WHEN MAGIC CONFRONTS AUTHORITY: THE RISE OF PROTEST PUPPETRY IN N. AMERICA

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Why was a cop knocking me off my bicycle on the afternoon of August 1st, 2000?

Maybe the cardboard goat head that I was wearing had something to do with it.

In July of 2000, a group of *puppetistas*—activist-artists who design, build, and perform with cardboard and paper mâché sculptures at political demonstrations and gatherings—had rented a large leaky warehouse in West Philadelphia for $500. The *puppetistas* would spend the next two weeks creating giant puppets and street theater in opposition to the Republican National Convention (RNC). They set to work storyboarding five days of public pageantry: July 28th centered around health care, July 29th focused on militarism and gun control, July 30th would highlight the shortcomings of the two-party system, July 31st featured a massive anti-poverty march, and August 1st was a day focusing on the prison industrial complex and the death penalty.

"I'm doing you a favor," said Michael Graves, a building contractor and arts patron who owned the warehouse. "You know the FBI is watching you. I'm putting myself at considerable risk."

Sure enough, on August 1st, 2000, the warehouse was besieged by a trio of helicopters and surrounded by 180 Philadelphia police officers. Michael Graves and the seventy-eight other occupants of the building were handcuffed and loaded onto armored buses, where they were detained for nine hours without food, water, legal counsel, or medical attention. Graves and his former tenants were each charged with ten misdemeanors and imprisoned with bails set at $10,000 apiece—the low end for the 420 activists arrested during the RNC.

"The police called the warehouse a 'nerve center of criminal activity'," chimed ABC network news. "The protesters say they were 'making puppets'." And the report went on, now referring to Michael Graves' building as "the nerve center."

The next day city employees visited the warehouse again, armed this time with three garbage trucks, into which were loaded the puppeteers' tools and paint, silkscreen equipment, musical instruments, and what one inspector from Philadelphia's Department of Licenses and Inspections later testified to be more than 300 pieces of "trash:" trash that had been sculpted into enormous faces and hands united by brightly colored rivers of fabric; trash in the form of banners and flags stenciled with poetically captioned illustrations that beckoned resistance; trash that looked suspiciously like an array of tophatted peanuts making corporate campaign contributions to cartoonish animal parodies of political party mascots; trash shaped like 138 eight-foot tall cardboard and bamboo skeletons, each bearing the name of a person that then Texas Governor George Walker Bush had executed to date. All this, and more, was unceremoniously hauled from the warehouse and compacted in the garbage trucks. Three volunteers from a local community garden came and sat down in front of the trucks in a last-ditch effort to stop the inevitable from happening: they were brought to jail and the puppets were taken to a landfill.

"The protestors had no clear message," chuckled Fox News reporters over images of shouting crowds.

Men with American and Communist Party flags carry a pair of giant wooden fists through the streets of New York on May Day in 1938. Photo: John Albok.

"Yeah," said Ben Matchstick, a *puppetista* who had managed to not get arrested, "we had no message because the cops destroyed it."

Playing With Dolls

Most Americans don't get it. When I tell people that I'm a puppeteer, they usually assume that I work with either hand puppets or marionettes, and that the average age of my audience is 4 1/2. I've been openly laughed at for the work that I do. Puppeteers aren't taken seriously as workers (or even as artists) and earn little respect and even less money outside of the mainstream work of Julie Taymor's *Lion King* or Jim Henson's Muppets. The work is grueling and taxes all of a person's faculties. So why do it?

Today's adept puppeteer must be simultaneously skilled as a writer, architect, sculptor, painter, electrician, mechanic, musician, promoter, director, actor, modern dancer, political commentator, and manipulator of objects. Maybe this is why radical puppeteers are drawn to their medium: it presents a challenge on all fronts—artistic, social, political, economic, and logistical. To do it at all in the face of so many obstacles is itself an act of radicality. And to overcome these challenges and produce theater that moves an audience to action is rewarding—on every level.

You might ask, "What is radical puppetry? Where does it come from? Where can I see it? What and who is it for?" The history is vast, dating back to as early as humans began using art and theater to make fun of authority. As a kid did you ever dress up in funny clothes and mock your parents or teachers? Did you ever use dolls, toys, kitchen appliances, or furniture to enact stories where there was some kind of conflict or struggle? Well, that's what I'm talking about. Most of us did this. Some of us still do this. And we've found other people who still do this and we've formed connections, collaborations, and community with each other. An entire movement of artists has emerged consisting of subversive grown-ups who never stopped "playing with dolls." That, in a nutshell, is the radical puppetry of today.

This article focuses primarily on the modern continuum of massive "protest puppetry" that was birthed in North America during the movement to end the war in Vietnam, and eventually became a poster child for the anti-globalization demonstrations of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Protest puppetry is any kind of puppet theater that draws attention to the ironies and flaws in the way things are and hopefully illustrates a way that things could be instead. It predates the political and countercultural climate of 1960s, and some background will be given here to the artistic, community, and older protest traditions that parented it, as well as the social movements that shaped and were shaped by it. Thousands of people have done, and are still doing, this work, and tens of thousands of individual puppet shows have come and gone. Not all of them can be mentioned here, and so emphasis is given to a few groups, movements, and methods that have had a far-reaching effect on the history and culture of puppetry as protest.

The problem with puppet theater, and theater in general in this age of information, is that few people see it. Print, music, video and electronic media are so readily reproducible that live theater cannot compete in terms of numbers of spectators. Before the advent of all the modern entertainment technologies—computer, TV, radio, cinema, recorded music, etc.—theater reigned supreme and was widely discussed among the public. But today the wider public only flock to see live shows that are marketed to be familiar and expensive, and this limits not only who gets to see theater, but what kind of theater is made. There is a diminished desire to take risks on the part of the audience and therefore less incentive to make risks as a theater producer. It is in this low-risk environment of predictable, rehashed entertainment that the brazen upstart of modern radical puppetry rears its pointy little head. In case you may have missed it, here it is.

The Protest Parade

The shirtless man in the mask wears burlap pants and a twisted expression bordered by an explosive mane of straw. A semicircle of twenty drummers pound a path through the protest for the masked man as he struts down Pennsylvania Avenue, thrusting and tossing a huge hand-painted flag into the air. He is followed by 200 brown paper mâché bas relief figures, each between five and six feet in height, who choreograph themselves in clusters, swaying to the right and left, jumping up and down, laying themselves horizontally above their manipulators, or whooping and arcing from the back of the pack to the front. A giant mâché madonna-with-child bust hovers above this swirling sea of brownness, while a fifteen-foot tall skeletal horseman made from thick, wooden poles gallops behind on his matching skeletal steed. It is Death, sporting a pair of hand-painted signs that read "FREEDOOM" and "DEMOCRAZY," bringing up the rear in Bread & Puppet Theater's 2005 parade against the war in Iraq.

An onlooker points to the lumpy brown maelstrom of vaguely humanoid puppet figures and asks one of the drummers, "What are those supposed to be?"

"What do you think they're supposed to be?"

"I don't know…" He hazards a guess: "People?" (He's right.) "Iraqi people?" (Right again.) "American people?" (Of course.)

Whistles blow and the drummers quicken their beat, stirring samba rhythms up into a cacophony. The mâché population shakes and quakes and falls to the ground, their masked leader stumbles down dead in the road as the figure of Death cackles maniacally behind it all. Then a man runs around and wakes them all up with cymbal crashes and the parade resumes to the cheers of onlookers.

"Don't you get tired doing that?" asks a woman. She's holding one of the thousands of identical "US Out of Iraq!" signs. "I get so exhausted just carrying this sign around all day—I can't imagine doing all that falling down and then getting up and moving around with a puppet in my hands."

"That's exactly why I'm not tired," says one of the volunteers in Bread & Puppet's dance. "Because I *am* moving—I'm doing something."

Old World Roots

The Bread & Puppet Theater is the chief progenitor of modern protest puppetry in the United States. They began doing parades in New York City against the war in Vietnam in 1963. But Peter Schumann, Bread & Puppet's founder and director, really began building his theater in the aftermath of World War II.

"We were refugees in northern Germany after the War," recalls Peter. "We were hungry and had to steal food and we had to defend ourselves against the locals who wanted to beat us up, so

Marchers pull a giant puppet madonna of death through the rain in New York's 1938 May Day Parade to bring attention to the Nazi horror in Europe. Photo: John Albok.

we had to form gangs and beat *them* up. And we did puppet shows. We went around to the soldiers in their tents who were imprisoned there, and to the houses in the village, and told them that we were doing a puppet show. We'd get some chairs and tables and turned them upside down and put the curtain over them and we started playing foolish—just doing puppets."

Puppetry was a commonplace affair throughout Germany. Roaming puppeteers traveled from town to town with a collapsible stage and a set of stock characters. The star of their public shows was the national comical hand puppet mascot Kasper, also known as Hans Wurst ("Jack Sausage") or Pickelhering ("Salted Herring"). Around the world he had many other names: In Czechoslovakia he was Kasparek. In Greece and Turkey, Karagiozis and Karagöz. Armenia and Iran had Karapet, while in Uzbekistan he was Palvan Katschal. Russia is famous for Petrushka, and Italy for Pulcinella. In France this was Puncinelle (before being replaced by Guignol) and in England he became the long-nosed Mr. Punch who had a wife named Judy. The list goes on: Panza in Spain, Pança in Portugal, João Redondo in Brazil, Semar in Indonesia, and Vindushaka in India—just to name a few.

A parade marshal guides nine paper mâché puppets mounted on backpacks around the bend on May Day of 1937 in Manhattan's Union Square. The puppets likely represented capitalists at odds with the marching workers in white berets and red sashes demanding a raise in pay. Photo: John Albok.

Regardless of his name, every national puppet protagonist played the same role in society. "He was the commoner's hero," says puppeteer K. Ruby in her *History of Radical Puppetry* slide-lecture. "He acted as a live news service for the people, satirizing local events, taking potshots at the government and spreading the gossip of the day."

"Punch and Petrushka and Guignol use nuance and innuendo," says theater historian John Bell. "So while the censors are listening or watching, you're not saying something outright, you're juxtaposing images that have four or five different levels of meaning and putting them together with other elements. You say, 'We're not doing a show where we make fun of the king,' but the real message becomes clear to the audience." And in the face of state oppression, these subversive puppet heroes resisted and survived. Throughout the repressive regime of the Ottoman Empire, Karagöz got away with everything from scathing social critique to absurd penis jokes. When the British dictator Oliver Cromwell shut down all of the theaters for eighteen years in the mid-seventeenth century, the roving Punch show could still be seen in public. While the Czech language was banned under Austrio-Hungarian rule in the nineteenth century, Karapet continued to spout anti-fascist remarks in his native tongue. Up until the twentieth century there were periods when Kasper and Guignol performances were monitored, censored, and even banned by European states, but as leaders came and went, the puppet lived on.

Another form of traveling public theater was the banner show, or *bänkelsang* (German for "bench-song"). Storytellers would stand on a bench and sing while pointing to painted banners that illustrated their tales. "The *bänkelsang* was quasi-news," says puppeteer Clare Dolan, "about murder, fires, death, affairs, sex. The bench-singers were vagrant people who were always getting arrested, censored, and exiled."

The banner show's history can be traced back to sixth century India when nomadic holy men eked out a living by knocking on doors and telling stories with painted scrolls depicting gods or the afterworld. Buddhism spread this art form to China, where it became *pien* literature, and to Indonesia, where it was transformed into the famous *wayang berber*, or scrolling shadowplay. Buddhist propaganda in Japan took shape as *etoki*, and the hanging scrolls were divided into panels or made into little booklets, paving the way for the popularity of *manga* (comics) centuries later. In Italy during the middle ages, the Church was using banner propaganda, and by the sixteenth century a secular tradition called *cantambanco* (bench-singer) or *cantastoria* (story-song) was sweeping the streets. Victor H. Mair writes of the bench-singers in his book *Painting and Performance*: "Their social status in the seventeenth century is determinable by their associations with magic, swindlery, skullduggery, quackery, charlatanism, puppetry, and even acrobatics."

"When I was a young kid *bänkelsang* was still in the market and on the fairgrounds just before it died," recalls Peter Schumann. "The Nazis killed that together with other folkloric forms."

The subversive puppets and performable artifacts of Europe weren't always small or concealable creations that a puppeteer could smuggle easily from place to place. Beginning in the fourteenth century, giants made of wicker began to crop up. Gog and Magog were the giant guardians of London who came to symbolize the end of the feudal system as they were paraded through the streets each year. Belgium's Guyant was a symbol of resistance to French domination that was banned and then rebuilt each time power changed hands. Catalonia gave birth to *gigantes y cabezudos* (giants and bigheads), fiesta figures depicting local personae or taking the forms of fantastical beasts. In Italy and southern France wicker statues made an appearance at Mardi Gras and Carnival festivities, which culminated in a mock trial of the king, who was always found guilty and burned in effigy. These giant puppet pageants were something for townspeople to rally around and bond over, as well as representations of common dreams of liberation.

Some of these dreams were sent overseas. "Many Italian anarchists who emigrated to the United States settled in Vermont," says Sara Peattie from the Puppeteers Cooperative in Boston. "With them came puppet theaters and town pageants. They used these as labor organizing tools." And sometimes these workers' pageants surpassed the scale of their humble village roots. In 1913, author John Reed collaborated with arts patron Mabel Dodge, painter John Sloan, and members of the Industrial

Workers of the World to mount a huge pageant to draw attention to the Silk Strike of 1913 in Paterson, New Jersey. The pageant brought 1,200 actual striking textile workers to perform at Madison Square Garden in nearby Manhattan, where they reenacted pickets, scuffled with *faux* police and sang union songs in front of a 90 by 200 foot painted backdrop depicting Paterson's silk mills. The show ended with triumphant speeches by labor leaders Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Carlo Tresca, and Big Bill Haywood, though the actual strike ended in failure.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, radical pageants grew less commonplace in the US as many cities and towns passed laws that restricted the number, size and content of public celebration. Often it was the elite that were permitted to parade and symbolically flaunt their power. St. Louis, Missouri's famed Veiled Prophet Celebration began after a trolley strike in 1878, with the prophet herself decked out in a white robe, white mask, and conical white cap, and packing a club, pistol, and two shotguns. "It will be readily observed," the *Missouri Republican* reported, "that the procession is not likely to be stopped by streetcars or anything else." The Pilgrim's Progress parade that takes place on Thanksgiving Day each year in Plymouth, Massachusetts is a tradition rooted in a similar display of power, with the town's white populace marching gleefully to church with muskets and bibles in hand. Most town pageants in the US followed this trend, favoring patriotism and the histories that exalted the good-natured perseverance of the white race, whether based in fact or not.

"The basic battle in society is over how to tell different stories about what's going on in the world," says activist-artist David Solnit. It's a secret that the heads of state, religious and corporate institutions have been hording for millennia. "People who understand how to communicate with images and words and voices have the tools to catalyze people and reach people's hearts and minds, and tell different stories to combat the dominant control stories—to speak in the language of the heart and the gut."

A New World of Puppetry

In the 1950s the young Peter Schumann busied himself in the resurgence of the avant-garde in Germany. "We rented a cellar in Munich and put posters all over the neighborhood, and we pretended to do a concert—improvisations with big titles, vocals, garbage sounds. It kept shifting. We did dance concerts and more people participated. I made big masks and figures and put people inside bags with or without holes in them, or just moved fabrics." He and his friends were continuing the work of the radical art movements that had been killed off by the Nazis. "It was in the air—the Expressionists, the Dadaists, the Abstractionists, the Bauhaus in Germany—all the radical turners of today's aesthetics had been extremely busy with different styles and mixings of media. It was learning from that, and also *protesting* that." Peter was both angered and ideologically shaped by the inaction of some of his forbearers. "Why did this not become a protest movement against Hitler? It was only wiped out."

Peter Schumann set out to start a dance company in New York. "First I'd tried to work with all these fancy dancers from the Merce Cunningham studio and they were non-responsive mostly." Peter's building superintendent (who called himself "The Ambassador of the Planet Uranus") had some friends who Peter recruited as his first volunteer performers. "I got all these dope addicts together and they were my company," he says. "And it was a great company." The incidental group performed a *Dance of Death* for the weeklong General Strike for Peace organized by the War Resisters League, the Greenwich Village Peace Center, and members of the Living Theater in February of 1962. Author Grace Paley, Catholic Worker founder Dorothy Day, and folksinger (and former puppeteer) Pete Seeger all spoke and performed throughout the week, alongside many others. All of New York's major daily papers refused to print ads for the strike or announce that there would be picketing at US Army recruiting offices and the New York Stock Exchange.

The Strike was the rekindling of a 1930s tradition. With fascism on the rise in Europe and in the midst of the Great Depression, there had been a General Strike for Peace in 1936, along with annual May Day parades in Manhattan's Union Square. Mexican muralist David Siqueiros, Works Progress Administration (WPA) puppetry director Remo Bufano, and the young painter Jackson Pollock joined scores of other artists to build floats and puppets, large and small, depicting African-American heroes, bulbous-headed politicians, or enslaved European workers being whipped by an SS officer as they towed Adolph Hitler and all of Germany's death camps down the street. The artistic wing of the WPA was an environment for people whose ideologies were as radical as their art, and puppetry was one part of that.

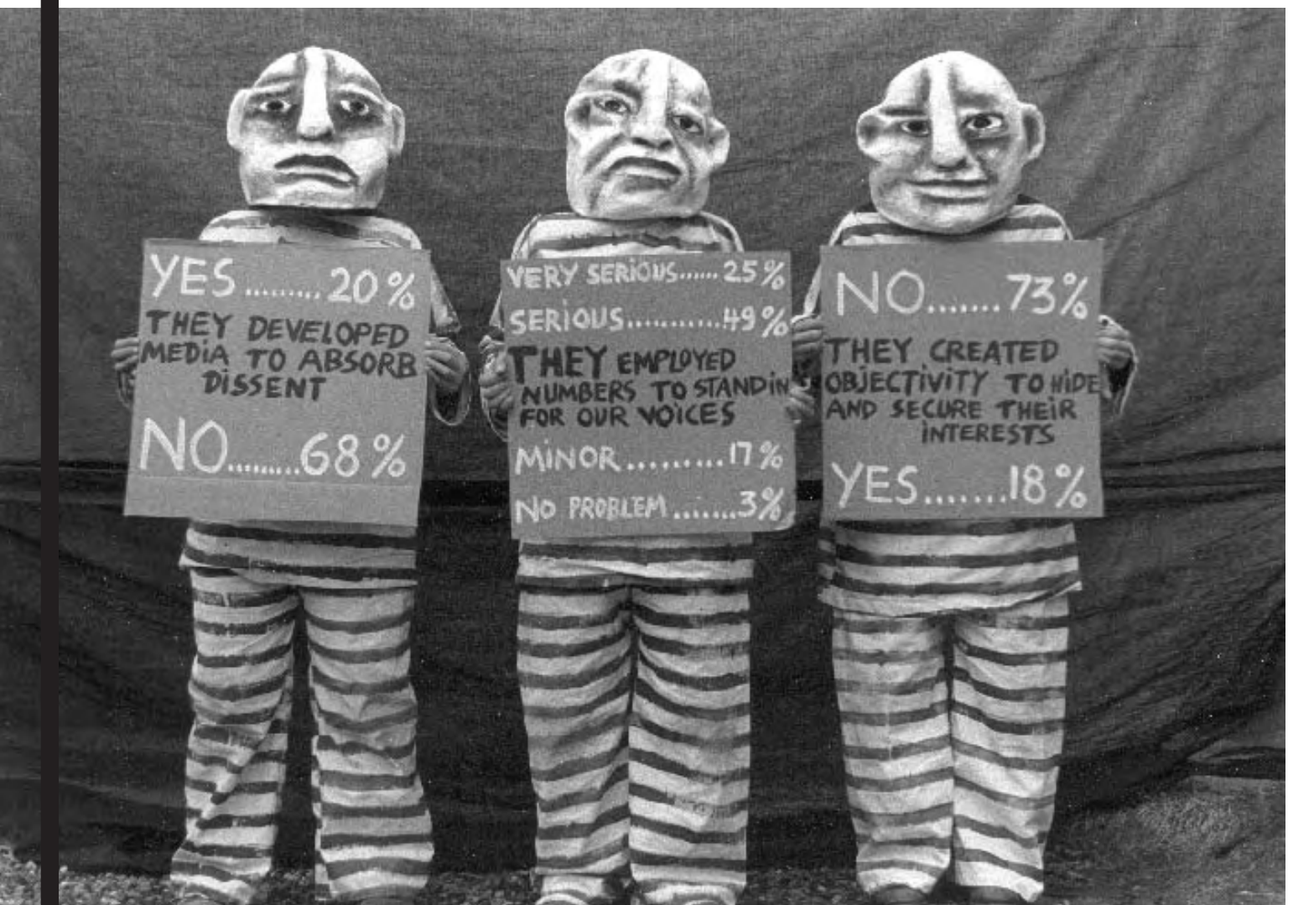
"Their point of view was, 'Puppets? Why not?'" says John Bell. The American puppeteers of the Depression Era were using puppets in the way that their Old World predecessors had used them. World War II and the subsequent rise of McCarthyism changed that. "The Cold War set in this idea that's still prevalent," says Bell. "That puppets are children's entertainment. This really dug itself in and it's really an American idea." Perhaps that's why an un-American artist with un-American ideas is credited with igniting the radical puppetry revolution in America, as the 1960s ushered in a new era of rebellion and different thinking.

In 1963, Elka Schumann had a job teaching Russian at an alternative high school in Vermont, but her husband Peter was turned down when he wanted to teach dance. "They came to see that *Dance of Death* and they were horrified," he laughs. "So I said, 'Oh, what about puppetry?' I just threw it out, just like that, and they said, 'Puppetry, yes. That's for children, right? Yeah. Good.'" The name for the Schumanns' puppet company came when another element was added to the theater. In addition to being a sculptor, dancer, printmaker, musician, and

The Reaper claims the life of a labor leader in Bread & Puppet's *The Passion of Chico Mendez*, 1988. Photo: Bill Teel.

puppeteer, Peter Schumann was also a bread baker. He was heir to a century-old strain of Silesian sourdough culture—the key ingredient to his famous rye loaves that are dense, dark and not as easy to swallow as the white, pre-packaged Wonder Bread that most Americans are accustomed to. Peter slathers slices of his sourdough bread with a sharp aioli that is often so strong that it burns. He began serving this at every performance, and the audience went home with garlic on their breaths and politics on their brains, digesting both difficult bread and difficult theater—bread and puppet.

Bread & Puppet's earliest work was in the streets of New York City, staging scrolling *cantastoria* shows on top of garbage cans with Puerto Rican activists. They also worked in churches, transforming traditional Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving stories into anti-war shows. Peter Schumann made 100 puppets called "Gray Ladies"—narrow female figures that stood twelve feet tall, their hands clasped in prayer, and manipulated by a single pole—and used these in collaboration with a chamber music ensemble for a version of Bach's *Cantata #140* that also became a piece about Vietnam. "We borrowed kettledrums from some orchestra and during the Cantata movements the drums would mow down people and the Cantata would raise them up. It was a very simple, big choreography. It came out wonderfully. Then we used the same Gray Ladies in parades—piles and piles of them." And the participants in these parades were the same people that performed in Bread & Puppet's shows all over the city. "It's something that grew very quickly to be for many, many people. We did parades where we needed virtually hundreds of people."



What Bread & Puppet was doing was completely unheard of. "Puppetry in America was Bil Baird and all the kitsch-makers of the world," says Peter. "I went to the Puppeteers of America festival in 1963—solid kitsch. We had to play outdoors because there wasn't enough space for us indoors. We strung people up by their necks in the show and all kinds of nasty things. Somebody wanted to kill me. And the fire department came."

Bread & Puppet's radicality stood alone in the puppetry community, but another kind of radical performance community was growing. "I participated with Kaprow and Oldenburg and other Happening-makers," says Peter. The Happenings were art events that arose in New York in the late 1950s in backlash against the dominance of abstract expressionism in the art world. The Happening-makers drew inspiration from the simultaneous performances conducted by the European Futurists and Dadaists a few decades before, and counted former Bauhaus professor Josef Albers and music composer John Cage among their mentors. Happenings happened in unusual locations—gymnasiums, garages, parking lots and abandoned hotels—and housed absurd performances with objects as everyday as typewriters, lawnmowers, and cement mixers, to the extraordinary, like cardboard firefighting uniforms or a nine foot tall boot that walked itself awkwardly around the playing space. These performances drew a variety of nervous responses from their willing audiences, distraught neighbors, and curious police detectives. "They were so similar to what I was doing in Germany," says Peter. "It was amazing."

Most of the Happenings' radicality was in form and not always in content, whereas Bread & Puppet's unwavering commitment to make theater whose message was as radical as its presentation was informed by Peter Schumann's close-up experience with war and time spent as a refugee. But with increased US involvement in Vietnam impinging on American life, resistance to that involvement escalated. Some of this resistance came from artists. "In the late 1960s, street theater grew all over New York," Peter remembers. "Dozens of groups appeared all of a sudden, a lot of which had done workshops with us." Similar things were going on around the country, notably in California. "We also met with the West Coast folks—the San Francisco Mime Troupe and Teatro Campesino. They came east and we went west. We did the Radical Theater Conference together. That was an exchange of ideas and similar things."

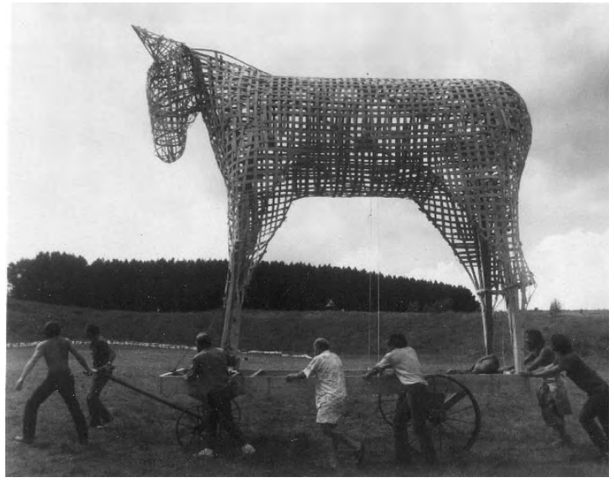
Bread & Puppet's *Fire* was an indoor show in remembrance of the first three Americans to die by self-immolation in protest of the war in Vietnam. *Fire* was a series of eight scenes revealed by a silent, masked narrator. A card displayed a day of the week, a small bell rang, and a curtain was drawn to display a dozen actors standing, sitting, or lying almost motionless, all wearing black garb and identical white masks molded from the face of Li Minh, a Vietnamese woman who was in the company. The scenes began as familiar, with the actors sharing a meal around a table, or poised to dance in pairs to sporadic music, or gathered around a deathbed while one of their number read another's last rites. The scenes grew more disturbing and dark, each hanging there for a few minutes that could feel like hours, before the curtain closed and the narrator moved through the ritual of presenting the next day. The play ended with a day called "FIRE" and a lone figure, enclosed in a cage of cinderblocks and barbed wire, entwined herself from foot to head by drawing strips of red tape up the length of her white robes.

Fire is cited as being the show that made Bread & Puppet famous, though not in America. New Yorkers appreciated it only as "weird protest theater" and not as art. The reaction in Europe was different. John Bell explains, "On an artistic level they saw Bread & Puppet's European sensibility and made connections to Futurism, Dada, Expressionism, and the Bauhaus." And on a political level, the European public had a cleaner conscience about the situation in Vietnam. "There was also this vision of the US as being at the center of youth culture and so Bread & Puppet appealed to young audiences." In 1968, the year that student

Masked prisoners reveal survey results for the Quincentennial of Columbus' arrival in America, 1992. Photo: Clare Dolan.

demonstrations in Paris built into a weeklong general strike by two thirds of the French workforce, *Fire* played and there were crowds breaking down the door to see the show.

Bread & Puppet continued to make appearances in New York and abroad while taking a four-year residency at Goddard College in Vermont. The move from city to country affected Peter Schumann's output and he found himself working with a different set of players—Vermonters, not New Yorkers, and mountains, not skyscrapers. "What had worked in New York or DC didn't work in Vermont," says John Bell. John joined Bread & Puppet in the 1970s, after the residency at Goddard ended and the Theater had chosen to stay in Vermont where there was more space to play with and store giant puppets, and cheaper rent for the scores of puppeteers that it took to make giant puppet theater happen. "Elka's father had acquired this land in Glover, Vermont and on it was this huge gravel pit," explains Bell. "He had just sold the gravel to build the interstate and was going to have it smoothed over, but Peter said, 'Hey! This is an amphitheater!' and that became the setting for *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus*."

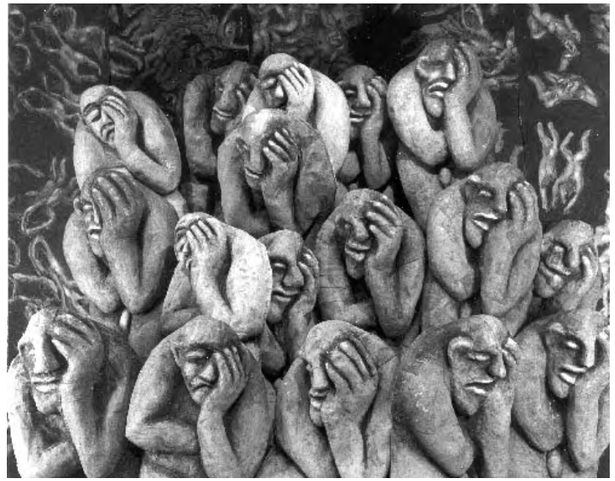


Our Domestic Resurrection Circus began as an annual event when Bread & Puppet first moved to Vermont. For two decades the circus drew crowds to Glover to camp out and wander the grounds, seeing sideshows around the field, in the forest, and under the barn before finding a spot on the hillside to watch the main event. Bread & Puppet's Circus transformed social critique into a series of quick acts with traditional circus figures: a lion would brandish a whip and command a pride of humans to stand on buckets, jump through hoops and watch TV, while global warming or the National Debt could be a big, pink elephant that politicians would like to pretend isn't there. The Circus grew rife with plenty of puppet representations of Vermont life (cows, sheep, farmers, goats, a donkey) and actual aspects of local culture (like the use of traditional Sacred Harp singing, or sheaves of grain culled from a nearby field). Forms from the Old World showed up too: Germany's everlasting hero Kasper became the Circus' slapstick clown, and Bread & Puppet's output of *cantastorias* now numbers somewhere in the hundreds. And of course, there were giants.

Up through 1998 Bread & Puppet's summer staff would recruit volunteers from the Circus audience to be in a pageant that made full use of the rolling hills and expansive fields of their farmland. In earlier years the audience numbered a few hundred, but by the late 1990s there were an estimated 40,000 people coming from all over the country to see the Circus and partake in the spectacle that grew up around it. A lot of these people came primarily to party in the nearby campgrounds, many more just to see the shows, and quite a few to participate in any way possible. So when the call came for volunteer performers, hundreds of people responded, most of whom had never been in a puppet show before.

Volunteers were divided into teams, given costumes, taught their roles, and within an hour were performing in front of an audience of many thousands. The pageants were sparse, slow-moving, and far more abstract than the verbose antics of the Circus, pointing more to Schumann's roots as a choreographer. The pageant's climax was always the arrival of "Mother Earth," the largest puppet of all, emerging over a rise to usher out the evils of the world.

It is this massive scale of participation that is the reason for Bread & Puppet's influence over arts and activism in North America. Many people who came and saw and participated wanted more—to run away and join the Bread & Puppet Circus. And a lot of them did by volunteering in Bread & Puppet shows in other cities, or by writing and requesting a summer internship in Glover. Some of these people stayed and became part of the community that grew up around the Bread & Puppet Theater and Farm over the years. Many others left to make their own work because they felt that the work they were doing at Bread & Puppet could never be their own—it was Peter Schumann's.



Aresh Javadi, an artist and organizer with New York's More Gardens Coalition, made the pilgrimage up to Glover after being told that his community arts work was reminiscent of Bread & Puppet. "I was very impressed by the joy and humor and smartness, and obviously the critique of administration that was lacking in other fun, celebratory, circussy things that I'd gone to. So I came back for the summer program and it was really exciting. You could just feel it building up as time went on because there's this big Circus day and a familial feeling of bringing everything together for the tens of thousands of people who are showing up to watch. The hierarchy was really obvious in that whole structure, coming from Peter down to the bottom, but it was really fun to put my hands into paper mâché and slop it and to have all this space to be able to be creative and to be around so many people who have high energy doing it full on." When Aresh returned to New York, he began using puppetry in his activist work.

Gustavo Boada made masks for Peru's Yuyachkani theater group in the 1980s. He came to the US to work with Bread & Puppet. Peter Schumann was extremely impressed by Gustavo's craftsmanship, and Gustavo recalls how Peter expressed this. "He told me, 'I don't need a mask-maker—*I am* the mask-maker. You should be creating your own work.' So I did this." Gustavo moved to North Philadelphia to make masks, teach stiltwalking, and create street and puppet theater with members of the Latino community. "Peter inspired me to do the work I'm doing now. I wouldn't be doing this if he hadn't said what he said."

Matty Hart began making puppets with the Radical Færie community and was told that he needed to go up to Bread & Puppet. "It was a truly life-changing moment. I had never understood that that type of world existed, that that type of art got made, that people participated in anything on that scale. It completely changed the way that I understood how people got together, what art could be in the world, and the scale and function of participatory art." Matty reflects on being a young, queer puppeteer who founded Spiral Q Puppet Theater in Philadelphia partly in reaction to his experience at Bread & Puppet. "Bread & Puppet came to represent a paternal figure. I had to leave it. It was part of youth, to say, 'I'm not you, I'm something else.' And Spiral Q did it organizationally. 'We're not that, we're an *urban* public theater. We're street-based. We're younger, edgier, more radical.' And we were, but in a different way. Bread & Puppet had a political and capital capacity and a function and a

This page: Puppeteers tow a giant wicker horse to the Bread & Puppet pageant field in Glover Vermont, 1985. Photo Paul Petroff. Next page: Figures inspired by an image from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco *The Last Judgement*, used in Bread & Puppet's *The Thunderstorm of the Youngest Child*,1982. Photo: George Lange.

breadth and an intelligence way beyond ours. But it was important to break away."

Graciela Monteagudo studied different forms of puppetry in Argentina and was looking for more serious training in street theater. She met Bread & Puppet in Brazil and worked as a translator for their show about Brazilian labor leader Chico Mendes. She says that many of the Brazilian volunteers took issue with Bread & Puppet arriving with a show about one of their national heroes that was already made. "They complained that it was not flexible. There were other problems, but in the end the show turned out good and everything was fine." Graciela moved to Vermont to join the company. "Bread & Puppet creates pieces at the farm in Glover, with Peter directing a small group of puppeteers. Once the show is finished, the group takes it on tour to different communities. Community members volunteer for roles, while the young Bread & Puppet people direct them into a fully scripted show. This is a process that opens a unique opportunity for people who do not define themselves as artists to participate in a political artistic performance, but does not empower the community to tell their own story." Graciela went on to make street theater in Argentina and the US that incorporated collective input and community feedback into the creative process. "I still continue to work with Bread & Puppet because I have a lot to learn from Peter."

Matty Hart says, "It wasn't until much later that I realized that it was a European model of artist training: master and student. Peter was the master and there were students at different levels. You learn, you graduate through practice and production, and public humiliation and all this stuff, which is a part of that very old system. It's a cooperative hierarchy." Bread & Puppet's authority to do this is a testimonial to their ability as well as their longevity as a company. While most of their contemporaries from New York, San Francisco, and Vermont that were around in the 1960s and 1970s no longer exist, Bread & Puppet has continued to

An army of children guide a golden Trojan Horse down the street in Heart of the Beast's 2005 May Day Parade in Minneapolis. The Horse's placard reads "A Free Gift For You." Some of the child ren are emblazoned with corporate logos. Photo: Sal Salerno.

be not just a theater company, but a theater school that has taught the art of making puppets and puppet shows, *cantastorias* and pageants to thousands of people worldwide. And it has served as a model for those wanting to make this kind of art and theater, as well as for those willing to teach it. In this way, radical puppetry has spread and taken on new forms and methods in its design and process.

Cooperative Beasts

It's the First of May 1977, and a few hundred people parade puppets and banners through the streets of Minneapolis. The imagery is a mishmash of purple-faced women, giant flowery dragons, majestic buffalo and other animals divided into four sections and representing the seasons of the year, each accompanied by its own musical sound. The procession makes its way toward Powderhorn Park for an annual maypole ceremony, until it is blocked by what looks like a group of people who should be in the parade. They have picket signs.

"They thought that we had stolen May Day from labor," says Sandy Spieler, artistic director for In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater. "I stepped forward and stated that our intention was to enact this procession as a way to celebrate the workers who build this community every day with the creativity of their hands, hearts, and minds."

Nixon was president and the National Guard had just killed four students at a campus protest in Kent, Ohio when Heart of the Beast performed its first show in 1973. Originally called Powderhorn Puppet Theater, Heart of the Beast was started by a handful of artist-activists who believed that society could be changed through art, and that public action in the form of theater could inspire people to take other forms of action. They had prior experience in agitprop protest theater that decried all the bad stuff in the world, issue by issue, with no end in sight. Powderhorn's founders had grown weary of agitprop's preachy and reactionary pitfalls, but struggled with trying to make something that went beyond the flatness of issue-based art. In the book *Theater of Wonder: 25 Years in the Heart of the Beast*, Powderhorn co-founder David O'Fallon writes about making a big militarized corporate puppet head that was plastered with bits of hardware, armed forces insignias and logos from IBM, Coca Cola, and Xerox. When he looked at the finished product, David realized that he had made something that was the physical embodiment of the didactic protest theater that he and his cohorts were trying to move away from. He threw it away and set about making a different kind of puppet theater.

Their first show, *A Boat, A Boot, A Book, A Ball of Yarn*, was made entirely from found materials and performed in a neighborhood park in front of a small lake on the Fourth of July, 1973. It was a simple, beautiful piece using puppets, giant masks, and cheap theatrical tricks. In the show, people struggle to reclaim the fruits of their labor (the objects in the show's title) that have been stolen from them by the forces of church and state. The people fall into subjugation before being awakened by a giant puppet named "Mama." They then realize that their power to create is in their own hands. About fifty people watched. Within thirty years, that number would swell to 35,000.

Heart of the Beast credits Bread & Puppet as a role model, as is evident in their use of clay-molded mâché and specific images, such as the arrival of giant maternal liberator in their first show, or the stark Gray Lady-like figures in their wordless 1975 production *Magnificat*. Heart of the Beast had local influences too: the personality of Minneapolis, the Mississippi River, and the struggles of the American Indian Movement all had a major impact on their work. At one point Heart of the Beast was faced with the same choice that Bread & Puppet had made: stay in the city, or move out onto a farm.

"We consciously chose to ground ourselves in Minneapolis," says Sandy Spieler. "The issues that we took up were ones that affected us locally, but of course had global repercussions as well, because everything is interconnected." The theater's namesake reflects this ideology. "It's a phrase from Cuban poet José Marti, popularized by Che Guevara. When people from the US wanted to be part of the Cuban Revolution, Che said, 'I envy you. You North Americans are very lucky. You are fighting the most important fight of all—you live in the heart of the beast.' We take that to mean that wherever you are, that's your place of power—that's the community that you can affect from your own self, your own place of change, your own soul and heart

and mind. From there you can go on to your immediate community, then the larger city, and eventually the nations of the world. You must work from where you are—that's the greatest challenge of all."

Working from where they were is exactly what Heart of the Beast did. In 1975 they held their first May Day Parade and Festival and have continued to do it every year. The Parade transforms ten blocks of Bloomington Avenue into a river of living images and music. Each section of the parade tells part of a story that unfolds into Powderhorn Park for a giant puppet pageant. The pageant has a different theme each year, but with recurring elements that give it a ceremonious quality to people who witness or take part in it repeatedly. The performance opens with "The Four Big Ones,"—giant puppets built in 1981 that represent Woods, River, Sky, and Prairie—and closes with the rowing of the Sun across the lake to lift the Tree of Life from its winter slumber. What happens in between is different every year, and pays tribute to both the "Green Root" (honoring nature) and "Red Root" (honoring labor) of May Day.

Tremendous planning goes into this day-long event. "We begin with a community brainstorm meeting in February," says Sandy Spieler. "We start thinking and talking and then break into teams who take artistic leadership for particular sections that they design, enact, direct and set music for. Each team brings their part back to the whole committee to see if it makes sense, or if anything is being repeated, or if it's going way way out. May Day's an interesting blend of individual artistry and collective brainstorming. It's never one exact process." The tail end of the Parade is called the "Free Speech Section" and anyone can participate. "We have rules in the storytelling part: no signage of individual groups. But in the free speech section each group *must* have a sign identifying who they are. There's no pre-meditated ordering to the lineup—it's first come first serve. So sometimes there's a really interesting flow of participants."

Heart of the Beast takes on issues and extends them beyond the limited scope of reactionary protest theater by exploring them on a committed, long-term basis. The speeches and struggles of the American Indian Movement (AIM) inspired a herd of giant puppet buffalo for the American Bicentennial, and a number of shows in tribute to the life of Anna Mae Aquash, a murdered AIM activist whose hands were cut off by the FBI. A three-year series of shows about water culminated in a thirty-person puppet circus tour that took the Theater from one end of the Mississippi River to the other by boat (or tried to—their boat, *The Collapso*, died en route and they had to complete the voyage by land.) In the three years leading up

Black banners bearing names of people killed in Iraq appear in Heart of the Beast's parades and May Day Ceremony, 2006. The banners are used by different groups for events in Minneapolis throughout the year. Photo: Liz Welch.

to the Quincentennial of Columbus' arrival in the Americas, Heart of the Beast produced a number of shows that, through collaboration with visiting puppeteers from Latin America and over a hundred community members, delved into the hemisphere's natural and cultural histories, conquest, exploitation, and possible futures.

Heart of the Beast was just one of several radical theater companies to emerge from their community in the early 1970s, and like Bread & Puppet, they continued while other groups came and went. The longevity of both Heart of the Beast and Bread & Puppet could be attributed to what they had that other performing groups didn't: giant puppets. "There's a centrality of big things," says John Bell. "What they attract is so different than 'actors' theater.'" And with giant puppets, a place is soon needed to store them. In 1990 Heart of the Beast purchased a former pornographic cinema to be their theater, workshop, and storage space. And then there's the Bread & Puppet Museum. "The Schumanns have a big barn," says John Bell, "and when you're a puppeteer you say, 'Here's the barn, fill it up with puppets!'"

Heart of the Beast and Bread & Puppet aren't the only long-standing participatory giant puppet institutions in North America. Sara Peattie and George Konnoff started the Puppeteers Cooperative in the 1970s when they began making "instant parades" with community groups. Sara is renowned for her handbook *68 Ways to Make Really Big Puppets* and still runs the Puppeteers Cooperative out of a church basement in Boston. "We try to be like the library," says Sara. "The library doesn't ask who you are or what you want it for. Our political stance is that it's a cooperative and people do a lot of different things." Part of the Cooperative's basement space is an organized workshop, equipped with tools, hardware, rolls of colored paper, and other materials used for making and maintaining giant puppets. The other part is the library itself—roomfuls of puppets that have been built over the years that anyone can borrow for whatever they want. Sara also works with a sister cooperative in Brooklyn and similar organizations have been cropping up around the country. "There's usually one in every city," says Sara. "It's an ecological niche. Once you have puppeteers, it's hard to get rid of them."

The Joker and the Fool

San Francisco is packed with pageantry. Annual celebrations honoring Chinese New Year, Carnaval, Cinco de Mayo, LGBTQ Pride, and Day of the Dead all parade through a city whose buildings are adorned with hundreds of murals. These parades and works of public art reclaim space through culture that is rooted in the celebratory resistance of marginalized communities. In recent years, political demonstrations have joined the roster of public festivity with the presence of giant puppets, but back in 1990 there was no culture of protest puppetry to be seen in the Bay Area, or anywhere else on the West Coast. "There had been in the 1960s," says K. Ruby, "with the San Francisco Mime Troupe and Teatro Campesino, but there hadn't been since I began living in the city in 1981."

Ruby began making dolls at age seven, and as a young adult she was an accomplished maskmaker. "Masks are kind of dumb if you just want to be a visual artist and hang them on a wall," she says. "That doesn't seem very rich somehow." So in 1988 she landed a job performing with a troupe that brought the cathartic techniques of *commedia dell'arte* maskwork into prisons. The troupe also employed the *Theater of the Oppressed* techniques invented by Brazilian author and theatrical director Augusto Boal.

Boal criticized the legacy of what he called "formulaic tragi-drama." From tragi-drama's inception in ancient Greece and up through its modern-day reign in Brazil's televised *novelas* (soap operas), Boal argued that governments use tragic themes to keep people distracted, passive, and non-participatory, instead of working to solve real problems in society. He began making political theater in the 1960s with people in Rio's mostly black *favelas*, but as a white, middle-class man, Boal's effort to inspire poor people to rise up against race, class, and gender inequality was inhibited by his own position of privilege, which was only augmented by his designation as "director." So he threw away his scripts and replaced them with improvisation within the framework of theatrical games. The games had actors posing problems to an audience of "spect-actors" who could, at any moment, intercede to create and act out any number of potential solutions. In this

"forum theater," any notions of rebellion and the impetus for change came from within the group Boal was working with, and he shifted from being a director to acting as facilitator—a role that he named "The Joker" after the playful and neutral nature of the wild icon from a deck of playing cards.

Brazil's military dictatorship responded to Boal's ideas by arresting, torturing, and finally exiling him, and so the *Theater of the Oppressed* spread throughout the world. Working in the global North, Boal found that though many participating spect-actors were dealing with different forms of oppression than those he had encountered in Brazil, the forum theater exercises still applied. And they were especially useful for people living in prison.

K. Ruby's troupe toured from prison to prison, making theater based on the inmates' stories. For $100 a month Ruby lived on the bus with the company, made masks of the stock *Commedia* characters, created theater with prisoners, and got her ass pinched by her boss. Within a year she left the troupe to seek out a project free from the paradoxical traps of patriarchy, hierarchy, and ass-pinching sexism.

Ruby ended up at Heart of the Beast and helped build their 1989 May Day Parade. "I worked twelve to sixteen hours a day for no pay," she says, "and I loved it." And she also loved working for a company that was run by women. She brought what she'd learned at Heart of the Beast back to the Bay Area, and joined forces with Amy Christian, an artist who had worked on "Mask-O-Rage"—a demonstration that had brought hundreds of people together to make masks and then parade with them to the gates of the Nevada Nuclear Test Site. The two women were approached by David Solnit, an activist who wanted visuals for an anti-nuke demonstration in remembrance of the Hiroshima bombing. "We built puppets in my basement," says Ruby. "I was still just learning and I was also trying to teach people. But we made four or five giant puppets and took them to this action." These puppets included a giant toxic waste monster pitted against an enormous bird, a huge root creature, and a big baby holding the world aloft, that called for clean air, clean earth, and a healthy future for our planet.

Amy and Ruby rented a larger space and spent a month working with people to build sixteen more giant puppets for another action against the Nevada Test Site. "People were excited," Ruby says. "There'd been a masked event the year before and now there was this bigger puppet event." Ten of these puppets wore matching happy faces and were choreographed to simultaneously flip around to reveal the apocalyptic expression from Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. What Amy and Ruby were doing was not entirely unheard of. Many people who came to the demonstrations assumed that this was the work of the Bread & Puppet Theater. Even though Vermont was located 3,000 miles away, Bread & Puppet's name had become synonymous with giant protest puppetry. The two women had not set out to start an organization, but with the question, "Are you Bread & Puppet?" being lobbed at them whenever their towering figures put in an appearance, they had to call themselves something. In the tradition of the court jester who spoke truth without censure and with a nod to Boal's Joker-facilitator, they named themselves Wise Fool Puppet Intervention.

Within a year Wise Fool had begun working with other activist and community organizations on issue-based puppet shows about alternative energy, white privilege, racial diversity, and living with HIV. The process of show-making began with group input and inviting people to come share their experiences. Several weeks later, people's stories came to life as large-scale, outdoor performances that used giant puppets, rod puppets, shadow puppets, *Bunraku*-style puppets, costumes, masks, and sculptural elements. Wise Fool also led free workshops in puppetmaking and stiltwalking—a skill that Ruby had picked up both in her stint making theater in prisons and via African stilting traditions used at Heart of the Beast. Wise Fool helped local artists and cultural workers to make living altars and parades for Day of the Dead and Carnaval in San Francisco's Mission District. Wise Fool also brought their puppets to all the demonstrations. And there were a lot of demonstrations—George Bush (the first) had just launched a war in the Persian Gulf.

"We were getting up at 5:00 a.m. three or four days a week," says Ruby. Wise Fool would march their giant oilmen puppets, wearing dripping-red signs that read "Oil is Thicker than Blood," followed by fifteen costumed drummers walking on stilts. "For me that was the beginning of a new era of puppetry in the streets. We were doing it."

A Zapatista Theater

"I had been organizing for fifteen years on single-issue politics," recalls David Solnit of the early 1990s, "which is how most social movements in the United States were organized even though we all knew that the problems were systemic." David, like a lot of activists, was hungry for other forms of resistance and different ways of doing things. "I had organized demonstrations and marches and mass civil disobedience for years but they didn't feel adequate. I was looking for a new language. The shift for me was when the Zapatista uprising happened and told a different story about how to change the world."

The Zapatistas revealed themselves to the world on January 1st, 1994 as a counterweight to the implementation of NAFTA—the North American "Free Trade" Agreement, which threatened an accelerated marginalization and cultural homogeneity of Mayan peoples in Mexico. *Zapatismo* sought not to seize power via a party-line ideology, but fought to restore autonomy to civil society by submitting itself to the wishes of community, or "to lead by following." The cry of *¡Ya basta!* (Enough already!) was a "No!" that suggested multiple tangible forms of "Yes!" The Zapatista uprising called itself "a revolution to make revolution possible."

With manifestos that were poetry and speeches that told folktales, the Zapatistas invited outsiders to transcend antiquated models of token solidarity and imagine a new world where many different worlds fit. Visitors traveled to Chiapas to engage in *Zapatismo* through a series of meetings, or *encuentros* (literally "encounters"), in the Lacandon jungle.

At the First International Encuentro, the Zapatistas demonstrated their creative refusal to pander to elitism and hierarchy. An example of this is when they pulled the plug on the pushy and uncooperative corporate media. While waiting for the arrival of the EZLN at the onset of the Encuentro, several visiting news crews ignored a request to remove themselves and their gear from the stage, and so the electricity was shut off. All the power to run the cameras and recording equipment, as well as the lights for the entire Encuentro, was suddenly gone. There, in the darkness of the jungle, hundreds of international observers waited silently and could just barely make out a parade of tiny lights that flickered on a distant mountainside, descending slowly over the course of an hour before disappearing into the foliage at the mountain base. The gringo masses huddled in blackness until the procession of masked Zapatistas entered the clearing with torches aloft. The crowd erupted with cheers and applause, the Zapatistas ascended to the podium, and the lights were turned back on.

In the fullest embodiment of the Spanish verb *hacer*—to do, to make, to build, to perform—the Zapatistas are performance artists and theater-makers on a grand scale who, like Augusto Boal, propose questions on the stage of the world to be worked out by some six billion "spect-actors."

"The Zapatistas had a new language," says David Solnit. "I was very inspired by them. Looking around I thought, 'What do we have that we can create a new language with?'"

The Convergence Model

"It was the first time I ever saw people using cardboard for anything."

Four years before she hunkered down to pen portable murals for the Beehive Design Collective, Kehben Grifter was point-person for visual outreach and roller-skating at a ten-day gathering in Chicago called Active Resistance. Active Resistance was a counter-conference to the 1996 Democratic National Convention (DNC) envisioned by anarchist collectives from Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, and other spots around the Midwest. It was more than just an anarchist gathering—it was for people wanting to organize with popular movements that didn't self-identify as anarchist. People participated in week-long workshops on alternative economics and community organizing that had a hands-on emphasis on sustainability and permanence, which many participants were experiencing for the first time. "It was formative for me to raise the standard for how things happened and try and make this historic event that was very hopeful," says Kehben. "It was very forward-looking….It was movement-building."

Kehben crafted posters and propaganda, but puppetry was strange terrain. "It wasn't on the radar screen for me," she says. "There had been

a lack of creative stuff at anarchist gatherings. Visuals were a radical thing."

Well-established companies of giant puppetmakers existed in the Midwest—notably Chicago's Redmoon Theater and Minnesota's In the Heart of the Beast—with a history of running legally permitted puppet spectacles in the streets. But if puppets were "not on the radar screen" for the organizers of Active Resistance, then the idea of participating in an anarchist gathering that was to culminate in unpermitted demonstrations on the doorstep of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) would seem totally insane to professional puppeteers who sometimes relied on the support of the municipalities where they worked. Instead, experienced activist-puppeteers were called in from the West Coast to share skills with people who came to Active Resistance.

Artists didn't just build puppets, they organized the protest. "The whole logic was to step away from having cultural workers and performers there to just decorate a predictable demonstration," says David Solnit. "It was a participatory theater, not just a protest with a little bit of culture on the side." The "Festival of the Oppressed" pageant that attendees of the gathering brainstormed and built out of cardboard and paper mâché featured about 200 participants. Some carried puppets while others played roles indicated by placards worn on their bodies. The pageant's centerpiece was a four-sided corporate tower that manipulated gruesome likenesses of Bob Dole and Bill Clinton, looming over some thirty workers, consumers, taxpayers, and voters who dragged it down the street. A procession of as many shackled representations of immigrants, minorities, single moms and other marginalized people followed, all policed by puppet government operatives, politicians and bulbous porcine cops. Caricatures of reporters buzzed about toting oversized cardboard video cameras emblazoned with "EMPTY TV" and "SEE BS," randomly interviewing curious onlookers. The parade stopped at major intersections where, in the tradition of Boal's theatrical vision, the masses of oppressed people united to tear the walls from the tower to reveal costumed dancers and four positive visions of a future that Active Resistance participants had developed over a week of workshops.

The Corporate Power Tower with puppets of presidential candidates, part of a 200 person theater pageant and march through Chicago's Wicker Park during the 1996 Active Resistance Conference. Photo: Susan Simensky Bietila.

The reaction from people on the street to this participatory theater differed greatly from the turn-offs that run-of-the-mill street protests normally offered the public. "I've seen these things not work," Kehben reflects, "but it was very well choreographed and there was a lot of engaging with people on the side of road."

Chicago's civilians weren't the only ones to respond strongly to the demonstration. As the pageant neared the DNC, the police presence flanking it grew, and, in tribute to Chicago's infamous DNC of 1968, many police hid their badges, then beat, stomped on, pepper-sprayed, and arrested a handful of demonstrators and independent journalists.

"I consider it 'state flattery,'" says David Solnit. "We've had a lot of flattery by the state where they consider our images so powerful and delicious that they feel obliged to try and arrest and repress them."

This unintentional flattery on the part of the state, coupled with positive reaction from the public, convinced organizers that this was a direction to go in. "Doing something with your hands was not going on at gatherings before that," says Kehben. "It was way more 'in-your-head' protest." It was a shift in the North American anarchist movement. A plan for a new model of organizing was being developed. "Active Resistance restructured the standard for what something like that should be. It set the bar. That was our goal."

The birth of Art & Revolution and a new connotation to the word "convergence" emerged at an event held at a tree farm north of Seattle in 1997. Building on the momentum from Active Resistance, the Art & Revolution Convergence trained artists and organizers to use "culture as a weapon" through four days of sharing skills that culminated in a street action. "The goal was trying to shift what resistance and protest looked and felt like," says David Solnit. "To make it more of a festival and learn how to communicate not just through flyers and speeches, but through art and culture." Art & Revolution co-organized street theater actions with the United Farm Workers, Homes Not Jails, and Earth First! Similar convergences soon followed in Detroit, at the Headwaters Forest Reserve in California, and then again in Seattle the following year in tandem with Reclaim the Streets actions in England where the G8 were meeting. David says, "On a very small scale it was what the World Trade Organization protests would look like a year later." A downtown Seattle street was sealed off in an impromptu block party complete with puppet theater, dancers, music, a drum brigade, and general celebration. The Seattle police did not know how to respond.

Both Art & Revolution and Reclaim the Streets were operating on a decentralized model inspired by *Zapatismo*. This was different from more company-driven political street theater of groups like Bread & Puppet that had a director and a centralized structure of participation. Bread & Puppet would roll into town, put puppets into people's hands, make their theater happen, then pack up and leave. There was only one Bread & Puppet Theater. "But anybody who wanted to be Art & Revolution could be," says K. Ruby. "Art & Revolution is like Critical Mass, or Bikes Not Bombs, or Food Not Bombs—it's a repeatable structure that is free—free intellectual property." The creative, international network formed by these and other groups exploded into a popular mobilization that brought people to Seattle in 1999 to denounce the World Trade Organization (WTO).

"We took everything we'd learned about using art and theater as an organizing, educational, and mobilizing tool and we put it to use," says David Solnit. "We did puppet workshops for locked-out steelworkers, Unitarian youth groups, and local communities up and down the West Coast." Art & Revolution traveled with a union steelworker and a former sweatshop laborer who had been fired for trying to unionize. Their presentation articulated the pitfalls of corporate globalization from a variety

of firsthand perspectives and was part of a growing network that led to events that would ignite a public dialogue throughout the world.

A Time Called Seattle

Q: "Where were you during Seattle?"
A: "I was being sworn in as a US citizen."

This was the exchange between a US Customs officer and Juan Martinez, a Colombian-born puppeteer with the Bikes Across Borders Cycle Circus who was returning to the US after a performance tour of Mexico. The odd thing about the officer's question is that "Seattle" isn't a point in time—it's a point in space—a city that has existed for over 150 years. The odder thing is that both Juan and the officer understood that "during Seattle" meant "during the 1999 demonstrations in Seattle where 50,000 people used direct action to shut down the ministerial meetings of the WTO."

Early in December of 1999, major newspapers ran a front-page photo of a mammoth banner sporting arrows labeled "Democracy" and "WTO" pointing in opposite directions. An activist stunt team had hung it from a crane high above the Seattle skyline and it sent a clear message to a media-gobbling public who had never heard of the World Trade Organization. The images delivered to people's homes via TV, newspapers, and the Internet made them wonder, "Why are these people risking their lives to hang a sign in front of the Space Needle? Why are people dressing like big sea turtles and blocking the streets? What is the WTO and why do so many people care?" It was Boal's model of forum theater set upon the American public: "Here is a problem—What can we do to solve it?" In the words of writer Paul de Armand, "The WTO protests were the Chiapas insurrection come to America."

Art & Revolution chapters from around the country converged and were joined by puppeteers from nearby Vashon Island and members of the Bread & Puppet Theater. Together they mapped out a pageant. "It was a step forward in that those of us who were artists and puppeteers were actually also organizers," says David Solnit. "We weren't just decorating and having other people do the organizing. The logic of the organizing was using art and theater logic. And puppet logic."

Though the actions against the WTO were an escalated continuation of the convergence model, the climate was different than it had been at previous gatherings. "Seattle was bigger and not about having conversations," says Kehben. "Our energy shifted to dealing with cops." The city and state government were underprepared for what they assumed would be a small protest. Martial law was declared, civilian defense against tear gas was outlawed, and police were ordered to arrest anyone who "looked like a protestor." The police also unwittingly took part in street theater.

"Anybody approaching the protest zone was stopped and had anything they were carrying taken away, including banners and puppets," says Jan Burger, co-founder of Paperhand Puppet Intervention in North Carolina. "Some people were wearing cardboard turtle costumes. The cops were so agitated from the previous day that they just came at us and threw us to the ground. And when they came at the turtles they actually tore the shells open and *de-turtled* them. It was incredible. It was an ironic, powerful moment because they actually had a plastron and a carapace and they pulled them apart." Ironic, too, that Seattle police were equipped with reptilian-looking anti-riot armor that earned them the nickname "mutant ninja turtle cops."

After the WTO meetings ended and the Seattle chief of police resigned, protest organizers licked their wounds, chalked up a victory for a revolution to make revolution possible, and asked each other, "What's next?"

The *Puppetista* Uprising

"Ten years ago when you heard the phrase, 'The Next Seattle' it meant that a city had a bunch of really hot grunge bands."

Author/musician Al Burian said this to an audience of hipsters in the spring of 2000. The nation's youth, along with people from grassroots social movements, plus a handful of hopped-up mayors and high-ranking law-enforcers were all talking about "The Next Seattle" now in terms of where the next mass mobilization was going to take place. Major international trade meetings that few people ever even knew about and even fewer people had protested, were now slated to attract tens of thousands of demonstrators willing to travel across the country—even across the globe—to have their voices heard and their bodies counted. And a major attraction was the new wave of art that was happening in the streets.

From top: *The Face of Liberation* spans a street in Washington DC, 2001. Photo: K. Ruby; The Flying Wrench Singers demonstrating against the IMF/World Bank in Washington DC, 2001. Photo: K. Ruby; "Hands Off Street Youth" puppet leading a 1998 march in support of Toronto's "squeegee kids," teens who earn money by washing car windshields. Photo: Scott Bebin, 1998)

In the spring of 2000, the Puppeteers Cooperative opened its doors to activists during BioDevastation, a conference and demonstration to counter an annual meeting of the biotech industry that was happening in Boston that year. At "BioDev," images by Maine's Beehive Collective were ubiquitous, Philadelphia's Shoddy Puppet Company shared stages with Vandana Shiva and Ralph Nader, and 3,000 people attended something that was as much of a festival as it was a rally. Several theatrical sideshows were situated around a major downtown park, and at one end a large stage served as a podium. The roster of speakers was broken up into twenty-minute segments, in between which people would go see a sock-puppet show about genetic engineering, or a theatrical basketball game where stilt-walking CEOs played "keep-away-from-the-people" with the Earth. The Bread & Puppet Theater arrived in their painted school bus full of puppets and announced, "We need 300 volunteers!" More puppeteers from the Dirt Palace and Big Nazo, both up from Providence, waltzed around in costume or on stilts. A throng of winged children and parents in monarch butterfly outfits fluttered around a nine-foot roller-skating Bride of Frankenstein and called for an end to GMO crops that killed beneficial insects. The Puppeteers Cooperative emptied its vaults to fill hands with beautiful beasts and gargantuan mutant tomatoes, and the mass of 3,000 seemed like twice its size as tourists and Sunday shoppers lined the sidewalks to watch and interact with an avenue awash with colorful figures. Protest transformed into parade.

BioDev 2000 launched a radical puppetry community on the East Coast. There were several pockets of puppeteers working in a variety of different ways: some ran puppetry lending libraries, others were in touring troupes, some were individual artists possibly playing at protest for the first time, and others had been organizing street theater with hundreds of people for thirty or forty years. All these came together with a common purpose and made something beautiful happen.

Radical puppeteers needed a word to distinguish themselves in a country where "puppet" conjures up images of Howdy Doody, Lamb Chop, and other drossy icons of 1950s American kitsch-for-kids. Someone said, "We are *puppetistas*!" It was a fusion of the Germanic word "*puppet*" meaning "doll," and the Romantic suffix "*-ista*" meaning "one who does this" (e.g.: *dentista* and *taxista* translate from Portuguese or Spanish to dentist and cab driver). In North America this suffix bears an almost knee jerk association with Latin American leftist movements. "The '*ista*' part—it has a sort of revolutionary flair to it," says Argentinean puppeteer Graciela Monteagudo, "like '*anarquista*' or 'Zapatista.'" It was the naming of an art movement whose ideals had indeed been funneled through the examples of Zapatismo. "I like it," says Graciela. "I like that it's spelled with a lower-case 'p'—that it has no center. Anybody who's working with giant puppets in the streets can claim to be a *puppetista*. I like the hybrid aspect of it—it's a great word."

Aids Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP) wields cardboard skulls at a demonstration in Philadelphia, 1998. Photo: Spiral Q.

Like many activist buzzwords, "*puppetista*" has the potential to stir up feelings of alienation outside of the countercultural communities where its meaning is understood. It was perhaps naïve for a group of radical artists, who were predominantly white, to appropriate a suffix from a language spoken mostly by people who are marginalized in the English-speaking world. Some *puppetistas* are people of color, but many more are not. K. Ruby speculates as to why this style of puppet theater appeals to some people and not others. "I believe that there is a way that we make puppetry that is distinctly European. It comes from that tradition and in part that's why it appeals to white people." Ruby also talks about working in a prison system that's mostly populated by people of color. "The inmates would ask us about what we did, and they would say, 'Wow—this is really hard work! You must be getting paid a lot!' When I told them that we made a hundred bucks a month their jaws would drop. They just couldn't envision doing something that wasn't financially viable. As radical puppeteers, unless we kind of 'make it,' we're doomed to living off of pennies and I don't think that that has a big draw for most people of color."

"In this country white people are the most privileged," says puppeteer Jabari Jones, "while many black and Latino people are struggling to obtain some form of status because we've been second-class citizens for so long. In order to become first-class citizens, one often adopts a posture of consumerism or anti-radicalism. Maybe the *puppetista* movement is overwhelmingly white because the people who do it see it as a rejection of privilege and normalized consumer values. And then there's this vicious cycle: when people don't see people like themselves doing something, they won't do it until someone emerges whom they respect, and even then that's not always guaranteed. My cousin has come to see me perform with Bread & Puppet and he tells me that it's not his thing, even though we're on the same page with the same issues."

"I think that it reflects on what the anti-corporate globalization movement was and is," says Graciela Monteagudo. "The *puppetista* phenomenon reflected this culture. But we were never really able to open up to communities outside of middle class white people in this country."

Trojans & Vikings

During their war with Troy, the ancient Athenians hid inside an enormous wooden horse and tricked the Trojans into accepting it into their city walls as a gift from the gods. Then forty Athenian soldiers popped out of the horse and opened the gates for an army of their friends who walked in, killed all the men, and took the women and children as slaves.

That's the story, circa 1200 BC, penned by Homer and Virgil, and literally the oldest trick in the book. Law enforcers knew the legend of the Trojan Horse and believed that giant puppets could be used in a similar manner. The *puppetistas* knew that if puppets were to be used as "Trojan Horses" that their legitimacy as objects of art and communication would be jeopardized and all puppets would suffer a demotion to "instruments of crime" and not be protected by the First, or any other, Constitutional Amendment. So the *puppetistas* adopted a "No Trojan Horse" tenet to their agenda.

It didn't matter. A conservative conspiracist think-tank calling itself the Maldon Institute (named for the Battle of Maldon, where Vikings surprised the Britons in 991 AD) was issuing reports to law enforcement agencies across the country suggesting that the *puppetistas* were "funded by the Federation of Former Soviet Republics [sic]," and also, "worshippers of Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction." These claims, though absurd, amplified a growing fear of activists and protest culture among the police, and the information was used to justify raids and undercover police activity wherever puppets were being made or used.

Here's a sampling:

Two weeks before the 2000 Republican National Convention (RNC), Matty Hart was prepping the studios of Philadelphia's Spiral Q Puppet Theater when he saw two men on a rooftop taking pictures of his building. He waved to them. "Hey guys! Where are you from?" Sarcastically, they said that they were from "Seattle" and left. Later that afternoon, Matty was running workshops with single moms from Kensington Welfare Rights Union and teenagers from Asian Americans United, plus a daycare center, when city inspectors dropped in to shut Spiral Q's studios down.

"It had been proven that puppets made a lot of sense and read real well in media," says Matty. "[They] created a fantastic environment that more people wanted to be a part of. They made protests fun. When there were these larger and larger demonstrations, there was a really powerful force from the government, and we were paying attention to what were the primary functions of that force. One of them was preemptive strikes and consolidation of all the art. We knew that this might happen, so we organized a few spaces that we were going to put stuff and had our legal stuff organized and had phone trees done, but also didn't really think that it was going to happen. There was a concern that people would disappear off the street, and later on, they did."

Philadelphia police harassed public puppet performances on numerous occasions. Agents photographed performers and audience members at a show in front of the Ethical Society building, and staged intimidating drive-bys at a Puppet Uprising cabaret, whose poster was critical of police harassment. During a rally in support of the puppeteers and other activists arrested during the RNC, thirty officers surrounded and searched a hand puppet show that was in progress in a park across the street from their headquarters. The show just continued while officers threw the props around. After finding nothing, the police hung back and watched the show as a hand puppet beat cop popped up and arrested the other puppets for conspiring to commit a crime.

On the eve of protests against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in Washington, DC, fire marshals declared the protest's convergence center unsafe and ordered everyone out. Then the DC police came in and confiscated all of the puppets, flags, musical instruments and kitchen supplies to determine their crim-

inal nature. *The Washington Post* ran illustrated articles showing how water bottles could be made into explosives and detailed the ingredients for what they decided was a homemade pepper-spray: onions, garlic and cayenne.

"I was making soup!" laughed one of the cooks.

"They wouldn't let us have any of our puppets back until the ACLU got on them and deemed the confiscation unconstitutional," says Jan Burger. "Then they gave us *some* of our stuff back. It was like a symbolic gesture. They didn't give back everything. Lots of our stuff got destroyed. We made these two fifteen-foot heads with the word 'Liberation' painted on them. They gave us one back and destroyed the other. It's just weird and bizarre." The police returned the puppets in what looked like a ceremony performed by a team of unskilled furniture movers. "It was amazing seeing a high-ranking officer dragging this giant puppet labeled 'Democracy' through the street by her hair. It was beautiful in a horrific way."

A scene from Paperhand Puppet Intervention's shadowpuppet show about a woman who saves a library's books from being destroyed by American forces in Iraq. Photo: K. Ruby.

Police have impounded puppeteers' trucks when they saw stilts or paper mâché figures strapped to the roof or stuffed in the back. David Solnit was invited to Windsor, Ontario for a teach-in prior to demonstrations against the Organization of American States. "They actually staked me out and followed me after the puppet workshop. They seized my truck full of puppets and threw me in jail for the duration of the protests." He was released on a legal technicality, and was told to be out of the country by sundown.

The Flying Rutabaga Cycle Circus was kicking off a cross-country bike tour in St. Louis, where the chemical company Monsanto was hosting the World Agricultural Forum (WAF) in 2003. The Rutabagas' *Caravan Across the Cornbelt* was a puppet circus revue whose themes emphasized sustainable forms of transportation and agriculture. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* ran a front-page article that gave equal space to both sides of the agribusiness question. "That made Monsanto very nervous and they asked the police to intervene on their behalf," says puppeteer Jabari Jones, who was touring with the Circus. The St. Louis Police had teamed up with Allied Intelligence, a private agency hired to protect the WAF's interests, and raided the house where half of the Rutabagas were staying, arresting everyone inside. The other half of the Rutabagas were arrested in a park for "riding bicycles without a license"—a law that had been stricken from the books ten years prior to the arrest.

"Ironically, it was 'Bike to Work Day,'" says Dave Bailey, another puppeteer with the Circus. "We were arrested essentially for the 'intention to commit puppetry.'"

Though actual jail time served by most of these artists has been relatively short, the legal battles that follow are not. Many cases drag on for three years or more and drain thousands of dollars from people's pockets to pay travel expenses and lawyer's fees. And these people are artists—they live their lives out of love for what they do, not for money. By the time a case sees trial and some judge inevitably laughs it out of court, the city takes a moral and financial beating, while puppeteers are left with their lawyers' bill in one hand and the Maldon Report in the other, wondering, "Where's our check from the Federation of Former Soviet Republics?"

Clearly law enforcement has seen the effectiveness of art and theater as a form of action, and sometimes outlaws it altogether. At George W. Bush's inauguration in 2001, puppets were banned, but cardboard signs were permitted, and these rules were enforced at a number of checkpoints around the city. One group of performers managed to sidestep this by making a bunch of signs that unfolded and locked together into a giant puppet using a slot-and-tab system. In other cases, law enforcers carry the spirit of "state flattery" to the extreme by turning artists' own tactics against them.

In November of 2003, Jan Burger helped the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to orchestrate a three-day walking procession from Lake Worth, Florida to Miami where reps from every government in the western hemisphere were meeting to hash out details for the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Thirty people carried giant puppets for sixty miles in a pageant illustrating a history of globalization beginning with Columbus coming to America. Several towns along the route had passed temporary anti-puppet laws and Jan talks about an increased police presence that reached a critical mass upon entering Miami. "They had cleared out the entire downtown so that nobody saw the march. All we saw was cops. It was like trying to have a demonstration in the middle of a military camp."

The convergence space was under constant siege by the police, who had helicopters buzzing overhead shining searchlights down upon activists all night. They even turned the electricity for the entire block on and off just to interfere with spokes-council meetings. And law enforcers used theater as a weapon.

"There were agitators," says Burger, "undercover actors—just instigators of craziness. There was this one guy who was going around with his camera all up in people's faces, directly trying to create a provocation. Eventually these black bloc kids got up in his face, telling him to get the fuck out of there, and he said, 'I can do whatever I want. This is a free country.' Then a friend of mine said to the black bloc kids, 'Relax guys. He's just trying to get your goat.' They got mad at her and she said, 'Well, maybe you guys are the cops—who knows who the cops are?' That pissed them off to no end. They looked like they were going to go after her, so I said, 'Look guys, relax.' And they said, 'Don't tell us to relax!' And of course by then the guy with the camera was nowhere to be seen. Later on he handed out a card to somebody that read, 'AMBIENT MANIPULATIONS—Hire me for whatever job you want.'"

Another tactic used by agents is to exploit subculture through rudimentary clowning. Jan tells a story about a guy with a Band-Aid taped to his head, dressed in fatigues and wearing a floppy hat. He approached Jan, who was packing up his car, on the night before the big anti-FTAA demonstration.

"Where are you going?"

"Why do you want to know where I'm going? I don't know you."

"Can I go where you're going?"

"Why would you want to go where I'm going? You don't even know me."

"Look man, I lost my ride, I need to get out of here. Can you give a brother a hand?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, see, I got this package, you know? I need to take it somewhere. Can I put this in your car?" He showed Jan a mysterious four-foot long package covered in tape and stickers marked "FRAGILE".

"I thought, 'Holy shit! This guy is so bad!'" says Jan. "He was the most unbelievable cornball, and I was instantly freaked out, thinking, 'He's really going to try and put this thing in somebody's vehicle and then they're going to get busted with a felony for carrying an explosive or something.'" Jan ran into the convergence space and shouted, "There's this guy outside! He's trying to put stuff in people's cars!" The woman at the security desk told him that the Package Guy had been at it for hours and that there was nothing that they could do.

The disruption of activism by law enforcement is used like the tragi-drama of yore: it distracts us from the issues that we are working on. Instead we worry about the behavior of the police, and what ballistic and chemical weapons they are willing to let fly. The daily papers and nightly news play this up with shots of "protest porn"—skirmishes between demonstrators and police—instead of talking about why we are having a demonstration in the first place. Despite this divisive atmosphere, connections are sometimes attempted across the lines. At the IMF/World Bank protests in April of 2000, downtown Washington, DC looked like an enormous surrealist football game between protesters and police. A line

of activists would span a street facing off with a line of helmeted officers who were ready to let loose with nightsticks and pepper spray, and then a ten-foot paper mâché monkeywrench would arrive escorting a secular Sacred Harp choir. Shouting gave way to singing, and the hostile situation would quickly calm. Another group tried a different tactic at the same protest: they locked themselves to a giant pink piggy bank made of wood, cardboard, and many layers of paper mâché. Anticipating arrest and confiscation by the police, the piggy's designers had left a surprise in the puppet's center: a big box of Krispy Kreme doughnuts. However, the piggy became the protest's media darling and, with added protection from millions of TV viewers, made it through the day unharmed.

The Puppet Horizon

Many *puppetistas* have taken a step back from the front lines of protest puppetry. After years of involvement in big puppet convergences, Ben Matchstick founded the Cardboard Teck Instantute in Montpelier, Vermont, and works locally touring his hand puppet shows and workshops by bicycle. "What was exciting for me is that we'd all come together and find out what we could all do collectively. It wasn't possible for us all to live in New York City or San Francisco—it would deprive our communities of the energy that we have. There was this macrocosm aspect that worked to a point but now needs to be rethought. Maybe it doesn't have to do with protests, but coming together and having art and culture and not necessarily rapid response to a perceived threat that's immediate. There's so much work to be done."

"Mobilizations are kind of like a sandwich," says David Solnit. "They're only as nourishing as what's in between the slices of bread. We have to have a lot organizing in our communities in between so that there's actually a demonstration of the power that we've built in our movements leading up to the mobilization."

"There's this big, big high to see these things happen at giant street protests," says Graciela Monteagudo. "But my favorite project was when I worked with other puppeteers in Buenos Aires in 2003 to build a show using ideas generated at the neighborhood *asambleas* (assemblies) about how people's money had been stolen from the banks in Argentina."

Argentina's economic crisis came to a head in December of 2001 when the policies of the IMF and multinational corporations began to affect the middle class. With half of the population living below the poverty line and one in four Argentine workers unemployed, people took to the streets, many making a musically theatrical statement with the banging of pots and pans—empty, for want of food. The popular uprising ousted five federal governments in two weeks and the general public began relating to one another "horizontally." A process of communication and discovery took root whereby people participate in ways that are directly democratic and nonhierarchical. People held public neighborhood *asambleas* on a regular basis, coordinated hundreds of micro-enterprise cooperatives, and more than 160 factories were occupied and run under workers' control. Graciela's theater took shape through horizontalism. "We brought it to unemployed workers' communities and performed it, and each time we got feedback, we reworked the script. Then we brought the show to Europe and the United States and used it as an introduction for activists to talk about their first-hand experience as workers in Argentina."

Graciela has also helped to apply the ideas of horizontalism to pageant-making for protests at Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia. In many instances where giant puppets are seen as uninvited guests by a city government that has promised to play host to the GOP, WTO, WAF or whatever, puppeteers' artistic efforts have often been undermined by increased repression. The pageants of Bread & Puppet, Heart of the Beast, and Spiral Q emerged from similar traditions of protest, but grew into established annual ceremonies that are now ingrained in the social fabric of their regions. A middle ground between these unwanted guest protests and more accepted ritualized pageants can be found outside the gates of Fort Benning, where the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (formerly the School of the Americas, or SOA) attracts as many as 20,000 demonstrators every November. In the face of arrests, five year ban-and-bar letters, six-month jail sentences, counter-protests by some of Columbus' residents, and infiltration by the FBI, the event continues to grow and puppets have become a large part of it.

Every year the pageant at Fort Benning focuses on an aspect of the SOA's role in promoting military dictatorships, torture and massacres, and on the Latin American social movements that have persistently resisted. The puppets add a beauty that runs counter to the horrors of the SOA, and also a meaningful, ritualized quality to the annual vigil. Catholic Worker Sue Frankel-Streit writes about bringing her three children with her to help create the pageant in her essay "Reflections of a *puppetista* convert:" "Being part of a puppet action gives participants a way to help write and live out the story. As we create each role, we challenge ourselves and each other to think about what that role means; how it looks, moves, sounds, how it plays into the bigger picture. Practicing this creative process helps us learn to analyze, challenge and change our own and others' roles in the real world."

Spiral Q Puppet Theater began as a place to build demonstrations with ACT UP and Kensington Welfare Rights Union, and then with schools, community groups, and residents of recovery houses, making puppet shows, pageants and parades. Matty Hart explains the name as a convergence of everyone who doesn't quite fit. "The Spiral is a universally recognized symbol of energy, a destination or source. It's kinetic—something's happening there. The Q is the queer, it's the other, it's the ghost in the back of the bus. It's the too fat, too kinky, too weird, too much to say, too dumb, or too far-out. The Q is the otherness that doesn't fit into the black box and doesn't have a role in traditional theater-making we see commercially in the US. The idea with the Spiral Q is that if all those people who actually aren't allowed to participate in contemporary theater, did their own public theater and performed in the streets, we would create a new vision for what theater could be: a real vehicle for a revolution that could be theatrical and based in community organizing. And it would look like us."

Spiral Q's Living Loft Museum is a weird mix of artifacts from the past decade: giant pink skulls from Day of the Dead parades, glittery gen-

The inside of a giant caterpillar puppet operated by ten cyclists and driven in parades and Critical Mass rides in New York City to draw attention to the plight of the city's community gardens, 2001. Photo: Aresh Javadi.

der-bender puppets from the Philly Dyke March, a ballpark with fangs from Chinatown's victorious anti-stadium battle, some two-faced ex-mayors and district attorneys from a show built for the MOVE organization, a humongous Dracula head for the annual Halloween parade, and hundreds of diverse faces, houses, animals, trees, and representations of food products that reflect the lives and thoughts of the various kids and adults who made them. Every October all of the groups that Spiral Q has worked with over the year return to parade the contents of the museum through the streets in a citywide parade and pageant called Peoplehood.

New York's More Gardens Coalition began making puppets and street theater in 1999, specifically to defend community gardens from being destroyed. Aresh Javadi explains how the group managed to make giant things in a city where space is scarce. "Everything we had was foldable, crushable, squishable, and light. We made a wearable tomato out of metal rings connected by fabric that would squash into one big circle like a paper lantern. We had a carrot that was wearable and it would run around. We had birds, ladybugs—things that were beneficial and also very powerful. We also had the bad guys. We made a baby carriage into a bulldozer that was collapsible and could be carried around and then expanded and put together." More Gardens also made puppet vehicles—bicycles were welded together to form the innards of a giant ladybug that could transport four people, and a humongous jointed caterpillar that was pedaled by ten. The gardens themselves were watched over by twenty-six-foot tall metal sunflowers or an enormous Puerto Rican *coqui* (frog) that people could live inside of.

More Gardens' focus is on the positivity of their work and their street theater echoes this. Javadi says, "We didn't want it to be 'The garden gets bulldozed and these are the bad guys,' but to bring in a win-win situation so that people who were against us would join us, and they could see that vision as we performed it. There'd be a transformation where after a caterpillar was squashed by this gigantic auction mallet that said, "SOLD!" the caterpillar would then transform inside the mallet into a butterfly, come out and bring the people from the audience into this performance, and they would also help with turning the mallet into a pen that would write, 'We are making community gardens permanent!' The bulldozer turned inside out and became a tool shed, again transforming things into something that is useful rather than something that's destructive. And oddly enough that's what happened. We have over 700 community gardens, and more than 600 are now permanent. A lot of real bulldozers we've had dig holes and come clean up empty lots to create new gardens and move old gardens into new locations. You create visions that you need through the puppetry and somehow people continually persist until it eventually happens. A lot of lawyers and politicians came out of their buildings and said, 'You know, it really lightens my heart and makes me happy to see these colors and butterflies and creatures out here in this cement courtyard.' So it does affect people who've been there just dealing with paper and all sorts of legislation that they know in their hearts is not something that is helping the people and is just helping some corporation and some rich person get richer."

Over the centuries radical puppeteers have moved through being wandering individuals with banners and hand puppet shows, to participants in small art movements that attempted to shape society, to being directed as untrained performers in puppet rituals on a massive scale, to horizontal relationships of making theater via spontaneous direct democracy. All of these forms and formats continue to exist and inspire others to take up the puppet as a voice for social change. In the process, art gets made, a show is performed, people watch and laugh and think. Dreams are shared, plans are concocted and carried out. Sometimes we achieve our goals, and sometimes we are utterly ignored, laughed at, attacked and defeated. And still we challenge and are challenged to tell our stories and create theatrical visions of a world we want to live in. We continue to work toward the horizon and what lies beyond it. We believe in forms that speak louder than words, that bring people together, that ask questions and stimulate dialogue. We believe in the power of play and of participation, of mockery and of the unique ability of the clown to laugh in the face of the king. We believe in magic, and offer up the words of some wayward *puppetista*: "When magic confronts authority, magic always wins."

INTERVIEW RESOURCES: Steve Abrams, Dave Bailey, John Bell, Gustavo Boada, Jan Burger, Amy Christian, Clare Dolan, Kehben Grifter, Matty Hart, Aresh Javadi, Jabari Jones, Xander Marro, Juan Martinez, Ben Matchstick, Graciella Monteagudo, Roby Newton, Beth Nixon, Sara Peattie, Erik Reuland, K. Ruby, Peter Schumann, Deb Shoval, David Solnit, Sandy Spieler, Lydia Stein, Rebecca Tennison, Paul Zaloom, Donovan Zimmerman.

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