh! Tynysh!*" He is not saying anything.

The girls go to gather more food for their babies, Toghzhan calling on Yerlan to look after them. He wraps the dolls in their hats but quickly gets distracted by Kaiser, who stands on a horizontal beam of the playground equipment. Yerlan acts as if he will throw the ball he holds at Kaiser, but Kaiser first lowers himself to the ground, grabs the bag of toys that were supposed to be for his babies, and runs off. Yerlan goes to chase after him, but first reaches to steal Naziliya's pony and hat. She grabs it from his hands, yelling "Apay!" He gives up and runs off.

Later, my research assistant remarked that it was impressive to watch the children. She was impressed with the girls for knowing all the words to the lullaby, and to see Toghzhan, in particular, acting as if she really was the mother of her doll — Toghzhan who guarded her doll fiercely, warding off noises that might wake her when sleeping and who demanded gifts of toys for the children from their papa.

Holding two truths

There is ambiguity in the girls' play, and ambiguity in the home itself. Woolard (1998) introduces simultaneity and bivalency in her consideration of particular instances of bilingual talk, in which words or stretches of talk could "belong" to one code or another, instances she

describes as “unresolved copresences” (6, see also Urciuoli 1996). At Hope House, in everyday life and in play, as they juggle multiple frames, roles, or figures — first and second home, teacher and mother, person and object — the children sometimes show an ability to hold these multiple frames together and to play with the very ambiguity that comes up around them. These copresences of imaginary worlds and material worlds, the seeming conflation of roles or worlds, at first present problems for analysis, but they might also act as a kind of semiotic strategy of ambiguity or a kind of bivalency, keeping play worlds open to multiple truths for the children engaged in them.

Neither my assistant nor the girls had any problem with the fact that the dolls being cared for as babies were, in fact, made and marketed as icons of a pony and a teenager. The girls engaged with certain properties of the dolls’ iconicity — they chose to sing to these objects, after all, and not the sticks they used as paintbrushes or the ball that Yerlan threw at Kaiser — and ignored others. And yet, unlike my research assistant’s assertion that Toghzhan treated her doll as if she was the “real” mother, Toghzhan and Naziliya found no need to assert themselves as mothers or as others – until I asked. It was possible that before I asked them if they were teachers or mothers, Naziliya had one scenario in mind, and Toghzhan had another. The two stories had had no problem coexisting as they played⁶⁷. I might have asked them to define roles that they were quite comfortable keeping murky. The line of questioning assumed they held the same understanding I did of distinctions between mother and caregiver, and between Hope House and family home. The girls, like the other children, were placed in the home young enough that most of their memories of their first years were always fading, and would mostly be lost. The “first home,” with mothers and fathers, was increasingly becoming for the children an imagined place,

67. Taylor (1999) notes, in her study of imaginary companions, that children sometimes seem to take questions about such figures as a prompt to make one up on the spot.

rather than a remembered one, these imaginings co-constructed by the children, the teachers, and the parents.

Tamilya and Zhamilya were mostly in the background on this day, sweeping dead leaves and calling for me to look. At one point, however, Zhamilya called on me to ask whether they were going somewhere that day. I had been trying to arrange for the kids to see a show at the puppet theater for the past few weeks, but twice the theater canceled the show the children were supposed to attend, and once Hope House had had to cancel because of visiting sponsors. I told Zhamilya that they should be going to the theater the following day, but that I couldn't go with them because I had to go to Astana for a conference. She was more concerned with the puppet show than in my own coming and going, but I pressed on. I often found that I had to tell people the same things many times before they understood, because of my bad Kazakh, and because I had been coming and going quite often during my stay. No one – including adults at both sites – seemed to believe that I was really about to leave more permanently. I will go to Astana, I continued, and then I will come back, but then I'll go back to America, to my home. I added that she, Zhamilya, and her sister, Tamilya, would be going to *their* home. The helper stepped in, “She'll go back to her mama, and you'll go back to hers.” The helper switched to Russian, then, to ask me how old I was, and why I wasn't married, questions I was asked almost every day in Kazakhstan, which would inevitably turn into concerns about when I would have children. Zhamilya returned to her sweeping.

I volunteered one summer at a more traditional children's home in East Kazakhstan — a permanent orphanage where most of the children would not ever go home to their parents. When they got older, would be transferred to a different orphanage until they turned 18. One of the teachers there said she had left the children's home briefly to work at a school, but had returned

when she realized the schoolchildren didn't need her the way the children at the home did. "They have mothers already," she said, referring to the schoolchildren. The children at that orphanage, however, were like her own. It was one of the homes where all of the children called all of the women "mom," and where they had called me "mom" soon after meeting me. At Hope House, the children were not the children of the teachers, helpers, or other women who worked there. Most of the children spent years at the home, some had lived there since they were less than a year old. It was common for a teacher to move with the same group and to stay with them for multiple years. But they were never mothers to the children. The children still had their mothers or fathers.

Zhamilya and Tamilya's mother visited a couple of times when I was present. Their grandfather attended one day. Another time, their mother brought a baby boy, just learning to walk, who turned out to be the twins' little brother. Zhamilya and Tamilya occasionally came up to me and called me "mama," but they did it, looking up to me, perhaps hugging my waist, in a baby voice. They framed it as play. Other kids played this game with one another. Olzhas liked to play that Maisa was his mother, and she played along. When addressed as "mama" by the twins, however, even if they keyed it as play, I would break the frame and remind them that they had a mother. I would promise that she would be coming to visit, that they would be going home. I could rotate my position: Sometimes I was an Apay who was supposed to tell them to stop eating the grass or to teach them English. Sometimes I was a kind of living doll who could receive their care and grooming. Sometimes I was a silent cameraperson, trying to get them to forget I was there. And sometimes I could act as a caregiver or mother to their dolls, comforting them when they were crying or needed help bending their legs. But even in play, I couldn't take on the role of the children's mother. The teachers wouldn't have liked it if I had, and even if the

children were capable of keeping these two truths in their head at the same time — even if they could play that I was a mother while remembering they had a real mother coming for them — it was difficult for me, not least of all because the twins were my favorites.

As the children moved through their world at Hope House, as things and people came and went, one of the most important things they learned to do was to recognize and get comfortable with a kind of simultaneity in play, in which the iconicity recognized and enacted in the children's play remained undetermined. A horse can be a baby, a six-year-old baby, who wears makeup to the Children's Park. A six-year-old could animate the figure of a mother by acting a lot like the teachers she knows. A mother can seem to be more of an imagined figure than a remembered reality, but sooner or later, the real mothers showed up, and the children did go home. In the meantime, certain attachments might be discouraged or disavowed through teachers' and helpers' rejections of making a big thing of goodbyes, but attachments happened, anyway.

A few days later, I returned from Astana, for my last day at Hope House, to say goodbye to everyone. It was supposed to be the twins' last day, too. It was supposed to work out just like that. But as it turned out, they had already gone home, over the weekend.

When I visited Aygul Apay two and a half years later, she introduced me to Tamilya and Zhamilya's brother, whom I had met when he was only a toddler. On one hand, I was sad to see that the twins' return home had meant their brother having to come to Hope House, but I was also excited to meet him and to tell him, "I was Tamilya and Zhamilya's Apay. I loved them very, very much. Aygul told him to recite a poem to me, which he did. It was a poem about his mother. She told him to give me a card with a flower made of tissue paper on the front — handmade, but probably by a teacher. I only opened and read it later. It must have been left over

from their International Women's Day concert, which Aygul said they had had the day before. The inside, written in pen, by an adult, said, "Mama! For the 8th of March I congratulate you!"

In weaving these two stories together – of Hope House and of the puppet theatre – I wish not only to compare and contrast the interactional architectures in which these animations unfold. Another thread that ties them together – which emerged with the chosen repertoire of the puppet theatre in their new productions – is the way adults use these tales to romanticize orphanhood, adoption, and fostering as adventures, as proof of humanity. In Kashtanka's case, the correct choice for her is to go back to the first home. There is a way in which the primacy of the first home overpowers other relationships of care. Belonging supersedes other attachments. But Hope House allowed other types of attachments to exist, and to persist, despite loss and absence. Their techniques – along with various ways the puppet theatre dealt with loss – are the focus of the final section of this dissertation.

Part IV: Animating Absence

Chapter 7. Hiding in Plain Sight (Part II): Reanimations

Death and Childhood

Gaspare set up his puppet booth in a hospital lounge at the end of a hallway. One by one, with help from their nurses, children emerged from their rooms and gathered in the opposite corner of the room to watch Gaspare's Pulcinella. Gaspare, a renowned Italian puppeteer of traditional Pulcinella puppetry, was in Almaty for an international puppet carnival in the fall of 2013. They had chosen a few of the participating artists to visit a children's hospital on this day. I was there to help translate. The children wore masks over their faces to protect themselves from our germs. The masks hid their mouths and muffled their laughter — a reversal to the masked performance Orazaly had been preparing to debut that same week, in which he had worried about how the actors could convey emotions to the audience when their eyes were covered. In the hospital, I tried to read the children's eyes for an index of a smile. Perhaps it was just the masks, muting their reactions, that made the performance seem more subdued than Gaspare's performance at the puppet theater two days prior. It was also far more intimate.

Pulcinella is the original fairground puppet show. Emerging from the eponymous character of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition in southern Italy, Pulcinella traveled Europe, adopted and given new names such as Punch, Petrushka, Don Cristobol, and Dom Roberto. For a

Pulcinella show, one puppeteer, inside his small booth⁶⁸, animates a cast of hand puppets. The star puppet is Pulcinella, a masked trickster with a voice that traditionally comes from a swazzle (Proschan 1983). The mobility of the booth made it ideal for traveling. For these children, who cannot make it out to the theater downtown, the show could come to them, all the way from Italy.

At the end of the show, Gaspare stepped out of the booth, with Pulcinella still perched on his hand, so that the puppet could offer the children a kiss. At the theater, the children had clamored to greet the puppet at the end of the show. At the hospital, the children were shy. The first to let Pulcinella approach her was a baby, perhaps a year old, held in the arms of an adult. Others gained courage. One boy, perhaps seven years old, made as if to shake Pulcinella's hand, but then pulled back at the last moment and bopped the puppet on the head. A girl, probably around three years old (who, like many others, looked younger because of her lack of hair), had been especially vocal throughout Pulcinella's show, responding to his greetings to the audience the loudest. After the other children had shaken Pulcinella's hand or given him a kiss, Gaspare and puppet slowly approached her. She was silent as Pulcinella grew near, her eyes growing larger. Just before the puppet could give her a kiss, she shouted out, "*Poka!*" — "Goodbye!" The adults laughed, while the puppet and his master backed off.

My job at the end was to hand out balloons. I kept letting them get too close to the light, causing some of them to pop. Somehow, the girl who was afraid of Pulcinella ended up with all the balloons that were left over. Someone joked that she looked like she was about to float away.

The children went back into their rooms to rest, and Gaspare packed up his booth. I offered to help, but he had a precise method, a place for everything. As he worked, he told me it

68. It is usually "his" small booth, though this is beginning to change, as I met two female Pulcinella artists in Naples in 2014 who had trained under one of the great masters of the Pulcinella tradition.

had been difficult to perform that morning because he had gotten word of the death of a friend the night before, a director with whom he had planned to work in the coming months. I asked if it was sudden — an accident. He said no, it was like with these kids.

In Gaspare's *Pulcinella*, as with most versions, Pulcinalla must fight Death, a puppet usually clad in black, with a skull for a face. In another version I saw the year before, by Philippe, a French puppeteer, Polichinelle beats his landlord to death, but then cannot bear for his adversary to stay dead, so he (Polichinelle, the puppet) takes the hand of the puppeteer and forces it back inside the limp body of the puppet, bringing his adversary back to life.

On the day of the show at the hospital, I wanted to ask Gaspare if he had considered taking Death out of the show at the hospital. His repertoire included different storylines, and he had performed for hospitals before, so he could have developed a deathless version. When he told me about his friend, however, I couldn't bring myself to ask, so I wrote to him about it later. He responded:

Death is not a bad thing. Death is the only certainty that all of us have...Death does not ask who you are. Death is key to discovering that we are eternal. Children are not conscious of death while adults hide away to live in a false world...Children have the gift that we do not have, the children laugh at our misery...adults are too bourgeois and censored to take the laughter of sick children and convert it into a gift for making a world of justice and peace...Children are part of the society that is reborn every time. Death and children are the face of the same coin. (Personal correspondence, 9/23/2013, trans. from Spanish)

Gaspare draws from familiar ideologies of childhood aligning birth and death (Stasch 2009). He characterizes their joy as innocent and artless, in opposition to adult artifice and self-censorship. Children have the role of renewing society, so their importance rests on their futurity. Our futurity lies in them. He doesn't reflect on the fact that the futurity of the children at the hospital lay in doubt, that they might be more conscious of death than most (Bluebond-Langner

1978, Clemente 2015), and that they might also be most eager to see Death as a comedic character who can be outwitted.

If childhood (or birth) and death are the faces of the same coin, we presume they are on different sides, though that is not always the case. Children really are vulnerable. Puppet bodies such as Pulcinella bring these sides together, the wonder of the puppet occurring through the ability of an inert object to come to life through the work and imagination of puppeteer and viewer. Puppets and dolls provide a medium for children to encounter Death as an object external to themselves and to laugh at it. Animation moves in and out of the puppet, just as it can in children's play with dolls. In nineteenth-century America and Europe, children frequently played at burying dolls, their customs becoming more elaborate, in keeping with Victorian fashions, and parents encouraged this play: "Mourning clothes were even packed in the trunks of French dolls in the 1870s and 1880s...Fathers constructed doll-sized coffins for their dolls instead of what we consider the more usual dollhouses" (Forman-Brunell 1993: 21). Children polled at the end of the nineteenth century revealed a variety of practices related to doll deaths and beliefs about their dolls' abilities to die. For some, their dolls could back to life as a new character; others held funerals for dolls' individual parts when they fell off (Ellis and Hall 1897). If children are more likely to experience the uncanny because they experience greater uncertainty in life, children's play with puppets and dolls offers an opportunity to consider how these questions of presence and absence, materiality and imagination, childhood and futurity, also raise questions surrounding loss, which sometimes includes death.

Introduction

This chapter is about the acts of de-animation and re-animation that occur through puppetry and the opportunities such transpositions and possessions offer puppeteers and puppets. It, moreover, considers the themes identified by Kuba and by others as central to the story of *Kashtanka* — about freedom, monotony, and memory. Kuba equates monotony with a kind of death in which every day becomes indistinguishable from the last — thus making memory impossible. The fight to gain freedom requires escaping monotony in favor of unpredictability. Literary scholars' attention to themes of memory, on the other hand, raise questions about the relationship between memory and imagination, as *Kashtanka*'s memories largely unfold through dreams, and as her memories are characterized — by the story's narrator and the play's — as taking on a dream-like quality. The dreams of *Kashtanka*, moreover, re-animate past occurrences and even dead friends, so that the finality of the embrace of death comes into question. Imagination enables resurrection. Kuba relates the theme of freedom to the personal choices one makes in life, while his collaborator, Anuar, draws explicit political comparisons to world events. The obscurity of the connection between the onstage drama and offstage events raises questions, however, of who recognizes and draws connections and how we might find evidence of uptake among audiences and artists. The actions of the directors themselves, at least, suggest their own commitment to seeking a less predictable life, but these choices present a loss.

Give Me Freedom

In my early interview with Kuba, he said that in making a show, he didn't think about the intended age of the viewer from the beginning, so that a children's puppet show need not be defined by any characteristics distinguishing it from a play for adults. The most important element was the theme of the show, he had insisted. It was around this theme that aesthetics and

acting styles revolved, not around a target audience. Moreover, there were certain themes that all ages could grasp, even if they grasped them in different ways, depending on whether they were very young or very old. The day before the premiere, just after everyone had blown up at one another and they had had to take a break, I asked Kuba what he saw as the main theme. He answered:

The main theme--I don't know if we succeeded in carrying it out or not. The main theme – that's the theme of choice. Between being free albeit perhaps hungry. Or stable but maybe satiated. Exactly that choice everyone chooses for oneself. Either he lives in stable society, but without freedom, but he eats well. There's work. In the morning he gets up for work. Things go. His life passes, scheduled to the very end of death. Everything is good, everything satisfied, but there is no freedom. Yet there is something else: when you feel free, sometimes hungry, sometimes you don't know how tomorrow will finish. You don't know what's waiting for me. That's the life that I am for. That I don't know what waits for me ahead or that every time I do everything like it's the last time. I simply don't know. Tomorrow I will die. (*Interview with author November 29, 2013*)

Kuba draws a contrast between the first home and the second as one of freedom versus security. Freedom is uncertain, but it's exciting. This is what the first master represents to him. It doesn't matter if Kashtanka will go hungry. It doesn't matter if the master takes her by the throat or if the boy Fedyushka teases her in various cruel ways. In the original story, the boy ties a piece of meat to string and lets her swallow it, then pulls it out of her throat. Kuba sees this unpredictability as a kind of freedom in and of itself, even if the dog doesn't necessarily have the ability to choose what she will eat or where she will sleep. The second master and the second house, meanwhile, represent a stability that becomes monotonous to the point that life becomes indistinguishable from death — because there is no change. Kashtanka is never the master, always the pet, and thus has few choices, compared to her masters, until she gets to the moment of choosing between these two masters and between these two homes. While Gaspare notes the

utter certainty of death, Kuba highlights the uncertainty of life — or at that an uncertain life is somehow livelier, whereas a life that is too certain becomes like death because it never changes.

Kashtanka’s eventual refusal of the safe second home is also a rejection of performance. Not only do Kashtanka’s days in the room with the other animals unfold in a monotonous routine, but the circus routine itself relies on the predictability of interactions between the dog and the clown. During rehearsals, the director has been aligning himself with the second master, the clown, by comparing his own interactions with the actors to the relationships between the clown and the animals. Here, however, he transposes himself into the perspective of Kashtanka, changing gradually over from third person (“he lives...he eats...”) to second (“you feel free”), and finally to first (“That’s the life that I am for...I simply don’t know, tomorrow I will die”). Even in third person, he uses a hypothetical “he,” rather than the “she” that is the protagonist, Kashtanka, so from the beginning he has moved out to a point of abstraction about the play’s theme (Friedrich 1966).



Figure 38. *Kashtanka*. Rehearsal of a rehearsal.

This is perhaps a difference in the way he sees power, influence, or animation working in his own directing, as opposed to the monotonous predictability implied by the final performance scene, in which audience members stare straight ahead and laugh in unison. Kuba appealed to the actors to rely on their own reason, responsibility, and imagination to compel themselves into action, denaturalizing their ways of considering their bodies as something external.

Dreams, Memory, and Monotony

Kashtanka has three dreams in the course of the play, each devised by Kuba in ways that varied more strongly from the original text than the events that occur when the dog is awake. He continued to play with different possibilities for the contents and realization of the dreams up until the final days of rehearsal. In each of the dreams, Kashtanka conflates memory and imagination, though they become increasingly fantastic. Meanwhile, during each dream, Kashtanka's body splits into two — while one version of her lies at the front of the stage, sleeping, the other version appears near the back, surrounded by the other characters appearing in her dreams.



Figure 39. Doubling Kashtanka.

On her first night in her new home, after Kashtanka and her master have each eaten their fill, the master sets a pillow on the floor for the dog and tells her to sleep. Then he exits. Bolat helps Kashtanka settle into the cushion. She turns around, curls up, and lies down. Bolat sets the rods that connect her to him against the left wall of the proscenium arch. His hands hooked into his denim suspenders, Bolat steps away from the sleeping puppet. Music resumes. As he walks off to the left, we can hear Aydan, playing the boy Fedyushka, calling out “Kashtanka!”

Fedyushka appears from upstage right, in his red and white blouse and without shoes, dragging the second Kashtanka – the dream Kashtanka. She is the same as the first, but instead of long rods to be controlled from above, she has a small handle in the back of her head. Fedyushka swings the dog wildly over his head, holds her by the tail, then lies on the floor, wrestling around with his dog. Hearing Vlad’s voice, he jumps up, hiding Kashtanka behind his back. Vlad (the carpenter, Luka, drunk in the first scene, Fedyushka’s father) enters, wheeling out a box, and begins reprimanding Fedyushka for his shoddy work cutting a piece of wood. Kashtanka wriggles from behind Fedyushka’s back. When the carpenter isn’t looking, Fedyushka throws the dog into the box to hide her, but she keeps wriggling around from inside, trying to open the door to get out.⁶⁹ Despite Fedyushka’s attempts to cover it up, the carpenter notices, takes the jumping dog out of the box and throws her offstage. He pushes his son and the box offstage, as well.

Literary critics Finke (1994) and Kirjanov (2000) characterize time and memory as the central themes of the story, as Chekhov’s dog struggles to remember her first masters upon arriving at the second home, and as she will later describe memories of the second home as dreamlike. Kuba doesn’t cite such themes as significant, yet he emphasizes the contrast between

69. To accomplish this, there is a puppeteer inside the box, animating the dog from below. Despite the openness of the production in showing all other puppeteers, they warn this puppeteer not to let the audience see her hands.

before and after and his calls upon on the actors to anticipate the following scene or remember the previous one in order to heighten these contrasts. This encourages the actors to fixate on relationships between time and memory, but in regards to the memory held their “first I,” rather than as a theme of the play. With the first dream, we see Kashtanka’s dream as a simple memory of her meeting with her first master, just after she has, in real life, met the second one.

After the master renames the dog, two scenes of daily routines follow: the animals eat, then the master appears to rehearse their routines with them. In the first instance, Kashtanka tentatively eats from the gander’s trough, but is scared away when the gander suddenly breaks into song. Voiced by Maral, the goose sings in an alto falsetto — “Gakuuu gakuuu gaku gai gai gai...” Kashtanka joins in, barking in excitement at the bird’s song. When the goose finishes, he begins to eat, and then invites Kashtanka to have some, as well. When the master begins practicing the circus routine, Kashtanka is at first enraptured by the animal pyramid they form and barks so enthusiastically that she makes them fall over in their first try. At the end of this, Bolat announces that the day passed for Kashtanka unnoticed (*nezametnoe*). After a musical interlude, a month passes, and the routine repeats itself: the animals awaken, eat, the gander sings, the master practices with the animals. This time, instead of howling for joy when the gander sings or the animals practice their tricks, however, Kashtanka buries her face in her tail and tries to go back to sleep. No longer the rapacious mutt the master first found, she rejects the gander’s food.

In rehearsing this scene, Kuba emphasized to the actors that in the earlier scene, while their “second I” of the performer had no idea what was going to happen next, their “first I” knew all along, was thinking ahead about that contrastive scene, and emphasized the contrast between

the two scenes accordingly. The monotony has quickly become unbearable. She is waiting for time to pass on its own.

In the second dream, rather than a fond memory of her former masters, imagination and memory blur together. This second dream occurs when the master and the other animals go off to perform without Kashtanka. In her dream, the dog commands Fedyushka and the carpenter to sing, dance, and play the balalaika. In this dream, Kashtanka has a human voice. Though for the majority of the play, Kashtanka is puppeteered by Bolat, a man, who is also the narrator, when Kashtanka can speak, in this dream, it is Maral, a woman, the puppeteer of the gander, who voices her commands to the humans to sing. It is following this dream — of the dog directing trained humans — that the master begins training Kashtanka for his show. She is a quick learner, and the master declares her an undeniable talent.

Death of a Puppet

In the training scenes with the animals, the gander, Ivan Ivanich, performs a series of rather morbid tricks. In one rehearsal, the master brings out a frame with a wooden gun and bell hanging from it. He runs around the stage yelling, “Fire!” while the gander goes to the bell and pulls the cord. Behind puppet and puppeteer, Altay rings a real bell. Next, the master describes a scenario in which a thief breaks into their house. The gander goes to the frame and pulls the string hanging from the gun. Again, from behind but visible to the audience, Altay shoots a cap gun into the air. This noise makes the dog go berserk. In the second rehearsal scene, Ivan Ivanich is told to “play dead” and complies; then he is presented with hurdles that he must jump over. He stumbles over one, and the master catches him in his arms. The second master provides for the animals, but also places them at risk.

After Kashtanka's successful rehearsal scene, Maral is settling the goose into a sleeping position for the night, like the others. The animals' sleep is always marked by a separation from the puppeteers, who sometimes move offstage entirely. Other times, as here, they crouch behind the boxes of their respective animals, and rest their own heads on the boxes. But instead of an easy settling into sleep, the goose falls out of Maral's hands, as if by accident. His beak bangs against the front of the wooden box. Maral regards the puppet with surprise, as do the dog and cat. As she studies Ivan Ivanich, she touches his head and helps him slowly raise it to let out a moan, then the head slips out and knocks back down again. The master comes in and yells at the goose for waking everyone up, then goes back to bed.

Maral strokes the goose's wing, and helps him raise his other wing to let out another moan. Maral again looks shocked, and she rushes offstage. The master returns onstage and says, not serious, "What, are you dying?" He touches the goose's wing and sees that it is bleeding. Recalling an accident with a horse earlier that day, the master realizes the goose really is dying. Maral returns with a small metal bowl and puts it up to the goose's beak. The master commands the goose to drink, but it is no use. The master laments that he had planned to take the goose to the country to run in the grass. He blows out his candle and returns to bed. Kashtanka and Fyodr Timofeyevich, the cat, snuggle up to one another to go back to sleep.



Figure 40. Maral loses control of her puppet.

Maral picks up the goose — once her puppet to animate, now a corpse — by a wing, flings him into his box, and closes the lid with a thud. She wheels the black box offstage.

Mori, in theorizing the uncanny valley, pinpoints several different objects on one of two different trajectories, depending on whether or not they move. He acknowledges the possibility of an entity to slide up or down the slide according to its state of animation. For example, when a person suddenly dies, they quickly slip down the slope into the uncanny. On the right bank of the valley, climbing up out of the uncanny, he charts only two beings: an ill person, beginning to slip down toward the valley of death, and the Bunraku puppet. Of the latter, he writes:

“I don't think that, on close inspection, a *bunraku* puppet appears very similar to a human being. Its realism in terms of size, skin texture, and so on, does not even reach that of a realistic prosthetic hand. But when we enjoy a puppet show in the theater, we are seated at a certain distance from the stage. The puppet's absolute size is ignored, and its total appearance, including hand and eye movements, is close to that of a human being. So, given our tendency as an audience to become absorbed in this form of art, we might feel a high level of affinity for the puppet.”
(Mori 2012: page NA)

The spectator's affinity for the puppet is only a possibility, at least in this translation, as suggested by “might” — but affinity can never be guaranteed, even among living creatures. Mori includes the possibility for movement from one place on the graph to another, depending on changes that objects and beings undergo in their encounters with the world and depending on those encountering them. Though Mori writes about Bunraku puppets with the assumption that we experience them in animation during a performance, puppets frequently transition between static and dynamic objects. The de-animation of a human through a sudden death that Mori mentions as a slip down the slope into the uncanny is no doubt a ghastly, but extremely rare,

event.⁷⁰ Puppets, on the other hand, might be manipulated to sing and dance one minute and get tossed aside in the next.



Figure 41. *Kashtanka*. Maral disposes of her puppet.

Puppets as Protestors

Kashtanka dreams of the goose. They are together, with the cat, and Ivan Ivanich flies up into the sky, is shot down by a gun sticking out from the right wing. But the gander suddenly rises back up, cackling, and the cat and dog flying off with him.

While Kuba only expressed the theme of the play in abstract terms — of freedom versus monotony and death — his friend and colleague, Anuar, the artistic director, more explicitly saw it as an apt metaphor for the protests unfolding in Ukraine that winter, in opposition to the government’s rejection of closer trade ties with the European Union. As events unfolded that winter, Kazakhstanis tended to frame the protests less on Ukrainian citizens taking a stance on whether Ukraine should be leaning more toward Europe or Russia, but simply as dissatisfaction with political corruption. Anti-protest laws were passed in Ukraine, and then annulled.

70. “Or rather is a certain type of ghastly, traumatic, as long as it is extremely rare, whereas when it becomes habitual, it becomes a different sort of trauma.”

In Kazakhstan, meanwhile, smaller protests popped up later that winter, but were quickly quashed, thanks to heavy restrictions on citizens gaining permits in order to protest, but they nonetheless gained attention in Kazakhstan, especially when protesters were arrested for peaceful demonstrations. The largest in Almaty occurred in protest of the sudden devaluation of the Kazakhstani currency in February 2014 by almost 20 percent, the protest in Almaty afterwards attracting as many as 100 people at one point, but with an unreported number of these protesters detained and escorted away in police vehicles (RFE/RL 2014). There were other incidents, smaller and no less quickly punished: three bloggers protested their exclusion from a meeting with the mayor of Almaty. When they were arrested, another blogger protested their arrest, and was, in turn, arrested (Lillis 2014). Another small demonstration that garnered attention that winter was against the implementation of an import ban — part of a trade agreement between Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Russia from 2011 but only about to go into effect in 2014 — against lace underwear, banned for its lack of absorbency. Women protested by wearing their lace underwear on their heads. Several of them were detained, as well.

Thus, while Kazakhstan's own culture of protest against the government seemed weak — or even funny, in the case of the lacy underwear protest — during this period, Anuar and others saw the Ukrainian protestors as courageous examples. On my first visit to Kazakhstan, the woman who was hosting me explained that after the fall of the Soviet Union, Nazarbayev had made a deal with the people: he would provide political and economic stability, but democracy would have to wait. In the past several years, of course, the economic stability had, at different times, faltered, with the financial crisis of 2008, just preceding my fieldwork, and with currency crises in 2014 and 2015. It was not necessarily that people were actively choosing freedom over stability, but rather that stability was falling away. They were faced with choices about whether

it was better to hold on to that promise or to seek something new. There was also the question of the costs of making the choice of freedom. Even these small protests resulted in arrests, while higher profile actions faced graver consequences: the Zhanaozan protests in winter 2011 resulted in police killing at least a dozen civilians (with different news sources reporting different numbers).

None of this political critique manifested in any explicit way in the production of *Kashtanka*, a pre-Soviet story staged at a puppet theater funded by the state, nor did I ever see the directors discuss their interpretation of the political significance of it to the actors. Anuar told me, on more than one occasion, that he and Kuba saw the play as an apt metaphor for Ukraine, and wished to perform it in Russia to see what they thought of it. People have often used puppets as a safe proxy for political critique, from the portable fairground puppets of Petrushka in Imperial Russia (Kelly 1990) to Bread and Puppet Theater's larger-than-life, papier-mâché protest puppets. Schumann, founder of Bread and Puppet, sees puppets as intrinsically anarchic objects (1990). Fairy tales and children's literature in the Soviet Union, more broadly, served as a uniquely safe space for experimental writers such as Daniil Kharms to publish unconventional work (Rothenstein 2013, Yankelevich 2007); and fairy tales in the Soviet Union were a site where Aesopian language offered a way for artists to offer messages that could be interpreted politically but were safe from censorship (Balina et al 2005, Losef 1984, Nikolajeva 1996). The Almaty puppet theater artists, on the other hand, often described their work as teaching children various forms of order — to love the state, to obey traffic laws, and to understand the difference between good and evil.

While Bread and Puppet make direct political commentary through their puppets, Kuba and Anuar left it up to viewers to interpret whether the story was just a story about a dog or if it

provoked them to consider their positions as political subjects under a master who offered stability without freedom. It did seem, however, that this metaphor had personal significance for the two directors. Anuar quit on Friday, but returned on Saturday for the premiere. Kuba left the theater shortly after I left Kazakhstan, returning to the German theater where he had worked before. There had been some kind of unrest between the actors and administrators that I knew nothing about until I saw press about it online, after I had left. Actors held a press conference complaining of their treatment at the theatre. I never found out the details of this unrest, nor did I probe into them, but the actors all stayed, and said the situation in the theater improved after this small protest.

Conclusion: The Possession of Puppets

At the end of *Kashtanka*, after we see the master/clown holding his large bag with the cat (we presume) inside, looking at the audience for his beloved Tětka, in vain, there is a brief scene of Kashtanka going home with her original masters. In the last scene, Bolat tells us that the dog's time with the clown/master quickly faded into a dream for her. Bolat has narrated throughout the play in the third person, but he has also been Kashtanka's primary puppeteer. At the end, then, it is not only the clown/master who has lost this dog, but the puppeteer, as well. Kashtanka is free from the circus and is free from this other master of hers. And it is not the puppet without the puppeteer that leaves a pathetic taste in our mouths, but this puppeteer, standing onstage alone without a puppet.

Pulcinella puppeteers have described their work as one in which they not only animate these objects, but in which, after centuries of Pulcinella tradition, passed down between master and apprentice, the voices of past puppeteers move through them. There is a chain of possession

that takes place, enabling not only the continual re-animation of these inanimate objects, but also of the puppet artists who passed down their art to subsequent generations. The embodied aspect of the tradition of Pulcinella's voice – its ability to reanimate old masters – also comes at risk to the puppeteer, as Gaspare pointed out in another exchange: “The “Pivetta” instrument [the swazzle] for the voice of Pulcinella is dangerous and I can die if I don't concentrate, my body is formed through food and sports, my spirituality is nourished because I am conscious of being part of a line of artists more than 500 years long” (Personal correspondence, 9/26/2013, trans. from Spanish by author).

Kuba frames Kashtanka's choice between the two masters as an ultimate one: once she makes that choice, she cannot go back. Yet the repetition of the rehearsals and the performances ensures that she will be confronted with a choice, night after night (or day after day), as long as they continue to perform the show. The ending of the story already being known, Kashtanka's choice and the gander's death appear inevitable; yet animation is never only about control. It also highlights the precariousness of control over self and others. Ngai argues that “animatedness” as an affective category bestowed unevenly onto racialized bodies, is inextricably linked with potential violence performed both on the animator and the animated. While “animateness and its affective cousins (liveliness, vigor, zest) remain ugly categories of feeling reinforcing the historically tenacious construction of racialized subjects as excessively emotional, bodily subjects, they might also be thought of as categories of feeling that highlight animation's status as a nexus of contradictions with the capacity to generate unanticipated social meanings and effects” (2005: 124-125). As much as *Kashtanka* might be about that choice that a dog makes to be free or to live a life of comfort, the play is also about that moment when the gander slips from

Maral's hand, and she looks at it, bewildered. It is also about the moment at the end, when the second master loses his newly beloved Tëtka, and the puppet parts ways with the puppeteer.

As Lemon (2011) points out, breaking down relations between persons and objects – whether achieved through acts of alienation and estrangement that put these relations in a new light or whether they occur through the objects or persons themselves breaking – don't necessarily lead to a productive reconstitution of the social, material order, any more than turning a world upside down through the carnivalesque necessarily challenges the world to be any different once it's rightside up again. The shifts and breakdowns of participant frameworks described in this chapter have been various, and so have their results. The de-animation of the puppets differs in crucial ways from the deaths of Vlad and Evgenii. Just as children become symbols of ideologies that only partly have anything to do with them, the death of the puppet might have little to tell us about the loss of a friend.

Kuba left the theater just a few weeks after I finished my fieldwork in 2014. Koralai, the cat's puppeteer, went on maternity leave in 2015. Gulym replaced her. Koralai returned, and then Gulym went on maternity leave. Evgenii, the carpenter who had a hand in making all of the puppets and sets at the theater for roughly 40 years, who won awards for his beautiful puppets with moving eyes and mouths, passed away in 2015. Vlad, the carpenter and *Kashtanka's* first master – who also, at various times, lived with, as, and through the characters of Ded Moroz, a wolf, a bear, a dancing Ukrainian, a beast who transforms into a prince, and a narrator – passed away in late 2016, at the age of 51. Despite these changes, *Kashtanka* remains listed on the theater's repertoire. During my last visit, in spring 2017, I asked Baqytzhan if they were still doing *Kashtanka*. Baqytzhan replied simply, "Vlad died." I said yes, I knew, I was sorry. Did it

mean, I asked, that without Vlad, there would be no more *Kashtanka*? Eventually, he said, they would choose someone to replace him in the role, but not yet.

Chapter 8. Technologies of Framing

Introduction

When I visited Hope House, the children wore their regular clothes, even when I filmed. One day, in the middle of a lesson, Aygul Apay noticed that Marlin had a hole in his sweater. She called in the helper, Altyn Apay, to get him a different one. She received a phone call and told Altyn to take over the lesson. Altyn looked at the pictures on the board and began to talk about them with the children. Meanwhile, Marlin had taken off his sweater, awaiting a new one, and two other boys had removed socks that had holes in them. While Altyn stepped into the bedroom to find a sweater and socks, the other boys tickled Marlin, who waited in his undershirt. Altyn returned with a new sweater for Marlin and socks for Nurlan, but none for Yerlan. She went back to talking about the animals on the board.

It was odd timing for such a wardrobe adjustment, in the middle of the lesson. I suspected that Aygul's sudden worry about the children's clothing, along with her decision for Altyn to teach the children (something I otherwise never saw the helpers do), were in some way a reaction to the presence of my camera. In the introduction, I described a day when the children played outside in special clothes, their teacher leading them around, warning them not to get dirty, reprimanding Aynura when she got a spot of mud on her tights. Two young women, visiting for the day, followed the children around with their cameras, as did I. The visitors produced images of the children and shared them with particular audiences, in the process organizing the

children's activities that they purported to document. This was a common occurrence at Hope House and at orphanages in various parts of the world (Cartwright 2005, Dahl 2014, Johnson 2011). Cameras took part in the economy of performance and sponsorship at the home, with visiting donors posing with children for photographs or for TV cameras. The bind in which it placed children — that they should perform their play, appear natural and spontaneous, but not get mud on their tights — was something I was guilty of creating, as well. I tried not to direct the children the way the visiting photographers often did, telling them where to stand or what to do. Still, my camera and I interfered in our own ways, eliciting poses or performances from the children and causing the teachers to worry over how the children would appear onscreen, and to whom.

Rather than condemning cameras as killing naturally-occurring interactions, I wish instead, in this chapter, to interrogate the roles of such technologies of capturing in regards to what they created and what they curtailed. Lemon (2000) describes that when a television crew visits a Kelderara Romani community, they not only ask Kelderara to pose for the camera but stage their activities and dress to look more “authentic”; later, the Kelderara are disappointed not by the inaccuracy of it, but that it never gets aired. Lemon notes:

It seems then that the production, the process of filming, had indeed profoundly different framing of social ‘reality’ for each side. The director had framed their performances as if separate from social relations in space and among people, while his crew’s camera shots were to represent penetration ‘into’ an unknown world. But for the Kelderara, the presence of the camera pointed ‘outward’ to a world of renown and to chains of social capital reaching back to Moscow. (2000:157)

Children performed for these cameras, to be sure, but because the children lived in a space where performance was a part of their daily lives, such actions were never “just” performances.

Moreover, these mediating technologies sometimes served as productive inspiration for certain

types of play, such as when Nurlan — in this scene and on his last day, described in Chapter 1 — turned a toy into a camera. In this scene, he usurps the role of photographer from the visitors and grants Maksat the opportunity to pose for him without needing to edge out another child to get into the frame. The children at Hope House encountered cameras and spectators often enough that they became resourceful in finding ways to frame performance as play, even when they were not as free in their activities as adults might have idealized. Pushed out of one camera's frame, Nurlan and Maksat created their own. Other times, outsiders' gaze — and the threat it brought to those responsible for the children — created tension within the home, as it did on the day of the two photographers. The need to give the photographers what they wanted while ensuring they didn't muddy their special clothes seemed to put Saltanat on edge. Aynura was far from a shy child, but one of the most eager to please the teachers at Hope House, excelling in lessons, in performance, and in art. She was unaccustomed to drawing the teachers' ire. Saltanat's reprimand shut her down.

At the puppet theater, too, camera crews from television stations periodically visited. On these days, the puppeteers would stop whatever they had been rehearsing in order to stage a rehearsal for the crews, offering a range of puppets, which would be edited together with short interviews into a news story lasting no more than a few minutes. Because the artists frequently interacted with cameras and interviewers in this context, my daily presence at the theater and my interest in filming rehearsals of the same shows over and over again perplexed them. When I tried to conduct interviews, certain artists would direct me to others, who were more senior and who usually handled the interviews for the troupe. They answered questions about how they had decided to become puppeteers or what fascinated or challenged them about it with short sound bytes, many of them answering the same thing.

As with considerations of play and performance, I don't see these special rehearsals or interviews as merely representational, any more than I assume that a more extended interview would have uncovered an unmediated encounter with the self of the subject (Briggs 1986). I want to consider the ways technologies of framing — interactional frames and physical frames — go beyond preserving and representing images, sounds, or texts. These framings moreover co-constitute social relationships wrapped up in the institution, whether between Saltanat and Aynura, between the photographers and the children, or between the photographers and myself. I didn't talk to most of the photographers or camera crews that visited the children's home or the puppet theater, yet they undoubtedly informed my own way of thinking about my presence and its effect. Technologies for recording became ways for children and adults to shape subjectivities and to imagine future selves. They created a promise of enduring presence in the face of anticipated absence, and mediated relations between inside and outside the institution.

In this chapter, I first consider the particular challenges and opportunities visual methods offer studies of childhood, raising unique questions surrounding when and how children should or can be seen and heard. I examine how textual framing became important for one teacher at Hope House, insofar as she animated the production of testaments about herself as a way of soliciting indexes of her work. I consider why letters of thanks became so important to her. Circulating texts and images helped maintain social relations between children and adults at Hope House (and beyond), and Aygul Apay became uniquely invested in directing the creation and flow of such media as our relationship developed. I consider these endeavors alongside the children's own limited agency in controlling the frames produced of them. Lastly, I examine how the camera manages not only to anticipate impending absence and to mitigate this loss by

capturing subjects and moments, but also how the camera manages to prolong departures, holding people in and weighing them down for an extra moment.

Sensory methods in childhood

The videos of the children's play and lessons have proven far more interesting for me to analyze than the performance videos, but the clips of the children singing and dancing or acting out skits of friendly ethnic groups became more embedded in social relations at Hope House. While the videos in some ways made events into things in ways comparable to talk-to-text entextualization (Silverstein and Urban 1996), the videos offered specific sensory information. The richness of visual and audio data enabled by such processes makes film or video attractive for moving experience across institutional boundaries and larger geographic spaces, as highlighted by anthropologists' work with visual methods. This can be particularly powerful or useful in working with young children with limited language skills for interviews or other methods relying on verbal data.

Children served as an important subject in early film (in visual anthropology, with Mead and Bateson's (1954) cross-cultural examination of childrearing practices. Visual methods enable anthropologists to study — and show — differences in parents' interactions with adults from a multimodal perspective, comparing not only parents' use of language when bathing their babies, for example, but also ways of holding them and orientations to temporality that reflected cultural differences. The reflexive turn in cultural anthropology included skepticism regarding the power dynamics of voice and gaze engendered through ethnographic encounters, as represented in ethnographic film and writing (Clifford and Marcus 2010[1986]). The ethnographic voice-over, of which Mead offered a classic example, came under attack for overpowering the voices of those onscreen. Ethnographers of childhood have struggled with

discourses surrounding “children’s voices,” which have often paid little attention to the ways adults controlled who had access to those voices (or images), how they were distributed, or which children’s voices and images came into circulation (James 2007).

More recently, anthropologists of childhood have advocated using visual methods to empower children and to offer a somehow less mediated take on the world from children’s perspectives. Johnson (2011), for example, uses Photovoice, a method of participatory photography, so that Kenyan orphans can depict and comment upon their experiences adjusting to the orphanages where they have been placed. Johnson et al. (2010) argue for using participatory visual methods with children, as these can position children as collaborators and as producers of meaning (Young and Barret 2001).

Asking a child to draw, to participate in dramatic play, or to take and comment upon photos might offer a certain amount of creative freedom lacking in the interactional setting of an interview. It offers aspects of children’s understanding of the world that might not be readily apparent in observing their daily activities. At the same time, Mitchell (2006), notes the complications that arose when her own research team elicited drawings from children. American anthropologists might assume that an activity such as drawing is somehow natural for children to engage in, but this overlooks issues specific to culture, gender, and class that influence not only ideas about what should be drawn, but moreover about the activity of drawing in and of itself. At Hope House, teachers coached children heavily on what to draw and how to draw it. Children applied these standards even on the rare occasions that they were allowed to draw whatever they wanted; they also quickly identified who among them was a “good” artist and would recruit them to help with aspects of their own drawing that they wanted to achieve.

Besides these participatory methods, anthropologists of childhood use video as a tool for collecting “data” that they will later analyze. Hayashi and Tobin (2012) tried to avoid imposing their own interpretation on videos of preschool children in Japan by using the videos to elicit responses from Japanese adults, but found that decisions regarding the video editing had excluded certain children in ways that profoundly influenced interpretation.

The complexity of using visual methods need not invalidate the attempt to use cameras to learn something new about children. However, it requires us to consider how the camera becomes a node in unfolding social relations in the moment it is used, along with how its role is always influenced by other mediating technologies in the children’s lives, from the cameras brought in by visitors to those invented by children like Nurlan.

Aygul's Frames

When Aygul Apay, the teacher with whom I had worked most, found out I would soon be leaving, she had an idea. I should write an official letter of thanks, print it, have it framed, and give it to the director. She spoke extra fast when she had an idea. She told me what to write in the letter. It should include a paragraph about her, about all she had done to help me with my project, and about how grateful I was for this.

This was not the only letter of gratitude she requested at Hope House. A couple of weeks before my departure, Marlin’s father and a few of the other children’s mothers came to the home for a performance celebrating May 1, the Day of Unity in Kazakhstan. It was the largest gathering of parents on one day that I had witnessed in my group. The holiday in Kazakhstan being less about the rights of laborers, and more about celebrating the friendship of nationalities in Kazakhstan, the children’s performance included skits of the children, dressed in different ethnic costumes, enacting the friendship of the peoples and displaying Kazakh hospitality.

Before their performance in the music room, however, Aygul Apay asked the parents to sit at the little tables in the classroom and fill out questionnaires about the home. When they finished, she gave them each a sheet of blank paper and asked them to write a letter of thanks. Last, she asked Marlin's father to talk to my camera. I thought she was arranging for an impromptu interview with me, but instead she instructed him:

“Look at the camera and say, now, what year he [Marlin] started here, then how he's developed a lot since you saw the disk of him. Please, mention all the good qualities that your son has.”

With his arm around his son, Marlin's father talked to my camera:

“My name is Yerbol. This pupil at Hope House's name is Marlin. I am Marlin's father, and earlier, Zhanara, my daughter, was here. They started growing up here in 2010, and it was two years ago that I took my daughter from here. Now she studies in second grade.

“But now since 2010, Marlin has been here four years, and next year he goes to study in school. He was small when he came here, and now he's grown. I've seen all the care of this place, all of the discipline and health. All of it is good. My child has grown into one of the best, most capable [children], it is all good.

“I am satisfied with Hope House. There is nowhere better, there are no quarrels, bad habits, bad characters. With his friends, they are all cooperative and friendly. Everyone plays openly.

“They put on concerts, dance. We watch everything. We are given disks of recordings. I watched the last disk. I am really thankful for Hope House.

“I have no complaints about Hope House. I would like to thank all of the employees here. They made all the opportunities for other people's children and look after them as they would

their own child. I am thankful that they bring up children as their own and offer a good upbringing.”

Still speaking to the camera, he offered his gratitude to Hope House, wishing them good health and blessings for their families and their houses.

Then we cut, and the children went downstairs to perform for the parents.

When I would come to Hope House, Aygul Apay mostly left me to film whatever the children were already doing. More than anyone else at the home, however, she took me on my word when I said that I was happy to help out in any way at Hope House. When I began to bring my camera in to film the children’s play, Aygul Apay began to think of other things I could film, such as recording people asking questions that she could play back during the children’s open lesson. In my second year there, she would encourage me to come on days they were performing for visitors, to film the children’s performances and to make DVDs of them. Other teachers expressed shyness, the second year, when I asked to record their lessons; they apologized for the quality of their visual aides or that they had not had more time to prepare. Aygul Apay not only welcomed my recording her lessons, but she also asked for copies to keep for herself.

Frames as entextualizing technologies

In many ways, it seemed, the videos served something of the same function for Aygul Apay and others at Hope House as they did for me — they recorded and preserved for later use, to be experienced again after the moment had passed. They served an entextualizing function. Converting talk into text can serve functions of “rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit—a text—that can be lifted out of its interactional setting” (Bauman and Briggs 1990:73). Silverstein and Urban point out that not only analysts of

culture make use of texts; participants in culture exploit the thing-y-ness of texts to create “an image of a durable, shared culture” (1996: 1-2). Similarly, these recordings made events into units, bounded off by a beginning and an end, which could be edited, converted onto new formats, such as disks, and distributed to new audiences. They could be viewed, again and again, long after the event had ended.

The development of my relationship with Aygul Apay gave way to her becoming increasingly active in directing what I filmed, along with how these images were distributed around Hope House. Silverstein and Urban argue that entextualization “reveals an architecture of social relations” (1996: 14). These social relations constitute and are constitute through processes of creating and distributing text-artifacts. Aygul Apay brought the camera — and me, as camera operator and editor — into the field of relations between teachers, children, parents, and directors. I became an object for her to use. Such a position was illuminating in its own way. This position also meant that I became instrumental in pushing out certain objects or people from interactional frames in the name of capturing others. Entextualization is a “fundamental process of power and authority” (Park and Bucholtz 2009: 486), and while I welcomed the opportunity to cede some of this authority to Aygul Apay, as a local expert, such endeavors at the same time highlighted Aygul’s own authority over the children and, to a certain extent, over the parents, as long as the children were in the custody of Hope house.

Marlin's 6th birthday

In May of my first year, when Aygul Apay had me film short scenes of adults asking questions for her to use in her open lesson, she also asked me to film a series of different types of lessons. This was before I later began filming their morning lessons. I had mostly been focusing

on the children's free play, inside and out. Aygul Apay wanted to have a visual record of her teaching for herself, to be able to show the directors (or possibly future employers) her range of teaching abilities. She had me set up the tripod in the classroom, she assembled the children, the materials, and the furniture the way she wanted them. She told me when to begin filming and when to cut.

She taught lessons that ranged from a minute and a half to five minutes. She began with phonology, the children tasked with identifying sounds as vowels or consonants. Next, the children stood in a circle, Aygul held up a number, and the children formed groups of that number as quickly as possible. Next, they identified shapes — again, as quickly as possible. They were not so much lessons, as much as demonstrations of the children's knowledge of things she had already taught them. She ended each scene abruptly by saying "That's all" — *vse* — so that the camera would cut away. Aygul directed the children and me regarding how to set up the next lesson, and the next shot.

During a lesson on botany, Tamilya, wearing an apron and sleeves, narrated as she wiped the leaves of the violet with a damp cloth. Offscreen, from the back of the room, a voice asked for Aygul Apay. It was one of the directors, accompanying Marlin's father, who came bearing treats and gifts. Aygul told him we were in the middle of something, though he had come during the designated visiting hours for parents. She asked him to leave the things, and assured him we would eat the cake later. Marlin's father gave the birthday goods to a helper, said goodbye, and left.

We went back to filming. The children had an art class, in which they were allowed to draw, with markers, whatever they wanted, for three minutes. Next, we cleared the tables away and got out the puppets I had been making with them. They were simple hand puppets with

papier-mâché heads, the last layer of which was their own work, and they painted them after they had dried. I had sewn simple white gowns for their bodies that I wanted them to paint themselves, as well, but there hadn't been time for this yet. Aygul Apay had them line up, announce who their puppets were, and a journey ensued, in which a superman met a mouse, a wolf, and multiple princesses.

For the last scene, the children stood again in a circle, and, as I filmed, Aygul Apay announced that it was Marlin's birthday. The children were to come forward, one by one, plant a kiss on his cheek, and make a wish to him. The children often made wishes to one another — as part of their lessons, on holidays, or to me, if I had just given them a present for a holiday. Usually, they gave wishes to one another as a chain, in a circle, each going around and making a wish to the person on their left or their right. It was rare for one child to be lavished with so many wishes at once. Some of them were short — “Don't get sick” (*aurymaisyn*). Some were longer. Olzhas wished for Marlin not to get sick, to be rich and happy, and to listen always to the teachers. Most of the children kissed Marlin first; if they forgot, he pointed to his cheek. Some still didn't understand, or they got nervous. Nurlan began to speak, then stopped in the middle to give the kiss, then resumed his wish. Bekzhan never managed to kiss Marlin.

They sat down and ate the cake Marlin's father brought, accompanied by a banana, their regular afternoon snack. I went home feeling badly that the filming had prevented Marlin from spending time with his father on his birthday, that his father's visit had been treated as an interruption — as if the filming had been more important than him seeing his son on his sixth birthday.

Circulation of Images

In my second year, as Aygul Apay became more active in encouraging me to record the children's performances, she asked me to make disks not only for her and for Hope House's files, but also to make copies for the parents. There were a couple of performances for which she asked me to make copies for all of the parents in the group. For several others, she asked me to make copies for Marlin's father, specifically. She would remind me that Marlin had a father, but no mother. For the most part it was mothers, and occasional grandparents, who visited them. Yerbol's plight as a single father put him in a different category than the single mothers, for Aygul Apay, whether she thought this reversal in gendered roles made it especially difficult for him, or worried that it put Marlin in a more vulnerable position of ending up in a long-term orphanage once he was old enough to go home.

This was the "disk" Marlin's father mentioned in his video addressed to my camera — as prompted by Aygul Apay. By directing me to film the children's performances and create the disks, she enabled a circulation of images to anchor connections between the parents and their children whom they sometimes didn't see for weeks or months at a time. By engineering the video testimony addressed to my camera, she acted as a principal to Yerbol's animation of gratitude toward her, Hope House, and me, for enabling him to watch, from afar, his son's growth and development.

Between Play and Performance

In the group where I spent the majority of my time, I introduced the camera slowly — first observing their daily play and taking notes, then setting up the camera in a fixed location so that they were aware of it (as they were aware of the security camera in the corner, which they pointed out to me), and eventually alternating between a fixed position and sometimes following certain children as they played, especially when we were outside. Following one child cut out

other children and drew more of their attention to the camera, but otherwise, the children's play was too noisy to understand any of it, as eight voices commingled with the noise of the television and toy cars running along the floor. Because I was there daily, the children gradually paid less attention to the camera

Just before I left Hope House, I tried to film another group, the Russian-speaking group. The group was more mixed in ages than the others because it was the only Russian-speaking group at the home, but most of the kids were close to the same age as the kids in my group, so it would offer a relatively controlled comparison. These children knew me fairly well, at this point, because I had been teaching English to them throughout the past nine months, but they were unaccustomed to me observing or recording their play. I tried to switch my role for just a day, hoping they would adapt, grow bored of my presence, and forget I was there.

It was naive to expect this, but I had seen children lose interest in my camera and in me quickly in the past. I had spent time, the year before, observing and recording children four and five years old at a private kindergarten in Almaty. The school's facilities were modest, in comparison with some of the more elite kindergartens I visited elsewhere in the city and compared to Hope House. There, the children all brought in their own toys — branded action figures like Winx and Monster High. On the days I recorded their play, they became quickly engrossed in negotiating the terms of the pretend play scenario they wanted to act out together.

In the Russian group at Hope House, they did not forget about me so quickly. As they posed for the camera, I asked them what they liked to play. This prompted Nastya, 5, to run to the other room, fetch a tiny stuffed rabbit, and begin to play quietly with that by herself. Other children shouted, "Look!" and did cartwheels, narrowly avoiding knocking into one another. Ali

threw balls into the air and caught them, almost juggling. Anya, Nastya's older sister, wandered into the frame, stirring a plastic pot with a plastic spoon, but cartwheels got in the way.

While another boy struggled to imitate Ali's juggling, Anya came back into the picture and disappeared, too close to the camera to stay in the frame. I saw that she was crying, and asked her what was wrong. "There aren't pictures of me," she complained. "*Menia net fotku* (sic)." She sat on the floor and buried her head in her arms. Ali sat down next to her and tried to engage her in a game of rolling his juggling balls back and forth. Anya simply frowned. Just then, another boy did a sloppy cartwheel. He just grazed Anya with his foot, but this gave her a reason to cry more intensely. As Ali offered more tricks for the camera, Anya returned, hit him in the face, and cried, "Look at me!"

I insisted that I *was* looking at her. Ali, whom she had just hit in the face, joined me, "Come on, we're going to look at you now!" (*Davay, teper' posmotrim*)

I had noticed Anya long before I started teaching her group. In my first year there, she had often danced at the front of the group when they had performances. She had huge brown eyes, a ready smile, and a willingness to engage with adults. Her lack of shyness made her stand out, even among a group of children who were mostly not shy. When I began teaching her group English, she followed the lesson and responded when the others paid no attention. When we were outside together, she would point to different things and ask for their words in English. I had also seen her get upset before: At the end of English classes, when teachers asked if the class had listened and I would admit that they hadn't, she would complain that *she* had listened. Crying, she would insist that she deserved a reward, even if none of the others did.

Anya lay down on the floor now, on her stomach and on her face. The play continued to revolve around the children offering me things to film, and Anya continued to get frustrated

when others were in front of the camera, going so far as to grab Ali's brother and throw him down. The other children continued to try to appease her, as did I, but they also quickly went back to performing for the camera.

Eventually, Anya played ball with a younger girl, Aliya, while Ali told fairy tales to my camera. When Nastya interrupted his stories by making her little bunny hop on his arm, he almost began to cry. Anya was not the only one who sought to have the full attention of my camera and me. Yet one of the most striking things about watching the video afterwards was not just how upset Anya became that she didn't get the camera's full attention, but how hard Ali tried to soothe her, even as he also tried to find ways to get the attention of the camera and me onto him.

Another day, around this time, as I was leaving their group, the teacher complained that they didn't know when Anya would be going home. She was turning seven and should be going back to her mother to start school in the fall, but her mother had recently been incarcerated. They were waiting to hear from the grandparents. Down the hall, we saw Anya peeking out around the corner. She smiled. Her teacher told her to go back to playing. Despite not wanting to pathologize the children's behavior as stemming from their placement within a home here, I couldn't help but wonder if children such as Anya or Aynura – whose mothers visited more rarely – didn't rely more than the others on using performance to be seen by the adults who looked after them.

On days such as this, when visitors or I brought cameras to play spaces, we blurred boundaries between play and performance through these technologies of framing. On other days, children themselves chose to frame their play as performance, sometimes for my camera but often for one another or for their teachers. Teachers and helpers played music on their phones to

encourage them, and the children went back and forth, laminating keyings of play and performance (Goffman 1981, Hymes 1975). Certain children, such as Anya, Aynura, and Maksat, eagerly positioned themselves as performers. On the day Aynura's tights got dirty, the evaluation implied by the performance frame — and her teacher's condemnation suggesting that Aynura had failed to perform well — overpowered any attempts to engage in fantastic interactions with her doll or with other children. On the day when I tried to film the children's play in the Russian group, some of them made a game of playing *as if* they are performers in a different kind of show, with their acts of juggling and acrobatics. For Anya, these endeavors took on a much more serious tone.

Despite the centrality of play in ideologies of childhood, sometimes, children can find it difficult to play. Other interactional frames — and technologies, such as camera frames — competed with or overpowered play frames. This happened most often with children such as Aynura and Anya, who had learned to value performance as a way of securing adults' attention. Some children, who were less adept at showing cameras and spectators what they wanted to see and were placed in the back or taken offstage, such as Yerlan, found their own ways to be seen. Others, such as Bekzhan, seemed not to mind too much if they slipped through the cracks during moments of performance.

Marlin seemed fairly uninvested in performances but found himself, nonetheless, placed in the front row or in front of the camera. Marlin was missing from the group for the first two months of my fieldwork there. He was at sanatorium, I was told, but never found out why he had been sent there. When he had only been back at Hope House for a day or two, he was immediately cast in the lead role for a short play they had been preparing for a visiting theater teacher. At the end, the theater professor offered advice to Aygul Apay about getting the children

to show more emotion in their roles. It was rare for visitors to offer anything but a positive appraisal of the children's performances. Aygul explained that Marlin, their lead, had just returned to the group after a long absence. The following year, Marlin – who was coordinated, able to follow directions, and the oldest boy in the class – was frequently placed at the front of the group when dancing, his work held up for others to copy.

Going Home

The day the children performed outside, in green and yellow tutus and traditional Uzbek dresses, the visiting businesspeople exited quietly, while the circus performers, whom the sponsors had hired to entertain the children, took the stage (i.e. the carpet). The clown, Serik, scared the smaller children when he came out. They began to cry, and the teachers took them inside. He spoke Russian, but even the older children who didn't speak much Russian cracked up as he adjusted his large tie and stuck out his butt. For his juggling act, he recruited Alma Apay, the pedagogical director, to catch all of the hats he threw to her. As he threw her too many at once, delighting the children as she inevitably dropped one hat and then another, Alma laughed with her mouth closed, her lips in a taunt smile, her body shaking. At the end, the clown rewarded her courage with a pink balloon sword, which she gave to Marlin. Other boys grabbed at it so much that the teachers took it away, promising to return it to Marlin later.

The clown did a magic trick next. This time, he called for a child volunteer. He chose Marlin. Like Alma Apay, Marlin made a compliant but sheepish volunteer, as the clown reached into Marlin's ear and pulled a coin from it. Coins proceeded to pour out of Marlin's pockets, mouth, and rear end, the coins' presence and movement entirely indexed by the sound of their hitting the bottom of the metal bucket that the clown held underneath. Other children raised their

hands, anxious to serve as volunteers, as well, but the clown moved on. After the clown, a child contortionist pulled himself out of a tube, and then the ringmaster — now dressed in a green, sequined bikini top and gauzy skirt — brought out snakes of different sizes and a small, listless crocodile.

The show ended, the children went inside, where they had to perform for other visitors, and then they went upstairs to their classroom for a late lunch and short nap. Normally, I would have gone home for the day, or to the puppet theater, but today was Marlin's last day. His father would be coming in the afternoon to pick him up and take him home. I went out to buy a present for him and returned to find the children just waking up from their nap. Aygul was calling Marlin's father to find out exactly what time he would be coming. The kids got dressed in their play clothes and waited in the classroom. When Marlin's father arrived, Marlin ran out to the hall to greet him. He came bounding back, carrying a cake. It was his seventh birthday.

Marlin set the cake on the teacher's desk and began to take off his clothes. When children left Hope House, they left behind their clothes — sometimes even if the parents had given those clothes to their own child. In my first year, Maksat's mother gave him a shiny, silver snake costume to wear for New Year's yëlkas. The second year, after Maksat had gone home, Yerlan wore it for New Year's. Maksat, by then, had surely outgrown it, anyway. Marlin's father had brought new clothes for him to wear home — a plain white T-shirt and a pair of jeans. While Marlin changed his clothes, Aygul Apay seated his father at her desk, with a notebook and pen. She leaned over him as he wrote more notes of gratitude to her and to the children's home.



Figure 42. Marlin dresses to leave while his father writes a letter.

They walked out of the bedroom and through the classroom, passing by Zhamilya, who held up a toy computer as if she was trying to give it to Marlin. He ignored her. Aygul Apay took from the bookshelves an activity book and a box containing a puzzle of some sort. Other children surrounded the father, begging to be picked up. He gathered three or four of them at one time into his arms, lifting them up and setting them back down again immediately. He gave another group of children a turn at this. In the meantime, Marlin's hands had become full of things that Aygul Apay had given him, including a box containing a new toy car and the balloon sword that Alma Apay had given him at the circus performance. His father put down the other children to help Marlin carry the toys that were going home with them. Marlin and his father made their way to the door. The children followed behind. Zhamilya ran up with a plastic bag and held it open to help Marlin put everything inside. Aygul Apay, Marlin, and his father got to the door of the cubby room, leading out to the stairs. Aygul began to tell Marlin's father how much Marlin had learned at the school, motioning to me that I had taught him English. He thanked me.

I realized they were already leaving. I stopped filming to get Marlin the small present I had bought for him during the lunch break. His father then instructed him to go back into the classroom and kiss all of the children goodbye. This idea — of telling the other kids goodbye — hadn't seemed to occur to Aygul Apay or to Marlin. Marlin was ready to leave. Marlin ran back in, took each child's head into his hands, and kissed each cheek. Serik and Naziliya both clamored to be kissed while he was busy with others. "Eyyyyy," Marlin muttered, out of annoyance, and refused to kiss Naziliya.



Figure 43. Marlin's dad picks up kids while Marlin waits.

He gave Aynura a kiss on each cheek, then one on the forehead, and then pressed his own forehead to hers. He did it just as quickly as the others, yet she beamed afterwards. When he missed Zhamilya, she came up to him and kissed him on each cheek. He kissed the helper, Altyn Apay, on each cheek, and she kissed him on his forehead, telling him to be good and *molodets* — a way of telling someone they have done well, and that they are good. Children grabbed at the balloon sword his father held for him.

Zhamilya tried to give Marlin a pink plastic ring, but he immediately handed it over to Tamilya, who was grabbing at the balloon. Then it was my turn to give him a kiss. The kids told Marlin goodbye — *sau bol* — as he and his father made their way to the hallway. They left the cake on the desk in the bedroom, for the group to eat after Marlin and his father had gone home. While his father put his shoes on, Marlin finally played with the balloon sword the others had tried to take from him all day long.

I followed them outside, where Marlin's father picked him up and put him back down. I wanted to get a shot of them walking away, but it seemed they felt it was rude to walk away from the camera. I told them goodbye again. Before they could leave, one of the doctors at Hope House spotted them and called out, wanting to say goodbye and to talk to the father as they walked toward the door. Again, they said goodbye and made their way toward the gate, but just a few feet away from it, they were stopped once more, this time by Alma Apay, the pedagogical director, along with the teacher of the Russian group. Alma Apay brought them inside to her office, where she gave Marlin two more workbooks, a toy truck, and a small backpack. He thanked them, said goodbye, and ran back into the hallway. His father wanted to take more time to thank them, however. While we waited in the hall, I pointed out that the word "truck" — one of the few English words he knew — was written on the front of the toy. Again they said goodbye to me and walked through the hallway, toward the exit. I gave up on trying to film them walking out of the gates, not wanting to hold them up any longer.

Marlin, about to leave behind the clothes he wore, the toys with which he played, and the children who had been his companions for the past four years, showed no ambivalence about leaving. In everything he did, he moved quickly, impatiently, as he carried the birthday cake into the bedroom, as he changed from his old clothes into the new ones, and as he moved through the

classroom. It was as if he was trying to steal away with his father, and people kept stopping him, weighing him down, asking for another goodbye. The camera, too, seemed to keep holding them in, compelling them to turn and say goodbye one more time, to wave again. While I waited for them to turn and walk away, they would stand frozen in front of it until I put it down. The camera and the gifts not only mitigated absence by creating hope of a bond that would survive absence by offering a visible or tangible trace of past co-presence. The continual framing of the moment of goodbye through these media — the letters, gifts, and videos — served to delay it, as well.



Figure 44. Marlin’s father picks him up, near the gates.

As I walked back through the hall, I saw that in the pedagogical director’s office sat Anya, whom I had noticed earlier returning from somewhere by herself, in one of the vans. She had been at cello lessons, which some sponsor had arranged for her. In the pedagogical director’s cramped office, they offered me a short concert. She played a few simple melodies, using the bow and plucking the strings with her fingers. I said *molodets* many times. The pedagogical director had a question about something on her computer and asked me to help her with it, prompting Anya to stand up and say *vse* — “that’s all” — marking the end of her concert.

Frames, emptied and replaced

When Aygul Apay asked me for the letter, she asked me to deliver it, in its frame, the following day. She often wanted things done faster than I could manage. For the letter, I would need more time to write it, have someone proofread it, and then print it and frame it. I was about to head to Astana for a conference. I promised to bring it after I returned, on my last day in Kazakhstan.

I was certainly grateful to Aygul Apay and to the home for all their help with my research, but my writing in Russian was still messy enough that I looked online for a template to copy, rather than trying to draft something from scratch. I thanked the director and the institution for their help and cooperation in my research. I said I had learned much about how the children play, learn, dance, sing, help one another, grow, and develop. I said that when I began to teach English to the children, it was easy because the teachers supported me and my work. I said the children listened and learned with enthusiasm. I wrote that all the teachers showed the children that education was necessary, important, and interesting.

In a separate paragraph, I said how pleasant it especially was to work with Aygul Apay, from beginning to end, that she always helped me, answered my questions, and showed me different aspects of the children's lives. I praised their work and wished them success.

The letter was not only an adaptation of examples I found in my online search for "letter of gratitude" in Russian. I also took cues from Marlin's father's address to my camera a couple of weeks earlier and from Aygul Apay's way of telling me goodbye before I went on short trips to Kyrgyzstan, when she would assure me that she and the children always looked forward to my visits. She wished me safe travels and a speedy return. I sent the letter to my friend Masha, a native speaker of Russian, for proofreading. I printed it the morning I was due at Hope House for

the last time. The copy shop had no frames the size I needed, and I was running late, so I ran home, took a certificate from a puppet festival out of its frame, and put the letter in its place.

Just as I arrived at the children's home, I saw the director walking through the halls. She was a difficult person to catch. Her work kept her busy, and she had been absent during that winter, with health issues. I worried I would miss my chance if I waited until later, so I stopped her in the hallway to let her know it was my last day. Always awkward at presenting gifts, I presented her with the framed letter, embarrassed at the self-importance implied by the frame. The director scanned the letter and nodded. She took me into her office and put the letter on a shelf. Sometimes, in the past, she had used my visits to her office as an opportunity to talk with me about her daughter studying in Canada, about childhood, or about the children at Hope House. For the past few months, though, since she had been sick, our visits had been shorter. We chatted for a minute and said our goodbyes. I went upstairs to my group, relieved to have completed the most official order of business on my checklist of goodbyes at Hope House that day.

Aygul Apay was astounded that I had given the letter to the director without letting her see it first. She sat me down in the kitchen, away from the children, with whom I was eager to spend some last time and to say goodbye, and asked me to recite everything that was written in it. I tried my best to remember, to give her an overview of the letter in its entirety, and I assured her that I had included an entire paragraph about her. She took me into the kids' bedroom, sat me down at her desk, and gave me a notebook, where she asked me to write, by hand, another letter of gratitude, this time addressed to her, rather than to the director. I wrote one. Then she gave me a blank piece of loose leaf paper and asked me to write another letter, again addressed to her.

When I finished this task, the children started coming up to me with pieces of paper, asking me to write letters, as well. These letters were short and simple, in Kazakh. I wrote things like:

“Dear (Child’s name),

“My name is Meghanne. I am going to America. I will write a dissertation about you. You are my friend. I like you. Thank you. XOXOXO Meghanne”

They read XOXOXO as Cyrillic, pronouncing it “ho ho ho” and found it very funny. I explained that it meant “hugs and kisses,” which might have led them to believe that “ho ho ho” is English for “hugs and kisses.” Bekzhan asked me to write a letter to his mother, rather than to him, so I did.

We took pictures together, the first pictures I had taken of myself with the group. By now, the group was almost completely different. While I had been in Astana that weekend, the twins had gone home to their mother, and Yerlan had joined his brother at home with their mother. Only Aynura and Aygul Apay were there with me from the beginning to the end. Aynura was due to go home any day now, but her mother, living in another city, was difficult to reach.

I gave the children hugs and kisses, along with temporary tattoos as farewell presents. Aygul Apay searched her shelves of extra gifts and presented me with a set of glass bowls. When I protested that I would have trouble bringing such a large, fragile gift back to the United States, especially since I would be traveling in Europe for a few weeks in between, she told me, “Just be very careful.” Another teacher gave me a stuffed animal from her group’s reserve stock.

I said goodbye to the children, and Aygul Apay walked me to the hallway. She promised to get email so that she could write to me. I thanked her again for all she had done.

“*Samoe glavnoe*,” “The most important thing,” Aygul Apay began her parting words, and she paused, then began again: “The most important thing — is that you wrote that letter, and you put it in a frame.”

Unsure how to respond, disappointed that the most important thing hadn’t been my relationship with the children or her relationship with me, I agreed with her that yes, the plastic frame in which I had placed a formal letter of gratitude — which still contained a spelling error that I caught only after I returned home to reread it on my computer — that was the most important thing.

Afterwards, for some time, I wondered why the letter in the frame was the most important thing. Aygul Apay’s collection of letters of gratitude — from the parents and from me — suggested to me that she had plans to make her superiors aware of them, even if they were addressed directly to her. Wolof griots in Senegal sing praises of nobles, as nobles bragging about themselves would violate expectations that they be laconic and reserved. The griots, known as “volatile people, excitable and exciting to others,” are responsible for providing “affective animation to the message of the noble” (Irvine 1996: 150). The affective animation of Wolof griots takes advantage of typifications of their volatile nature and eloquence in expression, even if this outpouring of excitement is not entirely spontaneous. Stoller writes of the griots of Songhay, “For several Songhay elders, ethnographers are griots. Ethnographers, like griots, must learn history and cultural knowledge. Griots are strictly oral practitioners; ethnographers recount what they have ‘mastered’ in printed words or in filmed images... When ethnographers are asked to read their works to gatherings of Songhay elders, they, too, are considered griots” (1997:25).

Griots, as Irvine points out, animate utterances of which others often act as authors or principals, yet the boundaries between these roles is necessarily leaky, so that ideologies

surrounding the character of the griot as excitable are as important as the utterance itself. Unlike the verbal artistry of the griots, my own letters were far from eloquent, but my status as a student who had learned from Aygul Apay — like the parents whose children had lived with her at Hope House — gave me particular rights over testifying to the importance of her work because I was someone who had benefited from her help, as had the children at Hope House and their parents.

The form of the letter only mattered insofar as it met standards of formality befitting an official letter. The writing was nothing special. The physical frame, however, transformed the size, shape, and texture of the letter. Printed on paper, the letter was susceptible to getting stained or torn. It was a thing small enough to get mixed up in a pile of papers on the director's desk. With the frame, it was harder, more durable, more difficult to ignore, and readily available for display. The frame protected the letter, while augmenting its importance by taking up more space. Not unlike the work of entextualization, transforming talk to text, it made the text a different kind of object, more portable and more subject to scrutiny in suggesting its display. Although the letter was addressed from one individual to another — from me to the director of Hope House, it asked to be seen by an audience, to be propped up on a shelf or mounted on a wall.

The objectification of talk, text, or other interactional experience through acts of framing, recording, and circulation, offer a way to observe experience. The letters of gratitude also offered Aygul Apay an opportunity to see herself from another perspective. Mueggler (2001) sees the built environment acting as a framing device for social relationships in the houses of the families he studies in western China. Each space in and around the house at once anticipates and is a product of social relations. A kin member's death creates an absence that empties this frame of social relations. Ritual mourning takes stock of this loss, mourning the failure of a dream of unity

and marking the emptiness that follows. Mueggler offers, at the same time, a more optimistic consideration of mourning, as offering not only an expression of loss but also an opportunity to gain new understanding:

If loss emptied these frames, it also gave people opportunities to take on, partially and imperfectly, the perspective of another. In this way, houses could be a kind of material foundation for an inclusive ethics through which their inhabitants could share each other's burdens and responsibilities, despite the many differences of power and perspective that divided them. (2001: 94)

With Marlin gone, another child would soon occupy his bed, would wear the clothes he wore, and Hope House, as a frame, would not offer traces of this absence.

The letters and videos not only presented reminders of the children and the parents who had passed through the house. They also gave teachers such as Aygul Apay a way to see or hear their work articulated back to them. Aygul Apay never suggested to me that she cared for the children as if they were her own. In fact, discourses of care at Hope House emphasized to parents, teachers, and children that the house was a second home, that the first home was that of the mother. It was only Marlin's father, the only single father I met at Hope House, who suggested for my camera that the employees had cared for his son in this way, as their own child. Yerbol thanked all of the teachers, though. He didn't mention Aygul Apay by name in his video, but I did, in a separate paragraph, and I put it in a frame.

Conclusion

On a recent return trip to Kazakhstan, I opened one of the complimentary newspapers on the plane, and found, on page 2, a short piece about a movie theater offering a free screening of an animated film to children, some of whom came from a local children's home. The picture featured a row of theater seats, occupied by stuffed bears: gifts from Nur Otan, the political party of President Nazarbayev. On the same page, in the corner, was an article about a boy destined for leadership, for his name was Nurotan. While Kazakhstanis often commented on the post-independence popularity of the name Nursultan — Nazarbayev's first name — here the child served as a living icon of the future of the President's political party.⁷¹ Such examples of children as political symbols abound. I have chosen to follow the everyday processes within these institutions to understand how children and childhood become incorporated into state and private projects of imagining ideal childhoods, ideal families, and ideal national futures.

This ethnography is about imagining childhood — and how children and adults animate such visions for one another. It highlights childhood as a central ideological concept in contemporary Kazakhstan, with children serving as a potent image of the possibility of change and while maintaining certain sentimental ties to Soviet pasts. A contradiction inherent in such an ideology of childhood is that children come to stand in for the possibility of change – with the

71. "Menya zovut Nurotan," March 1, 2017. *Ekspress K*.

hope presented by new life, plastic brains, and promised growth – and the continuation of the past – as the products of reproduction who will go on to reproduce. As children, artists, parents, and teachers work through such relationships between self and other, child and adult, this manuscript offers an interactional analysis of how children and adults animate figures of childhood — through manipulations of objects and human bodies — transposing perspectives, laminating participant roles and distributing agency and responsibility.

This ethnography of imagination is also an ethnography of institutions and institutionalization. It offers an account of how individuals work through the state — or how the state works through people — to animate ideas of childhood. The state uses children as symbols of hope, and as indices of their benevolence toward its people through these programs; people use the state in projects of care for children, as well. More work needs to be done to trace the effects of these entanglements of state and private institutions animating and animated by ideologies of hope: When a multinational energy corporation sticks a logo on the corner of a television and donates it to a children’s home, for example, what responsibility do the children watching it bear regarding the ecological, economical, and political impacts that corporation makes in Kazakhstan or in other parts of the world? When children successfully index their vulnerability and potential, does the dual indexicality of this performance shake the threatening label of “bad subject” off their own institution but project it elsewhere – onto another children’s home, or onto an institution for adults – an asylum, a prison, a hospital – where discourses of hope are perhaps less robust?

This project sprang first from a desire to know how children growing up in an institutional space — cut off from everyday life with families — came to understand the world around them and to imagine people and places beyond their everyday experience in their group

homes. In my fieldwork at Hope House, however, I found the children involved in more than their own socialization into the institution and their anticipation of life outside of it; they also became skilled at entertaining adult spectators by performing figures of ideal childhood. While their lessons, games, and play involved imagining the social and material worlds outside Hope House, their most frequent contact with outsiders involved them offering a fantasy of childhood for visitors, through these performances. I entered the puppet theater wanting to understand what puppet theater did for children in Kazakhstan and why and how, in order to understand this historical link in postsocialist Eurasia between the state, performing objects, and child audiences. Because of their projects of renovation, I found the actors and directors working to imagine themselves, their aesthetics, and their role in Kazakhstan, in new ways, as well.

Any number of postsocialist countries in Eastern Europe or Eurasia could have served as a research site to study these institutional forms — children’s homes and puppet theaters. I chose Kazakhstan because their institutions had better reputations, among Americans who had adopted from there, than certain others. I anticipated that this would allow me to study children’s experiences, their understanding of their situation, and their imagining of the world outside their institutional space and time, rather than having to focus exclusively on these institutions as sites of abuse, neglect, and trauma. Studying how children understand life in a home such as Hope House offers insight on how they construct an idea of the world and their place in it. This dissertation contributes to literature on institutionalization by offering a unique perspective on children’s everyday life, rather than documenting children’s damage as a result of institutionalization.

Regarding what made the Kazakhstani puppet theater special, this was a question even the puppet theater could not answer for me during my time there. As it turned out, it was a

question the theater was asking itself during my time there. The theater had existed for nearly 80 years already when I arrived. During its massive renovation, its directors, old and new, had trouble defining the theater to me or to themselves; yet during this period of renovation, it seemed to become increasingly clear to them that they needed to define more clearly for themselves how a Kazakhstani puppet theater should look, sound, and feel. Thus, while the children at Hope House worked to understand the world around them and their place within it, the puppet theater worked to define itself in regards both to dramatic theater of actors and in relation to other puppet theaters in the world.

In order to understand how people at both sites worked through these questions, I chose to focus on their play, performance, rehearsals, and discussions with one another, in interactions onstage and in classrooms, and to see how they constructed fantasies in order to imagine themselves as other types of figures, in other spaces or in other times. For the children, this understanding would ostensibly ease their transition into their family homes, their schools, and the larger world around them. For the puppet artists, their supervising department put a great deal of pressure on them to change during this period, but the threat of obsolescence was less dire. This was no temporary institution. When I returned in 2017, a couple of the directors had left, but almost all of the actors were still there. Puppet makers said there was less money for new puppets these days, so that they were refurbishing old ones for new use.

In this dissertation, I have tried to work through the intersubjective, intersensory, material and imaginary processes of collaborative fantasy at institutions that cultivate hope in Kazakhstan's future through the promises presented by childhood. The hope that each site manifests is always vulnerable, however, so that these processes require ongoing animation and re-animation. Imagined futures are always up for negotiation, so that each act of animation

involves the work of multiple hands and voices. People distribute agency to one another, attribute personhood to objects, and the figures that emerge are made up of laminations of multiple entities. In the next section, I summarize each part of the dissertation and suggest overarching contributions, followed by a broader discussion regarding the implications of the ethnography.

Institutions of Displacement

In Part I, “Animating Institutions,” I introduced my research sites as spaces of temporary displacement. This dislocation drove the children and artists to imagine the origin points to which they would return. I showed first how Hope House acted as a second home by constantly reminding children of their first home with the family and by encouraging children to imagine this home through lessons, games, and stories. At the puppet theater, fantastic storylines offered children accounts of fairy-tale worlds, promising to make the puppet theater itself a “fairy tale island” for children, as well as a site where adults could recuperate a lost childhood. At the same time, even after the renovation of the physical theater was complete, the internal renovation emerged as an ongoing project in which new directors were recruited to lead. In this way, the theater was always an unfinished process that required fresh motivations and inspirations. The new theater was always just beyond the artists’ reach.

In line with my persistent impulse to draw parallels between themes where no causal correlation exists, let me here note the frequent themes of movement that figure into Kazakhstan’s historical narratives. Still proud of the nomadic traditions that ended (or moved outside of the Soviet Union to Mongolia or Western China) with forced settlement during Soviet rule, in this sense a large part of Kazakh identity is defined by movement. At the same time,

early decades of Soviet rule included not only forced collectivization and an end to nomadism on the Kazakh steppe; Kazakhstan was also a site of major deportation from peripheral areas to the East and West, with ethnic Germans, Poles, Koreans, and others forcibly removed to the steppe, where they experienced intense material hardship and famine (Brown 2004). In Almaty, rather than discussing this recent history of forced displacement, however, people at my field sites – who were overwhelmingly Kazakh⁷² – drew on themes of diversity and hospitality, of friendship between people. At the same time, the social and cultural engineering of the Soviet Union had its effects practices and representations of Kazakh identity that were undergoing negotiation at both institutions. At the puppet theater, actors and directors struggled to define what a Kazakhstani theater should look like in the twenty-first century. At some points, they continued to turn to Soviet cultural centers, such as when they planned to invite a special stage director from Moscow, while at other times they discussed the decreasing relevance of the Obraztsov theater and stated the need to turn to more “European” aesthetics or “American” practices of art business. In this way, even though its physical space’s renovations were finalized by the end of my first year of fieldwork, the troupe still worked, through the second year, to find its proper place.

In regards to Hope House and this history of displacement, there are more direct links between early Soviet crises of care surrounding orphans and other children and the institutional forms built to cope with such issues. Orphans of war and famine necessitated the growth of orphanages during early Soviet decades, so that they became the norm by the middle of the

72. That is, the teachers and helpers at Hope House, along with the puppet artists at the theatre, were almost entirely Kazakh and born in Kazakhstan, disproportionately so in context of the population as a whole in Kazakhstan (see <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>). Among minority populations who came to Kazakhstan as a result of these forced deportations, such themes would likely have been more robust. During my follow-up visit in 2017, papers featured mention of various ceremonies commemorating the 80th anniversary of the 1937 deportations of Chechens, Koreans, and other groups to Kazakhstan. In Almaty, some of these groups – Germans and Koreans – still have their own theatres.

twentieth century. Programs geared toward offering new solutions, such as fostering and adoption, were met with a certain amount of resistance in post-independence Kazakhstan. Kazakhs may have lamented a loss in reliance on extended kin networks for children's care, but a continued belief in the importance of blood ties to keep families together acted as a justification for the stigmatization of adoption of non-kin. Ideologies surrounding kinship and blood thus served to maintain the necessity of orphanages and other institutional solutions. Nonetheless, these institutions were under continued scrutiny, so that Kazakhstan child welfare advocates were also working to imagine new programs to keep children in families. Hope House offered one attempt at an alternative, but was one that nonetheless relied on older institutional forms.

Creating a Figure

In Part II, "Animating Bodies," I consider how human bodies in performance come to animate characters, and how inhabiting a role involves socially-embedded processes of imitating others and drawing in viewers. At the puppet theater, a new director implored the actors not to make each utterance a simple "rubber stamp" copy of the last one, yet preparations for a masked musical in Kazakh and in Russian required actors to watch and to copy one another's words and movements. Meanwhile, the roles they animated were adaptations — and thus re-animations — of other manifestations of popular types that had appeared in countless fairy tales, puppet shows, and animations in the past. Such animation is not merely a mechanical copying of set forms, but an intersubjective process of watching others and animating idealized characters. At Hope House, children animated figures of ideal childhood for visiting adult sponsors, working to counter persistent stereotypes of children in such institutions as the opposite of this ideal — as damaged and therefore dangerous, as lacking the qualities of vulnerability and potential that comprise ideal figurations of childhood.

In both chapters, I note the endurance of characterological figures from Soviet times into post-Soviet stereotypes of childhood, gender roles, and tropes of belonging and adoption. Directors and actors work to influence and motivate one another and the diverse sources from which they draw in these intertextual animations. At the puppet theater, the artists may have come to voice and embody forms drawn from previous productions and animations, but this was not mere mechanical copying. It involved, in its own way, ongoing redistributions of agency and transpositions of subjectivity in order to create identifiable figures. At Hope House, pedagogies of performance require intersubjective work of adults animating children and children distributing responsibilities through sentimental performances. This work reveals that even seemingly simple performances of essentialized characters and hyperbolic mood emerge through processes of ongoing, complex redistributions of agency and attachment.

These figurations of childhood – vulnerable and hopeful or damaged and hardened – have political and economic implications. For example, teachers worried that overseeing bodies might cut funding for their institution in order to prioritize another program, whether this meant traditional, permanent orphanages or incentivizing foster care by extended kin or strangers. Moreover, publicity surrounding an institution’s mishandling of children in their care could lead to international scandal: A pediatric AIDS epidemic among children in hospitals and orphanages in Romania at the end of the Cold War – attributed to contaminated equipment and unscreened blood used in transfusions (Dente 2006) – contributed to highly publicized movements of Westerners adopting Eastern European children in the 1990s and 2000s (Cartwright 2005). Moving in the opposite direction, reports of ill treatment of children adopted from Kazakhstan to the United States resulted in Kazakhstan’s adoption ban to American parents (Lillis 2013). The young people who grow out of these institutions and go into the world must deal with these

stereotypes, as well. Marked as dangerous or hopeless, often with a more limited social network or financial support than their peers who grew up with families, these young adults – according to nongovernment organizations who are working to help them – are more likely to end up homeless, to resort to unsafe or illegal practices in order to get by, and to commit suicide. Such concerns were more frequently articulated outside Hope House than inside, but the pervasiveness of negative typifications rendered post-institutionalized youths as figures of “bad subjects.” Hope House struggled to show that they were the opposite – still vulnerable and cute but full of potential.

Dolls and Other Doubles

In Part III, “Animating Objects,” I consider how artists and children bring objects to life so that they become social agents. At the same time, these animations always involve more than a simple human-object interaction. While at the puppet theater, I highlight multiple layers of transposition in these endeavors — with directors seeing themselves in multiple characters — and multiple dividualations of personhood, with the line between “first” and “second I” under shift. At Hope House, children’s play with dolls did not necessarily render the dolls the children’s doubles, despite adults’ frequent assumptions that this is their primary role. In fact, my research revealed that animation of objects by children was not as unambiguous as adults frequently posit. Whereas puppeteers argue that children really believe that puppets come to life, the children at Hope House, in their engagement with humans and with objects, revealed sophisticated abilities to hold two frames in mind at once — so that a doll could be at once a social agent and a lifeless object, and attachments with a new adult did not necessarily require a forgetting of others or result from an indiscriminate attachment.

These chapters draw from literature that often prioritizes subjective experiences with objects – writing on the uncanny and transitional objects – and considers the role of doubling, transposition, and engaging with objects as social agents in transforming social relationships between present and absent humans. Artists and children embrace and exploit ambiguities inherent in the contingent relationship between an icon and its object (in the sense of Peirce 1955) – whether the icon is a doll or a play. Both chapters, moreover, reveal how processes of animating objects create new intimacies between people, as a director sees himself in the clown onstage or a girl cares for her doll as both a mother and a teacher.



Figure 45. A Women's Day card for me.

Mediation, Movement, and Porous Boundaries

While Part III highlighted the utility of proliferating attachments and transpositions, however fleeting, Part IV explores how people deal with losing one another. As puppet scholars often note, puppets not only teach us about how things come to life, but they gain their power

from the constant possibility of de-animation (Posner et al 2014). Part IV, “Animating Absence,” focuses specifically on de-animation, departure, and how objects and technologies mediate and mitigate loss. These are themes that run throughout the dissertation. At the puppet theater, Kashtanka’s choice between two masters required not only a loss of one in favor of another, but the stage director moreover framed the problem as a choice between the unknown/freedom/life and comfort/monotony/death. His colleague, meanwhile, directly compared such a dilemma to the one faced by Ukrainian protesters, so that the play became a political metaphor that nonetheless remained unengaged with questions of political action in Kazakhstan and the choices citizens faced in 2014. At Hope House, technologies of framing — physical frames of texts and of cameras — served to transform moments into objects that could be circulated to outside audiences. Such technologies both anticipate impending loss and serve to mitigate it. Both chapters note, in different ways, how people anticipate and accept loss, whether through the death of a puppet or the leaving of a child, and the ways that frames can make fleeting attachments into more stable objects that enable the endurance of a certain moment – and the relationships forged during that time – to endure.

Political Puppets

Fantasy is both social and material. Whether a boy animates a doll as his baby or when a director works to bring an internal separation between the self onstage and the one anticipating the next scene, imagination unfolds through social and material relations. Anthropological studies of play and performance reveal that fantastic endeavors create culture, rather than merely representing (or escaping) the real. Despite the rich and varied body of anthropologies of play and performance, anthropologists of performance often need to justify such realms as

anthropological, whether by noting performance's similarity to ritual – thus making it part of a particular cultural tradition, rather than the work of an individual artist (Turner 1982); or they note direct engagement with politics, through the performers' use of political content onstage, by noting institutional engagement with the state or other entities of power (Askew 2002, Mandel 2002), or by analyzing political questions of race or gender that emerge through performance (Lemon 2002, Seizer 2011, Wirtz 2011). The theater can offer representations of or commentary on the state or on other political issues; the state can encourage or limit how or where performers deliver such representations, through subsidies or censorship. Political events can enter the stage in more subtle ways. These can be difficult to trace, but ethnography offers the opportunity to examine the relationships and events unfolding outside the frame of the performance, to which we are made privy through sustained engagement with artists and other actors (Lemon 2008, 2009, Pandian 2015).

The processes by which imagination works through humans and nonhumans are always hierarchical processes, with agency and affordance exerting themselves in multiple directions. When politicians accuse one another of being puppets of others, they tend to oversimplify relationships of power, influence, and manipulation — both in terms of puppetry and in terms of politics. The metaphor of the political puppet has been in common usage in English at least since the late sixteenth century (OED online 2017), and “marionette” (*marionetka*) appears frequently in Russian-language press in Kazakhstan and in Russia to question the legitimacy of a leader's rule.⁷³ However, press coverage in both Russian and English abounded with headlines in late 2016 and early 2017 asking or asserting the extent to which US President Trump was, indeed,

73. For example, on March 28, 2011, Akkuly uses the metaphor in detail to introduce a roundtable regarding the political power of those working within the Presidential Palace: “Marionettes on the Political Scene of the Akorda.” In an article on a scandal that erupted surrounding the second puppet festival, the then-administrative director used the opportunity to declare, “I’m not a marionette!” (Plianskina et al 2012).

Russian President Putin’s “puppet” (or *kremlevskaia marionetka*, in Russian).⁷⁴ As the Republican candidate in the Presidential debate in which Democrat Hillary Clinton accused Trump of being a puppet, his retort – to deny it and cast the label back onto Clinton – reveals ideologies surrounding the puppet as negative in its passivity.⁷⁵ At the same time, the fact that these accusations are always subject to debate reveals the complexities of sorting out, definitively, who controls whom.

The same is true for actual puppets, even when we see who holds the strings. Puppeteers listen to directors, who take orders from overseeing departments, but they are also all at the mercy of the children they are in charge of entertaining. I was sad to learn that the theater was no longer showing one of my favorite productions of theirs. It was the most intellectually challenging, and people simply stopped coming to see it. One actor said that in the middle of one of their shows, a three-year-old girl stood up from her chair and said to her grandmother, “There’s nothing interesting for me here. Let’s go for a walk in the park.” Studying the interactional emergence of an animated character assumes that there is not one simple, easy answer regarding who controls whom, any more than we can disentangle political “message” from its multimodal, mediated unfolding to the public (Lempert and Silverstein 2012).

Subjects of Animation

This work stands to enrich our understanding not only of performance and of play, but moreover of discussions surrounding relations between humans and nonhumans, whether in

74. For a Russian example, see Pravda’s August 5, 2016 article, “Ex-director of CIA: Donald Trump is a puppet of the Kremlin” (published before Dem. Presidential Candidate Hillary Clinton calling Trump a puppet of Putin in their final debate that October) or in English, Rubin’s January, 2017 opinion piece in the *Washington Post*, “Trump gives critics ammunition: Is he Putin’s puppet?”

75. This is perhaps especially true of men in certain places, including the US. After all, girls and women in English are affectionately referred to as “dolls” and “poppets” (UK). In Bosnian, the term *lutka* refers to both dolls and puppets, and is also an affectionate name for an attractive girl or woman.

dialogue with online avatars (Manning 2009) or the agency of a hinge (Latour 1992). This dissertation works to study agency in objects and humans — how it emerges and how it gets taken away — by looking closely at these processes and at how people and objects effect change upon one another. It has implications for understandings of other questions of human-nonhuman interactions, including human relationships with nonhuman animals, ecological concerns, and relationships between humans and technologies. As Posner (2014) point out, the puppet served as a potent metaphor across Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, mostly in regards to its comparison with the live actor. Craig (1908) and Meyerhold (1969[1913]) praised marionettes for a conventionality that they strived for actors to follow. Russian symbolists Briusov (1981[1908]) and Sologub (1981[1908]) used puppets as metaphors for mechanical action and passivity. Simonovich-Efimova and Slominskaiia, who were working at the same time to develop the art of actual puppet theater in Russia, insisted instead that the puppet was never completely passive, nor could it be compared to an automaton. It always depended on an interaction between humans and materials (Posner 2014).



Figure 46. The children paint puppets.

With children, too, we find a problem of identifying and recognizing agency in any form other than resistance. I question whether understanding the children's experiences beyond questions of their victimization necessarily requires a hunt for agency. Whether or not they are effecting change at a given moment, attending to how they live acknowledges that they are, in fact, subjects who are living, experiencing, growing, and imagining. At a recent conference on childhood, dominated by historians, a keynote speaker offered an overview of traditional divisions between studying ideologies of childhood and lived experiences. Though many argued for the value of the latter, they were far more difficult to obtain. When I asked if historians of recent childhood had tried using home movies as elicitation devices for oral histories of childhood, comparing it to the use of PhotoVoice in anthropology, the speaker commented that it was, of course, so much easier for anthropologists to obtain the "lived experience" of children. Nonetheless, anthropologists of childhood struggle with many of the same divisions between ideology and experience.

These questions, moreover, point to more pervasive difficulties of getting at anyone's experience, let alone children's. Trying to understand others — whether we describe this as "empathy," "theory of mind," "intersubjectivity," or "ethnography" — is always at some point an act of imagination, one that involves transposition. Puppeteers and audiences often achieve such transpositions by focusing on these objects coming to life. The closest I could come to understanding the children's world came through my interactions with them and by paying attention to them. The closest I can come to conveying their world to readers is through describing what I saw and heard. For this reason, in writing about them I have prioritized the mundane details about light and movement, about little scraps of paper or about a teacher placing her hand on a child's head. There are too many, and they are not enough: The kids smacking

their lips and declaring *damdy* – “tasty” – as they each take a drink from a single glass mug of liquid yogurt that the helper holds out for them, the smell of a dish of chopped onions left out in the classroom during the winter to kill germs, the sensation of trying to dig snow out from inside the boot of a child (because the boot, which is a little too small, will not zip). Children might not always be actively resisting the worlds where they live, but neither are they simply the pathetic faces that appear in American journalism or the smiling faces of the Kazakhstani photo ops. They are living, creating, and imagining. Sometimes they defy, sometimes they refuse to participate, sometimes they perform enthusiastically, and sometimes they are tired.

Understanding the complexity of the agency and subjectivity of puppets and children alike requires us to admit that despite all of our work, we often prioritize individuals as agents, as subjects, so that puppets and children are weaker forms of that individual agency that we are striving to understand. Instead, the complex acts of transposition, manipulation, inspiration, and animation that we find in adult-child and human-puppet interactions should attune us to the ways animations unfold between adults, in scales ranging from international politics to the most intimate relationships. Children and puppets are not exceptions to rules about individual agents, but act as potent reminders that our assumptions about agents are wrong.

Animating the Future

This dissertation has highlighted projects of animating childhood, the significance acts of fantasy have for the social relations from which they emerge, and the import of children as symbols of the future and as anchors of hope for Kazakhstan. I am working on articulating the import of this understanding of childhood to Kazakhstan specifically – as the use of children as icons of hope is hardly limited to this case – and am wondering if part of the specificity of the

case might be the fragility of the national future. On my recent return to Kazakhstan, I was surprised to see how little of the change proposed at the puppet theater during my fieldwork managed to take root. The directors who pushed hardest for experimentation and innovation stayed only a short time. Those who remained and had arrived afterwards still spoke of the need for change, but also admitted that some of the new productions had proven too different for local audiences. *Little Red Riding Hood* might not have changed since Soviet times, but people come to that, a new director admitted, and the kids like it.

This new director also spoke about the problem of Kazakhstani actors and audiences not wanting to have to think too deeply about art, not wanting to engage in any way that might be difficult. At the same time, when I asked about political engagement, he immediately denied any interest in politics. I wonder at the degree to which artists can break old aesthetic habits when there is a palpable fear of change regarding the political future of the nation. Friends and others I met readily admitted that they wanted nothing to change. They worry about what will happen after President Nazarbayev. No one spoke of this event as bringing anything hopeful. This simultaneous focus on futurity, with discourses of hope and potential, alongside a seeming fear of what comes next, especially if it might be a change that cannot be imagined, are not antithetical to one another. Rather, focusing on ideologies of ideal childhood offer a narrative in which present vulnerability gradually becomes replaced by ability, on an ideal trajectory of growth and development. How this will play out remains to be seen. In the meantime, adults and children at my sites animate one another, on stages and playgrounds, offering fantasies of home, remembered and anticipated, and a vision of the future that includes a fairy tale city, populated by the leaders of the twenty-first century.

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