

VOICING AN OTHER: UTILIZING PUPPETRY AND PAGEANTRY FOR COMMUNITY-  
BASED SPECTACLE IN AMERICA

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## ABSTRACT

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Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater each utilize masks, puppets, and performance objects to create large-scale outdoor spectacles with the goal of creating, engaging, and/or building community. Each of these three companies can be seen as representative of one of Jan Cohen-Cruz's three strains of community-based performance: (1) "[A]ctivist performance as vigorous support for or opposition to sociopolitical circumstances," (2) "grassroots performance to retain and express collective identity grounded in tradition or place," and (3) "experimentation characterized by art blurred with life, whose everydayness welcomes broader participation and shapes and expands aesthetic impulses." This thesis will place these three companies into a historical context of puppet and mask traditions employed in the service of community, and will show the way in which each company corresponds to one of the three strains of community-based performance by discussing the companies' history, performance modes, and aesthetics.

To my wife, Laurel.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose of Study .....	3
Community-Based Performance .....	6
Literature Review .....	8
CHAPTER I. A BREIF HISTORY OF MASKS AND PUPPET TRADITIONS .....	14
Masks in Ritual and Performance .....	17
Puppets in Ritual and Performance .....	24
CHAPTER II. BREAD AND PUPPET .....	33
CHAPTER III. IN THE HEART OF THE BEAST .....	51
CHAPTER IV. REDMOON THEATRE .....	66
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION .....	86
BIBLIOGRAHPY .....	92
APPENDIX A. FIRST INTERVIEW .....	99
APPENDIX B. SECOND INTERVIEW .....	110
APPENDIX C. CONSENT FORMS .....	115

## Introduction

They [Puppets] ask that we actively manufacture belief. The puppet relies on the audience's assistance. Its face never changes or exhibits feeling. It doesn't glance or transform. Nothing happens without the audience willing it to be so. And this, it seems to me, is the gift of the puppet: the gentle reminder that belief is an exercise, a willful act of consciousness that we can employ to transform our reality.

-Jim Lasko, Artistic Director of Redmoon

Puppetry in America over the past fifty years has been largely defined by television shows aimed at children's education or by live performances supporting those television endeavors. Following the examples set forth by Jim Henson, mainstream children's television has embraced the puppet wholeheartedly, making it a commonplace image in many households. There exists in America another approach toward puppetry, however. Companies such as Bread and Puppet, based in Vermont, In the Heart of the Beast, based in Minneapolis, and Redmoon Theater, based in Chicago, have embraced a far different aesthetic, choosing instead to focus on community engagement and community-based performance, utilizing grassroots performance models and recycling materials to create massive indoor and outdoor spectacles. The purpose of the massive spectacles is to build, promote, and/or serve communities, providing a voice for healing, renewal, and transformation.

In her book *Local Acts: Community-Based performance in the United States* Jan Cohen-Cruz points to three trends in the development of contemporary community-based performance:

[A]ctivist performance as vigorous support for or opposition to sociopolitical circumstances; grassroots performance to retain and express collective identity grounded in tradition or place; and experimentation characterized by art blurred with life, whose everydayness welcomes broader participation and shapes and expands aesthetic impulses. (9)

These three trends are descriptive of three major American companies engaging in community-based spectacle and pageantry utilizing puppetry and mask work, namely, Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater. Cohen-Cruz's three strains will provide a useful structure for undertaking a study of these three companies. The first strain, that of "activist performance as vigorous support for or opposition to sociopolitical circumstances," is typical of the Bread and Puppet's model of performance. The second, that of "grassroots performance to retain and express collective identity grounded in tradition or place," is representative of In the Heart of the Beast's model of performance. The third legacy, "experimentation characterized by art blurred with life," can be used to describe Redmoon Theater's performance model. While it is possible to identify elements of each of these three strains of community-based performance within the performance practices of all three of the companies, this alignment highlights the predominant performance practices for each of the three companies being examined.

## **Purpose of Study**

In this thesis, I will argue that although traditions of Puppetry and Mask performance have a long and rich worldwide heritage, one can identify an enunciation of puppet- and masked-based spectacle which arose in the United States in the mid- to late-Twentieth Century. Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater utilize a language of imagery built on puppet and mask techniques to create large-scale spectacles that overcome barriers of language, race, and ethnicity to celebrate diversity and build community. The power of the mask and the puppet lies in creating an “other”. It may be an other that allows us to place our enmity upon itself, it may be an other that allows us to feel part of the heroic struggle, or it may be an other that allows us to speak up or speak out without fear of harm or repercussion. It is an other that creates both a language of image and a means for language; a language of dissent, or a language of education. It is this “othering” that makes masks, puppets, and performance objects so valuable to the realm of community-based performance, and makes Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater such powerful forces in the realm of community arts.

The use of puppets and masks in the realm of community arts creates an interesting dynamic in that they are as ambiguous or as specific as one chooses to make them. An evil or satiric character can be easily recognized, while an iconic character makes it possible for people from many different backgrounds to empathize with that character. A puppet or a mask allows the performer to create a new voice, and this other can freely critique the societal norms from a position of safety. It is this effect that Peter Schumann speaks of in his poem/manifesto entitled, “what at the end of this century is the situation of puppets & performing objects.” “People exist as citizens,” writes Schumann, “and puppets are insurrectionists and therefore shunned by correct citizens” (56). Conversely, the heroic mask, simple and iconic, creates an ambiguous face to



which audiences can easily relate. Susan Valeria Harris Smith states: “The masker no longer has an identity: he is transformed, he shares a moment with divinity. Affecting the union with the gods, he acts out the struggle on behalf of the entire community” (50).

Few companies exemplify the power of puppets and masks in community-based performance than the Bread and Puppet Theater. Peter Schuman’s Bread and Puppet Theater was, according to Steve Kaplin, “The first modern puppet company in America to aim its work specifically at adult audiences and to open itself to direct community participation” (28).

Although Bread and Puppet was not the first to target adult audiences (Paul McPharlin, Tony Sarg, and numerous other companies in the early Twentieth century targeted adult audiences as much as children), Bread and Puppet was one of the first American companies to position its work in a political, socially concerned manner.

Bread and Puppet started in New York in the 60s as part of the American avant-garde movement. Its members were interested in creating theater that could connect old forms with new forms that would allow them to “respond to and reflect what seemed to be going on around them” (Bell, “The End” 62). What was going on was the Peace Movement, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and Bread and Puppet would become instrumental in creating protest performances, not as means for change, but as a witness. Peter Schumann would help change the way people thought about puppets in the United States, staging puppet shows and pageants initially in New York storefronts, lofts, and streets, and eventually in the expansive open fields of northern Vermont (63).

Any company that does large-scale outdoor pageants and spectacles owes at least a small part of their success and popularity to Bread and Puppet. Many of them, like In Heart of the

Beast Mask and Puppet Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota, grew directly out of the Bread and Puppet tradition. Unlike the Bread and Puppet theater, though, Heart of the Beast has chosen to root themselves in a specific community, in order to help transform and renew it. Every year they stage a May Day Pageant Spectacle in and around the Powderhorn Park neighborhood in Minneapolis. The purpose of the pageant is to celebrate the end of winter and the renewal of life, a transformation made apparent in the surrounding neighborhood: once a rundown, crime infested area of the city that is now being rejuvenated and rebuilt, thanks in large part to the dedication and efforts of In the Heart of the Beast.

While Bread and Puppet and In the Heart of the Beast rose out of the agit-prop, anti-war arts movements of the '60s and '70s, Redmoon started in the late '80s in response to what the founders saw as a "world that encourages greater isolation and individual focus." They wanted to create a theater that could "transform streets, stages, and architectural landmarks into places of public celebration," and make theater that could "challenge the boundaries that sit between people and that inspire a shared experience of our common humanity" (Redmoon.org). Initially, Redmoon created celebratory pageants centered around holidays as a way of reclaiming those holidays from commercial dominance. Relying on collaboration and experimentation, Redmoon has created a style and aesthetic that utilizes masks, puppets, and mechanical objects to transform buildings and landscapes in and around Chicago into fantastical dreamscapes in an effort to

encourage non-traditional theater audiences to forge new relationships between fellow audience members, the work itself, and the location in which it takes place [...] speak a universal, highly visual language accessible [...] to all [and] foster

deep neighborhood-based relationships with the community, based on the mutual promise of prolonged exchange and commitment. (Redmoon.org)

### **Community-based Performance**

Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater are all theater companies committed to a community-based approach to performance. It is necessary then to look briefly at the state of scholarship regarding community-based performance in order to have a basis for understanding these three companies' community-based approach.

Jan Cohen-Cruz describes community-based art as “a field in which artists, collaborating with people whose lives directly inform the subject matter, express collective meaning” (Cohen-Cruz 1). Current strategies of community-based performance have their roots in political activism of the 1960s and 1970s. According to Cohen-Cruz, a tendency toward identity politics has been a dominant theme: “Indeed, the community-based art movement of the past thirty years is often a cultural expression of identity politics, referring to groups of people who connect on the basis of shared identities fundamental to their sense of themselves” (2). Several definitions of community-based performance have been posited. Richard Owen Greer uses the terms “of, by, and for” (xxviii). “Of” is used to mean about a community or concerning them; “By” means that the performance directly involves the community—writing, performing, and producing; and “For” meaning that the performance is given for and witnessed by the community. Arlene Goldbard posits the definition that “Community art practice is based on the belief that cultural meaning, expression, and creativity reside within a community, that the community artist’s task is to assist people in freeing their imaginations and giving form to their creativity” (23). Her

definition includes something that is missing from Greer's; namely, the notion of community artist—a professional artist who gives direction and leadership in the creation of the performance. Greer and Goldbard do not take it upon themselves to give any indication as to how “community” is established in the first place. According to Cohen-Cruz, a tendency toward identity politics has been a dominant theme: “Indeed, the community-based art movement of the past thirty years is often a cultural expression of identity politics, referring to *groups of people who connect on the basis of shared identities fundamental to their sense of themselves*” (2).

The Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theaters South) categorizes community in three ways: place, spirit, or tradition. Place is geographic, referring to neighborhoods, towns, regions, etc. Spirit refers to beliefs, values, or interests, as in Catholics, Republicans, or book clubs. Tradition refers to shared activities or backgrounds, such as fraternal orders or ethnic groups (alternateroots.org).

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson makes the distinction that community is a man-made, social construct, and only exists as an agreed upon, imagined endeavor. Community exists when everyone involved has a knowledge of the community. When the community is too large for everyone involved to know everyone else, an imagined knowledge of the community is created through language. Anderson cites language as the main factor in creating both the “great sacral communities” of the past (Christendom, Islam, Confucianism, etc...) and the national communities that replaced them. Sharing a common language allows for connection, in some case across social, cultural, and ethnic divides. Knowledge of Latin was shared by members of Christendom, Arabic by Islam, Sanskrit by Hinduism (14-15).

Language remains a determining factor in the creation of community; on the large scale indicating membership in a national community—American, German, Chinese—or to a more narrow geographic region or neighborhood—Mandarin, Midwesterner, Manhattanite. Shared language also determines membership in a community of spirit, i.e., ways of speaking about Christianity may vary from denomination to denomination; as well as communities of tradition, i.e., passwords used to gain entry to fraternal meetings.

The communities focused on in this study encompass place, tradition, and spirit. In the case of *In the Heart of the Beast* and *Redmoon*, the community is most often a community of place: a local neighborhood community, or the community of a city. In *Bread and Puppet's* case, the community transcends place, focusing more upon tradition or spirit: the oppressed, the poor, the hungry. All three companies use a visual language to create community among their audiences, ideally forging new relationships and helping the audience to see the world in a new way.

## **Literature Review**

In his introduction to the book *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, John Bell takes a look at the state of scholarly writing focused on puppets and performing objects. According to Bell, much of the writing about puppets, masks, and other performance objects is focused on the performative aspects of the cultures within which the various disciplines are located, rather than approaching them as a specific aesthetic, resulting in an “invisibility” due to the lack of a “close, unified attention.” (Bell, “Puppets, Masks” 15) More recently, however, more attention has been paid to the importance and power of using puppets and masks in performance. In the beginning

of the twentieth century, playwrights and directors like W.B. Yeats, Edward Gordon Craig, and Vsevolod Meyerhold helped create renewed interest in the use of masks and puppets in modern drama. Many modern dramatists began incorporating elements of puppetry and mask work into their performances. In America, Paul McPharlin and Tony Sarg, among others, helped create interest in puppets; publishing, creating performances, and taking part in parades and other events (16).

John Emigh's *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theater* is a study of mask performance and ritual, especially in Southeast Asia. Emigh uses different case studies to illustrate various modes of performance, giving historical context and analysis of the performances. He covers a variety of forms; those of most importance to this study include ritual masking in Papua New Guinea, performances of *Prahlada Nataka* in Orissa, India, and the *Barong Ket* and *Rangda* masks of Bali. Emigh's study of mask performance provides not only an important historical and global context into which American companies may be placed, but also gives valuable insight into how masks function in the creation of communal rituals and performances.

*Masks in Modern Drama* by Susan Valeria Harris Smith is a survey of the way in which masks were utilized by Modernist playwrights and directors. By separating masks into the categories of satiric, heroic, and psychological or dream masks, she is able to reveal the function of the mask in modern drama. In particular, she sets up two major categories of mask, the ritual or "heroic" mask, and the grotesque or "satiric" mask. While these categories may be somewhat limited, being somewhat generalized and broad, they can, however, provide a valuable framework for looking at how different masks can function.

Eileen Blumenthal's *Puppetry: A World History* presents a survey of world puppet traditions, not by categorizing them according to geography or form, but according to the historical and societal roles that they have fulfilled. Her chapters on "Politics" and "Other Services" provide a valuable context for understand how the puppet has been used in a variety of service roles. These roles will be discussed further in Chapter One.

In addition to studies that focus on the historical and global contexts of mask and puppet performance, I will use studies that focus on the history and performance aesthetics of the three American companies. Perhaps the most comprehensive study of the history of Bread and Puppet is Stefan Brecht's two volume *The Bread and Puppet Theater*. Starting with the group's formation in New York in 1963 and going through the mid-eighties and the group's work in Vermont, the book provides detailed descriptions of shows, reproduced texts, and an overall history of the company up to the 1980s. In addition to Stefan Brecht's immense volumes, several articles and short books have been published about Bread and Puppet. Of note are John Bell's "The End of 'Our Domestic Resurrection Circus': Bread and Puppet Theater and Counterculture Performance in the 1990s" from *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, "Louder Than Traffic: Bread and Puppet Parades" from the anthology *Radical Street Theater*, and "Beyond the Cold War: Bread and Puppet and the New World Order" from *Staging Resistance*. The first article addresses the more recent history of the Bread and Puppet company, in particular *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* and why Schumann chose to stop performance of the massive outdoor spectacle. The second article focuses more specifically on Bread and Puppet's early work in New York City Parades. The article provides a brief discussion of the history of parades and pageants for celebration of community or political protest. The third

article deals with Bread and Puppet's model of performance and how it remains relevant over 40 years after the company was started.

While John Bell's articles do deal with how the company uses puppets and masks in parades and pageants and why Bread and Puppet's techniques work for creating political, community-based performance, none of the scholarship really places Bread and Puppet into the greater context of community-based performance that utilizes performing objects. This study will attempt to place Bread and Puppet into a continuum of puppet and mask performance created for the sake of a community, and to compare Bread and Puppet's aesthetic modes with both traditional ritual performances and their contemporaries, as well as the contributions made by Bread and Puppet to the field of community-based performance.

While the bulk of writing on companies that utilize puppets and performing objects to stage massive outdoor pageants deals with Bread and Puppet; *Theater of Wonder: 25 Years in the Heart of the Beast* focuses on Minneapolis's In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Company. Published as a companion catalog for an exhibition of the company's puppets and masks at the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum in 1999, the book collects several articles celebrating the history of the company and the impact it has had on its surrounding community. The articles contained are mainly retrospective celebrations of In the Heart of the Beast's work; this study will focus more on why In the Heart of the Beast's work has been so successful and what lessons one can take from their experiences.

Given the lack of scholarship regarding Redmoon Theater, my research regarding that company has been more direct. I have had the privilege of conducting interviews with Frank Mageuri, Associate Artistic Director of Redmoon Theater. Mageuri has been with Redmoon for



more than ten years, working as a director, designer, and performer, as well as leading the staff in community vision work. He has helped in the creation of all Redmoon's major spectacles, including the All Hallows Ritual Celebrations and Winter Pageants. In addition to working with Redmoon, he has worked extensively with Dogtroepe and Groupe ZUR in Europe and is a founding member of Theater DANK, a collaborative of puppet directors and designers who led Chicago Puppet Festivals in 1998 and 1999 (Redmoon.org).

To undertake my study of American performance models utilizing puppets, masks, and performing objects, I will break my study into four parts. The first part will be a historical and analytical survey of the history of puppet and performing object as a socio-political voice and a means for creating, developing, and celebrating community. An understanding of the roles that masks and puppets have fulfilled is necessary to understand how the mask and puppet can be used to engage community in performance. The second, third, and fourth parts focus on Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater respectively. In these sections I will undertake a brief survey of the history and performance aesthetic of each company, and then look more specifically at how each company formulates performances and creates community-engaged and community-based performances. It is important to note that I have not witnessed any of the performances discussed in this study, instead, my research has been based on archives, secondary sources, reviews, and interviews. These sources will allow me to not only look at how these companies create performances, but how they are framed and how they frame themselves.

While there is a large amount of scholarship being produced about community-based performance, very little has focused specifically on the strengths and advantages that masks, puppets, and performing objects bring to this field. By examining how Bread and Puppet, In the

Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater utilize masks and puppets to shape and create community-based performance, I will illustrate how all three of Cohen-Cohen-Cruz's strains of community-based performance can be shown to benefit from the incorporation of object theater.

## CHAPTER ONE: A BREIF HISTORY OF MASK AND PUPPET TRADITIONS

Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater are known for their inventive use of masks, puppets, and performing objects. In the case of Bread and Puppet, the puppets and masks have been created out of Peter Schumann's early experimentations, ranging in size from hand puppets to giant "living puppets" that can cover a hillside and take upwards of three puppeteers to manipulate them. In the Heart of the Beast has built upon Bread and Puppet's styles, adding puppets and masks that take inspiration from a variety of sources, including Japanese *Ningyo Joruri* and Javanese *Wayang Golek* puppets. Redmoon Theater also draws from a variety of International puppet traditions, and also utilizes techniques of collaboration and experimentation to create fantastical mechanical objects and transform buildings and landscapes into strange dreamscapes. In order to understand better where these companies have taken inspiration and reveal the traditions of mask and puppet performance that they are building on, this chapter will look at the history of mask and puppet performance, especially styles and traditions that are utilized for teaching, healing, or celebrating community. Specifically, I will look at mask possession rituals in Southeast Asia including the *Prahlada Nataka* in India and Balinese *Barong* and *Rangda* rituals. Additionally I will examine Susan Valeria Harris Smith's categories of Satiric and Heroic mask, and attempt to place various characters or styles of performance into these categories. Finally, I will explore how puppets have been utilized in a variety of social and political roles: as dissenters, as healers, and as teachers.

While masks and puppets often perform similar roles and are commonly grouped together, it is beneficial to take some time to discuss the differences between masks, puppets, and

performing objects. Attempting a concrete delineation or definition of puppets and masks is something of a futile task, because, as I will demonstrate in the following pages, most scholars simply offer a basic litmus test with a notice that there are many examples of both masks and puppetry that defy definition or categorization. As Eileen Blumenthal puts it: “Trying to fix the limits of puppetry is a hopeless exercise. The borders are misty. And porous. And elastic” (229). I will follow this example, suggesting a broad and loose method for distinguishing the various categories and styles, while fully admitting that setting forth a concrete delineation between masks and puppets is likely impossible.

The term performing object refers to any inanimate object that is animated (given movement) and used in a performance. It most often refers to found objects that are used in a manner similar to masks or puppets, but it may also be applied as a blanket term for all types of inanimate objects in performance. Frank Proschan uses the term to refer to “material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance” (4). They may be as simple as an object that is anthropomorphized, like a scissors made to “walk” on its blades; or as complex as an animatronic dinosaur brought to life for use in a film. Differentiating between masks and puppets can be more difficult. Most basically, the difference is one of distance between the object (mask or puppet) and performer. Typically the mask rests on the performer's face in direct contact with the performer, such as Japanese *Noh* masks or prosthetic monster masks used in Hollywood; while contact with the puppet is mediated through another surface, e.g., a string, rod, or the hand; such as marionettes like Pinocchio or hand and rod puppets like Kermit the Frog. This simple distinction begins to break down when one closely examines certain methods and traditions of puppetry and masking. For

example, certain styles of “puppets” are worn directly on the puppeteer’s body and manipulated from within—like the backpack puppets of *Sesame Street Live* or Peter Schuman’s living puppets. Further, some masks are separated from the performer’s face, as in Julie Taymor’s *Lion King*; and some masks are articulated and manipulated by the performer’s hands, as the Balinese *Barong* or Haida transformation masks. Kaplin describes this hazy area of distinction where he writes: “There is a liminal zone where the actor in an oversized mask and the puppeteer in an all encompassing bodysuit overlap” (23).

The field is further complicated by the rich diversity of statues, amulets, dolls, and other ritual, artist, or play objects. In many languages, the word used for puppet and doll is the same, as the Russian *kukla*, French *poupée*, and Italian *pupi*. Generally, puppets are manipulated with external or internal mechanisms, e.g., hands inside the puppet, strings inside or outside, or rods inside or outside the puppet, while a doll is manipulated or played with by direct, external contact with hands (Blumenthal 229, 230). However, the Japanese *ningyo joruri* tradition uses puppets where the feet and sometimes arms and hands are manipulated by direct, external hand contact, just as with dolls. Statues are also very closely related to but distinct from puppets. “A statue is inert, whereas a puppet is imaginatively endowed with life. That border seems clear enough, yet many figures slide back and forth or inhabit an equivocal middle ground” (Blumenthal 230).

Eileen Blumenthal suggests the following way of defining and distinguishing between puppets and mask: “Masks and costumes disguise the handler, whereas puppets are beings distinct from the manipulator (more or less)” (229). This definition provides a consideration for distance of the performer from the object as well as intended purpose and intended audience, and

provides a starting point for looking at the difference, while still allowing for the exceptions that will be inevitably encountered through the study.

Both puppets and masks create an other that gives the performer both a different voice and a different body. Unlike masks, however, the voice and body are often not only different, but also physically separate. The other created by the mask is an other that is still connected to the performer, creating an alternate face and often an altered or shifted body. The other created by the puppet, on the other hand, is an other that physically separated from the performer with contact often mediated through strings or rods. The result is that while the mask, which is worn directly on the face with unmediated contact, is often perceived to be more imbued with life; while the puppet, with contact that is mediated through varying degrees of separation, is seen as separate from the performer and therefore is perceived at times as being extremely life-like and at times very much as an object. This shifting is further compounded by the variety of forms and ways in which puppeteers manipulate their puppets. For example, the marionette, manipulated from above by a hidden puppeteer who controls the puppet with strings, may seem to move on its own; while Bread and Puppet's large-scale puppets, with limited movements being manipulated by two or three puppeteers in full view, are much more object-like and iconic. This shift cannot be simply attributed to the visibility of the manipulators, however. There are also many forms of puppets that can seem very life-like while being manipulated by puppeteers in full view, e.g., Japanese *Ningyo Joruri* or *Bunraku*-style puppets.

## The Mask in Ritual and Performance

While the rhetoric of community-based performance is relatively new, performance in service of a community is not. In particular, masks, puppets, and other performance objects have a long history of being used in communal ritual and performance as a tool for healing, teaching, or celebrating the community. In many cultures, the mask is considered a conduit for visitation and possession from gods, demons, or other powerful spirits. In many instances, the reenactment of a mythical or historic event serves as an exorcism, a blessing, or a commemorative event. In some situations, all three are accomplished. In almost every case, the mask is a powerful tool for healing and celebration, though Schumann notes that these healing roles are hard to prove (Schumann “Radicality” 75). Each tradition is a unique entity with its own aesthetics and its own styles, but they have many things in common. In his book, *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theater*, John Emigh (citing Victor Turner) points to one such commonality: “Turner notes that performance activities tend to cluster around “liminal” occasions—times when continuity and change, past and future are held in an uneasy balance, on a threshold, “betwixt and between” the old and the new” (Emigh 1, citing Turner). Masks, being liminal objects sitting astride the animate and the inanimate, function as excellent tools for these liminal occasions (7). “Appearing as hybrids of the animate and inanimate worlds, masks are particularly effective “transitional objects” in performance events that cluster around “liminal” occasions” (7). The way in which the masks go about doing this can vary. In some places, a crisis or time of change is approached by re-enacting a similar crisis from the community’s past, be it a remembered event, mythic event, or imagined event. “The re-enactment or recalling of a successfully resolved moment of crisis in the ancestral life of a community is then, a common

subject for performance in New Guinea” (13). By looking to the community’s past, the ritual allows the community to imagine a future where the crisis is resolved.

While such masked performances in Papua New Guinea can be viewed as having the conservative function of maintaining group identity by glorifying the power of the past, they also have a more creative function—extending the sense of the possible through the imaginative attention lavished the masks and on the activities that bear witness to their animation. (13)

In the west, the mask is seen as a primitive object, and often viewed negatively. The mask is seen in terms of disguising and hiding, i.e., “hiding behind a mask,” or “masking” their true intentions. Further, the mask is seen as restricting and corrupting (Emigh 7). In much of the rest of the world, however, the mask is viewed differently:

In Papua New Guinea, though, as in many other areas of the non-Western world, the tendency is to regard the mask as an instrument of revelation, giving form to the ineffable and providing a nexus between the individual and those communally defined forces that shape one’s sense of human possibilities. Commonly, this is accomplished by linking the mask to an ancestral presence, thereby bringing the past into the present. (7)

In many cases, the mask allows an “other,” be it god, demon, or ancestor, to enter the community and bring with it healing or protection. In cases where the mask acts as a conduit, Emigh says the visitation is often “characterized by a loss of the sense of “me” and an engulfment of the self by an entity that is considered “not me”—with an attendant loss of conscious control and a scanty memory of what took place while performing. When masks are



used to facilitate this transference of identity—as they frequently are—they tend to be large ones that completely obscure the identity of the performer.” (29) It is this performance of an “other,” a liminal state of “me” and “not me,” that gives masked rituals such power of healing and protection.

Another common tradition involves a ritual mask that takes on a demonic form. In some cases, the demonic presence is exorcised, but in other traditions, the power of the demonic presence is the main goal of the ritual. Similar to gargoyles in the west, these demonic presences have healing and protective powers. “Like gargoyles, these robustly demonic images function, paradoxically, as protective icons. They are apotropaic: designed to turn potentially destructive power against the forces of evil, by means of artistic play” (Emigh 37). In *Masked Performance*, Emigh records some of these trance-inducing demonic possessions.

In Orissa, the demonic aspect being portrayed is *Narasihma*, a wrathful “man-lion” and an avatar of Vishnu. The mask is performed as part of the *Prahlada Nataka*. The mask itself is a four foot tall wooden mask with green face, a prominent red nose and forehead, a protruding crimson tongue, a flaming mane and an elaborate crown (Emigh 41). Narasimha is an incredibly powerful and dangerous being brought into the performer’s body through the mask. Given the power of the mask, the performance and the mask are treated with complete respect and care. In some cases, the mask itself is worshipped and used to cure illness without needing a performer to animate it. The *Prahlada Nataka* is a theatrical performance likely written for the sole purpose of giving a context for the mask to be performed (43).

Emigh cites an actor/priest who performs the Narasimha masks describing the possession in the following way:

When I first put on the mask, my legs tremble, my thighs and knees tremble too. My body becomes very heavy and my neck and face become like fire. My eyes burn. My whole body takes on a different form that I can't describe. Once the mask is on, I lose sense of my body. All other members of the troupe stand by to restrain me. Sometimes, they say, twenty-five people catch hold of me, and still they can't control me. (59)

The trance is not, however, always so violent. In some cases Narasimha can be easily restrained, and in some cases a full trance is not achieved. When the trance is not achieved, the performance is still completed with the action being portrayed mimetically. "Evil would still be contained, but this time through the metaphoric procedures deployed within the realm of theatrical representation." (57)

Emigh also records a better-known ceremony involving possession, the Balinese *Cupak*, a ritual performance of the *Rangda* and the *Barong Ket* masks. Balinese trance dances involving the *Rangda* and the *Barong* have been the subject of many performance and anthropological studies. *Rangda* and *Barong* performances, as well as the trance dances that accompany them were recorded and written about in the early twentieth century by ethnologists and filmmakers Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Jane Belo. Like the Orissan *Narasimha*, the *Barong* is a protector in the form of a lion or tiger, and like *Narasimha*, the mask is kept in a temple and given incense and other offerings. Unlike *Narasimha*, however, the *Barong* is performed by two dancers and is almost always paired against another extremely powerful mask, known as *Rangda*. The struggle between *Rangda* and the *Barong* usually represents the struggle between good and evil.

Jane Belo describes the performance in her book *Bali: Rangda and Barong*.

What happens is that dozens of villagers, aroused by the excitement held incarnate in these two figures and by the stylized interplay between them, go into a trance, go through patterned behavior in a somnambulistic state, attack the Witch with their krisses, are revived by the Barong, attack their own chests with their krisses, and preferably work themselves to a climax, a true convulsive seizure of hysterical order. After such a performance everyone goes home feeling perfectly great and at peace with the world” (12).

In the instance recorded by Emigh, Rangda defeated the Barong and the original story that provided the context for their meeting was completely forgotten. This would seem like an unfavorable result, as Rangda usually represents the forces of “black” magic; however it is not necessary for the Barong to be triumphant for the performance to function, it is only important “to provide each a worthy opponent and *an opportunity to display its powers.*” The *Cupak* merely provides a context for the two masks to be pitted against each other (66-7). Both Rangda and the Barong Ket are considered to be protective forces, so it does not matter which of the two beings is ultimately triumphant, only that the power of the two masks is displayed. “To set Rangda against the Barong Ket is to provide each a worthy opponent and an opportunity to display its powers.” (67)

The connection between these possession rituals and contemporary models of community-based spectacle may not be immediately obvious. My purpose in including them, however, is not simply to provide a historical context for mask performance. Rather, it is the potential of these rituals to protect and heal a community that makes them important. The

transformation of a dancer or performer by placing a mask on their face creates an other, whether it is simply a physical representation or a powerful spiritual presence; and allows that other to create a transformation of the community witnessing the event. In the next three chapters, I will show how Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater use this same ability to create an other to work in and with community in order to create a similar transformation.

Susan Valeria Harris Smith, in her study *Masks in Modern Drama* sets up two major categories of mask, the ritual or “heroic” mask, and the grotesque or “satiric” mask. Her categories provide an interesting and valuable framework for looking at how different masks function. Smith’s study focuses mainly on the use of masks in modern dramas, but her analysis of the ways in which masks function provide valuable ideas and tools for talking about masks in ritual and theater alike.

According to Smith, the ritual or “heroic” mask symbolizes an exalted and ennobled mankind. Ideally, the heroic mask reveals a humanity of superior and mythic proportions. Iconic and familiar, the heroic mask creates a shared experience with the audience that allows it to partake in the heroism and exalted state of the script. “The heroic mask encourages the spectator to nourish his sense of supremacy and rejoice in human accomplishments” (Smith, 49).

In contrast to the heroic mask, which heightens humanity; the satiric mask distorts and exposes the grossness and depravity of humanity. The satiric mask is animalistic, machinelike, and distorted. Its exaggerated features reveal the guilt and foolishness of the character.

Such masking distances the viewer from the still recognizably human form, but it also sharpens the viewer’s perception. In effect, the mask makes visible man’s

inner life, his spiritual condition [...]. Such a mask, the simplest tool of the satiric dramatist, has a prominent place on the modern stage where it has been used extensively and diversely. (12)

The satiric mask can take many different forms. It may be bestial or demonic, such as the masks of medieval mummers; it may be a caricature of social types such as the lecherous old men of *Commedia Dell'Arte* and Japanese *Kyogen*; or it may be an exaggerated or caricatured portrait, such as a Nixon mask (14-15).

It should be noted that these two different categories of masks do not necessarily exist separately from each other, nor are they exclusive to certain styles or forms of theater. They often coexist side by side in a performance; for example, Bread and Puppet's *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* often features a large oversized mask/puppet called Uncle Fatso performing alongside Christ figures. Uncle Fatso has appeared numerous times in Bread and Puppet performances, always dressed in a fancy suit with a cigar in one hand and an Uncle Sam-style top-hat. Perhaps the most interesting feature about Uncle Fatso is his ability to function in different roles and to be interpreted according to the audience's experiences and current events. According to John Bell,

[W]hen Uncle Fatso first appeared in street parades, some watchers were sure his face was Nixon's. But in later years, other audiences were equally sure it was Lynden Johnson's, and then Ronald Reagan's. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, when Bread and Puppet played in socialist countries such as Poland, Eastern European audiences took Fatso (wearing a simple black hat) to represent Russian domination. (Bell, "Beyond" 47)

Eileen Blumenthal claims that “Masks and costumes disguise the handler,” but perhaps it is better to say that masks can disguise or transform their handler. They allow performers to portray an other or at times to actually be that other. They can transform the performer into the lowest and basest of humanity or elevate him or her to the highest levels. In Bali, a talented Sudra, or low caste dancer can take the role and duties of a Brahmana (Priest Class) simply by wearing the mask of a Brahmana character (Emigh 151). Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater have utilized the mask to transform not only their performance aesthetic, but their audiences as well. The transformation of a masked performance occurs only when the viewers decide to believe in that transformation. By engaging with the mask performer, the audience shares in the transformation, and in this way is able to be transformed themselves.

### **The Puppet in Ritual and Performance**

Many of the abilities that make masks so useful for community-based performance are shared by puppets. Puppets, however, have some unique abilities of their own that make them a valuable asset for Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater, and indeed any company engaged in community-based performance. This section will give an overview of some of these abilities and how they are utilized by these companies.

The history of Puppets is as long, rich, and diverse as that of masks. Objects and figures endowed with life used for one role or another in society exist throughout history. Miniature figures as old as 30,000 B.C.E depict women with swelling breasts and stomachs. These figures were likely associated with fertility. The oldest record of a puppet performing comes from the

Nile Basin in the twentieth century B.C.E. Puppets have also been found or written about in Mesopotamia, Greece, the Indus Valley, and nearly every other major civilization (Blumenthal 11).

In most of these cases, puppets have been associated with deities or other spiritual beings. Herodotus writes in the 5th century B.C.E. about Egyptian processions where puppets were carried to honor the god Osiris, a god often associated with fertility (12). Puppets, similar to masks, have served as temporary containers for deities and spiritual beings:

In many cultures, crafted beings straddle the living/nonliving divide by serving as substitute bodies for spirits whose original bodies have died. These replacement bodies may be life-sized or miniature, may have moveable limbs or not, and may resemble the deceased or follow a conventional style. (213)

Blumenthal also notes that: “Besides accommodating the dead, puppets provide temporary bodies for all manner of other spirits, demons, and gods. Their chief area of work besides fertility is protection, safeguarding humans and their spiritual allies” (217). Because of this close association with gods and demons, puppeteers are often thought to have magical powers. In Niger and Nigeria, puppeteers are believed to have magic powers that allow them bring puppets to life, and some cases, even change humans into monkeys. In Bali, puppeteers have a close association with religion. “Balinese *dalangs* are considered priests as well as entertainers, and their performances frequently are a part of temple festivals or blessing ceremonies” (212). This close association to deities has lead scholars to postulate that puppets descended from idols and other ritual figures. Whether this is true is impossible to know, but one thing is clear, in many cultures puppets and puppeteers are incredibly powerful forces for good or evil.

The puppet is also very powerful in the sociopolitical realm. As long as there have been puppets they have been used for politics, either in support or in dissent. Political puppets come in all shapes and sizes, from tiny hand puppets, to life sized effigies, to giant rod puppets. Though they are in some cases used to promote or glorify the powers that be, more often they are used to voice criticisms of the government. Puppets are especially well-equipped for sowing sedition and unrest, as they are often given license by the ruling body or are even overlooked as being trivial (Blumenthal 166). In some cases, the puppeteer has been able to use the puppet as an excuse to get out of trouble. There is a well known tale of a Czech puppeteer who was brought to court for political dissent and was deemed innocent after he blamed it all on Kasperek, his puppet. Similarly, in the nineteenth century when authorities tried to force puppeteers to give their performances in German, famous puppeteer Matej Kopecky replied that although he could speak German, his puppets could not (Bogatyrev 89-90). Puppet theaters have been historically considered different from theaters employing live actors, and thus not subject to the same regulations or censorship. In nineteenth-century Rome, theaters were required to submit their scripts for approval, but puppet theaters were not, despite the fact that they regularly lampooned the pope and the cardinals. In France, puppet theaters were exempt from censorship if they used narrators instead of spoken dialogue (Blumenthal 166-7). Sometimes, however, the puppet's status as "not person" is not enough to allow them to escape scrutiny from the powers that be. In these cases, puppets have to resort to other means to voice their opinions. "Puppets living under foreign occupation often use local dialects and slang to shoot defiance at the unsuspecting butts of their opposition" (168). They also disguise their satirical messages by placing them in seemingly innocent situations, like children's



performances. Puppets also use their generally small stature to escape unwanted attention: “A hand-puppet stage can be packed up and out of sight within seconds. Police cannot censor performances or arrest performers they cannot find.” (168)

Peter Schumann has written much about the political nature of puppets themselves. According to Schumann, “Puppetry is conceptual sculpture, cheap, true to its popular origins, uninvited by the powers-that-be, its feet in the mud, economically on the fringe of existence, technically a collage art combining paper, rags, and scraps of wood in kinetic two- and three-dimensional bodies” (Schumann “Radicality” 81). Their existence on the fringe, on the outside of society, allows them to be troublemakers, rabble rousers, and dissenters, voicing the concerns of the citizens without fear of repercussion. “Why are puppets subversive? Because the meaning of everything is so ordained and in collaboration with the general sense of everything, and they, being only puppets, are not obliged to this sense and instead take delight in the opposite sense, which is the sense of donkeys confronting the existing transportation system” (Schumann “What” 59).

Unfortunately for puppets and puppeteers, their rebellious ways have not gone unnoticed. This attention has not deterred puppets or their puppeteers from voicing their dissent; if anything, the puppet has become even more of a common sight at political protests. In 2000, police in Philadelphia made a “preemptive strike,” arresting more than 70 puppetistas, or puppet activists, and destroying all their puppets. The puppetistas were planning to protest during the 2000 Republican National Convention (Blumenthal 170).

Puppets are well known for their ability as educational tools for children and adults alike. Used as toys, they allow children to explore identities and differences without consequences.

They also provide inspiration for the child's imagination, creativity and storytelling.

Additionally, they are used to help adults with learning and are especially useful for language instruction. "For at least half a century, puppetry has been included as a pedagogical tool in teacher-training courses for adult literacy and immigrant language instruction around the world" (Blumenthal 187). The same freedom that allows puppets to be political dissenters also allows them to cover controversial material like sex education and family planning. In Ahmedabad, Rajasthan, and other conservative areas of western India, hand puppets are able to get away with performing skits about birth control, a subject that would be extremely sensitive if not taboo for live actors. In Java, a largely Islamic state, *wayang* puppets with traditional "jumbo penises" have demonstrated condom use. Puppets also help with AIDS education—"Gary Friedman's Puppets Against AIDS have spread their message, including condom use, through much of southern Africa and parts of East Africa" (189).

Puppets have proven themselves to be incredibly useful to psychology and physical therapy, both as a diagnostic tool and as a treatment aid. "Improvising with puppets, patients may reveal angers, fears, longings and attitudes they normally hide" (Blumenthal 189). In group therapy situations, puppets allow patients to attempt difficult social interactions through the puppet, essentially an alternate persona or "other" self. Patients with speech impediments are allowed to practice speech patterns from behind the puppet, without any risk of embarrassment to themselves (191).

The strategies and practices of *Bread and Puppet*, *In the Heart of the Beast*, and *Redmoon Theater* provide excellent examples of the abilities of puppets. In the case of *Bread and Puppet*, not only has the company utilized the puppet's abilities as a political dissenter, but Schumann

has contributed new and vital ways of creating and performing political puppets. “Puppet theater is an extension of sculpture. A professional sculptor doesn’t have much to do but decorate libraries or schools. But to take sculpture to the streets, to tell a story with it, to make music and dances for it—that’s what interests me” (Bell, “Louder” 273).

Further, while performing in third world countries, Bread and Puppet has used their unique aesthetic approach to puppets as a means of engaging volunteers in the process and creation of performances. While I will deal with this in greater detail in the next chapter, essentially Bread and Puppet’s low budget, low-tech approach to theater allows them to overcome the limitations of technology in these third world locations.

In the Heart of the Beast and Redmoon Theater both have created outreach programs that use puppets as a way to encourage community members to express themselves. Both In the Heart of the Beast and Redmoon have created youth programs including In the Heart of the Beast’s summer theater camps and workshops and Redmoon’s Dramagirls, a program that matches adolescent girls with female professional artists:

[T]he program uses components of Redmoon’s unique form of spectacle theater making, such as stilt-walking, acting, ritual-making, drumming, and symbolic movements, to lead girls in the creation of an original production based on stories of their own lives. (Redmoon.org)

Jim Lasko, Artistic Director of Redmoon Theater, sums up the use of puppets very well:

The puppet has many virtues. Besides being egoless, demanding no benefits, or even pay, they are incredibly flexible and never lie. But what is most exciting about the puppet is that it adores collaboration and

promotes community... Like having a common friend at a table with strangers, the puppet promotes healthy conversation, demonstrates our differences, and highlights our similarities... It is acrobatic, expressive, and unflappable. With the right urging it can do almost anything. But the puppet's appeal goes beyond that to something more esoteric, less conscious, and perhaps, deeper and more meaningful. A puppet on stage relieves us of the obligations to the 'realism' that dominates film, television, and most theater. Puppets don't ask us to 'willingly suspend our disbelief,' as Diderot understood the audience's responsibility to realism. They ask that we actively manufacture belief. The puppet relies on the audience's assistance. Its face never changes or exhibits feeling. It doesn't glance or transform. Nothing happens without the audience willing it to be so. And this, it seems to me, is the gift of the puppet: the gentle reminder that belief is an exercise, a willful act of consciousness that we can employ to transform our reality. (Liese)

It is the puppet's ability to be that "common friend at a table with strangers" that makes it such a powerful tool for teaching and education. The actively manufactured belief that puppets require is the same manufactured belief that allows puppeteers to get away with political and social satire. The grafting of life and emotion onto the puppet's face, the transformation of the inanimate object into an animate being is the power that allows Redmoon to transform spaces and transform people

I have argued that the power of masks and puppets lies in their ability for transformation, creating an other self, an alternate voice that can speak up and speak out without consequence. Because they rely on the viewer's willingness to participate in that transformation, they implicate the audience in the transformation, allowing for a similar transformation among the audience. In the next three chapters, I will look at how these three companies use this power to transform their audiences.

## CHAPTER TWO: BREAD AND PUPPET

Puppet theater, the employment and dance of dolls, effigies, and puppets, is not only historically obscure and unable to shake off its ties to shamanistic healing and other inherently strange and hard to prove social services. It is also, by definition of its most persuasive characteristics, an anarchic art, subversive and untameable (sic) by nature, an art which is easier researched in police records than in theater chronicles, an art which by fate and spirit does not aspire to represent governments or civilizations, but prefers its own secret and demeaning stature in society, representing, more or less, the demons of that society and definitely not its institutions. (Schumann "Radicality" 75)

Since the 1960s the Bread and Puppet Company has been creating plays, parades, and spectacles with puppets and masks in various scales on a variety of topics in a variety of venues. It has become one of most well known unknown theater companies, by which I mean that they have deliberately stayed out of the limelight, preferring a lo-fi, low-budget approach to creating their various shows. Bell writes: "Peter Schumann's project in the United States has been to invent a twentieth century method of political theater using puppets and masks and the energies of hundreds of different participants. By definition, this effort has operated at the margins of American culture" (Bell, "The End" 52). In the past forty-plus years, however, volumes of books, articles, and images from, by, or about Bread and Puppet have been published, making them one of the most written about companies of the twentieth Century. In terms of community-based performance, Bread and Puppet can be pointed to as one of the companies responsible for the influx of companies engaging in community-based performance, and it is the prime example

of Jan Cohen-Cruz's first strain of community-based performance, that of "Activist performance as vigorous support for or opposition to sociopolitical circumstances."

Any discussion of the Bread and Puppet Company must necessarily begin with Peter Schumann, the director and driving force behind the company. Schumann was born in June, 1934, in Lueben, Silesia, (now in modern-day Poland) not far from Breslau, Germany. His father was a Lutheran schoolmaster and mother taught him how to make the heavy black rye bread that would later put the bread in Bread and Puppet (Brecht 5-6). While a child in school, Schumann made masks and stone carvings and was involved with various dance and theater performances. A family friend of the Schumanns, Max Jacobs, was a puppeteer, and Peter and his siblings often watched his puppet shows and received puppets from the Jacobs, which Peter and his siblings used to put on their own puppet shows. Schumann apparently lost interest in the hand puppets, and after high school left puppetry behind for a while (Brecht 10-11).

Following high school, Schumann studied art, in particular sculpture, although he abandoned his formal education at the age of 21 to pursue dance performance. He continued to sculpt after he left the art academy, often combining his pursuit of dance with his sculpting and mask making (47). In the spring of 1961, Peter and his wife, Elka, came to the United States to visit Elka's parents, and decided to remain. They moved to New York City, and it was there that Schumann would find a focus for his art and dance.

Schumann made masks and puppets for various dance and theatrical performances in 1961 and 1962, but it was not until 1963 that Bread and Puppet was finally born. He created the first Bread and Puppet shows in the fall of 1963 with Bob Ernsthall and Bruno Eckhardt (a German painter) in a loft in the lower east side of Manhattan (Bell, "Beyond" 32). Schumann

had seen a performance of the Manteo Family's oversized Sicilian rod puppets, and was inspired by them. He began to experiment with giant puppets that were similar in spirit to the Sicilian puppets, though quite different in form and structure. He combined elements of the large rod puppets with masks and came up with an idea that would remain a central element of all his later shows—the live puppet. He put the puppeteer inside the puppet, essentially creating a full body mask (Brecht 343).

The anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s gave Bread and Puppet a focus and a large audience for their work. Schumann had been searching for a purpose to motivate his art, and the Peace Movement provided that purpose. Bell suggests that having been a child (and a refugee) in wartime Germany gave Schumann a strong sense of the effects of war.

At the same time he had (in a tradition going back to German classicism) both a high-minded idea of the moral role of theater and an adroit sense of popular theater techniques. This, and the enthusiasm of a changing roster of artists, musicians, actors, writers, and political activists in New York, made Bread and Puppet street shows, indoor productions, and street procession the theatrical center of anti-Vietnam War activity in the 1960s. (Bell, "Beyond" 35)

It was during this time in New York that Schumann developed and perfected the political puppet parade. According to Brecht, Schumann invented this form of performance (489), though Bell notes that politics and parades have a previous relationship with each other. "Of course, political street parades have a long, pre-twentieth century history, but Bread and Puppet parades during the anti-Vietnam War years were a particular contribution to American culture, a combination of the popular art forms of puppet theater and street demonstration with



Schumann's sense of the possibilities of political art" (Bell, "Louder" 273). The significance of this contribution is considerable. Bell explains the importance of the Parade: "A Parade celebrates the public nature of the entire street, repossessing it (momentarily) from the state and from productive use, redefining it as a performance space, and thus celebrating all those participating—paraders and pedestrians, performers and audience" (278). The parade exemplifies theater that is for, by, about, and in the community. Schumann himself offers several reasons for why he combined his puppets with parades:

I decided to take my painting and sculpture into the street and make a social event out of it, and out of that grew my puppet theater [...]. Puppet Theater is the theater of all means. Puppets and masks should be played in the street. They are louder than the traffic. They don't teach problems, but they scream and dance and hit others on the head and display life in its clearest terms. (271, 273)

The Bread and Puppet Theater became a driving force of the "pacifist-anarchist-liberal wing" of the Peace Movement of New York City in the 1960s. As the landscape of political protest began to change, however, so too did Bread and Puppet's involvement in it.

For as long as and to the extent that this wing represented the coalitional consensus of the New York City Peace Movement—and it did so decreasingly from '67 onward—Bread and Puppet Theater was the organ of the New York City Peace Movement. When from '67 onward the ideas and the protest forms of the Youth and New Left Movements rose to preponderance in the Peace Movement, Schumann faded out of the Movement. (Brecht 485)

By the mid-1960s, the anti-war protests had started moving away from its non-violent roots to a more frustrated, aggressive anti-war movement, and Schumann stopped feeling comfortable. According to Brecht, Schumann had little faith in the efficacy of protests, but felt a need to speak out. As the anti-war movement became popular and moved away from its grassroots, non-violent origins, Schumann no longer felt any connection to the movement.

Instead, Schumann turned his attention to other performances. In April of '68 Bread and Puppet went on their first European tour, and in September they participated in the Radical Theater Festival in San Francisco, along with the San Francisco Mime Troupe and El Teatro Campesino (Brecht 573). In 1969, the company again toured in Europe, performing indoors and in the streets. They learned in France that American soldiers stationed there had been forbidden to attend their shows, so they decided to perform in front of a barracks. They were met by policemen with clubs, and when they began to perform, they were beaten and chased away (Brecht 578).

In 1970, Bread and Puppet was invited to become a theater-in-residence at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont. The move coincided with much larger "back to the land" movement that was growing in popularity during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Elka's grandfather had first popularized an agrarian subsistence way of living in the 1930s, when he left the city for a farm in southern Vermont (Bell, "Beyond" 36).

The greatest innovation of Bread and Puppet while in Vermont at Goddard (and later at Glover) was the development of the circus performance. According to Brecht, the idea of a Circus was born out of a reaction against the performance of *Cry of the People for Meat* in established theaters in Europe for habitual, bourgeois audiences. Schumann wanted to be

independent of these “mausoleums” and create a theater for a popular audience (Brecht 125). A circus format would allow Schumann to present as entertainment: “(1) his critical attitude toward modern life and toward modern America in particular,” and “(2) his personal metaphysics, an inner relationship of life to death that could be conveyed by birth-life-death sequence or structure and—as part of it or independently—by a dance of death.” (Brecht 126) Schumann’s initial attempts at circus happened in 1970 and 1971. He decided to call it *Our Resurrection Circus*. The circuses in subject spanned the history of the world and included many allusions to American culture and history. Both the 1970 and the 1971 circus toured after their initial performances, but neither were well adapted for traveling. The first year it was simply too big and, according to Brecht, thrown together too quickly to make sense, and the second started out as touring show, but soon grew too large to continue touring (131-3). In 1972 and 1973 there was no circus, but in 1974 Schumann returned to the circus format. This time the circus lasted from noon to dusk for four consecutive days. The first part of the show consisted of sideshows, short skits and plays repeated throughout the afternoon. The second part was the “silly circus,” usually a fun and satirical show about American history. The “silly circus” would be followed by a musical puppet play—a puppet show set to a classical composition focusing on individual death and salvation. The final portion of the circus was a large-scale pageant involving musicians, giant puppets, and processions. Subsequent performances of *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* would follow the same basic format until the circus was retired in 1998 (Brecht 141). Following the Circus of 1974, Schumann (and Bread and Puppet with him) left Goddard and moved to Dopp’s Farm in Glover Vermont.

The first *Domestic Resurrection Circus* on Dopp's Farm was performed in the summer of 1975. The Farm had a large horseshoe-shaped amphitheater that had been created when Elka's father sold several tons of gravel to a construction company building an interstate nearby. The construction company left a steep-sided, horseshoe-shaped bank curving around a large hayfield. Schumann and company transformed a barn into a museum to put their puppets and masks on display. The main ring was in the center of the amphitheater, with the small sideshows and performances in and around the performance areas. The Dopp farm would be the site of every circus between 1975 and 1998, when the circus was retired. It grew in scope, with more performers and larger audiences each year (Bell, "The End" 55-56). *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* became the central focus of Bread and Puppet's artistic endeavors. "The *Circus*," writes Bell, "was the event for which new puppets were built and new themes, music, texts, and movements were invented, and determined the theater's performances for the following year" (57).

The circus was meant to be a celebration of community, humanity, and nature, "an annual local celebration in the landscape, to which in principle the community of all of mankind, in practice the neighbors (widely conceived) are invited: to participate, by time, labor, money, performance or inwardly. The event is (is to be) a community gathering around spectacles." (Brecht 275) The community that Schumann wants to gather around his spectacles is not a localized geographic community or a cultural community. Instead, Bread and Puppet's intended community is that of the world as a whole: "The audience now addressed was the community or the neighborhood: which in principle was not bounded, extending not only to Quebec and even New York but to the whole world" (277). One way in which Bread and Puppet created and

promoted community was by using large numbers of volunteers to achieve large-scale indoor and outdoor spectacles, including the *Domestic Resurrection Circus*.

An especially practical invention of this period was the creation of giant spectacles (beginning with the 1980 *Washerwoman Nativity*) that depended upon scores of local volunteer performers to augment the Bread and Puppet company in the creation of large scale indoor or outdoor pageants. (Bell, "Beyond" 37)

Unfortunately when the whole world is invited, sometimes they come. As more people came, more problems arose. Greater numbers meant more cars, more campers, more trash, and more hungry mouths. Bread and Puppet responded by having their neighbors and their audience members help out: asking neighbors to rent or give space for people to park and camp, asking the audience to clean up after themselves, and asking everyone to bring and share food. Eventually, though, the numbers swelled so much that Bread and Puppet had to invite vendors to supply food. Other vendors followed, as well as other less welcome sellers such as drug dealers (Bell, "The End" 60-1). Bell writes:

This different vision had become, at worst, a devolution into "alternative" consumer choices, and, at best, a vague sentiment of iconoclasm allied to phenomena such as the summer Lollapalooza festivals, Grateful Dead tours, and the gigantic Phish concerts. (62)

Some people reportedly never actually came to the puppet shows, spending all their time in the campgrounds instead. Schumann decided not to do another *Domestic Resurrection Circus* after 1998. While attending the 1998 circus, Michael Sarazin, a logger from Post Mills, Vermont, and

a regular Bread and Puppet goer, was struck by another camper and died a short while later from a brain hemorrhage (64).

Bread and Puppet remains one of the oldest politically-minded theaters in the United States; only the Living Theater and the San Francisco Mime Troupe date back further. Their legacy is firmly established through a long line of politically motivated performance and theater throughout the twentieth century. Many artists who got their start with Bread and Puppet have gone on to found their own companies and make a name for themselves. Notably, Paul Zaloom, best known for his roll as Beakman in the children's television show *Beakman's World*, but also the creator and star of several "politically acerbic" one man puppet shows, started working with Bread and Puppet in 1971 and still on occasion works with them (Blumenthal 177). Co-founder David O'Fallon and Sandy Speiler, the artistic director of Minneapolis's *In The Heart of the Beast* both worked with Bread and Puppet in the 1970s and based much of *In the Heart of the Beast's* strategies and aesthetics on what they learned there (Sheehy 4). George Konhoff, an alumnus of the San Francisco Mime Troupe began working with Schumann and Bread and Puppet in New York now creates puppet spectacles with the Puppet Cooperative of Boston (Bell, "Beyond" 36). Former and current members of Bread and Puppet including John Bell and Stephen Kaplin form Great Small Work, a toy theater company that produces social drama on the very small scale (Blumenthal 177).

The first strain of community-based theater identified by Jan Cohen-Cruz is that of "Activist performance as vigorous support for or opposition to sociopolitical circumstances." This strain of activist performance fits perfectly with Bread and Puppet's performance model and aesthetic. Bread and Puppet was born out of the rent strikes and political activism of the 1960s

Peace Movement. It was in this age of political protests and parades that Peter Schumann developed his craft and determined what worked and what didn't: "I decided to take my painting and my sculpture into the street and make a social event out of it, and out of that grew my puppet theater" (Bell "Louder" 271).

While Bread and Puppet is comparable to the Living Theater and the San Francisco Mime Troupe in scope and mission, unlike these theaters, Bread and Puppet does not rely on incendiary material aimed at creating riots or motivating crowds to join a movement; instead, as Bell argues, Bread and Puppet relies on participation and the power of puppets and masks to comment and to teach, allowing the audience to think about performances on many levels:

Bread and Puppet's use of them [puppet, mask, and spectacle theater] to create contemporary political theater is a fascinating development, providing one of the most successful examples of what Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht defined as epic theater. The fact that puppet theater by definition involves a constant sense of separation between performers and their work creates a kind of automatic *verfremdungseffekt*, allowing a perusal of content as political issue. This form of puppet theater involves the constant juxtaposition of objects and other stage elements (music, spoken text, light) in a multilayered theater spectacle both grounded in real political issues [...] and yet capable of abstract open-ended meanings. (Bell "Beyond" 39).

It is this same effect that puppeteers and mask performers have used for centuries to approach delicate or taboo issues. Schumann has been able to deal with many different topics in many

different places throughout the world thanks to the use of puppets and masks. Very rarely, however, does Bread and Puppet take on a particular cause. According to Theodore Shank:

While the intention of the Bread and Puppet Theater is not to advocate a political doctrine, Schumann's work is a protest against the dehumanizing effects of a modern urban life and its materialism. He wants to evoke in his audiences a direct emotional response to those forces which promote destruction of the human spirit. (104)

One sense in which Bread and Puppet protests against materialism and dehumanizing modern urban life is evident in the aesthetic and performance style of the pageants and circuses. Performed on a hillside on a farm in Vermont, there are no markers of the urban life, and modern technology. They are performed in sunlight, with live music, no sound recordings, and no microphones. The puppets and masks are made out of junk, and the "curtains" of the backstage area (when there is one) is usually created by old school busses whose ability to run is questionable. But beyond the obvious lo-tech nature of the pageants and spectacles, Bread and Puppet adds further elements to reveal modern life's dehumanizing and materialistic nature. For example, during the *1<sup>st</sup> World Insurrection Circus*, held in 2004, several figures with large, grey masks sat along the side of the performance space throughout the various performances, surrounded by car parts, televisions, and other various mechanical or technological artifacts. The figures watch the performances, at times with seemingly blank faces, at times engaging with various pop culture references in the performance (Paul).



At times, Bread and Puppet's content even borders on or delves right into propaganda, a word that Peter Schumann is not afraid of: "[I]t's true, we do a lot of propaganda, if you wish" (Bell, "Beyond" 33). Schumann further explains:

I think all art is political because if you abstain from politics, you make a political statement right there. So whether you realize that you are in a social context and a political context, whether you are naïve about it or conscious about it, it makes you political whether you like it or not. (Bell, "Beyond" 34)

The word propaganda, however, usually has negative connotations for those who consider themselves artist. When confronted about this, though, Schumann is quick to respond—"I'm a baker. I don't particularly care for the fine arts. We call ours the rough arts or the sourdough arts, or the sour arts" (33). According to Bell, Schumann uses rhetorical diversions to avoid having to use "mere words" to explain his work: "At times he portrays his work in high moral and political tones redolent of Brecht or Piscator, but if the rhetoric heats up, Schumann in ready with a feint: it's only puppet theater; he is just a baker" ("Beyond" 32-33).

The politics of Bread and Puppet is not limited to subject matter. Bread and Puppet's aesthetic, performance mode, and the materials used all contribute to the political nature of the company.

The political nature of Bread and Puppet's performance mode is as much a necessity as it is a deliberate way of operating. The nature of Bread and Puppet's large scale pageants and spectacles forces them to rely on large numbers of local volunteers:

An especially practical invention of this period [1976-1984] was the creation of giant spectacles (beginning with the 1980 *Washerwoman Nativity*) that depended

on scores of local volunteer performers to augment the Bread and Puppet company in the creation of large-scale indoor or outdoor pageants. (Bell “Beyond” 37)

Using large numbers of local volunteers has allowed Bread and Puppet to overcome limited budgets, at the same time creating a sense of community and investment in the work on the part of those participating by involving them directly in the creation and process of the performance. This technique has been particularly helpful when Bread and Puppet has performed abroad:

The volunteer spectacles, together with Bread and Puppet’s devotion to “cheap” means of making theater, were especially practical techniques in Latin America and Third World locales visited by Bread and Puppet, where a lack of theater technology and even such resources as electric power was offset by an abundance of spirited volunteer performers. (Bell “Beyond” 37)

Pageants, however, are by no means Bread and Puppet’s only mode of performance. Another major mode is that of the parade. Parades were the mode that Bread and Puppet began with and they remain a major part of Bread and Puppet’s performances.

Although parades are one of many performance forms used by the Bread and Puppet theater, in the 1987 documentary film *Brother Bread, Sister Puppet*, Peter Schumann speaks of the central importance, calling them ‘our most radical statement on the simplicity and the publicness of the arts,’ and defining them as ‘the basic form of theater.’ The power of the parade, according to Schumann, has to do with its potential to reach a truly random audience. (Bell “Louder” 279)

Bread and Puppet have had years to perfect the parade, evolving from the loud protests of the early years in New York, to a more structured (though still far from narrative) mode of performing a parade; “Instead of simply presenting a series of hopefully powerful images, the parades create meaning through the images’ juxtaposition—or, perhaps even better, through the images’ active involvement with or against each other” (Bell “Louder” 276).

The parade as a performance mode is innately political, given its position on the street. The street is created and maintained by the government for the sake of convenience, and any disturbance, and especially the parade, temporarily claims the street from the government and disrupts the flow and ease of movement. According to Bell: “The innate politics of any street performance have to do with the definition of the street as a convenience and necessity provided by the state for the citizens” (278).

Bread and Puppet will perform almost anywhere, though they rarely perform in a theater on a stage. Typically, Schumann is more interested in shifting the notions of performer and audience, at times staging performances in the seats while putting the audience on stage. Bread and Puppet isn’t interested in the sort of audience that comes to see a show at a theater. The company wants to reach the general public. So the performance is brought to that public:

We have played them outside in the open, in town squares, in parks, in odd kinds of stadiums and factories, or cafeterias. By and large, we have performed them in a manner that says, let a sampling of the general public see them, not the theater clientele. (Bell “Uprising” 38)

Perhaps the most powerful aspects of Peter Schumann’s puppets are their relationship to language. In many cases, the language of objects is able to break the typical boundaries of

communication. Instead of a language of words, they employ a language of image. According to Schumann:

The radicality of the puppet theater includes a redefinition of language as not merely a tool of convenient communication. Puppet language is more than an instrument of fine tuned information. It is an experiment which strips words and sentences of the secondary fashionable contexts and condensed quantities of habitual gossip into singular terms. The puppets need silence and their silences are an outspoken part of the language [...]. In the puppet theater words are attached to face which don't move externally but are all the more obviously able to produce meaning. ("Radicality" 77)

Schumann is speaking about the puppet here as a personification of Brechtian ideas like distance and alienation. The language spoken by puppets is a stolen language, because the puppets are completely unable to speak by themselves. By taking the language away from human actors, the puppets are able to strip them of their emotional context, because the puppet is not capable of emotion itself. The distance is created by the puppet's status as "other," not only an other self, but also other than human.

In addition to politics, Bread and Puppet has always been a company concerned with being ecologically friendly. Modern technology has never had a part in Bread and Puppet shows, other than to point out the dehumanizing nature of technological production. Instead, Schumann has opted for more traditional ways of creating his puppet shows. At a time when many in the puppet world were turning to hi-tech foam rubber and animatronic gadgetry, Schumann went the other way, preferring instead to use fabric, old newspapers, tree branches,

and clay. The same clay used to build the puppets is used to make the bread ovens that Schumann used to bake his famous bread. Schumann says: “I like the idea of very lightweight, very easily decayable stuff. It seems to me an advantage that things go away again, don’t sit around too long, and get replaced” (Bell, “Uprising” 40). For Schumann,

Puppetry is conceptual sculpture, cheap, true to its popular origins, uninvited by the powers that be, its feet in the mud, economically on the fringe of existence, technically a collage art combining paper, rags, and scraps of wood not kinetic two- and three-dimensional bodies. (“Radicality” 81)

In addition to performances, Bread and Puppet offers its audiences bread. Throughout the years, people have asked Schumann why he combined bread and puppets. For him the answer is simple—“We sometimes give you a piece of bread along with the puppet show because our bread and theater belong together” (Mission Statement). The handing out of bread brings with it images of Christ—of the feeding of the 5,000 with a few loaves of bread and some fish as well as of the Last Supper. The commonalities between these images, combined with a tendency to include Christian imagery in his performances, have often led critics to accuse Schumann of pushing a Christian agenda with his puppet shows. It is far more likely, however, that the Christian imagery is employed by Schumann because he recognizing its power to unite people and create community—it is easy recognizable and therefore easy to relate too; additionally, the act of sharing bread is by no means exclusive to Christianity, but provides a unifying experience for audiences of a variety of creeds and religions. Bread and Puppet makes bread wherever it performs, and it shares not only the bread, but methods for making both the breads and the clay and brick ovens that the bread is made in. According to Schumann:

This learning how to build a stacked brick oven without cement, just by piling the brick into a dome shape, and heating it up—how nice that is to show people, in Siberia or in Poland, and wherever...these odd places [...]. It's as if getting bread like this connects you to an ancient way of food production that is in danger of being lost, that is irreplaceably good. To get food that is so purely straightforward, with good smell, and good ingredients—that is very hard to come by in our system of food production [...]. I like the building of ovens and the bread distribution in Third-World countries much better than in First-World countries, because food in the First-World is so opinionated, so set in patterns that have been educated by the food market. I remember in Columbia, for example, when I did the bread-baking and we couldn't hand it out to the bourgeoisie for some reason, the kids and the poor people came, and almost ripped it out of our hands and made a feast of it. (Bell "Uprising" 41)

In 2002, Frank Anthony interviewed Peter Schumann for the literary journal *Curious Rooms*. He asked Schumann where Schumann thought puppetry fell in his overall philosophy of things. Schumann replied:

I feel we probably bake so much bread because we are not sure of what puppetry is good for. But I think there is a great need for communal forms of an understandable, of a simple kind of spirituality, that is not derived from existing modern religions or philosophies that are carried by mass media and newspapers. It is simpler, more accessible, more like the real stuff that people have in themselves. To me it seems that puppetry is a form-giving force for latent, not

really existing spirituality that might exist. So the purpose of puppetry it to find such a form that is accessible to the large community of all of us haphazard people. (163)

Bread and Puppet's influence and success as a company using puppetry and performing objects to engage with audiences worldwide is a testament to the power of the "form-giving force" embodied in puppets.

Bread and Puppet's politically activist theatre personifies Cohen-Cruz's first strain of community-based performance. One of the oldest political theatres in the United States, Peter Schumann's company could even be considered to predate the community-based performance movement. Together with the San Francisco Mime Troupe and El Teatro Campesino, Bread and Puppet helped give rise to community-based performance, laying the foundation for the generations of community-based artists to come. Schumann recognized the usefulness of puppet- and mask-based spectacle as a tool for protest and a powerful witness to raise awareness for or in opposition to a cause. Using masks and puppets to create "activist performance as vigorous support for or opposition to sociopolitical circumstances" has brought Bread and Puppet to the forefront of American, community-based political theatre.

### CHAPTER THREE: IN THE HEART OF THE BEAST

As a *puppet* and mask theater, we are in line with an ancient and powerful tradition whose roots lie in articulating the mythic mysteries of human existence and the deepest rituals of community life. The first puppeteers were shamans and street wanderers. In many ways our work is closely aligned with these ancient traditions as we seek expressions of our connection to each other and the natural world, to life and death itself, and to a spirit world. (Speiler “Puppet Rites” 32)

Jan Cohen-Cruz describes the second strain of community-based art as “grassroots performance to retain and express collective identity grounded in tradition or place.” Perhaps no company personifies this strain better than Minneapolis’s In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater.

In the Heart of the Beast began in the basement of Walker church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It was founded by David O’Fallon and Ray St. Louis, two performers who had grown tired of the agit-prop theater in which they had been active. In 1973 they decided to start their own puppet company, which they called the Powderhorn Puppet Theater, named after the neighborhood in which they lived and worked (Sheehy 102). In 1979, the company changed their name to In the Heart of the Beast (109).

In the Heart of the Beast’s name is an allusion to a phrase written by Cuban poet Jose Marti that was often quoted by Che Guevara. Guevara urged North Americans who wanted to participate in the Cuban Revolution to “stay home and work in the place where you live, where you find your community, in the heart of the beast.” They took the name in 1979, after they had



begun to teach and perform outside of Minneapolis (Spieler 50). The name is perhaps best explained by the words of Company member and poet Steven Linsner:

To be puppeteers in the Heart of the Beast [...] is to find ourselves in the great world Beast made of families, races, ages, sexes, classes, corporations and nations, people, (and creatures!) all different, working out a way to live together [...] is to tell the story of people who live in the heart of the beast—as courageous and resourceful as they really are” (45-46).

O’Fallon and his wife had worked with the Bread and Puppet Theater in Vermont a few summers earlier, and he suggested to St. Louis that they follow a similar model with their own company. Given O’Fallon and Sandy Spieler—who joined the company in 1974—were both alumni of Bread and Puppet, it is no surprise that the aesthetic style and purpose of these early shows was very similar to Bread and Puppet. The first show, called *A Boat, A Boot, A Book, A Ball of Yarn*, was performed on the Fourth of July in 1973. A roughly semi-circular space was staked out and marked with banners at the foot of small hill in Powderhorn Park. The story was told with narration and large but simple puppets—a group of workers go looking for the fruits of their labors, which have been stolen from them. O’Fallon describes the action:

I narrated a story of a people whose belief in the value and power of their own actions was symbolized by a tree on which hung the fruits of each one’s work—a boat, a boot, a garment, bread from the baker, a book for the scholar. The tree is stolen from them. They struggle against the forces of state and religious institutions to get it back. But they fall into subjugation until they are awakened

by a force personified in the puppet called Mama. Then they realize that their fate is, literally, in their own hands: “These hands, made each good thing that hangs upon the tree.” (O’Fallon 25)

*In the Heart of the Beast* is not simply a Bread and Puppet clone, however. It has created a style and aesthetic that is specifically its own. Sheehy writes, “The company has also developed its own distinct style and subject matter by, for instance, responding to its urban setting, investigating culture and issues of the Midwest, and developing a collaborative model of artistic creation” (Sheehy 4).

Six years after *In The Heart of the Beast* had its beginnings in the basement of Walker Church, they moved into a storefront on East Lake Street in the Gustavus Adolphus Building (Spieler “From the Mud” 50). In 1984, having clearly outgrown this space, the Company discussed the possibility of moving to a farm, but instead chose to stay on Lake Street and move their workshop into the third floor of the Robert Shoes Building (60). Finally, in 1988, the company acquired permission and funds to move in and renovate the Avalon Theater at 1500 East Lake Street (62). The Avalon was built in 1937 as a movie house and was turned into a pornographic theater in the 1950s. In 1984 it was closed after neighbors organized against it. The building remained empty until *In the Heart of the Beast* took residence (Sheehy 118). Shortly after moving in, the company placed a sign on the Avalon’s Marquee that read, “Bye Bye Porn. Hello Puppets” (1). They received funds to renovate the building, and after an extensive rebuild they reopened the Avalon to the public (Spieler “From the Mud” 62).

The first main stage production in the new space was a restaging of *La Befana*, their tenth restaging of the play, followed by *Invisible Child*. *La Befana* was based on an Italian legend of

an old witch who travels the world looking for the Holy Child. After she has travelled for a thousand years, she discovers that “All children are holy!” The initial production of the story was staged in 1974 with four people—a narrator, a masked actor, and two puppeteers. As *In the Heart of the Beast* continued to use the story, the staging grew becoming first a touring production and then a main-stage performance with twelve puppeteers and musicians in addition to child performers and youth interns (48). *Invisible Child* utilized a technique called “black light” puppetry, where puppets appear to float in a curtain of light while the puppeteers are virtually invisible in the darkness behind the puppets. The production told the story of “a young girl who chooses to be invisible until she is loved back to visibility by a family of oversized trolls.” Both productions sold out the new theater (63).

The new space allowed *In the Heart of the Beast* to start new programs. In 1991 after neighborhood youth began “hanging out” at the theater, company members Roy McBride and Beth Peterson started a free youth summer program called The Lake Street Theater Club. The program teaches kids performance skills, such as stilt walking or drumming, and helps the participants create and produce short puppet shows. The older children act as “intern-mentors” to the younger children and create short touring performances that they take to block parties, park centers, and summer schools in “the Art Bus,” a lively painted van (Spieler, “From the Mud” 66). They also offer workshops and classes in puppetry, mask making, voice, and other aspects of performance for children and adults at various times throughout the year. On most Saturdays, they have matinees of children’s shows followed by puppet workshops, and one Friday every month they offer a free performance for day care or preschool groups (hobt.org).

In 1996, In the Heart of the Beast secured the funds to officially purchase the Avalon Theater, making it permanently theirs (Frasier 35). In December 2003, they partnered with the Neighborhood Development Center and Latino Economic Development to purchase an adjoining former Masonic Lodge. They renovated it in July 2004 and reopened it nine months later, renaming the building Plaza Verde. The space is used as a woodshop and studio, as well as a performance space and offices (Hunter 35). In the Heart of the Beast rooted itself in a community and has always relied on that community for support. The company relies on local musicians and artists to help it create its plays and performances, deliberately distancing itself from traditional text-based actors and “straight” plays. “The Beast” in In the Heart of the Beast’s name, apart from Linsner’s definition, refers to the neighborhood in which the company has rooted itself, namely, the Lake Street neighborhood near East Lake Street in Minneapolis. For the majority of the existence of In the Heart of the Beast, the neighborhood has been in a downward cycle, known for poverty and violence. The survival of the company has been threatened by choosing to remain in such a neighborhood, but that choice is what makes In the Heart of the Beast what they are; it has allowed them to be a “beacon for the patient spiritual and economic revival” of the neighborhood (Spieler 41).

One of the best examples of In the Heart of the Beast’s dedication to community revitalization is their Annual May Day Parade and Pageant. Every year, the company plans and produces a parade of giant puppets and floats. A theme is chosen and told part by part as the parade progresses. The culminating event is the Tree of Life Ceremony held on the shore of Powderhorn Lake in Powderhorn Park (Spieler, “From the Mud” 51-54).

The first May Day Parade was held in 1975. Originally, the event was planned as a way to help the community deal with the tragedy of the Vietnam War. When the war ended two weeks before the event, however, it turned into a joyous celebration of renewal and rebirth. This first parade featured about 50 to 60 people, some large puppets left over from *The Grass Will Grow and The River Will Flow* (an earlier indoor performance) and a puppet maypole performance (Spieler, "From the Mud" 51). They rooted the idea of the Parade in both the traditional celebration of springtime and the more recent worldwide celebration of labor (50).

As the years went by, the Parade developed into a massive production involving thousands of people with public workshops to plan and build the puppets and floats. Stilt walkers, dancers, and musicians have been added to the floats and puppets, and the ending ceremony has evolved into a vast celebration of the return of spring. Giant manifestations of the Woods, River and Sky start the ceremony, drawing human action into the natural world. A Giant Sun Puppet comes across the Lake, and the Giant Tree of Life Puppet is erected. Everyone involved joins in singing "You Are My Sunshine" to welcome the Sun's return after the long winter.

The process of producing the May Day Parade begins in February with several public brainstorming sessions. Members of the community are invited to bring ideas, images and concerns to these sessions. Staff members then take these ideas and research them, rearrange them, and deconstruct them, until they finally agree on a single theme. A basic story line gets mapped out as a series of images. During the months of March and April, In the Heart of the Beast's theater turns into a massive public workshop. The public is invited to help build the

Giant Puppets and floats. This process is the essence of In the Heart of the Beast's work to develop community. Speiler writes:

We hold public workshops throughout April for people of all ages to build their own *puppet* creations or help with the larger *puppets* that embody the chosen theme. Hundreds and hundreds participate. At first sight, the workshops seem like chaotic hives of buzzing bees. On closer inspection, one can see the parade and ceremony story gradually emerging from the dizzily busy hands molding clay, stapling fabric and laying paint. These public workshops are the heart of May Day, for it is here that neighbors of all ages meet each other, generating contagious vitality. On May Day itself, the parade explodes onto the street with several thousand participants blessing this familiar artery in a new way. (Speiler, "Puppet Rites" 32).

In September 2003, In the Heart of the Beast was invited to perform a similar style of "ritual" at the opening ceremony of an international theater festival in Gwaechon, South Korea. Together with Korean artists, students and families from the Gwaechon area and a dance company from Iraq called Mardohk; they created a piece called "Prayer for Harmonious Coexistence". This event helps to illustrate the performance object's ability to cross barriers of language and cultures through visual imagery to create community. According to Speiler: "It was a stunning privilege to work as collaborative celebrants with Koreans and Iraqis across the divide of fear and nations" (Speiler, "Puppet Rites" 32).

In its 30-plus years of existence, In the Heart of the Beast has housed itself in many different buildings, but has always remained on or around Lake Street in south Minneapolis. The

company is the perfect example of Cohen-Cruz's second category of community-based performance; that of "grassroots performance to retain and express collective identity grounded in tradition or place." In the Heart of the Beast's very name testifies to their commitment to place and tradition. The company was born out of a need, or a perceived need, for a voice that could speak specifically for and about a particular neighborhood. David O'Fallon, a community member himself, started the company along with Ray St. Louis to try to fill this perceived need:

We saw that ordinary people, the people who worked in and around Powderhorn Park, did not value their own thoughts or words or believe that they could affect the way their lives or neighborhood worked, let alone a city or a nation. Where was the theater that told the story of life around this neighborhood—that somehow belonged to this neighborhood? (O'Fallon 22-23)

In its early years, the company was centered around two specific locations: Powderhorn Park and Walker Church. The park had often served as "a gathering place for all kinds of social and political action, energy cells of liberals, progressives, and radicals" (22). The church, then under the guidance of Pastor Brian Peterson, was trying to "work for peace, fight for justice, speak against racism, defend the poor [...]" (22). The church and the park became a spiritual and physical center for the company, providing space for rehearsal, construction, and performance.

The late George Latshaw, former editor of *Puppetry Journal* and well respected puppeteer, had this to say about In the Heart of the Beast:

In the Heart of the Beast has its own ritual ground. It is a piece of theater real estate that is not in the best part of Minneapolis, but it is home to the people who

live there, and it is home to In the Heart of the Beast, who live and work there with them. (16)

The Lake Street neighborhood has long held a reputation of being a less than desirable place to live. In the 1980s and early 1990s especially, the neighborhood was known as area rife with crime, prostitution, and drugs. Low property values contributed to a poor economy locked into a downward cycle. This is another way in which In the Heart of the Beast differentiates from Bread and Puppet: the urban landscape of the Lake Street neighborhood are very far away from the fields and hills of Dopp's farm in Vermont. In the Heart of the Beast has never wanted to be in a nice place to live, however; it has always desired to be in the place where they are needed. According to Speiler: "We wanted to tell stories from the center of where we lived, from the center where the heart beats, the place of change" ("From the Mud" 50). Throughout its years, In the Heart of the Beast has worked to engage a neighborhood stricken with poverty and crime: speaking to and with the community, not as outsider artists coming in to fix problems but as neighbors, friends, and co-workers who deal with the same troubles and trials.

The Lake Street area has seen worse times—more poverty, more crime—and now what might be better times, with glimmers of revitalization and economic development. Through all this, In the Heart of the Beast has ministered to the surrounding community. (Sheehy 6)

For much of In the Heart of the Beast's existence the company's viability has been threatened, but thanks to a generous outpouring of support and volunteers, In the Heart of the Beast has continued to survive. Sandy Speiler writes:



Because our theater was born from the political activism of the early 1970s, interviewers often ask me if we see ourselves as a “radical” theater. I ask, is it radical to sing forth the vision and reality of a Beloved Community? Then yes, I say, we are an actively radical puppet theater. The most radical act we have done is to consciously ground ourselves for twenty-five years in this urban neighborhood in which we began. We have chosen to stay in this economically troubled part of the city and to transform a former pornographic theater into the theater we use as our home base today [...]. Our survival has also been a beacon for the patient spiritual and economic revitalization of this street that we now witness. We are not a trend or an experimental fluke. We are a puppet theater that has woven itself into the cultural fabric of this very urban south Minneapolis neighborhood, and our patient growth has been a seedbed for a blossoming of the puppetry arts in the Twin Cities. (Speiler 40-41)

While *In the Heart of the Beast* has rooted itself deeply into a specific community, it has also reached out to the greater community. In the Foreword to *Theater of Wonder: 25 Years In the Heart of the Beast*, Lyndel King writes: “*In the Heart of the Beast* works hard at keeping its feet—and its heart—firmly planted in its community. At the same time, it recognizes the growing international audience for puppet and mask theater” (v). It has taken its parades, pageants, and performances from the local neighborhood into greater Minneapolis, the Midwest, the United States, and the rest of the world. It has tried to tackle issues that are important to the immediate community but that also affect the rest of world. As a Midwestern theater company with Midwestern concerns, dealing with agricultural issues is an obvious choice. Over the years,

the company has focused specifically on issues dealing with water pollution, irrigation, and food, among others. They chose to focus on corn given its status as a specifically New World plant: “[W]e found ourselves discussing “Corn” as a metaphor for our ancient agrarian roots, connecting North, Central, and South Americas” (Speiler 61). Corn also allowed the company to connect with farmers on the local level and agricultural administrators and organizers on the national and global levels:

The corn theme led into conversations with farmers and people involved with land stewardship and agriculture policies. Jim Ouray directed a piece to take to the schools about farm issues and the rural-urban connection. *The Story of Corn* featured a wonderful puppet of a young girl named Suzie (played by Kitty Kuluvar), whose fascinating look into the history of corn begins with her bowl of cornflakes on morning [...]. *The Story of Corn* also focused on the economics systems that control most of the food production today. (62)

In the Heart of the Beast has balanced being a community-based theater rooted in a specific neighborhood with being globally concerned citizens. The company has remained committed to its own community while its acclaim and with it its reach has grown. They have toured throughout the country and to places throughout the world, but they always return to Lake Street.

The theater’s commitment to a particular street in a particular neighborhood in a midwestern city in a farm region should not be mistaken as having less than national stature. I have seen this company transform audiences in New York City and in tiny Oregon towns. I have watched a trail of outstanding awards and

reviews follow its performances, whether they be on wet grassy fields or in big city hotels with valet parking. But no matter where the theater travels, it is never gone long, because it is a street theater that belongs to a particular street. Our street. (Frasier 35)

Over the years, In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater has deliberately chosen to dedicate their work to improving their community, and to do so using masks and puppets as their medium. Although In the Heart of the Beast initially drew upon lessons learned from Peter Schumann and Bread and Puppet to create their puppets, they have since expanded their repertoire, drawing on a variety of international puppetry traditions for inspiration, including Japanese Bunraku and Balinese rod and shadow puppets (Latshaw 10). They have remained true to their beginnings as a grassroots company, however, relying on recycled materials to create their puppets.

We often build our puppets from supplies at hand and frequently recycle the wonderful junk found in alley dumpsters into various parts of puppets and sets. Many of the puppet heads are sculpted from cardboard or clay and then layered with papier mâché. (Speiler 44)

The resulting mixture of international traditions combined with recycled “junk” has created an aesthetic style that is both beautiful and distinct. The puppets and masks range in size tiny tabletop hand puppets to giant masks and puppets that are at times simple and noble, at times complex and allusive. The style ranges from the abstract, reminiscent of surrealist and cubist sculptures, to the iconic, reminiscent of religious icons. So why puppets? What about them is so useful for fulfilling In the Heart of the Beast’s mission? Sandy Speiler writes: “We are a puppet

theater because the pure metaphor inherent in the ancient tradition clearly expresses the soulful act of transformation that words cannot speak” (Spieler, “From the Mud” 41). It is this act of transformation that makes the masks and puppets such an essential part of what *In the Heart of the Beast* does. By operating puppets, they are able to re-experience their own births by giving life to the puppets as they lift them onto the stage, and by extension they are able to share these experiences with their audience. They are able to preview their own deaths by laying the puppets back down. Using puppets and masks allows them to bring nature and life onto the stage in a way that no live actor could. Cities and nations, plants and animals are able to become the main characters (43).

Further, using puppets and masks naturally extends the community-based nature of *In the Heart of the Beast*’s work. According to Spieler:

Our residency work in schools, colleges, churches and community organizations in cities and small towns most often uses puppetry for the discovery and articulations of the participants’ own ideas and puppets. Here we work as midwives, teaching puppet techniques but also teaching the participants how to form their stories from the body of their own community. Whole neighborhoods come together for the enactment of such local pageants. (45)

While Peter Schumann uses puppets as a means to access a large community, *In the Heart of the Beast* uses puppets to not only engage communities, but also to help those communities access their stories and ideas and bring them to life.

Poet and Heart of the Beast member Steve Linsner says that to be a puppeteer is to “hold life in our hands, to sense how we are all like puppets—worked by instincts, voices, and forces above us and below us” (45).

In the Heart of the Beast has endeavored to work in their neighborhood, to give voice to the community members and allow them to speak out on their own behalf. Through the company’s work in the Lake Street neighborhood, revitalization has occurred, but the change was not enacted by In the Heart of the Beast. Rather, In the Heart of the Beast gave the community the courage and the means to change it for itself. Co-founder David O’ Fallon writes:

We see now that we cannot move the iron monster with our songs and stories.

But In the Heart of the Beast bears witness. It keeps alive a host of images and stories, of possible and potential human relationships, kept like seeds of ancient plants against the time when the monoculture comes crashing down, and we need to turn to the old fruits again, hardy in their diverse ways. (25)

In the Heart of the Beast is a prime example of Cohen-Cruz’s second strain of community-based performance. Building off the example created by Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast has developed a form and style that is completely its own. By utilizing puppets, masks, and spectacle to encourage creativity and celebrate community, In the Heart of the Beast has been able to engage directly in the rebuilding and revitalization of the Lake Street neighborhood that it has rooted itself in, personifying “grassroots performance to retain and express collective identity grounded in tradition or place.”



## CHAPTER FOUR: REDMOON THEATER

In a world that encourages ever greater isolation and individual focus, Redmoon Theater makes theatrical events in public spaces that challenge the boundaries that sit between people and that inspire a shared experience of our common humanity.

(Redmoon.org)

Redmoon Theater Company was started in 1989 by Blair Thomas, a puppeteer, Laurie Macklin, a dancer/choreographer, and Clair Dolan, a performance artist. They began as a small storefront puppet theater in the Logan Square community. The company invested in indoor and outdoor, site specific, non-narrative work. The first show, about the end of a romance, was called *You Hold My Heart In Your Teeth* (Velsey 1). Though Redmoon has much in common with other companies engaged in large-scale spectacle like Bread and Puppet or Heart of the Beast, it follows more of what Associate Artistic Director Frank Mageuri calls “international models”. “It’s based primarily on what we’ve seen and have as artists at Redmoon the opportunity to engage with particularly European groups, the way that they structure their artistic labors” (Mageuri, personal interview, 28 May, 2008). That structure, according to Mageuri, is one of extended exploration and experimentation on the part of a collaborative or collective body of artists and performers. In addition, the companies work in site-specific models. “They are extremely interested in the site-specific work that essentially is capturing public space in a really dynamic way” (Mageuri, 28 May).

Mageuri also acknowledges that Redmoon has many similarities to American models of community-based spectacle performance.

In many ways what we share with all those groups is principle, more than practice. Principle more than performance. All of us together believe in a particular politic of the people [...]. We just practice them publicly in a bit of a different way. More poetically, more sideways, more ethereally, less objective.  
(Mageuri, 28 May)

While this poetic or “sideways” approach to spectacle sets Redmoon apart from Bread and Puppet and In the Heart of the Beast, it also contributes to Redmoon being a prime example of Cohen-Cruz’s third strain of community-based performance, namely: “experimentation characterized by art blurred with life, whose everydayness welcomes broader participation and shapes and expands aesthetic impulses.”

According to Mageuri, spectacle was always an important part of Redmoon’s ideology:

We’re really good at making the epic material work. We’re excellent at puppet theater, we’re [...] good story tellers. Most of us are more interested in cinema than we are theater which is why our work is and looks the way it is on some level I think; but the spectacle drive really has remained alive and become fully pregnant because of the group’s kind of internal, social impulse about activating public landscape and creating a powerful experience for people in general: audience, community, whatever, about their neighborhood, location, history, story. (Mageuri, personal interview, 23 May, 2008)

In 1992, Redmoon produced their first Winter Pageant. The pageant was well received by critics, including Richard Christiansen of the *Chicago Tribune*. He referred to the pageant as a “surrealistic-neo-futurist-dada-grade school project-Cecil B. DeMille epic-Mardi Gras-children’s



theater extravaganza.” The show was low-tech, featuring “brown wrapping paper” scenery painted with brightly colored, childlike pictures and a variety of puppets of different styles, including a large three-headed giant that attacked and destroyed the brown paper buildings and was in turn killed by a “butterfly-like creature on stilts” (“Redmoon’s Winter Pageant”).

Redmoon’s 1995 production of *Moby-Dick* was performed at Truman College at the Palmer Square Arts Fair. First created by Blair Thomas and Jeff Dorchen, a Chicago playwright, the initial production was a short, two-man show performed on the beach. Thomas conceived the show as being both irreverent and relevant given its criticism of obsession. “We wanted to play with the import the novel has in our culture, thought it would be fun and irreverent to take this cultural literary masterpiece that’s imposing in its length and turn it into a circus puppet show on the beach” (“Arts Week”). The 1995 version of the show was expanded to 12 performers and a live orchestra.

*Moby-Dick* was well received by critics, and it led directly to Redmoon being invited to perform at Steppenwolf Theater. There, they created an interpretation of Mary Shelley’s classic monster tale, *Frankenstein*. Like *Moby-Dick*, *Frankenstein* was adapted from a literary icon but featured very little dialogue, relying instead on image to tell the story. According to Jim Lasko, who along with Thomas created the show: “Traditional theater is language based, and that’s not the kind of theater we want to make. The seed for this show, of course, was planted by Mary Shelley’s novel, but most of my inspiration came from the “Classic Comics” version of the story” (“Redefining”). The show used more than 100 masks and puppets of various sizes, including Grand Guignol masks, a 4-foot monster head, a macabre miniature carousel, a tiny rod-puppet that pilfered corpses, soaring shadow puppets, and looming icebergs (“Redmoon’s

'Frankenstein'''). The show was workshopped in various venues and formats including parades and outdoor pageants for a year before it arrived at Steppenwolf. *Frankenstein* was met with praise and earned Redmoon a Joseph Jefferson award, an award given annually to Chicago area productions for excellence in theater.

In 1995, Redmoon created their first *All Hallows Eve Ritual*. The goal was to create a return to the pagan, ritualistic roots of the Halloween holiday. According to Mageuri, "We were attempting to reclaim Halloween as a ritual evening versus a consumer event." This, and other acts of reclamation are one of the main ways that Redmoon engages with a community. The event, which happened every year on October 31st from 1995 to 2002, began as a lantern parade through the streets of Logan Square. The parade featured large lanterns shaped like animals, real or mythological, fire-eaters, jugglers, skeletons, and musicians from the Jellyeye Drum Theater, a percussion group that uses drums built from sewer pipes and giant oil barrels. Costumed community members were invited to join the procession. In 1997 the parade was expanded to include a 20-minute performance at the Daley Center Plaza ("Redmoon Heads Up"). The event continued to expand, including large performance sites, art installations, and diverse community groups to "To create a public exchange that involved an audience of up to 10,000 people in one night" (Redmoon.org). By the last *All Hallows Eve* in 2002, the event included shrines and installations built by community members and artists, a parade, pyrotechnics, and a large-scale spectacle that finished at the corner of Fullerton and Logan Boulevard (Redmoon.org).

Other notable performances by Redmoon include 1997's *The Ballad of Frankie and Johnny*, 2000's *Hunchback*, adapted from Victor Hugo's novel (remounted in 2007), 2004's *Cyrano* (with the Court Theater), 2005's *The Cabinet*, and 2008's *Boneyard Prayer*. *Frankie*

*and Johnny* is a story about a “nice but vulnerable girl” who meets a two-timing guy and ends up shooting him. Redmoon’s adaptation of the simple story turned it into a “noir cabaret,” featuring live actors, puppets of various sizes, magic tricks, and a live jazz band playing music composed by Michael Zerang (“Redmoon Troupe”). Redmoon’s *Hunchback*, conceived and designed by Jim Lasko, condensed Hugo’s massive novel to 90 minutes, adding cutouts, pop-up books, and mechanical towers as well as masks and puppets. Hugo, played by David Engel, makes an appearance, not to narrate, but to protest Redmoon’s treatment of his novel. Eventually, however, Hugo gets caught up in the story, until, finally, he finishes the show by quoting the end of his novel, relating the end of the love story of Quasimodo and Esmeralda (“Little Theater”). *Hunchback* was taken to New York and performed as part of the Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater (“Victor Hugo”).

Redmoon joined forces with the Court Theater in 2004 to create a version of Edmund Rostand’s *Cyrano*. Co-directed by Court Theater’s Artistic Director Charles Newell and Redmoon’s Lasko, the production streamlined Rostand’s five-act play, focusing mainly on the love triangle between Cyrano, Roxanne, and Christian (Redmoon.org). The performance marked the first co-production for Redmoon. For Newell, who initiated the collaboration, the reason for joining forces was simple: “I knew it was something I could never do myself.” Initially, the puppets allowed for large-scale battle scenes to fit into small places, but Lasko, concerned that the puppets were simply “tacked-on,” wanted to push the script further. The end result was a re-ordered, non-linear memory play version, with the events of Cyrano’s life unfolding in his mind as a flashback (“Court, Redmoon”).

*The Cabinet* was adapted not from a massive work of classic literature, but from the 1919 German Expressionist silent film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Redmoon.org). As in the film, the plot of the production revolves around the murderous doctor and his sleepwalking slave, Cesare. The events unfold inside of an angular expressionistic “cabinet of curiosities,” with puppets and puppeteers appearing and disappearing behind hidden doors. Mageuri says:

The piece of furniture operates on a number of symbolic and metaphoric levels.

In the horror genre, something scary may be hiding under a mundane bed or behind a closet door, and the cabinet symbolizes the coffin where the somnambulist is kept in the film and it creates a sense of claustrophobia.

(“Cabinet”)

*Boneyard Prayer* was a “one-hour chamber folk opera” about loss, death and hobos, drawing from such sources as Dante’s *Inferno*, William Kennedy’s *Ironweed*, T.S. Eliot’s *The Hollow Men*, and other Depression-era literature, music, and art. Utilizing a variety of forms of puppetry and projection and an original score by Charles Kim, the story told the tale of the “fractured life and ultimate redemption” of a man named Martin (Redmoon.org).

Although most of Redmoon’s productions, both indoor and outdoor, utilize in some degree elements of spectacle, pageantry, and community, the productions of most importance to this study are Redmoon’s massive indoor and outdoor spectacles. *Winter Pageant* and *All Hallows Eve* were annual events centered around the Winter Solstice and Halloween respectively. Like ritual performances in Bali, India, and Papua New Guinea, *Winter Pageant* and *All Hallows Eve* mark liminal events. All Hallows Eve, or Halloween, as it is generally referred to today, takes place on October 31st and signifies the end of the harvest. Gaels

believed that on that day the boundary between the living and the dead dissolved, allowing the dead to influence the realm of the living. The *Winter Pageant* celebrated the winter solstice, which marks the height of winter and the beginning the transition into summer. “The show was always something about the coming of summer. The breaking of winter and the coming of summer” (Mageuri, 23 May). The first winter pageant, held in 1992, featured 41 performers of varying ages and a large number of puppets performing in front of a brown wrapping paper “set” painted with bright, childlike images of buildings and neighborhood scenes. The 1992 pageant was presented one night only for an audience of 300 people (“In Redmoon”). The 2003 winter pageant ran for six weeks and involved over 500 non-professional community members engaging in one aspect of the production or another, including performance, productions, building, and logistics like ushering or providing childcare for the performers.. The various community groups involved in the production participated onstage in two-week long stints (“Redmoon Winter”).

Redmoon’s initial work with spectacles such as the *All Hallows Eve* celebration was created with a fairly typical model of community interaction. In order to create these community-based efforts, Redmoon worked with various community groups for six to ten weeks.

I would intentionally look for a large social service agency that was providing support to schizophrenics, and then I would find an organization working with homeless people, then I would find an organization working with pregnant mothers, and then I would an organization working with immigrants—and immigrants being a broad word here, one year it was you know, young Polish students new to America, young Russians new to

America [...], or, you know, a recovery home for addicts and alcoholics. I would try to find really diverse populations, so that we weren't working six to ten weeks in these organizations with all the same populations.

(Mageuri, 23 May)

In working with such diverse populations of people, Redmoon sends a clear message that it has not rooted itself to a specific geographic neighborhood or community, instead seeking to serve communities throughout the greater Chicago region. By seeking out a variety of groups, Redmoon is attempting to infuse their community-based events with a wide range of voices and a wide range of concerns.

Redmoon would approach these groups with an idea of what the event might look like, but generally allow them to shape their event. Instructors, typically visual artists, would be hired to work with the various groups to help them create images, collages, ritual sites, and other elements of the event.

They would become the captains of that site, and each one of those sites would have a route or an audience to travel through and/or an opportunity for the audience to have some kind of exchange with those members. So the individuals who build the site were really the agents of that location. (Mageuri, 23 May)

In addition to helping these diverse populations create installations, events, or ritual sites, Redmoon would also design and create a spectacle event "that was, for lack of better language, closure to the other sites" (Mageuri, 23 May).

Redmoon no longer creates a *Winter Pageant* or an *All Hallows Eve* ritual. Instead, they chose to shift their focus to a single spectacle event distinct from both traditions. The reason, according to Mageuri, was simple:

The *Winter Pageant* was becoming more and more misinterpreted as a theatrical event, versus a kind of spectacle ritual. And *All Hallows* was becoming more and more a production event, meaning we were spending most of our time talking about how to manage the audiences, and less of our time about “what do we want the art to be?” So we decided to take all of that energy and shift it into one clear celebratory event that could really get at the best of all of those things. (Mageuri, 28 May)

Like Bread and Puppet, Redmoon’s spectacle and “ritual” events are not aimed at the typical, theater-going audience; they are meant to be seen and participated in by the “common man,” as opposed to an artistic or theatrical elite. It was necessary for them to reinvent their efforts at spectacle to avoid becoming complacent and be written off as just another crazy theater event. Since the Winter Pageant and the All Hallows Eve coincided with popular holidays, it is likely that to some degree the spectacles became part of the very commercial nature they were trying to reclaim the holidays from. By separating the spectacle events from these specific, well-known holiday events, they are more likely to stand on their own as separate, and more likely to be startling, new, and original.

Redmoon’s more recent spectacle events have not been rooted into a particular time or event. “The events that we’re making now we hope to do late summer consistently, around a holiday we’ve [not] yet chosen and possibly a holiday we might create” (Mageuri, 23 May). The

spectacles, however, have still occurred at a liminal time, happening in late September or early October, marking the end of summer and the beginning of fall. Other reasons are more practical: “We’re looking for a season that is weather tolerant, permits the most active outdoor event, and is a time of season when many Chicago people are actually here” (Mageuri, 23 May).

The more recent spectacles also rely less on community input and more on narrative structure, though Mageuri is quick to point out that they are not narrative in the typical sense: “[...] narrative being a dangerously deceptive word in this kind of dialogue, ‘cause narrative would elicit story but it really is poetry” (Mageuri, 23 May).

The first of these more “narrative” spectacles was 2004’s *Sink, Sank, Sunk*, was performed in Ping Tom Memorial Park in Chinatown. The goal was to create a site-specific spectacle to “introduce audiences to undiscovered, often-overlooked Chicago locations” (Redmoon.org). The park was built on a former railyard and is bordered by the Chicago River, train tracks for freight and passenger trains, including the “L” system’s “Red Line.” Redmoon latched onto the park’s obvious relation to industry and, in particular, travel, creating spectacular vehicles for the various characters of the performance. The character of The Crooner utilized a dolly cart transformed with lawn mower parts, featuring a foldout staircase and stage with a vintage style microphone (created from found objects). The Sales Person, another character, who operated a public bath, traveled in a mobile shower. The Housewife rode on an “abstract version of a vintage sailing ship powered by a contemporary golf cart.” The deck of the ship was covered with vintage steamer trunks filled her many belongings, accumulated during her many marriages. The Bossman’s vehicle, a 16-foot tall tower with a house on top of it, reflected the



house on the top of the vertical lift railroad bridge at the south end of the park (“Wacky Contraptions”).

The first part of the spectacle had no specific structure; the audience was asked to move about the park and visit the various characters. Eventually, the loose story kicked in, as the Bossman, followed as always by his accountant, tried to woo the Housewife. The death of the Crooner led to a funeral procession on the river.

A band played as a 20’ kayak covered in candles and nine bicycle-powered pontoon boats, with propellers towing campfires in truck inner tubes on long leads, traveled the river, representing a flaming funeral pyre [...]. And when they went under the 18th Street Bridge, a 30[-foot] net of flame dropped down, forming an archway to pass under. (Napoleon)

The net, made of 1/8 inch aircraft cable, was 100 feet long and had to be removed from the bridge after each performance so the bridge could raise and lower to allow river traffic to pass underneath. It took twelve volunteers stationed along the length of the curtain to light and drop it over the side of the bridge, but according Mageuri, the effect was well worth it: “The fires seemed to float in the air, like being right near a star, and softly and slowly each one faded out, until the underneath of the bridge was empty and black again. It was poetic” (Napoleon).

While a portion of *Sink, Sank, Sunk* was performed on the river, all of 2005’s *Loves Me...Loves Me Not* took place on water. The spectacle, held on the Jackson Park Lagoon, was intended in the beginning to be a light-hearted story about a flooded town whose residents decide to stay. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans about two weeks before the Spectacle’s opening, Redmoon decided to change to focus of the spectacle.

The whimsy of that [original story] disappeared [...] in an instant as soon as Katrina hit. And we suddenly saw all those images on the television of people's houses that were actually flooded, who didn't have that choice. People who had drowned and people who were suffering terribly from that tragedy. And so we changed it entirely from top to bottom. We made something that was much more of a kind of elegy to that tragedy. (Lasko)

Redmoon jumped into action to completely re-work the event, shifting its tone from whimsical absurdity to a reverent story of survival and coping. The Spectacle took place on the Jackson Park Lagoon at the south end of the Museum of Science and Industry. The spectacle showed survivors shortly after a flood learning to deal with their new situation. A swan boat delivered a cradle to an expectant couple, and took away a corpse wrapped in cloth. A band played on another raft. Torches and candles floating on the surface created a ritualistic, meditative feel to light the whole event. "This isn't a piece of theater as much as it is an attempt to create a meditative space for an audience" ("*Loves Me*"). *Loves Me ...Loves Me Not* also featured the Nia Imani Youth Gospel Choir. Ten percent of ticket sale proceeds benefited the Disaster Relief Fund of the American Red Cross (Redmoon.org).

In 2006, Redmoon created *Twilight Orchard* in Chicago's Columbus Park, marking the third year in a row that Redmoon collaborated with the Chicago Park District. Performed from October 3-9, *Twilight* presented a series of interactive site specific installations designed by local artists. Fourteen-foot tall moveable walls transformed the park into various rooms, and "sound pods" traveled throughout the park (Redmoon.org).

“Cure for Scurvy,” one of the installations, was created by Carol McCurdy. Located at the base of the lagoon, the installation featured McCurdy holding a lantern and preparing to set sail in a boat made from a bathtub and a curtain. Her eyes darted back and forth from the crowd to the boat, as if she is unsure if she should stay or go. “Canary Chamber” featured Marisa Heilman dressed as a Pippi Longstocking-like character trying to trap canaries while whistling on a tree swing. Valerie Taglieri created “Violet Furnace,” an installation featuring baskets of purple fruit and hanging violet lights surrounding Taglieri. She looked at the hanging lights with alternating emotions of fear, joy, and bewilderment, as if she was both trapped and comforted by the surrounding lights. Other installations featured two medieval jesters playing chess and a giant squid answering the telephone over and over (Fenton).

Volunteers from the surrounding neighborhoods and schools helped transform the park by making hundreds of “birds’ nests” from natural materials and found objects and decorated with twinkling lights. Visitors to the spectacle were encouraged to leave messages in the nests. As Lasko explained to one interviewer: “We wanted to create a magical space that is a garden of the imagination in the park, which is an oasis in a heavily-trafficked urban area, where a diverse group of people will find a sense of family and community” (Lasko, quoted in “What’s ‘Orchard’”).

The summer-time spectacle events were typically created in a similar manner to the community-based events but with a different tone. “The one major difference really is that the community events, the spectacles, were often about ritual, they were about voice and interaction, while the more current spectacles are really stories” (Mageuri, 23 May). Mageuri describes the creation of these spectacles in the following way:

[W]e choose a public landscape in the city or the surrounding areas that we want to in some way call attention to: we want to exaggerate the already beautiful landscape, or we want to draw attention to the new location that is forgotten. And in that notion we think that we're trying to celebrate that space, draw people to that location, and hopefully render that space powerful again. So a site gets chosen, then generally we begin to think object and design in that space. You can see I'm moving backward already, somewhat. We begin to think about objects in space, like 'wouldn't it be great if there was a giant tower that had on top of it a house that could collapse' or whatever it is as a collective of artists.

(Mageuri, 23 May)

Collaboration is a central part of Redmoon's process. Once a site has been chosen, a team of artists working with a producer creates ideas for the spectacle. "The path and roles shift somewhat from event to event based on the site and then the material being used in the production" (Mageuri, 23 May). Once material, object, and design elements have been created, the artistic team proceeds in one of two ways:

We'll cast a group of people that we really like to work with who will generate both character and story; or we'll generate an extremely loose story, very loose story, a page and half of action—no text, no dialogue, no real character names—A kind of monumental situation in the arch of a theatrical experience, and then we'll cast a group of people that we really

like who have the right skills and the right personality then begin to again expand, explore through character, the tale. (Mageuri, 23 May)

This collaborative process allows the spectacles to grow organically and go places that they never would have gone otherwise. As Jim Lasko said, “At Redmoon, ideas start in one place and come back completely transformed. I feel like I sit in the middle and watch the ideas blossom” (“Objects”). This freedom to explore, to play, is the foundation upon which Redmoon builds its spectacles. In order to accomplish this, however, they need people willing to engage in the process. Mageuri describes the ideal participants as “Strong performers, not actors, necessarily, though there are actors in that, but strong performers really driven to spontaneously [...] create moments, scenes, sometimes costumes, sometimes everything about a character” (Mageuri, 23 May). Redmoon does not typically use “actors who work with text,” relying instead upon people who have been trained in physical theater: puppeteers, clowns, dancers, etc. The whole of the spectacle is shaped by the artistic director, who “stands far enough away to see what’s working and not working, and keeps the piece together, and balances out story and image and dream and poetry, so it doesn’t become laden with narrative weight and doesn’t become so esoteric that its indecipherable” (Mageuri, 23 May). Since the goal of Redmoon’s spectacles is to render the chosen site powerful again, the work must respond to the landscape. Given the expensive nature of the undertaking, the work typically begins indoors at Redmoon Central or another location and is moved to the chosen site later in the process, but it is the on-site work that shapes the end product. “To be on site, fully on site, meaning moving a shop, moving a team, living on water—the list is fairly endless—it’s really expensive” (Mageuri, 23 May).

While Redmoon's spectacle events bear many striking similarities to the spectacles and pageants of Bread and Puppet and In the Heart of the Beast, they are not the same. One of the main ways in which they differ is in the use of objects. In general, Bread and Puppet and In the Heart of the Beast use performing objects as characters or metaphorical personifications of abstract ideas, e.g., Bread and Puppet's Uncle Fatso and In the Heart of the Beast's The Sun. However, because one of Redmoon's main goals is to transform known landscapes into something new and fantastic, their objects are not limited by character. Instead, Redmoon creates fantastical mechanical objects that are meant to amaze and mystify, as in the giant fire curtain from *Sink, Sank, Sunk* or *Twilight Orchard's* bird nests. These mechanical wonders do not necessarily function differently from puppets and masks; just as masks and puppets create an other for their manipulator or wearer, these mechanical objects transform their landscapes into an "other" landscape, hopefully allowing the audience to see it in a new way, to capture a sense of magic and whimsy. The goal is transformation, just as with Bread and Puppet and In the Heart of the Beast, but the path that Redmoon follows is not the same.

According to Cohen-Cruz, "Any given community-based performance is situated somewhere between ritual and art" (81). The ritual end of that continuum is comprised of performances created with a community to serve a "social or spiritual function" (84). Ritual, she explains generally relies on the participation of all being shaped by a skilled leader or leaders. At the art end of Cohen-Cruz's continuum, all the participants must have a set of special skills.

The key purpose of a given performance is at issue: is it most important for the people participating to have the primary experience, as in ritual, or is it better to depend on representation by trained artists, as in art, to get a group's viewpoint

across to a larger audience that may have trouble appreciating a piece with limited artistic craft? (87)

Redmoon's spectacle events seem to slide along this continuum, not really belonging particularly to one side or the other, but not really falling in the middle, either. Rather, the different elements seem to fit at different points. In the community-based work the events and installations created by various community groups would logically fall toward the ritual side of the continuum, while the concluding spectacles that brought closure to the community-based events would seem more appropriately categorized toward the artistic side. The more recent, narrative-based spectacle events like *Sink, Sank, Sunk*, and *Loves Me... Loves Me Not*, having been created by a group of artists, would necessarily fall to the artistic side, but given the audience's often active participation in the performance as they move from site to site, one could arguably place these events closer to the ritual side. Perhaps it is Redmoon's loose collaborative and improvisatory style of performance that makes it so hard to categorize. Perhaps it is Redmoon's efforts to remain in flux.

Each event that we construct, and each time that we work with community members, we're not very interested in repeating a workable model. We're more interested in looking at the last model and seeing what's going to surprise us and the audience, so it generally means taking pretty severe turns each time we generate something. (Mageuri, 23 May)

Is it really possible to call Redmoon's more recent narrative-based spectacles community-based performance? After all, the model of creation doesn't really allow for community input, the spectacles being mainly generated and performed by a group of artists and

performers. Certainly they don't fit into Richard Owen Greer's "of, by, and for," satisfying only the "of" and the "for" portions of his definition. Neither are they "a response to a collectively significant issue or circumstance" nor a "collaboration between an artist or ensemble and a 'community'" (Cohen-Cruz 2). Both of these definitions assume a certain amount of social agenda necessary for a performance to be community-based. Goldbard, however, says "The community artist's task is to assist people in freeing their imaginations and giving form to creativity" (23). Redmoon's spectacles engage in highly imaginative work, "overwhelming a particular landscape with image, story, song activities; ritual, interactive opportunity for audience sort of activity" (Mageuri). In this sense, then, Redmoon's spectacles engage in a celebratory transformation, not just of a landscape or site, but hopefully of every person who engages with the event.

Redmoon's mission is to transform streets, stages, and architectural landmarks into places of public celebration utilizing a unique theatrical language that is capable of speaking across economic, cultural, and generational boundaries.

Redmoon communicates via a language of masks, puppets, robust physical movement, and live music, making work that is accessible by large and diverse audiences. (Redmoon press release)

Redmoon's spectacle events are not created in response to a specific social agenda or to bear witness to a specific social/communal need, rather, it hopes to engage community members in the active process of reclaiming space through the transformation of the space. In this sense, Redmoon's spectacle events do not necessarily fit within Greer's or Cohen-Cruz's definition of community-based spectacle.



Whether it is a box that opens to reveal a hidden world, a puppet that suddenly opens its eyes, or an entire park being filled with hundreds of man-made “bird’s nests,” it seems that transformation is at the heart of Redmoon’s Spectacle, and it is this “language” of masks, puppets and performance objects that is Redmoon’s tool for undergoing this transformative effort. Lasko sums up the use of puppets very well:

Besides being egoless, demanding no benefits, or even pay, they [puppets] are incredibly flexible and never lie [...]. [The puppet] adores collaboration and promotes community... Like having a common friend at a table with strangers, the puppet promotes healthy conversation, demonstrates our differences, and highlights our similarities [...]. They ask that we actively manufacture belief. The puppet relies on the audience’s assistance. Its face never changes or exhibits feeling. It doesn’t glance or transform. Nothing happens without the audience willing it to be so. And this, it seems to me, is the gift of the puppet: the gentle reminder that belief is an exercise, a willful act of consciousness that we can employ to transform our reality. (Liese)

It is this gift, this reminder that belief takes work, that makes it such a powerful tool for teaching and education, for healing and building community. The transformation of the inanimate object into an animate being is the power that allows Redmoon to transform spaces and transform people. By relying on the audience to create the first transformation, puppets include the audience in the second transformation. And, as Lasko said, “When something transforms into something else, it’s just fun. It’s just fun” (Lasko). Redmoon’s imaginative

spectacles have the power to transform landscapes and audiences alike. Its collective, collaborative approach to creating large-scale, community-based spectacle sets it apart from Bread and Puppet and In the Heart of the Beast, giving it's performances a fresh take on community-based performance. Redmoon transforms their audience by utilizing "experimentation characterized by art blurred with life, whose everydayness welcomes broader participation and shapes and expands aesthetic impulses."

## CONCLUSION

Peter Schumann drew on European models of pageantry and mummer's parades as well as a background in sculpture to create Bread and Puppet's political parades and large-scale pageants. Bread and Puppet's contribution to puppetry and spectacle-based work in the United States and worldwide is considerable. The company has been an important force in many different communities, and through touring and inspiration it has spread its message and its Methods throughout the world. Many puppet companies were born out of Bread and Puppet's example, and continue to follow the Bread and Puppet model today.

Building on the example created by Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast has created their own unique approach to community-based performance and spectacle. By rooting themselves in a specific neighborhood, In the Heart of the Beast has created a strong and lasting relationship with community members, engaging with that community through a variety of forms; in particular, the annual May Day parade has become one of the main forms of community engagement. By inviting community members to participate in all stages of the creation of the May Day parades, In the Heart of the Beast engages the community in spectacle making. Thanks to their involvement and persistence, In the Heart of the Beast had helped bring about rebirth, renovation, and renewal in its neighborhood.

From its creation in 1989, Redmoon has engaged in large-scale indoor and outdoor spectacles, parades, and pageants. The experimental nature of its work and its drive to continue to be surprised by the work has led it to create a distinctive style and language. Based more upon European models of experimental, collaborative community-based spectacle than American

models, Redmoon has brought a new way of speaking to the table. The collaborative nature of its work allows it to explore and expand its modes of performance and continue to push the limits of spectacle performance. Its contraption-driven, site-specific spectacles have created an aesthetic and performance strategy that speaks “across economic, cultural, and generational boundaries [...] via a language of masks, puppets, robust physical movement, and live music, making work that is accessible by large and diverse audiences” (Redmoon.org)

“Nothing happens without the audience willing it to be so. And this, it seems to me, is the gift of the puppet: the gentle reminder that belief is an exercise, a willful act of consciousness that we can employ to transform our reality.” This quote from Redmoon’s Jim Lasko sums up perfectly the power of puppets and masks; it is, as he says, not a power that resides in the puppet itself, but in its ability to remind us of the power of our own belief. This is the power that Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater use to transform their audiences and, by extension, their world.

This study has shown that it is possible to identify an American enunciation of puppet and mask based spectacle in the United States in the mid to late twentieth century. These three companies, Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater, utilize puppets, masks, and performing objects to create community-based performance. Drawing from a variety of international and historical models, the three companies have forged three unique approaches to creating large-scale spectacles. Aesthetically, these three companies are very similar: they use large puppets, masks, and other performing objects, using similar materials for the creation of these objects; they work in a variety of environments, engaging with the environment and often incorporating it into the performance; and they incorporate community members into a variety of

roles in the creation and production of performances, from brainstorming to rehearsal to construction to performance.

While these three companies share many aesthetic and formal characteristics, they tend to differ in focus. Each company can be shown to be representative of the three strains of community-based performance identified by Jan Cohen-Cruz.

In the politically active realm of community-based performance, Bread and Puppet uses puppets and masks to provide a loud voice to comment and teach. John Bell says “[...] puppet theater by definition involves a constant sense of separation between performers and their work creates a kind of automatic *verfremdungseffekt*, allowing a perusal of content as political issue,” and according to Bell, Bread and Puppets use of puppets and masks provides “one of the most successful examples of what Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht defined as epic theater” (Bell “Beyond” 39). Bread and Puppet uses the Brechtian nature of puppets and masks to contribute to the political nature of its shows and build community through transformative power they provide.

In the strain of community-based performance engaged in a grassroots expression of collective identity grounded in tradition or place, using puppets and masks naturally extends the collective ability of *In the Heart of the Beast*. Puppet and mask work can be used as a valuable tool for discovering and awakening participants’ own ideas and passions. By allowing community members to speak through an other, puppets and masks give them the ability to speak without fear of repercussion. Sandy Speiler says “[...] we work as midwives, teaching puppet techniques but also teaching the participants how to form their stories from the body of their own

community. Whole neighborhoods come together for the enactment of such local pageants” (45).

Redmoon engages in the strain of experimental shaping and expanding of aesthetic impulses by using performance objects to provide a valuable medium for that experimentation and a participatory model. Puppets and other performance objects are liminal by nature, existing between the realm of the living and the dead. This transitory nature makes them obvious choices for experimentation, because, as Lasko stated: “[...] they are incredibly flexible [...] acrobatic, expressive, and unflappable [...]”(Lasko in Liese). Additionally, performance objects require collaboration from both a manipulator and the audience witnessing the object’s performance. They require an “active manufacturing of belief” on the part of an audience to be effective, thus implicating the audience in their transformation.

Bread and Puppet helped set the stage for community-based performance, laying the foundation for the generations of community-based artists to come. Peter Schumann recognized the power that puppet- and mask-based spectacle brings to protests and utilized that power to create agit-prop theater and parades.

Taking their inspiration initially from Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast has since developed an aesthetic that is completely its own. Diverging from the sociopolitical goals of Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast has instead engaged directly in the rebuilding and revitalization of the Lake Street neighborhood that the company has rooted itself in, personifying Cohen-Cruz’s strain of “grassroots performance to retain and express collective identity grounded in tradition or place.”

Redmoon's collective, collaborative approach to creating large-scale, community-based spectacle sets it apart from Bread and Puppet and In the Heart of the Beast, giving it's performances a fresh take on community-based performance. Redmoon focuses on "transform[ing] streets, stages, and architectural landmarks into places of public celebration" (Redmoon Press Release). Utilizing puppets, masks, and performing objects allows Redmoon transforms their audience through "experimentation characterized by art blurred with life, whose everydayness welcomes broader participation and shapes and expands aesthetic impulses."

These three companies should not be understood as a succession of companies engaging in community-based performance, but rather as three diverging branches of puppetry and maskwork. While Bread and Puppet is the first American company to create political, community-based performance, In the Heart of the Beast and Redmoon Theater have distinguished themselves from Bread and Puppet's example. Bread and Puppet began in the strife-filled streets of 1960's New York City, but soon moved to the tranquil pastures of Vermont, inviting the world to come and witness its spectacles and bear witness to the injustices brought to light by its puppet- and mask-based performances. In the Heart of the Beast, while taking inspiration from Bread and Puppet, instead chose to root itself into a very specific geographic neighborhood, utilizing puppets and masks as a means to engage with community members both as audience and performers. Redmoon Theater, however, did not built its spectacles off of the example of Bread and Puppet or In the Heart of the Beast, but off of a more international model of collaborative, experimental spectacle created by a collective of artists, utilizing wildly fantastic mechanical objects to transform landscapes in and around Chicago in an effort to reclaim them as useable and valued space. Puppets, masks, and performing objects can

open a realm of new possibilities for companies engaged in community-based performance. This study has shown that Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and Redmoon Theater have harnessed the power these objects can bring and used them to engage with audiences and communities around the globe. I have only begun to scratch the surface of the possibilities created by performance objects. There remains a vast field of possibilities yet to be explored. The flexible, collaborative nature of performance object; their tendency for loud and unabashed criticism or praise; their ability to give voice to an other; all these abilities combine to make them powerful tools for transforming the hearts of beasts all over the world.



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## APPENDIX A

Transcript for a phone interview with Frank Mageuri, Associate Artistic Director of Redmoon Theater, conducted on 23 May, 2008. The interview has been partially edited for clarity.

EK: To start with, I'll be focusing on the outdoor spectacles, So can you tell me a little bit about the process, the creating of these?

FM: How are you familiar with Redmoon?

EK: I've never seen any of your shows, but friends of mine told me about you guys and sort of explored what's on the web and what's been written about you.

FM: Okay, well let me give just a little bit of history that will, I think clarify some of the reasons the process of the way in which we make the work happens in the way that it does. Redmoon is almost twenty years old as an organization, and in its first few years began to generate not only puppetry work, which in the way that we've always defined puppetry—mechanical in nature about apparatus and machine and mechanism. So we never were a kind of traditional puppetry company though many people think of us in that context sometimes, but we share, or we've interpreted the definition of puppets to include that of, you know, design-based theater, that happens to use a certain type of mechanical object which sometimes has or had a life-like form which people would comfortably call a puppet. In that first few years, we were doing that sort of work, and while making puppet shows we were also invested in two other public arenas, one being a kind of community-based work which had at its core a kind of ritual ceremony performance goal, and then we were doing a bunch of parade work, kind of celebration-based work—puppets site based objects, mechanical devices that moved. And we then create kind of mobile



events, shows that we could take to city park, public places and other, that were transformative, funny, inspired pieces that used live music, mechanical objects and kind of broad physical gesture, and a little bit of text, to tell story or interpret universal themes, we found the parade activities to be not only incredibly spirited community events, but a great way and place to workshop ideas that would at one point become models of indoor activities. For instance when we made *Frankenstein* inside of Steppenwolf—really our first major breakthrough show, following *Moby-Dick* which was very well reviewed but really gave way to *Frankenstein*—we work-shopped that production outside on the streets in many scales in many forms—site specific, parade, etc..., for over a year before we brought the show inside, and created a kind of entirely different new event. And then people began to think of us both as a kind of spectacle organization, or more appropriately a kind of parade event group, and a kind of collective that made indoor work that included puppets, masks and other.

About six years ago, we decided to commit to the spectacle mission, to do one major outdoor event per year, this is now almost 15 years after making many outdoor events including our most popular, or at least well remembered on some level, *All Hallows Eve* ritual celebration. And that particular event was a deep and long endeavor that would, that we would work with over seven to ten different types of institutions that required service group, social work, schools, whatever, design massive site installations, and then we would create one major spectacle production at the end of the evening event that was mostly based in fire, live music, object. We did *All Hallows* for about eight or nine years. And then moved into the kind of narrative-based spectacle, which began with

*Sink Sank Sunk.* And since then, now have done three more of these kind of huge spectacle endeavors and trying to move to only spectacle work, only massive outdoor events that were as immersive as we could make them, meaning overwhelming a particular landscape with image, story, song activities, ritual interactive opportunity for audience sort of activity. So there's two types of spectacles that are born from this almost twenty year discovery; the first is a community-based spectacle, meaning we're working deeply with numerous community groups to help them develop and author a primary component or numerous elements of the spectacle landscape. And that permits us to take many different routes in image, or the more entertaining, widely received kind of narrative spectacle, narrative being a dangerously deceptive word in this kind of dialogue, 'cause narrative would elicit story but it really is poetry.

So the way that the latter gets generated, which I think is really the one that is of more interest to you—though they are both particularly powerful but very different in the way that they get created—the latter gets created firstly with a site, meaning we choose a public landscape in the city or the surrounding areas that we want to in some way call attention to: we want to exaggerate the already beautiful landscape, or we want to draw attention to the new location that is forgotten. And in that notion we think that we're trying to celebrate that space, draw people to that location, and hopefully render that space powerful again. So a site gets chosen, then generally we begin to think object and design in that space. You can see I'm moving backward already, somewhat. We begin to think about objects in space, like 'wouldn't it be great if there was a giant tower that had on top of it a house that could collapse' or whatever it is as a collective of artists.

The team remains the same primarily in terms of three artistic members and a producer who are at the inside of each one of the productions in some very immersive manner, in some authorship manner, might just be three or four scenes, it might be that I'm designing an event it might be that I'm creating objects, it might be that one of the artistic partners is directing the performance element, it might be that the artistic director is standing far enough away to see the whole of that [...]. The path and roles shift somewhat from event to event based on the site and then the material being used in the production. So if it turns out that we're using the facade of a building as the dominate special effect, that we are excited about exploring is shadow puppetry, most likely I would be called upon as the kind of puppetry person to be closest to that project in design and direction but it would in no way eliminate the other members of having both. So we choose a kind of material, object, design—this is the next step. Then generally we'll either do one of two things: we'll cast a group of people that we really like to work with who will generate both character and story; or we'll generate an extremely loose story, very loose story, a page and half of action—no text, no dialogue, no real character names—A kind of monumental situation in the arch of a theatrical experience, and then we'll cast a group of people that we really like who have the right skills and the right personality then begin to again expand, explore through character, the tale. We usually do that indoors for a little bit of time, and then outdoors at an alternative location, and then move on site for an extended period of time and begin to develop the piece for the actual environment. Sometimes that might be, for instance, *Loves Me Loves Me Not* we moved on to a lagoon and began to develop a show entirely on water. Or we move to the side of

a hill where we begin to develop a show entirely on the side of a hill or into a building where we begin to develop a show in that building, whatever it is, site specific. And then really, the piece emerges from the freedom to play. Strong performers, not actors, necessarily, though there are actors in the event, but strong performers really driven to spontaneously you know, create moments, scenes, sometimes costumes, sometimes everything about a character; I mean, I've performed in shows where I started as a general and wound up playing a doctor, you just really don't know. It kind of depends on, you know, the daily effort of the piece's direction. And then often the artistic director stands far enough away to see what's working and not working, and keep the piece together, and balances out story and image and dream and poetry, so it doesn't become laden with narrative weight and doesn't become so esoteric that it's indecipherable. And often probably the hardest thing about the spectacle creation and the most difficult thing for a performer or even a designer—often which we have tried to be one and the same—I perform and design and direct and we look for people that kind of have all of the interests and skills—the show gets shaped really in about ten days. No matter how long we've had the site, no matter how long we've begun to distinguish the object, no matter how long we've played with characters, something happens in the end where we [...] kind of aggressively develop the piece, because it's really the first level when the site and the character and the object begin to really emerge. Spectacle's really expensive, right? You know, to be on site, fully on site, meaning moving a shop, moving a team, living on water, the list is fairly endless, it's really expensive. So the amount of time on location can be limited by that kind of practical boundary.

We're always looking in the spectacles to have a balance of, you know, I think—and people think about this differently— but a balance of this kind of celebration of universal themes, meaning, we're not adapting necessarily complex narrative dramas, though we have, its not often where we're the strongest. We're strongest when we're thinking simply about the issues of life, death, birth, love, failure [...], it's usually these kind of really base themes and again universal themes, universal meaning, you know, we all deal with them, in some way, shape or another, that really breed the most kind of wild and beautiful events. That's kind of how those are made.

EK: You talked about how earlier in the group's history you worked with community groups and did more of a community-based spectacle. Can you talk a little bit about how you worked with the community, what sorts of issues you dealt with, and then maybe also talk about how those spectacles might have differed from the more recent?

FM: There's one major difference—I'll answer those questions backwards—the one major difference really is that the community events, the spectacles, were often about ritual; they were about voice and interaction, while the more current spectacles are really stories. Big, big, big stories with special effects. So the difference was really tonal. The community events tended to have a kind of sacred quality. They tended to be ritualistic, they tended to be kind of, you know, it's a dangerous word, prayerful or spiritual, without being in any way denominational or religious. Because we don't at all, we're not a religious organization in any way. There's many people in our group who have different religions, but they're varying and hardly ever a voice of a piece. The way that we would work with community groups is we would spend six or ten weeks with the most diverse

collection of population that I could gather. So I would intentionally look for a large social service agency that was providing support to schizophrenics, and then I would find an organization working with homeless people, then I would find an organization working with pregnant mothers, and then I would find an organization working with immigrants—and immigrants being a broad word here, one year it was you know, young Polish students new to America, young Russians new to America, or you know Mexican or Spanish people new to America, you know, its very different groups of people—or you know, a recovery home for addicts and alcoholics. I would try to find really diverse populations, so that we weren't working six to ten weeks in these organizations with all the same populations. So I would start there. Then I would hire, you know, particularly skilled instructors who had a visual arts background, not often in theater, hardly in theater—I would provide that particular support—who would generate image, collage, sculpture, ritual sites, costume, with the particular group. So we would come in with very little idea, we would say the event is something like this: 'We're dealing with the subject of grief. We want to make an installation with you and installations have looked like a,b,c,d,e,f,& g. We don't know what ours wants to look like; let's start exploring materials, ideas, what's interesting to you?' And over six to ten weeks we would support them in creating a concept that we could help them achieve. And then they would become the captains of that site, and each one of those sights would have a route or an audience to travel through and/or an opportunity for the audience to have some kind of exchange with those members. So the individuals who build the sight were really the agents of that location [...]. And then we would design and create a spectacle feature that

was often kind of ceremonial, bombastic, ritualistic, kind of deep and hungry and beautiful that was incorporating or trying to incorporate all of the different themes and subjects that the many populations were thinking about. So we would try to create then a kind of spectacle event that was, for lack of better language, closure to the other sights. We generally go into a community for six to ten weeks, two or three nights a week, and work, build, make things. That's generally the process.

EK: Would community members then be directly involved with the performance of the spectacle?

FM: They would be directly involved with the performance of the sights that led to the spectacle, they would not necessarily be in the spectacle show, though we have had community groups integral to spectacle shows. So for instance in *Sink, Sank, Sunk*, we had a community choir that sang through the piece. And it's hard to, you know... people struggle with our work a little bit because there's not any model. Each event that we construct, and each time that we work with community members, we're not very interested in repeating a workable model. We're more interested in looking at the last model and seeing what's going to surprise us and the audience, so it generally means taking pretty severe turns each time we generate something.

EK: When you're doing these more recent spectacles that are less community-based you say you just cast a group of people you like working with. What's the sort of pool that you draw from, where are these people what's their background? You say they're not necessarily actors...

FM: It really varies. I mean it really, really varies. They tend to be people who have at one point [...] have been either drawn to or trained in physical theater. So that could mean

puppeteers, that could mean clowns, that could mean people who've worked in opera, that could mean people who are just tragically bored with the theater in general who want to try something new, that could mean dancers, that could mean technicians who want to operate their own devices. But it's hardly ever the actor who works with text, though there are those people around, and they have morphed into being really important members of the company when we produce work. But it tends to be, if there was one kind of commonality, it's physical theater people.

EK: Can you talk a little more about the history of Redmoon and specifically the how and why of how you started and where you started.

FM: Well, the how and why of it was three people—Laurie Macklin, Blair Thomas and Clair Dolan—started Redmoon in 1989. Blair was a puppeteer, Clair was a performance artist and Laurie was a dancer. They began Redmoon as a small theater invested in indoor/outdoor, site-specific, non-narrative work. That began to emerge into some story-based effort, the group began to change, some in personal and personality. The how of it I think or the how and why of it really for the material that you're looking at, the spectacle material, was we began to find that we're good at making indoor shows, we're really good at making the epic material work. We're excellent at puppet theater, we're, you know, good storytellers. Most of us are more interested in cinema than we are theater which is why our work is and looks the way it is on some level I think; but the spectacle drive really has remained alive and become fully pregnant because of the group's kind of internal, social impulse about activating public landscape and creating a powerful experience for people in general: audience, community, whatever, about their



neighborhood, location, history, story. So we've remained really true to that particular element especially because we've found such resonance with that activity, and, you know, we realize that very few to no people are doing this sort of work; we're pretty singular in the effort nationally.

EK: I have one more, I think, big question, and that is, if when the spectacles happen has any sort of significance and if it does, if you could sort of talk about that or if it just sort of happens as they may?

FM: Say that again, when does it happen? I didn't understand the question I'm sorry.

EK: Does when the spectacles happen in the year have any significance? Do you try to coincide with certain events, or...

FM: I understand now. *All Hallows* ritual celebration happened on Halloween every year.

Obviously that had significance to... or we were attempting to reclaim Halloween as a ritual evening versus a consumer event. For years we held a production called the *Winter Pageant*. Which was a kind of lo-fi, home grown, rag tag, winter show that would occur November/December because it was the height of Chicago winter, and the show was always something about—we did the show for 12 years—the show was always something about the coming of summer. The breaking of winter and the coming of summer. So those two were locked in. The events that we're making now we hope to do late summer consistently, around a holiday we've yet chosen and possibly a holiday we might create. So currently, the big events are not based around a season or a day, other than we're looking for a season that is weather tolerant, permits the most active outdoor event, and is a time of season when many Chicago people are actually here. So it's a big

question for us right now, 'cause we are trying to locate what we're calling the annual spectacle somewhere late summer but historically the shows like *Sink Sank Sunk*, *Twilight Orchard*, *Loves Me Loves Me not*, Shows that you'll see very clearly on the website, have not been calendar specific [..].

I would recommend, you know, if you're looking to do some research between now and another conversation—I don't know what kind of work you've done around international inquiry into spectacle. Have you done any?

EK: Yeah, I've focused more on American traditions, but I have done some international as well.

FM: Okay, Well I only say that because our model really is an international one. And I could email you, if you email me again, a list of names of groups that you may or may not have come across that could be really beneficial in discussion around how we're shaping our kind of most current, past five year/next five year vision of the of the work. I'll give you those names and then we can talk again next week.

**APPENDIX B**

Transcript for a phone interview conducted with Frank Mageuri, Associate Artistic Director of Redmoon Theater, on 28 May, 2008. The interview has been partially edited for clarity.

EK: You talked about how expensive the Spectacle is, where do you get your funding from, is it in-house, or do you do fundraisers, or do you get grants?

FM: Well, there's a number of practices, the first is of course we attempt to get whatever corporate sponsorship we can get, which can be generally 15-20% of the budget. And then we sometimes have ticket sales, which is a small portion of the budget, because we keep the ticket prices really inexpensive. There's state and federal funding, which is another number in the math. And then there is a large number of donor support. Individual, family, other. So there's really four tiers there. And then there is our annual budget, which attempts to make the whole year even in, even out for production costs. That annual budget is significantly supported by a component of the theater called Redmoon for Hire. Redmoon for Hire—you can find a bunch of information on the website about it, at least visually—Redmoon for Hire is essentially an in house organization that rents materials that we make for spectacle for personal or corporate parties. And also essentially you can buy the artistic team mind/energy for major corporate events. So right now I have one, two... I have four major Redmoon for Hire events that have significantly sized budgets. When they profit, and this is mostly items that either we've made for something else, that we're using for a party, a food service device or something, or it might mean that all four of these events that I have on my plate demand of me massive art direction responsibility, you know going in and altering a

whole warehouse space. And all of those profits go to what we call a spectacle fund, so that when the artistic team earns that money, it goes to a significant portion of the spectacle budgets. So those are the essentially five areas: Corporate, donor, for Hire, and the other two that I mentioned. State/federal and the other, which I'm drawing a blank right now, cause I don't remember the order.

EK: Can you talk about why there was that shift from the *Winter Pageant* and *All Hallows Eve* to the more summer time, narrative based spectacles?

FM: Yeah, it's pretty simple actually. So much of our energy was being expended on those projects. They were becoming more and more... the *Winter Pageant* was becoming more and more misinterpreted as a theatrical event, versus a kind of spectacle ritual. And *All Hallows* was becoming more and more a production event, meaning we were spending most of our time talking about how to manage the audiences, and less of our time about, "what do we want the art to be?" So we decided to take all of that energy and shift it into one clear celebratory event that could really get at the best of all of those things. It was really, in the end... it was purely about energy. How do we focus our energy? How do we give to our audience in a way that is also still very satisfying to the artistic team?

EK: Last time you talked about Redmoon as an international -being based on an international model...

FM: Models. Plural.

EK: Right. Can you explain a little bit about that? And then maybe you can also talk about whether or not you see any connection to some of the American spectacle/puppetry companies like Bread and Puppet, San Francisco Mime Troupe, Heart of the Beast.

FM: Yeah, I mean, first of all, that's a big question, and a really interesting one. The first is, when I say its based on international models, I mean it's based primarily on what we've seen and have as artists at Redmoon the opportunity to engage with particularly European groups, the way that they structure their artistic labors. So for instance, they permit themselves an expended time of exploration and experimentation, they permit themselves to work more boldly in a collaborative or a collective. They are more comfortable with the task of working non-narratively and in large gestural image. They are extremely interested in the site-specific work that essentially is capturing public space in a really dynamic way. So it really is, when we look at troupes like Dogtreope or Royal De Luxe or Group ZUR—these groups that have been really successful in site specific, installation, mobile, mass work—we find not only an inspiration in the kind of work they produce, but in the model in which they work, which is collective, collaborative, over time, experimental, exploratory, that the artistic team has both the skills as performer, director, designer, this is the model I speak of. We can't, sadly, share their economic model, because this is the United States and that's Europe and there's an entirely different kind of funding source and a different public interpretation of the value of arts that we do not share here, in America. Or, *they* don't share here in America, 'cause *we* share it, but that doesn't make a big difference. So there's that.

You know, yes we absolutely have a number of things in common with those groups, especially; I think especially Bread and Puppet. And you know why Bread and Puppet? Because, you know, Bread and Puppet has a very clear political agenda and we have a very clear cultural agenda, and I think cultural and political can be often misinterpreted.

We don't attack exactly political circumstances or situations, we instead really thoroughly look at, you know, human issues. Human issue meaning, you know, fear, loss, the universal themes that I was referring to earlier. And that doesn't mean that, you know, the people who make up Redmoon aren't politically active people, you know, we are, but we're politically active through just a different artistic means. I don't believe that Bread and Puppet is necessarily dogmatic, but I would say that they are far more dogmatic than we are. You know we would never speak against or for a particular political party, we just wouldn't do that. We would speak against or for some, you know, circumstance that is a symbol of a situation. You know, we're working from a point of poetry more than anything else. So we have that similarity. We're looking at cultural subjects; they're looking at political subjects—this is my interpretation of it, that's how I break it down. We have a similar sense of materials, you know, we work sometimes really lo-fi, you know the model has similarities, but we don't work in that same kind of loose public shape that they do. You know, it's really “come one, come all” at Bread and Puppet, which I really admire and love, but we're far more select because the work is really kind of, I don't want to say more focused, cause I really admire what those guys do, there's no doubt about it; it has a more theatrical intention than a pageant intention, and Bread and Puppet really has a strong pageant intention and we have, you know, something different. Different. That probably makes sense to you. We share in common certain things with Heart of the Beast; you know, the parade mentality, but most importantly, the community sensibility. You know, that we're interested in sharing pedagogy, you know, this kind of spectacle pedagogy with numbers of public groups in a deep immersive way, that alters their community through the practice of art making. That is

at the core, a big part of Heart of the Beast's mission, and we share that. And there's commonalties between San Francisco Mime Troupe as well, in terms of kind of performance styles. Kind of really dynamic, hard, aggressive, clown, outdoor, though our material has far less text, often, and is far less literal. So in many ways what we share with all those groups is principle, more than practice. Principle more than performance. All of us together believe in a particular politic of the people. We all believe in a particular sense of that you know, the landscape or city in which we live or upon which we live belongs to us and no one else. You know, these sort of principles which are political in nature we share, we just practice them publicly in a bit of a different way. More poetically, more sideways, more ethereally, less objective. More lyrically is how I think of it. That's what I got for you today.

EK: All right, thank you very much.

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form

Researcher: Ethan Koerner

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Thank you for considering participation in this study, which will take place from May 15th to June 23rd, 2008. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

The purposes of this project are:

- 1) To provide primary research for a Master's Thesis, the focus of which will be:



to closely examine the process and production of Redmoon Theater, looking specifically at the impact masks, puppets, and performing objects have on community based theater. This paper will be an attempt to understand the dynamics and processes of working as an artist rooted in a community, particularly looking at the use of pageantry and puppetry as a means of creating community.

The methods to be used to collect information for this study are explained below. Members and staff of the company who have participated in one aspect or another of the creation, production, or performance of outdoor spectacles or other applicable performances will be asked to be interviewed and recorded. The interviews will attempt to cover all aspects of the creation and performance of spectacles in order to create a comprehensive understanding of the processes and dynamics of the performances. Interviews will take no less than 15 minutes and no more than 2 hours.

If for any reason you do not wish to have your identity disclosed your name will not be used at all in the study or in any supplemental materials used in the study.

If you grant permission for audio-taping, no audio tapes will be used for any purpose other than to do this study, and will not be played for any reason other than to do this study. At your discretion, these tapes will either be destroyed or returned to you. Transcripts of all recordings used in the study will be included in an appendix to the study.

Your participation in this research is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw at any point of the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice, and the information collected and records and reports written will be turned over to you.

You are encouraged to ask any questions at any time about the nature of the study and the methods that I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me; please contact me or my advisor at any time at the address/phone numbers listed above. Further questions or concerns about rights as a research participant may be directed to the Human Subjects Review Board at 419 372 7716.

Do you grant permission to be quoted directly?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you grant permission to be audio-taped?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to the terms

Respondent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to the terms:

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_