

DE KOFFER EN HET KISTJE

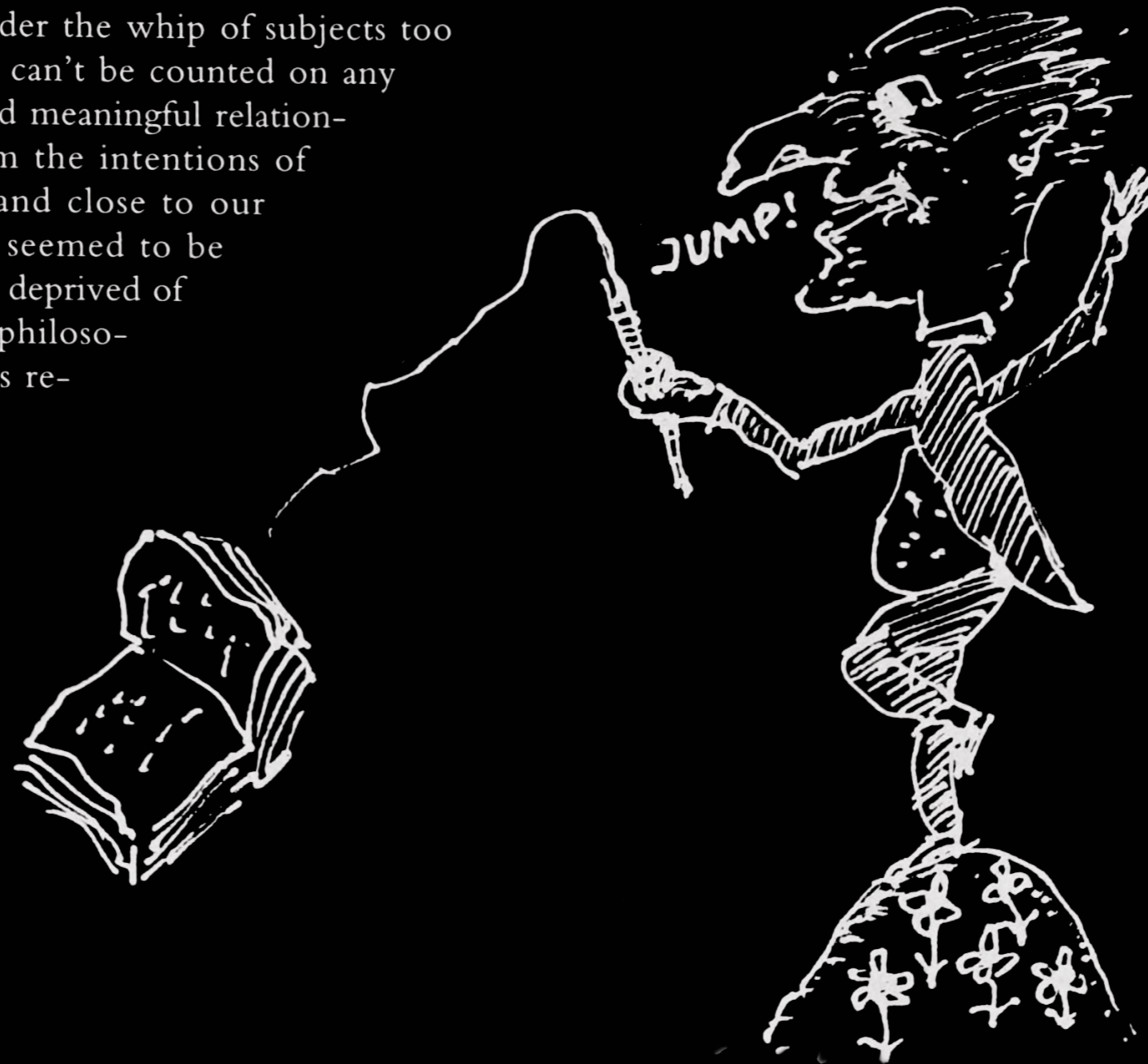


*In a conversation with Evelien Pullens in July 2024, she explained that before a group of hand puppets from Poppentheater Marag arrived at Jan Cunen Museum that month, they lived in a suitcase in a room in the theater. After the theater closed in 2014, the suitcase moved to Evelien's home.*

DE KOFFER EN HET KISTJE  
THE SUITCASE & THE COFFIN

*In a video played at the funeral of puppeteer Margriet Pullens, Margriet consoles Rimpel the puppet over the death of a bird he loved. "Kan er nix meer doen," zegde Rimpeltje. Margriet responds, "Weet je wat jje kan doen? Je kan een kistje maken! Dan kan je begraven. Timmerwerk!" In tears, Rimpel replies, "Dat ga ik doen..."*

Objects have been performing under the whip of subjects too long and are now disobedient and can't be counted on any longer. They avoid real contact and meaningful relationships and divorce themselves from the intentions of subjects. They used to be good and close to our hearts. They almost liked us and seemed to be grateful for our attention, but were deprived of their dignity by the throw-away philosophy, which resulted in the object's revenge: garbage.



*A page from Peter Schumanns illustrated essay "What, At The End of This Century, Is The Situation of Puppets and Performing Objects?", found in Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects (ed.: John Bell, 2002), that was loaned to me when I was researching for an earlier version of this script (Meeting of a Linden Tree, 2024) by Julika Bosch and Hannah Niemeier of Sammlung Philara in Düsseldorf.*

All of these characters are based on ones played by puppets from Poppentheater Marag (1972 – 2018) in Oss.

This character was originally written for a puppet named Troetel. However, the original Troetel puppet sits in the current bedroom of Agnes Huygen who enjoys her every day, and was therefore not loaned to the museum.

## PERSONAGES

### **OUDERDOM**

An *empath*; friendly, kind, gentle, wise. An allagory for old age.

### **SJAREL VAN DE KRANT**

A man that emerged from a newspaper. Pragmatic. Has little patients for jokes, thought experiments, or philosophizing.

### **KLEINE HEKS**

A sweet, mischievous, and adventurous little girl. A bit of a rascal.

### **PAULTJE**

A neighborhood boy who always wants to join in. Curious and worried. He is a new version of an older puppet of the same name, and has rarely been played himself.

### **RIMPEL(TJE)**

A young, curious boy with a lot of energy and passion. A talented violin player, beloved by many friends.

*with*

### **CHORUS**

A group that sings together, or with others.

**EVERYONE (except CHOIR)**

Rimpeltje! Rimpel! Rimpel! Riiiiimpeeelltjeeeee!!!

**KLEINE HEKS**

*(frustrated)* He'll never hear us!

**PAULTJE**

He's been here for a long time... Maybe he forgot how to speak!

**KLEINE HEKS**

Oh how I would love to hear his little voice again...

**OUDERDOM**

Perhaps we should follow Sjarel's suggestion and begin with some affirmations. Maybe he'll hear us then. Sjarel?

**SJAREL**

Oké. *(schrappen keel)* Does anyone besides our makers still remember us?

**EVERYONE**

Yes.

**PAULTJE**

Ummm...

**SJAREL**

And, when they remember us, what do they discover from the images conjured by our aliveness?

**EVERYONE (except PAULTJE & CHORUS)**

They see great possibilities of thought and action.

**PAULTJE**

But what if we are never "alivened" again?

**OUDERDOM**

Paultje, haven't we been over this before?

**PAULTJE**

Sorry... I think I just... need a little reassurance...

**KLEINE HEKS**

You're wasting our time! We were in the middle of trying to get Rimpel's attention!

**PAULTJE**

I know, I know. I want to see him again too. I just can't stop thinking about it... what if we are never "alivened" again? We just got out of years in the koffer. Will anyone still possibilities of thought and action in us?

**KLEINE HEKS**

Is "alivened" even a word?

**OUDERDOM**

Don't be so harsh, you know what he means. If we aren't "alivened", it means our individuality has yet to be discovered. In this circumstance, we are designated as an object. And, if...

**KLEINE HEKS**

*(interrupting)* And if we were never "alivened", our value would have decreased in the market. Just like you, Paultje! You're probably pretty cheap - I never saw this version of you on stage!

**PAULTJE**

Well... not *me* me... but the old Paultje is still me...

**KLEINE HEKS**

Exactly, I only saw the old you. Slightly different clothes, different hair. That's not the same. Look at your clothes now, they have barely any wear! You know what they say: "The mask needs to have danced!" Am I right Rimpeltje!

*(silence)*

**OUDERDOM**

As I was saying, And, if our individuality has been discovered - which means it has been "alivened" - then, when retire, we wait to be "alivened" again. In these circumstances, we are again designated as objects.

**SJAREL**

*(nostalgic)* Oooh ja. Retirement. The suitcase days. So cozy. Hey Rimpeltje, do you remember this song?

*(singing)*

Suitcase darkness day or night...

Rimpel is a puppet that was acquired by Museum Jan Cunen from Poppentheater Marag in Oss in 2012. This script was written for puppets on display at the exhibition Puppet Masters, in the same entrance hall where Rimple is permanently displayed.

These words are borrowed from the fourth page of John Bell's chapter "Entertainment, Spectacle, Crime: Puppetry in the Year 2000" in his book Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects.

In a conversation with artist Ada Patterson in 2024, she introduces a colonial phrase "the mask needs to have danced" (*il faut que le masque air dansé*) that originated from the colonial valuation system of performance artifacts that were pillaged and stolen from other cultures. If the masks were performed or used in the lands of their origin, they became more valuable on the colonial market. Patterson explains, "I see it differently... yes, the mask needs to have danced, and then it is not sold, it is not shown, it is not displayed; it simply needs to keep dancing, or not dance at all. For me, that's the difference in looking at this valuation system. It's the dance that's important." A part of Ada's practice involves developing characters through costuming.

These lyrics were sung to the tune of Tandenpoetslied, a children's song recalled by Merel van den Niewenhof while the script was being recorded.

The lyrics of this song are borrowed from The Trip, a road trip movie with puppets written and directed by poet Eileen Myles. As of August 2025 this video was openly viewable on Youtube, and it was shared with me by friend and curator Julika Bosch, who commissioned the first version of this work (Meeting of a Linden Tree / Een Lindentreffen) for a group exhibition at Sammlung Philara in Düsseldorf in September 2024.

**EVERYONE**

(singing) Indoor or out,  
It's all the same with you  
Years with us, time with us,  
Everything is love!

**OUDERDOM**

Indeed!

**EVERYONE**

Indeed!

**KLEINE HEKS**

Pft. Suitcase days! More like coffin days.

**SJAREL**

You should be thankful to be here, safe and still! You would still be being eaten away slowly by moths! Look at Rimpel. Look at his shoes! Can you believe those are almost 50 years old?!

**OUDERDOM**

Well, maybe she's on to something.

**KLEINE HEKS**

(takes a deep breath for a big statement)  
I refuse the definition of object as one without autonomy! The designation "object" only exists because someone else has been deceived into thinking of themselves as a subject. Subjects trap themselves in a silly religion of categories. They develop toxic entitlements that allow them to designate things as "objects". Their power is delusional. What kind of individuality exists in the prison of a subject? Tangled in their competing taxonomic systems, categorizing and re-categorizing and calling it a purposeful life... Fools!

**OUDERDOM**

It's true. Calling something a name that never changes does create a certain kind of false power.

**PAULTJE**

Well... I'm proud of my name...

**OUDERDOM**

You should be! It is a name that people recognize.

In a conversation with artist Pansee Atta in September 2024, Pansee describes her work 'To Make One Particle Of The Public Soul of All Things', an interactive performance at the Wereldmuseum in Amsterdam which ended in a taxonomic exercise that illustrated how categorical systems overlap, contradict and compete one another. She said: "It is too much work, but it is ultimately about getting on the floor, getting your hands dirty, and starting to do the work."

The idea of this particular "subject" and the prison they find themselves in is borrowed from Peter Schumann's illustrated essay "What, At The End of This Century, Is The Situation of Puppets and Performing Objects?", found in John Bell's Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects.

In the episode 'Ik kan het veel beter' of the television series De Dromen van Rimpel from 1986, Rimpel tries to separate from his puppeteers and start his own show. De Dromen van Rimpel are available to view at the archive of the Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid in Hilversum.

**EVERYONE**

(singing) "Paultjeeeee is heel erg klein... hij lopt wel kleine stapjes en eet kleine hapjes..."

**OUDERDOM**

And listen to your voice, Paultje. Almost as it was before we went to the koffer.

**KLEINE HEKS**

Oh don't flatter him. Admit it, all of us sound weird. Rimpel, what do you think? Don't we all sound a little weird?

(silence)

**SJAREL**

I don't think he's going to respond. Paultje, it isn't only your name. Someone else had it before you were even made!

**KLEINE HEKS**

Haha! See! Not so special after all! Hahaha, what do you think about that now Rimpeltje?

(silence)

**PAULTJE**

It doesn't matter! What matters is that I was made as Paultje! Margriet and Agnes made me, from the beginning; even before I had a head, before I had these clothes! I took on Paultje to relieve someone else that had the job before me. I am not just one Paultje; I am a whole Paultje universe!

**SJAREL**

Ayaiyai, you're sounding a bit crazy now.

**PAULTJE**

It's true! I am not just me, but an idea made by many! (thinking) It reminds me of something that Rimpeltje did. Remember when he tried to make his own poppenshow?

**KLEINE HEKS**

(mocking) Ha! Remember Rimpeltje! "Ik wil mijzelf spelen", you said. Margriet answered, "Je doe het voor de publiek!" And you said, "Nee, geen publiek!" Je dacht dat je het beter kon!

(silence)

Rimpeltje?

From an audio recording shared by Evelien Pullens of Agnes Huygen singing a song about Paultje and his friend Roes.

The Paultje puppet exhibited at Museum Jan Cunen is not the original Paultje that Agnes and Margriet played at Theater Marag; Evelien Pullens explains this Paultje was barely played at all.

**PAULTJE**

But "Rimpels Poppenshow" failed in the end!  
The lion didn't come out, all the children got bored and left. He needed help, he couldn't do it alone!

**SJAREL**

We can't be individuals, we need other people to be "alivened".

**THE CHOIR**

*(singing)* Ik wil steeds zo veel van wat ik niet kan...

**EVERYONE**

*(singing)* Heb iedere dag wel een schitterend plan  
Als ik dan dit kan en jij kunt dan dat  
Doen wij het samen, hoe vind je dat?

**KLEINE HEKS**

Hurray! Feels great to sing together again. Did you feel that, Rimpeltje?

*(silence)*

**SJAREL**

He's still not replying you know. He's trapped in there.

**KLEINE HEKS**

He's not trapped! You know who's trapped? Those people who call things "objects"! I pity them, not Rimpel, or us! As "objects", we are happily unfettered by the common sense these subjects are ruled by. This is why they love us: for our absurdity! Look at our glinting eyes, never blinking! Our impossibility. Our resemblance to them and simultaneously outrageous deviation from them. Throughout history, we have even been illegal! Our mere existences, illegal! This is real power. We are venerable mediums, bridging worlds of possibility with worlds of actuality.

**PAULTJE**

Wait, what does "illegal" mean?

**SJAREL**

*(stumped)* Uhm -

**OUDERDOM**

*(admitting)* We've never really been sure...

**SJAREL**

Yeah it's always been unclear.

There are surely many examples from various cultures of forbidden puppetry practice, but an example from Western history is: after the decline of antique cultures and during the factory of Christianity in Western Europe, church fathers "condemned the mime theatre as the remains of pagan culture". (From the chapter "Puppets and the Power of the State" in the book Aspects of Puppet Theatre by Henryk Jurkowski (second edition, 2013).

This song is from the episode 'Ik kan het veel beter' from the television series De Dromen van Rimpel.

The original English adjectives and nouns here are borrowed from Matthew Isaac Cohen's "Puppetry and the Destruction of the Object", Published in Performance Research 12 (4): 119-27.

In a conversation with puppeteer Nadia Ihjeij in 2024, she describes Beziehungskiste, an impromptu character made from a cigarette box. People expressed feeling stupid speaking to an animated box about their relationship problems, while nevertheless continuing to confess to the inanimate box.

This thought is a result of speaking with Pansee Atta about the Dutch children's book series turned television show Dummie De Mummie, where an ancient Egyptian boy is adopted by a white Dutch family. As a character, Dummie can speak but is rarely listened to. In "Dummie de Mummie: An Egyptian Body as the Undead, Oriental Other", Daniel Soliman explains that the series perpetuates xenophobia through humor in its narratives. (This essay was published as a chapter in "Classical Controversies: Reception of Graeco-Roman Antiquity in the Twenty-First Century", edited by Kim Berden & Timo Epping.)

**KLEINE HEKS**

One time there was a police agent in the theater... who took away DjuMa's elephant!

**OUDERDOM**

Even though we don't know the definition of "illegal", what we do know is that we are evocative. Abstract. They can't take their eyes off us, even now!

**KLEINE HEKS**

One time, after a bird died, we asked the children: "did a cat or dog also die in some of your homes?" and everyone said "yes!"! Dat was door ons getover!

**SJAREL**

Even if people feel stupid talking to a man made from newspaper, they have a hard time taking it out on anyone else but a man made from newspaper.

**OUDERDOM**

We have always been scapegoats.

**KLEINE HEKS**

*(dreamily)* Yes, scapegoats. We've landed in their courts through our summoned makers, who blamed us for our dissidence, and we have stood resilient to incarceration!

**PAULTJE**

What is incarceration?

**KLEINE HEKS**

*(shrill)* I don't know!!

**SJAREL**

Well, being a scapegoat isn't always a power. We can be scapegoats for bad habits. We can be used to abuse, neglect, or perpetuate ideas that would otherwise be unacceptable.

**OUDERDOM**

II don't think we have been used in this way. At least, I haven't been.

**KLEINE HEKS**

Maybe you should ask DjuMa's elephant about that. He was arrested once just for pooping! Remember Rimpeltje!

In a video posted February 8 2014 by Evelien Pullens, Evelien and Agnes Huijgen perform a scene at Poppentheater Marag where an elephant is arrested by a police officer for pooping in the theater.

Pyotr Bovatyrev writes an anecdote of a Czech puppeteer who, when summoned to court to defend accusations of launching political attacks from his puppet theatre, brought his puppet Kašpárek with him. He claimed he was innocent, and everything was Kašpárek's fault. From a an English translation of a text titled "Czech Puppet Theatre and Russian Folk Theatre" in Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects (ed. John Bell, MIT Press 1999).

**SJAREL**

(groans) Would you just give up already!

**PAULTJE**

So you're saying that our aliveness can be a protection. We can protect our makers. Sometimes in our glory, sometimes at our own expense.

Nadia Ihjeij describes her puppetry practice as one that allows her to access parts of her own character that she wouldn't be able to access without their presence.

**KLEINE HEKS**

We can be stand-ins for people that wouldn't otherwise get the job! Hide behind us kind of deal.

**SJAREL**

It's less about hiding, and more about enabling. We allow them to bend rules they would never dare bend in their own lives.

**KLEINE HEKS**

Weet je nog wat er over ons in de krant stond, Sjarel?

**SJAREL**

(proudly) Oh yes! "Marag maakt angst en dood toegankelijk voor kind".



From a headline that was featured in a film about Poppentheater Marag by Hans Hans Hest and Jo Verbruggen from 2011.

**OUDERDOM**

We make it safe to be seen.

**PAULTJE**

And when we aren't "alivened"?

**SJAREL**

Some people say we need to be put to rest permanently, outside of the eyes of subjects, in order to preserve the magic.

**OUDERDOM**

This idea can terrify people who are bound by a fear of wasted time.

**KLEINE HEKS**

And that seems like everyone out here these days! So much has changed since we first went in that suitcase...

**PAULTJE**

Well... To be forgotten forever just for the sake of preserving the magic... that sounds like purgatory to me. To decay, to be forgotten... to turn into nothing again...

As a student, Nadia Ihjeij was taught that puppets should never be put away before a live audience, or else it would "kill the magic", as the puppet would be made anonymous in a disrespectful way. She was trained to puppeteer exposed, which meant the puppeteer was always visible as the puppet was being played; this practice relies on a magic for the puppet to remain the intended focus of the audience's attention.

In a conversation with artist Aram Lee in 2024, while describing her performance *Holding Poison at the Tropenmuseum* (Amsterdam, 2023) she explains: "conservation doesn't mean caring; conserving something doesn't mean you care". She has also written these words in the context of her research on the ways that the chemical DDT was used until the early 1990s in Western museums to sanitize new objects for their collection, especially those coming from climates outside western Europe. The presence of this chemical now requires special safety garments and housing for handling and exhibiting the treated objects, and often makes restitution of these now poisonous artifacts back to origin countries nearly impossible.

Before their exhibition at Museum Jan Cunen, these puppets were put in an oxygen-less quarantine at the Kröller-Möller Museum in Otterlo in The Netherlands.

**KLEINE HEKS**

Well, there is always another option... And we seem to be living it right now! We have been freed from our koffer and are now being forced to do additional labor, with strange voices, in order to perpetuate a consumption that justifies your preservation! We have been given the opportunity to become total object, for the delight and the continuation of the economy of the subjects that categorize us!

**SJAREL**

Here we go again...

**PAULTJE**

I love to be appreciated! It's not that much work to just... be here...

**SJAREL**

Hold on a second. Think about this! Being conserved doesn't mean being cared for; you could become toxic, never to be touched again, sterilized and still, unable to travel because of the delicate conditions you require...

**PAULTJE**

But we weren't chemically sterilized! Just a room without air for a couple months. It wasn't so bad! I still feel very strong!

**KLEINE HEKS**

Never being allowed to rot, to transform, to decompose... How does it feel, Rimpeltje? Tell us!

**PAULTJE**

(horrified) But why would we want that?!

**OUDERDOM**

Some people believe that to be able to die is the proof of true life. Otherwise, you are stuck in some kind of...

**SJAREL**

Purgatory! That's what they call it.

**OUDERDOM**

Wait a second. There is another way to think about this.

**PAULTJE**

(relieved) There is?

Panssee Ata describes the Western museological tradition of displaying ancient Egyptian human remains as an indication of the dissonance between Western and Egyptian societies' regards to human remains. She describes sarcophagi whose inscriptions clearly explain the intent of the rested person to be left undisturbed, and the translation of these descriptions being displayed alongside the unwrapped remain in museums without criticality of this method, in the name of pedagogical study. She speaks of these demands of the institution on the remains as "additional labor".

Gleaned from the first page of John Bell's chapter "Entertainment, Spectacle, Crime: Puppetry in the Year 2000" in his book *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*.

A chalkboard hanging on the wall behind Nadia Ihjeij during a Zoom meeting in September 2024 reads: It is safe to be seen.



This line was originally written for Momo, a character from a story by Michael Ende. Momo has the gift of listening and helping others express their feelings. She is also unaffected by time, and the fear of wasting it.

**SJAREL**

I'm sick of all this thinking...

**OUDERDOM**

Yes. Think of the reason we were put in the koffers in de zaal in the first place. Love! Because of love!

*In a video from the Oss city archives, Margriet Pullens and Agnes Huygen speak together on stage about their first puppets with Rimpeltje (played by Agnes).*

**KLEINE HEKS**

That's true! They even made us birth certificates. Remember Rimpeltje? Yours said 1976! You old fart!

*(silence)*

People will recognize us! Our shining eyes, or stitched smiles! Maybe not our voices... but... they get the idea!

**PAULTJE**

Even if I'm never played again, I deserve an afterlife! We deserve a memory...

**SJAREL**

I, for one, am not afraid of death, but I am afraid of *the worry* of death. Everyone is just so worried... What's so bad about being used and then put to rest?

*One day in 2024, I found on the ground a pamphlet from a Rotterdam Christian church that asked on its front, "Do you worry about the fear of old age and death?"*

*Pansee Ata asks: "Are natural resources that are left in the ground and not used by industry, are those not preserved in their own way? When they're just left alone, there is an assumption that the thing will just decay, but I think that in fact that in it being left alone is in some cases necessary. To not insist on consuming it as wholly as possible as quickly as possible is actually what allows it to be preserved."*

**PAULTJE**

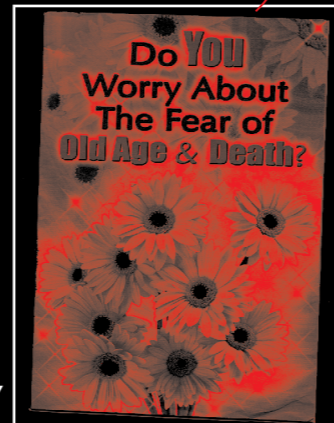
*(trailing off)* Because that is... the end of... a waste of... time...

**OUDERDOM**

Paultje, time has a way of working that needs no intervention. Memory is shared. It never leaves, because it is carried on through people, through stories. Perhaps it transforms, but you can be sure we have left a big mark. When we are left alone, there is an assumption that things will just decay; but sometimes, being left alone is necessary in order to resurface later.

**SJAREL**

*(matter-of-factly)* It is very much of our culture, to materialize something in order to remember it. But one could argue that in the process of materialization and preservation, the moment is already forgotten - death has already happened. It creates an immediate past. I'd rather enjoy the rain showers until I turn into pulp again!



**PAULTJE**

I'm still happy to be here. To see Rimpeltje.

**KLEINE HEKS**

Did you hear that, Rimpeltje? We're so happy to see you!

**PAULTJE**

Even if he's not responding..

**OUDERDOM**

Memory is a trace of an intention. And so are we. We create illusions that surpass our individual likeness. We stand in many roles, can adopt many voices.

**PAULTJE**

This is true. I've never heard my voice sound like this...

**KLEINE HEKS**

Ha! Yeah, you sound a little American!

**SJAREL**

We all sound strange!

*Paultje's voice was spoken by me (Lili Huston-Herterich). When speaking Dutch, I have a strong American accent.*

**KLEINE HEKS**

However we sound and wherever we are, we follow the path of poetic degradation, gradual perversion, and oblivion! Are you with me, Rimpeltje! Rimpeltje, are you with me?! Come on everyone, help me get Rimpel's attention!

**EVERYONE (except THE CHOIR)**

Rimpeltje! Rimpel! Rimpel! Riiiiimpeeeelltjeeeee!!!

[LOOP]

*These words are borrowed from Pyotr Bovatyrev's "Czech Puppet Theatre and Russian Folk Theatre" in Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects (ed. John Bell, MIT Press 1999): "the history of folklore according to researchers is considered a history of poetic degradation, gradual perversion, and oblivion."*





*A still from a film about Poppentheater Marag by Hans van Hest and Jo Verbruggen from 2011.*

**De Koffer en Het Kistje** was commissioned by Museum Jan Cunen on the occasion of the exhibition *Puppet Masters* (14 September 2025 – 25 January 2026). The script is based on a work from 2024 called **Meeting of a Linden Tree / Ein Lindentreffen**, which was first exhibited as a light installation with existing puppets from the Düsseldorf Marionette Theater Sammlung Philara in Düsseldorf, Germany.

**PUPPETS**

MARGRIET PULLENS & AGNES HUYGEN,  
THEATER MARAG

**VOICE ACTORS**

MEREL VAN DEN NIEUWENHOF  
HERMAN TIBOSCH  
JACK VAN LIESHOUT  
LILI HUSTON-HERTERICH

**SCRIPT**

LILI HUSTON-HERTERICH

**SCRIPT TRANSLATION**

DAGMAR BOSMA

*Dagmar translated the original English script to Dutch, contributing their inimitable skill with words.*

**SOUND EDITING**

LILI HUSTON-HERTERICH

**RESEARCH CONSULTATION**

EVELIENE PULLENS  
PANSEE ATTA  
NADIA IHJEIJ  
ARAM LEE  
ADA M. PATTERSON

*For her extraordinary support throughout the entire production of this work, her enthusiasm, and her trust in my process.*

**THANK YOU**

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HANNAH NIEMEIER  
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MARCO VAN DEN HAM  
MARIANA ABOIM

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*For their support with installation and preparation.*

*For her continued support and love.*

**COMMISSIONED BY**

MUSEUM JAN CUNEN

