

A foray into the territory of training in the arts of puppetry: teaching and learning

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I am a theatre director, a theatre maker, I chose and I devoted my entire work exploring the essence of the puppet, its metaphoric quality, its capacity to transmit emotions. As a young pedagogue I started teaching directing and puppetry performance. As a young director I needed to train people for my shows and I developed my own technique to teach puppetry, searching to attend the excellence in interpretation, exploring in depth the essence of the different types of puppets, taking inspiration from the traditional forms and inventing new forms, some of them for only one show. I searched to discover what makes their charm, their mystery, and their power, and what is the relation between each puppet form and its specific privileged dramatic territory. Teaching and learning... my adventure started in the mid' seventies.

Since then, puppet theatre has experienced several profound changes. I was fortunate to be part of the big enthusiastic wave, which started them.

- **The status of the puppeteer transformed:** the puppeteer started to be viewed as a stage artist who masters a diversity of performing skills such as acting, dance, music, a variety of

traditional puppetry techniques and the ability to invent new puppet forms, techniques, and technologies

- **The traditional puppet booth opened its walls creating new performing spaces:** As a result, puppet and puppeteer found themselves next to each other; their relation had to be defined and developed in multiple ways going beyond the functional necessity in search for a poetic meaning. The space poetics also changed; the relation between the space, the puppet, and the puppeteer got new dramatic functions.
- **Crossing borders:** the creative energy of puppetry and its means of expression attracted artists coming from fine arts, dance, music, video graphics, and film. The intertwining of puppetry with the other performing arts provoked the creation of new dramaturgies
- **A new approach to matter and materials:** the exploration of matter and its expressive potential provoked the creativity, and developed new aesthetics.
- **The process of creation itself got a new appreciation.**

The new approaches to puppetry required new skills. Puppetry departments already existed in a few universities in Eastern Europe, offering programs which focused on teaching the complex tools of puppet theatre: design, technology, building, dramaturgy, directing, and of course performing with the main puppet types. Now diversity of professional training structures and programs teaching the arts of puppetry were created, from higher education (university puppetry departments) to independent puppet theatre schools, workshop programs, master classes, and training inside puppet theatre companies aiming to develop creativity and certain performing skills.

The exuberant and innovative development of puppetry, the multidisciplinary training of the puppeteer, the multitude of new theatre forms combining several performing arts deepened artists' awareness of the powerful impact of their art.

The broad diversity of puppet theatre, the multitude of new theatrical forms using puppets, and the existence of ancient traditional forms, my observation along with my own professional experience made me feel the necessity to question our basis as artists and as pedagogues.

How do we define “puppet” and “puppet theatre” today? How do we define the skills a puppeteer must have? What is the mission of the different types of training programs? Whom are we teaching? What kind of students are we looking for? What are the specific goals of the programs? What is the space we give to research and creativity? What space do we give to skill development? What is the space we give to conceptual work – dramaturgy and stage directing? What is the space we give to knowledge: theatre traditions, aesthetics, philosophy, anthropology...? What are the challenges of today’s training: our successes, our failures, our doubts, and our questions? What dissatisfies us? Could we build bridges between the different types of training?

The present issue of the publication Móin-Móin invited experienced artists, pedagogues, theatre scientists, and theatre directors to reflect upon the essence of puppet theatre and puppetry training.

In order to further address these questions and many others, the UNIMA Commission for Puppetry Training organizes the International Meeting on Training in Puppetry Arts, which will take place in September 2015 in Charleville-Mezieres. Our desire is to bring together artists and pedagogues from different training forms, examine the foundations of training, address significant issues, and allow reflection on training goals in order to share the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, and explore the possibilities to build bridges between the different forms of training.

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