

## Reflections on the Professional Training and the Bond between Teacher (Master) and Apprentice<sup>1</sup>

Tito Lorefice

Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Argentina)

**Abstract:** This article reflects on a recurring question often in the field of professional training on puppetry: is it possible to describe the content and form of making art in our art, and communicate through usual process of teaching and learning? How the experienced artist, in his role of teacher, with the student or trainee is linked?

**Keywords:** Transmigrate. Emptying. *Póiesis-tekné*. Manipulation-interpretation.

### Prologue

Concern about Pedagogy and the process of teaching the practical knowledge of an artist, is inevitably linked to the need of relating the disciple to a teacher, who will be, on one side, the supplier of the information which the apprentice will receive in order to be able to generate a creative act, and on the other side, an instructor of the disciple's sensitivity, a catalyst, not of his own experiences, but of the instruments the disciple needs in order to appropriate himself of the resources and abilities which will allow him to express himself in a style of his own. This teacher will guide the future artist, through word and deed, to create and "animate", i.e., to put his soul

---

<sup>1</sup> Article translated from Spanish into English by Pablo Sosa.

–*anima*– in all those bodies which, like his own, will share the scene.

This is how the poet states it:

Some people like mountain climbing,  
Others entertain themselves playing dominoes.  
I love transmigration.  
While they spend their life hanging from a rope or  
banging their fists on a table,  
I never get tired of transmigrating.  
At dawn I settle myself on some eucalyptus and breathe  
the morning breeze.  
I take a mineral siesta inside of the first stone I find on my  
way, and before the twilight  
I am already thinking of the night and the chimneys with  
a cat spirit.  
What a delight to be metamorphosed into a bumblebee,  
to suck the pollen of the roses!...  
...When life is too human - ¡only human! – the thinking  
mechanism, does it not become  
an illness longer and more boring than any other illness?  
I, at least, am certain that I could not have been able to  
bear it without this aptitude for evasion, which enables  
me to move myself to a place where I am not,  
and at the same time, to be present:  
to be an ant, a giraffe, to lay an egg, and what is  
even more important, to meet myself when I had  
forgotten, almost completely, about my own existence.  
(GIRONDO, 2014, p. 32).

In a unique way Girondo narrates what could be described as the artist's own condition, particularly the artist experiencing that interplay of mutations and transformations which is an intrinsic feature of puppet theatre. The space in which this process of becoming, as well as this metamorphosis is possible, is the scene. These elements are there as a representation. To *re-present* means precisely to make present by means of *presences*.

## I

Presence refers to an imaginary existence. In acting theatre, it is the presence of a given character embodied by an actor. In puppet theatre of the type we could call “classic”, that presence is a material object which expresses a given character, in which case when the puppet appears it

needs no introduction; there is no doubt about what it is.

In contemporary puppet theatre, on the other hand, in most cases a third position is added, that of the relation and tension between the object and the puppeteer animating it, i.e., whatever lies between both bodies, building up the dramatic universe which contains them.

This is what shocks us; for that material object which we see and presuppose inert, is felt by us latent, breathing, somehow alive. Something we did not expect. The puppet astonishes us when it appears “in the same way we do not realize we are living when we are living”, Ariel Bufano used to say. Its presence is an appearance in the double sense of the word.

Puppet art, if we are to define its basic substance, consists of the creation of imaginary worlds inhabited by invented creatures. When the puppeteer gives life to his new creature, he also creates the universe containing it, with its own laws, which are different, or not, from the human universe of the interpreter to whom the puppet relates to. The puppeteer expresses himself as an interpreter with objects and forms, synthesizing and modifying reality, moving towards a new level in terms of ability for illusion.

In this respect, we could link the puppeteer’s performance with the use of corporality in dance. *A priori*, this artistic discipline is not intended as acting, but as a comprehension of the body in its objectual condition. “In dance the body is objectualized, transformed by its dynamic will; bodies become objects through the plastic beauty of the forms they achieve when modifying the space” (FERREYRA, 2007, p. 19).

To imagine the representation of an action does not mean reproducing movements in the animated form, transferring those of one’s own body, but rather to define an ordering principle made up of signs and symbols which imply a metaphorical transformation, a sublimation, a passage of states. But this transformation has a peculiar quality, as Aristotle reminds us: “Tragedy does not imitate men; it imitates action and life” (ARISTOTLE, 1974, p. 294).

### **Manipulation and interpretation**

In our art, this representation is carried out by actors and actresses *puppeteers* (which is not the same as actors and actresses *manipulators*). And here I would like to make clear the difference between **manipulation** and **interpretation** (or animation) as this could be the starting point

from which a professional training criterion for puppetry art may arise.

The manipulation of the object must investigate key points so as to let the matter acquire a life independent from whoever is handling it, and at the same time be realistic. The goal is not the imitation of human gestures or the search for realism in the puppet. It is rather the use of its dynamic features, observing and taking into account the way it breathes, it beats, it sniffs, it watches, it communicates, trying to comprehend its language. To that end techniques and methods will need to be developed, understanding processes and counting on the necessary tools acquired through concrete training.

However it should be clear that it is not the same to know how **to manipulate** an object in a dramatic function and **to interpret** through that object, thus materializing the **puppet** phenomenon. I am ascribing the puppet -as far as the physical contact is concerned- an objectual quality similar to that of a music instrument. A tool is to be manipulated (a hammer, the pliers, a spoon). But you do not manipulate an oboe or a piano. The interpreter expresses himself through it. The same as he does with a puppet or any other animated form.

### Technique

There cannot be a deep sensory transfer, a true animation in the complex and profound sense of the word “animare”, without a precise knowledge of how to manipulate a material object. Exercising and training of technical abilities are fundamental requirements to keep them serving creation and exhibition, without becoming a hindrance to expression. We know too well that technique must serve art, so that art will not be belittled by the interpreter’s lack of training.

But technical ability, even though a necessary requirement is not sufficient. We often watch virtuoso puppeteers who seem to be inviting the audience to bear witness to their abilities. What we see there is actors or actresses manipulating a puppet in their hands. But even if they may be doing it brilliantly, their virtuosity is not enough to communicate emotion, excitement, to achieve dramatic quality.

A writer may know perfectly well all the rules of syntax and semantics; he or she may have a perfect command of language and speech, but that does not make him or her, *per se*, a poet. Poetry comes through language and goes beyond it. A metaphor is made of words, but refers

to something beyond them. In the same way the puppet becomes alive through the player's manipulation, but it lives beyond this capacity.

The puppeteer is an artist creating spatial poetry. The puppet is nothing else than an embodied metaphor materialized in an animated form, through time and movement within the space or framework containing it.

## II

The word Art is derived from the Latin *ars*, which in turn is the translation of the Greek word *tekné* (from which "technique" is derived). But in the latter the appearance of beauty is not a relevant question. It has to do rather with the possibility of articulating a series of procedures in order to achieve an end and develop a skill which, quoting Tatarkiewicz (2001, p. 41), "[...] is based on the knowledge of certain rules; therefore there is not any kind of art without rules, without precepts". Hence the question about art and its possible transmission has centered itself around organization, systematization, and as far as possible in offering a pedagogy and a teaching process on the manners in which this skill of *tekné* can be communicated.

The Greek world offers us another key term to understand art. The word *poiesis* as pro-duction, i.e. to put forward something, to materialize it, explore its powers, update them, so that what was veiled, hidden, may appear.

As far as artistic creation is concerned, *poiesis* would be the aesthetic event; for example, an actor becoming the character beyond his interpretation, for which he would make use of a technique. However, to be Hamlet depends not only on technique. Indeed, in order to produce Hamlet onstage the skill of the actor is required, but this is not enough; the character should also appear, the event of the possible transmigration between the actor and his representation should take place; *poiesis* goes along and beyond *tekné*.

Now, it is possible to teach techniques, transmit criteria, explain the dynamics of the processes of the *mise en scene*, but can *poiesis* be taught?

*Poiesis* is an energy or active idea which joins the matter in order to communicate form to it. In other words, *poiēsis* is a generating capacity, an active virtuality that updates and exteriorizes the necessary and the universal in a contingent matter. The virtue of the poet is to determine and translate the informal of his poetic chaos into forms which can be manifested (SECCHI, 2013, p. 9).

The question remains, how do you drive, direct, encourage someone to achieve that generating capacity which embodies what is necessary and universal? How can you generate a poietic act which will manage to translate chaos into manifested forms, expressing the value of the beautiful, sublime, the unsettling that inhabits the art?

This is where we should ask ourselves about the premises in the task of puppetry training, particularly when it is carried out by an artist become a trainer. The guide for this question will be based on both the *tekné* features and the dimension of *poiesis*. For it may well happen that an artist could, under appropriate pedagogical and didactic conditions be a fertile communicator, a pool of information, of resources and working devices, but nevertheless that will not guarantee his ability to be a promoter of the poietic dimension in other people. In fact, no method can ensure such a thing: *poiesis* comes without a guarantee of transmission.

The challenge for an artist become a trainer involves mastering a technique aimed at achieving the poietic creation, and at making it happen also in those receiving his teaching: that through *tekné* may *poiesis* emerge. As Picasso (2005) argued: “when inspiration comes, let it find me working”.

Poietic inspiration happens better, can be grabbed, communicated best if it finds its anchor in a *tekné* which, incidentally, will not always be the old, traditional one. Therefore, an artist will not only work in the realization of “original productions”; he will also dedicate his time to the renewal of techniques, processes, modes of creation.

### **The relation between teacher (maestro) and disciple**

The pride of a teacher (maestro) is that his disciple does not equal him, his disciple somehow surpasses him, and in case he needs to think differently from his mentor, he feels free to do so. Such has been the case with Socrates and Plato, and also with Plato and Aristotle as well, whose best tribute was to say “Plato is my friend, but my greatest friend is truth”. In the same way, in the art of puppetry the purpose of the transmission of knowledge is not to generate repetitions, but release abilities, to establish future communities on learning received from the past.

Hans Gadamer (1991) argued that an artist invents his own community, made up of readers, listeners or viewers who capture the creator’s language and speak with him in that language, through which his art runs.

You could say then that a teacher (or Maestro in some countries) of Art is someone who teaches a language, not so that others will speak like him, but that in the creations of those who learn the new language new communities can be established, new transmissions; symbols, rules and forms may be renewed so the disturbing phenomenon will continue to be possible.

### III

In our contemporary world the boundaries between the performing arts become more and more flexible. And if, until recently, the puppeteer was a sort of integral artist, inclined towards the *uomo universale* of the Renaissance, who cradled knowledge from various artistic sources, today more than ever the puppet theatre itself as a whole follows the same tendency.

There is on it a crossbreeding of scientific knowledge, trades, artistic productions, the handling of various materials and their applications, all wrapped in an ideology held in the pursuit of truth and beauty. This same climate, these same impressions and impulses, are visible in the new productions where different artistic languages intersect on stage, no longer as a forced sum of expressive techniques, but composing new forms, expanding and pushing the boundaries of what is known as puppetry language.

It is a well-known fact that performing arts count on more interpreters than creators (which does not mean that an interpretation is not a creative act). But in regard with puppeteers there is in them a certain claim to be comprehensive creators. What would motivate the puppeteer then, an artist in the making, in love with movement and unusual acts, a rare mix of trash collector and scientist, to attend a school or a university in order to get an academic training? How to help train someone who reclaims creation in all its forms and intends to be simultaneously a writer, a musician, a dancer, an actor and also a magician of the image? How to bring about answers to this multiple need, this convergence of expectations of knowledge, practices and experiences?

#### **Personal training**

I would like to share here some of what has been my own process of professional training. Over the years I have come to confirm the fact that the review of our personal history can respond to some of the questions we

face, sometimes even before we have had time to formulate the questions.

My professional life started influenced by the areas in which I had been trained: acting, staging, mime, music, drama and sculpture. That was my basic background. Only years later did I become a puppeteer and that in the most traditional way, i.e. through actual practice. Having embraced my new profession with the guidance of my first master puppeteer, Silvina Reinaudi (later also Michael Meschke and Philippe Genty would be my (Maestros) teachers), I had an opportunity to join the cast of puppeteers of the Teatro San Martin of Buenos Aires, the company of Ariel Bufano, the artist who revolutionized the art of puppetry in Argentina.

Although until then I had been teaching Performing Arts at the University of El Salvador, in Buenos Aires, and also worked as a performer and stage director, my experience as a teacher in the art of puppets had been totally empirical. I had never studied with Bufano, and yet, having performed by his side and accompanied him in his classes, when the time came for him to go away I became his substitute. But, how was I going to teach in place of my teacher? What would I teach those young people, eager to get in contact with the puppets and perform immediately? And how would I do it? Would it be possible to teach? Teach what? Knowledge, basic techniques, creative procedures can be transmitted, but... is that enough?

Here I must make a confession: even if Ariel was my teacher, and I considered myself, and he in turn considered me his disciple, I compare him with Houdini, the great magician who never revealed his secrets. I learned from him more through his example, his integral attitude as an artist puppeteer than as a transmitter of knowledge.

### **Systematization**

As far as teaching is concerned then, in my case it was necessary to invent a method-guide which would grow and evolve over the years, and even today continues incorporating new adaptations.

The main idea of the method is to go from the general to the particular, for which, during the first long stage of his formation, the future puppeteer does not come in contact with the puppet, so he will understand, through practice, the phenomenon by which his own energy shall dwell in different materials in new worlds. Only later will it become

the outside shape in a puppet with a technique emerged and dictated by the object itself. To put it in more technical words: there must be a propaedeutic instance to initiate (in the sense of an initiation) the future artist before making physical contact with the object, before entering the pedagogy and didactics of the arts of puppetry.

A teacher can teach to manipulate, but... what the artist in the making will be able to do with this “know-how”, will determine that his future work be original, innovative, mobilizing or enriching, i.e. that it can embody the artistic act, or not. Is it possible to teach how to create? Can you teach to teach? And even more... Would we know what to teach? Actually we can only show.

If we look back into our personal history, we will surely notice that we have had different kinds of teachers – recognizing the distinction between the status or role of a teacher and the fact of *being* a Teacher.

There are those teachers we chose and followed closely even if we did not have a formal relationship with them; those teachers we did not choose explicitly in our studies but who due to a certain affinity, left their mark on us; those teachers who *chose us* as disciples, whereof we did not realize until later; and those teachers we deeply admired and chose, but with whom, for some unexplainable reason, the link did not materialize. And the list continues.

Now, adding to these features, we can describe three basic stages in the teacher-disciple relationship. The first formal stage, in which the disciple will see in his chosen mentor that “aura of talent” that initially, in a sort of infatuation, idealization, will attempt to copy. Later, a second stage, in which the disciple will try to emulate his master, but already with a critical eye, and even later, when the student has become an artist, a stage in which, if the human link was healthy, the student will try to differentiate himself from his teacher, having found his own personal and different style.

Talent is not transmissible, nor can it be “implanted”. At most what a teacher can do is to show and point out. To illuminate to a certain extent the way the apprentice should walk, but not to illuminate himself; the teacher does not consider his disciple, as we call it in Spanish, a-lumno, i.e. a being without light. His task is to inspire and stimulate him, to defend him from himself, to take care of him, and in mutual trust, to get to know and recognize each other, meet their ghosts, their dreams,

their dreaded scenes and hopefully those to be enjoyed.

One of the needs of the link between teacher and apprentice is for the former to be able alternately both to engage himself in the relation and to get away from it, in order to understand and take care of the expressive process of the training artist and at the same time not to interfere in it. The aim is to get the apprentice to express himself, not to fulfil his tutor's wishes.

Another fundamental issue is individual time. Each person expresses himself in a time all of his own that cannot be altered, even if anybody tried to. This raises permanent problems in relation to the progress of the group as a whole, but then, that is precisely the task of the teacher: to accompany the group task as well as the individual work, without forcing any of the two processes, fulfilling his role as a training artist: to guide students to encounter their own vision of the world and its beauty and their place on it. To encourage students to explore their own inside. Stimulate and urge them to find the vacuum inside. And from that vacuum, direct them to find their own personal style.

I believe it appropriate to speak of emptying, airing, getting rid of old structures and concepts in order to find new ones. If the disciple is to work on his own body as well as on somebody else's, and also on matter, image and word, it will be necessary first to remove whatever is necessary to be able to listen to the material's essence. When I say "*listen to the material*" I refer to the work of sensory experience and connection with the scenic space and all objects inhabiting it, including words.

Thirty spokes unite in the centre,  
thanks to the hole we can use the wheel.  
The mud is moulded in form of a vessel,  
thanks to the hollow we can use it as the cup.  
Walls are raised in all the land,  
thanks to the gate the house can be used.  
Thus, wealth comes from what exists,  
but the valuable comes from what does not exist.  
(LAO TSÉ, 1999, p. 26).

This listening to the material and the vacuum is close to one of Leonardo da Vinci's positions (In: BURUCÚA, 2013, p. 104-105) when

he states the difference between the procedures of sculpture and painting :

1) the way of the *porre* (to put) or *sum*: paint adds color to the canvas, giving it form, background and everything that emerges from the empty canvas.

2) the way of the *levare* (take off) or *rimuovere* (remove) in the sculpture: remove the superfluous...

Asked about his work as a sculptor Michelangelo would say: “[...] I see the sculpture inside the block of marble. All I have to do is remove from the block what is not necessary.” (In: BURUCÚA, 2013, p. 105).

The task of a professor will be to pass on and add the basic techniques that will serve as a springboard for future interpretations. The task of a teacher (Maestro) instead will be to guide his disciple to recognize his inner space starting from the vacuum, to learn more about its essence, to formulate the necessary questions, and to guide him towards his true teacher, the one abiding within him. This teacher, who is an elevated form of his own self, will find the appropriate answers to connect the artist with his poetic vision of the world.

We face here an apparent duality. On the one hand the academic classical relation of the teacher-student bond. On the other the traditional essential relation, the Teacher-apprentice link. Obviously they are not two inseparable forms, quite the contrary; the unity of these two ties will integrate the formative process of the artist. It does not mean that professor and teacher are two different people; they are simply two necessary stages of the same educational process.

#### IV

The great challenge today, sixty years after the creation of the first University School of puppetry (in the West), is to keep the spirit of that ancestral link of transmission of knowledge in articulation with the academic format. The best pedagogy is perhaps to provoke curiosity and sustain it. To teach primarily and above all a passion for the theatre, the pleasure of the imagination.

A college program in the art of puppetry should be malleable, mouldable, and subject to the necessary modifications. It must be a training program to “listen to the material” in every way, pointing out especially to the importance for professors, teachers and educators to sustain a wide breadth of ideas. It must be a living school, as all creation

itself is. In fact, in these schools, colleges and programs, creative teachers should make no difference between the training process of a student and the process of creation of a work of art of their own. And in the same way we consider it as very good when in the act of interpreting with a puppet the spectator forgets he is watching a puppet, a good academic training will also be held as such when the performance of a puppeteer will not show evidence of his teacher or the school behind him.

Training of future puppeteers should be carried out at university level - in the sense of universal - and also interdisciplinary, providing specialization when required to ensure knowledge of the complexity and the interrelation of the arts. The practice of transversal or multidisciplinary action is perhaps more arduous than specialization. But it is also more creative and more likely to respond to the contemporary scenic reality.

To create a training program of this nature implies immersing ourselves in a complex task, taking into account the constant updating and expansion of puppet arts, as well as the ideas about art in the contemporary world, and generating methodological synthesis which will on the one hand overcome obsession for the new and experimental and, on the other, avoid the mimetic repetition of traditional forms. In that respect artisan training is not sufficient. It is necessary to place yourself within a training framework which will facilitate broadmindedness and circulation of knowledge. And it is essential to consider this intervention in two opposite directions: specialization and interdisciplinarity. These two elements must not be perceived as opposites; it is necessary to take care of them at the same time, to encourage their mutual feedback.

At the National University in San Martín, Argentina, we have created a four-year training program in which special care has been taken in the selection of teachers, the idea being to create a faculty made up of active long standing professional artists who can also teach. This training program promotes contacts between artists of different disciplines who impart their ideas, their way of handling common issues and their experience with the theatre, allowing students, through this rich volume of information, to determine their choice, their creation, their particular route.

This challenge to grant an artistic practice as complex as puppet theatre an university entity, presupposes both the approach to the long standing academic practices of the institutions of higher education, and, conversely, that they be capable of housing art forms in its specificity,

their transmission and their particular way to create, and also of widening their criteria on what knowledge is, immersion in the community, and creation of the concomitant cultural value.

It took a long time to reach the present model and it involved a long negotiation with the academic world, especially due to a factor just as unexpected as comprehensible: none of the selected artists had a university degree. It was necessary to create a new formula of acceptance for the national universities in order to incorporate those artists to their teaching staff: teachers without a title. On the other hand, in the absence of a degree, the University recognized experiential knowledge through the formula of the “idóneo”, the “suitable” professional, who thanks to his/her career, his/her training, both personal and non-university, manages a “know-how” enabling him and her to work in formation at the high studies level.

In this disturbing adventure, we find ourselves, trying to uncover what Borges said of the aesthetic phenomenon: "the imminence of a revelation that never occurs." (In: ZORRAQUÍN, 2003, p. 303). We circulate on the mystery of art, on its production, its revelation, and we challenge it to show up. Perhaps to continue diving in that one that could help us to be better human beings. Emulating Shaw (1949, p. 141): “We use a glass mirror to see the face, we use puppetry to see the soul”.

Each period of time, and in particular the present one, with its great complexities and changes, will have to demonstrate how it places itself on the face of art as a phenomenon, and in particular on the face of scenic art, played with, by and through objects and animated forms, by those who faithfully renew the logs to keep the flame burning.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ARISTÓTELES. *Poética*. Madrid: Gredos, 1974.
- BURUCÚA, José. *Miguel Ángel*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Unsam, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Leonardo da Vinci*. Buenos Aires: Unsam, 2013.
- FERREYRA, Milagros. *Cuadernos del Picadero*. Buenos Aires: INT, 2007.
- GADAMER, Hans-Georg. *La actualidad de lo bello*. Traducción de Antonio Gómez Ramos. Barcelona: I.C.E. – Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Paidós, 1991.
- GIRONDO, Oliverio. *Espantapájaros - Poema 16*. México: Editorial Universitaria, 2014.

- PICASSO, Pablo. *Frases*. Málaga: Fundación Museo Picasso, 2005.
- SECCHI, Valeria. *Mímesis, Poíesis y Kátharsis* en la teoría estética de Leopoldo Marechal – un diálogo con Platón y Aristóteles. In: *Revista del Ciffyh - Letras*. Córdoba: Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 2009.
- SHAW, Bernard. *Who I am, and What I think: Sixteen Self Sketches*. London: Constable. 1949.
- TATARKIEWICZ, Wladyslaw. *Historia de seis ideas*. Traducción de Francisco Rodríguez Martín. Madrid: Tecnos, 2001.
- TSÉ, Lao. *El Tao te king*. Buenos Aires: Errepar, 1999.
- ZORRAQUÍN, María. BORGES: La palabra silenciosa. In: *Signos Filosóficos*. N° 9 (enero-junio). México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Unidad Iztapalapa, 2003.