

## Tradition as a condition of development<sup>1</sup>

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“Talent is the only news,  
Which is always new”  
Boris Pasternak.

I would start saying that there is nothing more traditional in the world than the break of traditions.

Nevertheless, the world around us would stop to develop without traditions because a tradition of to-day is not only the result of yesterday but also a guarantee of innovations in the future. The same happens in the puppet theatre art.

Any avant-guard theatre school in this or that way is based on rejection of the previous, obsolete one. The notion “innovative school” itself contains a thousand year tradition of professional “schools”.

Any innovation in order to become such needs an opponent, a tradition. Departing from it the artist creates something new that in many years will be also considered a tradition to depart from.

Please name any theatrical discovery, any revolutionary phenomenon in the art of performing puppets, any company, any pedagogical theatrical

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system, and any major artistic personality that wouldn't be based on tradition. Laurent Mourguet (1769-1844), Lemerrier de Neville, Joseph "Papa" Schmidt, Richard Teschner (1879-1948), Sergey Obraztsov (1901-1992), Evgeni Demmeni (1898-1969), Nina Simonovich-Efimova (1877-1948), Joseph Skupa (1892-1957), Michael Meschke, Mikhail Korolyov (1913-1983), Philippe Genty, Neville Tranter, Frank Soehnle. Each one of them has created his own artistic trend, method, school... And they all have departed from traditions and based on them creation of their own ones.

That is why studies of traditional puppetry techniques are not only important during the pedagogical process of teaching and training of puppeteers but they are simply fundamentally vital as no creative personality can be shaped without them.

It is the knowledge of the tradition and possession of it on one hand and striving to create something principally new on the other that is the essence of creativity. It is a guarantee of fully-fledged shaping of an Artist, an Actor, a Director.

It is possession of live tradition and yearning to get away from it, to create something absolutely new that are as necessary for each artist as flints and firestone are necessary to start a fire. You just cannot do without them. In the opposite case we get "creators" who sincerely think that they have made up something principally new while in fact they have just reproduced the long time well-known traditional form of art.

Once I have read an interview of some young puppet theatre director. He was asked by a correspondent, his enthusiastic admirer: "Is it true that you have created a new form of puppet theatre where dramatic



**The Power of Love and Magic (1916).  
Puppeteers Yuliya Slonim and Pavel Sazonov.  
Puppet Wizard. Artist Nicholas Kalmakov.**

actors act on stage along with puppets?” He answered: “Yes, I was the first one to use this method”.

For example, many best actors of the professional puppet theatre in Russia have studied working with the street theatre Petrushka. The skill they have acquired helped them to develop qualities of improvisatory actor and puppeteer.

Up to now, working with Petrushka in the street is considered the best kind of training for any professional puppeteer. It is not without reason that Sergey Obraztsov wrote in his fundamental book *My profession*: “I am carrying on a tradition of the street Petrushka folk shows but this tradition obliged me to do many things, first of all to look for repertoire” (OBRAZTSOV, 1981, p.84).

That is why it is impossible, to my opinion, to put a question on WHETHER TRADITION IS IMPORTANT DURING THE PUPPET THEATRE TRAINING. At least because the fact itself of holding such training is already a tradition.

The same could be said about importance of studying traditional puppetry techniques in the contemporary puppet theatre. It is not once that history gave unambiguous answers to that. If Richard Teschner did not study tradition of Javanese rod puppets and did not later implement them in his creative work, there would be no innovative Teschner theatre. If Nina Simonovich-Efimova did not study traditional Russian Petrushka folk shows there would be no avant-garde, for that time, Efimovs’ theatre. If in the beginning of 1960s Sergey Obraztsov did not see the Bunraku theatre on tour in the USSR he would not create his well-known performance *Divine Comedy*. If, finally, Jim Henson (1936-1990) did not study the tradition of Sergey Obraztsov’s concert numbers, perhaps his *Muppet Show* would not appear.

That is why I am sure that traditional techniques are necessary for dynamic development of puppet theatre (and for training in puppetry too). However, on one condition – these trainings are to be held by talented bearers of these traditions and not by scholastics.

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