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Homo Primitivus

Theory and technique of folk puppet theater

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Contens

Petrushka: Marginal Person and social satire. Puppetry and power: censorship, propaganda, resistance (XIX-XXI). International colloquium. Charleville-Mézières (France), November, 2014.	3
Petrushka-Punch as an Asocial Personality. Puppetry and Post-Dramatic Performance. An International Conference on Performing Objects in the 21st Century. University of Connecticut, USA. April, 2011	14
Primitive conciousness and Petrushka-Punch puppet show. Manuscript copyright.	21
List of main references	55

Petrushka: Marginal Person and social satire

Thesis 1.

Petrushka is not a character of the satirical folklore, as he personify archaic, “pre-social” mind.

Many researches examining the theatre of Petrushka believe that Petrushka personify the brightest features of the Russian people’s character¹. That said, they usually suggest that the common people, who are committed to the most advanced and democratic views, are always in opposition against the exploitation of man by man and the representatives of the official authorities. This assumption gives grounds for the myth that the social criticism is the main principle of Petrushka or his global peers.

We believe that it would be wrong to think that Petrushka was created only to express people’s discontent with the existing social order. A range of our works² prove that such personages as Petrushka (and his peers Punch, Pulcinella, Polichinelle and others) are the personification of a primal, pre-social, archaic mind, which is trying to maintain and live in the society. Petrushka behaves like a child, who knows no social rules; like a person, who is trying to understand these rules by implementing different social roles, while always breaking the bounds of decency.

On the other hand, the social criticism envisages that a “critic” is quite aware of the hierarchical structure of the society – the social critic knows who is a “leader” and who is a “guilty person.” First of all, a social critic is dissatisfied with the existing social situation, and he/she proposes a new social model (which looks more fair, in his/her opinion) or, at least, requires to punish those, who are guilty. In other words, a social critic is a product of a certain social order.

However, Petrushka is not a child of any social structure, so he cannot propose any “fair” model of society. Petrushka cannot laugh at any person or social phenomenon “consciously” and “voluntarily”, but his actions look like a targeted satire due to other reasons. Moreover, Petrushka – an outcast man – beats and offends not only his “social opponents” such as policeman, merchant, or doctor, but also his “social fellows” such as beggar, drinking pals, Filimoshka, and his father...³ Does not it clearly show that Petrushka has no positive ideas? No signs of social satire!

Thesis 2.

The comic effect of the situations played in the theatre of Petrushka is based on a conflict of his asocial, outcast mind, unaware of any social rules and laws, with representatives of this society, which act in line with well-known regulations and rules.

In the theatre of Petrushka and his peers all over the world, the similar subjects are used for plays and sketches. These plays demonstrate familiar and always repeated situations, which have occurred with all the people since ancient times, i. e. marriage, relationships with doctors, representatives of authorities, law enforcement officers, merchants, and so on...

Every one of us, people living on the earth has an experience of such relationships, but when we talk about these situations, we often describe some funny incidents. The comic effect does not arise from a conflict of interests (as in this case these incidents would cause dramatic situations), but from a difference in interpretation of social rules – each participant of these conflicts is trying to interpret the rules for his own benefit. Petrushka always resolves conflicts quickly and only for his benefit. We know how to behave in accordance with the social rules, and for this reason we often fail. Petrushka knows no social rules, but he always wins. This contradiction is the very source of the comic effect in Petrushka’s sketches, and this makes us to enjoy these plays – Petrushka reflects our secret desire to resolve any conflict very quickly – using a bat. And he does it for us!

Moreover, the fact that Petrushka's rivals are usually despicable increases the comic or even "a sort of" satiric effect of the situation. Of course, Petrushka is able to beat a good doctor or fair merchant as well, but this would limit the comic effect, but the rules of street comedies require the personages and situations to be clear and simple.

Thesis 3.

In Petrushka's plays, the satirical effect appears when a typical sketch is performed in a particular social context.

The typical and well-known sketches, which have been played thousands of times could be perceived by the audience as satire, when the viewers (watching this definite play at definite time) have in their minds a definite personality or situation touching their hearts. In other words, the spectators become critics, not Petrushka.

In addition, we should remember that the street theatre of Petrushka (or any other puppet street theatre) could hardly earn enough money to survive, if it only plays social satirical plays. Petrushka has to speak about simple and common situations, if the puppeteers want to make common people on streets to pay money for plays. Therefore, over the centuries, the theatre of Petrushka has selected just few well-known types of plays reflecting the basic situations of our common life. However, given the fact that almost every person of the audience was at least once in conflicts with police officers, bad doctors, or unfair merchants, the spectators perceive the punishment of these characters during the play as a direct satire. The satirical effect was much stronger, when a puppet player previously knew about a real cheater (familiar to the local audience) and then named this person during the performance.⁴ There are evidences that the aforementioned method was widely used by the Russian puppeteers in the past – they came to taverns and listened to the local gossips and rumors on order to use this information during the performance.

Thesis 4.

The political satire is not a must-have element of Petrushka's theatre. However, occasionally, when political tensions accelerate and the bulk of the audience is interested in politics, Petrushka's sketches could make a definite political sense being perceived by the audience as political satire.

One should take into account that Petrushka and other personages of his theatre express the idea of any scene using such plastic means as gesture, signs, expressive details and movements. Words are only used as additional instruments. The ideal expressed by Petrushka must be simple, laconic, clear, and it should be easily expressed by movements. Moreover, if the spectators do not share the same thoughts, the same mood, they will not understand Petrushka's hints.

For example, during the French Revolution of 18th century, when many aristocrats were executed, the classic scene describing Polichinelle's hanging (familiar to the audience for at least 200 years) was perceived by supporters of the revolution as sharp political satire. It was enough to put on "executed" puppet an aristocratic suit and hat to turn the archetypical situation into sharp political action. The sans-culottes in their red conical caps immediately caught the hint.

However, we can imagine the reverse situation, when the puppeteers are invited to a palace, and their Polichinelle kills a sans-culotte during the performance played, of course, for certain award.

Petrushka has no allies or enemies – he is on his own!

At the same time, the authorities are trying to use the popularity of Petrushka's theatre for their purposes – to "let off the social steam" or even to conduct any political campaigns.

Pierre-Jean Beranger wrote in his fable "The negroes and the puppet show" ("Les nègres et le marionnettes") about a slave merchant, who decided to organize a puppet show on the shipboard, as his African slaves were too depressed. "Amuse yourselves, my worthy slaves!" there is a refrain. "Tout roi que la peur désenivre/ Nous prodigue aussi les joujoux. / N'allez pas vous lasser de vivre:/ Bons esclaves, amusez-vous."⁵

Instructive examples of using Petrushka's "satirical potential" for the good of official authorities come from propaganda plays written in Russia in the 1st half of the 21st century (during the Civil War and the World War II).⁶ Petrushka being a soldier of the Red Army smashed his bat on heads of "bourgeois," "White Guardsmen," "landowners," Hitler, and Mussolini. In other plays, Petrushka-propagandist mocked at "old regime" and Petrushka-hospital aide fought with lice... However, trying to truckle to the ideas of verbal propaganda, Petrushka lost his original voice-pishchik (whistle). There were too many words, but few actions in Petrushka's plays. As a result, Petrushka died as a specific theatre character.

Our theatre has an experience of playing political sketches. Below we will describe some of them played with respect to different political events.

We invented and played sketches about the presidential elections in Russia, which have recently occurred on the backdrop of absence of real competition between the candidates. For this reason, our Petrushka killed (common way of dealing for this personage) all other characters – Doctor, General, and Merchant. Then he put them in a row saying: "as there are no candidates left, I have to govern myself!"

Let's look at another example: new public holidays appeared in Russia being imposed by new bureaucracy. There was introduced the Day of Unity and Consent. Then, in a year, the authorities introduced another state holiday – the National Unity Day (without the word "consent"). And our Petrushka trying to temp his girlfriend to live-in relationships (he always does it) said that the unity between them is possible and welcomed, but there is no need in her consent.

There is one more example. In accordance with a very old tradition, the Black Dog (infernal creature, representing the Devil) kills Petrushka in the end of the play. We usually play this scene during our performance. However, in our scene Petrushka called the Black Dog "Connie," and almost everyone in Russia knows that President Vladimir Putin has a black Labrador dog called Connie..

People in political clubs used to laugh at these sketches, as the bulk of the audience in these places was ready to catch the political hints. However, when we tried to play the same satirical scenes on the streets – just for walking people passing by – we noticed that those people, who previously eagerly laughed at classical scenes, immediately lose their interest towards the theatre and did not pay money.

Thesis 5.

The features of the theatre of Petrushka in terms of a social phenomenon are determined not only by the nature of the main character but also by those social circumstances that surround the puppeteer.

As a rule, the researchers examine the relationships between Petrushka and official authorities in terms of the nature of Petrushka regarding him as the main character of a puppet theater play.⁷ However, there is now a need to change the point of view on this issue: instead of “The authorities and Petrushka, the street theatre character,” let’s say: “The authorities and an artist, who plays the puppet.”

Petrushka is different from the puppet player, who makes him to act. The former is a character, figure, personage – the personification of archetypical human features in general, who also reflects the features common for all the people regardless their nationality, social position, education and so on. That is why different nations created and saved the street theatre of the same type, and there is no need to translate the play of Russian Petrushka, for example, in the US or in Germany; while the street viewers in China and Pakistan enjoy London’s Punch.

However, puppeteers do have their nationalities, social positions, and political affiliations. And they cannot avoid reflecting their private social experience in the performance. However, whatever the political preferences of a street actor may be, no matter what political party this actor may belong, an actor does not work for ideological reasons, not for the sake of “the holy art,” as benevolently minded intellectuals think. An actor works for money, this work brings him his food. One

remarkable London punchman once told us: “Both liberals and conservatives must pay to me. If I criticize any of them, some will not pay to me. But everybody must pay! So, I do not talk to the audience about politics, but about the most important thing – about our life! “

The second thing we should remember is that an actor is defenseless on the street, he is open to all winds and misfortunes, he is alone with his fragile booth and expensive puppets, which cannot be lost as the puppeteer will lose his piece of bread in this case. And there are hundreds of people around the artist, and each of these people has own political views. The artist could be expelled from the street for speaking against the government, and it is not the worst thing that could happen to him. In this situation it is difficult to demand the artist to show great political courage. We worked on the street, and we know how this could happen.

However, there is another problem in the relationships between a puppeteer and a viewer: how should a puppeteer behave, if he does not share the political views of the audience? As an example, how should we behave on the street, if we want to speak in our plays about the latest events – the association of Crimea with Russia? We (the artists) consider this political act as an illegal annexation, but most of the audience regards this as the “restoration of historical justice?” Our screen will be instantly torn into pieces, if we try to play a political sketch, which contradict the sentiments of the crowd.

Petrushka reflect the common, unified sentiments of the viewers. This is the principle of his artistic existence. And this helps the puppeteers to survive.

For this reason, the theatre of Petrushka is not political or satirical theatre, but it is just a theatre for people.

Thesis 6.

The theatre of Petrushka is an amazing and very rare phenomenon of the culture, as it expresses the ancient canon via fluent immediate dialogues with the audience; and a range of topics approved by centuries is veiled due to immediate changes of moods and scenes. The indissoluble connection between a strict canon and free improvisation gives the never-ending life to the ancient Petrushka. However, for this reason a researcher can decide that Petrushka was only created in the depth of the folklore culture talk about one-off events, to mock at “vices,” to express the discontent with the social injustice.

At the same time, we already know that Petrushka is not a “social critic” or “orator,” he does not “call” for anything, he “is all by himself.”

So, why does every one of us instinctively feel that Petrushka opposes the authorities always and everywhere? And why the authorities all over the world regard Petrushka (and his peers) as an oppositionist? The answer is very simple:

Petrushka is a cast of the deepest, primary, archetypical traits of the Man, and the Man is free in his archetype, in his very primary fundamental principle. This intuitive freedom common for Petrushka's nature puts him in the row of ancient and indestructible oppositionists. The feeling of the inner Freedom living in each man and woman from the very birth is perceived by the authorities of all the times as the most dangerous threat. Petrushka, as a cultural character, has a special mission – his secret and sacred task is to tell people: “You are free!”

Conclusion.

Now we would like to add some words about our theatre The Vagrant Booth and our experience.

Our experience suggests that in those countries, which commit to a certain “state ideology,” Petrushka immediately enters into a conflict with police or, at least, with censors.

First, we want to cite an example from our work in the US. One of the main parts of the US' state ideology is tolerance. And we know that the children theatres must strike off all the scenes of "violence" or any scenes, which could be perceived as "violence," from their plays. This means that the Wolf now has no "rights" to eat Little Red Riding Hood, and Christmas plays should not include scenes of "massacre of the innocent." The organizers of our performances in a residential treatment center in Boston⁸, where both children and adult patients were treated, strongly urged us to play Petrushka's show without any fights. Given the fact that the theatre of Petrushka is based on movements, and a fight is Petrushka's key way to express his thoughts, it was natural that there was some kind of misunderstanding between us and the customers. Finally, we found a way to resolve the conflict: during a fight, Petrushka did not hit another puppet with a bat, but knocked on the wooden pillars of the booth.

Let's consider another example. In nowadays Russia, we see a gradual formation of a political and ideological system, in which free assembly of people or free expression of any "message" become almost impossible. The cement of laws is steadily thickening, and it becomes more and more difficult to move and breathe in it.

On Nevsky Prospectus in St. Petersburg, there is a place, which is popular among many street actors. We have played Petrushka's plays here for 10 years. Sometime ago, the police helped us to organize the performance and guarded us. Now, everything changed: the street actors have to hide from policemen. Well, musicians and jongleurs can run away very quickly, but it is quite hard to take away the Petrushka's booth. In Russia, there are no laws governing the work of street artists, there is no licensing system for them. But there are laws prohibiting unauthorized outdoor assemblies. You can receive a permit for a street action, but at this permit should include not only the timeline and the exact place of the public performance, but also the define number of participants. So, if you gather bigger audience, you will get big troubles.

One day, when we played our sketches on the street, a policeman came to us and said that we must take our booth and go away.

“We do not do anything wrong, we just entertain people,” we said. In response, the policeman said a phrase, which definitely characterizes the attitude of the modern Russian authorities towards the street artists. “Okay, you can play! But try not to gather people!” he said.

Abstract

Petrushka is not a character of the satirical folklore, as he personify archaic, “pre-social” mind.

The comic effect of the situations played in the theatre of Petrushka is based on a conflict of his asocial, outcast mind, unaware of any social rules and laws, with representatives of this society, which act in line with well-known regulations and rules.

In Petrushka’s plays, the satirical effect appears when a typical sketch is performed in a particular social context.

The political satire is not a must-have element of Petrushka’s theatre. However, occasionally, when political tensions accelerate and the bulk of the audience is interested in politics, Petrushka’s sketches could make a definite political sense being perceived by the audience as political satire.

The features of the theatre of Petrushka in terms of its social phenomenon are determined not only by the nature of the main character but also by those social circumstances that surround the puppeteer.

Petrushka is a cast of the deepest, primary, archetypal traits of the Man, and the Man is free in his archetype. This intuitive freedom common for Petrushka’s nature puts him in the row of ancient and indestructible oppositionists. The feeling of the inner Freedom living in each man and woman from the very birth is perceived by the authorities of all the times as the most dangerous threat. **Petrushka, as a cultural character, carries out the special mission – his secret and sacred task is to tell people: “You are free!”**

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Petrushka-Punch as an Asocial Personality

Introduction

The characters similar to Russian Petrushka could be found in many puppet theatres all over the world. Remember Punch, Pulcinella, Polichenelle, Vidushaka, and Palvan Kachal.

The character, or the theatre that is usually called after him, has been living in folk traditions for many centuries. Sometimes, people lose interest in this theatre, sometimes it becomes popular again. But this puppet never dies. "Mister Punch is too old to die," the English say.

The nations all around the world consider this theatre to be their national one, as well as the main character to be a representative of their nation. But all the theatres of this kind play sketches with very similar stories, and the main characters of these theatres have more common features than differences.

Most of chronologists, as well as most of the audience, consider Petrushka/Punch/Pulcinella to be a satirical character. So to say, he is seen as a "public critic" of social institutions. That is why many people think that Petrushka could still be interesting, only if he is up-to-date. It means that the performances are to contain contemporary character types, present-day circumstances, and sharp political satire. It is possible, but it is not the main feature of Petrushka and the theatre.

Homo primitivus

We consider Petrushka/Punch to be neither a type of any national character, nor a character of the folk satire.

Many times we watched reactions of Russian audience to Italy's Pulcinella, or to England's Punch. And we happened to play our

Petrushka sketches before spectators, who didn't speak Russian. And in any case the actions of Petrushka/Punch/Pulcinella were clear to everyone without translation. The spectators on the streets of Moscow took English Punch for something of their own, as well as the people in London understood Russian Petrushka very well. And the audience laughed at sketches, which were funny even three centuries ago. This proved to us that Petrushka theatre is universal, and it doesn't depend on time or language.

Thus, we see that Petrushka makes people laugh referring to those levels of consciousness, which don't take any cultural differences. We take him on the archetype level of our consciousness. We consider Petrushka/Punch to be a character, which contains pre-social and pre-national consciousness. He is a proto human. Not a Homo sapiens, but a Homo primitivus.

To prove our opinion, we are going to compare Petrushka/Punch's actions during a performance with the actions of someone who has not yet learned social rules or national features.

I think you know who I am talking about. It's a baby!

Playing man

What does Petrushka do at the stage? He is getting married, buying a horse, falling ill, becoming a soldier and so on. In other words, he tries different social roles. The show is based on the rules of the simplest game. A casting first: "I am a Doctor, I am Petrushka, I am a soldier." Then, we see the development of the conflict. And finally, the performance suddenly, catastrophically stops: "Plonk! Crack! Killed!" When the storyline is exhausted, Petrushka easily begins a new game, like a baby does. He tries a new role forgetting about the previous one.

Petrushka examines the world playing, in the same way as a baby does. His way of the examining is interesting for us. The result could be absurd in our view: Petrushka mounts on a

horse, back to front; a baby puts on a plate instead of a hat. But an unexpected decision is so attractive for us.

Meanwhile, a game could not be considered only as cognitive activity, but also, and first of all, as the activity aimed at itself. Not cognition is the main goal of any game, but a pleasure of playing! Petrushka and a baby enjoy acting. That is why it is so funny to watch Petruchka. We saw children starting dancing at Petrushka's performances!

Fight and Death

The Petrushka's sketches are full of fighting. Culturally, Petrushka's fighting traces to sacral battles with the evil forces, the rituals we could see in many archaic cultures. In the context of theatre, the fight is a musical gag and dancing. Socially, the fight is the simplest way to resolve a conflict, an appropriate way for the primitive consciousness. We can often see that little children prefer actions to talks. Petrushka should not be considered in the context of social morals. Petrushka embodies the pre-moral consciousness, so he is beyond these frames. And that is why he resolves his problems with a cudgel.

If we suppose that the primitive is still alive in the depth of our minds, we could say that Petrushka reflects our desire to deal with the problems as simply as he does. Here is one of the reasons that explain why we love Petrushka so much.

We don't know on which stage of their development people realized the death. But we definitely know that a baby is not aware of death. Neither is Petrushka. He doesn't realize the death or even a possibility of punishment. But it is interesting that we can't imagine Petrushka to be dead. It's amazing, but it's true. We think that Petrushka cannot die. On the other hand, Petrushka can easily kill everyone beginning from his own wife to an executioner. Why? The answer is rather simple. All these characters are not alive for Petrushka. They are toys for him. It means that in this context the death of some character is not

a real death; and a murder is not a murder. We can perfectly see that a puppet taken off a hand is only a rag. We don't feel sorrow for the killed characters not because we don't like them, but because it is not a real murder, it's just a game.

Asocial personality

Petrushka's "awful" games, I mean all those "beating", "murders", "funerals" and so on, are really awful only when we look at Petrushka in the light of "distinctness" or "social typicality". But Petrushka is beyond these measures.

The cognitive activity of a baby consists in learning and expanding of its living space. But one can expand something only knowing the limits. When anybody tries to expand his space, he is always at the border between the permissible and the forbidden. A baby always tries to do something forbidden. So does Petrushka. He is always a marginal person.

However, during this activity a baby is getting socialized, while Petrushka doesn't learn anything. Here is the fundamental difference between Petrushka and a baby. Petrushka is always going around in a circle of his eternal conflict with the external world.

Petrushka's voice

Petrushka's voice separates him from the other characters. We believe all the characters to be our contemporaries. But Petrushka is out of time because of his voice.

Petrushka's voice is produced with a special contrivance, a voice modifier. Voice modifiers of such a construction are wide spread in the traditional puppet theatres all over the world: in Asia, in European countries, in Africa. It proves that the instrument, called pishchik (or swazzle in English), is very old, as well as Petrushka theatre itself.

In the theatre, the voice modifier is used to mark out the speech of the main character. Moreover, the modified Petrushka's laughter is the main musical theme of the performance.

The music in the Petrushka theatre is quite plentiful. It is produced with two types of musical instruments: wind one (swazzle) and percussion one (Petrushka's cudgel). Sometimes, a string instrument of the narrator could be added. In Russian theatre the narrator is traditionally called "a musician".

Using of the swazzle suggests that the Petrushka theatre is less verbal but more plastic theatre. Bruno Leone, famous Pulcinella from the city of Naples, called his theatre a jazz show. Petrushka is acting more than talking.

2. Petrushka and politics

Petrushka/Punch theatre could not be considered as a political or satirical theatre. Konrad Fredericks, punch showman from London, once said: "I work with people on the street, and I have to make them pay. If I say something against the Labour party, the labourists would not pay. If I criticize the conservatives, they would not pay. I should talk not about politics, but about common problems." And we believe the artist who has been playing street Punch shows for thirty years.

By the way, the audience often thinks Petrushka's sketches to be satirical. There are several reasons of this.

The typical Petrushka/Punch sketches are based on archetypical rules or on the contrasts: man – woman, common inhabitant – public authority, customer – salesman, sick man – doctor, soldier – officer, condemned – executioner and so on.

All these situations are well known all over the world, I mean that everyone has such experiences. And all the situations are potentially funny. So if we add any recognizable detail (image, actions, speech) to a common situation, we could compose a political sketch.

The satirical message should be simple and absolutely plain. The situation should be “in the air”, in the present-day political context. On the other hand, the character should express it very clearly.

I’m going to give two examples: one from the history of the puppet theatre, and another from our practice.

During the French Revolution in the 18th century, when many aristocrats were beheaded, the common sketch of head cutting was taken as a peppery political satire, while the scene had been known in Pulcinella/Polichenelle theatre long before the events. It was enough to put a camisole and a three-cornered hat on the “beheaded” puppet to transfer an archetypical situation into a political sketch. Sans-culottes got the reference immediately.

We had an experience of political satire in our theatre. We play the common scene of fighting with a dog. Almost everyone in Russia knows that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has a black dog called Konie. That is why, when a black dog appears on the stage, and Petrushka calls it: “Konie!” the Russian audience gets a political reference. Especially when Petrushka breaks wind in front of the dog’s nose, and a musician says: “It smells of opposition!”

Our experience suggests that the audience does not get any political hint when the political passions calm down. Meanwhile the archetypical situations, free of politics, still make the audience laugh.

Petrushka is an egocentric. He only knows himself. That’s why he can’t express any positive idea. He can’t side with any party during the political discussions. He is always of himself. And he is beyond the political frames.

Conclusion

In certain cases, Petrushka could be taken as a satirical character, but he stays free. Marginal person is always free.

Petrushka remains forever the same. That is his main feature. We love him not because he fights with evil, but because he laughs. Petrushka does not laugh at someone or something. He laughs because he is joyful. And his joy is in his nature. Immortal life – that is Petrushka's nature!

Puppetry and Post-Dramatic Performance. An International Conference on Performing Objects in the 21st Century. University of Connecticut, USA. April, 2011

Primitive consciousness and Petrushka-Punch puppet show

Everyone who once saw Petrushka-Punch would never confuse him with any character and would recognize him in any guise. This character – known all over the world under different names: Petrushka, Punch, Pulcinella, Vidushaka, and Palvan Kachal – is marked with a secret sign. And everyone of us considers Petrushka-Punch to be a part of his or her culture, regardless of nationality, social position, age, and education. Why is Petrushka-Punch so familiar and understandable for almost any representative of the humanity?

We believe Petrushka to be the “primitive” consciousness that is embodied in the dramatic character, in other words, a consciousness of a proto-human (*homo primitivus*). In our opinion, because of this circumstance Petrushka appears as one of the most up-to-date characters in any period of human development, as “*homo primitivus*” is a foundation of our personality and it is still alive at “archetypical” bottom of our minds.

In the puppet, theatrical embodiment Petrushka has some distinctive features: image, voice and behavior; and in this article we will closely examine two of them: voice and behavior.

I. Petrushka’s Voice

Petrushka-Punch’s laughter is unforgettable and it can be recognized in a great choir of many voices. It is not only a high tone but also a calling “mechanical” and very harsh sound that attracts your attention at once. Petrushka’s specific voice is produced by a special voice modifier called swazzle (or “*pischik*” in Russian).

Voice modifiers in the puppet theatre

Two types of voice modifiers are known in the world puppet theatre: mirlitones and reed aerophones (the wind).

Mirlitones [Musical instruments, 2001: 161] modify and intensify a sound produced by the artist's voice by way of a vibrating stretched membrane. "Comb singing" is a well-known example of a simple mirlitone. Musical instruments kazoo or zobo¹ – made in the same way – are wide spread, for example, in mock jazz-bands. The construction of the mirlitones that are used in puppet theatres is the same: a membrane either obstructs the sound flux² or stretches on a side hole and modifies the sound waves reflected from sides not obstructing an outlet hole. This ancient voice modifier is used in puppet theatres all over the world, for example in Turkish Karagoz theatre, in African puppet theatre [Darkowska, 1998: 109], in South-East Asia, in Tamil shadow theatre in India [Proschan, 1981: 528]

On the contrary, in Petrushka-Punch theatre reed aerophones are spread wider. Reed aerophones produce a sound by making a body of air to vibrate when it is going through the reed. [Music dictionary, 1990: 47] "Pischiks" or "govoroks" – the types of swazzles used in Russian Petrushka theatre – have a reed that is made in the form of thin elastic membrane, stretched in the hole between two bent plates¹. The instrument is put between teeth or on the back of the tongue in such a position that the membrane turns out to be parallel to a blown air. When the air supply is strong, the reed membrane produces a harsh, high-pitched sound. It will be simple to imagine this device if we remember how in our childhood we whistled through a blade of grass stretching it in our hands. The instrument is so simple

1 Kazoo and zobo are wind instruments that came from the African culture and appeared among afro-american citizens of the USA in the 19th century. At present these instruments are widespread in jazz-bands. [Wikipedia]

2 F. Proshan uses the verb "obstruct" and O. Darkowska uses the verbs "obturer, fermer" [Darkowska, 1998: 109, Proschan, 1981: 528]

and old that it has no any proper name in musical literature and is mostly called simply “pischalka” (in Russian; means “a squeaker”) or according its function - “manok” (a bird-call) among hunters or “govorok” (a swazzle) among puppeteers. We managed to find the proper name of this instrument only once – in the dialect of Boyks, the highlanders from western Ukraine, who called it “organok” [Gref, 2005: 40]

In the puppet theatres the construction of swazzles has not been seriously changed compared to the similar musical instruments, but the distinctive feature of the swazzle is that being put on a border between soft and hard palate it produces a rasping sound and at the same time allows the artist to articulate and to pronounce the majority of speech sounds quite clearly, as the artist’s vocal cords don’t produce any sound. And the artist’s hands are free. Any well-trained artist can take the swazzle away and put it back with his tongue extremely quickly when he alternates modified sounds with “normal” human voice; he also can keep carrying on a dialog between the characters at a rapid pace. However, the use of this instrument requires some special training and professionalism. The artist has to supply a strong flux of air into a tight hole of the swazzle during all the performance, so it is possible only after special breath-training. Nevertheless, swazzles of this kind were widely used both in European and Eastern puppet theatres. The swazzle of the examined construction was often described in the literature. [Godowsky, 2004: 309; Gref, 2009: 169; Puppetry Arts, 2000: 58; Folk theatre, 1988: 253, Simonovich, 1980: 115] We should repeat that the main distinctive feature of a swazzle is that vibrations of sound are produced by the reed membrane while the artist’s vocal cords are calm, therefore, the vocalized sound becomes distorted, “artificial”.

Traditionally, the ability to produce sounds with a swazzle is considered to be one of the best skills in the puppeteers’ community. O. Darkowska publishes an interview (dated 1935) of one African puppeteer, who “believed the use of a swazzle to

be a very difficult part of his art, as he had practiced for years to learn this technique” and he continued upgrading his skills. [Darkowska, 1998: 109] There is an opinion that puppeteers don't readily reveal the secrets of their art. In Africa “the technique of the voice modification is still regarded as one of the professional secrets and it is difficult to discuss this subject with the puppeteers” [Darkowska, 1998: 110]. Much the same was in Europe at the time when the puppet theatre was a closed guild. But nowadays European puppeteers are usually well-educated; many of them who have theatrical or art education understand that ancient traditions are dying. That is why they are ready to share their knowledge for saving the traditions.³

Speech, music and rhythm

It is clear that such an instrument as a voice modifier is not the most suitable contrivance for delivering monologs. And what is more, it is not possible to articulate all the sounds distinctly while using a swazzle.ⁱⁱ The distinctness of the speech depends on the construction of the swazzle, on the material it is made of, on the tension of the membrane, largely on the sounds of the performance language, and, of course, on the artist's individuality – the anatomy of his vocal apparatus, and on the position of the swazzle in artist's mouth. That is why the questions about how to use this specific instrument, why the instrument is needed for the puppet theatre and how it is possible to make puppet's speech understandable for the audience remain of primary importance.

It is common for puppet theatres to introduce in a puppet show a special character - an interpreter, a narrator, who explains everything what happens at the stage. A narrator, being out of the booth as in Petrushka theatre or in Iranian theatre [Solomonik, 1990: 116, 126] or being invisible for spectators as in Chinese theatre [Obrazcov, 1957: 254- 257], comments on

³ All puppeteers - Italian, English or Russian - with whom the author managed to discuss this subject were ready to give all the information while pointing out its secrecy by tradition.

puppets' actions and explains the words that are difficult for understanding because of noisy crowds or words distorted with a swazzle.

The main method of interpretation of the puppet's speech consists in repeating puppet's phrases in interrogative form. Unfortunately, this method is not almost recorded in any documents of the past, and A. F. Nekrylova mentions this fact in her work, "As to precise records of lexical, visual, and playing parts of the performance, they don't simply exist." [Nekrylova, 2003: 27].

We will publish an extract from the article by Frank Proschan to illustrate the mechanism of such dialogues. Here Punch answers the questions not from the musician-interpreter, who stands outside the booth but from another puppet character, Judy:

Judy: What do you want?

Punch: A kiss!

Judy: A kiss?! Girls and boys, shall I give Punch a kiss?" [Proschan, 1981: 530]

And here is a dialogue from the puppet play of our theatre:

Petrushka: How much?

Musician: How much does the horse cost?

Gipsy: One million!

Musician: One million?!

Petrushka: Tju-Tju (means you're going gaga)!"

By the way, a role of a narrator comes not only to simple commenting on the puppet's actions and to the explanation of hard-to- distinguish phrases distorted by the swazzle. A narrator, or a "musician" in Russian traditional puppet theatre, organizes the performance being a link between the puppets and the audience. O. Darkowska writes: "The voice modification often makes a speech difficult for understanding that's why the presence of a narrator is needed. Sometimes even two artists

participate in the show, as one of them “may feel bad or he can suddenly die”, Moussa Mamane from Nigeria explained to us. <...> The function of the artist of this kind, who accompanies all the performance from the beginning to the end, consists not only in the interpretation of puppets’ words but he acts as puppets’ partner and messenger. This omnipresent person is always on the move; he is always fussing applying now to the puppets, then to the musician, or to the audience. He interprets, asks, answers and comments; he asks for applause and encourages the audience to be generous. It is he who starts to dance or joins the puppets in a song.” [Darkowska, 1998: 112] The same behavior is typical for a narrator everywhere in the world: in Iranian and in Russian puppet theatres. [Solomonik, 1992: 20-24; Nekrylova, 1988: 36] ⁱⁱⁱ

However, the repeating of basic words is not the only way to conduct a conversation between the puppet and the spectators; there is a range of sound patterns that illustrate puppet’s behavior and are clear for an audience even without a verbal dialogue. Laughter, sobbing, sighs and exclamations - all of these are the instruments of puppet’s speech strengthened by puppet’s artificial voice. Petrushka-Punch’s laughter stands especially out of this range! It is a sign of the puppet, not comparable to anything and absolutely irreplaceable; it is an inherent feature just like huge Punch’s nose! The laughter supports almost every action of the puppet, forms its character, explains its behavior in many aspects and finally determines the puppet’s relations with other characters and with the audience. When the laughter is not heard even for a short-term period the audience looks puzzled, as if all sounds of the performance have just been “shut off”. The vocal range of the performance is an alternation of Petrushka’s laughter and other sounds.

But the very core the subject is that a swazzle and Petrushka-Punch’s cudgel should be considered as an inseparable pair of musical instruments (wind and percussion), a pair that has a millenarian history in the puppet theatre. In such a view

the role of a swazzle in forming of the performance changes significantly. The duet of swazzle and cudgel is the very music of the performance. This music is so self-sufficient, its rhythm is so clear and so completely illustrates and at the same time forms plastic movements that the verbalization of dialogues often appears to be unnecessary. This conclusion is confirmed by a practice of playing Petrushka-Punch puppet show before foreign spectator. When the audience laughs there is no doubt that stage actions are understood. “The fact that puppeteers around the globe use voice modifiers,” Frank Proschan writes, “suggests to me their profound (albeit unstated) understanding of how they work—that is, their awareness that speech itself is redundant, and that reduction in the sign and restriction of the signal are possible without sacrificing intelligibility.” [Proschan, 1981: 534] And what is more, Konrad Fredericks says, “Punch is also a very good singer!” So this widens a musical pallet of the performance. [Fredericks]

The melodic potential of swazzles as wind instruments is very divers: their rhythm, tonal and timbre nuances allow to express a wide range of characters’ moods. It is good to use swazzles for mimicking of various sounds, for example, a bird singing. But the hit, the main theme of swazzles of different kinds is a dance tune! We happened to watch a performance of Indian theatre from Rajasthan running by Puran Bakht who held a “boli” – that is exactly alike with the abovementioned organok – between his teeth to accompany the dancing puppets. Puran Bakht manipulated all the puppets, mimicking an energetic singing of the dancers that were whirling on the stage by the voice very suitable for the puppets, and at the same time his boli was the leading instrument of the nearby orchestra. It is important to note that the performance had a prologue, when the puppets of gods (bigger than other ones) talked in human voices and only at the main part of the performance, when “real puppets” had already appeared they began to sing in very “puppet” voices.

We insist that the nature of the performance in Petrushka theater changes cardinally whether the puppeteer uses a swazzle or don't. It should be stressed, as non-use of a swazzle in Petrushka-Punch theatres takes place not only in Russia, where the practice of Petrushka's shows has been interrupted for at least a half of a century but also even in England, where Punch has been "alive" for four centuries.⁴

Being educated in the tradition of literature theatre many of Russian puppeteers pay attention only on verbal dialogues of the characters published in texts of ancient puppet plays, forgetting that a folk performance is a continuum of plasticity, music, text and picture.^{iv}

They also neglect the fact that Petrushka's voice leads the performance rhythmically and as well expresses a substantial essence of the performance by opposing strange, relative character from *the other world* to other characters of the comedy, to all those who represent the human society and speak in "human" voices just because of this contraposition. Everybody who seriously works "inside the booth" knows that the voice of the puppet belongs to the very puppet, not to the puppeteer. Moussa Mumane, a Nigerian puppeteer, expressed this idea better than anybody else: "It's me, who puts something into my mouth but this is the thing I hold in my hand that does this." [Darkowska, 1998: 109]

A call from the other world

Let's consider more particularly why the puppet theatre still insists on using this complicated contrivance. Frank Proschan who considered the subject more closely than the others offers the following explanation: "A number of possible motivations are at work, to different degrees in each tradition. ...The distinctive sound of the voice modifier alerts audiences to the arrival of the

⁴ In Great Britain was even founded a special closed "College of Professors" aiming to save all the traditions of Punch theatre including using a swazzle. <http://www.punchandjudy.org/>

puppeteers and the beginning of the performance, for example. Another has been barely noted above although it is certainly extremely important: the squeaky voice is inherently funny, especially to the children who often compose the largest part of the audience..." [Proschan, 1981: 541] Half a century earlier N. Simonovich wrote almost the same: "This broken, sharp whistle coming out of curtains that are waving thanks to its blow... arouses the interest of the audience and makes the spectators to concentrate their attention on the small stage." [Simonovich, 1980: 116]

We do not deny the above conclusions, but see other reasons to use a swazzle, this specific instrument of the puppet theatre. Basing even only on European tradition that is more far from an ancient proto-theatre we can notice that the modified voice belongs to the puppet of a special kind. This puppet has saved its relations with an archaic, ancient theatre, although puppeteers and spectators don't always realize this fact. Petrushka's strange voice mentioned above, as well as his exaggerated nose, and his implied hump, and his cloths – all these characteristics separate him from other characters and set Petrushka against "*this*" world, the world of human.

The description of African puppet theatre, which has saved the elements of a magic theatre up to the present moment, will allow us to realize in full measure the connection of a modified voice with *the other world*.

"Listening to puppeteers from Niger and Nigeria, we noticed that all of them spoke in same snuffling voice while some of them spoke mildly producing a sort of pleasant squeak and the others produced unbearable sounds. According to the anthropologists this snuffling voice is connected with the death, <...> so puppeteers' snuffling voices take on special significance. In this specific context, the puppeteer who produces "a voice of the other world" emphasizes the supernatural level of his art and its initial contrast to the world of living." [Darkowska, 1998: 111]

We believe a swazzle to be originated in very ancient times, in spite of that the earliest records dates from the 17th century: “The use of voice modifiers in folk puppetry is recorded in brief and tantalizing notices scattered throughout the historical and ethnographic treatments of puppetry.” Puppets shows “in Seville in 1608 which used a *cerbatana* («pea-shooter» or «blow-gun») and Covarrubias (Sebastian de Covarrubias, 1539-1613, Spanish writer, lexicographer, cryptographer and a chaplain of Philip II – translator’s note) in 1611 remarks the use of a *pito* («whistle») by the puppeteers of Castile, with an interpreter in front of the stage to repeat the lines. Turning to Italy, we learn... that the seventeenth-century Pulcinella puppeteers used a *pivetta* (diminutive of *pivo*, «whistle») to recite the stories, with one puppeteer providing all the voices, or several, each one with a *pivetta* of a different size, providing the voices of the various characters. In Germany... the voice modifier was employed to provide the voice of the Devil. <...> The earliest evidence from England is ambiguous: in Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* of 1614, there is a puppet-play-within-the-play, and the puppets are described as «neighing» and «hinnying» with a «treble creaking». But, the puppets’ creaking is interpreted to the audience by Leatherhead, who repeats line by line what the puppets are saying... By the 1660’s Punch had arrived in England, and his use of the swazzle or swotchel (from German *schwassl*, means «conversation, chatter») was firmly established.” [Proschan, 1981: 547]

Comparing names of a swazzle in theatrical traditions of different nations we can understand the importance and role of this instrument in Petrushka-Punch theatre in the eyes of puppeteers. “We also find this instrument used by the puppeteers of eighteenth-century France, where in 1722, Abbé Chérier reports, Polichinelle was permitted by the censors to play his comedies only if they were performed with the *sifflet-pratique* and included a neighbor or associate who interrogates him by questions, to whom Polichinelle responds with his usual bawdy precision. <...> ...the Iranian and Afghani hand puppeteers use

a *safir* or *wizwizak* or *pustak*, a reed instrument held in the puppeteer's mouth. <...> The Turkish Karagoz puppeteers use of a *nareke* of the same kind. <...> In Pakistan and India, the Rajasthani kathputli marionettes use a *boli* («speech») and also employ an interpreter or musician. A kazoo like instrument, the *bowra*, is used in Tamil shadow plays... The Aragouz glove puppets of Egypt use a voice modifier called *amana* through which the puppeteer speaks, sometimes for all of the characters and sometimes only for the hero Aragouz. A musician outside the puppet booth engages the puppets in dialogue. <...> The word *amana*, literally a surety or collateral, is used in conversation when two people wish to refer to something (money, a debt, a business matter) in the presence of the other listeners, without the listeners understanding... «Give me my *amana*» that is, «Give me my business-between-us»...” [Proschan, 1981: 548-550]

Konrad Fredericks, a Punch showman from London, offered the authors a number of synonyms that name a swazzle: swazzel⁵, call, unknown tongue, mouth chat. [Fredericks] The word “call” literally means “cry of an animal”, and “quail-pipe”, and “powerful force of attraction”, and “signal to gather”, and “summons”, and – what is especially important for us – “the appeal of the death”. The word combination that is used more seldom “unknown tongue” can be translated as “strange accent”, “dialect”. But as a noun “unknown” means “stranger” and being an adverb this word means “secretly”. Strange accent, secret language, speech of a stranger – all of these remind a descriptive name of somebody who is unwanted to be named directly, who scares. And the beginning of this can be found in the most ancient periods of our culture. Let's examine the word combination “mouth chat”: “mouth” means not only “part of the human face”, “lips”, “inlet”, “crater of eruption”, “bottleneck”, but it could be also interpreted as “voice of a crier”, and “simpleton”, and “grimace”, and “eater”. As a verb “mouth” means “to champ”,

⁵ It is interesting that Dan Bishop, one English street showman, offered another spelling of the contrivance - swazzle that commonly used in literature.

“to hold between teeth”, “to put into a mouth” and even “to speak pompously”. This verb with all the meanings finishes the synoptical range that makes the further description of process of the contrivance making unnecessary as well as all the manuals! The word “chat” has a well-known meaning of “talk”! So finally we have “a talk of a simpleton through clenched teeth with champing, a voice of an eater and a crier on a square”; and at the same time – “a voice of somebody whose name scares” that is why he is named descriptively.

“*Siflette pratique*” could be translated from French as “penny-whistle made skillfully”. But in French common parlance “siflette” means “throat” as well, hence we can translate the phrase given above as “throat made skillfully” – that is folk “product” in itself.^v

In this context, we should mention the elements of one folktale plot that include changing of voice: “... Meanwhile, the biruk (wolf) comes at the smith’s place and says to him, “Smith, smith! Make my tongue thin.” And the smith did it.” [Afanasjev, 1957: №54; Andreev, 1929: №123] “The Witch... runs to the smith and asks: “Kovaliku, kovaliku! (Smith, smith!) Forge my voice to be very thin, just like Ivashka’s mother has; or I will eat you up!” The koval (smith) forged a voice for her just like Ivashka’s mother has.” [Afanasjev, 1957: №108; Andreev, 1929: №327C] Nobody denies that a strange, artificial voice is one of typical features of the representatives of “the other world”, it is their identification mark. And Petrushka’s voice is in the same range as well.^{vi}

A swazzle being a dual-purpose instrument – for modulation of human speech and for musical accompaniment for a performance, plays the same role in the modern theatre having kept its function and construction almost without any change. And this is one of the rarest examples in the history of culture. We consider Petrushka’s “artificial” voice to be a “proto-instrument”, that has been saved from the time of syncretic human culture.

II. Homo Primitivus

We suppose that the analysis of phenomenon of the primitive consciousness shown in Petrushka's personality, in his interrelations with both the living and the inert, in his relation with space and time, life and death must be fruitful if at first we compare his actions with actions of a child, who is on his way to cognition of the world. Of course, we will cite other examples where it is possible but after all a child is a homo primitivus both now and always.⁶

Game elements in Petrushka's behavior

What is Petrushka doing at the stage? He is getting married, buying a horse, falling ill, becoming a recruit and so on. [Nekrylova, 1981: 5-11; Folk theatre, 1988: 258-321; Nekrylova, 2003: 26-47] In other words, he tries different social roles. However he doesn't examine any social role in all completeness of relations but he just picks out the most typical or more exactly "archetypical" feature of the role. In marriage it is dancing and "pawing", in trade – exchange, in illness – "ouch, I'm ill!", in recruiting – articles in regulations... The show is built on the rules of the simplest game: at first there is a sort of casting ("I am a Doctor, I am Petrushka, I am a gypsy"), then the show develops strictly in frames of the certain conflict, and finally the performance suddenly stops at the moment when the storyline is exhausted. By the way the final moment is always catastrophic: "Plonk! Crack! Killed!"⁷ Each character of the play turns out to be just a toy in Petrushka's hands. He is the only one who has free will, and in this regard he is the only living and active character in the theatre. Petrushka is as free to manage his "toys", as a child is free to do anything he wants with his own toy box. The fact that a toy is usually thrown after its possibilities are exhausted is not a secret for everyone who has

⁶ And what is important, this kind of "homo primitivus" is well known and is always in sight in contrast to an Australian native.

⁷ About the role of "exhaustion of a subject" while playing see at [Rodari, 1978: 98]

children. Hence, Petrushka is examining the world in the same way as any child does while playing.

And this way of examining of the world is interesting for us, Petrushka's method to find a decision is funny for us, just exactly as it is interesting for us to watch the actions of a child who is examining a situation or function of an object. And it is funny, because it seems that we "know" the answer. It makes us laugh when Petrushka looks for "back and front" part of the horse, because we exactly know that a tail is on the back part! That is why an unobvious decision, a capability to believe the wheels to be the main part of a vacuum-cleaner, as it is possible to lie down on it and go for a ride on it; or a capability to use a drum as a hat or a flute as a cudgel give us some pleasure.

The main problem of Petrushka (and of any primitive consciousness) is not that he "confuses" the functions of objects but that he can't to complete his practice that he can't concentrate on anything for a long time! Everything attracts his attention, everything is interesting and that is why he struggles to do everything at once.

However a game is not only a cognitive activity, but first of all it is an activity that aimed at itself. Cognition is not the main purpose of a game, but a delight from a process of playing!

One two-year-old boy had been putting empty buckets (that were almost bigger than he was) one into another for a long time afterwards he broke that pyramid at once and began to roll the buckets in the yard. "...What a crackle it could be! What a splash it could be!" rushes immediately into one's mind. A great work was made only for a sound.⁸ He acts just like Petrushka, doesn't he? Remember Petrushka's never ending fights, and delight of sounds of strokes, and his ecstasy when he moves and dances!

⁸ There are many examples of making great efforts for producing a "sound". We described a "furcalo" a special propeller on a tread used by peasant children in the 19th in the Carpathian region. [Gref, 2005: 41]

Both Petrushka and a child take matters easy when the toys happen to be broken, because they enjoy all the actions of a game. The examination without any result just for the very process! It's a game! You take one toy, then throw it away, then take another one.

English Punch teaches a baby to walk just until the moment when it begins to walk alone. Immediately after that when "a storyline becomes exhausted" and a game is not interesting anymore Punch simply beats a baby with a cudgel.

Moreover, if we mention a process of examination we should stress that the primitive consciousness usually examines not the interrelations but only a structure of the objects. Doctor, and Gypsy, and Bride, and Corporal – they are not personalities for Petrushka, but they are just the objects that should be broken to look inside them. Function is not the primary interest of examining work of a child, as construction is far more interesting.⁹

When Petrushka (or Pulcinella) buries any just killed character, who doesn't fit in a toy coffin, he doesn't express the interrelations of the characters during funerals, but he only shows the structure of the ceremony: a dead body, a coffin and a grave digger. And this scene is funny because it is "excluded from" social and functional meaning of funerals. The puppet dead body doesn't fit in the coffin; he tries to cram it this and that way and finally he simply pushes the dead body in the coffin and closes a lid.¹⁰

9 As a famous Russian director of children's films Rolan Bykov said: "Grown-ups look at a table from above and see its function, but a child looks at a table from below and sees its construction".

10 This is very similar to an examination of the funeral "construction" in children's games. We remember how we made "secrets" with a piece of glass under which we put a dead body of a bird, a doll or simply a sweet wrapper. Of course a nature of our "secrets" was more complicated; it seemed a desire to peep into "that side", but none the less...

While analyzing the actions of a child during a game it is needed to be mentioned that a child not only cognizes the world around him while playing with different objects or circumstances, but he also tells everyone about himself by using games and imagery that are perceived as a nonverbal text.¹¹ Look attentively when any child is playing alone and you will see not only the “social roles” but, first of all, the exact reflection of your own features and up-to-date events, as in a mirror. Petrushka exactly as a child doesn’t express by words but he shows his attitude towards an object: his fear, joy and aggression – all the emotions are shown by the actions. Of course, Petrushka is just a theatrical character and is directed by the artist’s hand, but his behavior is determinate by his own characteristics.

Playing games is a way of life of a child. But game is also a way of life of Petrushka. Only from this perspective his absolutely antisocial behavior can be understood.

Antisocial personality

Petrushka’s “awful” games all those “beating”, “murders”, “funerals” and so on are really awful only when we look at Petrushka in the light of “distinctness” or “social typicality”. But Petrushka is beyond these measures.

Imagine a “foolish” child of more than five feet in height and with a physical strength of a grown-up man. What a terrible monster could be this creature! Does he realize a value of a thing? Does he realize a value of life? We smile when a baby breaks all things around and our property because of its little “capacity”. If a child were stronger we won’t be so glad! We can say the same about Petrushka. If we imagine for just a second a real damage from his behavior, we will see that his “jokes and tricks” takes disgusting, cruel traits and can’t be considered as

11 The reading of playing patterns as a nonverbal text is a foundation of the play therapy one of psychotherapy techniques. See [Landret, 1994: 10-14], we also gave a detailed description of it in our book of puppet therapy. [Gref, Sokolova, 2007: 5-11]

anything “funny”. Punch is especially “bloodthirsty”; he is able not only to bump off anyone, but to tear to shreds his own wife! But Petrushka-Punch- Pulcinella’s actions remain funny, so this points that we don’t take it seriously. At the moment of another “murder” we look at Petrushka not as at “of-social”, but as at an “antisocial personality”. He is a child, homo primitivus.

The nature of the comedy as it is known from Aristotelian times consists in “harmless mistakes”. “Something comic appears,” A. F. Losev writes, “when the idea is trying to be put into action this or that way but it never managed...” [Cited from: Rjumina: 215] In other words, it is important for us to understand that comic elements are accompanied with failed attempts to “implement” any action.

But what does a child look for? What does his cognitive activity consist in? It consists in a search of the limits of his possibility, in particular, the moral limits. When a child becomes “naughty”, he just examines the frameworks and principles of his living space and tries to expand his possibilities. A child understands very quickly that it is easy to settle the disputes about “the permissible and the forbidden” with grown-ups by making fun of a matter of dispute. “It was a joke!” children often say when they failed. Their pranks are just tricks out of moral frameworks.

We should look at Petrushka’s behavior from this perspective. As a primitive consciousness he lives in the world of indistinct moral limits. Everything that is a joke for him is an inadmissible behavior in the didactic, reasonable world! Children understand the nature of Petrushka’s actions, and this nature is close to them, clear and pleasing, there is no need to estimate anything. But it is amusing that grown-ups like Petrushka too! Why? Maybe it happens because of our desire to break the rules! Doesn’t everybody of us keep his “homo primitivus” alive in the secret recesses of his soul?

Something ridiculous is always on the edge. The universal nature of laugh does consist in this. When something happens

on the edge and all the limits, all the judgments are reversed it becomes funny. But if you make one more step it will turn out to be not funny but trashy. Rowdiness – a “trick” with breaking the rules and doing harm – gets out of limits of ridiculous. Primitives examine the world, the frameworks. That is why their humor often looks like rowdiness. They don’t simply know the limits well.

Petrushka is a marginal person by his nature. But his life on the edge, on the sidelines, far from mains gives him an opportunity not only to do “everything he wants”, without noticing the limits, but also to break and – what is important – to expand this limits. It is needed to be near the borderlines to have a chance to occupy new space outside, isn’t it? The dualism of function of borderlines consists in the fact that a border defends “this” world from the penetration from “outside” but it is possible to connect with “the other” world only going over the line. In this point of view, the marginality of both Petrushka and a newborn baby, who both examine the world near the moral limits, is the same.

But “universal” comic elements: fighting, ridiculous falling and so on are funny only in pre-moral world. The moral principles imply a consideration. Both Petrushka and a child don’t think if a man who has just fallen down hurt. They can’t to estimate the effect from their or somebody else’s actions. Empathy is something unknown for them, as this demands to look at their “ego” from the outside. Egocentrism – here is a key trait of “homo primitivus” personality. Moreover, Petrushka stands on the “pre-empathic”¹² level of human development and he can’t help or take pity on anybody because of his nature. Due to the characteristics of his personality he doesn’t simply know how it could be done. And likewise a child doesn’t know how to

12 Empathy is a form of prosocial behavior, a capacity to share the sadness or happiness of smb, to show an interest in smb’s feeling. Empathy is usual in wild nature – dolphins save their sinking mates, wolves don’t kill wounded member of their group and so on.

feel pity for anybody, as it demands treating other people as his equal. Sometimes little children happen to be affectionate but it happens only because of their desire to be caressed. It's just a life instinct, as a child dies without endearment. The paradox of child's behavior is that the most dependent member of society feels like principal one.

So Petrushka behaves like a little child, in other words, like "master of the situation": he takes everything he wants, he sits down comfortably in the very middle regardless of anyone. Petrushka and a child both are sure that everyone is glad to see them; they take lack of attention as something wrong.

Weak knowledge of the moral limits, inability to control his behavior – all these characteristics sometimes lead to aggressive action without any influence from even one external factor. A baby can play, laugh, make merry and then suddenly wipe someone with the fist. For no reason in particular! But these aggressive attacks are not spiteful, as it is nothing else but a trick, but over the line of absurd, over the moral limits. A baby doesn't remember good and evil – here is the key feature of its personality.¹³ Petrushka behaves in the same manner: he gets married, receives treatment, bargains and... suddenly fights! The unreasonable fit of anger is evident!¹⁴ Truly, there is a thin line between laughter and tears. But look at him, how cheerful he is! He is not angry even when he fights! If Petrushka were angry he wouldn't be so attractive. The reasons of our sympathy for Petrushka's fightings are various, but a little bit of our sympathy

13 It is necessary to specify (what is out of our article's frames) that the main, the core and fundamental feature that forms child's personality is *an unmotivated love*.

14 The same Petrushka's behavior is sometimes explained as a form of social protest like a punishment of an unfair doctor or trader. But we assure that Petrushka will fight with any doctor even if he is very good! He will find a fault because there is no need to find a reason; the motivation of fighting is inside him not in "unfair" social order.

for him could be explained by the fact that Petrushka doesn't know and remember evil.¹⁵

We can indirectly confirm the idea that Petrushka's primitive personality doesn't even reach the "empathic" level by mentioning the stages of child's personality development. When any person is able to feel sorry (what is untypical and even impossible for Petrushka)? I knew a 3.5-year-old boy who had already learned to be sorry about his wrong deeds. That boy could confess his evil deeds and even ask for pardon frankly and "whole-hearted", according to his own expression. Here is the way from "primitive" to "social" personality.^{vii}

Space and time, living and inert

Children live in compressed time. All possible roles and storylines appear in their mind at the same time. When a child plays a fairy-tale, he acts both as Pinocchio and as Geppetto at one time.

Primitives have no notion about the duration of any space of time. For them "tomorrow" is as far as "next week" or "next summer" or "tonight". Ignorance of time perspective is a natural property of the primitive consciousness. This generates the conception of the cyclicity of time that is typical for primitive people. [Gumilev, 2005: 355] Despite of variety of days, a primitive takes each day as truly new and finished timing cycle. For the primitive consciousness time moves out of the history and development.

Meanwhile, Petrushka has no notion of historical time as well. He doesn't change and learn during the performance. And he also plays each episode at incredible speed. He dances, fights, bargains and then suddenly forgets everything as if he hasn't done anything before. Petrushka behaves as if he never

¹⁵ By the way not knowing not remembering the evil Petrushka doesn't know and remember the good. This fact at once makes him not a "positive" but a very doubtful character.

killed anyone or didn't laugh near the coffin a second ago. He remembers nothing. But we do. That is why his "immoral" tricks are so strange for us. Petrushka takes every event and every meeting as something new and unexpected. He doesn't think over the strategy of his behavior not because he can't think at all, but because he has no notion of cause and effect relationships between his deeds and the results. And the punishment comes as a great surprise for him! Petrushka lives in the time that looks like a closed circuit (like Ouroboros).¹⁶ This is Petrushka who plays the sketches for the tenth and fiftieth time during a continuous cyclic action; he doesn't become any "conventionally new" character in a "conditionally new" performance. Invented for street shows, for permanent performing Petrushka lives in closed circuit of time and he does it very naturally, without considerations.

Petrushka easily settles his relationships with space as well. There is no space for him outside the booth. To be more exact, there is no space out of the performance place – a small stage before the curtain. That is why a portal frame is so important – it is his home and shelter. And when Petrushka goes out of the curtain to play before the audience he needs to feel the booth frame behind his back. The perception of space limitedness by visible boundaries is common for primitives. For your kid a travel by subway to his grandmother, a ride in a car to the country, and a flight to the Moon in a space vehicle – all these events are equal on the scale of space. Even among Russian peasants who have preserved elements of archaic thinking, a neighbor is called the only one with whom the farmer has a common fence. The primitive consciousness divides the space into friendly and hostile parts that is why a child is timid at unknown place. And when a grown-up feel shy in new surroundings it is also a rudiment of our primitive consciousness. That is why Petrushka is inappropriate for an open stage and that is why he hides inside the booth.

16 Ouroboros – an ancient symbol of an eternity, a snake eating its own tail.

The relationships of our heroes with the worlds of living and inert are also complicated. The case is that each object of the world around is interesting for a child only because of possibility to include it in the child's own world. In this context every object is only a continuation of child's egocentric personality and can't be considered an independent object. In other words, even being living by nature the object is not considered as something "completely alive". But at the same time, when a child include any external object in his "personal" world the object takes, regardless its own nature, the features of the child; it means that from this perspective any physical object can't be considered as completely "lifeless". Willing or not we remember Owl and Mantis talking near lying Buratino (characters of the book "The Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino" by Aleksey N. Tolstoy, 1936 – translator's note): "The patient is rather living than dead!" – "No, he is sooner dead than living!" Petrushka and a child can do everything they want with any "thing". Without a moment's hesitation they can break and throw out a puppet that has just "independently" talked and walked. But they would never be surprised at the fact that lifeless rag has just "walked and talked" as a living one.¹⁷

All primitives believe all the objects of the world around to be living without making distinctions between the living and inert worlds. So Petrushka has no firm definitions. One of the funniest Petrushka's sketches, when he displaces just killed rag puppets at the screen, is particularly funny because Petrushka is always getting confused: if a puppet alive or dead? In this respect all the relationships of any primitive with the world around are the relationships with the living because primitives have no knowledge of the inert world.

17 Dualism of the attitude towards the living and the dead as well as dualism of the playing phenomenon in total could be explained by a magic word "pretending". When a child says "I'm pretending" it doesn't outline the limits of conditionality, on the contrary this word serves as a password that a child being of good-soul shares with "grown-ups" to allow them have a look at the magic world of an integral, syncretic consciousness.

Human counting

As long as we begin to speak about counting, we have to make a few remarks on this very distinctive process.

“... I took some paper <...> cut several pieces not knowing exactly how many and gave a handful of pieces of paper to one of the natives <...> The others crowded him round at once. <...> This one sat down with an air of importance and called another one for help, and they began counting. The first one laid out the pieces of paper on his knee and repeated putting each one: «nare, nare» (literally means «one»); the other repeated the word «nare» while bending his fingers at first on one and then on the other hand. Having counted from one to ten and having bent the fingers on both hands he put his fists on the knees and said: «two hands», after that the third native bent one finger on his hand. <...> the remaining papers didn't make up... ten and were left aside. Everybody seemed to be satisfied.” [N. Miklouho-Maclay 1982: 59]

The scene described above surprisingly reminds Petrushka's actions, doesn't it? Maybe it seems so because of great importance of the very process. Petrushka-Punch absolutely needs to know how many dead bodies he has put on the garden bed. So he takes each one in his hands and displaces it again, and again always getting confused...

“The own history of counting – according to some researchers – begins only when counting accompanies a material manipulation with the objects such as putting them aside, displacement, addition etc. A primitive man needs to touch an object with his fingers while counting.” [Cited from: Ermilov, 2005].

And a child needs to touch an object with his hand while counting as well. “How many guests are there at our place?” we ask one kid, he runs around the room and counts touching each one, “Three!” – “And who is in the kitchen?” – “Mummy and granny!” – “So how many then?” we keep asking, knowing that he can count from one to five. But it's not so easy! The kid

runs to the kitchen and having touched the rest two comes back, “Five!” Here is the power of nature!

But what is interesting for us: counting and naming are closely associated with each other in the mind of any primitive. Linguists know that people of primitive cultures use different methods of counting for objects of different kinds. One of the oldest Eurasian languages, the Nivkh language, has a certain class of numerals for each type of objects that could be counted (animate and inanimate, objects of different genders and forms). In total there are twenty six of such classes. [Atlas of Cultures.2008, c.193] Inhabitants of Fiji Islands call ten boats “bolo”, but they call ten coconuts “karo”; just as North American native languages have absolutely different names for ten boats that participate in military operations and the same boats that are used for food transportation. [Cited from: Ermilov, 2005]. This echo of the archaic thinking is still quite alive in our society: in Russian quantities of different objects are named by different words: “tolpa” (lit. crowd), “kucha” (lit. heap of smth.), “stado” (lit. herd) ...

Why were Calf, Cow, Bull and Pig so scared when Kid had counted them in the fairy-tale by Vladimir Suteev? Kid has given them new names! Not “Bull”, but “Bull-the-fourth”. What should they do with their new names? And how will it change their properties and their life? It is not an idle question for the primitive consciousness. It is very important for a child to know his or her own name. But even for grown-ups (in spite of our “enlightenment”) name is something of primary importance. The secret magic of counting is based on the most archaic man’s views about himself and the world around him. Petrushka-Punch refers directly to our archaic consciousness and therein lays his strength.

Fight and death in Petrushka theatre

Let’s examine more closely the fighting, Petrushka’s favorite thing to do.

As we said above, the noise of bats and cudgels with all diversity of sounds (striking a bat with a bat, a head with a bat, a back with a bat, a garden bed with a cudgel, a garden bed with a head, a head with a head), accompanying by a laughter produced with a swazzle is a basis of musical part of the performance.

Petrushka begins fighting suddenly not only when “peaceful” arguments are over. It doesn’t mean that this character has no words of persuasion, but the words are not required. The persuasions take place only in fair play, but Petrushka’s internal aim comes to breaking the rules.

The main question that a two-year-old child asks itself is “why?” and this question is formulated not from the context of conversations, but from the depth of the personality, from the demands of the great work that his soul has made. Petrushka’s neverending opposition to the world around appears not because of the evil intent, but because the fact that a primitive, who has already entered the world, can’t help asking a question, “Why?!” (Even in non-verbal form). Why is the world arranged “this way”? And why should things be done “that way”, not another?

In Turkish performances of Karagoz (analogue of Petrushka) is introduced a sly and dodgy character called Hacivat. It seems that Hacivat does the same things as Petrushka does: on the stage he is arguing, playing tricks, trying to swindle everyone and so on. He behaves almost absolutely in Petrushka’s manner except one thing – Hacivat doesn’t fight! Living in the society and knowing well the rules of the game Hacivat uses them perfectly for his own benefit. In such situation fighting is not needed and is even unprofitable. But it is Karagoz who fights! He has no need to adapt himself to the rules; he takes actions with a cudgel straightly and roughly. If it is impossible to answer a question, why one way is right and the other is not,

it is necessary to take actions for own benefits quite plainly.¹⁸ As a primitive person Petrushka widens his zone of life breaking barriers with a cudgel.

The meaning of “fighting” as a ritual struggle with “the evil forces” has been described in many monographs of history of theatre. [Solomonik, 1992: 31] A fight against the evil forces goes back to a magic dance and ritual theatre; it has an ancient history, so we have nothing to add. We want just mention that Petrushka’s theatre is a plastic theatre in general; it is more a ballet than a drama. However, in Petrushka-Punch performances struggle with the evil forces “goes down” to a simple fight with characters those are unattractive but funny and harmless: Policeman, quarrelsome Wife, Recruiter, Doctor and even Executioner.

The only serious character among the others is a representative of the infernal world: it is Dog for Petrushka, Crocodile for Punch and Devil for Pulcinella. The infernal forces drag Petrushka away under the garden bed and this means the end of the performance and the death of Petrushka. However, the power of the puppet show is exactly in Petrushka’s immortal nature! That is why he will surely jump on the garden bed again either at the same place just after his death, or in the neighbor street, where he comes with his booth. And take a notice that he rises from the dead without any evident motivation! The motivation is not needed in Petrushka’s theatre as another kind of determinism takes place there. It is more serious and more general than a motivation of the plot. Everybody from the audience keeps in his or her mind the inevitability of Petrushka’s revival because Petrushka is a character who represents a personification of the

¹⁸ Although Petrushka and Karagoz have many traits in common, we will stress only one of them concerning of their speech: Petrushka and Karagoz are aliens from “the other world” and this circumstance is marked out by using a swazzle at Petrushka’s shows and by an accent Karagoz speaks with. At performances of the Turkish theatre Karagoz always speaks with an accent not common for a given region.

primitive, archetypic consciousness that is non-extermineable element of any person's consciousness. That's why Petrushka is entirely immortal!

In this case fighting with the evil connects to the very similar subject – to making the death an object of derision. In its turn the death metamorphoses significantly. It appears as a puppet (peculiar to Punch and Polichinelle shows) or plays a mediate role in the scene of funerals (common for Petrushka and Pulcinella performances); and after all the humiliation, beating and deceptions the death loses not only the status of “punishing judge”, but also the ability to fulfill its direct purpose of cutting life short. In other words, the death loses its nature. But gaining a victory over the death Petrushka is fighting himself, as he has generic features of the death. One of them is a squawking mechanic voice, the voice of an alien from “the other world”, as we examined above in detail. Therefore, there will not be a winner in the battle between Petrushka and the death.

The core of the subject is that fighting, being the most energetic action, the quintessence of life, the ballet at the edge of a spear, is possible only with presence of the death in the role of the fate, of inevitability that is always coming but never comes true.

Conclusion

Petrushka is very funny, he is universally funny. He stands outside frames of reason, nationality, social etc. It is impossible to play this character if you don't like him. It is impossible to express his sincere cheerfulness that has roots in the depth of human nature. We can see the universal joy of arising life in him. At the same time Petrushka as “a newborn creation” is incredibly serious and because of it he is endlessly touching. He is serious as a child that has just entered the world.

Nevertheless, Petrushka is not a child in fact! Petrushka is just an image, a mould of that state of human nature that gave birth to him many years ago, perhaps in the childhood of the world.

Men are changing permanently – this is one of the main tasks in our life. Petrushka doesn't learn anything; he catches the same bait thousands of times and that is why he is funny. It is surprising fact, but he is always up-to-date just because he is constant.

Petrushka touches such archaic depth of our own nature that we are filled with wonder: how little changed a man from the beginning of the world! And Petrushka will make us laugh until we keep something of homo primitivus in our hearts.

Notes

i We believe the capability of flexible material to change a pitch of tone depending to the intensity of the air supply to be one of the main reasons of wide spreading of wind instruments with elastic (not “hard”) reed in puppet theatres. This construction of a swazzle gives the artist the ability to elevate and to depress the voice of a puppet by intensifying or depressing the air supply. Aerophones with “hard” reed (as a clarinet) exhibit such characteristics in a less degree.

ii In our theatre “The Vagrant Booth” the Author and his colleagues E. Slonimskaya and I. Komarova had conducted a number of experiments studying the “phonetics of a swazzle” before they came to some conclusions.

Russian vowels are modulated well in the mass: there is only little general sliding to the sound [y] (close to English phoneme [u]) – but on the whole the vowels are quite recognizable. This results from the position of a swazzle between the back of the tongue and the soft palate. The position of the organs of speech in this case is close to the position while pronouncing Russian sound [y].

The consonants are harder to deal with. Russian consonant [p] (has no close phoneme in English) that is apical, flap and sonant, sounds much better than the others due to free position of the tip of the tongue while pronouncing with a swazzle. In general it is noticed that Russian voiced consonants change their quality sliding to voiceless consonants in the following pairs: [д]-[т] (close to English [d]-[t]), [б]-[п] ([b]-[p]), [г]-[к] ([g]-[k]), [в]-[ф] ([v]-[f]), [з]-[с] ([z]-[s]), [ж]-[ш] ([ʒ]-[ʃ]). Nasal consonants [м] and [н] (that are close to English [m] and [n]) sound worst of all. They sound as [п] and [т] respectively (close to English [p] and [t]).

This happens because of the position of a swazzle above the vocal chords and “above” the boarder that divides the air body between mouth and nasal cavities. As the vocal chords in this case don’t participate in sound generation, nasal sounds are not

produced and we hear voiceless stop consonants as they are the nearest in terms of the position of the vocal organs.

We also noticed that the closer a swazzle to the back of the tongue, the more potential for production of speech sounds. On the contrary, a swazzle placed near the tip of the tongue give no possibility to pronounce distinctive sounds. In particular this explains the individual verbalization abilities of different artists even within the same tradition, as the anatomy of their vocal organs differs.

In addition, a swazzle doesn't impede the intoning. Meanwhile K. Fredericks considers Chinese words to be extremely difficult to pronounce with a swazzle. In his opinion this fact impedes the transformation of a swazzle into an instrument for verbalization in Chinese puppet theatre.

iii Narrator is one of oldest characters in Petrushka theatre. We consider Petrushka to be a representative of "the other" world, so the narrator can be considered as "a natural link" between "that" world and the world of living. Consequently, the meaning of the narrator transforms from "an interpreter" to "a ferryman". But his role is not limited to this, as it is so various that demands a special study what goes well beyond this article.

iv Until now there hasn't been any serious attempt to analyse the records of Petrushka's performances in relation to phonetic specifics of a swazzle. We have the impression that some sketches recorded in the form of verbal dialogue in fact could be just the attempts of eyewitnesses to describe not only the auditory but also a visual impression of the performance. Otherwise when the information is given by the professional Petrushka showman he doesn't record some details that are evident for him, for example repeats.

Wikipedia – Wikipedia [website] – Access: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazoo>

v On the website <http://www.punchandjudy.com> you can find a dictionary of slang, a sort of secret language of English

Punch showmen and street traders. This language is generally composed of words from the Italian and Gypsy languages, as it is said in explanation. There is given one pair of synonyms: *swazzle* – *sgherlo*, with a note (*Italian*). In Old Russian *жерло* (*zherlo*) – according to Historical-etymology Russian Dictionary by P. Y. Chernykh, (more often in form of *жерело-zherelo*) had many meanings: *mouth (of a river), and throat, and voice*, and this word has cognate words in other Slavic languages. It is also interesting for us that *жерло-zherlo* is cognate to *жертва-zhertva* (*lit. sacrifice*). [Chernykh, 1993]

vi “Circumcision is probably the most important rite of passage for Australian natives; the main symbol of this ritual is a sacrificial murder. People who perform this ceremony embody or perform supernatural and quite demonic creatures. In some they used to revolve bullroarers before the ceremony and just after they show the instruments to newcomers (kippers). The symbolic meaning is obvious: the ceremony of circumcision is performed by a representative of the supernatural creatures, whose “voice” is heard (sound of a bullroarer). But the secret of the real source of supernatural “voice” is revealed for an initiate at the end.” [Eliade, 1998: 124] We think that the disclosure of the truth about the source of artificial voice is the most interesting fact, besides, of course, the producing of such a sound with a special instrument.

vii It is very important for us to understand when this great progress takes place and which factors have an impact on it. When a man, who never felt the pain of others, suddenly begins to understand the Moral Law? Maybe the Law is given “from outside”. In any case, the difference between *homo primitivus* and the man, who learned the Moral Law, is so great that in this context Petrushka can’t be called ***a complete man, a fully-formed man.***

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alexander gref