The Post-secular Movements of Bread and Bodies:
Peter Schumann's Pageantry

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In Peter Schumann's pageantry, divine icons intermingle with animals and archetypes, and new gods burst on the scene. Set amidst the pastures of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, participants animate paper maché figures and perform communal actions, spangling the fields in their sweeping choreographies. The pageant provides a framework for volunteers to move through and feel out the forces that shape their modern American world. It places participants inside actions rich with ambiguity, beauty, history, and horror. Spectators watch their fellow citizens navigate the pageant at a slow pace out of step with modern life. There is time for reflection, for juxtaposition and resonance between elements, for the weather to change. Language and narrative ebb, as the pageant clears space for enchantment. I propose that we consider this communal, affective space in a religious light, and that we view Schumann's radical pageantry as post-secular.

Pageantry as a form has quasi-religious roots reaching back to Medieval street processions and the American pageant movement. In fact, Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater makes its home in Vermont, not a hundred miles from the site of many historical pageants of the early 19th Century. I will soon contextualize Schumann's unique pageants alongside these two antecedents. Given that pageantry dates back to a time before what we now call the religious sphere was clearly circumscribed, it is only natural that religiosity cannot be separated from the smell of paper maché or the sound

of voices congregating. On the other hand, the Bread and Puppet Theater is not rooted in an overt, existential belief system.[1] Do these pageants possess religion's mustard when there is no shared platform of metaphysical belief among spectators? Among participants and community members? Might not Schumann's performances be a mere riff on Christian practice? How might riffing religion and ritualizing performance allow Schumann to put religion's tools to new political purpose. This essay sifts through these questions of sacred and artistic embodiment, tiptoeing behind Schumann's tight-rope walk along the lines between between immanence, transcendence, and live art.

I aim to unpeel how Bread and Puppet's pageants engage a participant's body, opening an affective space outside of rationality, which allows for enchantment, private spirituality, and collective mobilization. Any investigation into the corporeal appeal that Schumann's unique pageants share with religion ought to begin with an account of the bodies and actions at play. To this end, I share my own experience of the 2013 Bread and Puppet pageant.[2]

The Pageant Field

The cumulus clouds blossom prominently above an audience of a few hundred. Spectators are spread across a grassy hillside facing the twenty acre pasture where the pageant will be performed. A three-story female puppet has been erected, towering over the audience serenely. Her creased, paper maché face and over-sized hands are held up by long poles; her body and arms are broad strips of white fabric blowing in the breeze. A burst of hay decorates her head—hair or perhaps a crown of thorns. To many she might read as an ambiguous or ominous figure; to regular Bread and Puppet participants like myself, she is recognizable as a Goddess, the recurring character of the opening act of *Our Domestic Resurrection Pageant*.[3]

Seventy-one year old Peter Schumann stands among the spectators. He sounds two bugles energetically, announcing the start of the pageant. A line of participants forms before the audience. Like all Bread and Puppet performers, they wear white shirts and pants. One by one they place cardboard hats on top of their heads, and begin to march in a snaking pathway across the field. In the distance there is a frenzy of flag bearers, who circle each other at full run. The flags host images of boots printed in black ink. The flag-bearers gather in a clump, toss their flags in the air, and fan out about a hundred meters from the audience. Each performer hoists a giant puppet from hidden in the grass; the puppets are two-dimensional business men with black suits and stark, white faces. The puppeteers pilot the puppets' arms and legs, flapping the limbs up and down.

Two ten-foot boots enter from the left, each operated from behind by a single performer. As the two puppeteers run in front of one another, the boots appear to stride across the field. Trailing behind the boots is a masked figure pulling a wooden wagon. Meanwhile, the thirty marchers have convened as a chorus and begin singing a cascading canon of "freedom". The boots stop before the line of business men, and there is a clang. One by one each of the business man puppets is laid down on the wagon.

Another throng of participants has assembled beside the pine forest to the left. These performers crouch beneath three black tarps, and reveal three cardboard bird heads. The tarps transform into the bodies of massive ravens. The puppeteers squawk and flap the broad, black wings, moving the gigantic birds across the pasture. The birds stop, and the puppeteers conceal the raven heads beneath the undulating tarps. Tentatively, ten-foot human faces emerge. Each face is half-eclipsed by giant hands, which are sculpted onto the paper maché form such that the character is forever peering between his fingers. The black

tarps that comprised the raven bodies now read as cloaks out from which these despairing faces peek. The faces tilt back and forth for a several minutes, before a single human hand extends from beneath the tarp. More bare hands follow; they are the arms of the performers held high with fingers splayed. Gradually the black tarps slip away and the performers are revealed. With a neutral dedication, they hoist the giant maché faces above their heads and stack them atop the wooden cart. The cart, now laden with the inanimate forms of the dopey business men and the ominous faces, continues its course across the pasture. Some participants recede to the farthest ridge line to take up props and puppets before the next sequence. Others prepare the bread and stir the garlic aioli for distribution following the pageant.

Sacred Leanings

Christianity has always saturated Peter Schumann's work, prompting me to wonder what tools religion lends us as artists or as onlookers. The company gained its name from the practice of serving bread following every performance, an act easily linked to the commensality embedded in many religious rituals if not directly to Christian communion.[4] Schumann's works span a vast range of media and scale, from two-person street shows to *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* in which hundreds of participants performed before thousands of spectators. Alongside his pageantry, Schumann's art includes parades, plays, dances, masses, cantatas, circuses, books, chapels, and prints. I mention these myriad modes, because, like his pageantry, many of these structures are forms reclaimed from Early Christianity.

Many of Schumann's earlier works played on overtly Christian themes. These include *The Christmas Story, The Great Passion, Eating and Drinking in the Year of Our Lord, The Bible, Hallelujah, Domestic Resurrection Circus*, *St. George the Dragon Killer,*

and *Stations of the Cross.*[5] Frequently recurring puppet figures from these performances, most of which are housed in The Bread and Puppet Museum, include the Apostles, the God Head, Oscar Romero, Virgin Mary and other religious iconography. In the past decades, the religious framing of Schumann's works has been more oblique. However, he continues to direct post-modern masses, to perform "fiddle sermons", and to integrate Christian vocal music in many of his performances.[6] He continues construction on a paper maché cathedral at the company's home in Glover, Vermont. As in many of Schumann's gallery installations, the walls of his cathedral are lined with rough paper maché renderings of naked figures, huddling groups, beasts, coffins, and giant faces peering down on the public.[7]

Schumann explains his religious sourcing in a provocatively basic way, stating "[religion] doesn't deserve to own those terms and those imageries that they classify as being theirs. . . they stole them from other earlier religions. Secondly, after the Enlightenment, they certainly don't deserve them anymore."[8] One might easily take such authorial declarations as evidence that he aims to lampoon Christianity. However, I proffer a more productive connection between the power of communal religious practice, and the political imperatives of Schumann's pageantry.

Throughout the 90's the pageant served as the culminating act of the annual event entitled *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus*. Since then, smaller pageants have been performed weekly throughout the summer. The links between his pageants and religious practice are many. As with his other works I described, Schumann's pageants frequently host imagery identified with Judaeo-Christian religion, such as gods, angels, and hell. There was a forty-foot Mother Earth puppet, as well as a Mammon effigy, an emblem of greed from the New Testament, ceremoniously burned at the culmination of each show.

His pageants employ devices common to Christian ceremony, such as processions, choral interludes, and the breaking of bread, all three of which we see in the 2013 pageant I have recounted. A final commonality with religion is found in the pageant's epic narrative scale. There are domineering figures, deities that shelter cardboard populations, and phoenixes that rise from the ashes of puppet wars.[9] Ultimately, I find the tightest bond between these pageants and sacred action to be their shared tactics of ritualized performance, alogical appeal, and enchantment.

Ritual and Spiritual

Schumann's pageantry provides loose choreographies that structure corporal experience and representation in order to plumb issues of existence, morality, and society. Recent religion scholars investigates similar actions as essential to the formation and effect of religion. This performative approach to religion is captured early on in William Robertson Smith's assertion that action, rather than belief or myth, is the fundamental principle behind religion.[10] In the last half-century, a productive strain of religion and ritual studies has been forged by such scholars as Peter Berger, Victor Turner, and more recently, Robert Grimes, Richard Schechner, Catherine Bell, and Lance Gharavi. I bring up this scholarship, because I see Schumann's pageants reinforcing an idea through performance what scholars have probed in writing: that action and belief are mutually constitutive.[11]

In this essay I avoid describing Schumann's pageants as spiritual, in favor of exploring their quasi-religious nature. The term religion is one that meets resistance when suggested to many Bread and Puppet regulars. Spiritual is certainly a safer word and spangles the pages of performance studies articles and health magazines alike. The religious/spiritual divide is primarily an American one. Generally, spiritual might be said to originate in the individual, in contrast to religious, which is commonly tied to a

collective experience.[12] Schumann's pageantry is a system of intentional, communal actions, which open access to individual, but also potentially shared beliefs among participants. They distill and reflect aspects of the macrocosmic world we inhabit. To me, *spiritual* art lacks the tools to tinker with this broader topography of politics, history and morality.

Ritual is another fraught term that I must address; it remains at the nexus of many scholarly investigations into religion, theater, and dance.[13] Schumann himself objects to the term *ritual*. He views performances like puppet theater as creative, exploratory acts requiring constant receptivity and responsiveness of their performer.[14] To Schumann, ritual is timeless and separate from individual expression; it is an action one meets, enacts, and serves.[15] Rather than expounding Schumann's and others' definition of ritual, I propose that we consider the Bread and Puppet pageants as "ritualizing". This lens will ultimately illuminate how these pageants are at once quasi-religious and post-secular. For a fertile definition of "ritualizing", I turn to religion scholar Robert Grimes:

> Ritualizing transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places.[16]

Grimes makes a verb of the noun *ritual*, thereby highlighting that *ritualizing* is a process involving a certain approach and intentionality, rather than merely the act of carrying out a repeated action or *rite*. Without reducing ritual to its nebulous, colloquial use, it allows us to recognize that ritual may be religious, quasi-religious, or completely secular. I will briefly account for how Grimes's definition clearly inscribes Bread and Puppet's pageantry. Parsing his words will also provide a framework for my exploration of how Schumann's pageants invoke the potential embedded in religious rituals.

First, to deconstruct Grimes's definition, the pageant participants are "animated" in

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that they move and are moved by the choreographic structures.[17] Grimes uses the term "formative gestures" to signify how ritualizing action allows for a "non-discursive, bodily way of knowing".[18] I will pinpoint abstraction, parataxic juxtaposition, and chance as tactics of Schumann's pageants, which deny cerebral understanding, thereby emphasizing the embodied modes of understanding that Grimes describes. The "receptivity" required by Grimes's definition alludes to the necessity of a subject for whom the ritualized action is executed, be that an audience or ancient ancestor. The Bread and Puppet's pageants unfold in the face of myriad receptive subjects: the audience seated on the hillside, the participants themselves, and the "gods" invoked by the action.

Grimes insists that ritualizing action occur during "crucial times". By *crucial*, Grimes refers to the requirement that ritualizing actions cross tenses and disrupt the normal, linear experience of time. I see this *crucial* time in the pageant's is slow and deliberate execution, which stands in contrast with the racing pace of modern life and media. Furthermore, pageantry and puppetry are ancient forms whose histories I will soon bring to bear. Ancient structures and pre-modern aesthetic combat contemporary challenges, namely, the ethical crises of American society and Late Capitalism. These ritualizing facets of the pageant imbue the action with religiosity. This religiosity channels the power that many participants and spectators may have experienced in sacred contexts. It also highlights the powerful role that individual action and collective representation have played throughout the history of Christianity in contrast to the reductive, dogmatic view of both Christianity and political theater.

Schumann's pageantry makes one aware of religion's absence from progressive and leftist politics. These movements, of which Bread and Puppet is a part, tend to position

religion as a mere obstacle in the road to an egalitarian future.[19] I regard these pageants as radically post-secular, because of the contrast that they provide to this surrounding landscape. The pageant's religiosity launches a two-pronged attack: it challenges a politically oriented audience to reengage religion and it calls upon Christianity to resurrect its corporal, communal, civic roots in the face of contemporary, ethical struggles. Schumann's challenge is summed up in his dramatic appeal for puppetry to "give purpose and aggressivity back to the arts, and make the gods' voices yell as loud as they should yell?"[20]

Pageant History

It is useful to consider aspects of Schumann's quasi-religious pageants in the context of the Christian pageantry originating in the cities of Medieval Europe in a time when most religion was, after all, "quasi." During the Middle Ages, the lines between religion, science, and magic were faint.[21] In a continuation of earlier pagan processional traditions, masked characters and puppets rolled down the streets on wagon stages from which civilians gave speeches and enacted symbolic dramas. There were Greco-Roman figures, Griffins and Biblical figures, as well secular, allegorical characters: Justice, Industry, Hope, Humility, Commerce.[22] Through the 17th Century the melange of pagan, classical, and Christian iconography continued to expand. These revelatory, rebellious pageants are what Schumann identifies as "Christian and also very anti-Christian" art forms.[23] Much like the Saturnalia festivities of Roman Antiquity and contemporary Carnival in the Catholic world, these pageants are a double-edged sword: on one side celebrating the religio-political establishment, on the other side undercutting the authority of Church and State.

The other contextual touchstone is the American pageant movement of the 1900's, a

thread explored by Bread and Puppet Historian John Bell.[24] Pageantry faded in Europe during the Age of Reason, and only took root in America tentatively. As the new country sought to galvanize its own history, pageantry resurged.Towns would gather to re-enact founding legends and local lore. The historical pageants mobilized local citizens to embody and connect with past events in order to model hopeful, communal futures.[25] As W.E.B. Dubois notes in a leaflet for his New York City pageant "portraying deeds and thoughts of by-gone day, (pageants) inspire the young for unselfish work in the future."[26]

These pageants offered a nostalgic appeal for earlier, simpler times, and following the Second World War became chiefly associated with anti-modernism. Schumann's work shares such critique of technology and modernity. Interestingly this mistrust is also shared by fundamentalist movements among many religions, including Christianity— another strand in the post-secular braid binding Schumann's art with religious conviction.[27]

Anti-Modernity

Schumann's pageants place contemporary issues within the context of historical themes and macro-narratives. In a Church service, this context is frequently rooted in Biblical tales or ecclesiastical traditions. For Schumann, who is deeply committed to Marxist ideology, this context is frequently tied to events in our modern, capitalist age.[28] Schumann describes, "Since we are not Christians, since we are not Jews, since we are not Buddhists, since we are Modern people, these are our propositions for the Gods that we have. These gods act on our lives."[29] Schumann depicts these symbols of capitalism, such as the towering business men in the 2013 pageant, as effigies alongside other divine and natural figures. He places humans at the feet of these figures: in reverence of them, in defiance of them, supporting them, or destroying them.

We see Schumann's transposition of religious schema onto socio-political schema most clearly represented in the Convention of the Gods, a structure repeated across all of Schumann's *Domestic Resurrection* pageants of the 90's. The Convention of the Gods is a choreographic structure in which what Schumann calls the "gods of the day" enter into the field.[30] In the 1993 pageant, these puppets were Wind, Hope, Phobia, Termination, and Progress identifiable by the hand-painted signs that hung from their necks.[31]

I suggest we consider the Convention of the Gods in the long lineage of religious self-critique, notable in both the Hebrew Bible and Quran. Both texts encourage a singling out of lesser gods: the forces that act on us, which we might unwittingly serve.[32] By calling them forth in effigy, the Convention of the Gods holds these entities accountable. It places the grand powers of god, government and nature in the hands of citizens. Pageant representations like these evoke the Early Christian world, in which belief, politics, and magic were more enmeshed and readily explored through puppets, props and communal movements. They challenge us to consider what is lost in a secular society, and what forces move in to fill the spaces left by gods.

Pageant Bodies

To continue exploring how Schumann's pageants prove simultaneously religious and revolutionary, I will provide a deeper account of the bodies and movements in the pageant field. Alongside the aforementioned divine elements, Schumann's pageantry depicts recognizable archetypes, such as the business men puppets I described dancing in the 2013 pageant. Many of these figures recur in multiple Bead and Puppet works: cardboard populations, garbage men, skeletons, domestic women. There are elements of nature: the giants ravens flapping through the 2013 pageant.

Finally the pageant displays what I call *untethered* figures. These are the ambiguous and evocative elements that resist clear reading. The 2013 pageant abounded with such figures: the masked cart operators, the bodiless faces tipping back and forth, the pair of giant boots striding across the landscape. Another example is found in the culminating moments of the 2011 pageant, in which the participants hoist maché body parts with ropes affixed to the tops of giant posts. To the drone of hums and chants, they gradually assemble a nine-headed five-story figure from these hanging body parts. The giant being is at once fragile and terrifying, pieced together by humans it now towers over.[33]

The flux between these three kinds of elements—divine, archetypal, and untethered—result in a destabilizing slippage of signification. As a Bread and Puppet regular notes, "sometimes a white bird, is just a white bird,"[34] These diverse elements complicate how we read into the performers' bodies, which are essential to the pageant's representation of citizenry and human agency. In the 2013 pageant I described how the team of participants piloting the giant ravens emerges from beneath the black tarp. In an instant they shift from hidden operator to lead actor. Such unstable performativity is a hallmark of post-modern theater and puppetry, but also worth relating to the performance modality of religious ritual in general. As Ronald Grimes posits, "to ritualize is to deny or hide the discrepancy between front and back-stage behavior."[35] Performers' bodies traverse the spectrum of meaning; they can be mortal or divine, individual or collective, abstract or politically located. To me this is a critical message in the pageant production: people make this world, and people have agency.

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Parataxis & Ambiguity

With the end of the immense, annual pageant tied to *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* in 1998, and the move toward smaller, weekly pageants, long-time structural staples faded.[36] There are no longer rituals like the Convention of the Gods or the mammon burning. The recurring meta-narrative of convention, crisis, battle, resurrection, which typified his *Domestic Resurrection* pageants, has given way to more ambiguous imagery and thematic arcs.[37] Schumann's recent pageants are loose, with multiple overlapping elements and only loosely prescribed choreography. The action is rehearsed lightly and as separate components, rarely in its entirety. From week to week throughout the summer months, Schumann makes tweaks and additions to the choreography.

In his pageants of the 2000's, sequences of images carry allegorical meaning, but only occasionally indicate a linear narrative. Again recalling the 2013 pageant, the giant boots land beside the buffoonish business men puppets, and the puppets are then pulled down and piled on the wagon. Yet the cause, effect and motivation are ambiguous. The ravens crossing the field may read as ominous, but it is unclear what is to be made of their transformation into anguishing faces. In keeping with his roots in both German Modern dance and New York's post-modern performance scene, Schumann presents simple actions without further representational explanation or performative emphasis.[38] John Bell describes how this encourages a spectator to bear witness without seeking cerebral understanding.[39] The pageant organizes time for the individual to connect with nature, to observe, and wonder. Elements are frequently placed side-by-side without coherent connection. This is the parataxic aesthetic of Schumann's pageantry: meaning is left in the laps of the onlooker.

The timing within the pageant is also intentionally loose. As a Bread and Puppet

puppeteer, I remember peering over the hillside with my co-performers, approximating when to begin our dance. In the 2002 pageant I methodically moved several tall figures across a distant ridge line for the entire duration of the pageant. I operated on a timeline independent from the other action. Unlike with his other performances, where Schumann can be a detail-oriented stickler for timing and choreography, he rarely interferes with the details of the movement in his pageants. He lets the performers propose movements and modalities during rehearsals, and lets them find themselves within the choreography during performance.[40]

Participation and Performance

Schumann's pageants, like Medieval and American historical pageants, blur the line between spectator and participant. Similar to rituals like parades or Christian masses, participants may simultaneously perform and witness the action. The slow pace affords performers a chance to observe as they wait from their choreographed positions. Another element bridging actor and audience is Schumann's use of choric choreographies. Early Modern dance and Expressionist dance artists exploring choric work, such as Mary Wigman and Hanya Holm, understood that by limiting the action to simple gestures and placing bodies in tight groupings, dancers were able to feel out the timing and modality of the choreography in real time. We see such choric choreography in Schumann's 2013 pageant with the tight flock of flag-bearing dancers or the mass of puppeteers hidden beneath the fabric of the raven body. The performers rub elbows, which is no small thing. Bread and Puppet participants experience their own body transfigured and blended with the elements of a world they have collectively rendered. They feel one another as dancer, spectator, bird, god, hay bail.

A pageant is enacted by amateurs—Ordinary People in Schumann's lexicon—rather

than paid professionals. In order for American historical pageants to serve as expressions of locality, it was essential that the participants be locals. The same is true of Bread and Puppet's participants, a substantial portion of whom are community members from nearby Vermont towns. Participants and observers are people of all origin, age, and ability; there are local families, international tourists, college students, kids, elders, and long-time regulars. This amateurism stems from Schumann's conception of pageantry as an action created "in the space that is available, using the people available, particularly for the length of time they are available."[41] This participatory nature may be seen in the context of ancient, non-Western, or folk performances. However, it is also indicative of Schumann's postmodern approach to performance, which for the past three decades has been at the leading edge of contemporary trends in relational performance art.[42]

The mode of pageant performers is one of dedication to the object, not surprising given its roots and reliance on puppetry. I have described this neutral, task-oriented performativity as "ritualizing", and therefore evocative of religious action. It also supports a political message of collective agency and mobilization. Puppeteer Peter Hamburger identifies a moment that exemplifies this performance modality during the *Domestic Resurrection* pageants. After the participants encircle the Mother Earth puppet, they split, careening off in all directions to take up their puppets and props in far corners of the pageant field. As they purposefully fan across the landscape, civic collaboration is on display.[43]

Schumann believes the power of pageantry is in how it enables citizens to step into the dramas of which they are always already a part, but are rarely in control of. He describes of his earlier street pageants and manifestations:

> When I gave them a puppet they were actually very happy to take it, because we were all so upset by that war [Vietnam]. The expression of just holding up a sign or shouting a slogan is a very minor expression of anger, whereas when [you] are inside a whole reenactment … participating in that and your whole

concentration and creative attention are needed to do this, it is a very big difference of commitment.[44]

I propose that we consider this performative commitment to the action in light of the religion scholarship to which I alluded earlier, which posits action as formative and central to belief. The pageant begs of the participant, "Do and you might understand." I continue to stress the corporeality at the root of Christianity, because I believe that ecclesiastical doctrine and politics frequently overshadow the centrality of shared, embodied action.[45] I hold that, as Blaise Pascal posits, one may kneel and believe that he has knelt because of his belief.[46]

The pageant provides choreographic structures that help participant and observer alike to construct their beliefs about our current world. They are, as religion scholar Peter Berger puts it, "world-making".[47] In taking to the field, Bread and Puppet participants enact the forces that act on their lives, the "gods of the day".[48] In political terms pageants are an expression of human agency, in religious terms, I propose that we consider them a manifestation of divine immanence.[49]

Immanence

Schumann's spectacular pageants are distinctively anti-spectacular. They are born of sticks, cloth, clay, flour, and Ordinary People. The art is striking in its simplicity and resourcefulness. Puppeteer Peter Hamburger refers to this as the "shock" of materiality.[50] *Doing much with little* is a shared strategy among pagan, folk, and post-modern aesthetics. The raw palpability of the maché figures and non-virtuosic choreography gives the sacred puppets and their preternatural movements heft. The metaphysical is brought to the level of the palpable, digestible as bread.

The bread, broken following the pageant, is the most obvious and examined

example of *divine immanence*; it riffs on the Christian Eucharist. By wedding the making of bread to the making of maché, and the eating of bread to the watching of art, Schumann puts art and spirituality on the shared level of fundamental need. The bread breaking and bread baking implicates the *here* the *now* as critical partners in uncovering the all-powerful forces that govern us. In the Christian lexicon, this metaphysical handiness is summed up in the term *divine immanence.*

The pageant's portrayal of divine immanence is not merely meant to satisfy a wholesome notion of inter-connectedness between man, nature, and gods. Schumann's cardboard trees bear political fruit. They reinvest the fields and forms around us with spirits. When a grove of paper maché trees creeps along to the harmonic singing of its puppeteers, the natural, pagan roots of pageantry resurface. Such animism is natural to puppetry, a form filled with the sort of idolatry so concerning to early Protestants. When divine *transcendence* is unchecked by *immanence*, God is positioned as divorced from our material world. This was a central point of debate in the Reformation, with the Royal Society championing the idea that God was "out there". The view percolated down the Christian world that God had merely set the universe in motion, and would let it run its course. With God removed from the stuff around us, nature could be claimed as "natural resources."[51] Consequently, humans were free to plunder on their own terms. Schumann evokes the idea of divine immanence as a Christian trope, putting it to political use to further his eco-activist agenda.

Transcendence

Schumann harnesses chance as a tool for metaphysical insight. Much like the happening artists with whom Schumann associated in his early years in New York, he develops and rehearses the separate elements, but relinquishes their actualization to

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the performers with minimal interference. This is a brazen riposte to the regimented choreography of bodies during his German childhood, where mass embodiments routinely presented ideals of order and discipline. The pageants are unpredictable; they unfold at the whimsy Vermont's temperamental climate. The capricious environment, amateur participation, and parataxic choreography of the pageant collide with conventional Christian values of purity, order and infallibility. There is a divine sloppiness inherent to his pageantry that intentionally leaves space for the ephemeral and, I suggest, the preternatural.

To take a leap further I propose that the moments Bread and Puppet historian John Bell describes as an audience "sitting without understanding" occupies the same space as religious transcendence for the pageant-goers.[52] Liturgical art forms, as pageantry was originally, have a history of evoking such transcendence. One example is the architecture of Gothic cathedrals, which were designed with such verticality that sitting beneath the vaulted ceiling would lead one to ponder the ascension of the soul. Peter Schumann's sweeping, transient imagery evokes the same awe. However, while the Cathedral architecture renders the human diminutive, the pageant cultivates a more humanist breed of transcendence. His choreographies provide opportunities for enchantment, but ensure that the human trace is always present: the puppets display their hand-crafted origins, and the puppeteers wear conspicuous whites.

Art and Progress in a Secular Age

The traditional religious structures and folk aesthetics found in Schumann's pageants evoke an earlier age in which the world was not clearly divided into secular and religious spheres. The boundary between *secular* and *religious* arose during the Enlightenment.[54] The Age of Reason, for all of its scientific and humanist advances, pulled the

rug out from under pageantry and other such pagan practices. Relics, idols, and bodily expression were under pincer attack from Protestantism's cry for cleanliness, and rationalism's mistrust of anything un-provable.[53] This fissure divorced magic and superstition from the now squeaky-clean religion, and constructed a moral order of society originally intended to reflect gods will. As religion scholar Charles Taylor describes, the *social imaginary* had changed, allowing for God to be something believable or not.

The secular age was constructed through practices when the "social imaginary", being the world-view on which theories and societal practices are founded, was taken over by a moral order offering clear binaries between natural and super-natural, public and private spheres, and the distinction between magic and religion.[54]

To Taylor, the modern world of rationality, science, and politics is marked most brazenly by the pervasive disenchantment of its peoples. I borrow Taylor's claim that we are in a secular age, particularly when considering Bread and Puppet's situation in America, in Vermont, and within the broader liberal, political protest movement. His definition is salient because it highlights the underlying mindset that allows for the aforementioned distinctions.[55] It is important to note that the notion of a secular age does not preclude the presence of devoutly religious communities or widespread religious practices. It is possible that many spectators and pageant participants hail from different religious faiths and self-identify at various points along the spectrum between devotee and atheist. However, their individual faiths have little impact on the broader hermeneutical system that dictates the audience's predilection to distinguish natural from supernatural, knowledge from feeling, religious from spiritual, even fact from faith.

The ripples from the Enlightenment are still felt in the persistence of what some

religious scholars dub the *secularization thesis*.[56] The reductive idea equates secularity with progress, universality and freedom. This is in contrast to religion, which is positioned as antiquated, capricious, and oppressive. Lance Gharavi narrates the secularist line-of-thinking as such:

> Over time, people slowly but inevitably relinquish illusions and superstitions, gods and spirits, myths, magical thinking, ideologies, and grand narratives. These are replaced by progressively more accurate naturalistic explanations emanating from the sciences and philosophy.[57]

Most troubling is that the secularization thesis leads to the public defining itself on negative terms as a locus freed from influence of faith, magic, and transcendence. Society is no longer conceived of as a tool to tackle subjects and realities of the world beyond. I believe Schumann sees this lack of commitment as the chief crisis of our secular society; we don't ask enough of our communities, our experiences, or our arts.

Here I have to admit my own culpability in subscribing to this secularization thesis. As an agnostic progressive it was easy to accept this binary between religious and secular spheres, to place blame on the former and absolve the latter. Bread and Puppet's pageantry created the space for me, as one of those dancers moving in choric flocks and hoisting tall figures in the field, to get my hands on what I might not call god, but could no longer consider separate from the space of belief and the supernatural. It challenged me to do with my body, what my head could not make sense of.

The pagan form, overt Christian references, and corporal appeal that I have framed as quasi-religious are not salient in their own right. Rather, they are breadcrumbs sprinkled by the Bread and Puppet Theater, reorienting us toward an age when god, belief, art, spiritual action and politics were enmeshed. I label Schumann's pageants post-secular, because I see them positing an awareness and ambivalence toward both secularism and the modern world in which they operate.[58] Schumann's

pageants share the message common to many religions—that humans have access to gods through action. They remind spectator and participant alike that, in our secular age of unbelieving, new gods are still at work and at hand.

Future Work

This essay is my first foray into the religious and political tools engaged by Peter Schumann's pageantry. I have outlined how Schumann's pageants repurpose the following tools that religion has honed: kinesthetic understanding as a mode of learning what the intellect cannot conceive, choric mobilization as a means toward expressing human agency, divine immanence as an imperative for social and environmental responsibility, and the vital role of chance and ambiguity in cultivating moments of transcendence.

In highlighting the 2013 pageant, I fear that I have not provided a clear enough sense of the subject matter addressed by his many other pageants, some of which was more clearly political and historically located. The US intervention in Kosovo and the globalizing practice of the IMF and World Bank represent such obvious political subjects. However, I feel that these overt references are not central to the primary effect of the pageant. These timely political messages operate atop a substructure of communal embodiment that is historically and religiously charged. I have focused on this underlying structure.

The context I have provided for Schumann's pageantry has been entirely along the Euro-Christian lineage. This is the clearest context in that Schumann's works make direct reference to Christianity and are situated in northern New England. The post-secularity of his pageantry is particularly interesting, because of its situation in Vermont, a state that fostered the largely secular pageants of the early 1900's and whose population

remains one of the most secular in the country. However, I believe there are many other contextual connections to be made between his work and the pageantry of other cultures, particularly the Carnival traditions of the Caribbean and South America, and ancient Roman street festivities. These pageants also tackle divine and terrestrial politics, and have served as influences on Schumann.[59]

In his 1991 article "The Radicality of Puppet Theater", Schumann expressed his exasperation with modern and post-modern art's lack of commitment to effect social change:

> The tragedy of Modernism is its political and social failure, its inability to apply more than the formal discoveries to the historical situation … Kandinsky and Schoenberg believed in some higher, quasi-religious aspirations of Modernism, but Nazi Germany and modern capitalism dwindled these hopes into the specialization of sheer esoteric practices which we now think of when we say 'Modern Art'.[60]

In the majestic pageantry that has ensued over the last decades, Schumann has reinvigorated the dormant art of pageantry in contemporary American performance. For Schumann, we can't combat contemporary injustice and oppression without returning to the past. To reach into the past is to pierce the skin between religious and secular spheres, to connect contemporary bodies with the movements and motives of ancient bodies. To call upon the powers of Gods and mortals alike, Schumann challenges us to build, bake, move together, witness, and disperse.

Notes

1. Several clear belief systems emerge across the decades of performances, publications, and interviews given by The Bread and Puppet Theater, however, they are primarily anti-establishment, anti-modernist, or pacifist imperatives. The company may be viewed as Marxist, but does not endorse a specific view of human nature, the afterlife or god. More importantly, the company neither screens, enforces, nor encourages certain beliefs among its participants. It is an art ensemble, whose members include Christians, Jews, Hindus, and atheists.

2. The Bread and Puppet Theater, "Total This and That Deathlife Circus Pageant" (Glover, VT, August 4, 2013). In honor of the Bread and Puppet's 50th year celebration, an extensive video archive of Bread and Puppet performances is under development, which will house a video of the 2013 pageant. In absence of this, video footage of the pageant may be found at videosphere, *Bread and Puppet 2013*, YouTube video, accessed March 1, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxHhud30r_U.

3. *Our Domestic Resurrection Circus* ran annually in the summers of 1975 through 1998.

4. Peter Schumann, "About Bread and Puppet," accessed March 1, 2014, www.breadandpuppet.org.

5. Stefan Brecht, *Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater* , vol. 2 (New York: Routledge, 1988). Brecht's two volume history of the company spans 1963-1985 and remains the most thorough account for the early years.

6. Bread and Puppet regularly relies on Sacred Harp music, a genre of sacred choral music that flourished in early 19th Century American South and has recently resurged in the Northeast.

7. Peter Schumann, "The Shatterer" (Queens Museum, 2014); Peter Schumann, "Show People: Downtown Directors and the Play of Time" (Exit Art, 2002).

8. Peter Schumann, Personal Interview with Peter Schumann, interview by Michael Bodel, October 12, 2012.

9. Deedee Halleck and Tamar Schumann, *Ah! The Hopeful Pageantry of Bread and Puppet* , 2002.

10. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theater, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theater* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 30.

11. Lance Gharavi, *Religion, Theatre, and Performance Acts of Faith*, Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies (Taylor & Francis, 2012), 18.

12. Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

13. Ronald Grimes, "Religion, Ritual and Performance," in *Religion, Theatre, and Performance: Acts of Faith* , by Lance Gharavi (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013).

14. Peter Schumann, "The Radicality of Puppet Theater," *The Drama Review* 35, no. 4 (1991): 81.

15. Peter Schumann, Personal Interview with Peter Schumann, interview by Michael Bodel, October 12, 2012.

16. Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Waterloo, CA: Ritual Studies International, 2013).

17. In fact Grimes identifies Bread and Puppet's "Washerwoman Nativity" as a prime example of ritualized performance in which the participants are simultaneously puppeteer and puppet, actor and acted upon.

18. Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Waterloo, CA: RItual Studies International, 2013), 58.

19. Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pelligrini, eds., *Secularisms* (Duke, 2008), 4–12.

20. Peter Schumann, "The Radicality of Puppet Theater," 83.

21. Robert Baird, in *Secularisms*, ed. Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pelligrini (Duke, 2008), 175.

22. L.J. Morrissey, "English Pageant-Wagons," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 9, no. 3 (1976): 371.

23. Peter Schumann, Personal Interview with Peter Schumann.

24. John Bell, *Landscape and Desire*.

25. David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*.

26. W.E.B. Dubois, "Pamphlets and Leaflets," in *The Complete Published Works*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Whiteplains, NY: Kraus-Thomson).

27. Lance Gharavi, *Religion, Theatre, and Performance Acts of Faith*, Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies (Taylor & Francis, 2012), 9.

28. Anti-capitalist messages run throughout Schumann's circuses, fiddle sermons and self-publications, and Marxist text routinely serve as fodder for performances e.g. *The Proletarians* (1998)*, 27 Dirt Cheap Money Dances* (2009). The frugality by which Bread and Puppet

sustains itself is also a testament to Schumann's Marxist practices. The company refuses participation in the capitalist economy by denying funding from government and corporate bodies, accepting donations, and encouraging "cheap art".

29. Deedee Halleck and Tamar Schumann, *Ah! The Hopeful Pageantry of Bread and Puppet* .

30. John Bell, *Landscape and Desire* (Glover, VT: Bread and Puppet Press, 1997).

31. Deedee Halleck and Tamar Schumann, *Ah! The Hopeful Pageantry of Bread and Puppet* .

32. Amer Latif, interview by Michael Bodel, September 2013.

33. The Bread and Puppet Theater, "Man = Carrot Circus Pageant" (Glover, VT, 2011).

34. John Bell, *Landscape and Desire*, 21.

35. Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*.

36. John Bell, "The End of 'Our Domestic Resurrection Circus': Bread and Puppet Theater and Counterculture Performance in the 1990's," *The Drama Review* 43, no. 3 (1999): 62–80.

37. Deedee Halleck and Tamar Schumann, *Ah! The Hopeful Pageantry of Bread and Puppet* .

38. Stefan Brecht, Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater.

39. John Bell, *Landscape and Desire*, 11.

40. David Dudley, "The Necessity of Anarchy," *American Theater*, December 2013; Peter Hamburger and Amy Trompetter, interview by Michael Bodel, November 2012.

41. Peter Schumann, Personal Interview with Peter Schumann.

42. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Monts: Les Presses du RŽel, 2002).

43. Stefan Brecht, *Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater* , 1988, 2: Appendix.

44. Peter Schumann, Personal Interview with Peter Schumann.

45. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theater, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theater* .

46. Slavoj Žižek, "Spectre of Ideology," in *Cultural Theory: An Anthropology*, ed. Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 235.

47. Peter Berger, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967).

48. John Bell, *Landscape and Desire*.

49. Where the "gods" include both sacred and secular constructs: the forces that influence our world and social consciousness.

50. Peter Hamburger and Amy Trompetter, interview by Michael Bodel, November 2012.

51. This is an argument traced by Akeel Bilgrami. Bilgrami describes how politically powerful philosophers of the Enlightenment fell victim to the agendas of early modern business. They were lobbied by proponents of forestry, mining, and owners of plantation farms, who saw opportunity in the philosophical movement to supplant the troublesome presence of God from the world around us. See: Akeel Bilgrami, "What Is Enchantment?," in *Varieties of Secularism in "A Secular Age,"* ed. Craig Calhoun, Michael Warner, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 148.

52. John Bell, *Landscape and Desire*, 11.

53. Charles Taylor, "Afterword: Apologia pro Libro Suo," in *Varieties of Secularism in "A Secular Age,"* ed. Craig Calhoun, Michael Warner, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010).

54. Ibid., 309.

55. Craig Calhoun, Michael Warner, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., "Disquieted History in A Secular Age," in *Varieties of Secularism in "A Secular Age"* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 195.

56. Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pelligrini, *Secularisms*.

57. Lance Gharavi, *Religion, Theatre, and Performance Acts of Faith*, 13.

58. Ibid., 15.

59. Helen Brown and Jane Seitz, "With the Bread and Puppet Theater: And Interview with Peter Schumann," *The Drama Review* 12, no. 2 (1968): 70.

60. Peter Schumann, "The Radicality of Puppet Theater," 82.

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