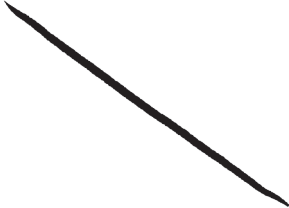


THE NATURAL COMPONENT IN THE TRAINING OF THE PUPPETEER-ACTOR

ANDREI ATABAY



I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest, Romania
Bravissimo Art School | Buluc Independent Company
andrei.atabay@unatc.ro

Abstract: The present article explores the imperative of re-evaluating the puppeteer-actor's inherent human dimension, a fundamental component in sustaining a vivid and authentic theatrical experience. In an era characterised by standardisation and conformity, the actor in general, and also the puppeteer-actor, faces increasingly complex challenges in preserving a genuine artistic presence while animating an object or scenic entity. The article examines how the academic theatre environment, through carefully developed pedagogical methods, can facilitate the rediscovery and enhancement of essential performer competencies. These include acute observation, sustained attention, imagination, spontaneity, embodied memory, and intuitive responsiveness. The article emphasises the significance of incorporating personal emotion and lived experience into the animation process, while also underscoring the pivotal role of educators in guiding students towards truthful, grounded performance practices that facilitate mastery in the manipulation of puppets, marionettes, and animated objects.

Using the principles of Ion Cojar's method and establishing a comprehensive theoretical and practical framework focused on cultivating the intrinsic human component, it enhances the artistic precision of manipulation techniques, contributing, in addition, to the personal development of the performer. By emphasising the embodiment of expressivity and the capacity to engender stage vitality, the actor-puppeteer gains resilience in their work and is less susceptible to the pressures of contemporary society.

Keywords: acting method, puppeteer-actor, human-actor, society, Ion Cojar's method.

How to cite: Atabay, A. (2025) "The Natural Component in the Training of the Puppeteer-Actor", *Concept* 2(31), pp. 93-112. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37130/aax7sa17>

Introduction

The concept of harmonious development encompasses not only the physical and intellectual aspects of an individual but also the emotional, spiritual, and social balance of that person. This article will examine the ways in which societal factors impede this type of development and the implications of this phenomenon on individuals and communities.

A salient negative influence pertains to the pervasive pressure to perform and achieve success. From an early age, individuals are subjected to a multitude of expectations, both from their parents and from the wider society. This phenomenon can precipitate feelings of anxiety and chronic stress, which, in turn, can adversely impact an individual's emotional well-being and contribute to the emergence of psycho-emotional disorders. Concurrently, intense competition for professional success and social recognition has been shown to erode spiritual values and inner equilibrium, directing attention towards external achievements at the expense of profound inner growth (Spolin, 2025, p. 17).

The social pressure for conformity and uniformity in society can have profound and complex effects on the individual, affecting their self-esteem,

mental health, and ability to develop harmoniously. This pressure can manifest in various forms and originate from a multitude of sources, including the family, educational, professional, or cultural environment. In this context, individuals may feel compelled to conform to certain social norms or standards in order to be accepted or to avoid stigmatization and rejection. A notable outcome of such social pressures is its impact on self-esteem. When an individual feels compelled to adhere to external expectations in order to be considered worthy of acceptance or respect, this can have a detrimental impact on their self-confidence and personal autonomy. Individuals may experience a shift in their values, preferences, and opinions as a result of societal pressures to conform to its imposed patterns.

Furthermore, the propagation of cultural uniformity in the media has the potential to culminate in the marginalization of non-conformist or minority artistic and cultural expressions. Cultural diversity is frequently underrepresented or distorted in favour of art and cultural forms that align with the dominant tastes of the media market. This phenomenon not only imposes limitations on the audience's exposure to a multifaceted array of viewpoints and genuine cultural encounters, but it can also lead to a diminution of appreciation for cultural diversity among individuals and communities.

In circumstances where societal forces impede the harmonious development of individuals, the academic environment of the theatre faculty becomes a space where teachers actively facilitate the recuperation and rediscovery of students' intrinsic human qualities. For actors, in particular, the ability to comprehend the intricacies of the human condition is of the utmost importance. This process involves exercises, corporeal games, and reflective practices designed to guide students toward self-discovery and authentic expression. In the case of the actor-manipulator, the importance of reconnecting with the natural human component is especially pronounced in the process of creating the theatrical illusion of the living objects. The importance of rediscovering the natural human component in the method of the actor-puppeteer is accentuated by the modern shifts in the relationship between the object and human within the process of creation, where, as a result of the development of the third genre, as theocratised by professor Henryk Jurkowski (1988) the presence on stage of the human, in front view, alongside the object, articulated and empowers the human presence and component.

By definition, this kind of actor utilizes not only their own body and voice in their work but also objects, puppets, and marionettes, requiring the performer to infuse life, emotion, and intentionality into entities external to themselves. As professor Cristian Pepino identifies, in his seminal work *Directing The Puppet Theatre*, the actor-manipulator develops expressive meaning and sentiments through the medium of the image. This image potentiates the

humanity, anthropomorphism of objects, making them emotional connectors for rediscovering the human component.

The animator creates images throughout the performance, altering the initial appearance of the animated object, and this situation is also evident in the more specific case of puppetry, where the constituent elements of the puppet allow for the creation of expressive configurations. (Pepino, 2006, p. 8) (our translation)

In order to achieve this objective, it is essential that the actor engages in a process of introspection and cultivation of their innate human sensibilities. These sensibilities include empathy, affective memory, spontaneity, and intuitive presence. By nurturing these qualities, the actor can infuse the animation process with vitality that transcends the performer's physical limitations.

Consequently, theatrical pedagogy guided by the ***principle of authenticity*** ("always start from yourself", "put yourself in their shoes" and so on) not only aims to refine artistic technique but also serves as a counterbalance to societal pressures of standardization and conformity. By fostering the recovery and cultivation of the puppeteer-actor's natural human component, education in the performing arts contributes to holistic personal development, strengthens resilience, and safeguards the authenticity and well-being of the performer.

The Human Natural Component

The human natural component is a fascinating and profound field that explores the nature and complexity of fundamental human characteristics. This exploration leads us to a deeper understanding of our primal instincts, our complex emotions, our ability to adapt to a constantly changing world, our innate creativity, and the interpersonal relationships that shape our identity and human experience. These aspects, influenced by the complex interactions between biological, psychological, and environmental factors, play a critical role in shaping not only our individual behavior, but also the evolution of society as a whole. By understanding these fundamental components, we can shape not only our individual, but also the collective portrait, illuminating the path for future progress and a deeper connection to the essence of humanity itself.

The observation according to which "the most personal of the arts is theatre. All other arts operate with objective material. Only theatre uses the living presence of the human being" (Hethmon, 1996, p. 14), emphasizes the uniqueness of theatre as an art form and its deeply personal and human significance. Theatre is distinguished from other art forms by its distinctive and

fundamental dependence on human beings. In contrast to literature, painting, music, and film, which are all brought to life through tangible mediums such as words, colors, sounds, or images, theatre thrives on the tangible and emotional presence of actors. The live presence of the actors introduces an element of genuineness and immediacy, as the audience becomes firsthand witnesses to the unfolding emotions and actions in real time.

The actor brings their entire identity into the interpretation of their roles, encompassing not only emotions and experiences, but also personality, beliefs, and values. One of the fundamental aspects of acting is emotional authenticity. Actors do not merely portray a role; they embody the emotions of the characters they portray. In order to achieve this level of authenticity actors draw upon their own experiences and emotional feelings because "the artist includes itself in the work" (Cojar, 2025, p. 111).

Professor **Ion Cojar** further posits that acting is a distinctive profession and art form, wherein the individual's body serves as both the instrument and the product. The connection between the actor and the role they portray is inextricable. This bond remains consistent regardless of the perspective taken. Humans are innately playful and creative, and these traits are reflected in the mimetic aspect of acting. Every individual assumes different roles or masks depending on their surroundings, thereby demonstrating the versatility of human nature. Moreover, the capacity for talent can be cultivated and refined over time. By repositioning the terms, we can view each individual as an actor in their own right, thereby emphasizing the transformative power of performance.

Stanislavsky, in his school M.H.A.T in Moscow, Lee Strasberg in the "Actor's Studio" in New York, Michel Saint Denis in England, Boleslavsky in America, Tairov, Meyerhold in Russia, Michel Checkhov, Michael Redgrave, B. Brecht, Grotowsky, and many other pedagogues of dramatic art demonstrated that between "talent" and "competence" there are great differences. The confusion between these two terms, which a whole category of "bad teachers", as Clive Swift calls them (in *The Job Of Acting*), who do not perceive this distinction, continue to practice the model of learning skills *through imitation*, with pre-established answers to any question, thus prolonging the practical-artisan mentality of apprenticeship from medieval guilds, dominated by clichés. They cannot fathom the "complexly organized unit" and thus they hinder the free and unpredictable manifestation of dynamic and contradictory human nature as it appears from the unique possible rational realistic perspective: **ACTOR = HUMAN**.

This logical couple is irreducible, no matter from what perspective or assumption, and therefore, form of artistic diversity, we were to approach the actor's art. (Cojar, 2025, p. 105)

In order for a theatrical performance to be considered truthful, the actor must embody naturalness, authenticity, and organicity on stage. This can be a challenging endeavor, even for seasoned performers, let alone for those in the early stages of their training. It is a widely acknowledged fact that individuals tend to modify their behavior when they are aware of being observed. The authenticity of their actions is replaced by artificiality. All the natural traits of a person, which are typically evident in everyday interactions, become concealed and disguised under the scrutiny of the audience. The individual strives to portray themselves as someone they are not, whether it be to impress others or to conceal their true selves. In the midst of this overwhelming unease, the student aims to transform into an actor.

In the case of the actor–manipulator, this challenge acquires an even greater degree of complexity, as the performer is required to maintain authenticity within their own corporeal and emotional presence while simultaneously transferring that authenticity to an animated object. Extrapolating from the observations of Professor Pepino, this transfer of authenticity can take place only through the intermediation of movement, understood not only as the transfer of motor qualities, but also of sentiment and self:

Movement is the most powerful means of expression in any type of performance. At the root of the strength of this expressive means lies, of course, the fact that the attention of any being is drawn to objects or creatures in motion. (Pepino, 2006, p. 17) (our translation)

As mentioned, the stage presence of the puppeteer–actor extends beyond the boundaries of individual expressivity and is transposed onto the puppet or marionette, which becomes the primary locus of visible emotional and dramaturgical articulation. When an artist loses connection with their innate naturalness and embodied truth, the resultant work often appears lifeless, lacking in vitality, intentionality, and artistic legitimacy. Consequently, the re-establishment of connection with one's intrinsic human qualities—affective resonance, kinesthetic awareness, and creative spontaneity—is a fundamental prerequisite for the actor–manipulator. This reconnection facilitates two things: first, it enables an authentic performative presence before the audience; and second, it generates scenic life within the object itself. In this regard, the practice of

object animation exemplifies the essential role of the human natural component as a core foundation for theatrical veracity, revealing the deep interdependence between human authenticity and the aesthetic efficacy of puppetry performance.

For an aspiring puppeteer, it is imperative to critically assess the fundamental qualities of an actor and methodically cultivate the requisite skills through structured training. This objective can be accomplished through a range of exercises and techniques that foster the development of critical competencies, including puppet manipulation, bodily expressiveness, and the coordination between the performer and the animated object.

Observation: from eyes to hand—cultivating observational skills in puppetry

Observation is a foundational skill, essential for understanding and interacting with one's surroundings. The process of observation is not merely the act of seeing or hearing. Rather, it is a complex process that necessitates attention, perception, and interpretation. The role of observation in numerous fields is pivotal, extending from the scientific and medical realms to the arts and interpersonal relationships. "The method that aims to reveal a number of natural facts, on the basis of which a hypothesis can be formulated and subsequently verified through experimentation, is called observation" (Sillamy 2000, p, 213). In essence, observation is a process whereby individuals gather and interpret information from their immediate environment using their sensory faculties. In contrast to passive perception, which is unintentional and involuntary, observation is a conscious and deliberate process of selecting and filtering relevant stimuli from the surrounding environment. This enables the recognition of patterns and the deduction of meanings, which are influenced by the individual's knowledge, experiences, and previous expectations. "Nicolae Mărgineanu regarded the concept of *observation* as closely tied to *perception*, part of a broader process of intuitively grasping the concrete world through the senses." (Darie, 2015, pp. 52-53)

Observation is a fundamental aspect of numerous aspects of daily and professional life. Actors must possess keen observation skills in order to enhance their performances and infuse their characters with authenticity and depth. This capacity enables them to comprehend and replicate human conduct with precision, cultivate empathy, and convincingly portray a spectrum of roles. In order to adequately prepare for a role, actors frequently engage in extensive research, observing real individuals or analogous case studies of the character they are about to portray. This meticulous observation yields invaluable and genuine insights that enhance the quality of the performance.

The animator must possess the ability to discern and accurately interpret the subtleties of movement, gestures, and human or non-human behavior, which they subsequently transpose onto the animated object. Through meticulous observation, artists can discern the intrinsic dynamics of movement, including rhythm, weight, and intention. These elements are then transformed into expressive forms within the medium itself, thereby infusing it with life and movement. Furthermore, through constant visual and sensory analysis, the animator cultivates sensitivity to detail and to subtle transformations that can lend credibility or poetic quality to the animated character. Consequently, observation transcends the realm of mere technical exercise, becoming an indispensable creative process that imbues the object with vitality.

"As we can see, observing the surrounding world is a technique which facilitates the process of mastering the actor's art." (Darie, 2025, p. 55) By disclosing to the novice actor a nuanced perception of the world and its inhabitants, the instructor provides the student with the most comprehensive support for the development of their internal world.

In order to enhance their observational abilities, students may employ the following methodologies: *Conscious Practice*—the initial stage of developing the capacity for observation is conscious practice. This entails allocating a specific period of time to actively observe the surrounding environment. *Intentional observation*—it is beneficial to approach observation with a clear purpose in mind.

Reflective analysis—after an observation session, it is advisable to engage in a reflective analysis of the observations made.

The curriculum of the acting course of the puppeteer includes the use of theatre games designed to facilitate the development of specific skills. The following games are suitable for observational purposes:

Sit down/Stand up

The trainer chooses three volunteers from the group and seats them in a semicircle. The volunteers then move toward the rest of the participants, who are instructed to either sit or stand. Next, the trainer introduces three possible body positions: standing, sitting, and lying on the floor. At the trainer's signal, the three volunteers must each choose one of the positions simultaneously, paying close attention to the choices of their partners. If two volunteers select the same position, one of them must become the observer and quickly switch to a different position. Participants watching from the outside observe their colleagues' reactions and later take their place in the activity. This exercise also helps develop concentration and spontaneous responsiveness. (exercise described by Darie, Jicman, Sehlanec, 2016, p. 27)

Echo-Image

This exercise is done in pairs. One partner carefully examines the mask and creates a short sequence of movements for the other partner—the one wearing the mask—to follow. The designer performs no more than three movements and then holds the final position. The mask-wearer reproduces those three movements. Afterwards, the designer adds another set of three movements to strengthen and enrich the mask's expressiveness, and the mask-wearer mirrors them again. The partners then switch roles so each participant experiences both the role of designer and that of mask-wearer.

"Reflection: (On designing and „scaling up" movement to meet requirements of the mask.) Did the movements grow? Did the movements reflect the character of the mask? Did the mask influence the person's design of movement? Did the person influence the mask?" (Latshaw, 2000, p. 50)

Focus and attention: essential skills for puppeteer-actors

In the contemporary fast-paced and information-saturated environment, the ability to sustain focus and attention is becoming increasingly crucial. In the context of an ever-increasing array of distractions and mounting time constraints, the capacity to engage in deep concentration and maintain focus on current tasks is of paramount importance for achieving success in both personal and professional domains.

Focus and attention are essential cognitive functions that enable individuals to direct their mental capacities towards specific tasks, thoughts, or stimuli while disregarding irrelevant information. Attention encompasses both the capacity to concentrate and the selective process of determining what to focus on. These processes work in concert to facilitate effective problem-solving, learning, and performance in a multitude of activities.

Attention can be classified into different types. The first of these is *sustained attention*, which is the ability to maintain focus over extended periods. The second is *selective attention*, which involves concentrating on a particular stimulus while filtering out distractions. The third is *divided attention*, which refers to the ability to manage multiple tasks simultaneously. Each type of attention plays a role in navigating the complexities of modern life.

The capacity to focus one's attention is of paramount importance for actors, as it is a fundamental requirement for their ability to perform effectively and authentically on stage. The art of the puppeteer-actor necessitates a high

level of focus and attention in various aspects, including the complete immersion into a character, responsiveness to cues, and interaction with other performers and the audience.

The puppeteer must distribute their attention precisely between three elements: their own body, the animated object, and the performance space. They must do so while simultaneously maintaining the coherence of the dramatic intention. During the rehearsal process, puppeteer-actors must be able to absorb feedback and make the necessary adjustments to their portrayal. The iterative process of refining their performance is contingent upon their capacity to concentrate and internalize the director's notes. Concentration is not merely an internal process; rather, it is an outwardly oriented skill. Animators must monitor how the audience perceives the movement and expressiveness of the puppet. In real time, they adjust the intensity, rhythm, and focus of the gesture. Furthermore, any deviation of the actor's attention from the puppet can instantaneously disrupt the illusion of life, thereby restoring the audience's awareness to the technical aspects of the performance and invalidating the transformation of the object into a believable character.

In theatre, the capacity to perform actions on stage with dexterity and discernment is what distinguishes a proficient actor from a remarkable artist. This level of expertise necessitates meticulous preparation, keen attention to detail, and a profound comprehension of human nature. All elements must be essential and accurate. "Truthfulness only emerges when the action performed by the actor is genuinely necessary, and necessity only arises when attention is truly being focused on an important point" (Darie, 2025, p. 60).

A fundamental aspect of the authenticity and efficacy of a theatrical exercise is the presence of a *focal point*. This focal point serves as a valuable tool that facilitates, maintains, and guides the overall process. Primarily, it facilitates the segregation of discrete segments within the domain of theatrical techniques (see the importance of the *Focus Point* or *Point of Concentration* in Viola Spolin's improvisational method—Spolin, 2025, p. 32). The division of the theatrical experience into smaller, more manageable units facilitates the identification of each detail, thereby eliminating any potential feelings of being overwhelmed or intimidated.

Theatrical games are employed by actors as a means of developing their ability to focus their attention. The following games are suitable for focus and attention purposes:

Zombie

Arrange as many chairs in the space as there are participants, placing them randomly. The coordinator selects one volunteer to play the Zombie, who moves slowly and deliberately around the room. All other participants sit in the chairs, leaving one chair unoccupied. The Zombie's goal is to sit in the empty chair. The seated participants must watch the Zombie carefully and work together to shift seats, trying to keep the empty chair out of reach. Participants should not abandon their seats near the Zombie simply to run toward a distant chair, as this would give the Zombie the opportunity to take a seat. (exercise described by Darie, Jicman, Sehlanec, 2016, p. 37)

Mirror Image of the Mask-wearer

"This exercise requires a team of two, with one partner masked, one unmasked. The partners face each other. The unmasked person tries to follow the movement as the masked person takes the lead. The unmasked person must concentrate on all that he/she sees, even to the facial expression on the mask, so that the mask-wearer can have the sense of seeing exactly what is being done. Play this directly with observers watching each unit. The team members should then reverse roles with the same partner. Reflection: Did the mask-wearer "see" what he/she was doing in the reflected action? Did the observers feel they were seeing mirrored images?" (Latshaw, 2000, p. 50).

The developing of imagination—the puppeteer's creative foundation

The term "imagination" is defined as a complex cognitive process whereby images and new projects are elaborated based on the combination and transformation of experience. (Paul Popescu-Neveanu, 1997, p. 92)

Imagination serves as the foundation for creativity and innovation, enabling individuals to transcend the limitations of reality and explore uncharted territories. It is this imaginative capacity that drives progress and fosters cultural growth by encouraging individuals to think outside the box and push the boundaries of conventional thinking.

The capacity for imagination is of paramount importance in fostering empathy, which is defined as the ability to comprehend and share the emotions of others. By assuming the perspective of another individual, one can gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and emotions. This empathetic comprehension serves as the foundation for the establishment of meaningful

and compassionate connections, as well as the promotion of social cohesion. In his work,

Arthur Koestler (Ralea, 1957, p. 236) noted that when empathy is activated, two emotional processes occur simultaneously. The first is the moment of identification—when the subject (whether listening to a true story, witnessing an event, or watching a film or theatrical performance) accepts participation in the life of another person, from a different time and space, temporarily setting aside their own concerns. In other words, it's an act of selflessness. The second moment, which is simultaneous, relates to the experience itself, the genuine experience which that other person feels. (Darie, 2025, p. 64)

In the domain of the arts, imagination plays a pivotal role in the shaping of artistic endeavors. Artists in a variety of disciplines employ the power of imagination to convey their distinctive perspectives and emotions through their work. Theatre is a unique and powerful art form, its ability to evoke emotion derived from the realm of the imagination. Imagination, in the context of theatre, is not merely a tool for fostering creativity; rather, it is an integral element that permeates every facet of production, performance, and reception.

Actors rely heavily on their imaginative capabilities to craft believable and captivating characters. Actors must engage in a profound exploration of their own imagination in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the inner lives of their characters. This entails an investigation of their motivations, emotions, and backgrounds. "The imaginary, being a mapping of distinct domains, achieves the identification of one subject with another through a process of projection." (Marcus, 1971, p.10)

Stanislavski's method of acting places significant emphasis on the significance of imagination in the creation of performances that are truthful and genuine. The employment of techniques such as emotional memory and the concept of the "magic if" enables actors to transport themselves into the circumstances of their characters, thereby making them react and respond naturally on stage. The term "sensation" is used to describe the characteristics of objects, whereas the term "perception" is used to describe the complete depiction of the object.

In the process of acquiring knowledge, the human being relies not only on sensations and perceptions, but also on mental representations. These latter processes are complex cognitive operations that process sensations

and perceptions, reorganising them into schematic mental images that can be accessed later, in the absence of any direct stimulation of the sensory receptors. (Darie, 2025, p. 77)

Prior to commencing work, performers engage in a comprehensive examination of the script, analysing the background, relationships and objectives of their character. They then employ their imagination to envisage the circumstances that have shaped the character's life. By immersing themselves in these fictitious scenarios, actors gain a more profound comprehension of the nuances of their character's psyche.

In the world of puppet theatre education, various methods are employed to expand the imaginative capacities of puppeteer-actors, helping them fully inhabit the characters they animate and bring authenticity to their performances. Improvisation is a fundamental technique employed by drama instructors to cultivate actor skills. By engaging in exercises such as *Yes, and...* or scene improvisations, actors develop the capacity to think quickly and adapt to various scenarios and emotions in a spontaneous manner. This not only enhances their capacity to respond in the present moment but also fosters creative thinking and flexibility in their performances.

Imagination is an essential element in animation theatre, serving as the driving force through which the animator brings inanimate objects to life and transforms them into credible and expressive characters. By employing the faculty of imagination, the artist effectively surmounts the physical limitations of the puppet or marionette, thereby endowing it with intentions, emotions, and reactions that extend beyond the materiality of the object itself. This creative capacity enables the construction of a coherent performance universe, in which movement, voice, and visual elements are integrated to generate meaning and captivate the audience. Additionally, imagination facilitates the exploration of unexpected possibilities inherent in the animated object, fostering innovation and spontaneity. Animation theatre, through its allowance of creativity, becomes a space for artistic experimentation. In this space, the boundaries of reality are constantly questioned and redefined.

In addition to the aforementioned techniques, the drama teacher may also utilize a variety of games to foster the imagination.

Fantastic creators

Participants are divided into two or three groups of equal size. Each group collaborates to decide what imaginative project they want to create—for example, a machine that builds flying carpets. After

agreeing on the final creation, every member invents a specific action that represents their contribution to the project, from start to finish. Once ready, the groups perform their “creative process,” and the rest of the participants try to guess what role each person played. (exercise described by Darie, Jicman, Sehlanec, 2016, p. 43)

Create a Ritual

Divide participants into groups of 6–8. Each group chooses a simple or primitive type of society. Characters may include a high priest, shaman, witch doctor, voodoo practitioner, wizard, and similar figures. The main magical figure may also have assistants and followers who participate in the ritual. After selecting the society, the group creates a ritual in which an inanimate object appears to move as the central magical act. The magician or their assistant must be clearly characterized, and the ritual should show how the onlookers react to the magic. No special trick materials (e.g., flash powder or flash paper) are allowed—the illusion must be produced solely through undetectable human action. Candles, incense, and similar props are permitted. Each ritual should include both characters who observe within the scene and the external audience. Time must be dedicated to planning and rehearsing the ritual. Rehearsals should take place out of sight of the other teams so that the final presentation remains surprising. During rehearsals, groups should gather props, set up the environment, and practice all roles and effects. After each ritual is performed, allow time for discussion and reflection before moving to the next group.

”Reflection: What was the magic you saw? Was it hidden from the beholders? What were its effects? Can you tell why it had these effects? Usually the presentation of the rituals should provide a session in itself. The response is such that it would be an intrusion to introduce a new aspect at this point. Let the observers savor what they saw. An understanding of the root beginnings they have made toward animating the inanimate will begin to seep into their consciousness. For some, the implications are awesome.” (Latshaw, 2000, p. 44)

Spontaneity in animation theatre: breathing life into objects

Spontaneity, often regarded as a hallmark of creativity and authenticity, represents the art of acting and living in the present moment without predetermined plans or scripts. This quality is highly esteemed for its capacity to introduce unpredictability

and freshness into both personal interactions and artistic endeavors, thereby infusing them with vitality and energy.

In the context of animation theatre, spontaneity is not merely a trait; it is a skill that is cultivated through practice and regarded as a fundamental aspect of captivating performance for puppeteer-actors. Viola Spolin states that spontaneity is the best response of an individual or group to a new and difficult situation, for it increases creativity and lessens anxiety (Spolin, 2008, p. 103).

A range of techniques and exercises that are specifically designed to enhance actors' capacity to adapt and respond facilitates the cultivation of spontaneity in acting. Improvisation, for instance, requires actors to think on their feet, create dialogue, and navigate scenarios in real time, relying on their intuition and creativity. These exercises not only enhance actors' spontaneity but also foster a sense of cohesion and trust within the ensemble, as performers collaborate seamlessly in the moment.

Photo shoot

Participants stand in a circle. At the coordinator's signal (for example, a clap), everyone freezes in a natural body pose, avoiding any movement that looks deliberate or artificial. The coordinator observes and encourages participants to let their bodies shift freely, without planning the next action. The coordinator uses taps or claps to indicate when to change positions, gradually increasing the tempo so that participants respond instinctively rather than thinking ahead. (exercise described by Darie, Jicman, Sehlanec, 2016, p. 61)

I'll be the body, you'll be the voice

This exercise is carried out in groups of four. Two participants choose the characters and the situation for a pantomime scene. These two performers can move but are not allowed to speak. The other two participants provide the voices for the mimed characters. The "voices" sit separately from the pantomime performers and speak while the actors silently enact the scene. The performers should not attempt to lip-sync the spoken lines, as the dialogue is meant to be spontaneous, though the general structure of the scene and its action should be planned in advance. This preparation gives the actors an idea of the direction the dialogue will take. After completing the first round, the partners switch roles so that everyone has the chance to perform both as actor and as voice. Each scene should be shared with the group, followed by time for discussion and reflection.

”Reflection: Did voice and action seem to blend into *one*? Which was easier to do the movement or the voice? Did you try to establish which half would take the lead-the voice or the actor-or did it just *happen*?” (Latshaw, 2000, p. 48)

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that spontaneity is not without its own set of challenges. It is of the utmost importance to strike a balance between spontaneity and structure, particularly in professional settings where reliability and consistency are highly valued. The ability to be spontaneous effectively requires a solid foundation of skills, knowledge, and self-awareness. This enables individuals to navigate uncertainties while maintaining focus and purpose.

Memory in animation theatre: retaining and reviving life

At its core, memory is a complex interplay of neurological processes involving different regions of the brain. The initial process of converting sensory information into a form that can be stored in memory is referred to as encoding. A number of factors, including attention and perception, as well as emotional and motivational factors that can enhance or inhibit memory formation influences this process. For instance, emotionally charged events are often more vividly recalled due to the heightened attention they elicit.

One of the most evident ways memory is important for puppeteer-actors is in memorizing lines and the movements associated with animating the object. The script and stage movements serve as the blueprint for any performance, and the puppeteer-actor’s ability to accurately memorize lines, gestures, and timing, and to convey them with the appropriate emotion and intention, is essential. This process involves not only mechanical memorization but also understanding the context and meaning behind each line and movement, which contributes to a natural and believable animation of the character or object.

Once information has been encoded, it is transferred to the memory storage area, where it can be retained for varying lengths of time. Constantin-Rădulescu Motru (1923) distinguishes between two categories of memory: associative and non-associative. He posits that

associative memory is conditioned by the functions of the nervous system and the existence of an individual consciousness or subjectivity. The term “associative” is employed to describe this phenomenon because it is the fundamental law of its formation. When association plays a role in understanding, then associative memory becomes intelligent. In

associative memory, the primary function is reproduction, whereas in *intelligent memory*, the primary function is knowledge. (Rădulescu-Motru, 1923, p. 160)

The utilisation of *affective memory*, which enables actors to evoke genuine emotions by drawing upon personal experiences, is of significant importance. This particular technique, which is commonly associated with the Method acting approach, involves actors recalling past experiences in order to imbue their performances with authenticity. By accessing their emotional memory, actors are able to effectively convey profound and intricate emotions, thereby rendering their characters more relatable and captivating. Drama games for developing memory:

The indigo animals

This exercise divides participants into two groups of equal size. First, one group creates a physical tableau representing an animal using their bodies. The second group then has 10 minutes (a duration that may be shortened depending on the working context) to observe and analyse the image formed by their peers. Afterward, the first group leaves the space, allowing the second group to reconstruct the tableau from memory. Finally, both groups compare the original formation with the recreated version. (exercise described by Darie, Jicman, Sehlanec, 2016, p. 68)

Mosaic of gestures

Participants sit in a circle. One person begins by performing a hand gesture. The participant to their right repeats the gesture and adds a new one. The sequence continues around the circle, with each person reproducing all previous gestures and contributing an additional movement. Once the sequence reaches the last participant, everyone repeats the full series of gestures, starting with their own contribution and ending with the gesture made by the person to their left. (exercise described by Darie, Jicman, Sehlanec, 2016, p. 69)

Conclusions

The significance of this approach in restoring the natural human component of the actor is underscored by the findings of this study, which emphasize its crucial importance for the authenticity and depth of theatrical performance. In today's society, which is largely characterized by pressures to conform and maintain

uniformity, the challenge for actors is to preserve spontaneity and authenticity in the face of these pressures.

In the field of theatrical academia, there is an important role in facilitating the rediscovery and cultivation of the fundamental skills necessary for genuine artistic performance. In addition to instructing students in the techniques of acting, theatre educators facilitate a profound journey of self-exploration and self-discovery. By encouraging students to integrate their own emotions and experiences into their artistic endeavors, these educators facilitate a profound and authentic connection between the actors and the characters they portray. It is of the utmost importance for contemporary actors to possess a number of indispensable skills, including observation, focus, imagination, spontaneity, memory, and intuition. These skills enable actors to remain true to themselves and to create performances that authentically reflect the intricate and diverse nature of human experience. The process of regaining and developing these skills is not only vital for artistic performance, but also for the personal growth of actors, equipping them with the ability to resist societal pressures.

The integration of emotions and personal experiences into the creative process represents a fundamental aspect of regaining the natural human component. This approach not only enhances the authenticity of performances, but also serves as a form of self-therapy, allowing actors to delve into and comprehend their own feelings and emotions on a deeper level. Consequently, this results in performances that are more nuanced and complex, capable of profoundly touching and moving audiences.

Furthermore, the development of the actor's intrinsic human qualities enables them to resist the negative influences of societal conformity. By cultivating a robust and genuine artistic identity, actors are better equipped to navigate the pressures of uniformity and contribute to the advancement of diversity and innovation in the theatrical arts. This resistance not only enhances artistic performance but also contributes to greater cultural and individual diversity in society.

The character in an animation performance is created by a visual artist (its form is based on a concept that conveys a visual message), and the animator of this object uses it in performance by adding further layers of meaning through the movement of the puppet, through its association with the actor's vocal interpretation, and through the accompaniment of movement with music. This theatrical play generates a different type of message—distinct from both the visual arts and live-actor theatre—although it still relies on expressive elements specific to each of them (Pepino, 2006, p. 5).

These principles assume particular significance in the domain of puppeteer-actors, where the authenticity of performance is manifested not only

through the actor's physical presence but, even more significantly, through the animated object. The puppeteer must transpose their own inner universe into a body external to themselves, thereby transferring the organic quality of human emotion into the movement of the puppet. This process necessitates an elevated level of bodily awareness, precision, and expressive refinement, as any falseness or rigidity is immediately reflected in the movement of the object, thereby compromising the truthfulness of the scenic moment. In this regard, the recovery and cultivation of spontaneity, sensitivity, and authenticity become imperative, as the body functions for the puppeteer both as an instrument and a conduit for the transmission of emotional truth. By fostering an organic relationship between the actor and the puppet, puppet theatre not only preserves but amplifies the human dimension of the theatrical act, thereby transforming the puppet into a vector of empathy and a profound point of connection between performer and audience.

The reclaiming of the actor's natural human component is not only an artistic necessity but also a personal and professional imperative. It is evident that theatre faculties and specialized teachers play a pivotal role in this process, providing invaluable support and guidance for actors in their quest to discover and develop their authenticity. This holistic approach not only leads to more truthful artistic interpretations but also to a more complete and harmonious personal and professional growth for today's actors.

References:

1. Cameron, J. (2013) *Cum să cultivi creativitatea copiilor – Exerciții pentru stimularea inventivității și exprimării de sine*. Iași: Polirom.
2. Cojar, I. (2025) *Poetics of the Actor's Art*. UNATC Classics Series. Translated by Maria Alexe, 2nd edition. Bucharest: UNATC Press & Paideia.
3. Darie, B. (2025) *A Course on the Art of the Actor: Improvisation*. Translated by Ana Popovici. Theatre Education Series. UNATC Press & Universitaria Craiova Press.
4. Darie, B., Boldășu, R. and Jicman, A. (2016) *Jocuri teatrale: manual pentru clasele V–VIII*. București: UNATC Press.
5. Darie, B., Boldășu, R. and Jicman, A. (2025) *Jocuri teatrale: manual pentru clasele V–VIII*, ediția a II-a. Colecția Educație Teatrală. UNATC Press & Universitaria Craiova.
6. Dobra, A.G. (2025) *Applied Theatre in the Integration of Refugee Children and Teenagers*. Translated by Victor Mongescu. Theatre Education Series. UNATC Press & Universitaria Craiova Press.
7. Ene, C. (2025) *Inerții psihologice în cunoașterea și dezvoltarea mecanismului logic specific de gândire în arta actorului*. Colecția Educație Teatrală. UNATC Press & Universitaria Craiova.
8. Hethmon, R. (1996) *Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio*. New York: Viking Press.
9. Jicman, A. (2025) *Theatre as a Social Inclusion Mechanism*. Translated by Cosmin Bădulețeanu, Diana Ștefan-Dinescu, Mihaela Zamfirescu. Theatre Education Series. UNATC Press & Universitaria Craiova Press.

10. Jurkowski, H. (1988) *Aspects of Puppet Theatre: A Collection of Essays*. London: Puppet Centre Trust.
11. Latshaw, G. (2000) *The Complete Book of Puppetry*. New York: Dover Publications.
12. Lucaci, L. (2025) *The Becoming of the Actor*, 2nd edition. UNATC Press & Universitaria Craiova.
13. Pepino, C. (2006) *Regia spectacolului de animație*. București: UNATC Press.
14. Popa, C. (coord.) (2017) *Psihologia educației și managementul clasei de elevi*. București: UNATC Press.
15. Popescu-Neveanu, P., Zlate, M. and Crețu, T. (1997) *Psihologie*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.
16. Rădulescu-Motru, C. (1923) *Curs de psihologie*. București: Cultura Națională.
17. Ralea, M. (1957), *Scrisori din trecut în filosofie*. București: ESPLA.
18. Sillamy, N. (2000) *Dicționar de psihologie*. București: Univers Enciclopedic.
19. Spolin, V. (1999) *Theatre Games for the Rehearsal*. Evanston, Illinois: NUP.
20. Spolin, V. (2008) *Improvizație pentru teatru*. Trad. M. Bețiu. București: UNATC Press.
21. Spolin, V. (2025) *Improvizație pentru teatru*, ediție prescurtată. Trad. M. Bețiu. UNATC Press & Universitaria Craiova.
22. Stroe, M. (1971) *Empatia*. București: Editura Academiei RSR.
23. Taylor, I.A. (1959) *The Nature of the Creative Process*. In Taylor & Barron (eds.) *Perspectives in Creativity*. New York: Aldine.

Online references

1. Buluc, Bucharest (2025) *Buluc.org* [Online] Available at: <https://buluc.org/> (Accessed 11 October 2025)
2. Bravissimo Art School, Bucharest (2025) *Bravissimo Art School – Școala de muzică, teatru și arte vizuale*. [Online] Available at: <https://bravissimo.ro/> (Accessed 11 October 2025)

Andrei Atabay is a graduate of a BA program in Acting and is also a graduate of the MA in Theatre Pedagogy at I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest. As an actor, he has performed in numerous productions both in state and independent theatres. With 10 years of experience as a drama teacher, he has worked with children, youth, and adults, organizing and conducting theatre workshops and personal development sessions. He is a specialist in modern pedagogy, he teaches drama at Bravissimo Art School and improvisation at Buluc Independent Company.