

Phénomènes Surnaturels



# Invisible Awakening

RESEARCH

# Genesis and purpose of the project *Invisible Awakening*

What if it awoke “by itself”? ...

Both observing that animated objects on stage usually involve “visible” assistance, Marjan Kunaver and Violaine Fimbel – respectively mechanical/robotics engineer and puppeteer/magician – have been exploring fully concealed animation through which the object comes to life in an invisible way.

Noting that these creative tools originating from the stage world and later developed by the film world could be rejuvenated if they met the theater stage again, the duo has made it the focus of the research they call **Invisible Awakening**.

Drawing from the language of magic in which the puppet acts as the partner of the impossible, Violaine Fimbel and Marjan Kunaver intend to challenge perceptions, spark wonder and baffle the audience while preserving the magical and supernatural phenomenon at work when the audience faces an animated object whose source of animation is invisible.



*Cie Yokai*

# Puppets, cinema and special effects

In their research they aim to interrogate the singular connection between puppetry, filmmaking and special effects. Violaine Fimbel comments: *“I’ve noticed that film has often borrowed things from puppetry, and that’s good, but it’s more and more rare to see the reverse happen. And yet Méliès, one of the pioneers of cinema who comes from magic and the theater, put to the screen the effects he had previously experimented with on stage. I became even more aware of that over my two-year training in New Magic at CNAC, and so my research will focus on delving into special effects that are much more commonly used in film than in the performing arts world.”*



*On the set of Gremlins / Warner Bros*



*Big Henson 1 control*

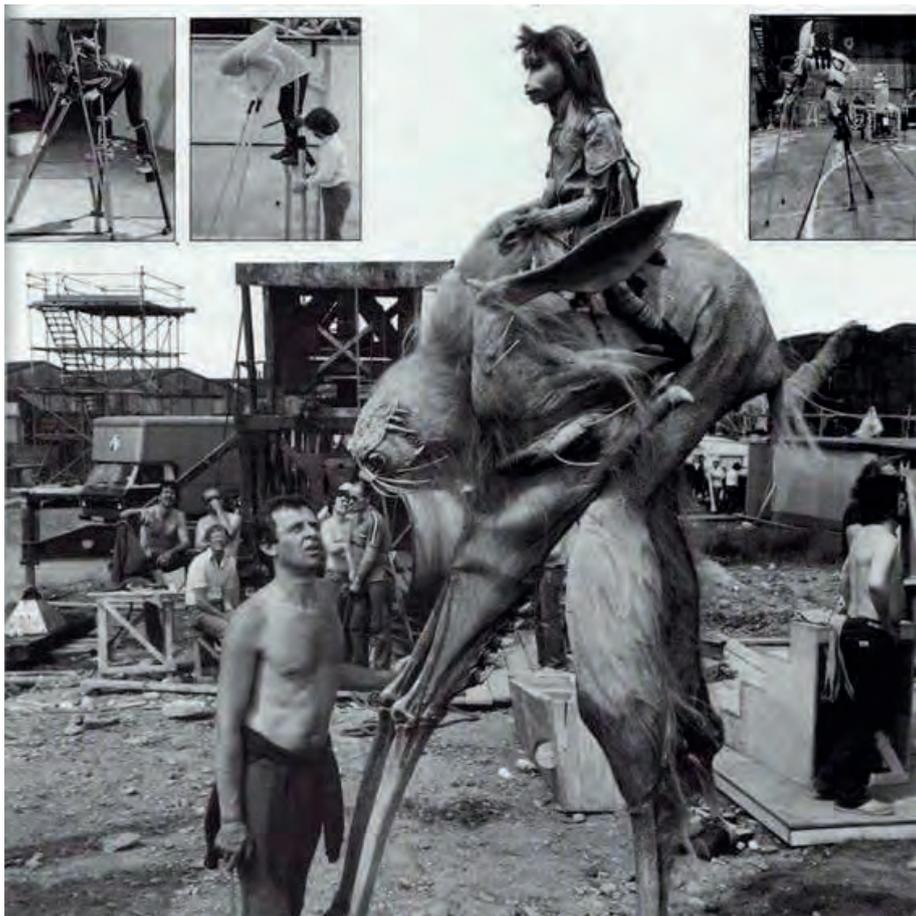
New linkages should be created in order to carry forward this exploration and find innovative solutions to the identified challenges. “Dead matter will trouble us only if the mind has lived in it”, Victor Hugo wrote in *The Laughing Man*. That sense of confusion only occurs when our perception is challenged, disrupted. The scope of *Invisible Awakening* lies in this zone of confusion.

**How to conceal the operator completely so that the creature gives off an illusion of life?**

This research must be conducted with consistent control over the quality and precision of that movement. A robot doesn't confuse the audience the same way an animatronic does – note the root of the word which contains “anima”, the soul inside it – because the primary requirement of an animatronic is to duplicate human, animal or vegetal movement identically. The mechanics give way to the closest and most realistic movement of what one wants to reproduce.



*Harry Potter studio / Warner Bros*



*On the set of Dark Crystal / Jim Henson Company*



*Cie Yokai*

# An innovative and hybrid project

**Invisible Awakening** fits into an explorative innovation process aimed at testing out the team's insights and assumptions about the potential cross-pollinations between mediums and art forms, mostly film, special effects, new magic and contemporary puppetry.

This translates into developing the company's puppet FabLab, combining groundbreaking tools originating from film and new technologies and pairing those with existing puppetry and magic know-how to meet the specific needs of invisible animation.



# Challenges and goals of the project Invisible Awakening

Following up on exploratory work on the shows **Possession** and **Gimme Shelter**, the company is now facing three challenges as it continues to explore animated objects and movement reproduction:



*Cie Yokai*

- **Making the animated elements highly reliable** : by resorting to a combination of digital tools such as modeling and 3D printing paired with robotics.
- **Achieving movement fluidity** : as our team researches the best enveloping material, the trained eye of choreographer Jérôme Brabant enables and helps along the accurate movement of the animated object. This dimension is supported by Le Manège-Scène nationale Reims and developed further thanks to our partnership with the Troyes-based company Compositex, which specializes in innovative textiles for state-of-the-art industries.
- **Making animated objects intuitive** : how to make technique unobtrusive on stage to performers who are not familiar with it? Builders and programmers aim to make these objects as simple and reliable as possible through innovations in ergonomics that considerably reduce the time needed for non-technicians to use them comfortably. Meeting this challenge enhances the quality of artistic practices.

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# Invisible Awakening

PRODUCTION

# A research project and a new work

Both a presentation and the actual object of the research, the company Yōkai presents a **supernatural conference**, now a fully-fledged piece.



*Cie Yōkai*

# A supernatural conference/show

The company Yôkaï carries out experiments that interrogate the boundary between the human and the creature, taking into consideration the transformational and inexplicable element this entails.

In order to fully appreciate the impact of these strange and unlikely presences on the audience, the company is developing mysterious transient shells. These are autonomous hybrid creatures at the intersection of magic, puppetry and digital technology. This project is called **Invisible Awakening**. In the course of a supernatural conference, an odd lecturer will come in to give an update on the ongoing research. This creature-character, who himself is the subject of the presented research, will talk with the audience about how he comes to life and assumes a shape and body.





*Cie Yokai*

# Technical specifications

This piece was conceived to perform in any location with a stage area at least 4 meters wide and 3 meters deep (conference room, university, show auditorium).

No rigging required

Blackout is not essential

Considered capacity is 120-150 people

Number of touring crew members: 3





**Conception, dramaturgy and codirection of the research:**

**Violaine Fimbel** is a puppeteer, magician and visual artist. She graduated from ESNAM (Ecole Supérieure Nationale des Arts de la Marionnette) in 2014 and New Magic at CNAC (Centre National des Arts du Cirque) in 2016. She is the founder and Artistic Director of the Yôkaï Company.

**Machine imaginator and codirection of the research:**

**Marjan Kunaver** is a Slovenian artist and trained roboticist who has also been a puppeteer (builder, performer and operator) for over 20 years. In the early 2000s, he attended artistic trainings in mold making and animatronics at the Institut International de la Marionnette of Charleville-Mézières. He has designed autonomous devices and magical effects for the Yôkaï company since 2016.

**Video artist:**

**Sylvain VALLAS** A film director and graduate of ESRA (Rennes, France), Sylvain Vallas has worked across multiple art forms for eight years, collaborating with the professional teams of puppeteers, magicians, jugglers, musicians as well as fashion designers, photographers and web magazine writers. These activities, especially when combined, are a constant inspiration to him

**Choreographic input:**

**Jérôme BRABANT** Choreographer and dancer Jérôme Brabant studied theater at Université Paris 8 and received training from the Marcel Marceau mime school. He has worked with P. Ferrara, L. Guédy, M. Muzac, and more. He started his company L'Octogonale in 2011 and was Associate Artist at TÉAT Champ Fleuri La Réunion in 2019.

**Professor- senior researcher:**

**Pascale de Rozario** is a sociologist, senior researcher at CNAM Paris (Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers), a member of the Lise lab (multidisciplinary lab for economic sociology), a joint research unit of Cnrs and Cnam. She has also been a longtime consultant on national and European projects in the arts and culture world.

**Lecturer:**

**Quentin CABOCEL** discovered magic at the age of 11 with close-up magic. He joined the Conservatoire d'Art Dramatique of Nancy at 19 to become an actor and put his passion for magic on the backburner. In 2015, he discovered New Magic where found an opportunity to mix his two passions within this stage language. He then applied to the New Magic training program at CNAC and got in. Since then, he has worked on interrogating reality through various mediums, including puppetry with the company Yôkaï and theater with the company Ex Nihilo.

**Stage manager:**

**Nicolas POIX** A lover of puppetry, Nicolas Poix has assisted and contributed to the visual, lighting and video designs of many shows directed by Angélique Friant. In 2019, he worked as a stage manager and puppeteer on the production of the show Gimme Shelter directed by Violaine Fimbel.

# Partners

## **Cultural partners**

Le Manège – Scène nationale de Reims

Saint-Ex, digital culture center and its Fablab in Rheims

International Puppet Theater Festival of Charleville-Mézières

NAPP European program (Numeric Arts Puppetry Project) – spearheaded by 4 European partners well-established in the area of puppetry arts: Puppet Theater of Ljubljana, Slovenia, International Puppet Theater Festival of Charleville-Mézières, Romania’s Teatrul Tony Bulandra in Targoviste and the Puppetry Center of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation in Belgium.

## **Film studio partners**

Jim Henson’s Creature’s Shop - USA / New York City / Los Angeles

Atelier 69 Montreuil Studios FX (make-up, objects, assorted creatures, photos) – France

## **Academic partners**

EiSiNe Industrial and Digital Sciences School of Engineering, Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne

ESRA (Film school), Rennes: cinema/television, sound and 2D/3D animation

## **Industrial and professional partners**

COMPOSITEX company: a company specialized in innovative textile technology, Troyes, France.

# Provisional schedule

**September 7-12**

Research residency and Invisible Awakening production.

**October 16**

First business meeting with Jim Henson Creature Shop – Los Angeles.

**October 19-November 6**

Research and production.

**November 6-7**

Supernatural conference/ launch of Invisible Awakening research as part of the NAPP Europe Creative program.

**May-September 2021**

Research and production residency.

**September 17-26, 2021**

Performances at World Theater Puppet Festival in Charleville-Mézières, France.



# Contact



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