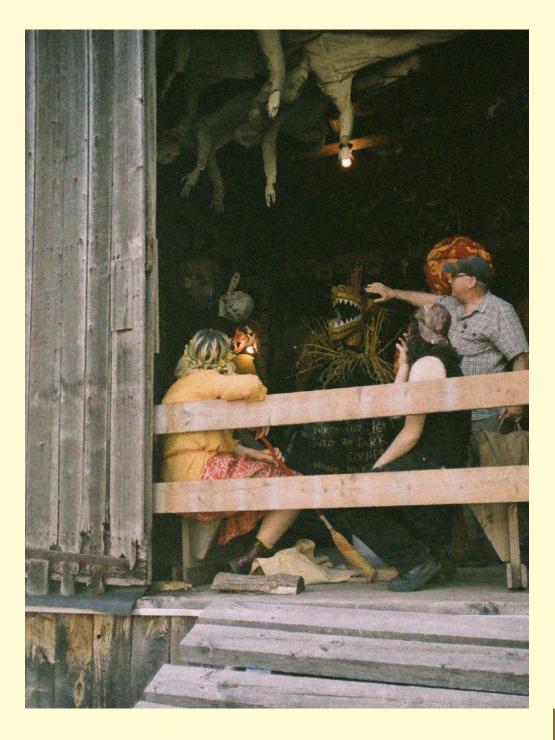
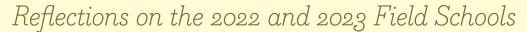
# Performance Creation at BREAD & PUPPET Theater



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Concordia University Department of Theatre Spring 2024

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The Undergraduate Journal of Performance Creation is set in Bodoni Egyptian (Shinntype) and Anton (Vernon Adams).

We acknowledge that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. Tiohtiá:ke (Montreal) is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community. We recognize the Kanien'kehá:ka as the custodians of the lands and waters upon which we work, create, and learn.

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# Performance Creation at BREAD & PUPPET Theater

Reflections on the 2022 and 2023 Field Schools









#### INTRODUCTION

### Mark Sussman Professor • Department of Theatre

t was 2008 and it occurred to me that there might be a good fit between the Concordia Theatre program then called Theatre and Development - now Performance Creation - and the summer internships being run a couple of hours down the road from Montreal in Vermont at the home of Bread & Puppet Theater. Little did we know then that the gang of students who packed up their camping gear, sunscreen, and white pants and shirts into the department's red van would be the first of eight groups (and counting) to travel to Glover roughly every other summer to get their hands in clay, paper-mache, rye dough, and aioli, to try on stilts and giant masks, to sing sacred music in four-part harmony, to put together outfits from the costume room, and to create new shows out of nothing, most of which traveled back to be performed in Montreal.

And little did we know how transformative the experience would be for generations of our students, many of whom have returned as volunteers year after year, some of whom have joined the company as full-time or part-time staff, and all of whom have, in some way, taken the skills and experiences from those intensive weeks into their work as artists, activists, and cultural workers.

Longtime Bread & Puppet collaborator and performer, Theatre professor Ulla Neueurburg-Denzer, took up the baton of leading these Concordia internships for the years 2012, 2014, and 2016, introducing much-needed organization to the planning and coordination of these internships. And it was Ulla's initiative that led Concordia's Faculty of Fine Arts

to bestow upon Peter Schumann an Honorary Doctorate in 2018, leading to perhaps the only Fiddle Lecture held at a Convocation ceremony, on the subject of puppetry, possibilitarianism, and the requirements of "bread and butter life." "Puppet shows," according to Schumann, "are meant strictly for the jolly, or not-so-jolly, dismantling of There-Is-No-Alternative Capitalism, which ruins the planet."1

Schumann meets the new crew from Canada upon completion of campsite setups in the circus field and a brief orientation to buildings and grounds. Sitting around the backyard table where meals are held, Peter welcomes the group with a discourse on the themes and texts concerning him and the plan for work for the coming week. This is woven with weather predictions, a little history of the company, some historical notes on the recipe for the loaf of bread he pulls out of a cloth and begins to slice, and reminders from staff members about upcoming performance commitments that will interrupt rehearsals for the final show, a fast two weeks away. There is also a healthy dose of demystifying media analysis and some rage at the political injustices of the moment.

In early summer, the nights in Glover are still cold, and the numbers of participants in rehearsals, building sessions, parades, and community shows is still modest compared with the late summer months when the numbers range into the low hundreds. In early summer, the texts, themes, and images for the year's projects begin to take life, emerging from Peter's notebooks and painting studio, ready to be animated and transformed by the performing company. The early

<sup>1</sup> Video of Dr. Schumann's fiddle lecture at the June, 2018 Faculty of Fine Arts Convocation ceremony may be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18jYMP5iYPg&list=PLYY1QdNQ7-bDTRM3J-0Pyl93rXGFC1to7&index=183

summer work will evolve into larger scale and much transformed pageants and worldwide touring productions.

To name a few of these productions made with Concordia students: Post-Modern-Society Demon Circus (2008); The Return of Ulysses (2010), adaptation of the opera by Claudio Monteverdi, in collaboration with Festival Montréal Baroque; Tar Sands Manifesto Pageant (2014), as part of the Hemispheric Institute Encuentro, in Parc St. Viateur, Montreal; The Theory of Our Needs (2022); and Mother Dirt Fights the Idiots of the World (2023), the last two performed in Montreal as part of the Suoni per il Popolo Festival at Entrepôt 77.

What follows is a collection of student reflections and images that remain from the 2022 and 2023 "field schools" — a term coined by the university to refer to coursework done away from classroom, campus and city, and here used to evoke a life-changing explosion of creative force taking place under the clouds, skies, and sun of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom at a place known around the world as a centre for socially and ecologically engaged quick-and-dirty performance creation.

#### Student groups included:

(2022) Roxane Bourassa, Khushi Chavda, Rae-Michelle Comodero, Kai Corrigan, Pat Dale, Gio Imola, Jen Jack, Nicole Kritzinger, Vanessa Lazare, Lisa Morrison, Béa Nusink, Anjali Pandit, Elly Pond, Abi Sanie, Marcela Szwarc, Rowena Tam, Anna Tchernikov, and Gaby Torchia.

(2023) Ava Berkson, Sara Capanna, San Choi, Rebecca Creasey, Wren Deslauriers, Lizzie Esses, Gaby Fraser, Schuyler Garfield, Sean Henderson, Madeline Savoie, Stella Mazurek, Callie Meadus, Manon Morin, Ian McCormack, Prerna Nehta, Isabel Walker-Sherman, and Marty Zimmerman.

OUR THANKS to the tireless Bread & Puppet company members, summer staff, cooks, gardeners, and guest artists who made these internships run smoothly and joyfully:

Amelia Castillo, Emma Doyle, Torri Lynn Frances, Maura Gahan, Ocea Goddard, Peter Griffin, Alan Hark, Gabe Harrell, May Hathaway, Tyson Houseman, Esteli Kitchen, Josh Krugman, Erika Landaverde, Hayley Lewis, Elle Love, Ziggy McKenzie, Uriel Najera, Lisa Nelson, Steve Paxton, Caitlin Ross, Raphaël Royer, Hillary Savage, and Icarus Tyree.

Thanks also to Kiva Stimac and James Goddard of the Suoni per il Popolo Festival in Montreal; and to Noah Drew, Chair, Department of Theatre, Maud David Lerebours and Katie Scribner, department staff, Perla Muyal in the Faculty of Fine Arts dean's office, and the staff of Concordia International. •



#### **EDITORS' NOTES**

#### Wren DesLauriers & Madeline Savoie

elcome to the fourth edition of the Undergraduate Journal of Performance Creation (UJPERC). Since 2008, Concordia University has been collaborating with The Bread & Puppet Theater to provide students with the unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the day-to-day activities of the Vermont-based non-profit theatre company. At the Bread & Puppet Field School, students work as a collective, living on-site alongside experienced puppeteers, performers and creators, and participating in activities from choral singing, to puppet-building, show-creation and rehearsal, and finally, performance in community parades, circuses, and a final show. In this environment of constant creation, the process is just as important as the outcome, it's a celebration of artistic expression and the love, passion and community that is created through art.

This being a journal on performance creation, we're sure there will be much focus placed on the 'puppet' aspect of our experiences in the coming pages. Before we proceed, however, we would like to give some attention to the 'bread.' The bread in question is a dark rye pumpernickel, made from a mixture of sprouted and hand-ground rye grains and baked for hours into a brown brick sturdy enough to dent a car if thrown with enough force. It is the food of the people. Frequently accompanying the pumpernickel is Bread & Puppet's hand-mashed aioli, a simple spread of garlic and olive oil, emulsified using a large mortar and pestle.

While it took us a few days to adapt to the taste, by the end of our time on the farm, we had not only learned to appreciate the combination of dense, sour rye and the sharp tang of raw garlic, but we had come to conceive of it as an effective metaphor for how Bread & Puppet's performances operate. With its harsh critiques of American exceptionalism, war profiteering, wealth inequality, and the prison-industrial complex (to name just a few), we would liken Bread & Puppet's leftist politics to its bread: perhaps difficult to swallow for the uninitiated, but intended above all to nourish and strengthen its audience. At every turn, however, the political messaging is paired with larger-than-life characters, absurd situations, and humorous turns-of-phrase. This is the aioli; bright, sharp, and full of flavour. It is in combining these things that Bread & Puppet thrives, employing an ethos that Peter Schumann refers to as "Radical Nonsense". Pair politics with absurdity, and they both become more accessible. The bread keeps you sharp, the aioli helps you get it down, and the combination makes for a radical tradition of artmaking that has stood the test of time for sixty years and counting. It has been such a joy and privilege to experience this tradition as theatre students, if only for a couple of weeks.

So often as artists, it becomes too easy to forget why we first fell in love with creating in the first place and instead start chasing unrealistic expectations of perfection which ultimately disappoint us when expectations don't meet reality. At the Bread & Puppet farm students reconnect with the roots of artistic passion, focusing on the joy of creation, the sense of community, and art's potential to make real-world change. In this edition, UJPERC aims to highlight the works of our fellow students, giving them a space to reflect on Bread & Puppets' impacts on their artistic practice. This collection of selected essays offers various students' perspectives on their time at Bread & Puppet, exploring the practice, history, politics and day-to-day activities of the sixty year old theatre. •







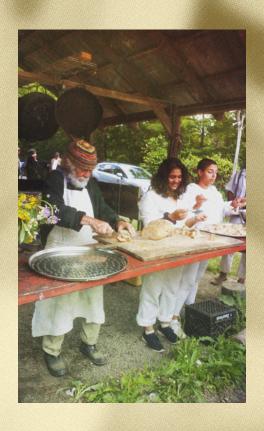














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## TAKE NOTES....



Stella Mazurek

ake notes, because stuff disappears" you told us from day one. Luckily, pen and paper have been a permanent extension to a limb of mine before I even learned my letters. I have a shelf at my parent's house

in B.C. bursting with dozens of journals, each one overflowing with scraps of paraphernalia and notebook pages. A chronic journal keeper since as far back as I can remember, taking notes is my lifeline, habitual. What follows are some of my reflections, efforts at documentation, and attempts to process the oxymoronic ethos of Bread & Puppet's unique and powerful legacy.

"Wow, that's intense," my friend Renée said as she swallowed the complimentary slice of bread and aioli after our Montreal show. I realized then and there, fingers dripping with garlicky oil and sticky with rye goop, that if I had one word to sum up the whole experience, it would be 'intense.' Adjectives fail me when I try and describe Bread & Puppet to anyone; because any adjective could describe Bread & Puppet. It is the culmination of everything, everywhere, all at once being processed into an absurdly accurate interpretation of our world. My roommate visited the property for a brief fifteen minutes on her way through Vermont. She watched us run our sketches a couple of times. Afterwards, I ran up to her in patched overalls and bug bitten arms, eager for an outsider's impression of our creations after nearly two weeks of minimal contact with the rest of the world. How did we fare? "It's post-post modern," she replied. I'd say it was an accurate interpretation..

Boredom does not exist at Bread & Puppet. It simply cannot survive in these conditions. There is always something that can be found to do. With a seemingly endless supply of spaces, shacks, shops, rooms, barns and buses, it

The farm is a catalyst, a crib to nurture any artistic, political and/or revolutionary form of art.

suits all stripes of creativity. The farm is a catalyst, a crib to nurture any artistic, political and/or revolutionary form of art. Ideas and projects impregnate this cool mountain air. The breeze is thick with them.

The siesta periods became one of my favourite times of the day, for they encouraged wandering, discovery, dusting off. It seems to me you can sit anywhere on this property and have sustenance for thought for hours on end. One morning, I awoke at 5 am to a splendid early sun. I sat in front of the upper kitchen bookshelf for a good forty or so minutes, simply reading over the vast diversity of titles and authors. Whether contemplating the titles on a pêle-mêle bookshelf, pondering the expanse of a glowing meadow, or digging up treasures to model in the magical costume room, there is endless fodder for the imagination in every nook and cranny. There is the stillness of the sewing room in the mornings, the fire-warmed hearth of the ballroom on a cold evening, and the spectacular retrospective of the museum's collection. There's a garden, a print shop, a clay yard, a paper mâché cathedral and a dirt floor theatre. Each space radiates with a certain shared, non-religious service to the gods of creativity. A community of souls entrenched in supporting an anti-capitalist vision. At the centre of it all: Peter Schumann.

He is relevant, charismatic, in touch, and full of daddle deedle doo (proper spelling pending). Peter gives toddlers a run for their money in the playfulness department, and tests adults in the reality check department. In his presence, I feel I am witnessing one of the geniuses of our time at work. It is incredible. Like what I'd imagine it to feel like to be in the presence of Keith Haring drafting a painting, bell hooks writing an essay or Alfred Hitchcock producing a film. The sheer breadth (pun intended) and scope of Peter's life's work--which is added to every day--is unbelievable. Masks larger than Ford pick-up trucks, thousands of lino and masonite cuts, trunks upon bins of painted bedsheets, and

Each space radiates with a certain shared, non-religious service to the gods of creativity.

boxes overflowing with absurd zines dubbed 'chapbooks.' There is seemingly no end to this man's creativity and ideas. Somewhat of a prophet of the performing arts, he seems to be following an almost otherworldly vocation. He has been going at this pace for 60 years and counting and, at 89, shows no sign of slowing down. For Peter, every moment is an opportunity for art—big or small. A spare minute is a chance to invent a dance to usher in the next activity, every morning meeting a chance to sing together, each afternoon the chance to improvise a new scene for a play. He is spirited and hilariously spontaneous. He is committed to humanity.

I hadn't done theatre since middle school, and the performance creation workshops were undeniably challenging for me. But part of Bread & Puppet's beauty is that everyone is qualified to learn. Peter has a unique way of making his philosophy digestible and I rapidly picked up all sorts of tidbits in the process. For instance, that the abstract must always be confronted with the ordinary; that action is best separated from and preceded by contextual narration; that small, isolated movements become meaningful when performed in complex costumes. As we are reminded by an inscription on the upper kitchen's wall: "When in doubt, be precise," as Anne Bogart said.

One wonders how Bread & Puppet is possible. It seems too magical to be true, too zany to be sustainable, too radical to be financially viable. But it is the power of collective living in action that keeps everyone going so healthily and happily. I currently live in an 8-person collective in Montreal and grew up in a family that valued the locally-sourced and small-scale. Even I was continuously struck by the ingenious reuse and commitment to self-sufficiency demonstrated on the property and in the creation of the company's art. The cardboard our groceries came in repurposed into paper-mâché, the bathtubs of clay sourced from the acreage's creeks, the saving of every piece of metal and tree branch for a future project... the list is endless in its resourcefulness and inventiveness.

At Bread & Puppet, it is the values and the visions for a stronger, more attentive world, a better future, that unite. It is Kropotkin's ideology of mutual aid in action. It is the courage to dare to change the world. And for all these reasons and many more, I am grateful to have had this experience.

I will end with a quote from Marc Estrin and Ron Simon's book, *Rehearsing with Gods*: "YAY. They can't be serious. Oh but they are. YAY. We are not blameless." •



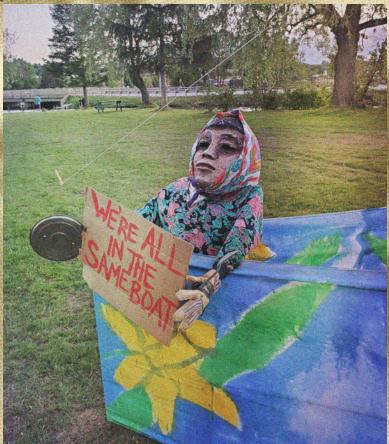




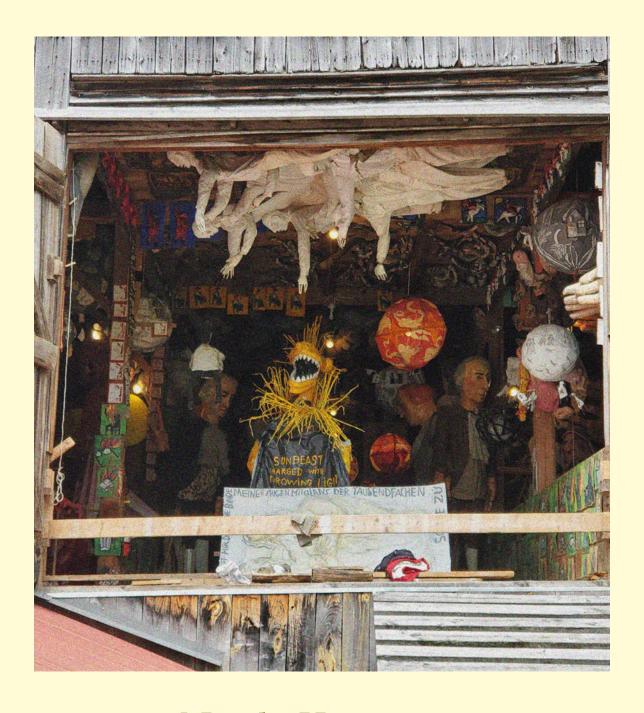








## PETER SCHUMANN HISTORY & INFLUENCES



Nicole Kritzinger

eter Schumann was born in Lüben, Silesia, Germany, in 1934. As a child, his family was forced to relocate due to the climate of World War II.

Avant-garde theatre and puppetry were introduced to him at an early age, and another puppeteer, a family friend named Max Jacob, played a significant role in his early life. In 1961, Peter and his wife, Elka Leigh Scott, came to the United States.

In 1963, Peter and Elka founded the Bread & Puppet Theater in the Lower East Side of New York City. They started doing shows for children featuring hand and rod puppets, with subject matter concerning "police and other problems of the neighbourhood." In 1970, they relocated to Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, where they worked as theatre-in-residence on a farm.

Over time, the practice evolved to include more intricate performances, subject matter, and pieces. They incorporated sculpture, music, dance, and language to diversify projects, and the puppets became larger. Performances often took place on the streets. Bread & Puppet Theater transitioned to a 140-year-old dairy barn located in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont in 1974, which was repurposed into a museum. Today, they make money selling merchandise and with shows that take place in the United States and abroad.

Schumann's diverse artistic influences include the aforementioned Max Jacob, a German puppeteer known for his inclusive performances for both children and adults, which could have inspired Schumann's own cross-generational appeal. John Cage, an avant-garde composer, experimented with prepared piano and silence as a compositional element, potentially influencing Schumann's unconventional musical techniques. Additionally, the work of Merce Cunningham, an avant-garde dancer and choreographer

renowned for pioneering choreography using chance operations in movement selection, likely kindled Schumann's fascination with structured improvisation.

We can see the influence these artists had on him as he continued his later projects. The "Cheap Art" philosophy is one of Bread & Puppet's core tenets. It started when Schumann, the company, and friends painted pictures on scraps of masonite, cardboard, and newspaper with slogans and statements about art and Cheap Art. They were in their old school, and they drove around and sold the pictures for 10 cents to 10 dollars. Art is for everyone!

Moving on from their philosophy to the puppets! Bread & Puppet Theater became known for using large, 5-metre tall rod puppets manoeuvred by 6 people (March). There was one rod for the head, a rod for the costume, and one for each hand. These puppets were used to protest

# The aesthetic revolves around this concept of Cheap Art.



against the Vietnam War and to perform in "The Cry of the People for Meat" (1969) and the nuptial dance of Mother Nature and Uranus (March).

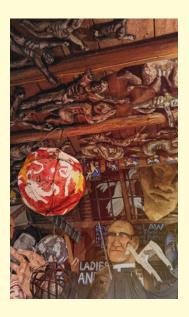
Large-scale puppets became a staple of the company. They were used in their earliest political street parades in the streets of New York in 1965 and later as part of the anti-Vietnam War movement (Bell). A performance titled "Fire" a work about the Vietnam war, performed at the Nancy Theatre Festival in France, was critically acclaimed and skyrocketed the previously unknown company into international standing. It earned them a decade of touring in Europe and afar.

The pieces they make are not subtle. Back in 2017, they put on "Insurrection Mass with Funeral March for Rotten Idea" at the Donald Savage Theatre in Buffalo. The performance is described as the "passions and politics of our capitalist culture" (Dabkowski), the performance is a critique of an unnamed political-economic event, heavily implied to be the culture around Trump. The performance involved "secular scripture readings, a fiddle sermon, and hymns in which the public is invited to participate," as well as set pieces such as "Mongolian hordes, singing toilets, and stilted flying businessmen" (Dabkowski). Local Buffalo artist and performer

Andrew Ross describes the company as unique for their lack of ego on stage. "The aesthetic revolves around this concept of cheap art" (Dabkowski) The puppets are made of easily found material, and the theatre is accessible to everyone.

Numerous people have been inspired by Schumann; to name a few, there are Amy Trompetter, Massimo Schuster, Paul Zaloom, Julie Taymor, John Bell, Sara Peattie, Pedro Adorno, Clare Dolan, Stephen Kaplin, and Roman Paska. We can observe the work of Paul Zaloom and Julie Taymor to see just how far Schumann's work has reached.

Paul Zaloom, an American showman and puppeteer, began his career with Bread & Puppet Theater in 1971 before transitioning to solo performances like "Fruit of Zaloom" in 1978, which pioneered Object Theatre. Known for his comedic and satirical style, Zaloom's solo acts incorporate various low-tech media such as toy theatre, ventriloquism, and shadow puppetry alongside work in film and television. Julie Taymor, another influential figure, known for her work as a director, mask maker, and puppeteer, draws inspiration from Bread & Puppet. Taymor's diverse portfolio includes directing operas, theatre productions like "The Green Bird" and Broadway's "The Lion



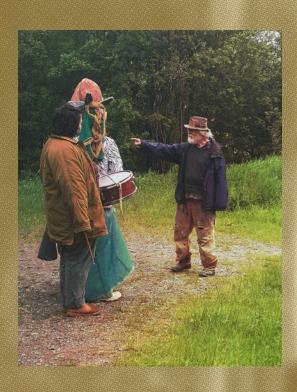
The puppets are made of easily found material, and the theatre is accessible to everyone.

King" as well as films like "Titus" "Frida" and "Across the Universe" all of which incorporate puppetry and masks into their visual storytelling.

Peter Schumann's life and influence are undeniable. The performance style, the way they only take what they need, and the way they give the audience what they need in return have inspired many artists for years. Through supporting their community and fostering new talent, let's hope we can see their impact for generations to come. •















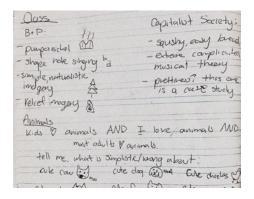
## WHAT IS SACRED?

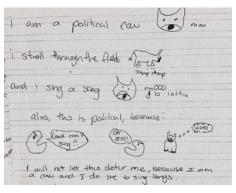


Lizzie Esses

pon arrival at the Bread & Puppet farm, I was instantly intrigued by Peter Schumann's references to Christianity, specifically as an acknowledgement of communal power and as commentary against elitism. The company's emphasis on community over governmental and economic hierarchy is more explicit than its religious references, particularly illustrated through the ritual of offering audiences sourdough rye bread baked by Peter and the company after each performance. The sourdough rye holds significance to Peter through its history as food for common people in Europe, eaten for its density and accessibility. This ritual, along with the company's focus on natural imagery, recycled materials, and anti-war sentiments distinctly accentuates Bread & Puppet's communal ethos. However, many underlying references to religion, particularly Christianity, highlight this ethos as well.

I first noted this trend on our second day of rehearsal. Before instructing us in the creation of clasping paper mâché hands, Peter puffed a large cigar and gave us an impromptu lecture on Matthias Grünewald, a German Renaissance painter known for religious imagery. He primarily crafted dramatic altarpieces, with biblical scenes including crucifixion and resurrection. Peter didn't seem too interested in the Christian tradition of the work, but emphasised that Grünewald painted more realistic hands than any other Renaissance artist. We spent time poring over a book of Grünewald's work, taking mental note of the veins and the shadows in the hands specifically. Eventually, we crafted the paper maché clasped hands and fixed them to a large bamboo pole, which we spun together in a circle and tilted side to side in our final Mother Dirt performance. Peter, in interacting with religious art, decided to focus on its emotional impact with





Selections from Lizzie's notebook

an emphasis on the clasping hands and human connection rather than on the Christian nature of the work.

As we continued our apprenticeship, I discovered religious references outside of rehearsal. One of Bread & Puppet's most consistent rituals is Tuesday night Shape Note singing, a choral practice with slightly different notation than conventional written music. The ritual was encouraged by Elka Schumann, Peter's late wife, and the music is commonly included in Bread & Puppet's performances. Shape Note night is a community event, with regular attendees from neighbouring areas of Glover. From the first song, I noted that Shape Note music is distinctly Christian, with lyrics commonly praising God or depicting biblical scenes. The book of music used for these nights, originally compiled in 1844, is astutely titled "The Sacred Harp," with many community members owning personal copies. However, Bread & Puppet staff made sure to make multiple disclaimers that the

Peter, in interacting with religious art, decided to focus on its emotional impact with an emphasis on the clasping hands and human connection rather than on the Christian nature of the work.

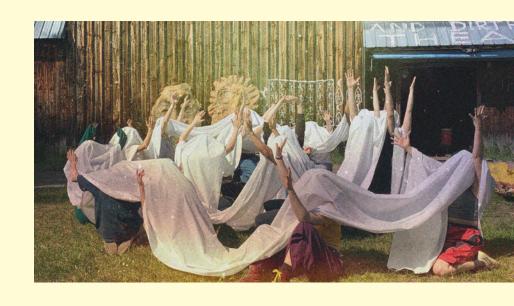
company does not use this music for worship and that the community was focused on the act of reading and singing the music rather than using it for religious purposes. Once again, Christianity was referenced in a historical yet non-reverential manner. Staff went on to clarify even further that Shape Note notation was created specifically to be readable by the common people rather than educated musicians, which is why the Schumann family values it so deeply.

Once I caught on to Bread & Puppet's frequent historical references to uneducated Christians, I found greater meaning in the title "Paper Mâché Cathedral/Dirt Floor Theater," a large wooden barn that serves as an indoor performance space. As expected, it has a dirt floor, but also includes walls and ceilings covered entirely in protruding pâper maché art. These pieces primarily feature humans and animals, centering their connection to one another. At first I didn't think too deeply about the theatre's name, thinking it was simply a playful title. However, imposing the name "Cathedral" on the space was thoroughly intentional, though it is not used to practise Christianity. This is evident through Peter's frequent references to the paper mâché art that lines the walls as "reliefs," a term used for three dimensional art on a flat surface. This art was commonly used in Christian cathedral spaces, particularly for non-literate Christians that relied on imagery to understand biblical stories.

In simple terms, Peter makes the deliberate choice to centre the voices of the historically underrepresented and under-documented common people, especially when referencing religious artwork. His rejection of institutionalized worship is a political message, implying that he cares more about humans than he does about hierarchical power in any form. However, his continued reference to this historical work is a reminder that the voice of the people is powerful. Religious practices are dynamic proof that spoken word, visual art, and written notation cause us to connect to one another and gain power as groups. In a time where religion is frequently politicised, Peter encourages today's common people to use this communal power, frequently dedicated to religion, in a manner that references humanity's connection to the Earth instead. He spreads this message loudly with his words and his actions, trading worship of deity for quotidian worship of plants, food, and animals. Even in day to day farm chores and the sharing of daily meals, Bread & Puppet's ethos remains firm, strengthened by a communal energy one could only describe as sacred. •







# THE FIRST RULE THAT STOOD OUT TO ME...



Anna Tchernikov

he first rule that stood out to me at Bread & Puppet was that Peter Schuman disliked 'canned music'- as in, the playing of sold and packaged music that was not made by us. The solution was to produce all the songs and music ourselves. This idea quickly revealed itself as the way of life at the theatre, where all physical and artistic products were to be made by us. The thesis was one of organic creation (from farmed food, to helping out with cooking meals, to executing concepts for shows that would come to be presented within a few hours, and then the group would start a new project right away). I am exhausted after the experience, not because the demand of creative and physical labour was too much, but instead because I never could've imagined so much personal and artistic growth could happen in just two weeks. I would describe my experience at Bread & Puppet as a kind of 'creative oversaturation' serving as a bottomless source of inspiration. Moreover, the immersion in nature and emphasis on sustainable living and building was executed beyond my previously imagined realm of possibility.

The history of Peter and Elka Schuman, as well as the theatre itself, was presented not only through oral history, but through the physical evidence of decades of effective anti-war, anti-capitalist protest art, which was carried out by a long-lasting, ever-changing community of locals and theatre members. The physical evidence of effective political theatre was previously unknown to me, and completely revolutionized, in my mind, what one theatre collective could do while grappling with mass events and changes in culture and society. Furthermore, being presented with a theatre company that was funded solely by the people and not by a single corporate interest was a novelty to myself, who had previously only been surrounded by and taught

Bread & Puppet defines community theatre for me, as they not only observe, but actively participate in cultural discussion and events.

about theatres with commercial strings. Bread & Puppet defines community theatre for me, as they not only observe, but actively participate in, cultural discussion and events. The emphasis on accessible theatre, education, and political discussion through long-term community building is a model I want to take as the ideal, to help create and maintain in the arts as a whole.

It was difficult to be thrown into very fast theatre-making right away, but it proved useful as we did many performances almost immediately, and were able to put on a full-length show and open the Bread & Puppet Museum to the public. Rehearsing and performing quickly, often in costumes that limited vision and hearing, while synchronising choreography was tough. It was a challenge I had to overcome for our memorial day parade performance. Knowing that it is possible to do public performance work despite those

limitations taught me to go with my instincts and not worry about messing up. (If I did, it became part of the performance, which I am not completely used to doing in other theatre settings.) It was a consistent factor in the performances that there would be an element of the costume or prop that would make it difficult to see or move, but learning to rely on group movements, and intuition was a useful skill to develop. Such performance relied heavily on trust, which is a good practice to maintain. It was a privilege to learn, live, and perform with Bread & Puppet, and to hear first-hand Peter Schuman's political, artistic thinking, as well as learning greatly from the staff that directed us on stage and in Shape-Note singing. •



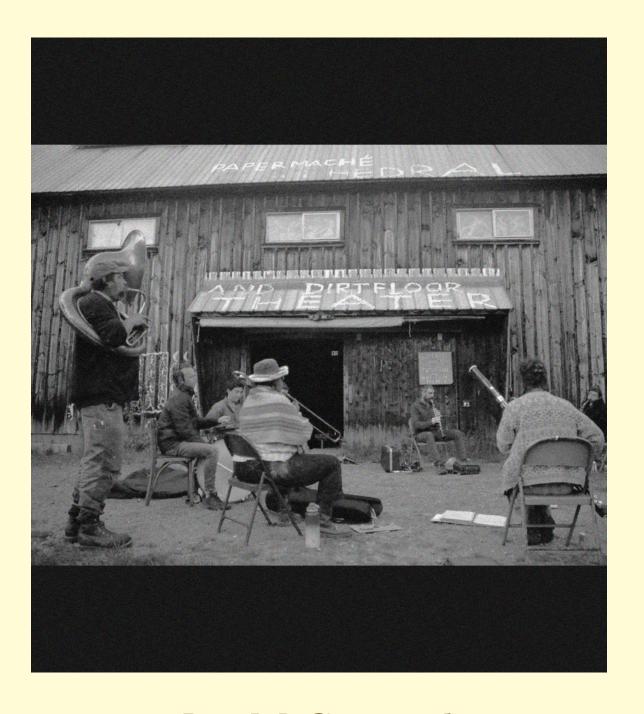








# THE ECOSYSTEM OF BREAD & PUPPET



Ian McCormack

hen reflecting on my last two weeks, living and working at the Bread & Puppet Theater company in Vermont, I can't help but think of the Rosy Retrospection Theory (Mitchell & Thompson).

This cognitive theory states a phenomenon in which moments or memories are remembered/ reminisced in a more positive light than what took place in reality. This is not to say that my time at Bread & Puppet wasn't positive; not at all. As I walk around the busy street of Montreal, having to pay my Hydro bill and participating in the hectic world around me, I can't help but wish I was in Vermont. I'm a small-town kid, who grew up in a town quite similar to rural Vermont in Northern Ontario. It felt weirdly like home when I was there, except now with the radical and political art practices that I have been longing for since I was a kid. But as I begin to reminisce and gain nostalgia for this time I can't help but feel a bit torn. Was it all positive?



The most intriguing part of Bread & Puppet for me came from its communal living configuration. One conversation that really stuck out during the experience was when Peter discussed the creation of the farm, its humble origin as a dairy farm, and its inspiration from Elka's grandfather's involvement in the Back to the Land movement. When I think about the way life is run at B&P, I think of it as an ecosystem: everything is meticulously done to serve a purpose; it's almost utilitarian in that way. The food is almost completely made from locally grown produce, and the boxes that the food comes in are used for paper mâché for the puppets. So much of the land and its materials are recycled into the art. Similarly, there's almost the same approach when it comes to the people living on the farm. Everyone has chores (whether that be weekly or daily) that they do to keep the ecosystem running. And the artists aren't just puppeteers; they are clay makers, gardeners, cooks, or in charge of recycling. Everyone contributes to living off the land instead of living against the land. This is the type of artistic company that I would love to one day replicate; of course, with a few suggested changes...

A large focus of the Bread & Puppet theatre is its focus on political theatre and street performance, two aspects of the performing arts that are crucial in my own practice. The idea of making theatre of a certain political relevance, and efficiently getting it in front of the eyes of the people is something that Peter Schumann's style of puppetry and activism does really well. Using puppetry as a way of educating the people through the power of Lubberland's nonsense and other mixtures of absurdity and reality, was really inspiring. But sometimes it did feel like the efficiency of making art began to overlook accessibility. For the most part, I agreed with Peter's takes on socialist politics; however, where

we differ falls on the appropriate way to address accessibility and consent in the theatre workplace. I really saw a company that was heavily divided between problematic traditional theatre work practices and a young group of full-time staff trying their best to add inclusivity into a flawed structure. I think the most jarring moment was when the staff puppeteers apologised for the actions and then reinforced that: "That is just the way it is." Even after a long talk on consent, as a neurodivergent artist, I and many of my peers were uncomfortable with the verbal communication and the system of appeasement found its way into the rehearsals. There were a couple of moments when I had to step out from rehearsals because I was getting overstimulated. It seemed

I think of it as an ecosystem: everything is meticulously done to serve a purpose; it's almost utilitarian in that way.

that the precedence of the company always happening this way means that its leadership lacks accountability. When Peter says something that I view as outdated or factually incorrect, like that the invasion of Ukraine is an American proxy war, there is no dialogue of constructive criticism, disagreement or education. The lack of accountability and the current culture of the 21st century curses this political company, blocking them from evolving, even if it does continue to tackle modern-day political issues.

That being said, I will definitely be coming back to volunteer to give it another chance. It's bittersweet because there are so many parts of it that I loved and memories and friendships that I made there that will last a lifetime. I know for sure that a communal living theatre company has a place in my future, in a theatre collective of my own one day. And for the negative experiences, I'm going to try to use them as a learning experience in what types of practices work best for me. Overall this field school was an experience I will cherish, I learned so much about puppetry creation as a new form of performance, discovered stilt walking, and even got to learn a little bit about myself. •













## MAKING THE MOST OF LITTLE THINGS



Manon Morin

uring and after my apprenticeship, I heard many people using the idiom "make the most of something" in relation to Bread & Puppet. Therefore, I tried making the most of the little time we had. Not having access to the internet at Bread & Puppet was refreshing. Back home, I often feel like I do not have time to create, read, walk around, or socialise. I realised that I do, in fact, have time, but poor time management skills. I spend too much time on my phone, distracting myself from stressful situations instead of doing things I enjoy. I was surprised during the first week when several people told me how they did not have time for themselves and to create. We indeed had a tight schedule, filled with intense activities, leaving us tired at the end of the day. Afterward, we surrounded ourselves with people, socialising to escape the apparent lack of individual distraction and privacy. I found distraction and privacy by working on personal projects in places like the sewing room, the clay yard, the paint shop, and occasionally the print shop. As someone who prefers working backstage, creating with my hands was especially important to me, since the show and the rehearsals took so much place during the apprenticeship. While I did not have time to finish most of my projects, I carved some wood and linoleum, sewed miniature pants and a shirt by hand, made some paper mâché hands and head for a puppet, painted prints and rocks, and drew. Like the people from Bread & Puppet, I made the most of the little materials they had.

Showing interest provided me access to some tools, materials, and spaces. I discovered printmaking and while I didn't have access to the printing press for personal use, I was lucky to try it. I made stamps from wood that came from the farm's exterior walls. I own a few wood carving tools and I count on continuing this new hobby.

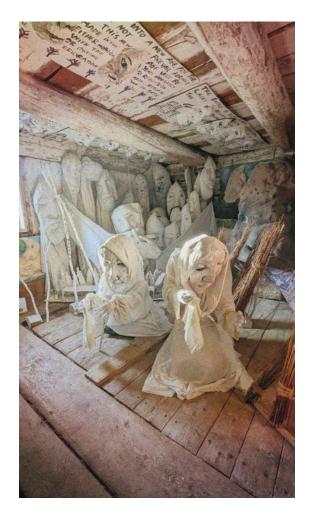
# I learned to use what was available, and I hope I will be able to settle for less.

I also earned some cheap techniques I will apply, like glue made from boiling water and cornstarch and ripping wet cardboard to smooth the edges. I learned to use what was available, and I hope I will be able to settle for less, recycling objects to create some puppets. I was expecting to see and use more puppets, even create or repair some, like masks or giant puppets for characters to which we give life. It was disappointing not getting more opportunities to work on the puppets hands on, but at least I got to confer with passionate people and work on my own puppet.

I often did not get what we were supposed to be doing, so I had to make the most of the little understanding I had. It was difficult to talk to stones and pretend to eat dirt or to fight the air while screaming at the top of your lungs. Most of the skits were absurd. Decisions were irrational or modified at the last minute. Because English is my second language, sometimes I did not comprehend what people, especially Peter, were saying. I sometimes had to step back, watch the others perform, or pretend I understood. I asked questions, sometimes unaware of their

I figured the puppets in this process were not made of cardboard and paper mâché but rather of flesh. The director expected them to move by themselves but was surprised when they didn't move like he wanted.

inappropriate honesty because I needed a clear intent for why I was doing something that did not make sense. I figured the puppets in this process were not made of cardboard and paper mâché but rather of flesh. The director expected them to move by themselves but was surprised when they didn't move like he wanted. Because Bread & Puppet is composed of a community, I expected the group to create the performances. While students invented skits, I felt limited because we had to use chapbooks, banners, and puppets invented by Peter. Most of the skits did not make sense, at least to me, because of their absurdity. If they didn't have a message, why were we not creating our sketches out of nothing? I regret not asking what people grasped from the skits. I still will gladly return as a volunteer to Bread & Puppet, where I would have more freedom to work behind the scenes, on other aspects of the farm, rather than directly in the performance. The memories of Bread & Puppet are already fading away, but I will make the most of the little remaining. •





Papier Mâché Peter by Manon Morin















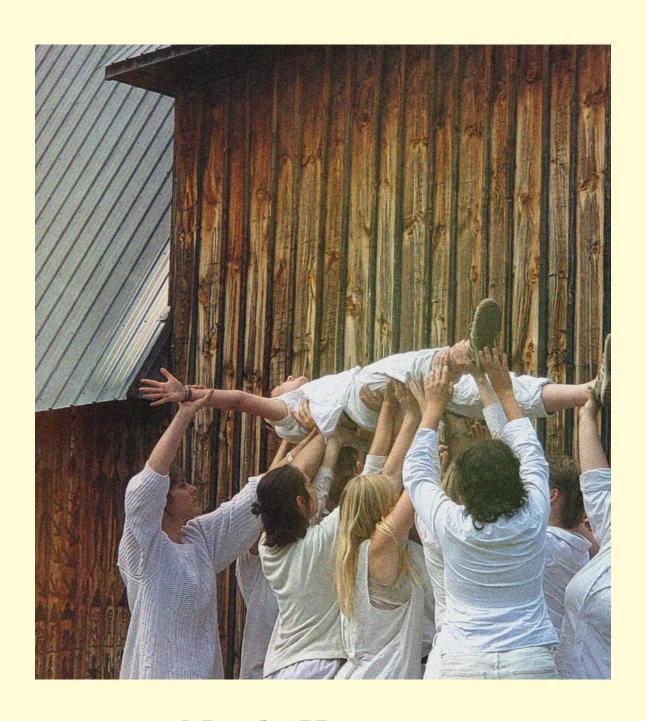








#### I WAS UNSURE WHAT TO EXPECT...



Nicole Kritzinger

was unsure what to expect when we first arrived. Would there be instruction? Would we be creating? Would we be performing? I was pleasantly surprised to learn we'd be doing all of it. It truly felt like we were members of something special, immersed and active in whatever was being made. I felt like I'd been there just days and also years at the same time. Moments where it was go-go-go I was swept up in it all, then during the evenings when we had a moment of down time I'd ask myself what just happened?

I enjoyed working together with everyone. Taking and giving feedback when needed, being able to step back when someone has a certain vision they want to see realized, while also being able to voice for yourself what you'd like to see happen, is so different from working solo on a piece.

Rehearsal that first week, to be part of the Hardwick Parade, was amazing. I loved being part of something, moving around as a group yet having the freedom to decide what action I wanted to take. I could always hear the band a distance away and I'd feel it. I've never been a performer, so when I imagined performing it was in front of a stone-faced audience who would scrutinise my every movement. That Saturday, standing in line waiting for the parade to begin, was one of the most nerve-wracking moments

of my life. Yet when it began, it all went so fast, and in contrast to my perception, it was entirely the opposite. From what I could see behind the soldier mask, adults and children alike were smiling or laughing or oohing and awing every time we so much as moved. The smile I got when I high-fived a kid at the end of the parade is a moment I won't ever forget.

Being part of a rehearsal for the final show, but having to sit out for the last 4 days with a bad foot gave me the unique chance to watch what we'd been doing from an outsider's perspective. Being able to anticipate what move would come next, writing out notes or movement orders down, then looking them over during the next rehearsal made me take a closer look at what we'd been practising and just how much thought went into everything.

The pacing, the beats in the music, watching it all become tighter and more polished as the days went on is something I didn't experience while performing since everything went so fast. As a bonus, I also enjoyed playing amateur photographer.

Getting to make a puppet with everyone the first week was one of my favourite moments of the trip, as well as learning where all the material comes from. We were told that Peter gets his clay from the land. I saw my classmates use a scythe to harvest grass that would be dried

I loved being part of something, moving around as a group yet having the freedom to decide what action I wanted to take. I could always hear the band a distance away and I'd feel it.

into the hay that's mixed into clay. I saw the staff make their own glue, I saw us separating cardboard, and saw Peter paint without references. Aside from the physical art, there were the dances and choreography. The motions were easy movements, some synchronised and some not, to a simple drum beat or toot of a horn. It was a way of curating a performance I had never seen before, but would love to do again. Performances were in front of a house, or a museum, or their own backyard, and there was an audience! There is something much less intimidating about grass compared to a stage, yet the feelings of being a performer and performing are still the same, which says a lot about how easy it is to transform a space with intent alone. •





# THE THEORY OF OUR NEEDS (June 5-6, 2022)





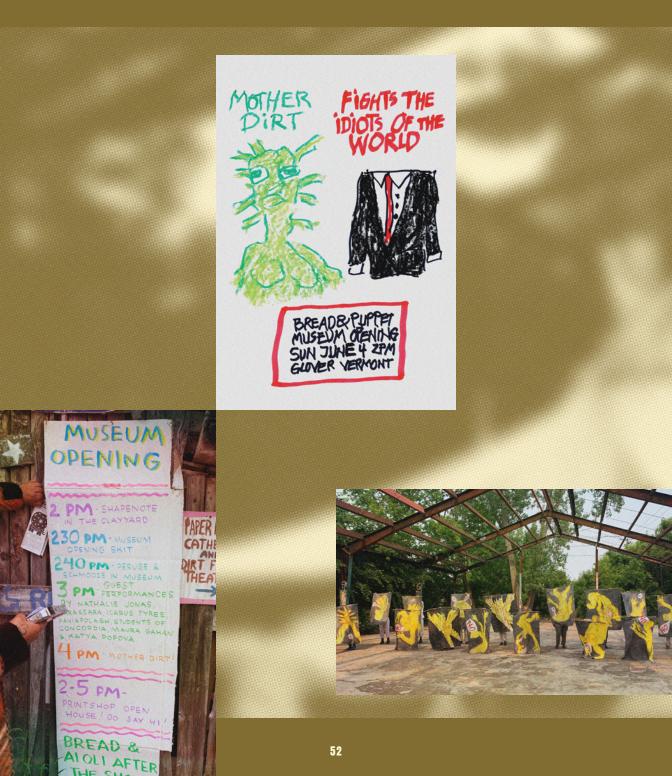






### MOTHER DIRT FIGHTS THE IDIOTS OF THE WORLD

(June 4-5, 2023)



THE SHOW







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