

3. THE PUPPET –THE ACTOR: PARALLEL MIRRORS

Raluca Bujoreanu-Huțanu³⁴

Abstract: *The contemporary dynamics of performing arts has determined us to plead for the re/evaluation of the statute of the puppet as actor, as well as the puppeteer's. The present study might also be seen as a journey from and towards the theatre principles established by Kleist, Craig or Obraztov; a lesson about the poetry of technique and poeticized technique. The analysis of the double dimension of characters in animation theatre – the plastic and the interpretative sides – but also of the role of the relation between puppet and puppeteer has determined us to prove the necessity of using methods that are centered on interdisciplinary and comparative studies.*

Key words: *animation theatre, actor, puppet, interpretation*

1. Introduction

Up until now, the definitions given to the puppet describe it as an object created or processed – before or even during the performance – that the puppeteer endows with “a soul and identity to become a form of communication” (Ciobotaru 2016, p. 26). Because of its *animated object* nature, the puppet, the marionette, the object or/and the mask must *always do something* (to act; to react), *speak* (through gestures, attitudes, silences). It is clear that, in the art of animation theatre, the animated object plays the actor's part in the art of dramatic theatre, the mime's in pantomime, the dancer's in the art of dance. On stage, the animated object, the puppet, the mask and/or the marionette acts as we have mentioned above because, in expression, the puppeteer no longer disposes of the acting we find in the mimics of a drama actor, mime or dancer, or of the expressiveness of human gaze, of the smiles or grimaces that all other artists display spontaneously. Therefore, it is also true that, in the puppet-like language expression, the animated object also fulfills the role that the musical instrument plays in the musical language. Accordingly, we must not forget that the animated object, the puppet in general, is also a tool of the puppeteer artist, an instrument, a means of communication.

If we perceive it as an actor, as a signifying *sign*, the puppet must be understood as a dramatic mask that the actor takes out of his face and body, and from which he “borrows” the soul, the voice, and the way of thinking. Since the animated object also becomes puppet-like interpretation means or instrument, we must mention that expression, the communication with its help is carried out only if the interpreter adapts his body movements and voice qualities to this type of instrument. Regardless the way we look at it, the *puppet* is an expressing sign expressing and a *communication tool*. Along with the other elements of the

³⁴Associate Professor, PhD., „George Enescu” National University of Arts from Iași, Romania, e-mail: r.m.bujoreanu@gmail.com

external component of specific animation theatre language, the animated object helps materializing the characters, the dramatic situations, and the other *signs* of the puppet-like language.

Defining puppet nature, specifying its place and role in the art of animation theatre, mentioning the specific elements of other artistic languages, but which are found synthetically and suggestively in the structures of the animation theatre language are information that set up the meaning of the term *puppet-like*. Natalia Dănăilă argues that the language created for the communication specific to the animation theatre “must serve the puppet and its expression availabilities” (Dănăilă, 2003, p. 202). The components of theatrical language are *qualified as puppet-like* if the characteristics and principles of the art of animation theatre are respected: *They must not imitate reality; They must create characters with a great generalization, essentialization, and abstraction power; They must convey messages by suggesting the facts and not by copying realistic details; The spoken word must only intervene in order to emphasize the gesture, the attitude of the puppet character.*

2. Discussions

Given that, in the art of animation theatre, the communication process is conditioned by the object, it is understandable why, in *puppeteering*, the art of suggestively interpreting human behavior through an object, the realistic criteria of dramatic art are replaced. Moreover, it is also understandable why the puppeteer’s expression is no longer based on the gestures and movements specific to a drama actor, why the puppeteer’s vocal interpretation serves the object that he animates and transforms into a string of signs of real and/or fantastic beings. The fact that, from the very beginning, the puppeteer knew to fuse the internal and external component of his language, in the *dramatic* and *performance* structure, the most expressive elements of the other artistic languages, explains the strength of puppet-like performance, the capacity of the puppet to communicate, to evoke. Standing on the *principles* and *criteria* arising from the *puppet-like nature* is the condition that must be respected and fulfilled in creating an autonomous communication way, with puppet-like features. If we synthesize the information above, we can advocate that the component elements of the language specific to animation theatre become signs of an autonomous communication, using communication means specific to the other arts, as follows:

- Literature elements create the script;
- The way to create the puppet-like scenario is taken from drama, but it respects the rules and principles of the animation theatre art;
- When the subject we want to present in the puppet-like script belongs to prose, we use only epic structures which introduce the general-human spatial landscape, socio-cultural, within which we imagine characters, relationships, lyrical or comical states, real or fantastic events, all connected by a generally valid and timeless historical context;

- When we use poetry in creating visual metaphors, we remember that poetry relies on metaphor, on the poetic language which, in fact, is nothing more than the common language, but used differently;
- The characters and the presentation spaces of some generally valid human situations take shape by merging the component elements of the visual language. We mention that we appeal to visual arts, to painting and sculpture language elements, to color language to achieve the shape and volume outline;
- The gestures, and especially the reactions through which the characters and the dramatic conflict resolution are revealed, are expressed by combining dramatic art language component elements and rhythmic languages – exaggerated gesture and puppet-like speech.

All this theoretical information could be summarized as ***the animation theatre language concept***. Understanding the above concept from the perspective of its two components, statements like ***animation theatre language presents itself as a syncretism of several ways of expression*** may be more applicable in practice. The materialization of the puppet-like inner component in a presentation specific to the animation theatre acquires much more certainty and coherence. From the same perspective, the way in which Natalia Dănăilă characterizes the animation theatre language, in the work that we have already mentioned, “*a visual poetic language, mainly gestural and of moving the animate objects by means of lyrical and dramatic story, by means of satire, parody, comedy*” (Dănăilă, 2003, p. 202) acquires a broader perspective in addressing and/or creating puppet-like language.

We do not wish to go too fast over the fact that the animation theatre presentation is the one that gives ***form*** and ***life*** to the ideal reality of puppet-like theatrical language. Therefore, we also mention that ***animation***, “the spoken language” of animation theatre, as a means of artistic expression, begins with an ***idea*** about something profoundly human and generally valid and ends with a ***lively scenic image***. The art of writing ideas in the animation theatre style, like the art of communication in general, is not an innate ability; it is not a natural process. It is learnt in order to achieve production, to work out the exchange of meanings between the partners of a communication act specific to animation theatre. ***The dialogue*** between the producers of an animation presentation and the public must take a ***shape*** that allows deciphering the anthroposemiotic signs that convey the message. Achieving the ***shape*** of the communication act through puppet-like language relies on the artists’ ability ***to encode a message*** in the style of animation theatre, on the way in which ideas and feelings that artists would normally turn into spoken/written words in animation theatre, if they were to use ordinary language, into puppet-like expression; the artists turn them into equivalent signs, that belong to non-verbal language, visual language, musical language etc.

Animation differs from the basic act of human communication and presents itself as a great way to convey messages through visual and/or aural sounds. For this reason, from the beginning, the language creator must be concerned with the script, with the text, to check if it is going to be a ***puppet-like discourse***. By

complying with the conditions imposed by the puppet-like term, the puppeteer's communication, from a realistic one, becomes a metaphorical one, and the handling act can be considered a symbiosis unmatched by any other means of theatrical expression. Thus, the puppet-like language is given **autonomy** and becomes part of the idea of theatricality, debated by Ion Zamfirescu³⁵.

At the end of these lines, we return to the common meanings of the term **autonomy** and we notice that they are manifold. One refers to "the situation of the one who does not depend on anybody, who manifests utter freedom in one's action" (Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române, 1998, p. 74). Another refers to a "condition of the one who makes one's rules" (Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române, 1998, p. 209). If we keep in mind only the two definitions of the term **autonomy** we note that, generally, there is a **tendency** to address the autonomy of an object or phenomenon by referring to the **condition** of the subject. Since the term **condition** refers to a fact, to a circumstance "on which depends the appearance of a phenomenon" (Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române, 1998, p. 209), it is necessary, in researching the issue in this paper, to also take into account the fact that the appearance of an object or phenomenon is conditioned by a **necessity**. The art of the animation theatre appeared, like any other art, to give some spiritual needs an external shape. Although we know this, we cannot state that the origins of the puppet-like art have also been analyzed from the perspective of the motivations that have generated man's need to communicate through animated objects. In general, when it comes to the emergence of the animation theatre art, statements like **animation theatre art emerged when the human mind borne the idea of animating an object** are uttered. If these pieces of information – as, otherwise, all animation theatre theories – are not analyzed in their complexity and phenomenology, they cannot help practically and concretely the one who wants to enter the art of communicating in the puppet-like style.

The statement that we have mentioned above is one of the fundamental truths of the animation theatre art. Along with other expressions used in defining the puppet-like field, it has become a common expression. The profound truth that all puppet-like art theory require remains unclear for those who want to enter the art of puppet-like communication, as long as there is no actual systematization of all data that can provide a comprehensive description of the real causes of genesis and evolution of puppet-like language. We must admit that the ones who actually try to find out **what** has prompted man to want to express his anxieties through animated objects, **what** has propelled him to want to animate them and especially **why** he has wanted to communicate through animated objects a series of fundamental, generally-valid human issue truths, are very few. Given the situation, we believe that a systematization of the

³⁵ "I think that theatricality is one of the major communication means through which the human spirit was able to spread his life knowledge and interpretation messages. I see no thinking, matter, and action way, other than theatre presentation, able to synthesize and give a more eloquent expression to several means of perceiving and transfiguring reality" (Ion Zamfirescu, *Probleme de viață, teorie și istorie teatrală*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1974, p. 28)

information that may elucidate the real causes of the genesis of puppet-like language might help the one who wants to enter the animation theatre art. But this is not the only reason. We proceed like this because, in the process of creating an autonomous means of puppet-like communication style, a series of historical, aesthetic, psychological, anthropological, semiotic, and even pedagogical information is needed.

We are trying to systematize a series of theoretical and practical issues that can concretely help both in the process of creating the puppet-like language as an autonomous way of theatrical communication and in training the puppet-like language creator. Through the systematization we offer below, we wish to point out that, in order to communicate in the puppet-like style, independently, one should not only know which *means, methods* or *ways of expression* are puppet-like, but especially *what they can express*. We believe that the research directions we propose to the one interested in the art of communication in the puppet-like style may help one understand, to some extent, the issue of puppet-like language autonomy.

Outstanding representatives from the field of psychology, philosophy and aesthetics have tried to explain *the essence* of the acting and its *relations* with the art. In **Scieri despre teatru (Writings on Theatre)**, Tudor Vianu tries to present the problems that answer in art. He emphasized the general *principles* of theories formulated on acting (the reaction theory, the abundance of energy theory, the compensation or cathartic theory). We have noticed that, although they are different, the theories are intertwined and complementary, but that none of them refers to the *ludic activity* that we mentioned at the beginning of this subchapter, but to a disinterested, purposeless one. The mentioned theories and principles cannot answer the following question: *why* does the man feel the need to express himself in a puppet-like style? If we were to try to explain the puppet-like artistic phenomenon, following Gros, Kant, Schiller and Spencer's views on acting, we might think that any creation of the animation theatre, and not only, is rooted in instincts. They considered the game a discharge of extra- energy, a necessity of the spirit from the need of imitation, a preparatory exercise of life or, simply, a need of relaxation. But puppet-like acting is more than that.

In order to explain the origins of puppet-like acting in terms of aesthetics and psychology, we call on the views of another theoretician of acting. In **Eseu despre creația artistică (Essay on Artistic Creation)**, Liviu Rusu claims that a research on artistic creation, in the sense that we also desire, can be carried out only if there is a real connection between art and acting. The aesthetician clarifies things to some extent and goes more in-depth, researching the *nature* of acting in general. Liviu Rusu believes that: *"The artistic creation is a reaction toward the instincts, and not an extension of them. (...) Can acting only be interpreted as an instinct exercise? Would not it be a reaction against them? Would not acting serve the inner life needs and not instinctive impulses seeking external world? What forces us to believe that man is the slave of instincts? Acting is not only a means of discharging energy or a preparatory exercise of biological functions, but a stimulus of some forces that contribute to inner life*

enrichment and spiritualization” (Rusu, 1989, p. 77). Thus, from Liviu Rusu’s point of view, acting can be viewed or analyzed as an *impetus* of the creation process of Homo Ludens representations. However, we specify that this idea is valid or sustained in creating all playful representation ways. But the art of the animation theatre emerges *from acting* and *as acting*. In order to argue that this aspect is specific to the puppet-like field, we believe that we need to clarify how the *impetus* to represent a generally-human issue in a puppet-like style appears.

Thus, we start researching the ruling aspect of the puppet-like language creation process, by investigating the hiding places of the human mind and soul. Researching these issues, one can understand that, by acting, the puppeteer’s being becomes free from all those “sins-desires” that feed a series of dissatisfactions, which shake and “toss about” his whole inner life. We are referring here to that impetus that summarizes the latent energies that exist within every man; we are referring to the forces and urges that generate and feed the puppeteer a series of complaints, which generates an *inner conflict*. In general, the conflictual situation arises from the difference between what an individual *is* and what he *wants to be*. The conflictual situation generates *the need to communicate*. In everyday life, the conflictual situation might also be translated as man’s chase for the better, in any form. Sometimes, the conflictual state externalizing way takes the form of theatrical acting. Thus, the game of the one communicating through theatrical language becomes a way to defend oneself, a defensive instinct. It is a matter mentioned and analyzed by Geta Angheluță³⁶ in the explanation she gives to the conflict that occurs within every human being. The reasoning provided by Geta Angheluță in *Arta actorului... Arta vieții (Actor’s Art... The Art of Life)* comes to facilitate the understanding of acting as an *engine* of all ludic activities. However, the opinions of the mentioned author cannot help us understand *why* the man wants to express himself in the puppet-like style? Why does he become a puppeteer?

Thus, we mention first that the man wants to become an actor based on a need he feels deep down: *the need for power*. Beyond everything that the artist wants to tell the whole world, he becomes an actor or a director or both, to be like a god: loved, listened to, and strong. The stage is the environment that enables him to best become aware of this good or bad part of his being. As for the puppeteer, this is what happens: usually, in the beginning, he wants to become an artist of the dramatic theatre, but after he discovers the world of the animation theatre, he no longer leaves it. There are such examples in the history of the animation theatre. It is said that some of the great puppeteers got close to this profession just for a while, in order to earn their everyday living in a decent way, but that they never left this world. We find the explanation in the fact that

³⁶ “...It does not matter if we are talking about the intellectual man, the spiritual one or about the brute. The inner mechanism is the same, just at different levels and at different structures of the psychic phenomena. Structures generated by motives that we do not take into account because, as I have mentioned, we have lost contact with them through education and civilization.” They warn us that the talking defense instinct is not the same with the preservation instinct (apud Geta Angheluță, *Arta actorului ... Arta vieții*, curs – UNATC “I. L. Caragiale” Library, București, p. 11).

they found the *possibility of being small demiurges*, of giving life to inanimate matter and of making it live by their own laws, in a universe which is subject to the “laws of magic”, thanks to which the most hidden desires come true and the spiritual turmoil finds its order, rhythm, and harmony; a whole series of inner needs that demand to be satisfied come true in this theatrical universe.

Coming back to the aesthetic and psychological feature of the puppet-like acting, we mention that the tendency to imitate or to live behind a mask also manifests itself within the puppeteer artist, but, in general, these are *human inclinations*. We also meet them in people belonging to other professions. But they do not become animation theatre or dramatic theatre artists. They do nothing else but to play their roles in society. For them, the working place becomes a stage. Acting also takes place there but, in fact, it is that *La vie mondaine*, about which Ioan I. Livescu said that: “*It is real Commedia dell’Arte, where everyone improvises the role on a given background, with accurate diction, gestures, and attitudes that all people take it seriously and even the greatest actor can be fooled*” (Rusu, 1904, p. 8), but it does not resemble in any aspect to the *acting of homo ludens*, dramatic actor or puppeteer. We have described these sides of humanity because we want to get closer to understanding the urge, the conflictual state that underlies the creation of an artistic act with puppet-like features. On this matter, we appeal to Liviu Rusu’s opinions because we believe that the aesthetician is right when he states that *acting* is not a discharge of energy or a preparatory exercise of some biological functions, but *the one* which activates all those energies that lead to the creation of the inner life spiritualization process.

3. Solutions

From our point of view, in the art of the animation theatre, the link between acting and art is true because acting manifests itself within the puppeteer’s being. The connection between acting and art is also explained by the fact that, although the puppet-like expression style is based on a conflictual state generated by a generally human problem, the acting which manifests within the puppeteer’s being causes the shaping of a ludic vision on life. At the first glance, the ludic vision on life and its issues specific to the puppeteer artists, materialized as a presentation, expresses a “playful” attitude. The directorial vision of a puppeteer seems an attitude of an entirely different nature: the presentation seems to be just a game. But it is not so at all. The puppet-like presentation was not created simply because someone desired to act. In the creative process typical for the animation theatre, the two types of disinterested activities, at least in appearance, the acting and the art *are alike, merge and have the same purpose*: to restore the spiritual balance of the who wants to be, from various reasons, the master of another world. First, the connection between acting and the puppet-like art exists and it is explained by the shared *characteristics*: the attraction for adventure, which aims at escaping from the stereotypy of life and the invention of one’s own world. Second, the final result of the creative process, intrinsic to this type of artist, must be perceived,

generally, as a comic or lyrical *attitude* on life, because this way of addressing the generally human problematic is due to the *peculiarities* of the puppeteer artist's typical personality.

Then, let us see what differentiates the puppeteer's artistic personality from the other types of artistic individualities or what makes them resemble. Like any artist and especially the dramatic actor, the puppeteer, actor or director, is dissatisfied with everyday life, that does not meet his need of an interesting way of living; it is common, lacking the possibility of changing anything, always the same and, moreover, even painful. His being wants to live a certain time as it would like, as it would imagine, in a world fit to its powers and qualities. Unlike other types of artists, in the puppeteer's case, all these needs give birth to the *ludic spirit*, and acting becomes a feature of his representation way; his expression mode resembles acting; through the acting that involves animation, the puppeteer creates the second world his soul is craving for. Its value and significance are explained by what is long time known: it gives way to another form of expressing what exists. On the border between the two worlds, a keen *observer* of human behavior, *an inventive mind*, *a special intelligence* acts jokingly, but also seriously. The puppeteer's playfulness invents the means of communicating a *lesson*; it puts them into action to create visual metaphors with *allegorical meanings*.

We could also state that, in terms of creative vocations, only subtle nuances make the puppeteer artist different from the dramatic artist. The differences and the similarities between the artist of the dramatic theatre and the one of the animation theatre reveal that puppeteer's *something* extra, created from the *playful availabilities* – the ability to scent life in inanimate matter; the ability to transform the objects around in real or fantasy characters; the ability to animate them. The playful availabilities are nothing else but those possibilities through which the puppeteer's reason and feelings manifest freely and, in the fullness of their manifestation, merge into the state of creating a puppet-like acting, in what is called *ludic state*. The puppeteer artist's creative potential can be highlighted by examining its means and ways of expression. During a puppet-like acting, we are “revealed” the puppeteer's specific way to reflect on a generally human matter; we are presented this type of artist's intrinsic way of behaving in relation to the objects from his field of interest. The analysis of any puppet-like presentation can prove that, due to the puppeteer artist's poetic nature, the created language take on forms that suggest the essence of his soul in a direct, noble, and graceful way. At other times, the shapes are grotesque, hilarious. They emerge from the other side of his character, *that of the waggish man*.

A puppet-like presentation takes on the aspect of a *world seen as a game*; it materializes as a creation that reflects *a dream world*, because the directorial vision expresses the puppeteer's attitude towards his anxieties. The images of the shapes that conquer anyone who is watching them expresses the puppeteer's way of suggesting how the evil of existence can be “defeated”. But the emergence of such images is due to the puppeteer's *predisposition to an optimistic philosophy*. This is another aesthetic and psychological aspect of the

puppet-like acting. Camil Petrescu drew attention to another important aspect in defining an artistic personality: “*Art requires a fully developed soul as intelligence, sensitivity, will, and affection. It requires a constant struggle between these traits and the environment, on one hand. For instance, a conflict between intelligence and affection, between passion and will. On the other hand, a conflict between what intelligence is shaping as chimera and what reality offers. By the nature of his soul qualities, an artist is an enthusiast or an outraged. A misfit*” (Petrescu, 1983, p. 408).

When it comes to the puppeteer, by the way in which he responds to a variety of external and internal stimuli, due to the characteristics of his being, he is an *enthusiast* or we can state that he fits into the *sympathetic artist*³⁷ type. That is, unlike the berserk type, the puppeteer succeeds much easier in quieting his inner turmoil. But the ease with which the puppeteer’s soul experiences its harmony comes from the distinction that it understands the world as it is. It is easier for the puppeteer *to mock* what bothers him than to “suffer” endlessly because he is not how some see him, or even how he sees himself, as it would be ideal. This also explains why all his presentations are, most of the times, *embodiments of hope, of optimism*. This sympathetic artist type responds in the same way to the variety of stimuli, due to the ability to see the new in common objects and to transform the meanings of those objects in the creative act. Everything happens this way due to the existence of the *predispositions to create by playing*.

4. Conclusions

The features of the puppet-like personality are, of course, relatively stable. But, clearly, the creator of the animation theatre language must become aware of his own strength, of his inner strength that makes him want to manifest this way, to behave *playfully* with the objects around him. From the specific manner in which he expresses his thoughts through animated objects, the inner laws of his being can be explained and he can explain them to himself. *Acting is the main element of his art*; it is the impetus that comes to life within the puppeteer and determines him to communicate it this way. Accepted as a means of adaptation, defense, acting becomes the engine of the puppet-like language-creating activities; it activates the energies that lead to the creation of the inner life spiritualization process. It is clear that, although it has a playful dominant, the creation and expression activity through puppet-like language is a *game* taken out from the biological sphere and entered in the privileged forms of exercising the spirit, *a game* that generates a multitude of expression means. Once again, we emphasize that, in the animation theatre, *art and acting* are not two different areas; they determine and influence reciprocally. Together, they becalm that

³⁷ “From a psychological point of view, the sympathetic artist type is, therefore, less troubled; he looks at the world with more optimism. (...) His soul is less troubled; it is more harmonious, more serene. He is more attracted by the harmonious aspects of the surrounding world and less by the ones triggering contradictions. His attitudes toward the world are conciliatory, he feels attracted to it, he sympathizes with it.” Liviu Rusu, qtd. work, p. 276.

puppeteer's chase after *something* better and more beautiful; they help him reach the mirage of the second world or the illusion of the second life; they give him the possibility to create for himself another universe in which he has the chance "to live differently". The puppet-like acting involves an escape from ordinary life; it becomes a refuge, a means to get out of the everyday monotony, an activity which absorbs the whole being of the one acting in a very serious way. Once one knows these aesthetic and psychological aspects of the puppet-like acting, one can better understand the puppeteer's *way of being, the specific working manner*, the original *style* in which he produces the metamorphoses and, not the least, explain the role of the relationship between the puppet and the puppeteer in the puppet-like language expression.

Bibliography

1. Ciobotaru, A. D. (2006) *Teatrul de animație – între magie și artă*. Iași: Editura Princeps.
2. Dănăilă, N. (2003) *Magia lumii de spectacol*. Iași: Editura Junimea.
- Livescu, I. I. (1904) *De-ale teatrului la noi și în alte țări*. București: Tipografia Luis.
4. Petrescu, C. (1983) *Comentarii și delimitări în teatru*. București: Editura Eminescu.
5. Rusu, L. (1989) *Eseu despre creația artistică*, București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.
6. Zamfirescu, I. (1974) *Probleme de viață, teorie și istorie teatrală*, București: Editura Eminescu.
7. *** *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*, (1998) București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic.