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**Enchanting Things: Cultural Object
Performance and Practice Encounters with
Material Performatives**

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for the degree of

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Declaration

This is to certify that the work I, Leslie Burton, am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism. ("Format")

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Abstract

Within the neoliberal, capitalist Anthropocene, over-saturation in material culture and passive acceptance of the overwhelming circulation of objects has led, quite literally, to a toxic relationship with (supposedly) disenchanted materiality. In this thesis, I argue that, in addition to being a performance practice that generates sites of potentially reparative enchantment, object performance also offers a neglected entry point for observation and analysis of the multiplicity of hidden material enchantments at work in contemporary culture. In all its forms, material performance, object theatre, puppetry – the performative animation of *things* – offers blatantly, and, sometimes, subversively, naïve alternatives to hegemonic, largely digitized practices of representation. While its ubiquity renders puppetry arts forever familiar, providing points of profound connection between people (and their material-cultural environments), puppetry’s drama in performance relies on its inherent uncanniness, on its strange ability to unsettle us even when we know how it “works.” Despite its apparent simplicity as an art form, object performance presents us with the collapse of some of the primary binary oppositions upon which Western culture rests: subject and object, mind and matter, visible and invisible, truth and trickery, dead and alive.

Grounded in new materialist ethics and the interdisciplinary imperatives of performance studies, this practice-led research travels transverse paths of creative arts practice and cultural analysis in the development of a critical approach to object performance that I call *puppeting*. Puppeting is a way of seeing and thinking that arises from engaging with materiality to make and perform with puppets. Puppeting therefore takes as given that making is itself a kind of thinking, that objects and materials are active collaborators in the thought process, and that the union of imagination and material, as negotiated through movement, produces physical manifestations of thought that influence their surroundings by virtue of their presence. With these givens in place, puppeting allows us to understand the enchantments of particularly situated objects and performances, and furthermore to recognize that such performances are going on all around us all the time. Indeed, between the specialized space of the theatre, where artistic puppets inspire affective experience, and the “normal” space of daily life, where functional objects regulate lived experience (traffic cones come to mind), there is the in-between space of cultural performance (the political rally, religious ritual, community celebration, etc.), where performing objects like effigies, relics, and fetishes do both.

Through participant observation, autoethnography, and critical analysis, this study identifies different modes of enchantment, both “good” and “bad,” as revealed by puppeting. By participating in alternative, even utopian, practices of world-making in a marionette workshop in Prague, on a Vermont farm with the Bread and Puppet theatre, in her own studio in Ireland, and along the route of the All Souls Procession in southern Arizona, the puppetry artist encounters enchantments of liberatory interconnection conjured in the course of creating and performing puppetry. As anyone who has ever read a fairytale can tell, however, not all enchantments are delightful; the latter half of the study focuses on the puppetry scholar's analyses as she identifies oppressive, divisive enchantments in cultural performances including the historical European practice of effigy destruction, the hangings-in-effigy of President Barack Obama across the USA after 2008, and the display of fetish-like plastic fetuses by anti-choice activist groups, particularly in Ireland's 2018 Abortion Rights Campaign. In each of these sites, puppeting offers a new lens through which to analyse the performative power of objects in performance, exposing the reflective and constitutive messages hidden in their depths, in the hope that understanding how these kinds of enchantments work will help us to produce more of the “good” enchantments and to avoid falling for the “bad” ones.

Chapter One¹

Objects as Actors in Enchanting Performances

There is a collective intake of breath from the audience as internationally-renowned mime and puppeteer Ilka Schönbein swiftly changes the position of her hands. In that moment, her puppet – a long, slim, abstracted cricket with two legs and two antennae – bodily dissolves and then reassembles. Only now it is doing a handstand, its head hanging upside down between its arms, arms which were legs a split second ago, legs which now seem to be outside of an invisible frame. The sudden transfiguration of both the puppet body and the way we see it, is surprising, marvelous, enchanting. After we (an audience composed entirely of adults) gasp, there is a sprinkling of light, abashed laughter at the childlike wonder we all just felt, and caught each other feeling.

~ ~ ~

At a performance of my puppet show “Jackie and the Potato Plant,” I subtly pull a hidden string from behind the table-top set. It works smoothly and perfectly for the first time since rehearsals, and even I am enchanted as I watch the result. The potato plant, rendered in wire wound with green wool, slowly rises from behind the table-top set and “grows” to its full, impressive height, towering about six feet over the floor where an audience of children sits. I hear a roomful of small voices sighing with awe when I surreptitiously flick the switch that turns on the little LED lights at the center of the plant's purple flowers.

~ ~ ~

A child and her mother walk hand-in-hand downtown. A turquoise balloon bobs far above them, and the child looks up dreamily, pulls at it, makes it jig genially. Suddenly, there is a knot of foot-traffic. An accidental jostle, a lost grip, and – my heart sinks – the balloon begins a sudden, melancholy ascent. But then! A passerby leaps and manages to snatch the trailing ribbon out of the air! Trio of mother, child, and balloon are gratefully reunited, the passerby disappears into the crowd, and I am filled with a sense of enchantment over the tiny three-act drama I have just witnessed.

~ ~ ~

¹ A Note As We Begin: I write sections of this thesis performatively, periodically punctuating the text with my authorial voice, which is admittedly playful at times, in order to break the scholarly fourth wall and highlight my (and all authors') inherent non-neutrality. I take inspiration from great feminist writers like Cixous and Phelan, who pioneered performative writing; they often acknowledge the fiction of objective critical distance, understanding writing as a creative, communicative practice rather than a means to the end of presenting static results. Herein, a textual shift to italics will cue entry into a more performative register – though, even when I let my presence recede, I will never leave you alone in the woods entirely. On we go!

I have felt the enchantment of witnessing a great performer in action, of eliciting that same feeling from an audience, and from slipping into a “puppet perspective” in the midst of the everyday. The *physical* materials and intellectual structures that appeal to us, that invite or compel us to think with and through them, inevitably train our senses of perception, and hence our practices of critical analysis, according to their particularities. To study with puppets and objects is to broaden a perspective everyone occasionally accesses, but which generally receives limited exercise. Dismissed as fantastical, superstitious, or simply extraneous and disconnected from Western neoliberal capitalist “reality,” the quasi-animist perspective gained by working with performing objects has little standing in comparison to those perspectives gained by working with culturally (particularly economically) valued tools and topics like chemicals and equations, markets and supply chains. However, puppetry has a place in most world cultures, and enchantment, a cousin of awe and wonderment, is a “manifest” human experiential state (Backhaus 24).

This thesis pays attention to the overlooked enchantments of materiality and material culture through the lens of object performance in order to critique the toxic relationship between globalized Western culture and its *things*. In the first half of this study, I reclaim the enchanting possibility of hand-crafted intelligences, ways of understanding the material world and the stories we tell with and about it. Through direct experience, I examine the dynamics of puppetry and object performance as emancipatory practices of collective community action, and of making by hand as a mode of intervention in neoliberal, capitalist consumption. The second half of the study focuses on how object performances and their enchantments are operational in the creation of political and social realities, whether positive or negative. Because these

performances are too readily dismissed as decorative, quaint, and inessential to the reality of political processes and their reception, it is a matter of urgency to recognize their power as conduits for leveraging political imaginaries. Whether what we find is joy in the enchantment of engagement with materiality, or horror in its power over life itself, this thesis focalizes the overlooked roles of performing objects to develop a theoretical lens (that is, a perception) of *puppeting*.

Puppeting allows us to see more clearly the vital role of material culture, too easily forgotten in this digital age, and to how we are controlled (i.e., enchanted) by a saturated visual and material landscape. When I say “puppeting,” I mean recognizing and engaging the free flight of imagination that characterizes and informs our everyday lives; I mean taking seriously the mutuality of people and things, acknowledging the active roles that inanimate beings play in shaping our existence and our understanding of it, and using that knowledge to see the world in new ways. With an understanding of the power of object performance, it becomes possible to make new artistic and theoretical work that rewrites received ideologies, as well as stage intercessions through community building and political activism.

The active pursuit of an undervalued perspective, and the creative and intellectual insights that can grow from it, is, from the outset, a commitment to the centrality of the marginal. Puppet theater in the West is, and long has been, a marginal art form, and so its omnipresent influences and its epistemologies have been overlooked. This thesis addresses this gap by analyzing and demonstrating these epistemologies, and foregrounding the ethical core of material arts practice. That core includes the ways in which objects in performance activate imaginaries to social and

political ends, as well as the ways in which manual engagement in particular fosters careful, relational cooperation with materials and objects, rather than destructive consumption. In this way, this thesis contributes both to our understanding of the value of puppetry arts practices and object performances in affecting new realities, and to our ability to recognize the deployment of puppets as objects of enchantment, manipulation as much as resistance. Puppeting as a critical lens therefore becomes a tool that can be wielded beyond the confines of this document.

In the course of this study, I have examined performing objects through making and performing with them in theatrical settings, and analyzing how they perform in non-theatrical ones.

Exploring their enchanting aesthetic power to mediate human relations, both as expressive points of externalized contact between people, and as active participants in political processes, this thesis asks: how do they act, and what do they have to say? If we were to take performing objects into account as co-creators of performance, with cultural histories of their own, what more could we learn – both from and about – performance and its actual (or potential) material impacts on our lives and environments than traditional anthropocentric stances have offered?

This study, then, is a practice-led investigation that proceeds from the historically-constructed margins. It affirms the enchanting value of live, material performance practices in our digitizing world, and analyzes the power of the phenomenon of feeling enchanted in a disenchanting, anthropocene era. In the processes of imagining puppet- and object performances, of examining the physical qualities and performance potentialities of different materials, of understanding the elements of effective representation through objects, and of taking the necessary efforts to render them (by making and animating figures by hand), what can we discover about “the” creative

process, the cultures we move through, and the (to steal the title of Bruno Bettelheim's seminal treatment of fairy tales) "uses of enchantment"? This study asks what happens to the way you conceptualize and visualize the material world by engaging in these marginal processes and accessing the "puppet perspective" -- in short, by puppeting. It is also an exploration of what puppeting reveals about the roles of performing objects (once they are recognized as such) as mediators in cultural exercises of political and social power.

Bringing a new materialist philosophical framing to performance studies, I use the new materialist "transversal" mode of analysis, one that does not define itself by rejecting previous theoretical frameworks, but rather, as Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin have put it, by saying "yes, and," to all of them, (89). I have inhabited my position as maker/performer as well as scholar, participating in and observing object performances both inside and outside of theatrical contexts; the enchanting, expansive, and emancipatory possibilities of puppetry and object theatre are manifold for artists and participants as much as theoreticians. Puppetry can mediate profound imaginative practices of alternative world-making, something we desperately need in the face of global crisis. Puppeting as an ethical, artistic practice of enchanting things through making and performing, can provide delightfully disarming experiences for audiences, as much as for craftspeople and performers: the kinds of experiences that draw you in, excite you, move you, make you feel at home with everyone in the room, at home in the world. When done well, these kinds of performances allow children and adults to collectively indulge in a way of seeing that we rarely get to enjoy on a "normal" day in a "disenchanted" world.

As anyone who knows anything about fairy tales can tell us, however, enchantment works beyond the bounds of the good and the beautiful, producing dark and unexpected paradoxes. The enchanting operations of performing objects *outside* the theatre space still have the potential to be liberatory, but they are equally likely to be found serving agendas of social restriction and oppression. Puppeting, as an analytic practice of identifying the many enchanting things already present in our environment, often limns ongoing operations of cultural control that alienate and dominate, defining social as well as physical boundaries and determining which bodies do and do not matter in “normative” discourses. The lack of critical attention to, and so appreciation of, performing objects as enchanting contemporary and historical actors means that their potency in both the politics of representation and the perpetuation of hegemonic power structures remains largely underrecognized. It is only by apprehending the material enchantments that work against the aims of peace, equity, and sustainability, and writing them back into a history that rarely examines them, that we can form the strategies necessary to address them.

Within this study, there are three main, interconnecting pathways toward understanding the enchantment of object performance: first, the path of iterative, embodied, technical learning through immersion in distinct artistic and political environments; second, the development of an interpretive approach based on those experiences (puppeting); and third, the application of that interpretive approach to events in my primary politico-cultural environments. The first part of the text discusses my own artistic training and practice through the field work I undertook in the Czech Republic and on the east coast of the USA, as well as the puppet play I designed and produced in a synthesis of those experiences in the 2017 Cork Puppetry Festival in Ireland. I then transition from discussion of theatrical object performance to cultural object performance

through analysis of my field work in the American southwest, where I participated in a theatrical parade that honors the dead.

In the second half of the text, I remain narratively present, but I shift tonally into analysis of the necropolitical power relations encoded in those cultural object performances that forge symbolic links between the objects in question and actual bodies. French critical theorist Achille Mbembe defines sovereignty in terms of necropolitical power, which is to say that the sovereign has the “capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” and to “define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not” (11, 27). With this in mind, I make a survey of European effigy practice to contextualize the horror of the use of political effigies of President Obama in the USA between 2008-2016. I also examine the fetus-shaped figurines used during the 2018 campaign to secure abortion rights in Ireland in relation to a postcolonial understanding of the concept of the fetish object. While these performances arose out of vastly different social formations and historical contexts, each sought to establish the dominance of one group over another by visually and materially declaring which bodies have cultural worth, and which do not.

This wide range of practice, from theatrical training and performing to political and cultural activism and analysis, demonstrates the value of thinking with object performance in both creative and critical modes. What follows here is a brief overview of the upcoming chapters, followed by a summary of the generative methodologies that underpinned the creative research process. The next chapter will address the foundational literatures which have informed the study.

An Overview of the Chapters

Chapter Two, ‘Terms and Conditions: A Literature Review,’ provides an overview and summary of the literatures that have informed this project, surveying the field of puppetry and object performance studies, their reliance on the culturally problematic concept of animism, and the affective phenomenon of enchantment which puppetry often produces in participants. This chapter serves to situate the research as a new materialist entry in the field of performance studies, to review the concept of enchantment (which is never far from view), and to acknowledge the body of work that focuses on puppetry and object performance in their own right. It offers insight into a set of theoretical “givens” upon which the other chapters rest. Chapters 3-6 primarily focus on the development of practical artistic skills, modes of engagement with different materials, and considerations of the cultural and political training environments I found and/or created. Enchantment here is experienced through the eyes and hands of the puppeteer; the feeling is generative and enlivening, driven by hands-on interactions with material arts practice, and the tantalizing promise of a more immediate, significant, urgent, and rewarding relationship with our physical and cultural environments becomes tangible in the given sites of engagement.

I build the concept of puppeting in these chapters as an active perspective, both embodied and intellectual, gained through the particularities of puppetry practice, i.e., making and performing and thinking in simultaneously material and imaginative terms. More particularly, Chapter Three (‘Making an Enchanting Object in the “Puppets in Prague” Workshop’) and Chapter Four (‘A Bread and Puppet Summer’) explore embodied engagement with materials, offering historical background, reflective analysis, and autoethnographic discussion regarding two distinct training

grounds, the Puppets in Prague Workshop in the Czech Republic and the Bread and puppet theater in the USA. Each of these spaces is dedicated to carrying on a tradition of world-making within our current world, using theatrical puppetry as the medium to do so.

They operate very differently; stylistically, the former is more like clockwork and the latter more like a sundial, neither being better than the other, but looking and feeling very different; politically, the former makes no overt statements while the latter has been proudly waving a Leftist flag since its inception. At Puppets in Prague, a rich and clearly defined tradition of marionette theatre makes space for its appreciation within contemporary Czech culture, and the worlds I saw and helped make were wondrous visual experiences, often informed by the enchantment of fairy tales. At Bread & Puppet, the theatre continues to carve its own distinctive visual tradition while carrying on the mission of the radical theatre companies of the 1960s, and the worlds I saw and helped make were visceral, large-scale experiences, informed by engagement with the enchantment of nature. Despite the tremendous differences in form and content, at these training sites I found a common language that informs the rest of the chapters: one of craft and care, of dedication to the tools and traditions of puppet-making, and of concern with building trans-historical interpersonal connections through object and story.

Chapter Five, 'Re-Enchanting a Foundational Folk Tale: from Capitalist Blueprint to Cooperative Manifesto,' is a reflection and analysis of my own creative work combining and applying what I had learned in both of the previous chapters. My world-making played with material and scale, politics and fairy tales, and ways of building collectively enchanting moments in performance. It offered a re-telling of "Jack and the Beanstalk," adapted into "Jackie and the

Potato Plant,” infused with ideals of cooperation instead of competition, connecting instead of conquering. The materials I used were salvaged, the process of making exploratory, and the premier performances entertained the children in the audience, but as I learned in both my training venues, adaptation is continuous and the process never ends; in preparation for a future performance, I wrote our adaptation into the format of fairy tale as a piece of performative writing, an enchanting process for me as it showed me how exactly to restructure the performance for future iterations.

Chapter Six, 'Death is a Good Place to Start, or the All Souls Procession of Tucson, Arizona,' marks a transition between the theatrical and the cultural or political object performance, in which I am still actively involved but to which I apply more critical distance. With reference to the avoidance culture surrounding death and dying in the USA, I examine southern Arizona's annual, community-powered parade that provides space to honor the dead. One of the central events of the civic calendar, this it is a self-consciously theatrical and secular ritual that nonetheless draws tens of thousands of participants each year, many of whom produce their own material performances for the parade, ranging from puppets to shadow boxes to floats. The central ceremonial Urn, in which people place their remembrances of friends and family members, is the gathering place of thousands of performing objects brought from all over the country. In the finale performance, the full contents of the Urn are set alight in an act that transforms a huge group of urban strangers into a collective for that liminal, enchanting moment.

While the first half of this thesis remains in the world of self-consciously performance-based practices and events, Chapters 7-9 focus primarily on analyses of specific object performances I

encountered, either personally or through historical accounts, beyond the strictly theatrical space. In these sections, the potency of enchantment is equally strong as in the first half of the study, however I turn my focus to its oppressive operations at the cultural level rather than its liberatory possibilities at the individual level. In these chapters, puppeting emerges as a lens that reveals the extent to which material performances encapsulate and influence cultural power dynamics. Ultimately, by recognizing the operations and impacts of these performances, we equip ourselves to intervene in them. Chapter Seven, 'Punishing the Effigy, Punishing the Body,' works through some remedial performance history regarding the usage of effigies in medieval and early modern Europe. This section examines the phenomenon of scapegoating alongside the unsettling concept of a continuity between the body and the performing object, which traveled to the USA with European settlers. To date there is no comprehensive study of effigy practices available, but only disconnected references to individual traditions. I have strung together what I consider to be necessary context for the understanding of legacies and continuities between historical and contemporary American effigy performance.

Chapter Eight, 'Effigies of Race in Contemporary America,' pursues the development of the American phenomenon of effigy destruction, particularly as it relates to the effigies of President Obama that appeared throughout his tenure. Clearly intended as visual references to historical racial terror lynching, the effigies divided public opinion between supporters of “free speech” and supporters of equality, diversity, and civil discourse. Though they were condemned locally, the fact that such effigies appeared all over the country failed to spark a national conversation, in part because of the public relations narrative that America had entered a “post-racial” era, and in part because each incident was apparently “isolated.” It hadn't and they weren't. Though it is

painful to examine, even from the safe distance of another country, there is a forgotten history of racial effigies in the USA; they have long been used to suppress Black access to political participation and to protest integration. Where they appear, violence is enacted on real bodies as well. The “enchantment” here is the dark enchantment of the white supremacist ideology at the base of an exclusionary conception of American identity that has seemed to rapidly gain strength since 2016. Here, the disturbing continuity between bodies and performing objects is discussed, drawing on the context given in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Nine, ‘Performing Objects in Ireland’s 2018 Abortion Rights Campaign,’ returns me to an active involvement in my immediate surroundings through analysis of enchanting objects on opposite sides of the Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment in Ireland in 2018. As a political actor in object performance myself, my position in this section is engaged as well as detached, active as well as reflective and analytical. I discuss how the pro-choice and anti-choice side deployed their object performances, what they were, and how they operated in the context of the campaign process. The anti-choice campaigners deployed fetish-like objects that were admittedly visually arresting, while the pro-choice campaigners deployed material symbols of solidarity. Two enchanting things, as elements of an intensely personal yet internationally-influenced political Referendum, competed for primacy. Through close reading of the disparate objects, I investigate the terms of the competition and the enchantments offered by each side’s object performance. Ultimately, one of them represented the chance to remain in an oppressive received world of archaic beliefs while the other represented the chance to remake reality for millions of people.

In Chapter Ten, “Concluding,” I review the steps taken to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of object performance as a lived art form as much as a theatrical one, an art form that has much more to tell us about how we work to control each other, even as we are controlled by objects of our own making. I offer puppeting as a way to make sense of public performance events which takes into account the objects we use to further our social and political ends (as much as our artistic ones), and finish with a close reading of one of the most iconic images of object performance in the last century, namely the photograph titled “Flower Power” by Bernie Boston, as an example of how this mode of analysis can be applied far beyond the bounds of the puppet theater or the figurative object. For now, however, I begin by discussing below the methodological approaches I took up from the outset in order to conduct the research project.

Practice-led Methodologies: The Making of Critical Puppeting

A Note on Coining an “-ing”: the typical verb that we see around the word “puppet” is “to puppeteer,” but in coining the term “puppeting,” as if “to puppet” were a verb, I centralize the object rather than the performer, and allow multifarious meanings to arise. “Puppeting” is, in the context of this thesis, a process of seeing, thinking, and making in ways that focus on the puppet-object, and the potential for any object to be a puppet as soon as it is viewed as one. Puppeting acknowledges the latent performance possibilities in every *thing*. Turning something into a puppet is puppeting, whether that means with one’s hands or with one’s imagination. It is a process of enchantment.

This section provides an overview of the methodological approaches that resulted in the development of puppeting as a critical lens. My understanding of performance is influenced by the experiences of making, performing in, and watching puppet theatre; participating in and investigating rituals centered on ceremonial objects; and experiencing the deployment of performing objects in everyday life, particularly in the political sphere. I engaged with the model of practice-led research, based on an ever-growing understanding of hand-making as a fundamental mode of knowledge formation, and so made my way through the material into the theoretical.

Practice-led research is based on the premise that the “training and specialized knowledge that creative practitioners have and the processes they engage in when they are making art” can result in generalizable “research insights” that can then be “written up as research” (Smith and Dean 5). Practice-led research allows the artist-researcher to develop her own practice in conversation with examinations of other artists' work in order to come to deeper understanding and/or new articulation of theory, such that it then may be applied to future practical or theoretical projects. It is, therefore, an exploratory methodology that *may* result in artistic products and/or new research imperatives, but which always rests on a presumption of the validity of knowledge claims that grow out of embodied artistic practices. Nevertheless, this is not a safe or stable methodology that comes with a concomitant set of strategies and approaches for actually conducting or presenting the research; each time it is invoked, the artist-scholar in question contributes her own research design to the growing body of projects carried out under its auspices.

By taking the stance of a new materialist in the field of performance studies, I have engaged a practice-led paradigm that plays well with others; I welcome insights that can be gleaned using a variety of qualitative methods as employed across disciplines. Cultural and feminist studies have provided crucial intellectual scaffolding, but I have also drawn on psychoanalysis, semiotics, history, and social sciences in the course of my investigations. Critical navigation of such a multiplicity of perspectives, narratives, ideologies, and truth-claims that are inevitably encountered in such a research process has required the adoption of a rhizomatic enquiry pattern as developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Their radical reconstruction of possible pathways through research allows that there are multiple entry and exit points, contacts, connections, and crossovers in thought that do not rely on hierarchical organization nor depend on binary categorization. Rhizomatic enquiry does not seek to find definite origins within a constructed historical narrative, nor trace direct genealogies in the history of ideas, rather accepting as given that any practice or theory is in process. As they put it,

a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connection between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. (Deleuze and Guattari 8)

I have taken Deleuze and Guattari's offering seriously, crossing international boundaries, working with different physical vocabularies and traversing local traditions in art, history, and politics, discovering different textures of performing objects that have not yet been examined in the extant literature.

Thinking, Making, and Knowing by Hand

The extreme (and evermore outmoded) binary of theory and practice, which separates the two and devalues the latter, includes an erasure of the body's (and, in fact, the whole of materiality's) part in actively contributing to knowledge creation; knowledge is supposedly the product of intellectual activity, above and outside of whatever is going on materially. Yet without the materiality of the world there is nothing to know; without the materiality of the body there is no way to know it. The separation of body-mind-world can be a useful way to bracket one's thinking at times, but it is a navigational construction that has been treated as an absolute reality for too long. A 2012 study of problem-solving abilities after embodiment exercises demonstrates that, in addition to *reminding* people of things they already know, “body-mind linkages influence not only processes of knowledge activation, but also processes of knowledge generation” (Leung et al. 508). Knowledge is an integrated phenomenon, and it arises through, to consciously use the navigational construction for a moment since it is so entrenched, *interactions* between body, mind, and world.

Making with one's hands is a process of feeling into and through the world. To accept that tools and materials, as well as rhythms and sensations, are guides *and* conduits for creation, is to understand making as a learning process: one that requires effort, failure, and repetition. Mastery of any craft, as anthropologist Trevor Marchand explains, “typically involves specialized training within a community of practitioners” that focuses on the use of one's hands (“Knowledge in Hand” 261). Working with the hands requires coordination, including synchrony with the rest of the body (particularly the eyes), responsiveness to sensory information provided by materials,

and adaptability in the face of challenges presented by resistance or mishap (Marchand “Knowledge in Hand” 262).

Developing such skills, says Marchand, “lends practitioners a vital sense of agency to make, undo, repair and transform their world, and the world of others, in an immediate, practical, hands-on way” (“Knowledge in Hand” 262). Marchand's point here is specifically about the “practical,” physical world, but I contend that learning through hands-on training in craft equally infuses that “vital sense of agency” across world-making practices, including artistic and theoretical interventions. He opens the door to this point by acknowledging the continuity between body, mind, and environment, but he does not walk all the way through that door (“Knowledge in Hand” 266). I, however, must, since this is the territory I have inhabited. The sense of being able to literally “world-make” and imagine material transformations informs the kind of thinking necessary to inhabit the “cracks,” as John Holloway calls them, in capitalist hegemony (“Cracks” 910).

Following Marx, Holloway identifies a toxic reduction of human activity into abstract, commodified labor within the capitalist system; however, he explains that the “tight social weave, [and] cohesive logic of capital,” make it impossible to escape; struggles against it manifest in moments of pushing towards alternatives from within, creating “cracks in the system of capitalist domination” (“Cracks” 910). Holloway uses the “critical, anti-identitarian, restlessly negative” theory of “breaking and creating” to illustrate “the drive against-and-beyond the negation of self-determination” that abstract labor engenders in the global economy, including as part of that drive, “the creation of extremely fragile spaces or moments in which we live the

world that we want to create” (“Cracks” 911). He sees the cracks everywhere, always shifting and unstable, but always presenting alternative logics within discrete spaces (classrooms, co-ops), times, and activities: sometimes in the course of rallying around a theme, resource, or political issue (“Cracks” 911). Recognizing the cracks, expanding them, and making new ones, allows “a different image of the world [to open] up” (“Cracks” 912). Being able to imagine that world, and catch glimpses of it through the cracks, is the first step toward realizing it.

Making by hand is a way of widening these cracks, of developing imaginative capacities for change in both mind and body. By using haptic perception in craft-making practices, we change our relationship with the environment, becoming a contributor to the structures of our atmosphere. As Natasha Lushetich explains, the normal terms of physical engagement with the modern world are through the semiocapitalistic and necropolitical aesthetic of connectivity “coated in smooth aesthetics,” i.e., smooth glassy phones and computers and architecture, smooth flows of information, smooth advertising featuring smooth bodies (1). To make by hand, to introduce a greater variety of tactile information into your experience, is to break out of the syrupy smoothness of the streamlined and digitized, and to break into other textures of experience, somatic as well as social.

As Marchand acknowledges, as much as imparting embodied knowledge, “the anthropology of craft and apprenticeship reveals that training equally includes the formation of values, ethos and social persona, and the learning of related professional competencies” (“Knowledge in Hand” 261). The knowledge in making is therefore also a social transfer of tradition, skill, and culture. Anthropologist Maurice Bloch describes knowledge transmission and creation, not as a matter of

“passing on” but as occurring through “a communication link...which then requires an act of re-creation on the part of the receiver... into a different mental universe” (qtd in Marchand “Making” S11). The development of appreciation, skill, and comportment are simultaneous and integrated aspects of a focused training experience of the kind I undertook. While the external understanding that training is a multifaceted process involving multiple levels of knowledge formation is important, there is no way to fully understand those aspects of training, or how the formation happens, without undertaking it oneself (see my published video essay titled “Material Collaborations” in issue 11 of *The Cine-Files* online journal as an illustration of these themes).

Participant Observation and Autoethnography in “Practice Encounters”

For my purposes, a “practice encounter” is a sustained experiential and theoretical engagement with object performance. In the course of this project, I have framed these encounters in a number of ways: through field work, through personal creative practice, through historical and cultural research from a scholarly remove, and through direct political action. In each of these modes of inquiry, I have assumed, to varying extents, the role of the *participant observer*. In the production of the exegesis, I have, to varying degrees, used a *reflexive, layered autoethnographic* approach with reference to the field notes I kept during my practice encounters: one with comparatively “objective” observations (descriptions of activities, procedures, performances, interactions, and the commentary of instructors and colleagues), and one with comparatively “subjective” content (my personal insights, reactions, analysis, comparisons, and connections).

As a method used for over a century in the analysis of “other” cultures, participant observation is generally defined as an immersive “method of data collection” in which a researcher, usually a

social scientist, partakes in the daily activities of a group in order to gain empirical understanding of localized practices and social operations (Kawulich). Through analysis of, for example, speech and gesture patterns, social spaces, artifacts, and texts, participant observers report on how members of a group make meaning within their own cultural environments. Classically, a participant observer must consider what aspect of a culture she intends to study, how to gain access to the group she wishes to research, how she will position herself within the group (on a spectrum from full participant to full observer), how she will establish rapport and select informants, how she will manage relationships ethically, and how she will maintain some kind of objective distance (Kawulich).

While these considerations are necessary in many instances of fieldwork, the nature of mine (in which I openly discussed my research, but was a student amongst students, an apprentice amongst apprentices, a performer amongst performers), and the knowledge I hoped to gain from it, were somewhat different. Anthropologist Tim Ingold's conception of participant observation as “a way of *knowing from the inside*,” undertaken with the aim of generating “skills of perception and capacities of judgment that develop in the course of direct, practical and sensuous engagements with our surroundings,” became a methodological guideline for my process (5, original italics). Ingold's distinctions between ethnography and anthropology provide useful clarification regarding the position I took as a researcher: where ethnographers produce studies *of* and *about* (a given person, society, or practice), anthropologists engage in a process of studying *with* and learning *from* (3). I have approached my field work primarily in in latter mode, seeking to develop creative technical and critical skills by studying *with* particularly situated

artists and groups, and learning *from* their approaches to materials, objects, and performance-making.

Documentary tasks of description and classification form important contributions to knowledge, but the most important task of participant observation, for Ingold, is to “join with people in their speculations about what life *might* or *could* be like, in ways nevertheless grounded in a profound understanding of what life *is* like in particular times and places” (5, original italics). By fully participating in distinct object performance cultures, I paid attention to the particularities of context and made note of the sociopolitical histories of each; these factors naturally affect how object performance operates in each site, making each experience a different kind of teacher offering a different kind of curriculum. My primary concern, however, in addition to materiality and performance preparation, has been performing objects' power to act as culturally affective mediators of experience. Thus, rather than investigating the situated meaning-making practices of a group of “others,” I investigated how these rich encounters with materials and fellow artists fostered my own meaning-making, which I then took forward both practically (see especially Chapter Five) and theoretically (see especially Chapters Eight and Nine).

My methods deviate from a hygienic, scientific knowledge production that relies on an Enlightenment- informed separation of human from world, and hence a privileged positioning of the researcher *outside* her area of study, as if she did not bring her own lifeworld to the research process. This style of knowledge production, tidily as its products may be packaged, perpetuates the myth of objectivity (which experience has shown to be misleading at best, and potentially irreparably damaging to human and non-human inhabitants of this planet). One of the few

methods of presenting research that “acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research,” accepting her presence as both formative and relevant in the research process, is *autoethnography* (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner).

Autoethnography is a research method in its own right, as well as a product of research. I engaged with it as such, following Heewon Chang’s interpretation of it as “combin[ing] cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details” (46). Writing, narrative or otherwise, is itself a craft, “a method of inquiry,” and also way of knowing, according to Laurel Richardson (379). It is a process through which one comes to recognize what one thinks, what one thinks is important, and what one wants to say. My autoethnographic writing practice is *layered*, which is to say that, in addition to writing about “epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity,” I engaged in reflexive analysis of personal experience in the environments I explored, “alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature” to contextualize my findings and connect my experience to broader cultural concerns (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner). As Ellis and Bochner acknowledge, “autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto),” and I find myself moving along this spectrum in accordance with the practice encounter under discussion (qtd in Chang 48).

The intensities of cultural identity I invoke also vary; I am a white millennial female Leftist American expat that spent the last decade in Ireland; thoroughly at home in urban Irish culture, though always an outsider, I am also always an outsider in urban American culture, however “at home” I may be. It just so happens that all of my practice encounters in the field were conducted

in English, though each community included international members, some of whom spoke little of the language (highlighting the non-linguistic communicative processes inherent in making and performing). The diversity of the groups with which I worked stimulated a great deal of cultural reflection captured in my field notes, central to which was a grappling with “American-ness” as a conceptual touchstone, stepping stone, and, sometimes, millstone around my neck.

More central to my study, however, is my cultural identity as a puppeteer in contemporary Western tradition, a member of the small international community of object performers that share in the “madness” Kenneth Gross ascribes to puppetry (1). Western puppeteers are, now as ever, magpie practitioners who incorporate, borrow, and adapt elements of any other tradition they come into contact with, all the while tinkering with their own material innovations. With limited exceptions, all puppeteers work with their hands; many make their own puppets (Russian puppetry pioneer Nina Efimova thought it essential to be involved in every aspect of production), even if they are only rehearsal figures or experiments (Posner 128). Making a puppet from scratch, making an extant object *into* a puppet, or making a puppet give a performance are processes of material thinking that join up imagination, sight, and touch in a process that must be recognized as the embodied research practices that they are, however limited textual representation of them will inevitably be. I have attempted to approach them autoethnographically, “from the inside,” in the following chapters, as physical engagements that inform a way of seeing, interacting with, and interpreting performances in which objects play uncredited roles.

Emergent from this research is the mode of analysis I call “puppeting,” or taking up the “puppet perspective” as a critical stance in addition to an embodied experience developed through arts practice. Puppeting leads to a reorientation of one’s relationship to the material world in general, and more specifically, to a more nuanced understanding of the active and affective potency of specific materialities as they perform in theatrical and non-theatrical public settings. This exists against a broad backdrop of the long histories and traditions of puppetry and the widely held Western perceptions of puppet theater practice, which will be reviewed in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Terms and Conditions: A Literature Review

This review of literature names key thematics and introduces my orientation towards the fundamental terms, ideas, and theoretical frameworks that undergird the following discussions. Each chapter draws on its own distinct literatures which will be presented discretely, but here, I identify the premises that I take as given throughout the text, the common denominators shared amongst the chapters to come. Key scholars like Henryk Jurkowski, Peggy Francis, John Bell, and Steve Tillis have worked to define the field of puppetry studies within theatre studies, with varying emphases on theatre history, semiotics, and literary dramatic arts. They have given excellent overviews of the comparatively small corpus of historical texts by authors like Edward Gordon Craig, Heinrich von Kleist, and Maurice Maeterlink, and so I do not repeat those here. Instead, I seek here to apply a new materialist perspective to my studies of object/puppet performance as if “puppet performance studies” were an established field, ready for critique.

“Performing Objects” and “Object Performance”

While there is an understanding amongst theatre scholars that performance shapes local, national, and international political discourses in ways that deeply impact the life processes of both human and non-human beings, the question of how *performing objects* participate in this equation has yet to be widely recognized, much less pursued, in the great majority of current literature. By “performing objects,” I do not refer solely to puppets across media, although they feature heavily

in this discussion. The working definition of “puppet” has expanded in recent years, becoming ever more difficult to pin down with precision. Eminent puppetry scholar John Bell first cites puppeteer Paul McPharlin's definition of the *puppet* as “a theatrical figure moved under human control,” and then semiotician Frank Proschan's definition of *performing objects* as “material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance” (qtd in Bell *Modernism 2*).

Bell extends Proschan's term further, to include theatrical automata, robots, objects used in religious ritual including effigies and fetishes, and “signifying props essential for the administration of states;” he even analyzes automobiles as performing objects, laden with cultural significance, personalized and performed by their drivers (*Modernism 2*). In simply, but crucially, applying the term “performing object” to things outside the bounds of the puppet booth or TV screen (which can also be conceived as just another puppet booth), Bell opened the field of puppetry studies the same way Richard Schechner and his colleagues opened the field of performance studies in the 1980s. By taking up the broad offerings of performance studies as an interdisciplinary field, I take a perspective that does not discount the human, but which equally privileges the nonhuman – and especially the material.

Of Objects and Things

Any uptake of the term “performing objects” presents a classic quandary as to what constitutes an “object” as opposed to a “thing,” and indeed whether puppets can or should be conceived of as one or the other. Though *object* and *thing* are interchangeable in everyday speech, *things* are considered more active and expansive in the literature: it is common to refer to “living things,”

but not “living objects.” Always caught in the subject-object relation, at least in the Anglophone world, the object is the passive element, the lesser term: that which is known, scrutinized, utilized, acted upon. The conceptual structures that undergird the Anthropocene differentiate between the terms, and an analysis of the difference reveals a habitual Western way of seeing the world that must be interrogated.

Interaction designer Giorgio Di Michelis's discussion of the difference between the *thing* and the *object* is classically androcentric, providing a prime example of the problems associated with making the distinction. He draws on art historian J.W.T. Mitchell's definition of the *object* as something that appears, to the subject, “with a name, an identity, a gestalt or stereotypical template, a description, a use or function, a history, a science,” and the *thing*, which is cast in the “role of a raw material, an amorphous, shapeless, brute materiality, awaiting organization by a system of objects” (156). According to this understanding, human subjects cannot see both objects *and* things at the same time; the *thing* only comes into view when an *object* breaks, which takes it out of its expected role, or when it takes on extra value as something artistic, spiritual, or commodified: something with multiple identities (Mitchell 156). *Things* look back at you, *objects* do not.

Michelis seems to miss Mitchell's critical acknowledgment of the imperialist imperative inherent in taming *things* by reducing them to *objects*, and instead argues that objectifying *things* is the necessary precondition for understanding, managing, and making use of the material world. He suggests that recognizing the “objectness” of a *thing* “domesticates” and “appropriates” what is otherwise evasively unknowable — all without challenging, he contends, the *thing's* ontological

status or its “essential nature” (192). He uses the example of a river: though a community must view it as a resource requiring continuous governance and management, it never ceases to *be* a river and the community understands this (192). We might as well say that a river, objectified by factory managers and poisoned by industrial waste, never ceases to *be* a river and that the factory managers recognize this. The waste water may still correspond to the Platonic ideal that is “river”; it is still the unknowable *thing*. But the object that, in Michelis’s formulation, we can understand, manage, and use, is no longer something that behaves according to our understanding of rivers; it becomes an unmanageable ecological problem; it loses its use value and becomes a liability. The attitude that objectifies, domesticates, and appropriates things is an attitude that has characterized Western philosophy for millennia and, broadly speaking, it has facilitated the social and ecological crises we now face.

According to Bill Brown, “the story of objects asserting themselves as things... is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (4). He complicates his assertion by adding that *things* are ultimately more ambiguous than that: they “hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable;” something that emerges from the “excess” in objects, or perhaps the some unfathomable “amorphousness” from which objects emerge (4). Are *things* before or after *objects*, are they causes or effects? Or, as Graham Harman theorizes in object-oriented ontology, are they wholly independent of relationality, totally unknowable and always beyond our reach?

These concerns are not my concerns, but I am aware that they *are* concerns for those theorizing *objects*, like Harman, or *things*, like Brown, or, like Maurizia Boscagli, who avoids the argument altogether and theorizes “stuff.” My concern is in the way of seeing that recognizes *things* as material to be tamed and put to human use, as quite innocently articulated by Michelis. For me, trying to think in a reparative way through puppeting, the only difference between *objects* and *things* is the presence of a performer, or the framing of performance. Any *object* is only one step away from being a performing object, which, based on the considerations given above, surely qualify as *things*.

A Brief Overview of Puppetry Scholarship: Performing Objects as Dead Things

The literature addressing puppetry and object performance specifically is still sparse, though happily the number of publications has markedly increased over the last decade. The works of John Bell, Cariad Astles, Caroline Astell-Burt, Steve Tillis, Matthew Isaac Cohen, Matt Smith, and a handful of other leading researchers have developed discussions of the ontology and aesthetics of the puppet and its theatre, the histories of individual traditions, the techniques of virtuosic performances, and the social applications the puppet is heir to. Julie Taymor's *The Lion King* (1997) and Handspring's *War Horse* (2003) have revealed to mainstream audiences the beauty, the poetry, the tragedy, the fragility, the gentleness, the violence, the sheer scope of what creatures of paper and string offer to drama.

Poet and playwright Heinrich von Kleist's early valorizations of the puppet in his 1810 essay "On the Marionette Theatre," in which the puppet is a figure capable of a grace ungraspable by human performers because of its egoless existence, were echoed in director and designer Edward Gordon Craig's writings a hundred years later in his concept of the über-marionette as the ideal performer (Francis 121). Whether these two were talking about literal puppetry, or simply using metaphorical language to advance a theory of performance, has been a source of much debate, though a fascination with puppets, automatons, and dolls threads through European Romantic and particularly Modernist art and literature of the 19th and early 20th century; the Romantics were suspicious but enthralled by the latent power in objects, while the Modernists saw the artificiality of the performing object as an apt representation of the ever-increasing mechanization of society, and its status as a lower-class entertainment as a rebuff of bourgeois values.

These different approaches to puppetry are indicators of contemporary attitudes toward technological and social "progress" in general: 19th century society simultaneously feared and embraced it, 20th century society simultaneously resisted and resigned itself to it. Henryk Jurkowski's two-volume *History of European Puppetry* charts this development, with reference to the flow of artistic movements and their effects on puppetry arts, from naturalism to futurism and dada. With the interruptions of two World Wars, 20th century puppets slowly began to disintegrate; artists began to experiment with ready-made objects, raw materials, parts and pieces, elements of traditions from all over the world, and to bring the puppet performer's presence fully into the theatrical frame (Jurkowski *History Vol 2* 453). This is the mode of performance that has long been the norm in the "high art" world of Western puppetry, and which has now entered the "popular arena" via *Lion King* and *War Horse*; meanwhile, the hidden performer and purely

representative puppet still populate the “low art” culture that has historically characterized that “popular arena” (Muppets, for example, or animatronic effects in popular film).

Having brazenly glossed several centuries of Western puppet history, I turn to a trend in the 20th century scholarship that I initially sought to overturn through my creative practice. That is an understanding of puppetry as being, at base, as John Bell says in his contribution to the 2014 *Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, the “animation of the dead world by living humans” (“Uncanny” 43). Elsewhere in this piece, he discusses the tendency, considered outdated in contemporary society, to see the world animistically, a thought echoed by Penny Francis, which I will return to in the next section. By evoking ideas of animism and the uncanny, Bell seeks to problematize earlier statements in 2008's *American Puppet Modernism*, where he unequivocally declared that “performing with objects requires us to recognize that when we play with them, we are simply animating the dead things for a little while, before *they* come to rest again, and, ultimately, before *we* come to rest, and ourselves become dead things, too” (5).

He was not alone in this understanding. Jurkowski refers to puppetry as the “endowment of life to a dead thing” in *Aspects of the Puppet Theatre* from 1988, in a discussion of puppets' use in funeral customs, bringing the deathliness of the puppet itself into conversation with the dead human body (144). Tadeusz Kantor wrote in 1975 of a “Theatre of Death” and determined that, at least in the context of his work, mannequins were intended to inspire “the vague and inexplicable feeling that through this entity so similar to a living human being but deprived of consciousness and purpose there is transmitted to us a terrifying message of Death and

Nothingness” (143). The similarity between the dead human body and the figure rendered in puppet-form bespeaks a continuity, or conflation, to which I will return (see Chapter Seven), but in my early research, I sought a second opinion to better match my own sense that the allure of puppetry was less to be found in its deathly countenance than in its lively one: the enchanting sense of the life in all things.

Entertaining “Animism”: An Overview of a Fraught Concept

In *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet* in 1992, Steve Tillis described the word “animate,” as puppeteers do with puppets, as literally meaning “to give...the breath of life,” hastening to add that such a thing is an absurdity since “the puppet does not actually live” (30). The need to remind a reader that puppets are not *actually* alive presages Kenneth Gross's exploration of our tendency to ascribe life to the puppet, both in and out of performance, in *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life* in 2011. Throughout the literature, there is much puzzling over that tendency to forget or overlook the fact that the puppet is *not* alive. Steve Tillis and Henryk Jurkowski refer to a quality of “double vision,” or an “opalization” or “opalescence,” respectively, to describe the continuous awareness of human operators even as the perceived life of puppets takes over an audience’s affective experience (qtd in Lorentz 188).

Before elaborating on the particular use of the term “enchantment” in this research, it is necessary to examine the use and legacies of the concept of *animism*. Thanks to the mechanistic worldview implemented through Enlightenment intervention, the material world was long conceived as so much dead *stuff*. Puppetry scholar Penny Francis implies a critique of that worldview when she refers to a “residual animism” at play in the human mind in *Puppetry: A*

Reader in Theatre Practice, but Francis does not develop her critique further within the book, and leaves the concept of animism behind (6). Yet animism is simply assumed in other, particularly non-Western, contexts. The case studies, sites, and companies I investigate in this thesis are all based in Western contexts, but with an awareness of the evolution of a colonialist/expansionist narrative created largely by the attitudes of 19th-century anthropologists (notably E.B. Tylor), who developed the concept of animism within a paradigm of primitivism and colonialism. Discourses about animism grew from a fundamental misunderstanding of a totally separate world view to Tylor's. The tangled colonial legacy of animism as a concept is beyond the scope of this thesis, however its influences are recognizable throughout the course of Western perceptual history and imagination.

In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett refers to animism as “nonmodern,” and “discredited,” and she refrains from using the term in her discussions there, preferring to use the term “vital materialism,” which she considers as having a longer and more illustrious lineage beginning with Spinoza (xvii, 18). When John Bell refers to animism as an operational aspect of puppetry, it is in the context of explaining Western modernity's skepticism and devaluation of the art form. He declares that puppetry's “primitive roots, animism, irrationality, and its basic contradictions with realism mark an art form that would not easily adapt into modern culture's interests in civilization (versus nature), realism, rationality, text, and bourgeois art” (“Uncanny” 44). Should we do away with a “discredited” term, aligned as it has been with imperialist framings of the “primitive mind,” childish misunderstandings, and “irrationality”?

While a full survey of non-Western performing objects and their social and political impacts is beyond my current scope, even a brief selection of examples illustrates the richness of performance practices that have historically been reductively labeled as “animist.” In the far east, the physical forms of puppets may be inhabited by spirits, deities, or ancestors in the course of performance. Malaysian *wayang* puppeteers are traditionally shamanic figures, acting as conduits between worlds, while some Japanese *ningyo jorhuri* performers understand themselves to be “the hands through which the spirit of the gods come and reside in the puppet” (Gibbons 60). Puppets' heads and bodies are stored separately in northeastern Chinese shadow puppetry traditions, to ensure that they get up to no mischief (Rollins 74). The supernatural and spiritual framing of puppetry in these contexts justifies the significance of the practice, while Western intellectual tradition, in utterly dismissing the validity of that framing, has relegated puppetry arts to the realm of the primitive and childlike.

Animism in New Materialism and Performance Studies

The impulse toward animism in contemporary scholarship is tempered and nuanced in its expression through the paradigm of new materialism. Within new materialism and the “yes, and,” mindset, the aim is to explore possibilities of opening conversations between paradigms, and even between seemingly disconnected disciplines, in order to find new points of contact. As a field, new materialism grew from feminist and queer theory, affect theory, and, of course, materialism. For my purposes, perhaps the most important aspects of new materialist thought are the many formulations (by Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, and others) through which matter is theorized as active, agential, vibrant; in short, for the new materialists, the material and the social are co-constitutive (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 103). While embracing a philosophical

monism in the tradition of Spinoza, new materialism does not ignore dualism or deny difference, but pays attention to the neglected term of any binary – particularly to matter, given the privileging of “mind” since Descartes.

Noting Isabelle Stengers's suggestion that we “reclaim” animism, and Nurit Bird-Davis's that we “revisit” it, Twitchin and Lavery define the word in a 2019 issue of *Performance Research* as “a dissociation of notions of agency and personhood from the supposed exceptionalism of the human animal... with its consequences for imagining who or what might constitute an ‘actor’ in different situations, both creative and destructive” (1). I combine their definition with Stewart Guthrie's refreshing acknowledgment that, however the term has been used, it names a phenomenon common to all people (and plenty of animals); an animistic view persists all over the world, even though “in industrial societies its loss of intellectual authority forestalls official recognition” (21). He considers this view to be a perceptual mistake caused by the need to be aware of possible active threats in the environment, saying that animism and anthropomorphism “are ubiquitous, because both are byproducts of a ubiquitous strategy of perception for a perceptually uncertain world” (17). I do not adopt his certainty that animists are mistaken, nor that animism is the foundation of religion: these are not my concerns. My concern is that paying attention to the animistic impulse, as Twitchin and Lavery point out, opens the possibility of seeing different kinds of actors in all kinds of situations.

Donna Haraway notes in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* that an animistic worldview cannot simply be “donned like a magic cape” by those whose culture does not already claim it (87). I am not donning any specific magic cape here, but I am

acknowledging the existence of many similar styles of capes. In my own cultural landscape, and within the bounds of this study, I am working with the concept of “enchantment” as a common experiential mode, rather than working through any specific animist or other spiritual tradition. In 2014's *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things*, Schweitzer and Zerdy accurately describe the situation of the performance-maker dealing with “the way that objects and things powerfully script, choreograph, direct, push, pull, and otherwise animate their human collaborators” (6). Primarily, the book follows in the footsteps of Sofer's *The Stage Life of Props* from 2003, focusing on non-figurative objects that perform their own stories in reference to the “symbolic economy of the culture that surrounds [them]” (qtd in Schweitzer and Zerdy 11). The puppet and *its* symbolic economy seem to inhabit a different sphere for these authors, but much of the commentary within *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things* applies equally to the prop or metaphorical image of a particular object as to the manipulated human- or animal figure.

A new materialist sketching of how we relate to the material world underpins much of the first half of this text, in the more detailed explorations of “sensuous engagements.” Imagining and performing with materials and objects as active participants in emergent processes of making is a concern for performance studies as well as new materialism, though neither field has engaged with puppetry or object performance to any significant extent. This project contributes to new materialism by bringing its attitudes directly into contact with puppetry and object performances (as opposed to *just* objects in the theatre, work which, as I have already mentioned, *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things* has begun), allowing an examination of the process Jane Bennett urges people to partake in when she advocates finding everyday encounters with the vital materials of the world.

Within performance studies, that equally nebulous field, this project offers new material performance examples against a normative notion of theatre as the purview of the human, and further extends the definition of what constitutes a performance in the first place. According to Schechner, “a puppet is more than dead wood or flat leather...Masks and puppets actually constitute second beings who interact with the human actors...[they] are suffused with a life force capable of transforming those who play with and through them” (*Performance* 203). I appreciate his attribution of liveliness to puppetry, but puppetry is only treated on a single page of his *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. In other words, there is a gap in the field of performance studies as much as in theatre, critical, and literary studies, which this thesis addresses. There is clearly room for more puppetry, more *materiality* in performance studies. What I take from it, greedily, is the door it opens to look at object performances that happen every day, as a matter of political import. Performance studies welcomes the opportunity to “read” anything “as” a performance—one of many ways of seeing the reality of a situation.

The Double Edge of “Enchantment”

The moment that the object shifts into the *thing* that looks back at you can be an enchanting one. Etymologically, *enchantment* comes from the Latin *incantare*, which means “to sing,” hence the “chant” within *enchantment* (OED). Singing vibrates through the materiality of one body, resonating within the materiality of another, bringing an individual into their own physical embodiment, or a group into a shared, embodied vibration. Enchantment works sensually; the feeling is physical as well as emotional, and when the feeling is strong, the intellect can only

attempt to fathom it afterwards. My usage of “enchantment” here, for the most part, refers to a distinct experience of communion with oneself and one's surroundings, including the material beings in it. I have experienced this kind of enchantment in watching and making and thinking with puppetry, and I have seen similar effects take hold of others in the same contexts. It was this fully positive notion of a secular but wonderful sense of enchantment that I set out to explore – the kind that can be accessed through theatre, ritual practice, and experiences of great aesthetic impact.

Phenomenologist Gary Backhaus helpfully conceives of as entry into a “sub-universe,” in which a kind of “hyper-awareness” is accessed via a shock experience occurring within a mood of heightened tension (32). Going to the theatre or joining in any other kind of ritual activity is a good example of the source for such a mood. During this time, the mundane, background experience of the world falls away and “the unexamined suspension of doubt of the everyday life-world is *existentially called into question*” (28, original italics). Then, suddenly, something considered impossible shows itself to be perfectly possible – or more than that, things never considered one way or the other show themselves to be possible – as in my first opening illustration, when Ilka Schönbein radically reframed her puppet's body. Of course, that which enchants me (or my group) may not enchant you (or yours); enchantment is idiosyncratic, dependent upon the meanings we make of an experience, either independently or collectively (Backhaus 45).

Awareness of the “everyday life-world” never fades in an experience of enchantment – otherwise it would be a hallucination; if it were an exercise of the imagination rather than an unexpected

experience involving actual, perceptual objects, it would be a fantasy (Backhaus 38).

Enchantment is a perfectly real, affective process in which new meanings take shape as if by magic. I hasten to add that there need be no attribution of enchantment to supernatural or religious intervention (though historically many examples have been interpreted as communications from the divine), and enchantment can be found in quite simple places, as in my third introductory illustration featuring the balloon's unexpected rescue (Backhaus 42). "The symbolic meanings gained through enchantment," says Backhaus (in the case of the balloon scenario, it was a reminder of little heroes amongst the strangers of the world), "imbue the everyday life-world with a new vitality of significance" (35). It is this latter aspect of enchantment that truly differentiates it from other experiential states, and endows it with transformative potential, as has been recognized by a number of theorists.

Pragmatist John Dewey, who argued in the 1930s against keeping art in rarefied atmospheres accessible only to the few, recognized and urged others to recognize art as an experience that occurs within everyday life. His idea of a "consummatory experience," which can be felt in relation to anything, but particularly in relation to art, is the pragmatist's enchantment. This is the experience of building towards and achieving unity with one's sense of the essence of "art," whether that comes through a painting or a sunset or an ice cream cone. The efforts of arriving at the experience (awareness of the past), the intensity of meaning gathered in the moment (presence in the present), and a sense that the experience is transformative (looking to the future) are all part of the process (Dewey 17).

From his perspective as a psychologist, Abraham Maslow acknowledges some influence from Dewey, describing his idea of a “peak experience” as:

An episode, or a spurt in which the powers of the person come together in a particularly efficient and intensely enjoyable way, and in which he is more integrated and less split, more open for experience, more idiosyncratic, perfectly expressive or spontaneous, or fully functioning, more creative, humorous, more ego-transcending, more independent of his lower needs. He becomes in these episodes more truly himself, more perfectly actualizing his potentialities, closer to the core of his Being, more fully human. (qtd in Dennis and Powers 61)

And art historian Bernard Berenson, writing approaches a similar notion in his description of the “aesthetic moment” as:

that flitting instant, so brief as to be almost timeless, when the spectator is at one with the work of art he is looking at...time and space are abolished and the spectator is possessed by one awareness. When he recovers workday consciousness it is as if he had been initiated into illuminating, exalting, formative mysteries. (qtd in Morgan 34)

The parallels between the understandings of 21st century phenomenologist and early-20th century pragmatist, psychologist and art critic show that all are discussing more or less the same thing.

There are surely many more examples following the same essential shape of idea, but I will only bring two more to bear on this conversation.

Political theorist Jane Bennett contends that the *affective* state she identifies as “sensuous enchantment,” when inspired by the natural world and cultural products within it, “might augment the motivational energy needed to move selves from the endorsement of ethical principles to the actual practice of ethical behaviors” (*Vibrant* xi). Her concept finds a theatrical parallel in Jill Dolan's description of *Utopian performatives*, which she characterizes as

small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a

hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if everyone moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense. (Dolan 7)

The individual enchanting experiences described by the previous four theorists meet a world-making objective in new materialist Bennet's and feminist Dolan's hopes toward "what the world might be like." Dolan clarifies her notion of the *utopian* as a partial active doing, a gesture toward, rather than a depiction of, a better future (8). The rest of the discussions (apart from perhaps Maslow's) acknowledge that the enchanting experience does not always grow out of delightful stimuli, and can in fact be an experience marked by disturbance, sadness, or pain – of a kind that is, nevertheless, meaningful to one's life.

Jane Bennett's definition of the enchanting experience clarifies how such a thing might be possible. She says that the enchanting moment is:

a surprising encounter, a meeting with something that you did not expect and are not fully prepared to engage. Contained within this surprise state are (1) a pleasurable feeling of being charmed by the novel and as yet unprocessed encounter and (2) a more *unheimlich* (uncanny) feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one's default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition. (Bennet, *Enchantment* 5)

It is this latter part of her definition, which includes the unsettling disruption, as opposed to *only* the surprising charm, upon which enchantment balances. While I initially focused on the positive points of the concept, having found a homely feeling within my own enchanting experiences, it is precisely the opposite, the *unheimlich*. Freud's use of the term is based on an interpretation of *heimlich* as "homely," and so for him, *unheimlich* literally means "un-homely," far from home, unfamiliar. The modern sense of *heimlich* means something more like "secret" or "hidden," which gives *unheimlich* a sense of things leaving their hiding places, coming out into the open

when they “should” not. Bell's consideration of Ernst Jentsch's use of the term refers particularly to the strange sense of not being sure if something is really alive or not (46). It is, in a sense, a perfect formulation for puppetry (and it offers an explanation for some people's fear of puppets) that seems to oppose a notion of enchantment. It should not be forgotten that enchantment is also associated with delusion, illusion, trickery, and deceit.

Following the “yes, and...” approach, enchantment contains within it the possibility of finding oneself at home in the world, through an encounter with something wonderful, *and also* finding oneself as far from home as you can imagine, through an encounter with something horrifying. Like Backhaus says, it is something idiosyncratic that happens through the building of tension, a shocking jolt, and the heightened awareness of entering a different universe nested within this one. There are many nested universes that we might fall into, under the “right” conditions, and not all of them are pretty. This is not to say that enchantment presents a dichotomy, for it is possible to hold on to multiple colors of experience at once, as when one wishes on a shooting star while facing the terrifying vastness of space. The next four chapters will address the aspects of enchantment that could be called peak experiences or utopian performatives, and the final three chapters will address the darker potentials of enchanting experience, and how the same materials and procedures can and do produce both modes of enchantment. These procedures, and the means to recognize them and understand them, produce an analytic lens I call puppeting, which is exemplified in each chapter at different sites, and which I summarize in the final conclusion.

Chapter Three

Making an Enchanting Object in the “Puppets in Prague” Workshop

This chapter locates puppeting as an analytic tool within the processes of making. The embodied recognition of the puppet-making process, and indeed the process of making things by hand in general, is a thought process in which materials are active collaborators. This research began in making puppets. The classical conception of making is based on the notion of an external designer who imposes his will onto the passive material world; this is the Aristotelian *hylomorphic* model of making. It is in the course of paying attention to materiality through learning a craft, as anthropologist Tim Ingold argues, that hylomorphism (at least as it has come to be understood and applied) must be rejected. Whenever we make something, we work and think *with* our materials, and, with enough practice, we learn to listen to their input, take their advice, and respect their limits. For every material and every tool arrives in our hands with its own distinctive physical properties that always influence the maker's approach to making, the rhythm of the work as it happens, and the character of the craft after the fact: its texture, weight, durability, longevity, etc. Every material and every tool also arrives in our hands with its own character, already steeped in the history of our culture's interactions with it (and, of course, our personal history with it); when we make things with even a passing awareness of that history, we access it with an otherwise inaccessible immediacy, and learn to think through the confluence of affect and material that the hylomorphic model separates.

The following outlines my training in the Puppets in Prague Workshop in the Czech Republic, alongside an overview of the history of puppet making in the Czech context. It gives details of

the practitioner's perspective within the making process, offering the insight that it is only through the concrete actions of making that one's relationship with materials changes. This training is documented through autoethnographic descriptions and photographs of the transformative process of marionette-making. This theory emerged from my hands; from physically engaging with a traditional arts practice and the tacit knowledges within it. Tacit technical knowledge that is passed through generations remains embedded in the tradition through which it arises. Theories of puppeting begin here, in drawing out the artistic and cultural elements that meld within the practice, and so this chapter provides a review of the historical context which sustains a long tradition of enchanted puppet-making.

In 2015, I traveled to the Czech Republic to attend a course in traditional marionette-making and performance at the Puppets in Prague workshop. It was a month of daily, hands-on practice under the supervision of experts: woodcarvers, costume and scenic designers, painters, and puppeteers. In this time, these teachers consistently demonstrated a seemingly effortless orchestration of ideas, eyes, hands, tools, and materials, the kind that only becomes possible through decades of practice. As a participant observer engaged in a practice encounter, I witnessed master craftspeople, equipped with the strength of local Czech tradition, perfectly "in control" of their tools and materials as if they were magicians conjuring puppets from raw ingredients, but it soon became apparent, once I took the matter into my own hands, that the craft is one of accumulated experimentation and negotiation with matter, rather than one of control and imposition of form onto matter. Under the guidance of an expert, this novice's experience of crafting a puppet became an enchanting practice encounter with active history as well as materiality in which, at the moment of assembly, her ideas and the work of her hands appeared

together before her in the (somewhat unexpectedly) affectively powerful form of a string marionette.

The Puppets in Prague Workshop

Founded in 2000 by American Leah Gaffen and her husband, Czech artist Mirek Trejtnar, Puppets in Prague has now hosted nearly 1,000 students of puppetry from all walks of life. Respectively organizing and teaching the workshops, Gaffen and Trejtnar bring renowned local theatre professionals to teach students technical drawing, carving, painting, costuming, and performance skills. Trejtnar, whose work can be seen in international collections, including in the puppet museum at the Bread and puppet theater in Vermont, and in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, is an heir to the great puppeteer and filmmaker Jiří Trnka. Himself a respected puppet-maker who has worked with an extensive network of puppetry artists over the years, Trejtnar connects students with masters of the craft. The workshop is as much a cultural experience as a technical and creative one; students are immersed in a powerful atmosphere sparked both by the presence of deeply experienced and talented individuals and by the thousands of years of history held in the city itself.

Contemporary Prague is a cymbal clash of art and architecture. It is an overflowing jewelry box of a city, filled with theatres, museums, churches, monuments, bridges, markets, tourist traps, and the every-day goings on more than a million regular inhabitants. And, running through the center, the Vlatva River, jammed with paddle-boat traffic. Street cars and a metro system connect a city that has seen endless waves of war and occupation over the last thousand years, but which has never been targeted for total destruction. Thus, Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque edifices lead into modern courtyard tea-rooms, museums, shops full of trinkets for tourists; Art

Deco, Art Nouveau, and Cubism are all represented in what strike me as outrageously ornate cafe interiors; near the villa where I stay, Brutalist communist buildings are decorated (albeit rarely) with statues of strong men and women carrying tools and bushels of wheat; a giant metronome perpetually keeps time atop a hill overlooking the city in Letná Park.

Teachers' creations, innovations, and contributions ripple through the city: Trejtnar's carvings and toys appear shops in the city centre, puppets designed by the other carving teachers are on display in the finest of the gallery-like shops in the bustling tourist areas, and director Zuzana Bruknerova performs, as she has for decades, in shows by her acclaimed company *Buchty a Loutky* (Cake and Puppets) throughout the country. The Puppets in Prague program affords the opportunity to perform in diverse venues and experience how integrated marionettes and associated stylistic are in the theatrical culture of the country (my group took the show we created to *Letní Letná*, the biggest annual festival of new circus in the country, as well as to the 2015 European Capital of Culture festivities in Pilzen), the fundamental opportunity there is in working with people whose embodied knowledge is profoundly embedded in long-standing tradition, and whose influence over our work carries within it the influence of generations of craftspeople working with puppetry. From this immersion in the Prague workshop, I garnered direct experience of working with materials as a form of thinking. This is a key element in understanding the concept of puppeting.

Puppetry in the Czech Context: Living History through Puppets

Respect for puppetry as an art form rather than a mere novelty is tangible throughout the city of Prague. Yes, there are shops full of mass-produced marionettes lining the streets of the city-centre, but there are also boutiques offering fine, hand-made puppets on both major tourist routes

and in more discrete, tucked-away locales. Yes, the National Marionette Theatre offers crowd-pleasing productions of classics like *Don Giovanni* and the *Magic Flute* on rotation, but the influence of puppetry arts on the design of contemporary drama, opera, and ballet is profound, even when figurative puppets themselves do not appear (which they often do). In short, puppetry is both commercial art and fine art, completely integrated in the performance worlds of the Czech Republic. The effect is unexpectedly moving for one who has never been immersed in such a tangible culture of puppet theatre: the theatre of the Czech Republic demonstrates the results of puppet traditions growing and intertwining with other theatrical media for centuries. In the contemporary theatre of actors, stage properties have been carefully considered (rather than simply sourced), the materiality of the stage world is engaged as much as the human performances, and objects may join in performance of their own at any moment.

While there is pictorial evidence that traveling troupes carried puppetry throughout Europe from the Middle Ages onwards, by the end of the 18th century, comparatively settled companies had taken root in Czech lands. The aesthetics that developed over this period reflect the practical concerns of the touring solo performer: the nearly life-sized puppets carried by troupes in earlier centuries shrank into proportions manageable for one puppeteer, and their heads were attached to metal rods like Sicilian marionettes, allowing the characters to sit unassisted. This style of manipulation allows for a dynamic gestural style that communicates dramatic action clearly to large audiences. The most important expressive features of the puppets, namely the heads and hands, were enlarged compared to the rest of the body (this is still an integral design aspect in contemporary Czech marionette-making). Trick puppets like groups of dancers and acrobats that could provide circuses-in-miniature became popular staples, and stock characters like devils, royalty, river demons, and skeletons were (and still are) perennial favorites. These characters

were used to re-enact popular dramas like Faust and Don Juan, but most often, puppet shows featured traditional Czech fairy tales delivered in the Czech language.

Puppet theatre became particularly attractive to the intellectual elite during the Czech National Revival of the late 19th century, when they took a leaf from the Grimms brothers' book of fairytales and began to look to local folklore as a source of national identity. Romantic nationalist sentiment recast puppeteers, who were mostly just traveling entertainers trying to stay in business, as heroic icons protecting precious heritage. Because of their continuous use of the Czech stories and language in performance despite hundreds of years of Austro-Hungarian cultural and political rule and the use of German as the official language, puppet theatre itself came to be viewed as a stage for Czech resistance against a flagging empire. In some cases, these notions were entirely justified: in one famous 19th century incident, acclaimed Czech nationalist folk puppeteer Matej Kopecký, when commanded to perform in German, responded in comedic defiance that, while he could speak German, his puppets only knew Czech (Bogatyrev 100).

Thanks to heightened popular regard for the format, and the new possibility of mass-production, table-top marionette stages became must-have household items in the 19th century, with scripts available in Czech. Families participating in the creation and performance of their own shows reinforced a sense of the national character as independent, self-sufficient, and productive. Providing entertainment via a form associated with collective identity, puppetry worked its way into both domestic and public cultural life, and by the 1920s, there were about two thousand puppetry companies, amateur as well as professional, operating in Czechoslovakia. Naturalism in performance ruled the day, and accounts of the great puppeteers of the era suggest a facility with marionettes to match the great actors of the time. Reporting on a performance by master

puppeteer Katel Novák in the 1920s, Moscow School member Pyotr Bogatyrev proclaimed that “such puppeteers bring their wooden actors to life so completely that not only do they convince their public that the puppets are ‘living people,’ but they half believe it themselves” (99).

So important were puppetry arts, that the Union Internationale de la Marionette (UNIMA), the first international theatre association of any kind, was established in Prague in 1929 to support their advancement. Czech puppeteers began to reject naturalism and experiment with avant-garde theatrical forms in the 1930s, and so they might have continued, had most theatrical activity not ground to a halt with the German invasion of the Czech lands during the Second World War. Puppeteers continued to practice their art, however, and held underground performances criticizing the occupation in people's homes, while more subtle anti-fascist performances continued in public. Because the shows were in Czech and appeared to be aimed at children, Nazi officials did not recognize the subversive content for years.

Most famously, director and theoretician Jan Malik's short pieces *Pomněnky* (Forget-me-nots) and *Sedmikrásky* (Daisies), based on Czech classical poems, offered solace to the public through coded symbolic language, while Josef Skupa, creator of the hugely popular comic duo of Spejbl and Hurvínek (with whom he had criticized fascist ideals since the 1920s), toured the country giving hundreds of performances mocking Hitler for those who could understand. In such examples “the capacity of the puppet to capture the synthesized essence of a popular response to a political moment” was made manifest (Astles 103). In 1944, Skupa (and the puppets) were finally arrested by the Gestapo. While Skupa ultimately escaped, and continued to be a central figure in Czech puppetry after the war, during this time over 100 Czech puppeteers perished in

concentration camps, either because they were Jewish or because their satire was too thinly veiled.

After the Soviet liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1945, dedicated state-funded puppet theatres were established as part of 1948's Theatre Act, formally enshrining puppetry's cultural relevance into the future. The state recognized that, “due to its folk origins,” and thanks to its place in the national consciousness during the war, puppet theatre could speak effectively to a vast, ground-level audience, rendering it “a very appropriate instrument of propaganda” (Jurkowski *Aspects* 122). Not only did the Theatre Act establish a network of performance venues, it supported an entire puppetry department the Prague Academy of Performing Arts, where Mirek Trejtnar and his associated would eventually study. Despite such a high level of State support, which ultimately allowed puppet theatre to continue as it has, Czech puppeteers have never given up the struggle against oppressive regimes. In 1971, the Drak Theatre (which celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2018) produced an allegorical denunciation of government censorship called *Cirkus Unikum*, in which a troupe of circus performers rebels against a villainous ringmaster (Blumenthal 2005, 168). These kinds of performances indicated the oft-unspoken political imperative at the heart of Czech theatre that would crystalize during the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

In November, 1989, riot police suppressed an anti-Communist demonstration by students, one intended to commemorate the violent suppression of student dissent 50 years earlier during the Nazi occupation. As a result, students, with constant support from the theatre community, spearheaded a series of protest actions. Students at the Academy of Performing Arts called for all students in Prague to go on strike; theatre professionals throughout the city supported them and

went on strike themselves, dedicating their theatre spaces to public discussion. Students and theatre-makers together traveled to factories to gather support for a general strike, which proved so overwhelmingly popular that the entire region began its peaceful transition to democracy by December of that year.

The fact that theatrical interventions, both direct and indirect, have had such an impact on Czech political reality is a testament to the ideals and values of the people rather than the State. Along with human actors, and perhaps even more effectively given their extra license to speak freely, puppets have been centre-stage in the shoring up of Czech culture. The Czech Republic is, therefore, an environment in which puppetry enjoys a deeper respect than in much of the rest of Western culture, and in which the processes involved in making and performing puppetry are more rigorously and richly defined.

On Personal Engagement with Making a Marionette

The Puppets in Prague workshop operates against the backdrop of all of this history, but the focus is not on cultural exchange. It is on working with materials to create puppets, and working with puppets to create performance; in this context, that is sufficient in and of itself. Because of their dedication to craft for its own sake, philosopher and sociologist Richard Sennett writes, craftspeople “[represent] the special human condition of being engaged” (20). For Sennett, everything from musicianship to laboratory experimentation, child-rearing to marionette-making are examples of craft; engagement is that state of caught-up concentration with a task in which we lose track of time in the quest for an exact execution of craft. He questions the traditional Western separation of “hand and head, technique and science, art and craft,” contending that the tangible and the technical have been removed from the spiritual and imaginative, with the result

that people are divorced from a sense of union with their environments and a sense of satisfaction with own handiwork (20).

It is of course in retrospect that I recognize that what I was doing at the Puppets in Prague workshop, in addition to training in a craft and investigating the process of puppet-making in a particular cultural context, was learning how to think in the interstices of materiality, imagination, affect, and movement. I was establishing a sense of union with my environment and a sense of satisfaction with my handiwork, as my field notes from the thirty days revealed to me during review, and which my marionette never lets me forget. It was also a process of emotional reckoning in which materials gave me something to hold on to literally and figuratively, and for these reasons, the following sections remain in the personal reflective register as a representation of the field work that also exists in the physical form of the puppet I built.

Part 1: Before We Carve

We begin with our simple sketched design, a front and side view of our basic character. I sketch many possibilities before arriving at the workshop (a princess in a polka-dot dress, a jester with nose and chin so long they touch, a ghostly chimney sweep) before settling on a strange little green creature with webbed feet and fangs. The design is the result of an afternoon of stream-of-consciousness drawing beside the River Lee in Cork: part cat, part frog, part human child, as you can see in Appendix A. I did not intentionally design the character with one of the most famous figures of Czech folklore, and hence Czech puppetry, in mind. Nevertheless, once alerted to her resemblance to the vodník, a sometimes- benign and sometimes-malevolent water sprite featured in fairy tales across Eastern Europe, I decide that my marionette's character will be that of a vodník's granddaughter. While they are always male, the Czech opera Rusalka shows

the tragic heroine's father as a vodník, so I consider my character mythologically feasible, even if her immediate parentage remains shrouded in mystery. I coin a nonsense feminine diminutive and name her Vodníčka.

With a character in mind, the first decision to make is technical: what system of manipulation will best serve the puppet in performance? The traditional Czech marionette is operated with a central rod to control the head and strings to control the limbs, while marionettes operated entirely on strings only came into popularity in the late 19th century, and even then, they were not widely adopted in the Czech Republic. The different styles of control have practical and aesthetic impacts: rod marionettes can sit up unattended by virtue of their sturdy wire mechanism and are somewhat simpler to operate, while string marionettes are more unwieldy and difficult to master. In terms of movement, rod marionettes are more dynamic, capable of sharp, dramatic motions, while string marionettes can achieve a softer, more fluid style of movement. For students in the workshop, the choice of which style to use depends primarily on actions necessary for the character to achieve its clearest expression. I chose to put my marionette on strings in order to give her a gentler range of motion than she would have had with a head rod, knowing that quick, rigid movements could easily emphasize the demonic aspects of her design (fangs, pointed tail, and so on).

With the essential character and manipulation system confirmed, we create precise technical drawings to ensure that our puppets are able to walk, sit, and kneel as smoothly as possible. The completed technical drawings provide all the information necessary to allow a carpenter to cut the wooden blocks required for carving. We are advised that puppets' heads and hands, the most expressive elements of character, should generally be of a larger scale than the rest of the body

in order to draw the eye. Since my puppet is a sprite child, I decide to make her head even more disproportionately large (a bit like a human baby's) and to exaggerate the size of her eyes. There are a number of "blank" example puppets in the workshop that we can investigate in order to see and feel the effects of the different kinds of connections, joints, and sizes. I select a very small figure to use as a reference for my technical drawing. Always referring to the center-line to ensure a balanced puppet, we plot out the shape of each separate piece (head, torso, arms, and legs), determining the placement of holes, positioning of joints, and styles of connections to be used. Though some of these details are a matter of math, calculating radii and circumferences to ensure free movement in the joints, others are more subjective: will the legs hang from a bar across the hips to be covered by costume, or seem to fit into the puppet's body? Will the elbow joints be mortise-and-tenon joints like the knees, or simply leather connections? These kinds of decisions determine the quality of the puppet's movement, and so, ultimately, how it performs and is perceived.

Part 2: Woodcarving

Considered a sacred tree in Slavic mythology, known for its protective and fertility-enhancing properties, the lime tree is a national emblem of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, though it grows all over Europe, North America, and Asia. The wood of this tree has been used in puppet-making for centuries. It is a hard wood, so it is strong and unlikely to warp once seasoned, but it is soft enough that it can be easily carved using only hand tools. It is lightweight, with a creamy color and an even texture. Its fine grain makes it possible to render intricate details clearly. This is evidenced by the impressive religious sculptures and altarpieces carved in lime wood during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance that still adorn churches all over Germany. It is a durable and workable material, widely used in decorative carving, turned objects, and musical

instruments. It is a reliable wood: homely, familiar, in use for generations. It is the wood of things that we make and use with our hands and fingers, rather than the wood of walls or furniture, which do not invite touch with the same warmth. We want to touch instruments, puppets, sculptures, to feel the contours of the carving as if to know the object (and the person who worked with it) better than our sight allows.

I touch the blocks of wood, cut to the sizes indicated by our technical drawings, gingerly. I have never even held a chisel, having always used malleable materials like clay and cloth. We begin by taking tracings of our technical drawings and then copying them onto the blocks. Starting with the head block secured in a vice, we use large, relatively flat chisels to roughly take down the corners. I experience some anxiety about taking too much away at first, but when I recognize how much the frontal features of the face need to come forward, it is clear that a great deal of the block needs to disappear. The rough cutting is a little awkward physically, requiring strong, stable movements away from the body.

Wood is anisotropic, which is to say that it behaves differently depending on which direction you work from. It is not difficult to slide the chisel along the wood's surface, as long as you travel along the lines of the grain. Cutting against the woodgrain is much more difficult, and most of us have the experience of finding ourselves struggling against the grain only to have a teacher stop us and turn our blocks so that we can once again carve easily. The umpteenth time this happens to me, I ask the teacher how he can tell which direction the grain is running, expecting him to answer in purely visual terms. His answer, however, is that wood is not like metal or plastic; it's not perfect, not uniform; it has been a living thing; you have to listen with your hands, feeling what the wood is telling you, and adapting to the resistance it gives. We have to respect the

wood's needs, using only the sharpest tools so that the wood fiber doesn't begin to gather like pilling on a woolen sweater. When one chisel begins to dull, we select another, and the teachers sharpen those we have discarded, in an ongoing cycle.

In a moment of impatience and lack of experience, I attempt to take one stubborn edge off of a small block without securing it in a vice, holding it in my hand instead. I exert too much pressure with the sharp chisel, and it skids off the wood and into the side of my left forefinger. The shock of pain is intense, and the cut begins to bleed profusely. Embarrassed, I quickly and discretely wrap a bandage tightly around my finger, hoping to staunch the blood-flow. I have to change it several times before the bleeding stops coming through. I will continue to bandage the wound for the rest of the month. It is several days before I admit to what has happened to one of the carving teachers. He holds up his own left hand, showing that his forefinger only extends to the first knuckle, and explains how he lost the rest to a bandsaw. Several years on, my small scar still twinges (I should probably have gotten stitches), but I am grateful that I didn't do more damage. The Greek woman with whom I share a workstation and a room in the villa commiserates with me, but also laughs, "You have bled for this puppet!"

Once the block is rounded out and the basic shape is in place, we begin the more detailed work. This shift in approach allows us to hold the wood in one hand while we carve with shorter, more delicate chisels. It is during this time that I begin to bond with my puppet, as I carefully pick out her features and hold her head in my hands. We are still instructed to carve away from our bodies, but I accidentally disobey now and then because my instinct is to work towards myself, despite having learned better. We are told not to watch a particular teacher as he corrects our mistakes because he has his "own method" of carving: he holds the chisel like a pencil between

his fingers instead of in his fist, and carves towards himself always. He has been doing it for twenty years. I idly wonder if I would end up doing something similar if I kept going for twenty years...

We work in a steady rhythm, carving for about six hours each day for most of the first week. Somehow no one tires of it. We are, of course, a self-selected group of people that are happy to be there, but I expected to eventually find tedium in the constant carving. On the contrary, it is thoroughly engrossing to dedicate so much time to the process of bringing a character's face out of a block of wood. For the most part, no one speaks during these days, for we are all too involved in the physical effort and focus necessary to carve accurately. The wood, taking on your body heat, becomes warm in your hand. Because I felt a fondness for Vodníčka at the outset, I find the entire process comforting, even soothing. Perhaps the experience would be different when carving a villainous character, but, in this instance, each carefully rounded stroke of the chisel is executed with affection. And as her face comes into focus, I begin to feel attached to her, excited to see how she will evolve.



Fig. 1. Beginning to carve facial details after the rough work on the head is complete. Photo courtesy of Mirek Trejtnar, Aug. 2015.

When each block has become part of a body, we assemble our puppets and test whether the joints are functional, making adjustments to ensure smooth movement. I have elected to use leather joints for the arms, so the only things I need to test are the hips and knees. Even without pins to hold them together, I can make this little armless, headless torso sit, stand, and kneel. The smoothly sliding joints are a snug, satisfying fit. I hold the head over the body and animate it slightly so that Vodnička-to-be can look down at herself. It is a strangely emotional moment to

see this unpainted, unfinished puppet looking up at me expectantly. I say hello to her. She does not reply.

Part 3: Decorative Elements

With each of our puppets' parts laid out before us, we are reminded to use the paints sparingly:

“You are painting a puppet, not a door,” says Mirek dryly. His philosophy includes the woodenness of puppets, he wants the wood and the carving to show through rather than being obscured with thick layers of paint. We are using simple, watered-down acrylics. Once I have applied a base coat of a bright, horrid green to each piece of my puppet, our instructor comes to my side and looks over the jarring result. She then mixes a potion of water, several dashes of varying yellows, some green and white, and a touch of brown. When I put the brush back to the wood, I laugh out loud at how subtle and beautiful this color is. The painting instructor smiles and, like a magician with one more trick, explains that now I can give shading to the paint. The secret is to use an opposite color (in this case, red). I note my own hesitation to put red paint on my little green monster, but before I can voice it, the instructor has conjured a very watery burgundy to use. I lift the brush and slide it across the green surface of the torso, and see that the color enriches the areas where shadows naturally fall and gives the green hue a more nuanced, natural, animal shade.

Finally, I paint the eyes. How the eyes are painted is integral to the puppet's expression: whether it is looking up or down, whether it is cross-eyed or wall-eyed, whether its eyes are light or dark. I have become accustomed to my carving of Vodníčka's face with its eyes blank; it is as if they have been closed all this time. I paint in big, black pupils and golden irises, but it is not until I place two little white dots to indicate the shine in her eyes that they seem suddenly to open and

declare the painting process quite finished. They have a sweet, slightly skewed, gaze. It is a further definition of the character and bearing of the final puppet.



Fig. 2. Trying different kinds of hair shortly after I finish painting the eyes. Photo courtesy of Mirek Trejtnar, Aug. 2015.

I consider that a costume might detract from the details I had carved into Vodnička's body to make her appear more reptilian, and would obscure her tail. Furthermore, the standard procedure in costuming a puppet is to secure costume elements directly onto the body. I approach the costuming instructor to ask how I can make a dress that would be easy both to put on and take off. Maneuvering around the strings presents the biggest challenge in designing removable costumes for marionettes, and the instructor pauses to consider the matter, leading me to believe that mine is a relatively unusual request. I watch her face as she considers my puppet, pulls out a piece of paper, and sketches. After a few minutes, she presents me with an

irregular shape that I do not at first understand – it looks a bit like a misshapen bib. She quickly transfers the shape to some scrap cloth and cuts it out to test on Vodníčka, and I realized then that she, with her vast experience of dress patterns, has imagined the three-dimensional dress I was asking for and reduced it to two dimensions in her mind in a matter of moments. Laying the shape across Vodníčka's shoulders and explaining where to put some velcro tabs, she does not see my excitement at the transformation of the oddly-shaped piece of scrap cloth into a template for the little dress I had imagined. For me, her ability to conjure this almost magical, but for her it is a matter of concentration, calculation, and a mild satisfaction that her hypothesis has produced a functional pattern.



Fig. 3. Sewing ruffles onto the dress, with Vodníčka's body on the table... I find myself concerned as to the whereabouts of her head in the photo as I type this caption... Photo courtesy of Mirek Trejtnar, Aug. 2015.

The result is a puppet that can run around with or without a costume, depending on performance requirements. The dress is quick and simple enough to construct, so I am able to add details to the plain, light brown smock that convert it into something much fancier. Though I had planned on its being simple and functional, something a river imp might make out of moss, I surrender to the extra time I have and add colorful ruffles and rosettes and a silky sash, turning it into a party dress. I am oddly compelled to keep her in costume for the rest of the time in Prague because she looks starkly nude next to her richly costumed fellows, and such is the extent of my anthropomorphic tendencies that I find myself concerned for Vodníčka's modesty.

We put the pieces of our painted puppets together, securing them with nails, wire, and strips of leather, and all at once the room is full of characters. Because it is not necessary to paint parts of the puppet that will be hidden by costume, most of the other puppets do not yet look finished. However, my original design included no costume at all; I made construction, carving, and painting decisions based on the assumption that each body part and every joint would be visible on the finished puppet. So, when I hammer the final nail into the leather cord that secures the head and neck to the body, I suddenly have Vodníčka in my hands, as a jointed doll. Though I have handled every piece of the material that makes her up, from her leather flippers to the wooden tip of her tail, I notice immediately the surprising weight and hardness of her. She doesn't exactly look soft, but she certainly doesn't look like she should be so hard, simply because, to me at least, she looks quite huggable.

Once we attach the strings to the upright controls that we have built, we take our marionettes for their first walk. From the first day of the workshop, we have practiced making the resident puppets walk, kneel, sit, stand, fall, jump, and run. By keeping ahold of the marionette's hand-

strings no matter the actions of the head or legs, the character appears to always be alert and engaged. When the hands are not attended to, the marionette seems to drag and the apparent energy of the character lags noticeably.

Our performance instructor explains that marionettes can be excused for unrealistic movements as long as we occasionally punctuate them with realistic gestures. Those sudden bursts of realism, when applied to important dramatic moments, excuse less precise motion in relatively unimportant sequences. If a character must run onto the stage, see a terrible sight, and sink to her knees, then the running on can happen in a flurry of legs and strings; it becomes irrelevant once the execution of the slow kneel is clean. Vodníčka wobbles and bobs in a way that, for me, is perfectly realistic for a not- quite-human toddler, but which to Mirek indicates that the head is too heavy for the body. Because she cannot achieve the smooth walk of the other puppets, running is a more complicated movement to perform with Vodníčka. Mirek suggests adding strings to her heels so that she can fly or swim, more or less horizontally, and so this amphibious character has become a creature, not only of earth and water, but of air as well.



Fig. 4. She can stumble-walk, swim, and fly. Photo taken by author, Nov. 2015.

Conclusion: Making by Hand as the Foundation of Puppeting

Once, to have said that an article is 'made by hand' would have been a statement of the obvious. How else would you have made it? ...In today's world, however, 'handmade'... connotes a kind of authenticity and devotion that people, increasingly cast as passive consumers rather than active citizens, feel is otherwise missing from their lives. With citizenship comes moral responsibility, yet how can we be responsible for a world that comes to us ready-made? At the very same moment when the whole world is at our fingertips, it also seems completely out of our hands. (Ingold 122)

Ingold explains that it is in the technological “progress” from the full, broad use of our hands (holding, carrying, shaping) into the mere use of our fingertips (pressing a button to start a machine, send a text, or type an essay) that the hand, “though still anatomically human, has lost something of its humanity” (116). In a consumer society, the act of making things by hand is a

radical practice that represents time stolen from the bottom line, money spent on materials instead of products, steps taken away from modern capitalist imperatives. By making, we literally bring the world back into our hands; we reunite with and communicate with the materiality of our own body as it exists in relation to the (always already material) world. Even if we cannot single-handedly recreate the entire world we live in by engaging in practices of making by hand, we can certainly activate or commune with the liveliness of our own small patch of the world by so doing.

When employing the “key capacities” of grip and touch that “make hands human,” making things by hand reveals a communion between people and materials (Ingold 116). As distinct as individual voices, “every kind of manual gesture admits infinite variation,” Ingold explains, and the things produced by hand, be they musical notes or woven baskets, carry something of the qualities of those who make them (116). In an interview on the 15th anniversary of the founding of the Puppets in Prague program, Leah Gaffen echoes this sentiment, saying that, “if you see the puppets that the students make, they always have something about them which looks like the maker. There is always this kind of psychological bond” (qtd in Velinger). The bond between individual and puppet is visible, not only in terms of physical characteristics, but also in terms of the way each person animates their creation with their hands. The puppet's style of movement is, obviously, dependent upon the way it is handled, and the personal variations each of us brings into performance reverberate through the strings and into the figure's actions.

It is in the process of making with one's hands that the realization that no single element (material, tool, hands or mind of the maker) can be regarded separately as the producer of the final object. As Ingold says, when engaged in making, “the actual form emerges from the pattern

of rhythmic movement, not from the idea” (115). It is in the collaboration of movement, pressure, gesture, material, and tool that something is made. We are not the sole creators of anything we make; whatever we make by hand is always more than our idea *and* more than the materials that make it up. My marionette is the result of rhythmic labor, of many textures of materials, of my ideas and my hands (as well as the ideas and hands of my teachers). She is the result of listening to materials and interacting with them, rather than imposing structure onto materials that have no active role in the process.

Figure 1 could be read as a model hylomorphic moment, the imposition of form onto inert material, a block of wood with no input into the process. However, as documented in this chapter, the collaborative tactile interchange between maker and material is responsible for the emergence of the creature, Vodníčka. While Ingold's emphasis is on the mutual co-creation of things through a combination of gestures and forces and materials' tendencies toward certain behaviors, another crucial aspect of making is the affective quality of engagement in craft. It is through spending time in physical and emotional contact with the various pieces of the puppet that the character of the object comes into being. The puppet is an aspect of myself as it manifests in conjunction with the skilled (or less skilled) gestures, raw materials, and carefully selected tools employed in the process of creative craft. I stand outside my own experience and view it in the form of the “finished” puppet (“finished” because the processes of damage and decay mean that the object is never *really* finished), and in so doing I feel as though I am communing with myself in an externalized, material format.

Revising the classical concept of making as a unidirectional process, into a relational, horizontal process is necessary feminist work in the recasting of how we imagine and make the world.

Feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, coming from a background of psychoanalysis and material culture studies, tells us that “external objects, implements, and instruments with which the subject continually interacts become, while they are being used, intimate, vital, even libidinally cathected parts of the body image” (80). The intimacy she names comes after an external object is incorporated into the body image from the outside, but when one *makes* such an object, that intimacy grows from the inside of the process of making, the meeting of material potentialities and human hands. Even when the object I create is not near enough to be included in my sense of bodily awareness, having made it gives me the sense of its being part of my self-image. The object continues to perform on me whenever I encounter it, a physical memory of an experience in which I made something real out of something imagined with the help of materials, and, almost as an afterthought, made myself along with it; in making a puppet, I have produced an object that is evidence of an extra-lingual thought process, I have inhabited something of a cultural history I would never have been able to access *except* through experience of engagement in this craft, and I have gained something of the “lost humanity” of my hands that Ingold describes.

This chapter has documented and discussed the foundational element of puppeting as a way of seeing and thinking: working with wood, respecting the process of stitching, feeling the character of a chisel, beginning to imagine how its voice might differ from that of a needle because, after all, this is a puppetry studio. Puppeting begins to take shape as a new materialist practice that sidesteps issues of agency and intentionality in materials, and bounds over concerns of projecting human interests into the heart of non-human matter, but instead equips one with an intellectual freedom born from artistic practice to engage in strategic anthropomorphism that helps us make ourselves at home in the world and have some sympathy for it and even enchantment with it. The

next chapter, in which I discuss another period of training and material-cultural exploration, this time with the American Bread and Puppet Theater, presents an expansion of these ideas; puppeting is not only an internal process of re-visioning one's personal relationship with materials and craft, it is also a way of re-visioning entire cultures' relationships with the materials that construct their physical and social realities.



Fig. 5. Facial detail. Photo taken by author, Nov. 2015.

Chapter Four

A Bread and Puppet Summer

While the previous chapter focuses on assembling active materials in a traditional process of making at the Puppets in Prague workshop, this chapter focuses on activating material assemblages in both cultural and theatrical performance with the Bread and puppet theater. Working with Bread and Puppet means working with the theatre's material history and, by extension, the cultural history of its materiality. Learning to think in the material terms of what's present on the Bread and Puppet farm in Glover, Vermont gives us the next element in understanding the key concept of puppeting that this thesis defines. We don't think of bread as a puppet; however, we can think about how bread is made, laden with affect, stuffed with significance; in essence, puppeteered. To take it even further, what happens when we think of bread through the lens of puppeting? We can see the different characters of bread, and how it has played different roles in building and enforcing socio-cultural structures (both hierarchical and communal) depending on the mode of its production. The Bread and Puppet Theater presents its anti-capitalist values via the themes its dramatic works explore; almost more so, however, their bread is a presentation of these values.

In addition to laying out the context of the contemporary Bread and Puppet Theater, this chapter activates and demonstrates puppeting as a doorway to critical analysis of theatrical events. To date, the intellectual investigation of the Bread and Puppet Theater focuses on its extraordinary puppetry, but the bread is rarely addressed as something interconnected and impossible to separate from the art. The lens of puppeting allows us to see this, and to consider the fundamental materiality of the bread as much as the puppets – and how they are doing the same

work in different ways, at different scales, in different registers. This chapter examines the bread as an inseparable part of the puppetry the company has produced. The basis the previous chapter sets out, namely that making is a form of thinking, underpins the recognition presented in this chapter that how we make something (or do not) informs our perception of all made things, bread as much as puppets as much as airplanes. That perception in turn determines our level of investment in what is made and frames our thoughts about it.

This chapter presents an extended residency period with the company, documented again through autoethnographic journal excerpts interspersed in italics (I have edited these excerpts for length, but have kept them, and all references to Elka Schumann, in the present tense to maintain the immediacy with which they were written). It analyzes the long practices of their theater-making, the lifetime of commitment to sustainable living as an enchanting possibility. The time spent on the farm led to recognition of making practices as disruptions in the destructive consumerist cycles of mainstream American culture. I engaged in both cultural performance (the case of the bread) and theatrical performance (the case of the puppets) while on the farm, and in so doing further developed an embodied, relational understanding of performing objects as points of enchanting intersubjective connection for those who encounter them in a performance register. Shared haptic perceptions of the same (or similar) stimuli in liminal/liminoid spaces produce a profound intimacy between people, an understanding of each other's immediate experience that can extend across vast spatial or temporal divides.

As an apprentice, I wore the same masks and costumes, performed with the same puppets, and ate the same bread that countless others had before me; in this way I entered bodily into a performance tradition that has made its way throughout the world, as those that have worked

with Bread and Puppet have carried it with them into their own distinct artistic practices. In other words, taking part in the Bread and Puppet apprenticeship programme, as I did in the summer of 2016, involves entering into a thoughtful collaboration with performing objects hand-made, over the course of decades, in a pointedly anti-war, anti-capitalist dramatic paradigm as developed by Peter Schumann and the late Elka Schumann (1936-2021). This chapter takes Peter Schumann at his word when he says that the bread is actually the most important element of his theater, and explores the complex interplay between people, bread, and puppets and how we are ourselves puppeteered by modes of production, capitalism, and consumerism.

A Brief Summary of the Bread & Puppet Theater's History

Bread & Puppet has touched the lives, and actively involved the hands, of countless participants, and the Schumanns have in fact seeded generations of theatre artists and activists (and passersby) with a set of fundamental values regarding art's vital role in both individual and societal well-being. A central strategy used to reach people is now, and always has been, the free offering of bread to all who watch. Founded in New York in 1963 by Peter and Elka Schumann, the Bread and Puppet Theater ("Bread & Puppet" here, for short) is one of the oldest non-commercial, self-sustaining theatre companies currently operating in the United States. Because its methods, aesthetics, and ideals have rippled through theatrical and political culture for decades, it also stands as one of the most iconic and quietly influential theatre companies in American history.

Avant-garde artists whose work invigorated New York City in the early 1960s, like John Cage and Allan Kaprow, certainly had an influence on Bread & Puppet and others working at this time, but rather than dive into that rarefied world, the Schumanns were making puppets and performing in parades with the neighborhood children on the Lower East Side. At that cultural

moment, in which the push to establish true civil rights was gaining strength, radical theatre-makers were energetically interrogating what theatre was, what it could be, and what it could do; banishing cultural gatekeepers and producing inclusive performances based on egalitarian, communitarian ideals were goals taken up by a variety of experimental companies, but Bread & Puppet is one of the few that continues in this mission. Baz Kershaw places Bread & Puppet, along with the San Francisco Mime Troupe and El Teatro Campesino in San Juan Bautista, California, at the head of the American wing of a “paranational theatrical movement” that has spread “across most countries of the world” (*Politics* 10).

Having risen to international prominence with its anti-Vietnam War performances, Bread & Puppet is still closely associated with its role as a radical protest theatre, perhaps most widely recognized for the enormous sculpted faces and hands its puppeteers carried aloft on poles in demonstrations and pageants demanding peace. Peter Schumann, dancer, sculptor, musician, baker, and artistic director since the company's inception, resisted such a specific classification for Bread & Puppet as early as 1968, stating that “the theatre must do more than protest... I don't think our business is to protest but to say what needs to be said or what feels good to say” (qtd in Brown, et. al. 64). Saying what needs to be said (or what feels good to say), for Schumann, has always resulted in socially-engaged performances employing an idiosyncratic range of stylized character archetypes (often proletariat heroes and bureaucratic villains, but also mythic figures of gods, demons, plants, and animals) across a range of media. Schumann has created, among other things, written manifestos, block prints and paintings, experimental dance, mask work, circus, and, of course, puppetry at all scales. As part of every performance, the company members have always offered freshly baked bread to the audience for free (entry to the performances themselves almost always being donation-based).

Active in New York City until 1970, the company toured all over the world, gaining members and always using the most basic and cheapest materials to produce performances. In 1974, after a four-year residency at Goddard College, the Schumanns relocated to a small farm in Glover, Vermont, and the theatre has operated out of this space ever since, housing company members when possible and continuing to tour. Until 1998, Bread & Puppet produced Our Domestic Resurrection Circus, a multi-textural performance festival featuring vaudevillian political circus and pageantry at an epic scale, every summer. As the crowds grew each year (eventually reaching numbers of at least 30,000), the event became unmanageable: “it wasn't ours anymore... it became everything that a market culture produces,” says Peter (qtd in Daley 191). The Schumanns declared an end to the tradition when a violent confrontation ended in a man's death in the camp grounds. Today, the company continues to tour, giving performances and workshops with a small core company of performers. It also presents a small circus performance every weekend during the summertime, with more intimate, indoor performances of Schumann's conceptual darlings each Friday night, performed by apprentices who live and work on the farm, learning the Bread & Puppet process and philosophy first-hand and taking that learning into their personal practices.

The impressions made by Bread and Puppet, along with its techniques of making, have spread across the USA and the world, and can be felt throughout a wide variety of contemporary cultural sites. Its radically leftist creative and political principles have chiefly set a powerful example for alternative theatre practices and the inclusion of citizens in political processes, influencing everything from street- and community theatre stylistics (the UK's Welfare State International is but one of many companies that drew on the techniques of Bread & Puppet and

spread them further afield, its founder John Fox referring to Peter Schumann as “my hero”) to the very face of contemporary mass political demonstration, where giant puppets and masks are practically expected elements today (10). Artistically, the rough-hewn, large-scale visual style that marks Bread & Puppet's work has been equally influential, not only through the efforts of companies and individuals that have taken this kind of work into communities across the USA to create political and ritual performance (In the Heart of the Beast in Michigan; Many Mouths, One Stomach in Arizona; and the People's Puppets of Occupy Street in New York, to name a few), but also via contributors and apprentices whose work has entered more mainstream, commercial spheres: director Julie Taymor drew on the Bread & Puppet style on Broadway in 1998, where the *Lion King* recast the possibilities of popular puppetry for the 21st century, and directly referenced it in the 2007 film *Across the Universe*, which includes an anti-Vietnam protest featuring Bread & Puppet designs; Bread & Puppet associates turned their skills to creating visuals for the music festivals of the band Phish, and these events evolved in conversation with other extremely influential festivals like Nevada's Burning Man.

In the realm of academia and criticism, Bread & Puppet has been followed and documented as well: it is consistently included in analyses of radical theatre companies of the 1960s (see Erven, Fenn, and Harding and Rosenthal); in 1988, theatre scholar Stefan Brecht offered two painstakingly detailed volumes covering the first twenty-five years of the company's artistic and internal workings in *Peter Schumann's Bread and puppet theater*, in which he makes it clear that Peter Schumann is the single artist of the 20th century who most fully realized the vision of Brecht's father Berthold; John Bell, professor of Puppetry Arts at the University of Connecticut (the only American university to currently offer a program focused on puppetry), joined Bread & Puppet in the 1970s, was a member of the company for over a decade, is now president of its

Board of Directors, and is one of the most influential scholars of puppet theatre currently writing. His work has been instrumental in bringing the study of puppetry into the realm of academic legitimacy.

Despite the critical and scholarly attention it has received over the years, its many awards and accolades, a number of political controversies (including Peter Schumann's consistent criticism of Israel's treatment of Palestinians and a revocation of the traditional invitation to perform in New York City's Halloween parade in 2001 following 9/11), Bread & Puppet has had, through its decades of touring and giving workshops in which ideas are freely shared, an “almost anonymous effect...on local pageant and parade practices” all over the world (Bell “Possibilities” 396). Perhaps because it has never been extensively funded (its politics being unpalatable to government and corporate funding bodies – and vice versa), perhaps because it is sometimes mistakenly pigeon-holed as one of a number of defunct radical theatres of the 1960s, perhaps because the company itself does not fit in any current models of commercial theatre, perhaps because its theatre defies categorization, Bread & Puppet has ever remained a humble enterprise, in receipt of minimal acknowledgment for the breadth of its cultural impact.

Rather than analyze its history or explore its artistic productions (as Brecht and Bell have done extensively), or further chart the many lineages that trace themselves back to Bread & Puppet, I examine the company as a processual training ground for the artistic and political imagination, using the insights gleaned during my apprenticeship experience in the summer of 2016 as illustrations of the company's role in a philosophical project begun half a century ago: namely, proving through practice that the culture of global capitalism in which we are enmeshed is neither a natural state nor a foregone conclusion. The truest legacy of the Bread & Puppet

Theatre is, I argue, a consistent insistence upon reaching toward alternatives to that dominating configuration. Holding space for others to join in the reaching, and feeding them with hearty bread and the permission/invitation to create cheap art, may not have been anyone's initial goal for the company, but it is an achievement in world-making that no other theatre company in the USA has had the capacity or temerity to strive toward.

She Went to the Woods

I went to the woods without motives like Thoreau's; I wanted to learn more about how to make and perform puppets in a style I had never experienced. I was aware of the Bread & Puppet Theatre from a scratchy videotape I found gathering dust in my undergraduate university's library. It was a short piece of footage of towering figures lumbering through pine trees as discordant music played. I easily discovered the basic history of the company, but when I went to join the apprenticeship program several years later, I realized how threadbare my understanding had been. My commentary on my training experience in this chapter intercuts in italics with a more theoretical and critical approach to the work and the legacy of the company. Having spent a month sleeping in a tent in the woods, participating in the performances, and taking part in life on the farm, my perspective as a participant-observer led to an embodied understanding of the company as a cultural and theatrical enclave for a distinctive repertoire embedded in the resources of its natural, social, and political environments.

Bread & Puppet has influenced generations of artists and activists in a holistic integration of artistic processes with the daily processes of living, and the farm can be seen as an example of world-making within a capitalist structure that espouses many of the same ideals (self-reliance, independent thought, and creative political action, to name a few), but rejects them in practice.

For me, Bread & Puppet acted as a training ground for what Peter Schumann calls “radicality,” as much as the making and maintenance of traditions. Based in material arts practice that celebrates an ideal of “cheap art” as an ongoing process of making that never ends, the enchantment of the work lies in its principles of social ecology and pragmatist aesthetics, in the continuity of the art as a practice rather than a product.

The Materiality of the Bread...

“Art is food! You can't eat it but it feeds you,” says Schumann in 1984 in “the Why Cheap Art? manifesto” (sic). This assertion stands against the free distribution of bread during every performance event, which does indeed feed us. The enchanting playfulness of his paradoxical approach destabilizes dominant production modes, theatrical as well as gustatorial. This offers us an alternative to invisible capitalist puppeting, making visible different modes of puppeting and the potential to take things into your own hands. It encourages us to actively produce instead of morbidly consuming, such that we creatively, critically, and politically produce our own environments, identities, and communities. The Cheap Art manifesto, one of the most famous pieces of text produced by the Bread & Puppet Press, was written in response to the Reagan-era “corporate takeover” of art; during this period, corporations began their own collections, actively intervening in museums and other arts institutions in order to build their own prestige for the sake of public relations strategy (Wu 122). Bread & Puppet has always made clear its opposition to the privatization of culture, insisting on universal access to art. Indeed, perhaps the single most important aspect of the company's legacy lies in the fact that it has always incorporated the efforts of the communities in which it has found itself. As a result, Bread & Puppet has touched the lives, and actively involved the hands, of countless participants, and the Schumanns have in

fact seeded generations of theatre artists and activists (and passersby) with a set of fundamental values regarding art's vital role in both individual and societal well-being. A central strategy used to reach people is now, and always has been, the free offering of bread to all who watch.

When I get back home from the Bread & Puppet farm in Glover, Vermont, I experience an intense culture shock. Having spent weeks camping out in the woods, the “real world” feels so much hollower and flashier than it did before. There are screens stuffed with advertisements everywhere; the farm is a screen-free environment where the only media is Democracy Now on the radio and a couple of independent newspapers. The lights of the city don't let night in; nights on the farm are dark, perfect for stargazing. The warming sense of being surrounded by people sharing in my experience of living in the physical world, feeling our feet in the grass, working on the same projects, eating the same bread, is slipping away. In an effort to hold it just a little longer, I make a loaf of bread. I've never tried it before, and it is more complex than Peter Schumann makes it look. Sweating and wondering whether I've kneaded it enough, I think of him, with his apron that reaches his ankles, covered in flour, pushing a wheelbarrow full of fresh loaves from the oven to the farm house almost every day. After a lifetime of baking bread, I figure, as I struggle with my own dough, it must become second nature.

While Schumann's work has been, in the words of Penny Francis, “a catalyst of the twentieth century's puppet theatre revival,” Peter Schumann considers his practice of baking bread at least as important as the puppetry (11). In a 2013 retrospective of Bread & Puppet's contributions to theatre history, he commented on the literal precedence of the bread in the company's name, saying that, “the real purpose is to create the occasion for the eating of bread together” (qtd in Cook). To take him at his word is not to discount the theatre or the art, but to recognize how

inextricable it is from the practice of making and sharing the bread. For over fifty years, all Bread & Puppet productions (circuses, pageants, indoor shows, and street shows) have included an offering of bread to the audience. It is now, as always, a dark, dense, earthy sourdough rye: the kind of nutrient-rich, flavorsome loaf that you can practically live off. Schumann learned to bake it with his mother when he was a child. When he was ten years old, during WWII, his family fled German Silesia (now in Poland) to the safety of a small village called Schleswig-Holstein, on the border with Denmark. There, the community tended shared grain fields, and used a single communal oven to bake their bread. “It was the most desired object,” says Schumann of the bread, “to have enough for family and friends” (qtd in Pollack). The sense of the preciousness of rye bread, as a fundamental staple to be respected and shared, that Schumann learned as a child, has never left him, and he still bakes almost daily, using the same sourdough starter since the 1970s when his family first moved to the farm.

Rye flour, water, salt, and sprouted rye berries are the only ingredients in the bread. Grinding the grain from the rye field is a daily task, and Schumann bakes most days of the summer, adding four gallons of sourdough with three gallons of rye berries to achieve a small bake. It is an ongoing process of mixing, kneading, and waiting – before building the fire, shaping the dough into loaves, and loading these into one of the simple, handmade clay ovens on a wide paddle. “And now comes the hocus pocus,” says Schumann, as he fits the oven’s wooden door in place and props it closed with a long, slender log (Bread).

It is thought that rye traveled from the Near East through Europe in the Bronze Age as a stowaway weed hidden in the midst of purposefully planted wheat fields. Wheat has been a prized crop for millennia, the grain perennially preferred for baking bread, however it is more

delicate than rye and in the face of a failing wheat crop, it became clear that rye could thrive in much harsher conditions, like those found in central and northern Europe. Though it has been cultivated in its own right for thousands of years, it has historically been a much-maligned grain; Pliny the Elder dismissed it as unpleasant, edible only to stave off starvation. Because wheat was more expensive and produced a finer, fluffier bread, it was considered more luxurious than oats, barley, and rye. Where wheat was used for cakes and the fancy, unreachable loaves of the rich, rye was used for the common loaf that kept people alive – and its better nutritional profile meant that it was, in fact, better suited to the job. Nevertheless, as William Rubel explains in *Bread: A Global History*, paintings and literature from the sixteenth century onwards feature white bread as a symbol of wealth and status, with darker breads being associated with the poorest in society (Rubel 42). Rye was the poor man's bread, the peasant's bread, the “bread of the people,” as Schumann would call it (qtd in Pollack).

Rye is, synchronistically, the best botanical metaphor for Peter Schumann's theatre: it does not make a delicate cake; Schumann does not make delicate theatre. Rye spreads like a weed and can grow anywhere; Bread & Puppet has traveled the world and performed in all kinds of spaces, public and private, leaving traces, ideas, techniques in its wake. Rye has been deemed lesser by certain cultural authorities; Bread & Puppet has never, in and of itself, entered a commercial “mainstream,” and it certainly does not appeal to those audiences who seek cake-theatre. The Schumanns have each drawn the comparison between the bread and the artwork for many years: the bread takes work to chew, the performances take work to grasp, and both are made over and over again in a practice of attempting to “get it right,” which, if it ever does happen, is simply another iteration of a larger project based in the process of making; the point is not the product, but the continuing experimentation with and exploration of elements that can never be exactly

the same every time. In 1968, Peter explained that “we named our theatre the Bread & Puppet because we felt that the theatre should be as basic as bread” (qtd in Brown, et. al. 64). As basic, as nourishing, as fundamental, as ephemeral, and as ritually important.

The little rye field on the farm overlooks the vast field where the pageants take place.

Throughout the summer, the sound of the wind combing through the stalks accompanies us as we work in the garden or troop to rehearsal or stargaze at night. Depending on the strength of the breeze, the rye looks like a gently rippling golden pool, or a stormy chaos of waves. It is possible to watch for longer than I would have thought, several weeks ago, when I first brushed busily past the whole expanse. My sense of time has shifted slightly, and so has my sense of what is worth watching, what is worth paying attention to.

“Theatre is a form of religion... It preaches sermons and it builds up a self-sufficient ritual where the actors try to raise their lives to the purity and ecstasy of the actions in which they participate,” Schumann explains (qtd in McCormick). Non-performers can participate in the ritual by sharing the bread. Of course, one can watch a Bread & Puppet performance without it, but the bread binds everyone together in a common moment of grounding, of chewing and tasting and swallowing. The acts of sharing the bread brings the performers and spectators into the immediacy of their physical presence, into an embodied awareness of their surroundings, into the moment. Any food, given the kind of respect Schumann gives his bread, will have such an effect, but because bread is so basic, and has been the most common staple food throughout European and Middle Eastern regions for thousands of years, it in particular has been taken up for use in religious ritual. Across Abrahamic religions in particular, there is a continuous sense of the ritual significance of sharing bread (for example, challah bread is eaten on the Jewish

Sabbath to represent the manna that fell from Heaven as the Israelites wandered the desert, and the bread of the Eucharist represents the body of Christ and his sacrifice for humanity). Its religious use spreads into secular ritual, and the breaking of bread together is an ancient act of affirmation and fellowship, used in rites of passage, to confirm social contracts, and to celebrate.

Schumann says that giving people bread makes them “a better audience” (qtd in Pollack). He does not explain why that might be, or how it might work. In fact, in any interview or piece of writing, he keeps his commentary so simple that you find yourself elaborating for him after the fact, or else he dips and weaves in discursive spirals. Either way, he avoids pinning himself to definitive statements. The bread makes a better audience, he says. That would suggest that having a good audience for the theatre is important because of the importance of the theatrical ritual itself. Yet he also says,

The theatre is just a vehicle for the bread. It's not the other way around. There has to be a method of distributing the bread. If you have free bread... very suspicious for Americans – they can't do that, it's not part of their culture. So in order to do that, you have to trick them. This trick is called puppetry. (*Bread*)

There are several loaves of bread in a cupboard in the kitchen all the time, in case anyone needs a snack. My body's timing is adjusting such that I am not very hungry at meal-times and so in the between times, I often take advantage of the ever-refilling bread cupboard. I never see anyone put new bread in, but there is always some there. It is like many other aspects of the farm – things seem to appear because everyone is always doing something to contribute. While I am out with a group digging old fence-posts out of the ground to widen the garden for the future, others are milling rye from storage, others are rehydrating clay for re-use, and someone is replenishing the bread supply. Though things seem disorganized and ad-hoc at times, which I find I am

perfectly comfortable with, the farm actually runs remarkably smoothly, especially considering that it is hosting 60+ people.

Schumann's puppetry has always resisted the commodification of art, and his bread has always resisted the commodification of food. Founded in the early stages of the counterculture movement of the 1960s, Bread & Puppet was (and still is) very much aligned with the values that typified the anti-authoritarian youth culture of the era. A rejection of traditional American social norms and mores very much included a rejection of the mass-produced, modern foods that had been marketed through the 1950s as evidence of progress: the marriage of science, technology, and efficiency. By this time, baking had become a professional undertaking rather than a home-based activity. Pre-sliced bread, made from flour bleached to a brilliant white (and then necessarily enriched), appeared in modern, streamlined loaves produced by the millions by the 1930s. As William Rubel puts it, “in millennial terms, a communal dream of eating the bread of kings [had] been realized” (42).

Nevertheless, baked into this bread, as Aaron Bobrow-Strain explores, was intense social anxiety about gender roles, immigration and racial purity, and public health. The increasingly widespread acceptance of germ theory by the turn of the 20th century led to acute concerns about cleanliness and its role in disease prevention. During this era, women were weaponized as guardians against the spread of disease because, as public health official Hibbert Winslow Hill wrote in 1912, “infectious diseases in general radiate from and are kept going by women” (qtd in Bobrow-Strain “White Bread” 24). Thus, women were tasked, by newly styled experts in household management, to maintain *the utmost cleanliness at all times* in food preparation – and in every other sphere. White bread produced in an industrial setting was sold as an antidote to

anxieties about hygiene; a controlled, industrial environment could guarantee “clean” and “respectable” bread, while home bakers with their inexact practices could accidentally harm the family unit and, by extension, the nation (Bobrow-Strain “White Bread” 28).

Concerns about the health of the nation were deeply intertwined with concerns about the dominance of the white race within it. The direct association between the color white and hygiene solidified in the early 20th century as it was adopted for everything from soaps to nurse's uniforms; this association extended to bread as well as people. The Immigration Act of 1924, which placed quotas on all groups from the Eastern hemisphere and enforced an outright ban on immigrants from Asia, was enacted explicitly to maintain the racial composition of the USA. As Bobrow-Strain points out, by the 1930s, “the design of everyday objects,” including loaves of bread, “reflected and advanced the ideology of social eugenics, with the visual ideals of streamlined objects, dirt-free environments, and racial hygiene continually overlapping and reinforcing each other” (“White Bread” 31). Multi-colored, home-made foods produced by immigrants stood in contrast to the ideal of mass-produced white bread, and marked those who ate them as less clean and less “American” than those who carried sandwiches dutifully made with Wonderbread.

There are limited toilet facilities on the farm; we are allowed one electric shower each week (otherwise there are several solar showers – large pouches that heat water with sunlight that you can hang from a tree), and there is one indoor toilet (we can use the composting toilets – lofted outhouses that require fairly intensive up-keep and are really for audiences – but are encouraged to use the less glamorous facilities in the woods near our tents, which amount to a seat on a bucket). Since we are either outside or in the dirt-floor theatre rehearsing, or else

working in the garden or making papier-mâché or clay or painting, we are all covered in sweat and dirt and dust most of the time. People smell distinctly human, but I note bemusedly that it's actually sort of comforting – besides, we have a lot of space to exist in and we're outdoors a lot. Never have I seen so many people washing their hands all at once before meals. I take full advantage of my weekly shower, but otherwise I catch a ride to the nearby lake most days at lunchtime to rinse off. In the first week, I went town to check my email at the Glover library, but after one trip to the lake, I figure email can wait.

Food historian Warren Belasco explains how the 1960s countercultural movement conceived of the production of white bread as a metaphor for racial control in contemporary society: “to make clean bread...bakers removed all colored ingredients (segregation), bleached the remaining flour (suburban school socialization), and then, to prevent discoloring decay, added strong preservatives and stabilizers (law enforcement)” (50). White bread was dismissed as part of the machinery of oppression. The best way to resist it was to take the authority back from industry and make food with one's own hands. Whole foods advocate Beatrice Trum Hunter claimed home bread-baking as “a revolt against plastic food in a plastic culture. The free-form loaf is but another aspect of the revolt against the mechanization of life” (qtd in Bobrow-Strain “The Rise”).

Peter Schumann's bread was never explicitly linked to the counterculture ideologies; his bread comes from his childhood experience of scarcity rather than rebellion. Schumann's bread exists in a timeless, fashion-less plainness; he simply keeps baking on a daily basis, whether the outside world seems to value it, ideologically or otherwise. It was, however, an ideal example of the kind of authenticity that many sought in the 1960s and '70s. The popular stance in counterculture

circles (inevitably composed in large part by privileged people) was that “good food was rustic, unrefined, and brown, ideally with roots in peasant society,” explains Bobrow-Strain, with more than a hint of sarcasm (“The Rise”). That this description authentically fits the bread of Bread & Puppet simply illuminates how much their work filled a void at that cultural moment.

The interest in this kind of food has ultimately changed how Americans eat, and the high esteem felt for home-baked bread in the 1960s counterculture has translated into the high esteem felt for artisanal bakery loaves today, this coming after a series of socio-economic permutations that has reassigned low status to mass-produced white bread (such that it is now associated directly with poverty) and made the seeded, brown breads of local bakeries symbolic of a lifestyle of health and holistic nutrition only the affluent can afford. Baking one's own bread is rare enough that, when governments introduced Covid-19 lockdowns in March of 2020, those who could began sharing their bread-baking escapades as if they deserved credit from anyone other than those eating it (Kecmanovic). Initially, pictures of perfect loaves appeared, complete with quirky captions, but, within only a few weeks, the fad turned back on itself and pictures of comically botched bread and cynical commentary overtook the picturesque entries. Soon, the trends shifted and bread-baking became one of many (brief) “quarantine fads.”

“Bread is life,” is an adage in countries across the world. In a capitalist global economy based on neoliberalism (or, as Reijer Hendrikse calls it in 2020, *neo-illiberalism*, given the consolidation of wealth and power behind nationalist politics and monopolizing tech industries), the lives we can choose from are reflected in the bread we are able to buy, and, in wealthier areas, the status it projects. We look to the prepackaged lives on offer, bound by the mimetic desire described by Girard, and anxiously compare what we have and what we have achieved against hyperreal

spectacle. To make one's own bread is, perhaps even more than it was fifty years ago, a material metaphor for making one's own life, outside the pre-packaged options available to us depending on our socio-economic status in a system that was always rigged. Though there have been distractions galore, international reactions to the coronavirus pandemic have made the false premises of that system breathtakingly clear, particularly in the USA, where mega-corporations (i.e., the managerial class) received billions of dollars in bailouts while regular citizens received scraps; a huge proportion of the population could not afford to stay at home and attempt to bake bread, and many more “essential workers” were never given a chance.

The divorce of the people from the means of production, from the basic skills of living and the basic opportunity to use them, has never been more apparent than in contemporary Western culture. This is not to opine for an idealized past; nowhere in the world have people *ever* had full liberty to create their own lives, but the doctrines imparted by Western governments *tell* us that we can, while the policies adopted restrict us to a small number of positions, all of which are cogs in the capitalist machine. Bread & Puppet has never espoused Marxist views, even as vague as these, and is ultimately the kind of company that would not be able to exist outside of the American capitalist system. They make do on very little, sharing resources in kind and taking donations, but the farm is an inheritance, those taking part in the apprenticeship program pay for the privilege, and the only regulations they really have to worry about are fire- and safety-related. Bread & Puppet is decidedly against the means and results of global capitalism, but if it puts forth any political ideology, it is undeclared – but that which it *exhibits* is more along the lines of Voltaire's oft-quoted and oft-ignored ending to *Candide*: *il faut cultiver notre jardin*, which can translate variously as “we must cultivate/tend/take care of/grow/farm our garden.” The problem is getting a garden in the first place.

We have one full free day each week, which many of us use as a laundry day in one of the nearby towns. We change dollars for quarters at the laundromat, combining loads to save water and money, and explore. Having grown up in California, I am dumbstruck by the sheer “Americanness” of Vermont: open space, rolling hills, fluffy clouds, and on one laundry day, a town center complete with bandstand, brass band playing, and families gathered for a summertime ice-cream social. It would feel like an Americana theme park if it were not so authentic, and I would find it eerily old-fashioned if I were not so charmed. On the way back to the farm, we stop at the country store in Glover – it, too, has this feeling of “old” America to it, with creaky wooden floors and brands I didn't grow up with. A deer's head is mounted on the wall.

I explore a little and discover that there is an entire section of the store that I haven't seen yet, that looks to be full of camping gear. I step in to see if I can find a better flashlight. Every wall is lined, floor to ceiling, with rifles for sale. I have never seen one in person before, and even though I recognize that these are meant for hunting, I leave without a flashlight. Back at the farm, with its multi-cultural mix of nationalities, ethnicities, and languages, I ask about Vermont's demographics and discover that it is over 95% white. I wonder, with my stomach dropping, whether I haven't internalized an idea of “old American” culture as “white American” culture. I wonder what kinds of mythologies I have unconsciously absorbed.

...And the Puppets

Invited to create characters to bring and dance along with Elka's recorder before the circus, I find a papier-mâché raccoon mask in the red barn, with a light brown cloth backing to cover my

head completely and a long, light blue, distinctly 1970s-style gown in the costume store above the museum. I, and several others, improvise dances along to the music as the audience arrives. We are among the first performers they see – we are setting the scene. Children cautiously approach, and we dance together.

The performing objects of Bread & Puppet are “puppets” primarily because that's what Peter calls them. They are unlike the marionettes and hand puppets that come to mind with the designation, appearing more like moving illustrations, mobile pieces of scenery, giant masks, and full-body costumes. Based on a contemporary account from the *Village Voice* regarding a protest during a 1966 pro-war rally held by Cardinal Spellman in New York City, political necessity and artistic energy united to help define the style of puppetry that would come to be most representative of Bread & Puppet: having brought masks in which to perform, the players were threatened with police action based on an 1888 city ordinance against masking in public (it is fitting that this ordinance was put in place at that time specifically to address masked actions by tenants against landlords, given that Bread & Puppet's earliest performances dealt with the very same issue), and so attached the masks to poles and hoisted them aloft (Fenn 56). Calling Schumann's puppetry both “primitive” and “anti-sentimentalist,” Barry Goldensohn also noted in 1977 that the “expressiveness of the puppets is in the molded heads and hands” (73). I remember the direction from Puppets in Prague to make the heads and hands disproportionately large for that reason; the heads and the hands are the most expressive parts of the puppet body, and Bread & Puppet takes this concept to its furthest point, many of them consisting of nothing more, perhaps some cloth connection points.

When his family was forced from their home by the war, Peter made sure that the one bag he was allowed to bring with him contained his wooden-headed hand puppets (Pollack). What exactly speaks to him about the medium seems to be its distance from the rest of the fine- or performing arts, which he sees as subservient to capitalist interests and quite divorced from what he calls “The Radicality of the Puppet Theatre” the title of one of his longer and more formal musings on the subject. In this article, he says,

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

The puppetry may be, as he jokingly suggests, a “trick” to bring the bread to people, but his style of puppetry is very much reflective of the bread; it is simple, but strong and ever-changing. It is not clean or sweet or respectable, and no two loaves or performances are ever the same. The themes and the figures have an ageless quality, and some of the puppets do indeed have a long history – some of them are fifty years old.

Those that have lasted this long are a result of the materials used to create them; Peter began to use a plastic-impregnated cloth known as celastic in the mid-1960s. Rising costs and the toxicity of the acetone necessary to model it made its use untenable over time. Many of the puppets on the farm that are still in pristine condition were made with celastic, but the relative fragility of papier-mâché has become a feature of using it rather than a drawback. It will inevitably disintegrate eventually, and so is more fully engaged in the temporality of the company's efforts. The celastic puppets offer a glimpse into the past, and such materials certainly offer a certain

allure of permanence; however, part of the company's focus today is the cyclical nature of reality, the ever-changing seasons that bring back familiar people and conditions without offering exact repetition.

I have two distinct reactions to the different spaces used to store puppets. The museum is quiet, and feels eerie when one walks through it alone. The barn, by contrast, with its clutter and its puppets being taken to and from the circus rehearsal space, is a livelier space – with none of the heaviness that accompanies the unused performance objects. From time to time, we patch up the papier-mâché and repaint the puppets, but there are always new puppets in process as well. Peter alone models the clay shapes and paints the finished puppets, while crews perform the interim-task of layering papier-mâché over the molds he makes. Almost all of the performing objects we use are made from a simple papier-mâché composed of cardboard soaked in water, with the corrugation removed to leave a pleasantly thick, fibrous paper to work with, and held together with a simple glue-like mixture of water and corn starch, boiled and stirred over a fire like a witch's brew.

When the Schumanns, and thus the company, moved to Glover, Peter and his team dug fresh clay from a nearby river, and this same stock has been in use since the 1970s, always molded and then rehydrated in an old outdoor bathtub. Apprentices work the clay with their feet, looking like traditional wine-makers. Kneading dough and kneading clay are connected by the process of getting one's hands dirty and shaping a raw material, and just as bread is the “stuff of life,” so clay is often a metaphor for the stuff of creation. In myths from all over the world, the gods made humans from the clay. This process of creation is mirrored in the creation of puppets, figures that we create and bring to “life” through movement. As Schumann writes, “the puppeteer[’s]

performance starts...with a passion for the correct or right raw materials... The process of their selection, their actual importance as participatory forces... [are] a subtle presence, and yet he owes his show to these invisible ingredients” (“Radicality” 82). There is a respect for each ingredient, as there is a respect for the puppets that have been carefully kept for so long.

On the farm there are three separate storage spaces for puppets: the museum, which was once a barn and grain-store, the loft of the dirt-floored performance space known as the “papier-mâché cathedral” due to the walls being covered from top to bottom with repeated papier-mâché reliefs of human figures, and the red barn. Between these spaces, hundreds upon hundreds of puppets dwell, with the most iconic figures from performances past housed in the museum and those still in active use stored in the barn and cathedral. Every Friday night and Saturday morning of the summer, these latter puppets appear in performances of plays, pageants, and circus acts. Some of the former puppets make appearances in the final pageant of the summer, when the largest crowd gathers. During my time there, we bring out the huge puppet of Mother Earth, with her enormous brown face that must be mounted on a wheelbarrow and her great, open hands attached to kite-like lengths of white cloth that flow in the wind. It takes fifteen or so of us to bring her into the wide field where we perform the pageant. This summer, the story of the pageant follows a set of familiar themes: the arrival of ogres that bring death, the collection of the bodies, and the growth of giant flowers brought into being by farmers. Mother Earth arrives to envelope the bodies of the final tableau in her arms. This final gesture has been a part of the repertoire for many years, offering a hopeful ending to the pageant.

Bread & Puppet has developed both a repertoire and an archive, as they are conceived by Diana Taylor. Using her definitions, *archives* are full of documents and textual testaments to plays of

the past, as well as objects and artifacts that can be “read” in different ways depending on the context of the reader, but with the unchanging assurance of its intelligibility or materiality (19). *Repertoires*, on the other hand, consist of embodied verbal and gestural performances such that “forms handed down from the past are experienced as present” (Taylor 24). The permanence of the form has allowed Bread & Puppet to combine archive with repertoire: not in preservation, but in repetition. The repertoire “requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission,” Taylor says (20). I would argue that the distinction between archive and repertoire is blurred in the case of Bread & Puppet, since the puppets only become themselves in contexts determined by the proximity of the performances. Before the performance, they are a collection of materials that must be assembled in the embodied practice of making. Outside of performance, they are sculptural objects. Within it, they are different beasts entirely, focusing the action of a performance and dictating the stylized gestures that are necessary for their animation. The sense of touch, weight, and balance that they impart become a voiceless instructor to the puppeteer's body.

The privileging of the archive that Taylor critiques as a continuation of the Western privileging of the text, quoting Barthes' assertion that all cultural materials are “a kind of writing,” is overturned in the active practice of a Bread & Puppet repertoire (26). Rather than a kind of writing, the puppets themselves and the process of making and performing with them are all a kind of physical sensation: the heaviness of the puppets as we pack and unpack them, the coolness of the clay, the unpleasant tacky feeling when the papier-mâché dries on your fingers; the meetings of the materiality of the body with the raw materials of the puppets are irreducible to any kind of writing. Engaging in these processes as an act of resistance against capitalist commodification or centralized control is part of a Western, and particularly American, master

narrative that is passed through, or activated by, embodied practice. This is what Taylor calls a *scenario*. The scenario at Bread & Puppet is both enabled by capitalism, in that the Schumanns have the freedom afforded by owning their own land through inheritance, and sets itself against the seemingly disembodied, a-historical conceits that capitalism sets up (Debord famously called this complex “the spectacle”). Bread & Puppet's scenario is one of self-conscious resistance against a culture mediated by images, and instead it focuses on an engagement with cyclical, material processes of making art, baking bread, and tending land.

Rather than aim at creating “high art” or a mass-producing (even entirely independently self-sustaining) farming operation, Bread & Puppet is closer to the kind of enterprise of the popular, traveling puppeteers of pre-17th century Europe. While many of those performers guarded their secrets, however, Bread and Puppet has repeated the format in its travels throughout the world, with the marked difference of sharing both its performances and its hands-on techniques with the communities it visits, allowing a further process of repetition and adaptation in their own artistic endeavors. It is a form of community empowerment, of history-making, however small. And, as Taylor puts it, “the ability to make history through embodied practice drives Brechtian and Boalian commitments to social change through performance” (qtd in Hirsch 1505). The act of pure sharing (information, skills, food, art), without economic reward, is subversive in a spectacle-dominated world. The work is strong rather than elegant, defying the smooth aesthetics of the spectacle; it activates rather than entertains, defying the spectacular imperative to uncritically consume.

Part of what we do every day is sing. Every morning after breakfast, there is a group meeting in which someone leads a song. People offer songs from their home countries, or we rehearse a

song for the pageant performance. Every Wednesday Elka unofficially hosts a Sacred Harp meeting, in which we sing 18th-century American hymns written to be sung in participatory fashion; people take turns leading, we sing as loud as we can instead of as prettily, and the harmonies sound rough to modern ears. When you stand in the middle of the group to conduct, however, you feel the full force of the 4-part music, and it is stirring and strange. Singing together activates the resonances of the body together with other bodies, and the unusual sound and structure of the Sacred Harp causes confusion and makes us laugh as we try to read the musical notation, creating camaraderie before the satisfaction of hearing all the parts converge into a coherent whole. The feeling of animating this music is like reaching into the past, is like using the aged puppets, in a new and ephemeral repetition of repertoire that does not truly exist until the performance activates it.

The Social Ecology of the Farm

Elka Schumann's grandparents Scott and Helen Nearing were pioneers of the North American back-to-the-land movement; they literally wrote the book on the subject, 1954's *Living the Good Life: How to Live Sanely and Simply in a Troubled World*. It was not a new idea; around the turn of the 20th century, there was a surge of interest in exiting urban existence for a simpler, more independent life closer to nature, but the Nearings' book is credited as the text that inspired the concentrated back-to-the-land movement of the late 1960s and '70s. The Nearings, individualist radicals who found themselves barred from their professions in the city because of their politics, first homesteaded in Vermont and then in Maine, becoming icons for the same idealistic young people in the early 1970s who eschewed white bread for home-baked. Scott Nearing's son John was less interested in subsistence living, becoming a journalist and moving to Russia, having

joined the Communist Party. There he met and married Elka's mother Maria, but the family retreated to the relative safety of America at the beginning of WWII.

Elka's parents bought the Glover farm from Daisy and Jim Dopp, hence the name "The Dopp Farm," but they eventually found the upkeep too strenuous. Though they were not young homesteaders at the time, the shape of their experience was mirrored by many of the youths trying to get back to the land in the 1970s: unprepared and somewhat naïve, the young, predominantly white, middle-class idealists went, became overwhelmed practically and/or financially, and became back-to-the-cityers. There is a distinct bitterness in much of the literature surrounding such experiences (typified by the title of Ray Mungo's 1970 book *Total Loss Farm: A Year in the Life*). For the Schumanns, however, the farm in Glover was an ideal solution as a base of operations for the theatre when their residency at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, ended in 1974. They were not exactly back-to-the-landers intentionally, and they were in their 40s with five children at the time, but the farm, though never a simple undertaking to maintain, has become integral to the theatre-making.

There are many simple reasons that this is so: elements from nature become building materials for the puppets, the circus is performed in a grassy amphitheater beside a large field where the pageants play out, and ethical considerations about nuclear power, fossil fuels, and the over-reliance of society on endless technological development (and the impact these things have on the environment) have driven performances since the 1960s. Perhaps more fundamentally, the placement of the theatre within the farm buildings and landscape introduces urban audiences and apprentices to the to-and-fro of influences between land and art. As Schumann explains, "the best thing we can get out of a pageant here is the clouds or the turning of light. If we succeed in

getting an audience to be perceptive only to these elements, this would be perfect, we wouldn't have to do anything" (qtd in Bell *Landscape* 5).

It takes about two weeks to realize that I have become aware of the phase of the moon. In the beauty of the Vermont summer, in this environment that allows us monumentally less screen-time than most of us have become accustomed to, the moon becomes a friend. It is a comforting presence in the sky each night, a daily encounter with wonder. I find myself becoming excited as the moon waxes toward fullness – and I am not alone in this feeling. On the night of the full moon, friends and I go to swim in the lake under its light. Though I have always been more or less aware of it as part of the world I live in, I have a personal relationship with the moon for the first time in my life.

As the summer progresses, we harvest green beans, snapping them quickly and crisply from their plants and tossing them into buckets; without declaring a competition, we move through the rows of beans as quickly as we can, collecting as many as possible. We dig for potatoes, a process of sending hands into soil and seeking out all the prizes we can find; it reminds me of hunting for easter eggs as a child – and whenever one of us finds an especially large potato, we give in to the impulse to show it off to others, to cheers and laughing acknowledgements. Suddenly the idea of taking a prize for growing the largest vegetables makes sense to my suburban mindset.

It was Herbert Spencer, and not his contemporary Charles Darwin, who described evolution in terms of "survival of the fittest." A gross simplification of this phrase has led to a concretized concept of the "fittest" as the strongest, most aggressive, and even most ruthlessly competitive species (or individual) in a given environment. Perhaps because of the linguistic associations sparked by the word *fittest*, the fact that Spencer really meant "most adaptable" has become

obscured by time and the development of capitalist society. The emphasis on *competition* that has characterized the popular notion of “survival of the fittest” for over a century has led to its use as a ready-made justification for capitalist ideals; the basic tenets of capitalist ideology are thus made to appear as natural *facts* rather than fallible constructs (Szumsky 17).

Two chief problems arise from this formulation: firstly, the *fitness* Spencer wrote about is unfixed and contingent, and can be traced to relative fertility, intelligence, or even empathy; collaboration and cooperation are fundamental to the success of most, if not all, life forms, as anarchist Peter Kropotkin explored in 1902 in his response to both Darwin and Spencer, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. Secondly, taking models from the natural world and applying them to human society is simply fallacious; the construction of those models is dependent upon the cultural biases of the model-makers. Is the reproductive female in a beehive really the “queen”? Is the most dominant wolf in a pack really the “alpha”? In the latter case, David Mech, the very researcher who developed the concept of “alphas” and “betas” in wolf packs has since contested his own conclusions, pointing out that wolf packs operate as families, with *parents* performing certain roles rather than especially dominant or aggressive individuals competing for status.

As social theorist Murray Bookchin explained in *The Ecology of Freedom* in the 1980s, the tendency to insert hierarchies into observed natural phenomena is a result of a particular strain of human social development rather objective analysis. We have simultaneously determined that a set of social systems echoing our own operate in nature (or ascribed “natural” processes to society) *and* also dualistically separated nature and society. Bookchin's theories of social ecology acknowledge far more intertwined complexity in the relationship between nature and society. It is not possible to reduce one to the other nor to separate the two; they are mutually co-

constitutive. The domination of nature, argues Bookchin, begins with the domination of people by other people. Bookchin refers to cultures in which the domination of nature is not a given, but in which nature and society are continuously shaping, supporting, and nourishing one another (109). This is not to refer to some “primitive” prelapsarian wisdom, but rather to show that there are alternatives to the humanity-nature schism that is so entrenched in Western cultures. He refers to rites and rituals dedicated to nature's processes and phenomena, saying that

...what the ecological ceremonial does, in effect, it *socializes* the natural world and complete the involvement of society with nature...the ceremonial validates as *kin*, a blooded, all-important estate that words like *citizen* can never attain... the blood that flows between the community and nature in the process of being kin is circulated by distinct acts of the community: ceremonials, dances, dramas, songs, decorations, and symbols. The dancers who imitate animals in their gestures or birds in their calls are engaged in more than mere mimesis; they form a communal and choral unity with nature, a unity that edges into the intimate intercourse of sexuality, birth, and the exchange of blood.
(Bookchin 114)

We begin the pageant, emerging from the woods from where we have hidden ourselves from the audience and playing our broken instruments while carefully listening to each other in order to reach some kind of musical agreement. As a leader lies down, all follow, and we lie on our backs on the pine needles. It begins to rain gently on our upturned faces, hands, feet. It is no cause for concern. The trumpet sounds, our cue to move to the next segment of the performance, and, as always, we all scramble to our feet and run out of the woods, each taking our own route through the trees as it appears clearest to us – only this time, there is a delirious exhilaration to the act, as we flick back wet hair and feel the damp beneath our feet.

The “unifying principle of an ecology of freedom” is an understanding of the entire world as a *whole*: a diverse, heterogenous, multi-faceted, and complex whole, but a whole nonetheless (Bookchin 450). The only way to counter domination and commodification, says Bookchin, is through community, without which there can be no politics (Rudy and Light 89). His solution to

both the social and ecological crises of modernity is the creation, or re-creation of “citizens' assemblies” on a small scale (community or neighborhood), the establishment of communication and confederation between these assemblies, the possibility for genuine participation in the system through education in the duties of citizenship, and the municipalization of property controlled by public democracy (Rudy and Light 90).

Bookchin's ideals are anarchist, egalitarian, and admirable, but the realization of them is unfathomable for the average person just trying to get by. The Bread & Puppet farm does not fully exemplify his political agenda in full or on purpose, but “citizens' assemblies” naturally arise amongst the apprentices, the notion of participatory citizenship is instilled in the maintenance of the crops and farm buildings and waste management systems, and the possibility of a more harmonious relationship with the natural world is an inevitable consequence of spending time there. It is only a peek into a possibility, not a resolution to the problems of the world (nor has it ever claimed to try to present any resolution). Only a few people maintain the farm on a year-round basis, but the conceptual space that the apprenticeship program offers to those able to participate in it is revelatory. The farm and the lifestyle are part of the theatre and vice versa, and this creates moments in which the ideals and the actions converge into a sense of purposeful possibility of alternatives, and it is a powerful possibility to carry.

We pull up weeds that strangle the crops, getting a potent satisfaction from doing something so necessary to the health of the garden as well as the physical activity – it is even exciting when we manage to wrench a weed out of the ground in its entirety. These are the kinds of activities, the kinds of necessary toil, that the progress of modernity has removed from our daily lives. We have dirt on our knees, in our hair, under our fingernails, and it feels wonderful. M. vaccae microbes

in soil have been proven to boost serotonin and norepinephrine levels in humans as well as mice (Kennedy). We are all affected by these forces during the summer on the farm. Yes, it is a beautiful setting in a gentle season, and we are not dependent upon these activities for our very survival, but we are given a glimpse of the kind of lifestyle Peter Kropotkin suggested could be possible at the end of his book Mutual Aid: one in which technology has provided abundance such that we can take satisfaction and sustenance from the earth without a baseline of fearing for our basic needs... without destroying nature. The circuses and pageants in particular address these themes. There is a sense in the sketches and grand, sweeping gestures that nature will prevail and that, somehow, we can be a part of it. There is hope for a more egalitarian society that includes rights for the natural world.

Attempting a Feminist Circus Intervention

Apprentices are invited to pitch ideas for short skits to join the circus lineup each week. I, and several women my age, have noticed a distinct lack of feminist content in the performances we have done so far. We suggest a sketch, exact subject TBD, that focuses on issues affecting women in particular. Several other ideas are also floated, and we all break into groups to plan: what is our message, will our actions and words be, what puppets will we need. My group has about twelve women to start with, and it is clear within five minutes that we not only have very different areas of focus, but that we have different ideas of what “feminism” is. We bring perspectives from Canada, the USA, New Zealand, Mexico, Brazil, France, and Ireland; we range in age from 18 to 54; we care about access to education, equal pay, recognition of unwaged labor, domestic violence, human trafficking, reproductive rights, and femicide; we have radical feminists, materialist feminists, intersectional feminists, and “not really a feminist” feminists

amongst us. Finding a single focus we can all agree on is not only impossible (each person voting for their own priority issue), it becomes both frustrating and tense.

After an hour, we are tired. The least tired and most ego-driven amongst us, who always seems to be the one with a piece of paper and a pen, decides that we will address all of our concerns by listing them on a menu. Suddenly the sketch takes place in a restaurant and we are going to be waiters. Too aggravated to bother with any other suggestions, the group begrudgingly accepts the premise. At this point, we have been here a week and have performed in one circus already, so we know the basic format and materials available to us. Someone suggests we cobble together a giant female puppet with a parachute for a skirt, someone else offers that one waiter can read from the menu while others “force-feed” the puppet each item. -Oh, so then a group of us inside the parachute can step outwards to make the skirt expand as if the puppet is expanding? -Yes!... And then she explodes and we all run out -And then what? -We can start a clapping pattern and get the audience to join -OK, ok, and then we all stop clapping at once and we shout “Enough!” -Is that the end? -Yeah, I think that's good -Okay, we need a parachute and a big mask puppet with an open mouth -Ok, so we're done here? -Yeah, I think we're done -Ok, bye -Bye -Bye -Bye

We meet to rehearse several times during the week and make the props we cannot find. Three of the group reassign themselves to other sketches because they feel their creative contributions are not being respected and the rehearsal atmosphere has become toxic. I don't have any strong opinions at this point (that's a lie – I'm just keeping them to myself because my primary interest is getting some representation of our theme into the circus), and I do what I can to contribute usefully. The major issue is sourcing a large-scale puppet head with an open mouth; we ask our Intermediary for help, he asks Peter. While we are rehearsing with the parachute, Peter arrives

with a giant head, saying it is the only one with an open mouth he could find in the barn. It clearly belongs to a demon: greenish skin, downturned open mouth, black horns, reddish eyes. He suggests cutting off the horns, repainting a bit, make it work. Several of us volunteer to work on it, giving the face more sympathetic eyes and trying to even out the skin tone, removing the horns and stapling on black cloth for hair. Once the paint is dry, we only have one day left to prepare, and so we have to make do with what now looks like a desperately depressed Medusa.

Peter has final approval on any sketch that goes into the circus, so while everyone is rehearsing, he checks each group's efforts. I am holding up the puppet's incredibly heavy head on a thick bamboo pole, and my arms shake. I have no idea what it looks like from the front, all I know is that there are three waiters, one of whom announces the "items on the menu at the Patriarchy Cafe," while the other two carry white signs with the basic words "healthcare," "rights," "freedom," "opportunity," "safety," "respect" written on them, and push each one through the puppet's gaping mouth. It is fortunate that they are made of cardboard, because all but one lands on my head while I struggle to keep the huge head aloft. Finally, the people waiting beneath the parachute "skirt," who have expanded it slowly throughout, start to raise their voices in an odd, building chorus. I shake the head vigorously and then carefully arc it down to the ground as the others burst out from beneath the parachute. Everyone lies on the ground for a moment, and then one girl starts to clap in a simple rhythm. We all get to our feet, joining in the clapping, following her lead until she stops and we all shout "enough!"

I am exhausted by the 60-second sketch. Peter, who has been standing studiously with his hand over his mouth, tells us sternly that we need to get a better parachute, clean up the timing, and make the explosion more dramatic. He'll look at it again before the circus tomorrow and decide

then whether we can perform it. He turns and walks away. Our Intermediary waits until Peter is a safe distance away, turns to us, flings out his hand in a gesture of presentation and says, "Ladies, the Patriarch!"

We finesse the performance. Peter allows it in the circus. The audience claps along with us and cheers and whistles more than at any other time except the finale. We are reasonably satisfied, though my arms are sore for a few days. There are other pitches for sketches the following week, and "Patriarchy," as it has been dubbed, is quietly replaced in the lineup.

They call this part of Vermont the "Northeast Kingdom," and on the farm, Peter is unquestionably the king. For all the communitarian principles our Intermediaries live by, the freedom we have to work on our own projects, go wherever we want during breaks, and make our own experiences, this is not a democratic company. Perhaps that is part of the reason it has survived where other radical companies from the '60s have not; there is a single unifying vision and driving force that does not dissolve. One girl in our group asks some of the female Intermediaries later how they feel about this structure, because it is clear that, despite all they do, the male Intermediaries are more prominent in performances and Peter seems to respect them more. One of the women tells us that she doesn't mind because she gets so much out of just being a part of the company. Another says that Peter is a bit like a grandfather who means well but comes from another era. Another says the topics he focuses on are universalist, which sparks another conversation on the nature of feminism. Most importantly, one points out, there is Elka, without whom none of this would be possible – at least, not as beautifully possible as it is. She has supported Peter's efforts since they met in East Berlin, she inherited the farm from her parents, she is clearly both a source of inspiration and critique, she runs the printshop, and she

interacts consistently with the apprentices in a way that we feel we are part of more than just rehearsals and chores. And for all that she is kind and gentle with everyone, she is strong and powerful: seemingly content to let Peter take the spotlight, but ever-present and ever-acknowledged.

The conversation continues, and the younger of the women amongst us do not seem fully satisfied, which I find encouraging, but I also recognize that this is not my battle – my battles are elsewhere, and I am learning the importance of making with my hands, whether art or bread, to fight them in cooperation with others (see Chapter Nine).

Conclusion: Art as Experience and Bread as Puppet

John Dewey wrote in 1934 that “when artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance,” suggesting that art, when taken out of everyday life, loses some of its ability to truly *matter* (2). As this chapter shows, bread functions in a similar way – offering calories but not sustenance, representing status rather than nourishment. Dewey’s reconceptualization of art as neither the practice nor product, but as the *aesthetic experience*, or the affective process that can occur when making or doing something (or appreciating something that has been made or done), was a fairly radical departure from the high-modernist art histories and criticisms that surrounded him. I choose to quote him now at some length because I think his is the only aesthetic theory that can apply to the life-art continuum that is crystalized on the

Bread & Puppet farm:

In order to understand the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens...The sources of art in

human experience will be learned by him who sees how the tense grace of the ball-player infects the onlooking crowd; who notes the delight of the housewife in tending her plants, and the intent interest of her goodman in tending the patch of green in front of the house; the zest of the spectator in poking the wood burning on the hearth and in watching the darting flames and crumbling coals. These people, if questioned as to the reason for their actions, would doubtless return reasonable answers. The man who poked the sticks of burning wood would say he did it to make the fire burn better; but he is none the less fascinated by the colorful drama of change enacted before his eyes and imaginatively partakes in it. He does not remain a cold spectator. What Coleridge said of the reader of poetry is true in its way of all who are happily absorbed in their activities of mind and body: 'The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, not by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution, but by the pleasurable activity of the journey itself.' (Dewey 4)

For Dewey, art is a particular kind of energetic involvement, a raptness of attention, even a plain old enjoyment, that he perceives as having been precluded from the sequestration of art to museums or expensive venues. He suggests that theorists have theorized art into a rarified corner so that people can no longer think of the activities and objects that bring them joy in their daily lives *as art*.

For Peter Schumann, making as much bread and as much artwork is a source of enjoyment and satisfaction. For Elka, singing and print-making are much the same. For me, there is no single element of being at the Bread and Puppet farm that I can consider apart from any other as more or less “the art.” It was the experience of dancing, of swimming, of molding clay, of pulling weeds, of being part of a seasonal cycle for a short time. Being immersed in the ecology of enchantment at the theater is an aesthetic experience of the kind Dewey outlines, the kind that can fully absorb and delight us with its offer of participation. Through the historical and autoethnographic descriptions presented here, I mean to demonstrate the potency of puppetry, and hence puppeting, to shift our political perceptions.

The morning after we return from a trip to perform the circus in Montreal, I take some bread and honey to munch beside the rye field. My feet are tough enough and my awareness has expanded enough that I notice the ground ahead and take my steps accordingly – I don't have to pick my way daintily among the rocks like I did at first, head down, all my focus on every painful misstep. It feels good – like running faster without realizing, or easily lifting something you thought was heavy once. But when I reach the field, the rye has been cut – the long, silky waves are gone, now only an expanse of twiggy brown stumps. I realize that those who stayed behind harvested as a matter of course (why should they have announced it – just so I could take a last look?). People live here, I remind myself, knowing that it will grow back. The rye must be processed so that Peter can keep making the bread, the very bread I'm holding as my breakfast, that I've been eating all month. Rye isn't there to be admired; it isn't there so I can listen to the wind brushing through it; it is there to feed everyone.

I sit beside the stubby remnants of the field and chew my bread mindfully, for the first time physically feeling the connection between the loaf and the plant. I wish I had thought of it before, but I have done so much in such a rush that I haven't had time to realize everything I took for granted throughout. I have to laugh at myself for being affected by this – something so mundane and so necessary as harvesting – but I indulge in a dramatically woeful inspection of the once-field beside me. At least it's an honest feeling. I want to get my hands dirty with paint and papier-mâché and make something now, anything, even if it's never finished or it looks like nothing. And I realize, not suddenly, but in a plain, little way that grows, that this is obviously what art is for – to sustain you while you wait for the rye field to grow again, to hold something of that feeling of sitting beside the long, lazy stalks of summer through the autumns and winters, even if they have

their own beautiful moments. Ultimately, art is what supports you through the necessary processes of surviving. Art is food, too, after all – you can't eat it, but it feeds you.

Chapter Five

Re-Enchanting a Foundational Folk Tale: from Capitalist Blueprint to Cooperative Manifesto

The combined experiences of the Puppets in Prague Workshop and the Bread and Puppet Theatre opened the possibility of creating alternative worlds through puppetry practice within this research project, or at least activating alternative perspectives of the troubled, damaged world we live in. This chapter follows the transition from learning to see through the puppeting lens into enacting changes in the puppetry canon. It charts the process of re-puppeting and repurposing a classic fairy tale in an effort to examine and shift the influence of that particular story. This is important because this story and those like it exert tremendous influence over lived experience. They offer us blueprints for the capitalist ethos in which we are soaked. Folkloric stories are planted in us as children, they grow within us as individuals as much as within cultures, and as a result certain tropes are normalized in our socio-cultural learning long before we have the capacity to question them. Yet they belong to us all, and repurposing them allows us to shift the blueprints and re-tool them as models of cooperation.

Stories are enchanting. These cultural products indirectly (and sometimes quite directly!) impart cultural conventions, assumptions, and priorities. They are shapeshifters, appearing in new forms every time they are told, never exactly the same, always conjured anew within the nexus of teller, atmosphere, and audience. When they are written down, they become artifacts, frozen glimpses of a time, a place, a people (and the particular mind of whoever held the pen). Like

specimens of beetles or dragonflies pinned on a board by Victorian entomologists, these written tales reveal much valuable information about morphology, and are useful for observation and study. However, in this format, it is impossible to understand their vital functions in culture. According to leading Western fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes, the *most* vital function of the stories we tell is to organize reality, shaping our perception of the world and its possibilities.

This premise assigns profound importance to the stories we have inherited and requires us to investigate how they reinforce our cultural assumptions. It is a premise that requires us to consider whether our most popular stories are in fact the most productive structures we can provide ourselves in creating the world we hope to live in. When sociology professor and anarchist John Holloway entreats us to learn to hope, he speaks not of the misleadingly optimistic hope that Lauren Berlant describes in her book *Cruel Optimism*, but rather of “a reasoned hope, a learned hope, a hope with substance; a way of thinking that opens paths to a different world” (“Now” 0:02:44 – 0:02:54). Holloway conceives of hope as a mode of thought, saying that “to learn to hope... is to learn to think from a world that does not yet exist, but could potentially exist” (“Now” 0:24:40–0:25:23). The world of fairy tales can be a place.

The world-that-does-not-yet-exist is an imaginary place, but it cannot come into being without the active participation of our imaginations, the telling of new stories, the performance of new possibilities. Puppetry allows us to imagine and build the-world-that-does-not-yet-exist in miniature in order to rehearse alternatives to what we already know. It was time to produce my own critique of capitalist hegemony, to try to create a site of enchantment of my own through practice in the research process. Leaving the concentrated space of the training ground, I established my own studio space to continue material practice, and found two collaborators along

the way (as a group we called ourselves “Humble Bee Puppet Company”). Dedicated to exploring the use of found materials, I began to experiment with modes of telling old stories in new ways, and eventually these exercises coalesced into a re-telling of “Jack and the Beanstalk.”

What follows details a review of the received and well-worn story of “Jack and the Beanstalk,” followed by a feminist and anti-capitalist critique of the tale as carried out through a practice-based reimagining. *Jackie and the Potato Plant*, a 30-minute puppet show that premiered in the 2017 Cork Puppetry Festival, was created in an effort to repurpose what is fundamentally a neoliberal capitalist fairy tale that exists at the heart of the Western canon alongside *Snow White* and *Cinderella*. Following the history and analysis of the “original” story, I present a metamorphosis of the tale, beginning with description and analysis of the creation and staging of *Jackie and the Potato Plant*. Traveling through a detailed re-tooling and re-telling of the story, I offer a rewritten fairy tale and reflection on its elements. In doing this, I demonstrate how the creation of a puppet show can disrupt the dominant discourse, rewriting and replacing perceived enchantments. This is the promise and potential of puppeting: to provide a way to untangle the tightly woven enchantments that keep us in a toxic paradigm of consumption.

A Brief History of the “Original” Story

Fairy tales are, and always have been, political animals, at the mercy of the era in which they are told and heard, written and read. They provide insight into collective desires, hopes, and anxieties of a society as much as they reveal power structures, economic trends, and social movements that affect the worldview of their tellers and audiences. Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale type 328, The Boy Steals the Giant’s Treasure, is a basic story structure that exists in cultures all over the world, having originated at least 5,000 years ago, when Eastern and Indo-European

languages diverged (“Fairy Tale Origins”). The most popular variation of ATU 328, certainly in the English-speaking world, is “Jack and the Beanstalk,” which is also the most popular of the subgroup of “Jack tales,” of England and Cornwall, where Jack is a stock character with many adventures to his name. While there are a great many literary retellings of “Jack and the Beanstalk” in particular that change details, it is generally agreed that the general plot points we recognize today come from two influential written versions: Benjamin Tabart’s *The History of Jack and the Bean-Stalk*, as it appeared in his 1807 chapbook, and Joseph Jacobs’s “Jack and the Beanstalk,” as set down in multiple editions of his collection, *English Fairy Tales*, in the 1890s.

As Brian E. Szumsky points out in his close readings of these early texts, fairy tales are dependent upon the particular cultural moment of their tellers, of their *episteme* as Foucault would put it, but “the artifice of the fairy-tale purveyor...is to create the illusion of a set of ubiquitous value systems, which lends an organic or natural quality to the cultural assumptions that are embodied in these narratives” (Szumsky 12). While the two versions are substantially different, Szumsky identifies distinctly colonialist and capitalist undertones in both. In essence, Tabart’s early-19th-century text added a plethora of moral elements that were likely never part of oral tradition, molding Jack into an acceptable hero for the respectable, middle-class English nursery, and making the story publishable given the emphasis on didacticism in children’s literature at that time (Szumsky 15). Jacobs’s late-19th-century text claimed to be more concerned with authenticity than morality, and so presented the story as a faithful report of the oral version he had heard (never mind that he admits in the introduction of his collection that he had to heavily rework the stories) (Szumsky 18). It is for the sake of this supposed authenticity that the Jacobs version became the accepted standard in the 20th century, and has been reprinted more often than any other (Goldberg 12). In his story, there is no prevarication or false justification for

the theft and giant-murder that Jack commits; those actions are taken as a given and are not as important as Jack's successful risk-taking and the rewards he reaps. In either version, there is a profound sense of Jack as a member of the "in group," as "one of us," and of the giant as a foreign, overprivileged Other who represents both a valuable resource to exploit and a savage force in need of neutralizing (or "civilizing").

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two stories is the moral element. In Tabart's version, a fairy meets Jack at the top of the beanstalk and explains to him that he must go to the giant's castle and "punish" him because, believe it or not, the giant actually murdered Jack's father and stole all his wealth (*The History of Jack and the Bean-Stalk* 14)! By virtue of this tortuous addition, which forced Tabart to add many footnotes' worth of explanation, Jack is painted more like a chivalric knight tasked with a quest to reclaim his birthright and exact just vengeance. Jacobs's Jack is more recognizable as a trickster-hero, like Odysseus or Brer Rabbit, who must rely on his wits, his cunning, his "entrepreneurial spirit," as Szumsky puts it (19). There is no fairy here, no overt moralizing, no forced character-arc for Jack: he begins and ends the story as an opportunistic, cunning, dissembling imperialist with a beanstalk instead of a ship, a capitalist taking risks to reap rewards.

The spread of secular thought, particularly the adoption of a Spencerian-Darwinian "survival of the fittest" mentality into everyday life, as well as the ever-increasing industrialism that led to two-thirds of the English population living in cities by the end of the 19th century, determined what kinds of stories could be published in Jacobs's time as opposed to Tabart's (Szumsky 17). Whatever the reason, as Szumsky makes clear, the underlying cultural assumptions of English superiority and the supposed duty of bringing culture to "'subject races' and 'subordinate

peoples,” all whilst taking care of number one, remain the same (Szumsky 20). Thus, we arrive in contemporary society with the two most widely-known and reproduced versions of “Jack and the Beanstalk” reflecting a network of beliefs about good/evil and right/wrong, as they were embedded in English culture during the flourishing period of empire and industry.

An Examination of the Story's Elements

We all know the story: Jack and his mother live in poverty, so she sends him to sell their cow, which he trades to a mysterious old man for magic beans, which in turn miraculously grow into a stalk that reaches the sky. Jack climbs it, finds a huge castle, and encounters a giantess who feeds him and warns him that her husband has a tendency to eat people... and when her husband does suddenly come home, she hides Jack safely away. For his part, Jack waits for the coast to clear before stealing some treasure and returning home. He repeats this process twice more, but the ravenous giant finally sniffs him out and gives chase. Sliding down the beanstalk in a jiffy, Jack chops it down, sending the giant plummeting to his death. And Jack and his mother live happily ever after.

To read “Jack and the Beanstalk” from a postcolonial, socialist, new materialist and feminist perspective is to come to several rather abrupt realizations about the transmission of the story and its problematic contents for a 21st-century audience. The initial result of such a reading is to question whether the story is one that can be told in good conscience anymore. Putting aside for a moment the question of whether or not fairy tales for children *need* moral or didactic content, the fact is that most of the stories we have inherited are infused with both. Whether or not folk and fairy tales were ever *intended* to communicate the possibility of a just society in oral

tradition, they certainly were in the literary tradition (the Grimms and Perrault all studied law, after all); their expected formula includes rewards for good characters and punishment for bad ones (Roberts 15). Based on that expectation, one must ask just *what* kind of justice “Jack and the Beanstalk” offers us because, while Jack is in the *position* of the “good” character, the only character to actively show compassion or generosity in the story is the giantess, and she is, if anything, punished for her goodness.

From the giant’s perspective, which a dramatist must consider, and which, as postmodern subjects, we are unable to ignore, he is simply going about life when, quite out of the blue, his most prized possessions are stolen and he is murdered in cold blood. From the giantess’s perspective, her kindness to a stranger leads to her exploitation and the murder of her husband. Jack’s exploration and plunder of a completely new world and its people can only be “legitimized in the context of a capitalist-colonial mindset, which must consume and exploit in order to remain viable, or in terms of a sociopolitical system in which the amassing of capital/material becomes the measure of personal success” (Szumksy 19). It becomes impossible *not* to view Jack as an imperialist with a beanstalk instead of a ship, and a capitalist with his eye on the bottom line.

There are justifications for Jack’s actions within the story, of course; his family is impoverished, after all, and he ostensibly kills the giant in self-defense, lest his bones be ground for bread. Jack is a classic underdog, and his plight makes it possible to identify and sympathize with him. Furthermore, he is a member of the lowest social class, the giant is a member of the highest (literally as well as economically), and so the story is also a wish-fulfillment tale about toppling the social order, of the poor working-class boy sticking it to the “man.” The small and weak

triumphs over the big and strong. But, even if we consider Tabart's addition of the fairy, which creates a different set of motivations and implications in which the *giant* can be read as the imperial conqueror and Jack can be read as something like the disenfranchised masses, he is no revolutionary. His actions do not change the structure of society, they simply serve his personal interests and deliver him into the social position previously held by the giant. Taken as a coming-of-age tale, Jack becomes a man when he takes his rightful position as *the* "man," and lives happily ever after having successfully lived the dream of "upward mobility in a bourgeois society" (Szumsky 24).

No matter the details of the version under consideration, the underlying assumptions about what kind behavior gets rewarded, and what those rewards are, remain the same. Ultimately, the "Jack and the Beanstalk" supports the exceptionalism of the individual, who, in this case, is willing to lie, cheat, steal, and commit murder to get ahead. That most of Jack's personal qualities are unambiguously valued in modern capitalist society, and similarly rewarded with material wealth and social power, particularly in business and politics, is a troubling realization once one has identified the toxicity of global capitalism as it stands.

Production, Materials, Performances: World-Making with "Jackie and the Potato Plant"

The production featured tabletop puppetry and hands-on manipulation. For the sake of scale, I determined to use a full-size set and to cast one of our members as the giant, so that the puppets would appear suitably small and vulnerable, and so that the separation of worlds would be clearly defined. I wanted to make the piece visually playful, with bright colors and a few tricks –

like setting the “small” world and the giant's world side-by-side so that Jackie seemed to climb from one realm right up into another, and connecting the potato plant to a pulley system so it would “grow” and ultimately fall in a controlled way. In the first production and devising meetings, my colleagues and I workshopped the story and discussed ways to invert the original (see “Analyzing the Adaptation” below for full discussion) and determined to construct the piece from as much recycled material as possible to align with the socio-ecological sensibility that the original story lacks and my retelling highlights.

My studio was situated in a commercial park by the River Lee in Cork City, and the area was rich with castoffs from the various businesses housed there. I found salvageable lumber, foam from old upholstery, broken lanterns and umbrellas fit for repurposing, and a veritable haul of spare cloth of all different colors from a theatrical prop-making company. A fellow artist with a studio nearby announced the closing of her mother's yarn shop and that she was planning to throw it all away, so I happily gathered as much as I could, sure of finding a use for it. The yarn became the central uniting material of the puppets and set: each of the human puppet characters was sculpted from recycled foam and covered in spirals of yarn, which gave them a warm, soft appearance. In keeping with the woolen aesthetic, the giant was enrobed in fluffy material and a false beard made of loops of yarn. The large set elements were made from thick, salvaged cardboard and covered with yarn and cloth. Even the soundtrack was recycled, consisting almost entirely of public domain music by P. Green that featured in cartoons of the late 1950s. The silly character of the Goose that lays golden eggs danced to the “Blue Danube,” but otherwise none of the soundscape was familiar or connected with recognizable external stories.

The process was organic, though not without foibles. The bulk of the 12-week preparation period fell victim to a cardinal sin that I had set out to avoid, namely the overemphasis on producing the puppets and set. While it was a valuable experience that produced innovative approaches to making, as a consequence we only had a handful of full rehearsals with all of the complete elements. The “final” product, given that this was a first development, was rough and frayed at the edges, but the show did go on, and audience feedback was positive. Happily, the video documentation of the first performance captures a small voice declaring “That was the best!” after the applause, and so, while none of the perfectionistic standards of the creators were met in that showing, we can be sure at least that one of our intended public came away satisfied with the experience. The sudden impulse of a small child to join us on the set (see fig. 15) also indicated a level of audience engagement that gave the show a lively atmosphere.

While the film that was taken of the first performance provides adequate reference material, it fails on the whole to impart the energy exchanged between performers and audience. Live theatre in general, but puppetry in particular, loses its essence on video when not produced specifically for the medium of film. After the festival, in preparation to revise the script (which can be found in Appendix B, with supplemental images, for reference), I adapted what we performed into the format of a written fairy tale in order to identify extraneous dialogue and identify the most potent images and themes for future performance. Illustrated with photos of the set and puppets, I offer below the resulting story as an alternative form of documentation that more accurately represents the spirit of the piece than a stale video can.

Jackie and The Potato Plant



Fig. 6. The full set. Still taken from first performance recording taken by author, 4th Aug. 2017.

Once upon a time, a sprightly child named Jackie lived on a small farm with her widowed father. *Sadly*, he had been very ill for a long time, and could no longer leave the farmhouse or do any of the work that needed to be done. To make matters worse, a drought lay heavy over the land and nothing at all would grow. Jackie tried her best, but maintaining a farm alone would be an impossible task for the most diligent of children, and Jackie was a little absent-minded when it came to anything other than climbing trees. She loved to climb more than anything else, as high as she could go, up into the treetops, to daydream.

One day, Jackie's father called to her to see whether she had done her chores – but she hadn't. Had she even milked Mooey? Jackie hurried to the cow, whom she loved dearly, and tried to milk her, but Mooey could give not a drop. With a heavy heart, Jackie's father told her to take

Mooney to the market and sell her. Jackie refused vehemently – Mooney was her only friend! – but her father began to weep. If only Jackie had been a boy, he wouldn't have to worry about her so much! If only her mother were still alive! Jackie had heard all of this before and knew that the only way to appease her despairing father was to obey his orders, and so she sadly led Mooney away.



Fig. 7. Jackie and Mooney. Photo courtesy of Anne-Marie Cornelius, 2020.

On the road to market, Jackie suddenly heard a strange voice calling for help. Looking up, she saw an elderly woman sitting amongst the branches of a tree. Jackie, at her ease amongst the trees, carefully helped the woman down.

She thanked Jackie for her help and asked her why she should be wandering through the woods with a cow. Jackie could not help it anymore; she broke down and told the woman everything that had happened. With a comforting pat, the woman told Jackie that she could help her. She would take Mooey in exchange for a handful of magical seed potatoes that, planted by the light of the full moon, would lead to riches beyond Jackie's wildest dreams. And then she could buy Mooey back if she wanted to. Jackie hesitated, but decided she trusted the woman and agreed to the trade.



Fig. 8. Jackie makes a deal with the Narrator... I mean, a kindly elderly lady. Photo courtesy of Anne-Sophie Cornelius, 2020.

Back home, Jackie tried to explain their good fortune, but her father angrily tossed the seed potatoes away and sent Jackie to bed without supper, before going to bed without supper himself, for there was nothing left to eat.



Fig. 9. The full-grown potato plant under a full moon. Still taken from first performance recording taken by author, 4th Aug. 2017.

As luck would have it, that very night the full moon shone over Jackie's house and, slowly but surely, the most enormous potato plant you ever saw began to grow, then and there.

The next morning, Jackie went outside and saw the enormous vines stretching up into the sky, so high she could not see the top. What a chance to climb!

Of course she took it!

She climbed and climbed and climbed...

...and climbed until she came to what appeared to be a ceiling made out of... dirt!

Suddenly, from the other side of the ceiling, she could hear a rumbling voice wondering aloud how a potato plant had gotten into his window planter. Then there was silence again.

Jackie scratched at the ceiling until light shone through, and then shimmied up through the hole she had made. Wonder of wonders! She found herself standing on ledge of an enormous open window! And inside, an enormous room with an enormous table and chair! The rumbling voice boomed out again and Jackie hurriedly hid herself in the frame of the giant window.

And then, a Giant! A towering giant strode into the room with a small boy standing on his hand. He appeared to be lecturing the boy, who he called Jim, about not climbing on the dangerous furniture, dismissively telling him that he was too small to take care of himself. The boy hung his head. The Giant sighed to himself that all the other giants had *giant* sons! If only Jim's mother, an elf, were still alive – *she* would know what to do, he said, letting out a snuffle.

Jim rushed to comfort his father by offering to count their gold together. This seemed to cheer the Giant somewhat, and they sat at the table to count out coins, one, two, three...

The Giant paused to sniff the air, asking Jim if he could smell anything strange, and then a crash sounded from another room. The Giant called out to his pet goose, Goosey, to see if she was alright, then picked Jim up off the table and left the room to check on her. And all of that gold was still spread out on the table...

Jackie knew she shouldn't, but she was only human, and there was so much gold there, and she would only take just one piece – surely that would be enough to last forever! Slipping down to the table, she took up a piece from the bright, gleaming pile, and popped back through the window box, down, down, down, to tell her father all about it.

He didn't believe a word of the story, but he did not question the gold before his eyes, and they immediately set about improving their house and paying off debts – and they even got Mooey back.

Unfortunately, soon the moths were flying from the coffers again. Jackie's father told her in no uncertain terms to go gather more gold, no matter from whence it had come. Jackie didn't understand – she had thought gold like that would last forever. Her father curtly informed her that nothing lasts forever, and sent her on her way.

Not entirely happily this time, Jackie began to climb the potato plant again....



Fig. 10. Jackie prepares to climb once more. Still taken from first performance recording taken by author, 4th Aug. 2017.

....and popped up into the enormous window box just as before...

... and found herself face to face with who-should-it-be-but – Jim!

At once he accused her of thieving his father's gold, and at once Jackie rushed to explain herself, but her curiosity took over when she realized that, without the Giant there, Jim didn't look so awfully small. She told him as much. They found themselves easily falling into conversation, when suddenly they heard the thunderous voice of the Giant – here he was, coming into the room! Quickly, Jim helped Jackie hide and ran out to greet his father, who sniffed the air suspiciously. Jim tried to distract him with counting gold, but the Giant was convinced he could smell that strange scent again.

Jim knew about his father's wicked past, and suddenly understood what was going on. His father was sniffing Jackie out! Desperate get his attention, and knowing his father's quick temper, Jim suddenly accused him of making things up – just like a great, mad fool of a giant! At that, the Giant bellowed that if Jim was going to speak so disrespectfully, then he could go to bed without supper, and stormed out.

With a sigh, Jim sat on the edge of the table. Jackie came to sit with him, a little sheepishly, and sympathized with Jim that sometimes she, too, was sent to bed without supper. They found themselves confiding in each other – how much they wished for someone to talk to and how lost they sometimes felt! Jim asked her all kinds of questions about where she came from, a land where he would not be too small for anything – what a magical thought! Jackie told him that she thought he was a perfect size, and he flushed shyly. She apologized for stealing, and described how the drought had made life so hard, turning people against each other as if they cared only for themselves.



Fig. 11. And Jackie gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. Photo courtesy of Anne-Sophie Cornelius, 2020.

Jim had an idea. Excitedly, he told her to wait, disappearing for a moment and returning with the biggest and most beautiful, shining golden egg you could ever imagine. He offered it to gingerly to Jackie. Their pet, Goosey, laid them regularly, he told her, so his father would never notice it missing.

Not knowing what to say, Jackie impulsively kissed Jim on the cheek, and they both stood there bashfully for a moment – before the Giant’s booming voice came ringing out!

FEE FIE FO FUM, I SMELL THE BLOOD OF A TINY HUMAN!

At once, Jim told Jackie to run, and run she did, down through the window box, whisking away, down the potato plant, all the way home.

The egg was solid gold, much more than the mere coin from before, and this time her father became truly frivolous, buying all manner of unnecessary things. He even bought stocks in farmland, but the horrible drought still persisted, and the price of shares plummeted until once again he demanded that Jackie bring back more gold. She was flabbergasted, but he would brook no argument, and grudgingly Jackie began to climb once again, figuring that at least she would be able to talk to her friend when she got to the top of the potato plant...

When she arrived in the window box, Jim was waiting for her. She began to explain her frustration with her father's greed, but Jim hastily told her that his father suspected that she had been visiting, and that he was afraid of what would happen if he found her... for Giants are known to eat people...

Jackie, stunned, stood stock still on the spot. Jim urged her to go, but it was too late, for suddenly the Giant came crashing into the room and grabbed Jackie with his humongous hand before she had a chance to make a dash for it.

Jim tried to stop his father, but he was too small to do anything except shout in protest that Jackie was his friend! The Giant gave an incredulous laugh, had never heard anything so preposterous, and hung Jackie by her jumper on a hook while he went to stoke the fire.

How to help Jackie? Heaving and ho-ing, Jim, pushed and pulled a gargantuan broom from the corner of the room and held it steady so Jackie could grab the end, steady herself enough to unhook her jumper, and climb down. They could hear the Giant humming hungrily to himself and his thundering footsteps coming nearer. Jackie grabbed Jim's hand and asked him to come down the potato plant with her. With no time to think, he held her hand tight, and they ran together to the window box just as the Giant's shadow crossed the doorway. He shouted at Jim to stop, but it was too late – the pair were on their way down the potato plant to the world below!



Fig. 12. Exit pursued by a giant.. Photo courtesy of Anne-Sophie Cornelius, 2020.

With an outraged roar, the Giant lunged after them, but he was too big to follow. Furiously, he began to dig into the window box in pursuit.

Jackie and Jim scrambled down, down, down. Still far from the ground, Jim's hand slipped and he wobbled precariously for a moment before Jackie swiftly steadied him, and soon they reached

the ground. There was no time – they needed to cut down the potato plant so that the Giant could not reach them! All in a frenzy, Jackie lugged her father's heavy axe from the shed and, with Jim's help to get the axe aloft, chopped down the potato plant with three mighty whacks.

The potato plant cascaded to the ground with a resounding, shuddering crash.

Just then, the Giant's head popped out of the clouds. Sputtering with rage, he shouted down at the children, cursing Jackie as a thief and a kidnapper.

Jackie's father (startled by all the commotion) looked out the window and promptly fainted away in shock at the sight of the Giant's tremendous, shaggy head looming high above. Jackie scampered into the house to check on him.

Calmly, Jim told his father that he would not return to the castle until amends were made with his friend. Astonished at his mild son's pronouncement, the Giant paused for thought. Jackie, having made sure her father was alright, returned to Jim's side and waited with him for the Giant's reply.

Grudgingly, almost petulantly, the Giant muttered an apology. Jackie accepted, but added her own condition that she would only let Jim return if the Giant promised to let him come down and visit her sometimes. Jim enthusiastically seconded the idea.

With the Giant's word given, Jim agreed to return home. From high above, a colossal bird glided down and landed beside the fallen potato plant. Jim introduced Jackie to Goosey. For her part, Jackie called to Mooey and introduced her to Jim. Not wanting him to go, but knowing that he must, Jackie hugged Jim quickly and told him goodbye. With a twinkle in his eye, he whispered to her that he had a plan, and, with that, climbed onto Goosey's back and soared away into the sky.



Fig. 13. Goosey. Photo courtesy of Anne-Sophie Cornelius, 2020.

That evening, Jackie's father, who had spent the afternoon finally listening to Jackie's entire story, apologized for asking her to steal, and promised they would find another way to make ends

meet. If only it would rain again...

The sun went down. Jackie clambered up to the rooftop to watch the moon and stars. Suddenly, she heard a distant *pssst!* and saw Jim's friendly face pop out from amongst the clouds. "Look!" he whispered down.

And, with a grin, he produced his father's giant watering can and gently sprinkled the contents down over the land.

"Rain!"

The End



Fig. 14. A child tries to join us on the set, his mother in hot pursuit: the joy of live theatre. Still taken from first performance recording taken by author, 4th Aug. 2017.

Analyzing the Adaptation

Stories are modes of interactive communication, and that what is communicated to children matters. The stories we decide to pay attention to and manifest in material form indicate their relative importance in the wide world of stories. Because it is structured on diametrically opposed ideals, *Jackie and the Potato Plant* embodies a challenge to the values imparted by the original story.

Ultimately, the work of adapting “Jack and the Beanstalk” lay in identifying and inverting the *masculinist*, patriarchal, capitalistic, colonialist values that produced the versions of the story we have inherited. It was tempting at first to abandon this particular story in favor of something more in line with progressive values. Nevertheless, assigning a completely different set of political ideals to the basic actions of such a familiar, emblematic tale forces an exploration of its problematic premises and invites the imagination to work toward the “world-that-does-not-yet-exist” from within the one that does. As Holloway says, we cannot pretend to exist outside of a capitalist system, and we must instead critique it from within, refusing to accept what it gives us, and telling the stories that help us momentarily “live the world that we want to create” (“Cracks” 911). Puppetry brings that world into a tangible, tactile, material reality.

To assign a completely different set of political ideals to the basic actions of the tale requires considerable divergence from the original story. The exercise of worldmaking in this instance does not mean the creation of an entirely alternative fairy tale universe with new rules. *Jackie* operates in a fairy-tale world that resembles reality in that the characters face social structures more or less as they currently exist. The retelling foregrounds alternative actions and

collaborations in opposition to the received structures of capitalism; the children get the chance to show their parents a better way. It is not subtle; it is in the main characters' management of, or resistance to, these structures that the story changes. For example, Jackie, situated in a comparable socioeconomic position to Jack's, maintains the original hero's sense of adventure and a bit of his lackadaisical attitude. Otherwise, her actions reveal her to be a very different kind of protagonist; tellingly, Jackie does not view the cow as a possession, but as a friend, suggesting a native respect for different kinds of life. Loyal, curious, and open hearted, she is also unsure of herself – very nearly the opposite of the trickster-hero archetype. Stubbornness, lack of self-assurance, and quirks of gesture and voice in performance are the key factors that differentiate her from a more familiar “feminine” fairy tale heroine.

Furthermore, the trope of the mysterious old man selling beans is here replaced with the trope of the witch/fairy godmother/narrator, who tests the mettle of many a classic fairy tale protagonist by appearing in distress and asking for help. For the staging, she also provided much needed narration at key moments (including comically halting the action right before Jackie steals the gold in the first instance, to explain that Jackie didn't *really want* to steal the gold, but was only human). Both the mysterious old man and the narrator/wise woman offer the protagonist an opportunity to climb into another world, but Jack and Jackie take that chance in entirely different ways with entirely different consequences. Jack tricks the fairly benign giantess, loots the castle, and kills the giant husband, and this is his route to success, riches, and full realization of his manhood. It is a “manhood” that smacks of the neoliberal role model: the psychopathic CEO who only cares about the bottom line, the ruthless American Western expansionist, the English imperialist. In this adaptation, Jackie's interest is in building alliances, not conquering supposed

rivals. She is an empathetic and productive alternative to Jack, offering cooperation instead of competition.

By contrast, Jackie's father can be viewed as a "failed" version of Jack – Jack as if he'd never gone up the beanstalk: not cunning or ruthless enough to "make it." He is a recognizable fairy tale figure, the widower-unable-to-provide-for-his-child, who sends said child into danger. He is much more rounded than Jack's mother, his inverse, a damsel-in-distress-type, reliant on her son to provide for her. He is a sympathetic character who loves his daughter and worries for her welfare, and in the stage show he provided great comic relief. But the greedy desire to get more and more and more that sits with both Jack and his mother in the original story are displaced onto Jackie's father here. He is caught in a system where personal worth is net worth.

Distributed, overarching capitalist greed serves as the antagonist of this story, rather than an individual villain. In focusing on a social value system as a source of strife we deviate substantially from the usual fairy tale formulas, which also critique social value systems, but tend to concentrate the critique on one character who can embody the entirety of the problem – wicked kings are easier foes to attack, for example, than the system of monarchy itself. Jackie's father displays the capitalist values most directly, with his comical playing of the stock market, consistent sense of their ruination despite their improved material circumstances, and insistence that Jackie steal more. The Giant displays his version of this greed through his hoarding and through the counting of his coins – indeed, this is one of the only ways Jim can calm him. Comic moments in the show were built around the Giant's reliance on Jim to count correctly, a nod to the abilities Jim has that his father does not fully appreciate.

Jim, a variation on the giantess in the original, is a downtrodden apologist for his father and has very clearly internalized his father's criticisms of his diminutive size. He allows Jackie to live up to her true character, and meets her halfway by living up to his as well. Our Giant does provide drama, both in terms of his size on the stage and in his tendency to eat people, but he is not evil. He loves his son and wants him safe at home, and is willing to adjust his behavior when he sees that he must do so or risk his relationship with Jim. The original giant has no redeeming qualities, and because of his lack of characterization, his murder is seemingly just. The complete demonization of the Other is an imperialist tactic, a reason to conquer anyone that is not part of the in-group. Our story, in showing the similarities between the two central families, holds on to a belief in the possibility of understanding between different groups.

Because Jim and Jackie's friendship is the real "hero" of the story, and they only have a small amount of stage time in the show to develop it, we tried to give them as much in common as possible so that their natural affinity for each other make sense. They have similar relationships with their widowed fathers, and the scenes introducing those relationships parallel each other tightly. Jim's father sees him as deficient and unable to function in the world due to his size. Jackie's father sees her as deficient and unable to function in the world due to her gender (and, of course, her preference for climbing trees rather than doing chores). Through the course of the story, and through their burgeoning relationship with each other, both realize that their fathers are not the ultimate authorities and come to trust their own judgment and abilities. In the end, each of them has saved the other in multiple ways and succeeded in getting their fathers to see them in new ways.

The ecological situation at the root of the hardships Jackie faces, namely the long-term drought, became tied symbolically to the misguided faith that greed can and will lead to true, vital sustenance, if only it can be satisfied. And, like any monster, greed only grows the more it is fed. It is not gold that will allow Jackie, her father, and Mooey to live happily ever after on their farm, but life-giving rain. It is not gold that will soothe the Giant, but a greater understanding of his son. It is not greed, opportunism, or individual industriousness that will lead to solutions to their problems, but a spirit of friendship, of interconnection, of mutual aid.

Conclusion: From Bread to Beans to Potatoes, or Stories as Staples

Folk and fairy tales, as much as foundation myths, are among the most significant features of every cultural inheritance. Drawing on the work of historian of religion Mircea Eliade, Jack Zipes explains that folk and fairy tales help people “to codify and order their lives,” and, at the same time to “gain a sense of...origins and feel the process of history in the present” (1). As Eliade and Zipes argue, these stories are not only blueprints, they create imprints in us that only get deeper as they pass through generations. As the example I’ve detailed in this chapter demonstrates, however, those imprints are not indelible; they can be rewritten. *Jackie and the Potato Plant* dismantles the value system underlying our received “Jack and the Beanstalk,” and in doing so it offers us a different code by which to order our lives. As it is written, it is an offering of hope from a world-in-the-making to readers. As it was performed, *Jackie and the Potato Plant* was an offering of alternative creative sustenance to its audience.

Puppetry and puppeteering are material processes, tools that reveal the mechanisms of enchanting practices (like storytelling) so that we can consciously wield them to our own ends.

In later chapters, I will examine how this power can be deeply problematic and even lead to violent action. In this example, however, I show how it can be used to intervene in a storytelling tradition in order to approach the world-that-does-not-yet-exist. In presenting *Jackie and the Potato Plant* to a seated festival audience, my project pushed an oft-repeated story in a diametrically opposed direction to its normal progression. The ritual of repetition, of revisiting the same storyscape, is central to the story's enchantment. Revising the tale by using the same plot, but placing it in a different moral frame (cooperative rather than exploitative) clarifies the variability of any one story. This is the shift from a didactic story that tells us how it is and how it must (or should) be, to an unfixed story that tells us how it could be. Once again, this demonstrates that practices of making are modes of thinking, ways of working through macro-level problems at a manageable scale. Through puppetry, we can take these story staples into our own hands. By insisting on their malleability, we can reveal their potential to sustain cooperative communities that can welcome multiple viewpoints and voices.

This theme of ritual repetition within a shared social imaginary is detailed in the next chapter through a different kind of storytelling. The annual November All Souls Procession of Tucson, Arizona, organized by the artists' collective Many Mouths, One Stomach, offers another set of practices ultimately aimed at the same communal ideals presented in *Jackie and the Potato Plant*. The Procession gathers groups in public space to celebrate and mourn the collective shared experience of death and loss. In this process, people are invited into the support of a community and encouraged to carry and share their own stories in a context that acknowledges the need to revisit them. This is a very different mode of storytelling, one that allows dissolute communities to re-enchant themselves with their own stories. By gaining awareness that stories enchant us, we gain the ability to mitigate their impact and redirect their power. *Jackie and the*

Potato Plant was a joyful experience, full of fun and humor and improvisation; it brought a new energy to a guiding blueprint and rendered a cooperative, generative, and forward-looking manifesto. The All Souls Procession, for all that it is also a joyful, elevated experience for participants, also serves as a container for the overwhelming sadness of the stories we collectively experience in the face of one kind of ending. The stories we receive and those we experience can control us, or we can strive to work toward multiple reimaginings.

Chapter Six

Death is a Good Place to Start, or the All Souls Procession of Tucson, Arizona

As we saw in the last chapter, the enchantments of stories and their telling can quietly steer culture, or they can become sites where we exert our own influence over our experience. They can lead our perceptions if we uncritically accept their structures without interrogating their underlying (often ossified) ideological contents. We consistently receive stories that inform and enforce the direction of our lives, that delimit our perspective in keeping with an accepted storyline. In this chapter, I move from the notion of the (seemingly) compact “story” in the form of the fairy tale to the wider cultural realm where shared stories create an affective community structure. Within contemporary Western culture, and especially in American culture, the shared story of perpetual forward momentum, economic growth, and eternal youth is one that serves to halt the instinct to reflect on the reality of life cycles, the repetition of endings as much as beginnings, and mortality itself. To stay with that instinct is radical in contemporary society, and extremely difficult to achieve in isolation. It is only with the support of the collective that we can create space to make and mend our communities. Here, puppeting is a lens to understanding approaching materiality as a practice of enchantment.

Bringing individuals together in festive ritual with serious intent is the core impetus of the nondenominational artists’ collective Many Mouths, One Stomach of Tucson, Arizona. Their annual event, called the All Souls Procession, offers a space for another kind of enchantment,

one that I investigated as an observer participant in October and November of 2017. Anyone can join the Procession, and all are encouraged to create their own memorial objects; these are access-points that take participants out of daily experience and into the enchantment of the event. The Procession leads towards a grand conflagration, in which some of the handiwork of the participants is consumed. The materiality of this handiwork, both precious and disposable, limns the simultaneous absence and presence of lost loved ones. The gathering of the objects is the conduit for the creation of the community. This practice has resonant echoes with fixed practices of effigy destruction, which I will take up in the following two chapters, but here the ritual works towards liberation from the destructive power of death-denial in American culture.

Having experienced the combination of communal lifestyle and protest culture inherent in the Bread and Puppet Theater, the creation of a focused moment for non-performers to fully participate and take part in their own experience became more urgent in the context of a Trump-led American culture. Moments of engagement and connection with diverse community were already endangered, and are continuing to rise in this era of political, environmental, communal crises. Where the Bread and Puppet Theater has been a steady oasis tucked away in Vermont, the All Souls Procession (whose organizers continue in the tradition of that work) offers an annual glimpse of the same possibilities of enchantment, and the same kind of site of resistance against prefabricated experience. The emphasis on creating a world together and repurposing stale stories is front-and-center in the All Souls Procession, even as its central theme is death and remembrance. Beginning with an investigation of death-denial in American culture, this chapter proceeds through a description of the Procession's origins, offering a context for the significance of this work. The particularities of place and people are brought to the fore through autoethnographic and ethnographic description of fieldwork. In addition to volunteering and

participating in the Procession in order to fully experience and observe the impact of its performances on the crowd of over 20,000 people, I also interviewed key members of the production team to find out about their intentions, ideals, and methods. In my experience of the event, the ceremonial urn where all the memorial objects are burned, seen through the lens of puppeting, becomes a central performer in the transformation of crowd to community and trash to transcendence. Little is written about this Procession despite the decades of continuous practice and ever-increasing number of participants. Within the context of this research, *Many Mouths, One Stomach* provides another unique example of how we can take the things that would destroy us into our own hands, and how much stronger our hands become when we join them together.

No Country for Grieving

Given the post-postmodern skepticism of anything absolute, we can still rely on death and taxes. Given the Enlightenment's tendency to interrogate prior structures of meaning, any sense of an integrated cosmos in which death somehow "makes sense" has been lost (if it ever really existed). Because science promised to render the natural world explicable, Western culture has moved away from a profound fear of, and sense of absolute vulnerability to, the forces of Nature. For all the ways that modern science has helped us to delay death, however, we have not yet found a way to cheat it, and it remains a fact we all must struggle to accept. Science cannot answer us *why*, nor any other discourse currently available to us. All we can do is try to find ways of coming to terms with the loss of others, and of ourselves.

There is a broad understanding that we in the West do our utmost to close our eyes, cover our ears, and hum loudly in the face of death, and this has been a baseline for much 20th-century scholarship on the topic. Anthropologists like Tradii and Robert take pains to disprove the “death-denial thesis,” and succeed in presenting the ways in which Western culture *does* (and always has) faced death, including the promotion of health culture through advertising and the popularity of crime dramas featuring forensic investigations of murder (1). Death itself holds a morbid fascination, and the surge of interest in “death- positive” information is evidenced by popular figures like Youtuber Caitlin Doughty of “Ask a Mortician,” who seeks to reorient attitudes toward the physical and economic realities of dying in America. Her interest, in an echo of 19th-century American sentiment that focused on dying peacefully, is in the “good death.” Doughty's version of the “good death,” is one that pays attention to the wishes of the dying in terms of how the aftermath of death is carried out. Her emphasis, as a funeral director, is on the dying person, rather than those who must deal with the loss. Whether or not a “good grief” can be achieved in contemporary American culture is a matter of concern. Researchers like psychologists Romanoff and Terenzio, however, who work specifically in the area of grief and loss in the USA, note that “popular American culture seems dominated by the modernist model of minimizing and deritualizing bereavement practices” (697). Tradii and Robert make a fair refutation of the death-denial thesis, but what cannot be refuted is the perhaps more insidious denial at play in Western, particularly American, culture, is the denial of *grief*.

Grief is an incredibly powerful process, a journey towards integrating the universality of pain into the individual experience of living. To deny it is to cut off the only affective access we have

to the reality of death. Debord offers an analysis of the impossibility of grief in a capitalist, “spectacular” culture in aphorism #160:

The unavoidable biological limitations of the work force — evident both in its dependence on the natural cycle of sleeping and waking and in the debilitating effects of irreversible time over each individual’s lifetime — are treated by the modern production system as strictly secondary considerations. As such, they are ignored in that system’s official proclamations and in the consumable trophies that embody its relentless triumphant progress. Fixated on the delusory center around which his world seems to move, the spectator no longer experiences life as a journey toward fulfillment and toward death. Once he has given up on really living he can no longer acknowledge his own death. Life insurance ads merely insinuate that he may be guilty of dying without having provided for the smooth continuation of the system following the resultant economic loss, while the promoters of the “American way of death” stress his capacity to preserve most of the appearances of life in his post-mortem state. On all the other fronts of advertising bombardment it is strictly forbidden to grow old. Everybody is urged to economize on their “youth-capital,” though such capital, however carefully managed, has little prospect of attaining the durable and cumulative properties of economic capital. This social absence of death coincides with the social absence of life. (Debord 91)

Here, Debord, bleakly yet passionately, explains the economic system’s stultifying effect on the experience of living as a consequence of the reduction of death to an inconvenience to the corporate bottom line. Given a moment’s thought, the fact of death recalls us to our true existence, which necessarily challenges the smooth operation of the conditions upon which the spectacle depends. Because of the strength of the spectacle as a cultural environment, however, it is difficult to overcome, for any appreciable amount of time, the perpetual stream of images that bombards us with its insistence upon its own vital importance. There is no place for grief in a society where time is money, and where mourning, as the “performance of grief,” requires, like any performance, time and energy to plan and enact — as well as, if not an audience, then fellow performers (Maguire 68). The pressure to revert to our status as cogs in the machine of the

spectacle, and so to take upon ourselves once again the character of objects, rather than living creatures that can — and will — die, is profound.

Yet the denial of grief is dangerous, widely recognized to be harmful to both mental and physical health at the individual level. How can such harm do other than affect the aggregate, particularly when those who study grief acknowledge the importance of community support in dealing with loss? Communal rituals and mourning practices cannot take hold in a society that so thoroughly devalues both life and death. Unfortunately for those in such societies, access to modes of processing loss is extremely limited despite a working understanding of what is required, as described here:

Successful resolution of bereavement requires (a) moderation or transformation of the person's sense of self resulting from loss, occurring in the intrapsychic dimension; (b) mediation or transition between the individual's pre-death and post-death social status, the psychosocial dimension; and (c) continuation of an intrapsychic connection with the deceased within a communal context. (Romanoff and Terenzio 699)

In the USA, where the intrapsychic and psychosocial dimensions of experience are most often collapsed into the one-dimensional daily reality of consumer culture, socially sanctioned approaches to bereavement are in many ways the *least* helpful ones imaginable. Grief is primarily a solitary or small- group activity, something to be gotten through discreetly and preferably at speed. Social response is typically perfunctory, stilted, and on the clock. Death does not fit into the capitalist model; once all funeral- and disposal-related expenses are paid (and of course the industry surrounding such things is enormous), we're on our own. There is no national standard practice or social space for processing loss, and there is certainly no place in the American civic calendar reserved for remembering, mourning, and sharing in the universality of personal grief. There are days to celebrate veterans and famous figures on a national stage, but

personal grief is distasteful and inconvenient business in a culture that sells positivity as the answer to all that ails.

Countries all over the world observe recurring rituals in remembrance of ancestors, and peoples throughout time have done so, apparently to their psychological benefit. The Buddhist and Taoist Hungry Ghost Festival that takes place all over Asia in August, the Hindu *Pitri Pasha* in September, and the Catholic Allhallowtide that straddles October and November, provide people with cyclical opportunities to enact the processes outlined by Romanoff and Terenzio above. By their estimation, “rituals can serve moderating, mediating, and connecting functions within the bereavement process, and thus facilitate the intrapsychic transformation, the psychosocial status transition, and the continuation of communal and symbolic connections” (Romanoff and Terenzio 699). The observances listed above, it must be noted, are largely driven by the structural power of common religion, and several hundred years of secularization in the USA has led many Americans away from institutional religion, if not spirituality: the 2017’s Gallup poll on religion showed that 52% of Americans seldom or never attend a church or synagogue (“Religion”). It thus becomes clear that a secular intercession on behalf of American mental health is necessary, but it is equally clear that such a thing will not come from any political or economic forces within the country. The All Souls Procession of Tucson, Arizona is one example of a productive way of attending to the profound gap that grief-denial leaves in American culture.

The Origins of the All Souls Procession

In 1990, visual artist Sue Johnson created a small memorial procession in order to honor the memory of her father, who passed away in April of that year. Having earned her degree in art

therapy at the Art Institute of Chicago, Johnson was keenly aware that, for her, the best mode of processing this profoundly painful experience would be an expressive one. During her studies, as she explained in a personal communication with me, she particularly resonated with the work of Carl Jung, and it was his model of the human psyche, with its innate drive toward creative self-expression, that came to frame Johnson's artistic rationale. She grew up participating in secular American parades and processions in her local community, and when she learned about the Swiss festival of *Fasnacht*, which Jung would have experienced during his youth, she immediately understood how this three-day celebration, in which people don extravagant masks and costumes and thus divorce themselves from their daily identities, was instrumental to Jung's understanding of rituals, archetypes, and the collective unconscious.

After completing her studies, Johnson obtained work with the railway system and spent more than a decade traveling the United States. Between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, she witnessed a range of processions and celebrations in major US cities, including Christmas and the 4th of July in New York, Chinese New Year in San Francisco, Mardi Gras and jazz funerals in New Orleans, and the Yaqui Indian deer dancing ceremonies of Tucson, Arizona – the city in which she would eventually settle. Though she did not grow up in a particularly religious environment herself, Johnson felt the deep cultural influence of Tucson's proximity to Mexico, where Catholicism is the dominant faith. Recognizing the value of structured, culturally-sanctioned ritual in processing grief, Johnson chose to perform her memorial procession for her father across the three Catholic holidays of All Hallow's Eve (secularly celebrated as Halloween), All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day (both of which are celebrated in Mexico as the Days of the Dead) in order to connect her personal ritual to the broader social period of reflection on life and death.

The first procession included efforts from 25 local artists, developed music and movement to animate the masks, lanterns, altars, instruments, and sculptures Johnson had created. Performed over three nights and culminating on the full moon, the ritual began in Johnson's studio before moving into the streets of downtown Tucson, where evening crowds became impromptu audiences. The artists and audiences who participated in this early work were inspired by the experience, and encouraged Johnson to lead another procession the following year. She did so, but this time with a grant that allowed her to facilitate workshops in lantern-, mask- and puppet-making, face-painting, movement, and music. By encouraging those in the workshops to create their own memorial objects and invest their own emotions into the procession, Johnson planted the seeds for today's All Souls' celebrations.

The need that Johnson had felt, not just to memorialize her father, but to do so in an artistic and communal way, was shared by many, and once a structure was in place to do just that, the event rapidly grew beyond its initial capacity. Eventually the number of people involved grew to the extent that the city required the Procession to obtain a parade permit. By 1995, it was clear that the Procession was going to require a more concrete system of management and administration, and so a small group of passionate artists and educators founded the non-profit organization Many Mouths, One Stomach (MMOS) in order to produce All Souls into the future. While the initial event took place over the days of Halloween and *los Dias de los Muertos*, in order to coincide with local traditions already well established, after a few years the Procession's popularity grew enough that MMOS recognized the necessity of moving the proceedings to the weekend after these holidays so that there would be no conflict in observance. Of central significance to the Procession is its positioning within the civic spaces of the city; in addition to a

moment of collective grief and recognition of each other's basic humanity, the Procession provides a redefinition of public space and what can happen within areas that are typically closely regulated. Under the direction of Nadia Hagen, founder of Tucson's premiere fire performance company FlamChen, since 1998, the Procession has grown into one of, if not the, the biggest grassroots community arts events in the United States annually, bringing approximately 150,000 participants from all over the country and the world to Tucson for a night of creative remembrance and celebration.

It is significant that the Procession was instigated by and that the labor of continuing it has been carried out primarily by women. Traditionally in America, death was feminine territory because it most often occurred in the “female space” of the home. Women, either family members or paid practitioners, would watch the dying, tend to them, verify that death had occurred, and prepare bodies for burial. The parallel with midwifery is strong: women carried out these important, skilled roles until the mid-19th century medicalization of both birth and death put primary control over the processes into “professional” hands. The professional sphere obscured the realities of birth and death, culturally sanitizing the two most profoundly personal mysteries of human experience. The All Souls Procession, with its iterative, cyclical nature, as well as its emphasis on personal contribution, open and accessible participation, and personal self-expression, is, without declaring itself as such, very much a feminist performance practice.

“Death is Political”: The Importance of Place For this Particular Procession

In our informal interview on a couch in her small Tucson bungalow, Nadia Hagen, every inch a political actor with a strong feminist bent, reminds me that Tucson is the home of Raytheon, the company responsible for the manufacture of most of the U.S. Military's weapons. “It's right in our backyard,” she says (see Appendix C, page 295). The reality and results of America's economic priorities is painful for many citizens to accept, and Hagen hopes to create a space where acceptance can begin. To her, death is political by nature in the USA: “...all of our culture around violence is tied into an economy that is tied to a military industrial complex,” she says. She keeps this in mind every year as she selects a theme. As with 2015's theme, “Unmournable Bodies,” which brought attention to the dead that are rejected or forgotten by society (including addicts and the mentally ill as much as enemies of the state or war casualties), Hagen seeks, not to “[hit] people over the head” or “[insult] their intelligence,” but to access territory that can inspire the use of “strong images that people can thread together in ways that just give them an opportunity to change their perspective, to have a different perspective on the repercussions of the things we do in our culture, of the place we live.” People who live in Tucson, the birthplace of so much destruction, have a particular responsibility to be aware and to bear witness to the environment in which they are enmeshed. It “makes sense that we have a death parade,” says Hagen.

Tucson is situated just a few hours north of the US-Mexico border. Joseph Roach, in his study of circum-Atlantic performance cultures, points out that transcultural societies like this one “have invented themselves by performing their pasts in the presence of others,” and by “defining themselves in opposition to others” (5). The aim of the All Souls Procession is to do away with

such opposition, and instead to claim the multicultural influences on American culture by inviting all manner of expressive traditions to inhabit the same space together. It is frequently referred to as a “Day of the Dead Parade” by people and organizations that are unfamiliar with its mission, which has caused some controversy regarding cultural appropriation, since the organizers are primarily white Americans. Sue Johnson was inspired by Mexican tradition, having felt the impact of the beauty of the celebration, but the Procession has never claimed itself to be representative of the specificity of *los Dias de los Muertos*. MMOS acknowledges this tension, recognizing that the conversation is particularly relevant given the relationship between Mexico and the USA.

MMOS is also committed to the belief that anyone attending the Procession should be allowed to express their mourning as they feel is appropriate to their process of bereavement. Though this may ultimately mean that some people misunderstand the purpose of the event and use it as one more way to dress up for Halloween, or to paint their faces like the famous traditional *calaveras* (skulls) of the Day of the Dead though they have not personally inherited that particular tradition, the feedback that MMOS consistently receives from participants of all backgrounds is overwhelmingly supportive of the atmosphere of inclusivity that occurs at the Procession, and that is the most important factor to them in their efforts to foster a sense of community.

A city is, according to Richard Schechner, a container. It is, he says, “a container of people, their residences, and the structures – both architectural and conceptual – that satisfy, or attempt to satisfy, the expressed and predictable needs and desires of the population” (*Imaginaries* 81). It is a “performed imaginary,” a performative ongoing process of co-constitution between people and their environment. Sue Johnson and Nadia Hagen both view Tucson as home, but both

recognized a lack of public engagement with the city itself, and were eager to address this lack, to better satisfy the “expressed and predictable needs” of its residents. The reclamation of public space for the Procession is a transformative process, one that binds people to their environment by endowing it with value as a stage for ritual and performance.

I was an Usher with the Community Spirit Group in 2017. The Procession had just been rerouted, after over a decade on one course, to a new path, one that runs along the Santa Cruz River. The finale site remained the same, simply the walking path had changed. Part of the Community Spirit Group's mission for the evening was to greet the river as a new part of the Procession's evolution. I could feel that the former path had been right in the middle of the now-hip-and-bustling, but formerly dusty and uninviting, downtown center. The economic upturn that has resulted in this trendy district has both invigorated the city and made it more difficult for groups like MMOS to get the permits necessary to perform. I was concerned that the energy would not be the same, for the slow build of the downtown atmosphere could have energized the past Processions. As the *taiko* drums sounded and the mulling crowd assembled into the street and became, in one sudden moment of forward motion, an actual Procession, I saw that my concern was needless.

The Procession is strong enough in numbers now that the atmosphere happens on its own, the sudden feeling of something celebratory and slightly strange – people with skulls painted on their faces for fun walking beside people with tragedies displayed on their chests. A young soldier's portrait, next to some high school photos, was pasted simply on white poster board. We share a kindly glance; everyone does. Because the people who painted their faces for fun have lost someone, too. Volunteer photographer Susan Tiss verbalizes such moments as times when we

find one another to communicate a message of, “I see you. I recognize you. I am also mourning someone or something. We’re here together. We’re honoring two different people; we don’t even know each other, but it’s still somehow communal, so I’m not alone in my grief or my sorrow or my not-knowing-how to process this.” We are all lost and afraid and broken by the fact of death, and that mutual recognition is what makes the Procession profound; everyone has grief to express, losses to mourn. It is why the police and local authorities look forward to working with MMOS. It is why people's behavior is consistently so good.

The All Souls Procession Today

After thirty years of evolution, the Procession has come to have a very different identity. Rather than an intimate, personal ritual, it is an enormous, community-powered celebration that makes grief visible and belies its solitary character. In keeping with its generally anti-capitalist ethos, MMOS applies for civic grants each year and receive donations from individuals and local businesses, but does not engage with corporate or commercial interests in any capacity.

Participation in any capacity is free. While one of Nadia Hagen's first innovations as Creative Director was to institute a spectacular performance at the end of the 1.5-mile Procession route, the event as a whole is not intended for spectators, but for *participants*. Hagen explains that, in the early days of the Procession, “people wanted to make something that was not just about entertainment, that wasn't just about having fun, that...had this deeper resonance. [They wanted to create] culture for themselves instead of just taking the culture that was handed to them... actually evolving something else out of whatever parts were at hand.” The impulse to join in the celebration has fueled the Procession throughout its history.

As Volunteer Coordinator and MMOS board member Melanie Cooley puts it to me when we sit down for tea and a chat, “You are responsible for your own experience at the Procession; the more you engage, the more you participate, the more you create an experience for yourself (rather than expecting one to be delivered to you), the better your experience will be” (see Appendix 2.2). In addition to curating the finale ceremony and liaising with performers, MMOS communicates with participant groups, hosts preparatory making workshops, manages volunteers, and deals with logistical essentials like permits, traffic control, and security. The group is always aware, however, that what they provide is really just a frame. The primary content of the Procession is provided by those taking part in it.

Each year MMOS introduces a theme around which to build memorials, altars, masks, costumes, puppets, and hand-powered floats. Themes provide light guidance to participants as well as ensuring a sense of aesthetic cohesion, and have ranged from simply individual colors to, more recently, complex ideas like 2015's “Ghosts of the road” theme, which encouraged participants to consider those who build, and have built, the infrastructure of the USA, and 2018's “Sky Islands” theme, which focused on isolated environments as well as social isolation. Participants are free to interpret themes as they see fit, in order to express their personal stories honestly. Susan Tiss, who has been present for every Procession since its inception, says that the themes “give you a place from which to evaluate and interact with the world,” providing a frame of reference within which to interact with grief. The range of things that people produce is staggering; everything from posters bearing photographs to shadowboxes to diorama-filled wagons are guided through the city streets in a pilgrimage toward the finale site.

The positive atmosphere is overwhelmingly well upheld by those in attendance, despite the scale of the event. Only one person, a hate-preacher from the Westboro Baptist Church, has ever been restricted from the Procession. MMOS gives only a few explicit directions in the realm of health and safety: be good neighbors to the people whose houses are on the Procession route, refrain from drinking or using drugs so that everyone remains present and comfortable, and keep an eye out for stilt-walkers as well as larger floats and puppets. MMOS has made a point each year to state clearly that people's modes of expression and remembrance may vary greatly, and that each person has a right to join the Procession in the way that means the most to them.

As much as individuals, bands, dance troupes, and community groups form the body of the Procession. Bar the finale performance, which is created by volunteers, everything is low-tech; in this way, each entry into the Procession reflects the personal efforts of those who produced it rather than their financial capacity. It is by encouraging the public to fully engage with the process of *making* that the Procession differs from so many public events. “You're not coming to it as a consumer,” Cooley explains. “There is no product; it is what you make of it.” To make one's own physical contribution to the celebration is the key to having a transformative experience in the night. Not only do people make things by hand, their individual efforts amplify each other and make the event itself. The idea of bringing an offering, rather than arriving to an event to take something away, does not sit easily with everyone. As Cooley sees it, “...for many people in our culture there's this unwillingness to take responsibility for their own experience. There's this expectation that someone else is going to provide this experience that they can then consume and critique. And that's not what we're doing... if you are paying attention, is a ritual that you are participating in.” What is so striking about the Procession is that, despite the

American culture of consumption, thousands of people *are* paying attention and *do* make their own experience.

At about 4pm on the day of the Procession, people begin to gather at the central Tucson location of Grande Avenue, where they can begin to take up their places, enjoy music and stilt-walkers, and view each other's artworks and costumes. It evokes the feeling of a neighborhood block-party or pot-luck; everyone has come together to share something they have made particularly for this day, and the atmosphere is light and friendly. It is not the typical festival atmosphere, however festive it seems. Though people smile and greet one another, almost everyone bears an image or an object representing one or more lost loved ones. There is a recognition of common purpose that has little to do with entertainment, and more to do with bearing witness to one's own experience, the experiences of one's fellows, and the bond of a shared understanding of loss.

Headed by a ceremonial Urn, its honor-guard, and a local *Taiko* drumming troupe, the Procession begins its slow progress around 6pm. A queue of dancers performs the Japanese *Bon odori*, the cyclical dance of the *Obon* festival, which celebrates ancestors, in time with the drums. Once the movement begins, the atmosphere shifts and becomes more somber. Everyone is now part of a vigil, a period of tribute, and it is during this time that the crowd becomes the community, united, however briefly, by shared intent and shared motion. The Procession grows as it progresses, with people joining from the sidewalks all along the route. To see the Procession coming towards you down the street is mesmerizing; a seemingly never-ending mass of people, of colors, of handmade flags and puppets and lanterns and small shrines hoisted aloft, moves forward in a slow-moving tsunami. As the darkness falls, those who have painted their faces like *calaveras* begin to glow eerily amongst the crowd as if they were the dead among the living. To

watch is to see the peculiar force of this self-selected group, and to join the walk is to feel it on all sides. It is perhaps the only place in secular American culture where it is possible to see so many people acknowledge this part of their experience.

It only takes about an hour to reach the finale site, where all participants have a chance to parade their creations and costumes across the stage. Then the ceremony begins. Nadia Hagen speaks about building an “ecstatic arc” in the finale ceremony. “It’s the same work as sex,” she laughs, when I ask her how she structures the finale in order to achieve this arc. In her many years as a performance artist, Hagen experimented with music, rhythm, outdoor spaces, and fire, and witnessed the way that steady beats can set up a trance-like state for a group of any size. Once that state is achieved, she explains, the right stimulus can bring about a sense of ecstasy and release. Music builds, dancers and stilt-walkers transition into aerialists and fire performers, and the pitch builds until a sudden stillness, at which point the Urn’s honor-guard perform a semi-improvised movement piece on the stage as the Urn itself is revealed as a crane winches it high into the air behind the stage. The fire inside it grows and grows as it reaches its final height of approximately 30 feet.

For a few minutes, the Urn is a huge, fiery lantern in the cool darkness of the autumn night. Inside of it, thousands of pounds of remembrances of the dead offered by the crowd during the lead-up to the night (names, prayers, and wishes written on slips of paper, photos, letters, placards, flowers, pieces of cloth – anything that can burn) spark and glow and crumple into ashes. Though the walk of the Procession itself is the main event, it is really this moment we have gathered to experience. Hagen explains it to me beforehand as a kind of magical moment that “reaches out to every single person that put something in [the Urn], and transforms that loss

and grief and changes it into something else, something that's shared with every other person that they're standing in that field with. And it's really palpable.” She is right. It is the quietest part of the evening. For all the logistical planning and the variety of contributions to the Urn, it is a simple and powerful sight. It is the object performance at the heart of the Procession, a performance that binds everyone together. As the fire burns itself out, people hug and wipe tears and begin to disperse into the night.

The Urn and Its Honor-Guard

The Urn performs the role of a sacred vessel on the night of the All Souls Procession, though it sits humbly atop shipping containers in a dirt lot for the rest of the year. A hollow metal sculpture with a diameter of 9 feet, the Urn is composed of triangular panels that form convex hexagons. Within each triangle is an intricate filigree mandala, and the negative spaces in the pattern allow flames to fully engulf the structure when fire is set to its contents. Perhaps the most important addition to Sue Johnson's original vision of the Procession, the Urn has been the focal point of the Procession for over a decade. While Nadia Hagen implemented the finale ceremony in order to bring the Procession to a rousing finish, it was MMOS member Paul Weir who “manifested” the Urn, and, according to Hagen, “the difference that made in the finale was like night and day... people all feel this really strong connection to the urn, like they have taken something that matters very much to them – that's precious – and they put it in the urn with everybody else's stuff, and so when that burns, it's alchemical.” Weir's inspiration came from disparate sources that, taken together, underscore the ritual significance of a ceremonial burning, even in contemporary settings.

While the tradition of burning offerings for gods and ancestors has mostly died out in Western cultures, it has continued in both secular and religious fashion in other parts of the world, and, for Weir, it was his knowledge of an annual Chinese ritual in which people burn paper representations of everything from money to houses to mobile phones in honor of relatives that have passed away, to ensure their well-appointed afterlife. On the other side of the world, though not too far from Tucson, the Burning Man Festival, a commercial behemoth accessible only to those who can afford to pay the high ticket prices and to take the time to attend, has also become an established annual tradition since its inception in 1986. The finale ceremonies of the festival include the burning of the eponymous Man as well as of a wooden Temple in which people are invited to write messages, names, and prayers. Weir's initial exploratory hunch was to place skull-shaped vessels around the finale site of the Procession and see if community members would take up the offer to fill these vessels with offerings to burn. Hagen reminisces about that year, explaining the importance of scale, and how the skulls they built were much too small to command the kind of attention that the urn does now. Even so, they noticed after the crowd had cleared, that the vessels were still burning brightly because they had been filled with so many messages. It was clear that people, with limited instruction, understood the intention and wanted to participate. Given this reaction, Weir applied for a grant from Burning Man and built the first urn. "For them, we're a really important sister organization," says Nadia, "because we do something that's free in an urban space — it's civic, it's urban, it's free — so we validate the mindset, but in a very different way, that's more inclusive, honestly, than what they can do."

In 2015, MMOS weighed the contents of the Urn before the burning and discovered that it contained over 400 pounds of material. Composed primarily of small slips of paper, the sheer amount of weight the Urn carries is a quantitative testament to the extent of people's affective

investment in its performance. This performance stretches beyond Tucson; people are invited in advance of the Procession to send messages over the internet, which are printed out and placed inside. Anything that can be safely burned can be placed in the Urn: letters, photographs, flowers, artworks. One year a woman brought her grandmother's wedding dress; another year, a man brought his father's ashes. The day before the Procession, the Urn appears at a specifically child-friendly daytime event called the "Procession of Little Angels," in which teenagers facilitate a children's procession in a local park in order to give children a chance to express their own experiences of death as well as to give a special time of remembrance to children who have passed away. On the day of the Procession itself, people gather to pass in their contributions to the Urn hours ahead of time. The strongest ritual aspect of the Urn's performance, however, begins once the Procession has started.

A team of volunteers, called the "Community Spirit Group," escorts the Urn throughout the walk. This team consists of three tiers: Urn Attendants, Ambassadors, and Ushers. Each of these positions has practical, theatrical, and symbolic duties that have grown over the years in complexity and importance as the Procession has grown, occupying different relations to the Urn, the crowd, and each other. Furthest from the Urn are the Ushers, who maintain their daily aspect more than the Attendants and the Ambassadors, though they still wear matching makeup and build their own headpieces to denote their position and integrate them into the visual world of the Urn. Their work is primarily logistical, answering questions and helping direct the flow of traffic, while maintaining contact with the safety officer at all times. They support the Ambassadors and Attendants by maintaining space around them so that they can perform their roles effectively, as well as establishing a ritual respect for the Urn's central importance by keeping the area around it clear. Ambassadors, more elaborately costumed in long robes, flow

freely through the streets, handing out paper and pencils ahead of the Urn's arrival so that people are ready to pass their messages to the Attendants.

The Attendants occupy a particularly special position in the Procession because they act as conduits, messengers that take the contributions of the crowd and convey them into the urn.

Attendants are the most visually striking members of the Community Spirit Group, building their own ornate costumes in accordance with the year's theme and preparing for two months in advance of the Procession. As Melanie Cooley, who was an Attendant for many years herself before becoming the Volunteer Coordinator, explains it, “the creation of that costume is very much part of the ritual preparation and the creative act; it’s part of getting ready. Creating a costume, a headdress that will help me transform into this non-individualized servant of this sacred experience during the procession, is part of getting there.” Their preparation includes working toward building up the emotional reserves necessary to remain present throughout the several hours of their journey from the beginning of the route to the finale site. “We talk about being the hands of the urn - the hands of the heart of the urn,” says Cooley.

Attendants take part in ritual preparation to become what Cooley calls the “hollow bone,” a reference to Lakota shamanic teachings. To become the hollow bone is to take a position of egoless humility and openness toward others, a position of complete presence that allows energy to flow through any resistance that might arise. To work toward such a state, the Attendants participate in group visualizations and exercises in which they express their own experiences of loss together, they create a collective attitude of engagement and a movement vocabulary that unifies their performance. Because each attendant interacts with potentially thousands of people

during the Procession, it is necessary for them to prepare themselves to enter a state whereby they can give the same attention to everyone they meet.

Though they maintain silence throughout the Procession, they communicate deeply with the public, taking a moment with each individual who offers something to the Urn. These offerings, however simple or ornate, are intensely personal, and the Attendants view their role as a secular, yet sacred, duty of respect and empathy to all who contribute. The Attendants are aware that each person who hands them something to place in the Urn have only that one moment to let go of whatever they have brought. "It's a really sacred responsibility, and emotionally quite tense," says Cooley, one that requires emotional and spiritual preparation. The Attendants are responsible for fully including all who choose to participate in the performance of the Urn, the ritual of the burning. By maintaining a soft focus and a trance-like energy, the Attendants aim, even very briefly, to express a nonverbal understanding that each person has experienced a painful loss, and that that is *why* we are all here together, because we have all experienced such loss. And if we haven't, we will.

Puppeting the Urn: A New Materialist Object Performance

The Urn is like the American Melting Pot of myth, a co-created space of intermingling. Its performance is one of *communitas*, one made possible by everyone who materially shares part of their experience with it. It is an active work of art, one constantly in process and in interaction with the people around it, and as such it is one that embodies John Dewey's pragmatic aesthetic. As an art object with which people engage on a visceral and affective level, the Urn is also an example of Heidegger's *thing*, something that is more than itself, something that *gathers*. The

thing, in doing what it does (“thinging,” Heidegger calls it), “stays the earth and sky, divinities and mortals. Staying, the thing brings the four, in their remoteness, near one another... Nearness is at work in bringing near, as the thinging of the thing” (175). The Urn is the *thing* through which the Procession's participants truly meet, share, and commune. The gathering that takes place throughout the Procession is externally affirmed in a physical form when the Urn burns.

In 2017, when the Procession's theme was “The Marriage of the Sun and Moon,” which referred to the Western tradition of alchemy and its basis in an understanding of the ever-present interaction between the spiritual and physical planes. As always, the Procession's goal in this year was to exist within the space of that interaction rather than to reify any dualist opposition, hence the “marriage of opposites” (sun and moon). The intention of uniting supposedly disparate concepts separated out during the Enlightenment, overtly indicated in the 2017 theme, is in fact an ever-present function of the Procession. The Urn's performance and its impact on those who witness it is an example of the blending of the material and the spiritual that is always already taking place in the world of things.

It is because people bring such intimate materials to share with the crowd that the Procession becomes a transformational event, itself an alchemical process. These objects open people to each other; the personal images foster sympathy in those who see them as much as the tall, spindly puppets foster a sense of wonder. As Susan Tiss describes it, these objects and images “give us something...tangible to attach to... We as humans need this tangible thing that we can then attach our thoughts and emotions to, because keeping it constantly abstract all the time is

really hard for us.” The tangible things that they make are people's way into the imaginative and “ecstatic” experience Hagen hopes to effect in the finale.

Perhaps this is why the fire burning in the Urn silently in the sky, after the buildup of rhythms in the ceremony performance, feels strange, otherworldly, magical. As Hagen describes it, the experience “opens up this possibility that there's this whole other level to reality that you have never

recognized and you don't know how to traverse - necessarily. I think also that's what's really great about the puppets and the costumes and the craft, is that those are your tools to traverse the magical world. If you make something, then you've already created your vehicle, you've already manifested something into that other plane that helps you navigate it. And then when people get into that, they want to do it more. (Hagen)

The individual contributions to the Urn feed the fire; they are the raw material that, combined with the element of fire, create something analogous to a chemical reaction within those watching. Fire is quite literally and quite symbolically a source of power. It is both ally and enemy, a close collaborator as much as an ever-present threat, something that makes life as we know it possible – but which can also unmake it. The physical reality of fire, from wildfire to cooking fire to campfire, is as multifaceted as the symbolic reality. Western literary and religious traditions treat fire with great respect; it cleanses but it destroys, signifies wisdom but also warfare, is untouchable but entirely tangible. It is, as are all the fundamental elements of the earth, a liminal material, rife with possibilities that have shaped our species. Human physiognomy and human culture are based on the use of fire; it has facilitated not only our evolution physically and intellectually, but our conquest of the ecosystem. In his study of fire in Western thought, Stephen J. Pyne puts it thus: “With it gods were manifest, about it myths were told, through it philosophy was explored and out of it a science evolved that would, in the end,

deconstruct fire's magic, mystery, and metaphysic" (1). When the Urn burns, for those few moments, the magic, mystery, and metaphysic reappear in their whole form. Hagen sees fire as a fundamental dramatic element. "You have light, you have heat," she says, "and you have something that people are drawn to, inexplicably... they can't not look at it."

It is important that the Urn is referred to as such. Schechner calls a city a container, and so is the Urn, in a condensed way. At the Burning Man festival, the space devoted to burning memorials is a "temple," a walk-in structure that burns the day before the Man does. An Urn is something quite different. It is more personal, associated with the specific function of holding an individual's cremated remains, whether for burial or display. It is a final resting place, a grave of sorts. In a way, those who place something in the Urn re-live the loss they are mourning as they watch the flames consume the piece of paper, the letter, the wedding gown, whatever it is. This time, however, they can have this memory, this echo of an experience, within an atmosphere of supportive collectivity that simply does not exist in any other context in American culture. The Urn allows a rehearsal of something that has already happened. By the same token, it allows a rehearsal for something that will continue to happen, over and over again, inevitably, until we engage in the performance of our own death. By naming this sculpture "the Urn," by maintaining a respectful space around it as it travels through the city, by charging its keeping to a well prepared and elaborately costumed escort, the metal orb takes on its special ritual character, coming into the fullness of what it is, achieving, paradoxically, its own particular kind of "life."

The word "urn" is related to the Latin *urna*, which means "pitcher." A pitcher, or a jug, that might carry libations for the dead as much as it might carry their ashes. When Heidegger attempts to analyze the nature of the "thing," he sidesteps the comparatively existentially

weighty urn and examines the relatively humbler jug instead. Nevertheless, he recognizes the possibility of the jug's outpouring of libations, and, as in the quotation above, discusses the *thing's* ability to draw different realities closer together: mortals may drink water that is poured from a jug meant for daily use, but when the jug (even a humble one) pours a libation, divinities are called into being (and into being present) to receive it. As Heidegger puts it,

In the gift of the outpouring, mortals and divinities each dwell in their different ways. Earth and sky dwell in the gift of the outpouring. In the gift of the outpouring earth and sky, divinities and mortals dwell together all at once. These four, at one because of what they themselves are, belong together. Preceding everything that is present, they are enfolded into a single fourfold. In the gift of the outpouring dwells the simple singlefoldness of the four. (Heidegger 171)

The jug, made of clay and carrying water or wine from a spring or from grapes, is a meeting of earth and sky, says Heidegger (171). The Urn, made of metal and carrying affectively-charged materials, allows earth to meet fire. The “fourfold,” then, of the Urn, includes fire rather than water, but the result is the same: multiple planes meet in the moment of the pouring (for Heidegger), or, in the case of the All Souls Procession, the burning, and achieve a union that is only made possible by virtue of the *thing* in question. The Urn does not engage in “outpouring” in the same way as the jug, rather it effects a profound literal and symbolic transformation of its contents that touches those participating in the ritual aspect of the Procession. This is how it performs for us, and how we perform with it, even when our action in the scene is finished and we become spectators hypnotized by the performance of fire burning in the sky. Like a marionette hanging on a hook, the Urn is unalterably itself; it remains the same even when it is not in use, but we recognize its life when we bring it into a performance. This is not to grant the Urn “agency” as Jane Bennett might do, nor to name it as an “actant” as Karen Barad might do,

but to recognize it as a fellow performer in the ritual, and as it burns above our heads, it occurs to me that it is really the star.

Conclusion: This is Why We Walk

“This is why we walk,” is a phrase that the Urn Attendants, Ambassadors, and Ushers repeat before the Procession in order to ground themselves in their actions. “My mother,” says one Attendant. “My daughter,” says another. For the teenage girl wearing her witch costume one last time who passes in a photo of her little brother, for the man who came across the country to pass in a slip of paper with nothing but a name written on it. This is why we walk. For the sake of the thousands of people who made their own votives, their own tributes, their own flower crowns, and came to join with others to remember those they have lost. The Community Spirit Group discusses the forgotten dead as well, which have held greater and greater importance within the Procession's themes over the years: those who have died in the country's ongoing wars, those who have died trying to cross the desert from Mexico, those who have died at the hands of the police, those who have died as a result of capital punishment in the “land of the free.” This is why we walk.

Perhaps the momentary unity people feel in the Procession is the conjuration of a fleeting moment, perhaps it is nothing more than a performed imaginary. But nothing can be done unless it is first imagined, and, for those who partake in the tradition of the Procession, there does exist a place and a time where this kind of unity is possible, even if it is only once a year. The Procession openly acknowledges the legacies of violence, exclusion, and fragmentation at the

base of American culture and provides a respite from the normalization of that violence in everyday life.

The preceding chapters have charted the journey through the delightful enchantments of working with Puppets in Prague and the Bread and Puppet Theater, of creating *Jackie and the Potato Plant*, and of walking within the Procession. Each of these sites of enchantment offered powerful entreaties to continue to fight the good fight and remain hopeful that alternatives to patriarchal, oppressive, capitalist hegemony exist. However, this research project and its development of the analytic tool that is puppeting also allows us to recognize the use of object performance as potent tools in the service of those very dominant and destructive socio-political norms we seek to overturn. In the final chapters of this research, puppeting will allow us to examine the under-recognized, active influence and power of performing objects within Western culture. Two particular sites will provide focus to this assertion: the destruction of effigies of President Obama during his time in Office, and the use and usurpation of fetal imagery and objects in the campaign to secure reproductive rights in Ireland in 2018. The next chapter details the necessary historical context and understanding of effigies as performing objects required to advance the final two chapters of this thesis.

Chapter Seven

Punishing the Effigy, Punishing the Body

Performing objects in the form of a human figure have a different impact than non-figurative performing objects. There is work to be done in the field of puppetry studies to define the differences between, for example, animal characters as opposed to human characters as opposed to abstract, animated objects. The lines between categories are, and perhaps should remain, blurry; the appeal and lure of the puppet is its ability to cross boundaries, to connect the inanimate and animate worlds directly through performance. So far, these chapters have charted personal processes of making and performing with puppets of a variety of scales and forms in order to analyze the ways we are enchanted by puppets, and how interactions with them rekindle a creative capacity for changing what seem like fixed contemporary cultures.

The understanding of the potency of the enchantment of the performing object, developed through hands-on practice, can now be extended past the registers of theatrical puppetry into cultural performances of power. These final three chapters will further develop the analytic tool of puppeting, giving historical background of the effigy figure in Western ritual and analyzing two contemporary examples of the enchanting power of the human-shaped performing object. Before proceeding to chapters 7 and 8, which investigate racial and gendered bodies, we must consider the specificity of the human figure as an enchanting object in historical effigy practices. By understanding the antiquated forms of effigy ritual, we gain an immediate understanding of their contemporary forms. Too often overlooked, dismissed, and relegated to a supposedly darker past, effigy practices are a continuous feature of human cultures globally, as much puppetry is.

This chapter addresses an oversight in the literature, which does not include investigations of the effigy as part of puppetry studies. Doing the work of understanding the nature of the effigy gives us the performance-studies based lens (i.e., puppeting) that we can then apply to deeply difficult and dark enchantments in the contemporary West. What follows is a historical survey; it charts European effigy practices *as* object performances not only because that connection has yet to be drawn in any of the literature but also because there is not yet any comprehensive survey of effigy practices in and of themselves, with or without the application of a puppeting lens. Here, I piece together an overview of effigy practices as necessary context for the next chapters, pointing to the traditional continuity between real body and scapegoat effigy: a seeming imperative in performative practices of interpersonal as well as civic power, both to treat human bodies as objects and human-shaped objects as bodies, especially in the arena of punishment and justice.

Beginning with an understanding of the imprecision of the term “effigy,” this chapter charts their role(s) in Western culture, and their socio-political potency despite the intervention of Enlightenment ideology that would see the effigy as *merely* an object, with no power of its own. It is in the denial of their power that they become covert actors in contemporary public performance, as the next two chapters will explore. First, however, a recognition of the overlooked yet active presence and purpose of effigies in both public and private ritual throughout recorded history must occur. To that end, after an overview of etymology and usage of the word, the following sections take into account the vast historical expanse of seasonal effigy rituals as collective acts of cleansing, of the materials used to create the figures.

Interestingly, these widespread practices have evolved through celebratory and cleansing acts into punitive iterations with ever-higher political stakes.

The second half of the chapter charts the to-and-fro between body and effigy in early modern European systems of justice. Two of the most famous effigies of the Western world, that of Judas and of Guy Fawkes (and to a somewhat lesser extent, the figure of the pope), originate in acts that commemorate violence against a particular scapegoat group; they are celebratory acts of triumphalism that engender violent behavior both symbolic and real, and enact social or spatial control over the scapegoated group. These effigy rituals have a dual nature in that sometimes the violence committed on the object satisfies the need within those who commit it, but sometimes that violence only incites a still greater need: to render a body into an object through an overflow of violence against those whom it is acceptable to kill.

Defining the “Effigy”

The OED defines “effigy” in extremely broad terms, as “a likeness, portrait, or image,” with the further qualification that it is usually a “sculptured representation” (“effigy”). Deriving from the Latin *effingere*, which is variously translated as “to fashion,” “to portray,” or “to depict,” the effigy is related, through the next etymological step of *fingere* (“to form, or shape”), to words like *fiction*, *feign*, *figment*, and *figure*. *Fingere* theoretically stems from Proto-Indo-European root **deigh-*, which refers to molding or kneading (clay or dough, depending on context). So, an “effigy” contains within it implications of its own constructed nature, its basis as a copy of an original, and the presence of a maker. There is also within this word something of the generative power of the hands in their literal manipulation of both dough and clay.

These definitions could ostensibly apply to *all* representational art, and the expansiveness of this lineage obscures the affective connotation “effigy” carries with it. Through its usage in the fields of art history, anthropology, and folklore, it has accrued a peculiar uncanniness. Within these fields, an “effigy” is most often a figure created for use in mortuary or memorial rituals, public performances of punishment (including protest), or magical practices. For effigies are not only figurative representations; they are powerful performing objects that occupy unfixed positions along the borderline between the world of the living and the dead, the past and the present, the real and the representational, the material and the imaginary.

Effigies become puppets when they are included in performances of rituals both public and private. Any item or resemblance linked either metonymically or synecdochally to a referent may be used to bind that referent to a static (and therefore manipulatable) material form. Ultimately, (and broadly) effigies imbue their creators (usually also their users) with a sense of control or influence over a person or situation. That sense marks a tangible shift in reality for the one(s) taking the control, those who bear witness, and sometimes for the referent as well. All effigies, public or private, magico-religious or secular, are mimetic performing objects that allow individuals or groups to puppeteer not just other people, but natural forces, spirits and deities, and even concepts.

For performance ethnographer Joseph Roach, effigies are “surrogates” that “[fill] a vacancy created by the absence of an original” (36). This working definition, rather than focusing on the effigy as a copy, focuses on the lack of an original's presence. The original, for Roach, is long lost or perhaps never was; specific characters or character types, stereotypes, or ideals might only be “constructed figures that provide templates of sanctioned behavior...across generations,” for

new surrogates, or performers, to inhabit (55). Roach's figuration is focused on how performing bodies become effigies that convey cultural memory and meaning; for him, actors as much as statesmen, celebrities as much as religious figures, and, crucially, even corpses can be read as effigies. Dead or alive, the effigy is a potent figure.

In Roach's sense, effigies allow for a continuation of something lost; effigy rituals keep cultural memories in motion. He refers to an archaic use of the word as a verb meaning “to something body forth” to describe his theory of the effigy (36). In his particular usage, that which is “bodied forth” can act to restore cultural heritage where it has been decimated by imperialist interference. Here, however, I am focused on the relationship between the human and the representative object, and how they can stand in for each other, take each other's places, and fill the same role in social-political imaginaries. This lineage begins in the ancient and recurring use of effigies in celebrations of seasonal change.

Public, Seasonal Effigies: Death, Rebirth, and Straw

A seasonal effigy aids in the performance of a given ritual mission: most often, its own total destruction forms an important liminal climactic moment. Because the entities conjured by these effigies are usually remote, whether by being abstract, historical, or mythological, sympathetic magic comes into play in order to “body forth” what is otherwise unreachable. Sympathetic magic refers to a widespread intuitive association between things that look similar, and to the belief that particular qualities, blessings, or curses can transfer from one object or person to another through touch or even simply resemblance. Recognition of an effigy figure is dependent upon the community's collective understanding of the representation; elaborate or simple,

impressive or crude, the visual language of the local effigy is ever re-created according to idiosyncratic signifiers every time in a way that roots it in the community that created it.

While private effigies (popularly called “voodoo dolls,” though this is a misnomer: see Chapter Eight) focus the attention of an individual (or small group) on a discrete magical aim, helping to manifest limited intentions within a specific domain, public effigies focus the attention of an entire community into a multivalent performance, depending on a full audience in order to affect shifts in group consciousness. They are also usually (suitably) physically larger – sometimes roughly the size of a human, like the straw “witches” burned even today at midsummer in Denmark, and sometimes enormous, like the Burning Man of the eponymous festival – to better engage with more people, all of whom share in the performance. Like the Urn in the All Souls Procession from the previous chapter, public effigies address the community’s collective well-being, as well as the individual well-being of each member/participant, assuring safe continued relations between the group and the *world itself*. While private effigies may be created and used at particular moments, following lunar patterns or other natural markers to support their magical efficacy, public effigies generally appear on an annual basis to punctuate festivals, which themselves often mark one of the most universally “tangible shifts in reality” that humans experience: the changing of the seasons.

As early 20th-century ethnologist Arnold van Gennep theorized, seasonal festivals *take* the same shape as “rites of passage” (and indeed *are* rites of passage in a way), with three main stages: separation from the everyday, an in-between (liminal) phase, and a reintegration into the familiar (Schechner *Performance* 236). The period of time spent celebrating seasonal festivals marks the liminal time between an ending and a beginning; each festival is both a progression forward in

the linear path of an individual life (from birth to death), and also a return to a recurring point in the cyclical path of nature as it revolves (between death and rebirth). These times of conscious celebration, of returning to the liminal non-time of the festival, cause moments of awareness of cyclical change. They affirm the continuity of the social cycle in conjunction with the natural cycle of weather, crops, and animals, and the destruction of effigies is a materially performative engagement with these processes.

Over the course of each cycle, tensions and troubles inevitably gather in a community and require expiation. The destruction of effigies in festivals that celebrate the changing cycle usually enact a banishment of the negativity gathered during the previous cycle in order to cleanse and renew the collective in preparation for the next. Though such events might occur at midsummer or midwinter, amongst the most prevalent European seasonal effigy rituals undertaken over the last two millennia have been rituals of renewal undertaken roughly in conjunction with the vernal equinox, which was the celebrated as the New Year in much of Europe before the adoption of the Julian calendar in 46 BCE. These rituals frequently feature the burning or “drowning” of human-sized effigies made of wood, reeds, rags, and, most commonly of all, straw.

It is beyond my scope to enumerate the many European bonfire rituals featuring straw effigies of human figures (Frazer having attempted such a task in *The Golden Bough*), but several illustrative examples show the common impulse across a vast swathe of time and territory. In ancient Rome, the *Argei* ritual, which Plutarch called “the most important Roman cathartic ritual,” began in mid-March and concluded in mid-May, suggesting that the ritual put the old year to rest and welcomed the new one (qtd in Graf 100). In the first observance, twenty-seven

straw effigies of male figures, with hands and feet bound, were produced and installed in shrines at key points in the city. Two months later, Rome's most important politicians, spiritual leaders, and high-ranking citizens would collect the effigies, carrying them through the city in solemn procession, and throw them into the Tiber.

These were ancient rites even to the ancients; poet Ovid and historian Dionysus of Halicarnassus could only guess at the origins and significance of the *Argei*. Though the details of their theories differed, they generally supposed the ritual to reference a pre-Imperial practice of human sacrifice. According to Professor Donald G. Kyle, the Romans “used a rite of sympathetic magic — effigies resembling corpses — to expel and exorcise hostile spirits, to release the land from any pollution and forestall the threat of retaliation by the spirits” (216). The Romans practiced many purification rituals in the spring, in which unclean materials were sent away from the city down the Tiber, and effigies were used in other contexts to bind and then dispatch wandering spirits, so it follows that the deposition of the effigies in the river may have been a sort of spiritual “spring cleaning” for the sake of the civic good and the health of Rome into the new year (Kyle 216).

While it is impossible to know for sure if the *Argei* once informed contemporary European traditions, the use of straw figures in territorial purification and cleansing of the community for the coming year persists to this day. Throughout Eastern Europe and Russia the *Marzanna* (as she is known in Silesia, where Peter Schumann of the Bread and Puppet Theater was a little boy) or *Maslenitsa* (as she is known in Russia), Slavic goddess of death and winter is “drowned” in a river or burned each March; “Old Jack Straw” is still burned at New Year's in Hungary to clear the previous year's influence (New Year's having once been celebrated in the springtime, this

festival's timing changed over the centuries); grand sculptures burn in the finale of the modern springtime *Las Fallas* festival in Spain, but this is after centuries of evolution from figures of straw and scrap wood.

In Robert Pearson Flaherty's comprehensive survey of the scholarship on the *Todaustragen* (the "driving out of Death") and similar effigy rituals that once took place across Germanic and Slavic lands, he affirms that the issues of origins and influences are impossible to trace, but that there are indications that Christian authorities began attempting to eradicate such practices as early as 743 C.E., suggesting that they were well and widely established at that time (42). While each ritual carries its own contextual specificity, Flaherty offers a broad understanding of the *Todaustragen* and its many cognates as a New Year's ritual involving the creation, parading to a border of a community, and destruction of a figure (in the case of the *Todaustragen*, a hideous male figure) made of rushes or straw that was representative of Winter and also of Death,

for the two appear in the ritual to be functionally equivalent. This Death is not solely that of the body, although that too is expressed in the straw figure, but the death of the vegetation that occurs in the Winter as well. That this is so is suggested by the use of straw from which the figure is fashioned, straw being a vegetable substance once living but now devoid of life. (Flaherty 48)

Though it is sometimes maligned as insubstantial, representative of poverty or hardship, or valueless, straw is a remarkable agricultural byproduct, a single piece being the naked stem from a grain-bearing plant after the harvest. These are the most important staple foods on the planet, sustaining human populations since the Agricultural Revolution. But straw is not a spent force once the wheat or oats or rye are removed; making up half the weight of the harvest, it is a plentiful and versatile material with countless practical applications. Straw can make baskets or buildings, rope or hats, dolls or scarecrows, and it can stretch animal feed when times are lean.

Light and durable, it can be soaked and then bent, twisted and woven into intricate braids and beautiful patterns. Perhaps most importantly of all, it becomes ideal mulch, protecting crops from disease and drought while maintaining nitrogen levels and increasing soil fertility as it decomposes.

Ubiquitous throughout agrarian Europe, straw held particularly strong associations with both birth and death, being placed beneath those lying in labor as well as those who lay dying, lining cradles as well as coffins. The inclusion of straw in these contexts reveals the level of intimacy people had with it in all its forms: feeling soft or rough to the touch, having carried both grain and chaff. In pan-Slavic folk custom, explain Bartmiński and Bielac, “straw, although light and dry, contains traces of the life past; it functions in between what is alive and what is dead: its borderline status makes it fit for acting as a medium in the passage from one state to the other,” and as a material to be used for magical purposes: to tell the future, summon prosperity, aid fertility, or ward off illness (129).

The unity of death and fertility symbolized by straw is tangible in many of the effigy rituals noted so far; the *Marzanna* and the effigy of *Todaustragen* are literal representations of death and winter, and yet, though the straw effigy itself might be reviled, once it is thoroughly destroyed, fertility festivities can begin. Often a decorated tree or budding branches are carried back into the village to symbolize the arrival of spring. Where bonfires accompany the ritual, youths might adorn themselves in greenery and jump over the flames, or drive cattle through, to encourage purity and fertility. Ashes from the effigy might be collected and strewn over fields to encourage the crops to grow. Mircea Eliade observed in the 1930s that people in Austria would even fight to gather pieces of a smoldering straw effigy, attesting to, in his opinion, “the

fertilizing power of Death – a power attached to all the symbols of vegetation...during all the various festivals of the regeneration of nature and the beginning of the New Year” (qtd in Flaherty 45). The cycle continues in an unbroken spiral, and the potential disconnect between death and rebirth is bridged with the festival, through the effigy ritual.

Effigies and Public Execution

Dionysus of Halicarnassus attributes the use of effigies in the ancient Roman *Argei* ritual, as opposed to living sacrificial bodies, to the civilizing influence of Hercules during his travels in Italy; in fact, all the myths and explanations of this ritual explain the effigies as replacements for human sacrifices (Graf 98). How one could possibly stand in for the other as an adequate sacrifice is not discussed, however. Sir James Frazer also asserts without doubt that the spring festivals he chronicles were once sites of human sacrifice, now represented in effigy, but also cannot explain how the transition might have come about in the first instance (chapter 47, section 3). It is likely to remain a mystery how and why something as significant as a human sacrifice could be replaced with an effigy ritual. Somehow, the “bodying forth” of one into the other, the blurring of the lines that define living body totally separate to representative object, is part of the way our species navigates its existence.

From the 13th to the 18th centuries, particularly in England, France, Spain, and their eventual colonies, the penal process included the substitution of effigies in executions where the condemned had escaped or already died (though in the latter case the cadaver was sometimes used). The effigy affected a continuance of social bonds and norms by being ceremonially destroyed, acting as stand-ins for absent bodies in spectacles of punishment. Both two- and three-

dimensional renderings of lawbreakers were employed over the centuries, and because they were typically burned after the display of the punishment ritual, they were made of flammable materials like wood, wax, cloth, or straw.

Resemblance to an individual varied widely; sometimes mere bundles of rags and wooden tablets bearing the offenders' names were sufficient, but there are examples of extravagantly detailed punishment effigies: in Denmark in 1661, the effigy of the courtier Kai Lykke, which bore his facial likeness sculpted in wax and was built with moving arms and legs,

was manipulated to process across the town, kneel before executioners, be blindfolded and stripped of its necktie. The effigy then patiently waited for beheading by the executioner as hundreds of witnesses stood by. After the execution, the decapitated wax head was displayed alongside the gloved hands in the pillory in the marketplace so that witnesses could affirm the 'death' of the offender. (Terry-Fritsch 196)

Lykke had spread gossip of the Queen's adulterous affairs and, rather than pay a hefty fine, had escaped Denmark, resulting in a death warrant and the execution of his effigy and the confiscation of his property. His vivid depiction made him something of a minor celebrity, though it was intended to demean the man.

In societies where humiliation, ridicule, and public disgrace were known to be both profound and effective punishments, the castigation of an image performed an execution of a reputation, if not a living body. Art historian Allie Terry-Fritsch finds context for punishment effigies in two particular phenomena: *pitture infamanti*, which were public defamatory images produced in Renaissance Italy to humiliate criminals that had fled the city, and in the practice of *damnatio memoriae*, in which records and objects associated with an individual or regime are destroyed in order to erase their legacy. This practice was carried out in ancient Rome, where it was

considered a worse punishment than death. Both practices persist in the present day in, for example, the toppling of statues of deposed leaders (see more on this on page 260), or the posting of satirical photos on the internet.

Unlike the images and objects in these two practices, however, the punishment effigy was a temporary materiality, both active within and productive of justice due to its physical placement in the execution ritual process (Terry-Fritsch 198). Terry-Fritsch explains that “effigies not only presented the missing criminal body but also assumed the definitive performative presence of that offender within the process of justice” (191). Assuring the suffering of the guilty parties was not, therefore, the critical aspect of public punishment; the performance of the ritual before a community of participant-witnesses was the goal. The ritual of punishment and public assertion of the dominant power structure, was, therefore, critically important, and it had the same official implications for society whether applied to a person or a representation. Such punishments were elaborate and dramatic, dependent on their ability to impress the public, and the effigy preserved that spectacular character.

Deterrence, the Enlightenment justification for what was seen as early modern barbarism in practices of punishment, was only one aspect of such spectacular justice, and not an end in itself. Foucault's famous interpretation in *Discipline and Punish*, one of the most influential critical works of the 20th century, was that public execution spectacles acted to repair an injury perpetrated on the eternal body of the sovereign; however, as Paul Friedland explains, healing the rupture in the social order, a rupture caused by an illegal offense, was the *true* performative purpose of literally “seeing justice done” (312). The effigy destruction, rather than instilling fear

and exercising control, says Friedland, allowed the cardinal ritual of “expiation and redemption,” as he calls it, to take place even without the criminal's presence (317). Like miraculous images and objects of the Middle Ages and early modern period, the value of punishment effigies was not in “their aesthetic or material worth, but rather [in] their ability to act or affect a new reality,” which was, in this case, the restored and purified society, an echo of the seasonal effigy ritual’s purpose (Terry-Fritsch 191). As this thesis shows, the lens of puppeting provides a way to see the continuity of this potent practice into contemporary performative political acts.

Rough Music and Extrajudicial Punishment-in-Effigy

Outside the bounds of the State, communities across Europe upheld their own unwritten social laws. The doling out of legal punishment to effigies surely informed ritual effigy destruction and vice versa; each provided context for and legitimated the other within the sphere of the collective social production of reality and followed similar ritual structures. The French *charivari*, the German *Katzenmusik*, the Italian *scampanate*, and the English *rough music* were distinct but related traditions of aggressive mockery, ranging from the mischievous to the violent, that maintained social norms within a community. Writing in 1959, British folklorist Violet Alford calls rough music a “side line in Social Anthropology” because “well-brought-up people...like to hear about May Day hymns sung from Church towers and judges carrying posies into Court” as opposed to hearing about the “less decorative” customs of their ancestors (505). Alford suggests that academics, creators of high culture, and genteel folk “have preferred to pronounce [rough music] dead and gone,” a relic of the crude peasantry of the past – yet, not only is it possibly the only British popular tradition of which there is written evidence from before the Middle Ages, it was still being practiced in the more rural parts of the UK when she made her remarks in the

mid-20th century (505). As theatrical rituals of punishment, they mark an important continuity between effigy rituals controlled by Church or State and those controlled by a community that felt they had every right, and even a duty, to carry them out.

Common across traditions was the gathering of a loud, raucous mob outside an offending person or couple's house under cover of night. The production of the eponymous music included bells, horns, whistles, clashing pots and pans, rattling stones in tins, and any number of other makeshift noisemakers. Generally, the mobs, most commonly called to order by young men, punished marriages deemed unsuitable (between older and younger people, for example), spousal or child abuse, or unfair employment practices on the part of the powerful members of a locality. People might be brought out and paraded through the town, re-enactments of their improprieties performed before them, mock trials carried out, and, particularly in the English rough music traditions, effigies representing the victims were beaten, burned, or otherwise dispatched before the crowd was satisfied. At times, those receiving such treatment were themselves beaten or thrown into bodies of water, before being forced out of the town by the mob; at other times, they were able to re-enter the community having been duly chastised or humbled. Rough music rituals were festive and celebratory for everyone other than the target of the shame, who might be induced to give money or other bribes to the crowd just to get them to stop their “merrymaking.”

In more intense episodes, where an unpardonable offense had been committed, E. P. Thompson suggests that the perpetrator(s) were “subjected to a hostility of magical dimensions, a ritual hunt. The community defined the boundaries of permitted behavior by expelling the hunted from its protection” (Thompson 9). Episodes could range from forcing a person to sit astride a plank

of wood as they were carried out of town by the group (called, among other things, “riding the rail”) to beatings to occasional fatalities. The use of effigies was particularly powerful, says Thompson, “with their ancient associations with heretic-burning,” and given the intimate connection between a person and their likeness, combined with the “magical or daemonic suggestiveness of masking and of animal-guising” amounted to more than merely theatrics – Thompson calls it “psychic terrorism” (19). He explains that to “burn, bury or read the funeral service over someone still living was a terrible community judgement, in which the victim was made into an outcast, one considered to be already dead” (7). The ritual resulted in the social death of the individual, the “ultimate excommunication” (Thompson 7).

“Social death,” argues Jana Králová, is a phrase that should be reserved for the most extreme of circumstances, encompassing the “loss of social identity, loss of social connectedness and losses associated with the disintegration of the body” (246). Rough music could result in a liminal period of social death, for as long as the ritual lasted, or, if the community condemnation was severe enough, it could result in a social death meeting all of Králová’s conditions, even if the “disintegration of the body” was only affected through the destruction of an effigy. E. P.

Thompson insists on the mythic scope of rough music, calling it “a vocabulary which brushes the carnival at one extreme and the gallows at the other; which is about crossing forbidden frontiers or mixing alien categories...; whose flaring bonfires may recall...even hell” (13). A ritual of such intensity could create a shift in reality with social and material consequences and produce what could be called a “social execution.” As in legal execution, the aim was to preserve the integrity of the community by enforcing behavioral standards and defining boundary transgressions.

Effigies and Bodies as Territorial Markers

The juncture of person, body, and object occurs at the moment of death, and the crossover between the body-as-effigy and the effigy-as-body is perhaps most visible in the practice of gibbeting between the 16th and 19th century. While it occurred on occasion elsewhere in Europe, gibbeting, or “hanging in chains,” was a primarily British and colonial post-execution punishment of display in which the dead body of a convict was placed in a cage or wrapped in chains and left to hang from a crossbeam off a tall wooden post, or gibbet, for all to view. Internationally, practices varied, but typically the cages were molded around the body, giving it the uncanny appearance of standing upright as it blew and twisted in the wind. Even in Britain, this was not a very common sight (dissection for medical and anatomical research was a more common fate for the executed during the period), and, as a relative rarity, their installation always drew huge crowds, sometimes in the tens of thousands; enterprising types set up stalls to sell food and alcohol, and a distinctly carnivalesque atmosphere would take over, sometimes lasting several weeks (Tarlow and Dyndor 80). Relics from the corpse, invariably that of a criminal made famous through newspapers chronicling their deeds, were much sought-after souvenirs, as potential cures for a number of ailments or as “charismatic” curios (Tarlow and Dyndor 82).

Corpses might be left for a matter of days, but there are accounts of bodies remaining suspended for years or even decades, as there was no prescribed time limit, and some of the gibbet posts still stand today (Tarlow and Dyndor 83). They were most often erected near the scene of whatever crime had been committed (along the coast in case of crimes committed at sea), the majority being in predetermined areas just outside London. Further afield, roadsides and

highways were favored placements, typically at crossroads or county boundaries, to increase visibility; over time they themselves became reference points, landmarks or boundary markers (Tarlow and Dyndor 83). These long-term object performances, like all public displays of corpses, warned potential criminals of their possible fate and vividly confronted onlookers with the absolute necropolitical power wielded by the state. And, as in other public punishments, the place of the corpse might be assumed by an effigy if the genuine article was unavailable or if outrage amongst the populace was so great that multiple executions were required, something that was rare but tended to happen in the case of political and/or religious perceived wrongdoing.

A famous case of the slippage between body and effigy occurred when Oliver Cromwell, who had taken power after the Second English Civil War in 1648 and signed the death warrant of King Charles I, died in 1658. Charles II took back the throne in 1660 and ordered Cromwell's body exhumed and hanged in chains in 1661, on the twelfth anniversary of the execution of Charles I. The figure that received the punishment was variously referred to in pamphlets and newspapers of the time as "body," "corpse," and "effigy," indicating a commonly held ontological continuity at the time ("Cromwell's Body"). The continuity between punishment and protest is also evident in the treatment of bodies and effigies; the example of Thomas Paine is perhaps the most notorious. A British-born revolutionary who wrote in support of American and French revolution, Paine was famously gibbeted, dismembered, and burned in effigy hundreds of times throughout 1792-93, all over Britain with government sanction.

Gibbeting and effigy execution was a more ad-hoc, raucous, popular affair in the American context; protests expressed dissent against the Crown in the form of whatever loyalist had angered or obstructed the patriots while also punishing that loyalist with social death that could

also entail physical violence should he not leave the area. Thus, both real bodies and effigies performed warning functions in early modern Anglo-American contexts and could define both physical boundaries and politico-social ones. In his reflections on culture during the German Reformation, Robert William Scribner considers rituals like the *Todaustragen* (see page 101) to be constitutive of a community's invisible boundaries (307). Defining the community territory was a protective measure, one that allowed people to cast out sickness and bad luck in the form of the straw effigy while allowing joy and prosperity to enter in (Scribner 316). This obtains for Slavic lands as well, while other processional rituals defining the limits of a community are found throughout European history (including in the ancient Roman *Argei* ritual with its twenty-seven straw men), often including the carrying of Christian statues or relics to define space. The territorial boundary was also a psychic and social boundary, separating the inside and outside, natural and supernatural, us and them.

The Church's Effigy: Burning Judas

First, I must stitch a loop back through the cycles of life and death approached in Chapter Four at the Bread & Puppet farm and follow the evolution of the seasonal effigies described there, as the Judas tradition diverges from a casting out of death to become a clear evocation of the sacrifice or execution of a scapegoat. The effigy, endowed with the character of Death or Winter, becomes a vessel that is acceptably (even merrily) dispatched, a surrogate for a power much greater than the people who destroy it. It is an act of inversion or misrule; the people have just experienced winter and know that they will again; by the same token, they know that some of their number will have died by the next New Year, just as some did in the year previous. The effigy's destruction is the people's brief and illusory triumph, the death of Death, for the moment. When

the effigy comes to resemble a figure with a name and a story, the inherent violence in the destruction becomes much clearer and, at least to modern sensibilities, the direct link with fertility ritual becomes less clear. The nature of the ritual and what it does changes, and the effigy's demise is no longer a human triumph over death, but an extension of violence against other humans.

Christian syncretism with folk religions was crucial to the successful expansion of the Catholic Church all over the world, and this process included incorporating local rituals into Christian holy days (or vice versa), bringing such rituals under Church- (and, usually thereby, State-) sanction. Having condemned the *Todaustragen* and its cognates as superstitious during the 1384 Council of Prague, the Church sought to reign in the practice and include it in the cycle of Easter rituals, with the addition of a straw effigy of Judas to beat and destroy (Flaherty 47). Flaherty draws on Victor Turner's assertion that "one of the chief properties of dominant symbols (those symbols presiding over whole ritual proceedings) is multivocality, polysemy, or condensation," when he argues that the Lenten Easter celebration of destroying Judas in effigy maintains a contiguity with the *Todaustragen*, casting Judas in the role of the expelled Death/winter and the resurrected Jesus in the role of the returning spring (48). The long history of European anti-Semitism and the *literal* and repetitious of expulsions of Jewish people problematizes this notion by shifting the nature of the ritual from a seasonal enchantment into commemoration and rehearsal of a living, continuous scapegoating ritual carried out like a public execution on a representative of an entire living group.

The identification of Judas with Jewish people, through the clumsy sympathetic magic of stereotypical appearances as well as the doctrine of Jewish deicide (which blames the entirety of the Jewish people for the death of Jesus), charges this effigy ritual with a different intention than the just the casting out of a straw man called Death. The symbolic link between a group of human beings and Death, through the figure of Judas, results in an affective shift; in the Judas ritual, violence overflows metaphorically and literally, affecting the safety of blameless people in a process of objectification. The effigy of Death can contain any violent overflow because Death is an eternal force that cannot be reached. The effigy of Judas cannot necessarily contain an overflow of violence – the violence redirects onto people or signs of people. Anti-Semitism in Europe is far more complex than retributive hatred for the figure biblically charged with betraying Christ, of course, but the urge toward his destruction in effigy was likewise representative of prevailing religious, social, and legal perspective and practices against real people.

Easter was, at the best of times, an unpleasant time for Jewish communities throughout Catholic Europe for over a thousand years. The Council of Orleans in 538 required French Jews to stay in their homes, with doors and windows shut, from Thursday to Sunday of Holy Week, and similarly restrictive edicts appear throughout Europe until the eighteenth century (Roth 366). These decrees were partially for protection, as violent attacks were known to occur during the Easter period, but they were also punitive in that Christian and secular authorities actively encouraged the ritual stoning of Jewish houses, particularly their windows and doors, which were symbolic of Jewish refusal to let Christ in (Roth 362). Henry and Renée Kahane even trace the Spanish and French words for “rough music” to Hebrew roots, suggesting that the terms

adopted for this kind of public humiliation, both linguistic and ritualistic, were perversions of Jewish language and religious practice (20). Certainly, the German ritual of using “rattles...clappers, hammers, flails, clubs, and other noise-making instruments” to drive Judas from the Church during Holy Week suggests an association with rough music traditions (Scribner 26).

Because moneylending was an accepted profession for Jewish people and not Christians, their presence was tolerated for periods, but hostility was the norm. Throughout the Middle Ages, official expulsions and exoduses instigated by violence sent Jewish refugees to ever fewer areas of safety, and still they faced ostracism in the wider community, particularly during the Christian holidays. Flaherty notes an Easter ritual featuring a Judas figure, rather than a pagan spring effigy ritual, in Austria by 1445 (47). The Jewish community of Austria had been forced out in 1421, making this particular instance a celebration of historical fact as much as a religious observance. The effigy ritual in this case marked a consolidation of early modern Christian primacy through targeted scapegoating, even if the notions of purification, renewal, and the banishment of Death remained embedded in the practice, and even if the familiar straw figure took the official fall. Thus, the destruction of effigies of Judas at Easter gradually came to *dis-*place, though never entirely *re-*place the destruction effigies of Death/winter at the vernal equinox; as stated, many localities continue the latter practices to this day, while the destruction of Judas, once widespread throughout Europe, is relatively rare today, persisting primarily in small villages in Spain, Greece, and Poland (Flaherty 47).

Modern celebrations featuring the *Marzanna* and Old Jack Straw may have been softened by time and forgetfulness, tempered by idealized, bucolic notions, but the destruction of Judas effigies continues to illuminate the possibility of vicious violence within festivity in, as it were, *real* time. In 2019, in the small southeastern Polish town of Pruchnik, Good Friday celebrations made international headlines by including the mock trial, hanging, beating, and burning of a Judas effigy created to resemble a grotesquely exaggerated stereotype of a Haredi man.

“Traditions” of ostracism, contempt, expulsion, violence, and even the horror of the Holocaust are rehearsed for Jewish people who see such acts. The event was universally condemned, both inside and outside of Poland, as a resurrection of a formerly abandoned racist ritual in a country with an extremely complex history of antisemitism currently experiencing a political shift to the far-right.

Elsewhere in the world, the tradition of burning Judas has evolved along similar lines, but with a number of different outcomes. European imperialism (particularly that of Catholic Spain and Portugal) that carried the ritual throughout colonial territories, where it has accreting local meanings and modes of performance a step removed from the persecution of actual people. Perhaps most notably in Latin America, the Judas effigy ritual evolved into a riotous and far more secular political statement after a majority of countries won independence from European powers between 1810 and 1821. Faces and costumes on Judas began to reference unpopular locals and politicians, as well as devils and demons. Mexico's festivities today are particularly colorful, featuring fireworks and brilliantly rendered displays of many effigies. These rituals hearken more to the original meaning of driving out of Death, namely, purification of the

community. The question remains, however, whether the inherent racism in the ritual can truly be expunged.

In some cases, particularly in the more famous Carnevale traditions, there is no desire to be rid of anti-semitic content, as parade floats and costumes in Spanish and Belgian celebrations in 2020 attested. Dancers dressed as Nazis and concentration camp prisoners appeared in the Campo de Criptana parade, while sculptures on floats with exaggerated, grotesque features and performers dressed as ants (but with “Jewish” masks on) celebrated in Aalst (which has been accused of antisemitic portrayals a number of times before in its parades). Despite the disapproval of international onlookers, there is no sign that these stereotyped portrayals will disappear any time soon.

The State's Effigy: Burning Guy Fawkes and the Pope

Church and State were intimately intertwined in the United Kingdom throughout the Middle Ages, but then in 1517, one Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of a German church, influencing the shape of Henry VIII's break away from Papal authority and his self-appointment as “Supreme Head on earth of the Church of England” in 1534. The ensuing oscillations of power between Protestant and Catholic monarchs in British lands set off a dizzying age of civil war and religious persecution that ultimately shaped the modern English-speaking world. By 1605, James I, a Protestant, was the king, and though there was initially hope that he would ease Catholic oppression, it faded quickly as he denounced the Catholic faith and ordered all priests to leave the country in the first years of his reign.

Robert Catesby, a devout Catholic of noble lineage who had already been involved in several efforts to install Catholic leadership in Britain, gathered a small group of trusted friends and relations to aid him in his plan to overthrow King James and replace him with his Catholic daughter Elizabeth. They recruited a number of other conspirators, including the respected soldier Guy Fawkes, and plotted to destroy the Parliament buildings in London, killing all inside, with the aim of sparking a Catholic revolution. They managed to smuggle 36 barrels of gunpowder into a cellar directly beneath the House of Lords, which it was Fawkes's duty to guard. Due to concerns about the plague, Parliament delayed its opening from the summer until the 5th of November. An anonymous letter warning a Lord sympathetic to the Catholic plight not to be present in Parliament that day led to the discovery of Fawkes in the early morning hours of the 5th, making preparations to light the gunpowder.

He only revealed the names of his co-conspirators after three days of torture. Some were killed in a siege, including Catesby, and the others were captured. All were tried for high treason and sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, as had been many Catholic priests during the reign of James's predecessor, Elizabeth I. As the last in line, Fawkes had to wait as his fellows, one by one, were tied to a horse and pulled to the gallows, hanged until almost dead, castrated and disemboweled before their own eyes, and finally decapitated and dismembered, their body parts fated to be displayed in prominent places around the country as warnings. Fawkes was “lucky” in that his neck broke during the hanging, but his dead body received the rest of the punishment nevertheless, as was customary. Based on a number of details that do not add up, and the unreliability of confessions given under torture, there has been speculation that the

government was actually involved in facilitating the plot in order to generate anti-Catholic sentiment, but the full story may never be known (Donald).

The 5th of November was declared a national holiday of thanksgiving for the king's well-being, and people were allowed to light bonfires and fireworks for the occasion. Over the years, anti-Catholic sentiment came to be the day's focus, and in 1625, after James I's son married a Catholic, effigies of the pope and the devil were introduced to the celebration for the first time in ceremonial burnings across the country as a sign of unified Protestant disapproval. The stereotype of Catholics as disloyal outsiders was reminiscent of Judas's position as the great betrayer, though crossover between the two traditions cannot be directly traced. Eventually effigies of Guy Fawkes joined the pope and the devil in the bonfires as the holiday became more of an excuse for sectarian violence and mob action, and successive governments attempted to control the festivities with limited success. The celebration waxed and waned, marked by outbursts of public disorder, and in 1859, it was removed from the state calendar of official celebrations.

By then, however, Guy Fawkes Day or Bonfire Night, as it had come to be known, had become such an important fixture of the populace's calendar that the celebrations continued despite the government's attempts to make the entire affair a more “polite” occasion. Jonathan Roper quotes the Brighton Gazette of 1828 as complaining that “the lower classes absurdly consider the suppression [of bonfire] as an infringement on their rights as Englishmen,” indicating that the day had been taken over by popular observance rather than official sanction (167). Roper compares Bonfire Night to a giant episode of rough music, in which local and national figures

were (and are) publicly denounced for unpopular actions or indiscretions committed during the year (162). Over time, the figure of Guy Fawkes became more ambiguous, still associated somewhat with religious terrorism, but also with a sort of heroic anti-authoritarian rebellion. Today, the tradition is a community celebration observed primarily in the southeast of England that makes political commentary with its effigies, denouncing international political and pop-culture figures, and has lost much of its local urgency and religious prejudice.

However, the exportation of the holiday around Britain and its colonies caused it to evolve differently in different areas. Imported to pre-Revolutionary America before morphing into Guy Fawkes night, the celebration of Pope Night developed its own ritual anti-Catholic vocabulary. Particularly in Boston, Pope Night grew into a huge yearly gang riot in the 18th century: organized working-class groups of men and boys trooped together as representatives of the North Side and South Side of the city and built effigies, which they marched toward each other in the center of the city. The aim was to capture and destroy the opposing gang's effigy while protecting one's own, and the proceedings invariably devolved into violent conflicts that lead to multiple deaths each year. Co-opted for political intimidation against a common enemy in the years before the American Revolution, Pope Night celebrations gradually died out.

Still alive and well, particularly in recent years, is the annual burning of effigies of the pope by Unionists in Northern Ireland as a symbolic assault on the Catholic population. Though this is a distinct tradition from that of Guy Fawkes, it commemorates the 12th of July 1688 Battle of the Boyne in which William of Orange's (Protestant) forces defeated James II's (Catholic) forces. Thus, it shares the anti-Catholic triumphalism of early Guy Fawkes celebrations, and during the

Troubles, an intense period of ethno-political conflict from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, burning the pope on the 12th became a bigger celebratory focus. In the years surrounding Brexit, the burning of pope effigies has surged once more, supported as it has been by city councils, in a material performance of discriminatory nationalism (Danaher).

Conclusion: Effigies as Underrecognized Material-Cultural

Performers

All of these examples deserve further scrutiny, and are compiled here as testament to the transhistorical nature of effigy rituals in Western folk culture, from the *Argeii*, already ancient in the days of ancient Rome, to contemporary political statements. Ultimately, the effigy is a fundamental enchanting thing: an ever-recurring performing object that has historically held many roles, and which appears in modern culture in a multitude of ways. Each example of effigy outlined above has its particularity of time, place, and symbolic structure, but all are united by their enchanting “ability” to draw and hold an intensity of focus on the liminal glimmer between worlds of binaries (life and death, spirit and matter, real and representational, straw and man). This is a place we can rarely see and can never stay long, the space of ritual in-betweens. It is a space that never recedes, is always enfolded in daily reality, but which comes into focus with the help of enchanting things like puppets, effigies, devotional objects, and even bread.

In the following chapters, I take two distinct cases of contemporary object performance enacted through profoundly powerful uses of effigy ritual, that of the presidential effigy and that of the politically-charged anatomical model of a fetus, made all the more effective by the seeming lack of cultural context to support such rituals. In fact, despite claims of Enlightenment, the context is

fully present, as shown in this chapter's list of examples, but it is a long context, one in which we are so immersed that we cannot easily recognize it without the lens of puppeting. Once applied, it is impossible to ignore the ramifications of the ever-presence of these performance-based rituals on our overall culture. The rituals take place in highly charged atmospheres, act as pinnacles of social acts, define political allegiances, and determine whose bodies and lives matter. In the final chapters, I will focus on two major examples of effigy performance and ritual practice in highly contested political scenes. Chapter Eight examines the surge in application of racially-coded effigy ritual in the contemporary USA during the Obama administration of 2008-2016, and Chapter Nine explores the deployment of abject fetal models, as opposed to campaign buttons, in the 2018 Abortion Rights Campaign in the Republic of Ireland. These close readings exemplify puppeting as a critical practice that can reveal the deep contexts of object performances and their overlooked influence.

Chapter Eight

Effigies of Race in Contemporary America

The unsettling historical continuity between body and effigy identified in the previous chapter becomes a matter of contemporary urgency here. Whether sanctioned by the state or by extra-governmental groups within society, symbolic violence displays necropolitical power; it is a tool of social regulation that defines individuals as members of distinct groups: those whose lives matter and those whose do not. The Black Lives Matter movement truly gained momentum in response to repeated incidents of police brutality and murder of Black Americans, but those incidents themselves are the result of historical violence both direct and symbolic. Symbolic violence contextualizes, normalizes, and even perpetuates direct violence, most powerfully when the symbols are not fully acknowledged at the cultural level. This chapter recognizes a tradition in American history that has to date remained unexamined: the destruction of effigies representing Black individuals and, as I demonstrate here, Black Americans as an entire group.

The American cultural narrative hinges on the promise of social progress coupled with economic growth. From within the safety of this narrative, the past comes to be understood as a boundaried territory, separate and distinct from the present, which can be explored and analyzed as if from an objective stance. Much academic work has been done to reconnect the past and present, but in the overarching American cultural context, the past is always conceived of as more distant than it is. In this chapter, I investigate the reappearance of American effigy tradition(s) since 2008, when Barack Obama was elected. The presidential protest effigy, a mainstay in political discourse from the inception of the nation through the end of the Vietnam War, seemed to have

disappeared as a relatively normal performing object by 2008, considered ineffectual and even quaint. When presidential protest effigies of Obama seemed to kickstart the tradition once more, however, it brought with it another American effigy tradition that had not been seen (or at least, not publicly acknowledged) in many years: the lynched, racialized effigy. Such effigies were widely employed to terrorize, intimidate, and suppress Black Americans² after the Civil War, during the Civil Rights Movement, and into the present. The effigies of Obama presented the presidential effigy combined with the racialized effigy for the first time in American history.

The effigies did not *have* to perform in this way; as with any prior president, protestors all over the world burned him in effigy, with the typical American flags and photographs of his face – without racist reference (except Russia, which has a remarkably good grasp of hateful American iconography). No, these effigies were intentionally made to overflow with symbolism, to reduce Obama to a body-as- object, through the use of an object-as-body: a key operation of the puppeting power dynamic, where the puppeteer can remain anonymous and unmarked. More than just an uncanny eruption of the suppressed memory of America's racist past into the present, effigies of President Obama marked the endless reproduction of that racial violence.

The American Post-Racial Fairytale

When Obama won the election in 2008, the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial board opined that, finally, “we can put to rest the myth of racism as a barrier to achievement in this splendid country” (qtd in Love and Tosolt 20). Critical race theorists Bettina L. Love and Brandelyn Tosolt explain that rhetoric like this not only presented readers with a teleological fallacy (that this election had been possible, if not inevitable, since the foundation of the State), but advanced

a fantasy that Obama's presidency was a retroactive remedy to all of America's racist history. The liberal news media and Obama himself embraced the narrative of a “post-racial” America, something critical race theory does not accept as possible. Race is a cultural construct used to determine power relations within American's white supremacist system. Racism is the “normative condition” therein; its effects can be mitigated but it is possible that nothing can dismantle it (Love and Tosolt 21). Obama's was a powerful symbolic victory but it was not “the end of racism”; it was the beginning of a profound backlash (Love and Tosolt 19).

When the hanged, burned, or demeaned effigies of Obama began to appear, the intent behind them was clear, but only a handful of installations ever received national news coverage, with the bulk of reporting of such incidents occurring through local news outlets (see Rouse). The news cycle quickly moved on, and while there was a general acknowledgment that the effigies were offensive, there was little developed discussion as to how or why. As Darrel Enck-Wanzer explained in 2011, in a neoliberal rhetorical field that declares racism to be “over,” the discussion of race as an institutional issue “becomes so taboo that, through an ironic act of metonymic transfer, use of the term stands in for racism itself” (28). So, mostly the media coughed and moved on, and Obama did not comment. If he had, he probably would have said, as he did to a pundit in 2009 “Are there people out there who don't like me because of race? I'm sure there are. That's not the overriding issue here. I think there are people who are anti-government” (qtd in Javers).

But the destruction of effigies of Obama were never simply anti-government actions or protests against an abstracted figurehead as prior presidential protest effigies had been; they were

reminders that “bodied forth” a brutal legacy of racial terror into the present, speaking to the continuing, active presence of those who would keep that past alive. Their message was simple: not only had Obama's election *not* magically “ended” racism in America, but hope for its end only extended so far. The effigies were an outright rejection of that hope; they instead made manifest a desire to preserve the racism in American culture, to oppose the political correctness espoused by “intellectuals” and “experts” who wanted to sacrifice economic growth and Liberty for the sake of “social and economic justice.”

The loudest opposition to this political correctness was a group of conservative populists that called themselves, perhaps too fittingly, the Tea Party. They never openly destroyed any effigies of Obama, preferring to spread disinformation on the internet: Obama was a secret Muslim (terrorist Other), that he had actually been born in Kenya and so was ineligible to be the president (illegitimate imposter), that he was a “reverse racist” who wanted to end “white America” (racialized outsider) (Enck-Wanzer 26). Tea Partiers were also especially adept at handling the neoliberal rhetorical game, claiming these as legitimate post-racial concerns that framed Obama as a threat on the national stage and thereby pulled a majority of Republican politicians away from any potential coalition or compromise with him.

Given this backdrop of clogged airwaves, whether dismissed as pranks, defended as free speech, or met with social condemnation, the effigies of Obama were not recognized as the atmospheric signals that they were. Without an understanding of the object performance’s historical power and the connection between effigies and actual bodies, the neoliberal fairy tale of post-racial America prevented meaningful dialogue about the fact that an ideological community, energized

by racial hatred and white supremacy, was (and, as has been made painfully clear in 2020, continues to be) alive and well in America. Having learned the “politically correct” jargon that provides shelter to racism rather than eradicating it, a subset of Americans claiming “traditional values” has now been emboldened to reveal *which* traditions and values they are actually referencing in that phrase.

Object Status from the Country's Inception

Drawing on feminist political theories that dismantle the notion of the supposedly universal individual behind Western civilization's philosophy and literature of, Robyn Weigman explains that “the white male citizen of Enlightenment thought draws his particular suit of rights and privileges from the rhetorical disembodiment of the citizen as a social category” (455). He is, in other words, unmarked; a member of the category against which all other members of all other categories are compared, measured, Othered. Because American systems of government were conceptualized in the first instance by the people present in the room, “through the value system of disembodied abstraction,” the founding documents of the country were written in the interest of elite, white males; the default voice of the law issued from a place of elite-white-maleness; and the rights and privileges that defined American citizenship belonged to, as all the elite, white males in the room agreed was proper, to elite, white males.²

² Only the elite, white males could vote in most states until the mid-1820s, at which point the vast majority of states dropped property qualifications and made voting universally accessible – to white males. Thus the entire category of “white male” rose to the level of “disembodied abstraction” under the law, and even (gasp!) *non*-elite, white male voices were enfranchised to contribute to shaping the laws of the land from them on.

Amongst the elite, white males at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 were Luther Martin from Maryland, who declared that slavery was “inconsistent with the principles of the revolution and dishonorable to the American character” (qtd in Lewis 3). Also amongst them was John Rutledge from South Carolina, who reminded those assembled that this was a question of “interest,” which “alone is the governing principle with Nations” (qtd in Lewis 4). He stated that this was a negotiation of economics, not of principles, morality or “humanity,” and that the “true question” was “whether the Southn. States shall or shall not be parties to the Union” (qtd in Lewis 4).

Though delegates from the North also threatened to take their leave, maintaining the Union was important enough that, not only had Thomas Jefferson (who was himself a slave owner) edited out of the Declaration of Independence an anti-slavery clause that he had written, the entire Congress ultimately agreed on the Three-Fifths Compromise, though many of those present found it to be an incoherence (Lewis 6). In essence, the southern states wanted to pay fewer taxes by excluding slaves from their population at the Confederate Convention in 1783. A compromise of paying taxes for three-fifths of the slave population was posed (after the South offered half and the North demanded three-quarters). When it came time to apportion representation, the South wanted more, and so, they had “argued for the largest possible discount for their slaves, four years later they hoped to maximize their power...by counting as many of their slaves as possible,” and ended up getting a bit of both (Lewis 4).

The ultimate argument between the elite, white men in the room rested on whether or not slaves were to be counted as people or property. Future President James Madison's strained rationalization was that slaves held “the mixt character of persons and of property. This is in fact

their true character” (qtd in Lewis 6). Though the grounds for objection were political and economic rather than humanistic, there was much grumbling over the Three-Fifths Compromise. Nevertheless, the person-property identity of slaves was enshrined in that hallowed document until the passage of the 14th Amendment in 1868, which granted citizenship to all born within the United States, including freed slaves. Two years later the 15th Amendment guaranteed the right to vote to all male citizens, but it was then, Weigman says, that “lynching emerge[d] to reclaim and reassert the centrality of black corporeality, deterring the now theoretically possible move toward citizenry and disembodied abstraction” (455). Equality in theory was not equality in practice, and would not be anywhere near it, even in 150 years.

The Object-as-Body, the King's Two Bodies, and the Multi-Bodied President

Joseph Roach calls upon the doctrine of the “king's two bodies,” as explicated by Ernst Kantorowicz in 1957, to examine the role of royal effigies in the opulent funerals of English and French monarchs between the 14th and 17th centuries. In keeping with the theory of the divine right of kings and the doctrine of Jesus as both mortal and immortal, medieval political theologians legally recognized both a mortal and an immortal body of the king. The former, the Body Natural, was subject to death, decay, and even folly, while the latter, the Body Politic, was invisible, eternal, infallible, and incorporated all of his subjects (with the king at the head and everyone else assigned a position in descending order according to their status). Though these two bodies were united in the king's physical form and indivisible, the Body Politic, being the greater of the two, incorporated the new king's Body Natural into itself upon Coronation. This formulation was politically expedient, becoming an “increasingly pragmatic and secular principle of sovereign succession and legal continuity” (Roach 38). At its base, however, it

instituted a religious parallel wherein the king was the head of the state as Christ was head of the Church, and, as Christ was interpreted to metaphorically be married to the Church (as in the biblical *Song of Solomon*), the king was “married” to the state.

Upon the king's death, an intricate wooden-and-waxen likeness, dressed in the Coronation regalia for only the second time, was placed atop the coffin carrying the actual corpse for the funeral ritual. As Roach explains, the royal funeral effigy “answer[ed] the need to symbolize the inviolate continuity of the body politic,” in the interim between the death of a king and the crowning of a successor (38). During that interim, the “invisible network of allegiances, interests, and resistances that constitute[d] the imagined community,” under the dead king's leadership was exposed, along with concomitant “anxieties and uncertainties about what that community should be,” under the new king (Roach 39).

The manifestation of the doctrine of the king's two bodies, made possible by the carefully crafted effigy's juxtaposition with the corpse, prevented the fragmentation of the social order by visibly holding the king's immortal power during the mortal political transition. As Kantorowicz put it, “the triumph of Death and the triumph over Death were shown side by side” (425). Some, including 16th- century British legal theorist Edmund Plowden, posited that the effigy literally, materially held the Body Politic until a new king's Body Natural was ready to be crowned, at which point the Body Politic would move to re-inhabit the anointed one (Woodward 194). French funeral rituals specifically adopted aspects of Roman tradition such as preparing banquets and attending the effigy as if it truly *were* king. The slippage between body and object via representative effigies of monarchs finds a parallel in presidential protest effigies, though their purpose and meaning in political performance is diametrically opposed.

Like the royal effigy, the presidential protest effigy is created for public display and procession, making visible the invisibly multiple bodies of the head of state. It, too, holds open an affective space that reveals the networks of “allegiances, interests, and resistances that constitute the imagined community” – indeed, in the case of the presidential effigy, exposing and expressing “anxieties and uncertainties about what that community should be” is the point of the exercise (Roach 39). The royal effigy's purpose was to preserve the power of kingship and assure the continuance of civil society; the presidential effigy threatens that Americans are always ready to disrupt social continuity and seize power from rulers that do not adequately represent and serve the body politic. Royal effigies maintain hierarchies, speaking symbolically to the people; presidential effigies tear down hierarchies, speaking symbolically to those in power. They claim that presidential power only exists in the configurations that the citizens sanction. Whatever eternal quality the symbolic role of the Presidency may have is never too sacred to symbolically assault.

The Founding Fathers did not stipulate either distinction or coherence between the person of the president and the Office, a cause of much legal confusion through the centuries (Renan).

Nevertheless, the doctrine of the king's two bodies can be adapted, secularized and Americanized, to provide a paradigm for examining presidential embodiment. While a king exists with an unchanging Body Politic and a Body Natural that, no matter its personality, ability, or experience, is always *royal*, the fact that nominally a president can come from any walk of life so long as he is a citizen means that his natural body has a culturally-shaped physical and social body that animates the Presidency for terms of four years (if all goes well). The Presidency is the

infallible, unchanging institution, and it, as it passes from person to person, is continuously representative and reflective of the “simultaneously multiple and unitary” American body politic that “brings society and state into existence” (Mills 583). It is a National Symbol in which the people of the country see themselves reflected.

The Presidency is thus a series of symbolic substitutions, surrogations, subsummations, and performances, which place the president both inside *and* outside the American body politic. The Presidency is a conceptual effigy of the kind Roach describes, “consist[ing] of a set of actions that hold open a place in memory into which many different people may step,” allowing the American body politic to reinvent itself in a slightly different image with every election (36). Yet prior to the election of Barack Obama, the Presidency had reflected a single type of body: white, male, and Christian. Though there were variations in the physical body (the rugged, adventurous natural body of Teddy Roosevelt as opposed to the wheelchair-bound natural body of FDR) as well as the social body (the formally educated social body of JFK as opposed to the self-educated social body Abraham Lincoln), the Presidency itself was unchanging in that it was always animated by a rhetorically disembodied, abstracted body that could be presented or projected in an idealized representation of that “original” American citizen.

Obama introduced a new kind of body to the Office: a *racialized* body, a marked body, a body that could not claim that rhetorical disembodiment. While both his physical and social body were in all ways commensurate with – if not noticeably superior to – his predecessors', with his polished public presentation, his picturesque family, and his elite education, the color of his skin, and what that meant historically in American culture, set him apart from those of all previous animators of the presidential body, all of whom had been white, not by coincidence, but by

design. Resistance to Obama's animation of the Presidency was largely resistance to the accreted meanings of his physical body, and represented the continuation of a part of the body politic that specifically excluded him as a member. Effigies of him were affectively different than any prior presidential effigies in their ascription (or reassertion) of object-status onto him, and all marked bodies, through the invocation of the image of the lynched man.

The American “Tradition” of the Racial Effigy

Part 1: Where There is Smoke

Racialized effigies are not only threats of violence; they are evidence that it is nearby. After *Brown v Board of Education* ordered the desegregation of schools in 1954, white segregationists throughout the south formed the White Citizens' Council (WCC) to obstruct progress. Composed of wealthier and more influential citizens than the KKK, they had more means at their disposal than merely violence to oppress Black communities. When Rosa Parks's arrest sparked the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama, the mayor of Montgomery joined the WCC and encouraged others to do so as well. The WCC tried to break the boycott in a number of ways, including bombing the homes of boycott leaders in the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) in 1956. Dr. Martin Luther King and other MIA members wrote to President Dwight Eisenhower that year to ask for assistance investigating the bombings and also the hanging of effigies in downtown Montgomery. He wrote,

Continued threats, violence which has included bombings of homes...; the hangings in effigy of a Negro and a white man who ‘talked integration’... Public officials are members of White Citizens Councils whose purpose is to preserve segregation by economic reprisals against Negroes. These officials are doing nothing to prevent the violence. In fact..., the city police of Montgomery led the procession to the down town public square when the effigies of the Negro and white man were hanged by a number of white men, some of whom were members of the White Citizens Councils. The effigies

were allowed to remain there for over an hour before the mayor ordered them removed. Not one arrest was made in the case... (King)

The rest of the letter details that KKK marches continue without interference, that Black voters are denied their rights for not being able to “pass a test” (he puts it in quotation marks in the letter), and that as a result people running on “platforms of racial hate” are getting into office (King). The resurgence of these issues in the 21st century (though they never disappeared) is striking. By the time of King's letter, effigy hangings to intimidate Black communities, and, as demonstrated here, white allies, in response to desegregation and voter enfranchisement efforts was a well-understood and powerful threat of violence of the many against the few.

There are many more examples of effigy intimidation than I can include here, but the magnitude of what was going on around them requires some exploration. In 1941 and again in 1947, groups of white students in John C. Fremont High School in Los Angeles hung and burned black effigies in protest of the presence of Black students, but some members of the school community were supportive enough that the students stayed (L.A. Board of Education Records). Elsewhere, there was less support. In 1956, the same year as Dr. King's letter above, and two years after *Brown v Board of Education*, Mansfield High School in Texas was set to admit twelve Black students. In protest against this development, the white students and their families destroyed two black effigies on the first day of school and blocked Black students from registering. They hung one from the school's flagpole and set it on fire. Signs attached to the effigy's legs read “This Negro tried to enter a white school. This would be a terrible way to die,” and “Stay away, n*****s” (“Resistance”). The other effigy was hung from the front of the school building. Bands of white segregationists roamed the streets of Mansfield with guns that day. The governor, a

strong segregationist, called on the Texas Rangers to defend the school's segregation, as opposed to the students trying to register. The school did not officially desegregate until 1965.

In September of 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas, nine Black students famously started school at Little Rock High School. The governor, encouraged by the Mansfield “success,” sent the Arkansas National Guard to keep them out, and crowds mobbed the area. President Eisenhower met with the governor and agreed to order his troops to protect the students rather than block them, but when he returned to Arkansas, he replaced them with local police, who could not contain the crowds, and rioting ensued. Eisenhower was never passionate about civil rights, but he felt his orders had been undermined on the international stage, and for that reason he sent 1,000 Army troops from 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock. The soldiers remained for the duration of the school year. In October, a group of about 75 white students walked out of class to protest against their classmates. Someone hung a black effigy from a tree outside the school building. News footage shows boys stabbing and tearing at the figure before lighting it on fire to the cheers of the gathered crowd. Police pulled it down and stomped on it to put out the fire. The Little Rock Nine, as they came to be known, faced intimidation and harassment throughout the 1957 school year. The governor closed all the public high schools in Little Rock the following year to try to stall integration; the schools did not reopen until the following year, after Supreme Court found the closure illegal.

Drastic as these measures were, such was the force of the resistance to integration; it was a force that had been fortified over the course of a century with no intervention. The Ocoee Election Day Race Riot, also known as the Ocoee Massacre, of 1920 remains the “single bloodiest day in

modern American political history” (Ortiz). In brief – though the story deserves much, much more – Black communities all over Florida had been prospering, with soldiers returning from WWI to start business and families; people were ready to vote. Nationally, suffragists had just *barely* gotten the 19th Amendment to pass in time for the 1920 election (Tennessee cast a tie-breaking vote); women had only nine weeks to get each other registered in time, and a third of eligible women managed it.

On election day, Black voters were turned away from the polling stations. A very prosperous farmer named Mose Norman took issue with it, and the white enforcers at the polls wanted to make an example of him. Norman went to the house of a well-respected friend named Julius Perry, and a mob came looking for him. Norman was gone, but tensions were high, and soon there was gunfire. Two of the mob were shot and killed, another wounded, and Perry was arrested and put in the sheriff's custody. The sheriff allowed a lynch mob to take Perry. The mob killed Perry and hanged his body from a telephone pole outside the home of an Orlando judge that had advised Norman that if he was denied his right to vote, they could bring a lawsuit against the County. The mob attached a note to Perry's body that said “This is what we do to n*****s who try to vote.” The mob returned to Ocoee, intent on killing as many people as possible. Estimates range between 35 and 60 people were brutally murdered, all the buildings and houses were razed, and all who could, fled. Virtually no one stayed; 1930 census showed no Black people living in the area, and it stayed that way until 1978. Until 1959 there was a sign at the entrance to town that said, “Dogs and Negroes Not Welcome” (Byrne).

Stetson Kennedy, a civil rights activist, folklorist, and photographer who infiltrated the KKK in the 1940s in order to expose their activities, captured this photo in 1940 in Miami, Florida.

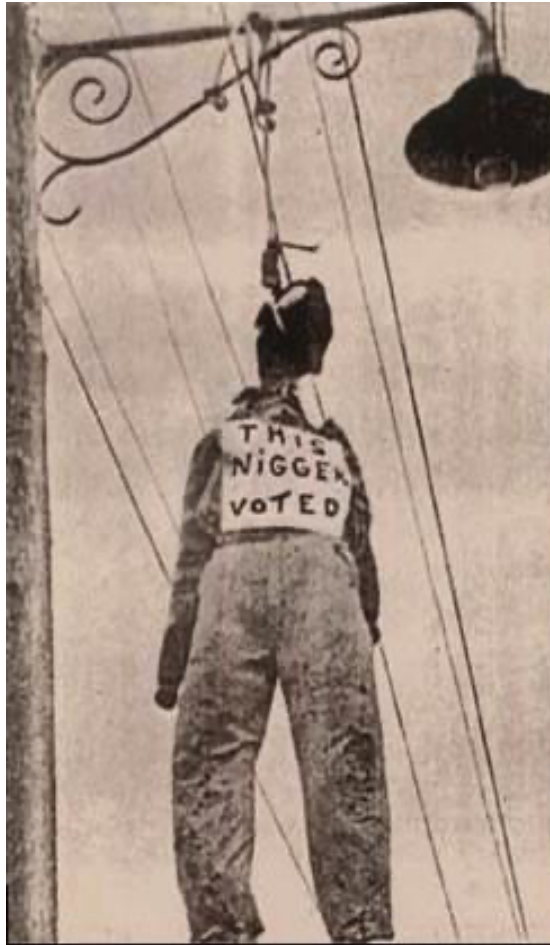


Fig. 15. Kennedy, Stetson. *Effigy strung up by the Ku Klux Klan, Miami, Florida, 1940*. Stetson Kennedy Papers, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SKennedy/id/13383. Accessed 15 July 2020.

It was only one of many effigies, with featureless faces and T-shirts with the same words written on them: “This n****r voted.” An uncredited photo from 1925 shows the same style of effigy, easily found through a web search, though where it was hung is unclear – and there are countless anecdotes of similar events throughout the 20th century. These objects kept the memory of what the KKK and their allies did to Perry, and Ocoee, alive in the South for decades through the repetition of deathly material imagery.

Part 2. Remembering and Mis-Remembering Racial Terror Lynching

The spectacle of lynching never fully disappeared. Despite the best attempts to suppress it, it lingered in public consciousness and it continues to resonate. Indeed, the history of lynching exists today only as spectacle, as images detached from the specifics of time and place: in photographs of nameless mobs and victims; in cinematic scenes; or... as horror visualized in the mind. But it is precisely that abstraction that has allowed lynching to serve as such a powerful and malleable symbol of racist terror. (Wood “Spectacle” 784)

The Ocoee Massacre did not happen in a vacuum, and it was not a coincidence that effigies of Obama were placed the way that they were. White supremacist terrorism, particularly in the form of lynching, had a tremendous impact on the cultural psyche of America as a whole, yet, despite its recurrence as a trope in film and literature throughout the 20th century, every effort has been made to efface the overwhelming reality of it from public consciousness. This violent, systematic objectification of thousands of individuals peaked between 1880 and 1930 and been called “the most successful terror campaign in history” (Berlatsky). As of 2018, the Tuskegee Institute records 4,743 people killed between 1881 and 1968, three quarters of whom were Black (Lartey and Morris). It is an ongoing process to try to discover the true scope of what happened.

The practices and discourses that defined spectacle lynching are painful to examine and easy to avoid; outside of specialized academic circles, this aspect of American cultural history is rarely publicly addressed. However, a highly nuanced discussion of the phenomenon has developed amongst scholars from many fields since the 1980s, and a particular renewal of interest sparked at the turn of the 21st century, thanks in large part to the 1999 exhibition and subsequent publication of *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, a series of photographs

collected by editor and antique dealer James Allen. These photographs and their accompanying documentation shocked viewers because of the brutality of the violence they communicated and the brutality of those who committed it, who were often captured in the images alongside their victims. Despite the public revelation of the photographs, most of which had been private “keepsakes” hidden from view for decades, an attitude of “leaving the past in the past” has long prevailed in wider American culture. Without allowing the past into the present, however, it becomes far too simple to construct false narratives of progress and remain ignorant of the basic implications of political policy, as has happened with tragic regularity in recent American history.

While the vast majority agree that spectacle lynching was but one of many social mechanisms meant to maintain a patriarchal, white supremacist cultural system that had been thoroughly humiliated during and after the Civil War, the different facets of the practice have brought a multitude of analyses to bear on why it happened, what it meant, and how its legacy continues to shape race relations in the USA. Though men, women, and children across racial lines have been victims of lynching in American history, the primary targets of lynch mobs in the postbellum South were black men; the image of the hanged black man is one of the most potent symbols of racial hatred in American iconography.

Historical spectacle lynching has been analyzed from many perspectives, including as a matter of Southern honor (see Wyatt-Brown), as an expression of white men's repressed sexual desire/anxiety (see Tipton), as a dramatic performance (see Fuoss), as a case of cannibalistic bloodlust (see Patterson), as a Christian rite of human sacrifice (see Matthews), as a shifting site

of social identity formation (see Markovitz), and as an erasure of the more pervasive and consistent institutionalization of sexual violence against African American women (see Alexandre).

This short list of framings gives a partial sense of the wide-ranging consideration that has been given to this topic, most of which I can only gesture towards in this context. Nevertheless, despite the clear identification of spectacle lynching as a cultural nexus joining race, social class, gender, sexuality, representation, spirituality, and necropolitical power, the literal history of the practice is not exactly forgotten, but certainly “mis-remembered,” as Amy Wood puts it, “...as if lynching haunts our social memories, but we are reluctant to grasp it or hold it carefully up for view” (“Legacy” 10). She goes on to compare the reality of lynching to a prism, rather than a lens, through which to view historical and contemporary culture, “since our perception through it is multiple and refracted, and it can obfuscate as much as it clarifies” (“Legacy” 10). My focus on the connection between the effigy, or the image, and the actual human body in the cultural object performance of effigies of Obama is an uneasy part of the spectrum to traverse because it recognizes the performative transformation of body, of individual, of victim, into object-representative-effigy, a process that is anathema to the supposed values of the “enlightened” American culture that enacted and oversaw it.

Perhaps the most horrific aspect of racial terror lynching is how contiguous it was (and is) with accepted social practices in the context of Euro-American culture as a whole. The spectacularized violence of these events was not *more* outrageous than that undertaken in public executions happening at the same time; the collection of “souvenirs” of the dead body or

artefacts from the scene of the murder (understandably cited as one of the most disturbing aspects of the lynching spectacle) happened at legal executions as well, and the glib tone of newspapers chronicling the events simply demonstrates how *regular* a part of social life they were – remarkable enough to make news at times, but certainly not aberrations. Attempts to delimit lynching as a historical and cultural anomaly based in the postbellum South do not stand up to scrutiny any more than attempts to ascribe modern racialized police violence to a few “bad apples” with badges. The systems that deliver these practices are normalized cultural inheritance just as much as the ideals that animate(d) anti-lynching protests, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Lives Matter movement. It is not enough to celebrate these parts of American culture without giving adequate examination to the very parts of American culture that made them necessary in the first place.

Part 3. Rough Music and Lynch Law

As discussed in the previous chapter, a variety of extrajudicial, community punishments of public ridicule and humiliation leading to social expulsion or excommunication came to America with European, particularly British, settlers. The story of the effigy ritual that opens this chapter can be an example of a particularly large-scale rough music event that drew on both the community tradition and the civic holiday of Bonfire Night, via the riotous anti-Catholic celebration of Pope's Day. Bertram Wyatt-Brown contends that the difference between lynching and rough music is one of degree and not kind, suggesting that lynching is the ultimate expression of rough music, in which social norms are offended and must be repaired. (“Western”). The argument from Violet Alford that British folklorists and cultural commentators preferred to avoid discussion of such “uncivilized” behaviors finds a more insidious parallel in

the 20th century discourses that declared lynching to be a thing of the past, but rough music shares more with lynching tradition than people's desire to ignore it; rough music and similar practices, brought by European settlers, was one of a number of practices included under the umbrella term of “lynch law” in the early United States.

“Lynch law” was the unwritten understanding throughout the early USA, particularly on the frontier(s), that “justice” would be meted out according to community standards where the judicial system was absent or deemed insufficient. Punishments were chosen by group fiat, and administered in full view of all who cared to watch. Those who committed unforgivable transgressions within the community, “drifters,” and unwelcome entities might be whipped, tarred-and-feathered, or simply mobbed and dumped outside of town. If a group of community members agreed that they were correct to do so, sometimes with the blessing or at the behest of the local sheriff, they would take it upon themselves to punish or kill criminals (or suspected criminals), appealing to the American credo of popular sovereignty to legitimate their actions. In theory, all Americans were subject to the rule of law, and had to work through the formal channels of the political machinery in order to see legal changes made or justice done. But, as Michael Pfeiffer explains, many communities “invok[ed] the tradition of the Anglo-American crowd and the substantial precedents of popular violence in the Revolution,” declaring that “communities might legitimately disregard laws and usurp the functions of criminal justice when government could not or would not act to protect the interests of citizens” (11). Thus, by the time of Emancipation in 1863, lynching was already one function of a set of entrenched social mechanisms across the country.

After the enfranchisement of 1870, blocking black and brown bodies from joining the American body politic became the explicit goal of groups like the KKK, and the implicit goal of those who took it upon themselves to enforce “lynch law.” The object-status of black bodies longer assured by the government, white men sought to impose object status on them extralegally through both psychological and physical (very often sexualized) violence, mob murder being the most public means to do so. In the case of spectacle lynching, the destruction of an effigy of the offender was replaced with the destruction *the offender himself* (whether or not he was, in fact, guilty of a crime – or even the right suspect). The living body of the accused was transformed, through torture, into a living effigy and, with his death, he was *unmade* as a person and fashioned instead as a representative effigy, a warning effigy, like the gibbeted criminal body in England. The hanged man not only demarcated territory ruled through the popular sovereignty of Americans whose rights had always been guaranteed by their race, he also represented the entirety of the Black community, and was meant to communicate the object-status of Black people in general and deter them from the “crime” of attempting to gain power in a white supremacist structure.

Part 4. The Body-as-Object

“A lynching was not a single focal event, circumscribed in time and space, but a pervasive cultural fact punctuated by serial rituals theatrically celebrating the doctrines of white supremacy that underlie them and make them possible.” (Rushdy 163)

When faced with the realities of what they reference, it is difficult to take analytic distance in examining the shape and reception of Obama effigies. The tragic and gruesome stories of atrocities committed by white mobs on Black bodies are not mine to rehearse further here; as Saidiya Hartman argues, recalling such scenes runs the risk of “reinforc[ing] the spectacular character of black suffering,” as if for the sake of it (3). Instead, I aim to illuminate the continuity

between violence against effigies and violence against bodies as intersecting phenomena – the former acting in support of the terror inflicted by the latter. “The oft-repeated or restored character of these accounts and our distance from them are signaled by the theatrical language usually resorted to in describing these instances,” Hartman says, and threatens to perpetuate a voyeuristic character of exposure rather than reckon with the inhumanity at the base of contemporary institutions (3).

To read lynching as a performance takes into account the pre-performances, such as the alleging of a crime, the stoking of mob mentality through recitations of the crime and the hunt for its perpetrator, and the potential of individuals masquerading as authority figures to capture an individual; the embedded performances of the lynching itself, such as the presentation of the victim before a crowd, the mock trial and potentially a speech given by accuser(s) and accused, and the torture and execution itself; and the subsequent performances, such as the dragging of a victim or the display of the corpse, the dispersion of postcards or other keepsakes, and the spreading of the story of the event by newspapers or word-of-mouth (Fuoss 21). In this step-by-step translation of the “lynching cycle” into theatrical terms, which, as he and Hartman point out, were terms very commonly employed by witnesses describing these events, Kirk Fuoss describes the spectacle lynching as “a not-soon-to-be-forgotten object lesson indicating the locus and extent of hegemonic power, the importance of knowing one's place, and the danger of stepping out of line” (17).

I want to take this statement further into the literal by emphasizing the “object” of the lesson, which is to say, the human body, and the maintenance of the “color line,” which is to say, the

constructed, fictionally impassable social and spatial divide between races. Lynching as a performance or theatrical ritual was one of a complex of practices that perpetually recreated the color line that Emancipation had ostensibly erased. Wherever a lynching happened, it was a reminder that the territory was subject to white supremacist authority and surveillance. Bodies of victims were left “dangling from sites such as water towers, bridges, train trestles, balconies of courthouses, and trees along major highways or railroads,” signaling the force of the local “popular sovereigns” and their pride in what they had done (Fuoss 24). This “subsequent performance,” in which bodies were left to be discovered, or overtly displayed where people would be sure to find them, is the act that prefigures the performance of effigies of Obama.

It is uncomfortable to view lynching as a ritual performance that “stages the transformation of the living body into a set of lifeless parts,” in which “the spectacle becomes materiality,” but to do so, and to accept the position of the body as an effigy in the aftermath ritual, provides some insight into the truly horrific nature of the Obama effigies and what they represented: namely, the historical breakdown between the representational and the real (Young 655). As the effigy was a surrogate for Obama that referenced the entire history of lynching, so the lynched body was a surrogate for an immediate local Black community *and* the wider community of Black America at large. Black victims were, as Jonathan Markovitz puts it in his discussion of cinematic lynchings, “caught up in... processes of metaphORIZATION...whereby they st[ood] for something broader than themselves” (35). In each instance, no matter the circumstances around it, mobs were attacking someone bearing the “mark of the plural,” someone representative of an entire group, an entire mythos.

Anti-lynching activists Ida B. Wells and Frederick Douglass both published pamphlets in the 1890s describing the shifting rhetorical grounds upon which advocates made their arguments for its necessity: from the end of the Civil War it “was necessary to quell the race riots and insurrections that threatened American spaces,” while, after the Fifteenth Amendment of 1870 enshrined voting rights for all (men) in the Constitution, lynching was “necessary to prevent ‘Negro domination,’” and, once the vote was thoroughly suppressed, the “lynching-for-rape” discourse arose (Rushdy 11). Lacking any other compelling cover story, the claim of avenging and protecting the honor of white womanhood rallied communities across the country against Black men in particular. Though only a third of the men facing lynching were ever even accused of rape, and those accusations were sometimes clearly fabricated, the idea took root in the popular imagination and became the “consolidating moment of lynching's justification” (Weigman 456).

The “sexualization of blackness,” Weigman explains, became the “precondition not only for mob action, but for lynching's broad cultural acceptance and appeal” (456). She contends that translating the economic and political anxiety that Emancipation inspired in Southern whites into gendered and sexual terms provided “a very powerful means through which not only black men but the entire black community could be psychologically and physically contained” (456). Weigman's argument relies on a psychoanalytic approach that reduces Black men to a bare phallic power that white men both fear and covet (463). In order to maintain control over the entire social sphere, and maintain access to all women as potential sexual objects, the Black man also had to be turned into a sexual, “feminized” object. This Weigman offers as an explanation

for the “symbolic rape” that lynching inflicted on the Black male body, through torture, castration, and death (464).

The ultimate exercise of necropolitical power and performance of social domination, lynching was analogous to the early modern effigy ritual in that the bogeyman of the Black body was forced into submission and conquered. Like Judas or Guy Fawkes, or indeed Death, dispatched to cleanse the collective and renew society, lynchings were visible reclamations of power from the depths of existential crisis, triumphantly maintaining hierarchies and affirming of “natural” and social cycles. As I have discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, this kind of ritual was a way for a group of people to approach a unified experience. As in the sacrament of Communion, onlookers and perpetrators joined together in a common experience mediated by the materiality of their bodies and a common “object” of external focus. The hanging man, left as evidence of the power structure that organized social space, was an effigy of that which was expelled from the body politic (as determined by the force of white entitlement).

While Roach's vision of the conceptual effigy as a place where community identities can be recreated is meant to open possibilities for those communities with splintered pasts, the idea extends in this less aspirational direction as well. The white community recreated itself anew by constantly re-creating the murderous effigy performance under the aegis of Justice and the sanctity of its values (or its valuables, i.e., white women). The “set of actions that hold open a place in memory into which many different people may step,” but which really “bodies forth” a particular type of performance is, in this case, the lynching ritual and the total domination and destruction of the surrogate selected for it in this iteration.

Through metaphorization and reduction, each spectacle lynching simultaneously reenacted every one that had come before and rehearsed every one that would come after, projecting the possibility of the same fate onto all those with whom an individual victim was synecdochically linked (by the mob's estimation). Indeed, before anti-lynching activism radically altered the narrative, spectacle lynchings were publicized in newspaper articles and through photographs as “orchestrated rituals that functioned as political theater, or to be more exact, collective melodramas in which white heroes vanquished black demonic forces,” and sent them back across the color line (Wood “Spectacle” 773). Once the “demonic forces” were exorcised, and the “correct” social order was reestablished, the body-as-effigy would often be left on display in a public space with the intention that it be viewed for as long as possible, or it might be further deconstructed into souvenirs to be claimed by members of the mob/audience (Young 641).

Perhaps the most uncomfortable part of analogizing the lynching performance with the effigy performance is, as Harvey Young notes in his examination of the lynching souvenir, the risk of losing the particularity of individual victims. He references Susan Steward's rejection of the possibility of a human body part as a souvenir because the body “is always already more than material; the effort to transform the meaning which it has into material (i.e., to turn the body into a screen upon which another meaning can be projected) exists as a form of historical erasure..., the desire of the lynch mob to fix the body in the past” (647). The loss of particularity and the fixing of the body in the past may disqualify body parts as souvenirs from Steward's perspective, but, painfully, these functions of object-ification are in fact what makes it possible to read bodies as effigies; these functions of object-ification were very much the point of the ritual.

Displayed as warnings to Black communities and as pronouncements of the continuance of white power, the lynched body performed in a similar way to the king's funeral effigy. Where the latter held the community together throughout a period during which the “invisible network of allegiances, interests, and resistances that constitute[d] the imagined community,” was exposed, the totally controlled body-as-effigy served as a representative of the sealing of that breach for the white imagined community, over and over again (Roach 39). Like the royal effigy, it “answer[ed] the need to symbolize the inviolate continuity of the body politic,” but it was a version of a body politic based on the exclusion of Black Americans (Roach 38).

Three Examples of Obama in Effigy

To be complicit in something frequently requires that we deny, in some crucial ways, our role in the performance of that event. To be in denial, in the face of evidence that shows our denial unwarranted, is to be complicit in the continuation of the thing whose existence we deny. (Rushdy 18)

Part 1. The Halloween “stunt” at the University of Kentucky

A few days before the 2008 election, just before Halloween, a hospitality worker at the university saw what he thought was a person hanging by the neck from a tree (Laster). The effigy was life-sized, costumed in a coat and pants, fitted with a Halloween-store Obama mask, and attached to the tree with a noose. The university quickly had it taken down, condemned the action, sent official apologies to the Obamas, and began to search for who had done it. If there were photos at the time, they have not remained accessible in intervening years, though it is not hard to imagine what the university employee saw that morning. The community response was swift and strong in this instance, and the university students held a vigil, though several of them

also said that they were not surprised by the event (Laster). Though the University of Kentucky campus was largely enthusiastic about Obama, said one student at the time “there is an element here that would not vote for a black man,” (qtd. in Musgrave). None of the national news sources reporting referenced “lynching” in any of their stories, using “hanged” and “hung” instead, interchangeably implying a person or a thing (though people often get that one wrong at the best of times).

Two young, white men (the newspapers actually neglect to mention their race, but of course they would mention it if they were not white), one of them a University of Kentucky student, were quickly arrested, the arresting officer referring to the incident as a “stunt that had gotten out of hand” (qtd in Alford). Only local Kentucky news sources reported the ultimate outcome of their hearing the following January: no indictment on the charges of theft and disorderly conduct. The act of hanging the effigy was considered free speech, and if it had not been done on public property, there would have been no charges at all (Ortiz). The two claimed that they had put up the effigy in response to news reports of a California man who had hung an effigy of Sarah Palin in his front yard and that they “were not attempting to make a statement about race” (Ortiz). It is hard to know which is worse: that two adults who grew up in a state third only to Mississippi and Alabama in terms of KKK membership could actually be that oblivious, or that their lawyer was smart enough to advise that they use the “post- racial America” defense now that Obama was safely in Office. “It was just a political prank,” said one of the men, his lawyer adding, “If they had hung Joe Biden, we would not be here” (qtd in Ortiz). The president of the Urban League of Lexington commented that he was not surprised by the outcome, given that the local radio seemed to have already dismissed it as “boys will be boys” (Ortiz).

While any number of presidential effigies have been hanged in demonstrations over time, there was no demonstration here: no publicity beforehand, no group to rally around the act, no message related to policy whatsoever in the hanging. It was intended to shock and to frighten with its uncanny likeness to a real body and real history. Even if one takes the two men's statements at face value, the arrogance of leaving a figure like that on a campus fraught with racial tension throughout the previous two years (a student publication had issued a cartoon wherein fraternity recruitment of minorities was depicted as slave auction and a black student's dorm had been defaced with threatening racial epithets, for example) is astounding (Musgrave). By contrast, in May 2020, during the Covid-19 lockdown measures in Kentucky, protestors supportive of Second Amendment gun rights openly hung an effigy of the (white) Democratic governor Andy Beshear outside his mansion at the state Capitol. One of the protestors cut the effigy down almost immediately, declaring that it was supposed to be a peaceful action (Silverman). Whereas only Democratic officials publicly decried the 2008 effigy of Obama, representatives from both sides of the aisle came out against the 2020 Beshear effigy. Whereas the University of Kentucky student involved in hanging the Obama effigy graduated, the man who was caught on tape hanging Beshear's effigy was fired from his job.

It is possible that the attitude toward political effigies as acts of aggression had shifted in the twelve years between these two incidents in Kentucky. It is possible that the youth of the men at University of Kentucky, and their claim that it was all just a prank, was a factor. It is also possible that the hanging effigy of a white man as opposed to that of a Black man elicit different responses at the local and national level.

Part 2. The Dolls on Mount Desert Island



Fig. 16. Effigy found hanging in Maine. *Bangor Daily News*, 7 Nov. 2008, bangordailynews.com/2008/11/07/news/police-pair-of-black-effigies-found-on-mdi/. Accessed 4 May 2020.

The day after Obama was elected, two featureless human-shaped dolls were found hanging from trees by nooses on opposite sides of Mount Desert Island, off the coast of Maine. It is a popular place for tourists in the summer, but the year-round population is less than 11,000 people, so there was not a lot of traffic there in November. “The figures...each were about 2 feet tall and resembled gingerbread men. [One] figure...had a horseshoe tied to the end of the rope so it could be thrown up over tree branches. Aside from their color and the timing of their appearances, there was nothing distinct about the figures that made specific references to Obama” (Trotter). The lack of signifiers beyond the color and the noose makes these simple effigies pertinent

examples of the simplicity of the visual language needed both to communicate and to recognize this particular expressive intention. A black “gingerbread” man hung from a tree by a noose might very well signify lynching on its own, but add the timing of Obama's election and these effigies become resoundingly specific and deeply unsettling in their lack of detail: a fundamental reduction.

Residents of the island quickly organized a rally against the act, proclaiming community solidarity against racism (Graettinger). There were a total of two articles about this incident in the Bangor Daily News, one about the discovery of the effigies, and one about the rally. Neither the articles nor any of the quotations within used the word “lynching,” or made any reference to knowing anything about the history of it, saying “If the effigies were hanged because of Obama's win, it would be the second known incident in Maine that officials are investigating” (Graettinger). One has to wonder *if* they were *not* hanged because of Obama's win, then for what purpose were these unsettling figures put into the trees?

These dolls evoke an effigy tradition somewhat different from the others: that of the private, magical folk effigy meant to affect an individual from a safe distance. The “voodoo doll” is the consummate example in American popular culture: the mostly featureless doll that is pricked with pins or otherwise tortured in order to bring harm to whoever it represents. Though almost all magico-religious traditions of the world utilize this kind of “figurative image magic,” as Natalie Armitage names it, to varying degrees, the popular idea of the voodoo doll bears far more resemblance to European antecedents than any item used in the Vodou religion of Haiti or Voodoo culture of 19th-century Louisiana (87). In fact, as Armitage explains, the image of the

voodoo doll was a dramatic tool used to indicate the evil intentions and ignorant superstitions (and yet also dark power) of Afro-Caribbean characters in American film and literature, mostly in the first half of the 20th century (85).

A more appropriate name for the figure used to influence or harm another might be the “poppet,” given this nomenclature in the early modern, Anglo-American history of witchcraft (Gordon and Simón 5). Despite the 200-year campaign against witchcraft, an Age of Enlightenment, and an Industrial Revolution, figurative image magic, though forced underground, was a more or less continuous practice (or at the very least, a continuously referenced practice) through the early 20th century in both Europe and the USA (Kittredge 98). The people of Maine in particular would have at least a passing familiarity with this kind of effigy because of the area's historical witch lore; furthermore, many of the accusers and accused in the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 were refugees from Maine, fleeing King William's War (Cummins). The layers of the local meaning carried by such dolls gives these “gingerbread men” a particular, situated intensity that speaks directly to the uncanny character of all of the effigies without the convenient cover of Halloween or, as in the next example, popular appeal.

While poppets are distinctly anachronistic in contemporary contexts, novelty “voodoo dolls” are easy to find – Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton dolls are widely available, while dolls depicting George W. Bush are still easy to find online. Dolls depicting earlier presidents become rarer, but in an example of ephemeral presidential memorabilia, a “Reagonomix Voodoo Doll” was produced in the 1980s – incidentally by a company in Massachusetts, where the Salem Trials took place (“Ronald Reagan”). These are mass-produced and clearly intended to be humorous,

private objects, but the Obama effigies hearken to a practice of presidential effigy performance that was less comical and more public.



Fig. 17. Abraham Lincoln Effigy Doll. Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, www.pinterest.ie/pin/210543351299484763/. Accessed 18 Aug. 2020.

While he is greatly valorized in American mythos, the collections at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library also document the absolute hatred with which people from all over the country regarded Lincoln in the years leading up to the Civil War. There are newspaper articles from Georgia, Ohio, and even Oregon, attesting to the destruction and defacement of home-made effigy dolls of Lincoln at rallies, and the Museum has an example of one from 1864 (“Effigy Doll”). It is a remarkably detailed doll, crafted with great care considering that this kind of effigy was created to be stuck with pins or thrown into bonfires; it features a paper mask bearing Lincoln's likeness that, when lifted, reveals a black cloth face in reference to the

nickname, the “Black Republican,” that he had earned by forwarding an anti-slavery agenda. It is very clearly a statement about Lincoln's being “Black underneath,” an imposter with a mask, just as Obama was characterized to be. Thus the Obama effigies seem to have reintroduced a style of presidential effigy that had not been viewed with any seriousness for over a century, and here, again, the anonymous nature of the hanging of the effigy sets the Obama effigy apart; the Lincoln doll, even if it was never destroyed in a rally, clearly took time to make, and must have been an item shown with some pride in its construction, rather than secretly left in a public place.

Part 3. The Hanging Chair



Fig. 18. Hanging chairs before 2012 election. *The Atlantic*, 1 Nov, 2012, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/11/how-tell-if-your-empty-chair-lawn-display-racist-does-it-have-noose/321878/. Accessed 5 May 2020.

In the run-up to the 2012 election, the internet was ablaze with bewilderment after Clint Eastwood's surprise appearance at the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Florida. The

legendary actor- director, who had already appeared in several events in support of Mitt Romney's campaign against the incumbent Obama, proceeded to take the stage and improvise. He began to speak to an empty chair beside the podium as if he were having a conversation with Obama complete with pauses for responses to his off-the cuff questions about the failings of the administration. For anyone that has ever done an improv class, it was clear that Eastwood was out of practice. It was a bizarre moment, but it was the most memorable of the night.

Conservative blogger Michelle Malkin encouraged readers to display their own empty chairs and add decorations (Smith). Over the next few months, empty chairs began to appear in people's front yards. In Washington, Texas, Virginia, and Colorado, several people decided to hang their chairs from trees using rope. When questioned, the individuals offered that they needed to tie the chair like that because otherwise it would get stolen, that they needed to mow the lawn and didn't want the chair in the way, and, simply, that others were reading too much into it (Reeve). Other chairs were more overt. One in Minnesota was hung by what was very clearly an actual noose. A chair in California was attached to a fence post. A few days later, the owner placed two watermelons on the chair. Still not satisfied, he hung a noose off the back of the chair and put a sign on it that read "Go back to Kenya."

The media response to these incidents was stunning by comparison to the 2008 Halloween effigy; the story was quickly viral. In addition to the traditional news media, every outlet from *The Atlantic* to *Huffpost* to *Salon* weighed in on the issue, unilaterally condemning it and unabashedly discussing "lynching" as such. I doubt very much that the level of discourse had evolved that much in four years. On the contrary, I think the absurdity of the Eastwood

performance and the fact of the chair itself lowered the issue to the point where contemporary discourse could reach it. The chairs were ridiculous. They were also accessible; the metaphor of the “empty chair,” (on par with the “empty suit,”) put the discussion into the realm of the metaphorical, allowing commentators to approach the topic from a safe distance, far from considerations of real human bodies, either now or in the past.

The use of a chair as a stand-in for a figurative effigy effectively renders the object surrogate for a surrogate, an effigy twice removed from its referent. The absence of an identifiable figure makes the effigy a more covert form of communication, one that depends on the knowledge of the inciting incident to understand it. It is a material instance of the rhetorical strategy of “dog whistle politics,” in which veiled racist language appeals to a target demographic. The so-called “Southern Strategy,” which found its full force during Richard Nixon's 1968 campaign, appealed to white Southerners by espousing such concepts as “states' rights” and “law and order” (Perlstein). Reagan carried the torch, coining the term “welfare queen” to popularize cuts to social benefits, and both of the Bushes and Trump used the same strategies, with stylistic tweaks. Reagan campaign consultant Lee Atwater spelled it out quite clearly in an interview in 1981, saying,

You start out in 1954 by saying 'N----r, n----r, n----r.' By 1968 you can't say 'n****r' — that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like...states' rights, cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites. (Atwater qtd in Perlstein)

It can be argued that empty chairs set on the lawn acted much like campaign signs for Romney in 2012, but those hung from trees were physical manifestations of Southern Strategy politics, offering a clear message with the cover of (barely) plausible deniability.

Part 4. And on and on and on

These hanging representations, and multitudes of others, performed differently than previous presidential effigies. As a general rule, presidential effigies tended to be part of group protest actions, paraded by a crowd to a designated rallying point where there would be speeches and ceremony, and the effigy would go up in flames. This may have happened to Obama effigies in private spaces, but, as in the examples above, they were quietly hung up and left for people to discover. Whoever hung the effigies in Maine probably achieved what the men in Kentucky tried to do – to anonymously leave an instantly recognizable, confrontational image in a public space. Those that joined in with the empty-chair trend must have felt emboldened enough by the actions of others to be willing to display their sentiments on their own property and implicate themselves (though they were unable to understand the implications of doing so!), but more often, these were clandestine acts.

There was no fanfare, no declaration of intent. Obama effigies were symbolic assaults on the president but, perhaps more to the point, they were symbolic assaults on other citizens – *many* other citizens. The man who found the effigy on the University of Kentucky campus; the Maine families that stumbled upon the featureless dolls; the shoppers strolling back to their cars in Minnesota who saw the effigy hung from a billboard in 2012; the people in their cars, speeding along the Missouri freeway who saw the effigy hung from an overpass in 2014; all who saw the images or read the articles or watched the news coverage. For people with no sense of history, they were shocking and frightening; Obama was an incredibly popular president, after all. For people who understood the imagery, they were signals that the area the effigies were in was unsafe, because that was what they had always indicated before.

Conclusion: Continuing Cycles of Violence

The very *ability* of white people to maintain blindness for shared humanity across the color line is reproduced in a lesser, but still potent, form in the destruction of racial effigies. If (and, again, it's a big *if*) the men at the University of Kentucky in 2008 were unaware of the harm their “prank” could cause, it was due to the continued power of the color line. The environment that structures their embodied experience holds Black embodiment at such a remove that they can disregard it utterly (or, more likely, regard it with contempt) and place a reminder of its annihilation before the eyes of those who it might psychically assault.

The effigies, even more than evoking a traumatic history, were reminders that this history is not over; the terms of engagement have changed, but the statistics on police brutality and incarceration rates prove that even if extrajudicial mob murder is no longer always a clear and present danger, Black lives are still in danger in the USA. Of more immediate importance than the visceral symbology of the lynched effigy is the ongoing violence against Black bodies in the name of “law and order.” Groups like Black Lives Matter, which continues to face backlash for daring to call itself that, have grown exponentially since blatant racist Donald Trump’s election sent shockwaves through half of the American psyche, and since the ubiquity of cameras on mobile devices made it easy for people to capture videos of police brutality against Black men — over and over and over again. As of mid-2020, with the added pressure of Coronavirus, more protests are bringing more attention to racialized violence and systemic inequality in the USA since the 1960s.

For with the proliferation of videos of men losing their lives to police, there is a new generation of effigies in a different format. Only now the wide distribution of their images has done what the anti- lynching media of the past could not do, and that is to show, with no chance of equivocation, the human circumstances of victims of brutality to a national and international audience. The murder of George Floyd by a group of police in May, the agonizing video of which went viral the following day, sparked outrage, fueling months of protests and declarations of solidarity in cities all over the world. Bitterly, on the day of his memorial service, a bill *finally* declaring lynching a federal crime, which had been approved by Congress, failed to pass into law based on a single Kentucky senator's objection that it provided inadequate police immunity. Thankfully, the police who killed George Floyd *are* facing appropriate charges for their crimes (a rarity in such cases), but, despite years of calls from activists for a true reckoning, the politically-correctly-termed "conversation about race" is only just beginning in the USA.

Chapter Nine

Performing Objects in Ireland's 2018 Abortion Rights Campaign

In this chapter, I continue to examine the complex interchangeability of body and object, this time in the context of a completely different power dynamic and a very different style of cultural performance. A similar, but particular, kind of psychic terrorism described in the previous chapter still, unfortunately, applies here. Happily, in this story there is also a performing object that resists that oppressive power and brings some sense of a light enchantment back into play in the discussion of non-theatrical object performance. The site I investigate here is the final stage of a decades-long fight to make abortion legal and accessible within the Republic of Ireland. The right to have an abortion was constitutionally blocked via the 1983 8th Amendment to the Constitution, and the normative discourses around it were based around the words "sin" and "murder," though mostly the topic was smothered in silence. After describing the results of the Referendum vote to repeal the 8th Amendment and moving through a historical overview of its actual effects on women living in Ireland, I describe the tactics of those on either side of the campaign, and apply the lens of puppeting to the performing objects they used to forward their arguments and the history of that line of representation. In the last chapter, the very public destruction of the effigy presented one kind of collective puppeting. Here, I explore the private, intimate fetishized object, in this case the model fetus, unexpectedly presented in public spaces to wield a certain kind of enchantment on a civic audience. Finally, I examine the opposition to this puppeted object with the seemingly innocuous object of the campaign badge, which, read though the puppeting lens, reveals itself as a symbol of a long under-recognized solidarity across

a wide spectrum of the public. Puppeting helps us understand how seemingly intangible ideologies present themselves in physical form, and how these objects can be recognized as the powerful social actants that they are once we consider them as performing objects.

“Yes” Vote Wins, By the Same Margin, 35 Years Apart

The 8th Amendment to the Irish Constitution passed with the support of 66.9% of the voting public saying “Yes” to its inclusion in 1983. The essence of the 8th Amendment was to ensure that the potential life of a fetus be considered as legally on par with the life-in-progress of a pregnant person. The text of the Amendment reads:

The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.

On the 25th of May, 2018, the Irish electorate again voted “Yes,” by astonishingly similar margin of 66.4%, but this time to repeal the 8th Amendment. Longtime as well as first-time activists were amazed – all of us had been anxiously anticipating a much closer vote. I was an embedded participant with a stake in the proceedings; my view of the issue and those involved in the Yes and No campaigns is informed by my experience living in Ireland as a person very much affected by the implications of the 8th Amendment. It is from the perspective of someone active on the ground in the Cork branch of the *Together for Yes* campaign that I offer firsthand analysis of the opposing cultural object performances that took place in the days leading up to the Referendum vote, and note that, in retrospect, they were entirely predictive of the overwhelming outcome.

My aim here is to primarily discuss the contents of specific object performances and how they operated, rather than to examine the political and cultural history of abortion in Ireland, or the

pro- and anti-choice movements there. These are complex and culturally contingent issues based on a specific history of religious, political, and economic repression, conflict, and upheaval, and as such are largely beyond my scope. However, it is necessary to provide context regarding the atmosphere in which the Referendum took place in order to discuss the roles of the performative objects that appeared during the campaign, and so the following section offers a cursory overview of the development of abortion rights legislation (or, primarily, lack thereof) in modern Ireland and some of the key turning points that led to the repeal of the 8th Amendment.

An Overview of the 8th Amendment in Practice, or, Women's Bodies as Objects

Abortion had been technically illegal in Ireland for over a century at the time the 8th Amendment was added to the constitution, via the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, which included provision for the punishment of those trying to terminate a pregnancy:

Every woman, being with child, who, with intent to procure her own miscarriage, shall unlawfully administer to herself any poison or other noxious thing, or shall unlawfully use any instrument or other means whatsoever with the like intent, and whosoever, with intent to procure the miscarriage of any woman, whether she be or be not with child, shall unlawfully administer to her or cause to be taken by her any poison or other noxious thing, or shall unlawfully use any instrument or other means whatsoever with the like intent, shall be guilty of felony, and being convicted thereof shall be liable . . . to be kept in penal servitude for life . . .

The reality of abortion in Ireland in the 20th century was continually dependent upon its legality in the UK; rates of backstreet abortions and infanticide, which had risen in the 1930s when contraception was universally banned in Ireland, decreased markedly from 1939 onward, when the English court determined that abortion was defensible in the case of a 14-year-old who had

been raped (*R. v Bourne*). This case established the priority of the life, as well as the mental and physical health, of the pregnant individual, and protected doctors undertaking the procedure. Those able to make the journey began to travel from Ireland to obtain abortions, beginning an 80-year “tradition” of a shameful pilgrimage shrouded in silence. Those who could not travel had few options. The Infanticide Act of 1949 established infanticide as both a separate and lesser crime than murder, indicating not only its prevalence but a level of sympathy for mothers who committed it. There was no such sympathy for the untold numbers of unmarried pregnant women who were incarcerated in mother and baby homes (operational throughout the twentieth century) and Magdalene laundries (operational from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries), abusive, prison-like institutions run by the Church that hid away “sin” and conscripted free labor.

The secular right to privacy became more powerful than religious prohibitions in countries with cultural ties to Ireland as the 20th century progressed. The 1967 “Abortion Act” made abortion effectively legal in the UK (bar Northern Ireland, where it remained illegal until 2019), and in 1973 *Roe v Wade* made abortion legal on the basis of the individual right to privacy in the USA. In the Republic of Ireland, where all forms of contraception were still illegal until 1979, concern that laws would change on the heels of these advances built amongst religious and right-wing political leaders, and the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign formed in 1981. The campaign to add the 8th Amendment to the constitution was deeply contentious, marked by aggressive ad-hominem rhetoric from those in favor of it, who claimed that those in the Anti-Amendment Campaign were immoral communists bent on destroying Irish traditional culture by coldly murdering future generations (Muldowney). The strategy was successful.

Not only was the illegality of abortion made iron-clad, bodily autonomy during pregnancy was effectively erased. The Association for Improvement in Maternity Services campaigned against the 8th, stating that “the truth is that every pregnancy in Ireland is affected by the 8th amendment. It affects labour and childbirth. It affects where, when and how a pregnant person wishes to birth. It overrides any preference verbally stated or written in a birth plan” (Krycia). Under the 8th Amendment, pregnant people's lives, health, and dignity were jeopardized or destroyed completely. Ireland became the only developed Western country to curtail abortion rights with such severity.

A major development in the evolution of the 8th Amendment occurred with the “X Case” of 1992. A 14-year-old girl, called Miss X to protect her identity, was raped by a man known to her family. Hoping to bring criminal charges against the rapist, the family sought to clarify whether paternity tests taken from fetal tissue would be admissible in court. Because the 8th Amendment was so vague, the question passed from hand to hand until ultimately, on the same day that the family traveled to the UK, Attorney General Harry Whelehan secured an interim injunction to block them from leaving Ireland or obtaining abortion services. Miss X, still pregnant, had to return to Ireland to be brought before the High Court. The court upheld the injunction and determined that, for the sake of the fetus, Miss X would not be allowed to leave the country for 9 months. This decision came despite testimony from Miss X's family that the traumatic circumstances had left the young girl depressed and suicidal.

A tremendous outcry followed, and the decision was ultimately reversed by the Supreme Court based on Miss X's threats of suicide; this ruling led to constitutional amendments ensuring that

women had the right to travel, to access information about abortion (which had previously been withheld from them), and to obtain legal abortions in Ireland in cases in which the life of the pregnant individual was at stake, including by threat of suicide. The result of the X Case was, in essence, that the life (though specifically *not* the “mere” health, physical or mental) of anyone of childbearing age could, for the first time in a decade, be legally considered as equally important to the potential life of a fetus.

It would be twenty years before actual legislation would be passed to implement the X Case decision. During this time, the profound impact of the 8th Amendment would be felt in waves of widely-reported controversies on the national level, and in a constant stream of practical realities on the personal level. In both 1992 and 2002, referenda were held in reference to the X Case, both with the aim of removing suicide as a legitimate threat to a pregnant person's life, hence as a legitimate grounds for making abortion accessible within the Republic. Though both attempts failed, suggesting that a majority of Irish voters were capable of some level of empathy toward those dealing with crisis pregnancy, there was very little momentum toward substantive change in Irish law. Public sentiment seemed to remain overwhelmingly anti-choice. Individual cases testing the scope of the 8th Amendment came into the headlines consistently over the years only to fade from view as soon as decisions were made.

In 2007, a woman known as Miss D became pregnant and discovered that the fetus suffered from anencephaly, a fatal fetal abnormality, and would not survive outside the womb. The Health Service Executive attempted to block her from traveling to the UK, threatening physical restraint if necessary. The High Court found in her favor and she was able to travel, but the case made it

clear (if it had not been already) that the public healthcare system was aligned with religious interests rather than with patients' interests. In 2010, three women who had suffered tremendously as a result of the 8th Amendment brought their case, *A, B, and C, v Ireland*, to the European Court of Human Rights. Despite hopes for a European equivalent to America's *Roe v Wade* ruling, the Court merely ruled that Ireland needed to clarify legislation regarding abortion access within the country. This ruling was not enforced in any way, and abortion laws remained untouched, stuck in a legislative black hole.

In 2012, a young woman named Savita Halapanavar died of maternal sepsis in University Hospital Galway after being denied a potentially life-saving termination. Despite the fact that the words “inevitable miscarriage” appear in the medical notes, and that she apparently knew as much when she requested a termination, Mrs. Halapanavar was told that Ireland “is a Catholic country,” and there could be no termination as long as there was a fetal heartbeat (“Midwife”). Her death was the result of twenty years' worth of ideologically-determined inaction by the Irish government, inaction which allowed the threat of criminal prosecution to tie doctors' hands at such a critical moment. The country-wide outrage that followed led to the foundation of the Abortion Rights Campaign, and finally forced the government to pass the 2013 Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (PLDPA), which at last established a legal framework for abortion provision within Ireland. The Act required that panels of doctors approve all terminations unless medical emergency demanded immediate action, and also established a maximum 14-year prison sentence for anyone found guilty of obtaining or providing abortion services outside of this framework, an addition affecting primarily those who might import abortion pills.

Frustration at the complexity, limited scope, and unworkability of this legislation was compounded by two high-profile cases that took place in 2014: those of Ms. Y and Miss P.* Ms. Y, an asylum-seeker who had been raped in her native country, desperately sought access to abortion services but received insufficient support at every turn. Though her medical records document increasing suicidal ideation as she begged for help and critical time went by, she was never advised of her rights under the PLDPA. Faced with carrying the pregnancy to term, Ms. Y began to refuse food and water. Though the HSE applied for a court order to force Ms. Y to eat and drink, the order was abandoned when doctors finally determined that early delivery of the now-viable fetus was warranted due to Ms. Y's psychological condition, and a coerced caesarian section was performed on her to ensure the survival of the fetus.

In the case of Miss P, the PLDPA provided no protection whatsoever. Her pregnancy was not yet viable when she was declared medically brain dead as a result of acute hydrocephalus. Nevertheless, and against the wishes of her partner as well as the rest of her family, Miss P was kept on life support for nearly a month in an ill-conceived effort to save the fetus inside her. When the case was heard, the interests of Miss P and the fetus were represented by different lawyers. The High Court found that, in this particular instance, wherein the chances of a live delivery were infinitesimal, the wishes of the family could be honored and Miss P could be allowed to die; there was a critical caveat in this decision, namely that, had the pregnancy been further along, the interests of the fetus would have to be weighed differently. It was the 8th Amendment that had made it necessary for this tragic situation to go to the courts, though abortion was not, strictly speaking, the issue at hand, and the necessity to move beyond superficial measures like the PLDPA was made manifest.

As in all cases involving the 8th Amendment that had come before, the cases of Ms. Y and Miss P highlighted with devastating clarity the impact of the legal concept of fetuses as wholly separate entities from pregnant individuals. As in all the cases that had come before, the supposed moral imperative to ensure the “right to life” of a fetus far outweighed any moral imperative to respect the self-determination or dignity of the pregnant adults (or children). The difference in these cases was that, in the public consciousness at least, action had been taken via the implementation of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act. The cases showcased its failures: both Ms. Y and Miss P were subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment that shocked the country. The latter received far more media attention than the former, at least in part because Miss P's family spoke out strongly about the circumstances as they unfolded while Ms. Y faced an isolated struggle (though she has since sought and been awarded compensation by the HSE), but both were critically important milestones in the evolution of negative public opinion regarding the 8th Amendment.

Between 1980 and 2018, over 170,000 people left Ireland to obtain abortion services, but the number of people who imported abortion pills once they became available in the early 2000s, or sought other means to induce miscarriage, are unknown (Ryan). The personal toll that the 8th Amendment took on thousands upon thousands of individuals cannot be tallied, the number of tragic stories that never went to the High Court cannot be estimated, and the element of class discrimination inherent in abortion bans in any region of the world cannot be overstated. What is clear is that cost of travel and of services, of taking time off work and of obtaining childcare, were prohibitive for poorer individuals and very young women in Ireland, and that migrant

women in particular were disproportionately affected given potential complications regarding immigration status. As activists declared in 1992 during the X Case, Ireland was still effectively an “internment camp” for many pregnant people through 2018 (“Internment Camp”).

Activists continued to fight against these injustices by any means they could; groups like Women on Waves worked to provide access to abortion pills, and small, local chapters of the international pro-choice movement offered support where they could. Momentum toward a Referendum on the 8th Amendment began to grow in 2016, when abortion was included in a list of issues to be brought before a Citizen's Assembly. The activist community, anxious to begin a campaign, saw this as the government abdicating responsibility, kicking the can down the road, and this view reflected the government's refusal to act for decades. It was, however, ultimately the randomly selected citizens who, when offered testimony from doctors, lawyers, special interest groups, and laypeople on both sides, voted that the 8th Amendment should indeed be repealed. Furthermore, they voted in favor of far more lenient legislation than anyone in the government or the pro-choice community had anticipated. Though anti-choice groups dismissed the entire Citizen's Assembly as failing to represent “middle Ireland,” it was now clear that a Referendum was on the political agenda. When it was announced in March of 2018 that the vote would take place in May, it was a sudden scramble on both sides to mobilize and make plain the arguments necessary to sway that elusive middle ground, about whose true opinions no one could be certain. In the following sections I discuss the divergent approaches taken by the pro-choice and anti-choice campaigns in performing their ideologies in an effort to gain votes. First, I examine the visual rhetoric of the anti-choice campaigns and the affective impact of the performing objects (namely, model fetuses) that the campaigners used to arrest attention on the

streets. This style of abject enchantment worked to shock, disgust, and intimidate one group while bolstering the other's confidence. Then I discuss the pro-choice movement's struggle with visual activism, and the ultimately communitarian enchantment of space that the *Together for Yes* campaign designed.

The Anti-Choice Campaign

Ever since the beginning of the modern anti-choice movement, which took hold in 1970s America in the backlash against *Roe v Wade*, a variety of scare tactics about the physical and mental health dangers of legal abortion have been used to argue against its legality, but the faith-based argument that life begins at conception and the assertion that abortion amounts to killing children have formed the true backbone of the anti-choice platform. During the 2018 Referendum, the anti-choice campaigns relied heavily on one of two (familiar) clear and impactful image vocabularies: the “happy baby,” in- or out of utero, and/or fetal remains. In either case, of course, such images are manipulated so that they may best manipulate viewers; beatifically-depicted infants effectively elicit sympathy and a protective instinct, and violently-depicted gore effectively elicits disgust and outrage. The imagery is mythic in the Barthesian sense, delivering a one-two punch of emotionally-charged messaging by equating every fetus with the culturally-agreed notion of the “bundle of joy” on the one hand, and presenting the possibility of the violent annihilation of that notion on the other. Thus, the urgent importance of preventing harm to the innocent is compounded by the looming possibility of the alternative, which implicitly threatens future generations and thus society as a whole. Even when only the first term in this equation is made visible in a politicized moment, the second is always implied. The anti-choice campaigns in Ireland, Save the 8th, which doubled down on the trope of abortion

as baby-killing, and Love Both, which insisted that abortion is detrimental to women, and framed it as an existential threat to one in 50 citizens had the 8th Amendment *not* been put into the Constitution, attempted to maintain a squeaky-clean public presentation. In demonstrations and rallies and information stalls on the street, however, disturbing imagery always appeared, even if it was brought by “concerned citizens” rather than event organizers. The official posters and pamphlets of the campaigns seemed to aim for the sympathetic, but the focus on the fetus remained central.



Fig. 19. A widely distributed anti-choice poster. *Save the 8th* Campaign, www.save8.ie/the_campaign/our-posters-explained. Accessed 10 July 2019.

The image on the poster from the Save the 8th campaign shown above is representative of the campaign's visual strategies as a whole. Relying on simple, inflammatory language and misleading assertions, the text on this poster restates the trope of “abortion is murder,” effectively conjuring gruesome imagery without presenting it directly, while also suggesting that abortion at six months would become commonplace in Ireland if the 8th Amendment were to be repealed (the fact that abortion at six months is rare and inevitably the result of extremely

unfortunate circumstances only muddies the messaging). The illustration shows what looks like a baby that has already been born (and washed!), rather than a fetus at the developmental stage suggested by the text, but the most egregious aspect of the image is the reduction of the pregnant body to a womb with no head, no hands, no legs.

The reduction of woman to womb, to vessel, to incubator, to “generative apparatus,” as physician Anna Galbraith put it in 1899, is a classical construction, traceable to Hellenic philosophy and biology and thence reified across the ages in artistic, medical, social, and political discourses (qtd in Stormer 112). As medical technology and imaging systems have advanced, the mother's very existence has been further minimized. Describing the use of ultrasound images in anti-choice propaganda, Barbara Katz Rothman indicates that, because they show no indication of the person who is pregnant, they create a “metaphor for 'man' in space, floating free, attached only by the umbilical cord to the spaceship. But where is the mother in that metaphor? She has become empty space” (114). The pregnant subject is reduced to an object, an incubator (or floating torso), before being erased almost entirely, ceasing to be a material entity at all. The fetus is the public figure, the one that matters.

The “public fetus,” a concept developed by feminist scholars like Rosalind Petchesky, Janelle Taylor, and Donna Haraway, describes the fetal image outside of the medical context, i.e., as used in advertising, films, books, and, of course, propaganda. The public fetus is depicted as an autonomous unit of humanity, one which, as Peggy Phelan elaborates, “has become a sign that is already powerfully implicated in the political economy of capitalism and patriarchy” due to its use to sell *things* as much as *ideas* (*Unmarked* 133). The scholars mentioned described the

phenomenon in the 1980s and '90s, but it is as relevant now as it was then because anti-choice imagery and rhetoric have barely shifted in the intervening years, as the poster above can attest.

Encountering The Model Fetus

An even more dramatic example of the trope of disembodied fetus appeared on the streets of Cork City during the Referendum campaign in the form of small, hollow figures distributed by anti-choice campaigners. If ultrasounds and campaign posters push the pregnant body, and all the cares and concerns attendant to it, “literally and metaphorically...out of the fetal picture,” as art historian Anne Higonnet archly comments, then these plastic fetuses perform in such a way as to simply disappear it (142). The maternal body, at this point of symbolic removal, does not exist, does not require consideration. The *fetus* is center stage. The *fetus* is present. The fetus is plastic. It is a puppet; it is puppeteered by a collective of many anti-choice hands. The very concept of the fetus (*as* a baby, *as* a proto-citizen, *as* a character with an active role in society) was, and continues to be, puppeted by the anti-choice movement as a mascot.

The model we encountered in Cork (distributed quietly by an anti-choice stall that frequently set up about twenty feet from our pro-choice information table), has the words “10-12 wks pre-born” printed on its back, situated just above the rough seam that indicates its mass-manufacture via injection mold. It fit right into my palm, cold, hard, pink plastic. Its proportions are rough, it is pinkish in color, and there is no indication of any umbilical attachment point. Notably, it *does* have small lumps of plastic between its legs, to indicate that it is *most decidedly* a male fetus. All of them are that way.



Fig. 20. “Young One” model fetus. *Heritage House '76*, www.hh76.org/details.aspx?prod_id=190. Accessed 1 Oct. 2019.

The one and only purveyor of the precise model of fetus that we witnessed in Cork, the openly evangelical (but non-denominational) Christian anti-choice establishment called Heritage House, located in Snowflake, Arizona, indicates that they are educational tools that show fetal development. Their explicit purpose is to proselytize the sanctity of life and illustrate the humanity of the fetus, even in the earliest of forms. Called “The Young One,” this particular product has been in circulation since at least the mid-1980s (Schoen 150). Models of fetuses at earlier stages are not available, though many people seek terminations before ten weeks; real fetuses before then look markedly less human, and so models of them would presumably be less effective. This is but one of the conscious decisions made in the production of this object.

There is enough attention to detail in the original cast to include the printed gestational age and the phallic markers, and enough thought put in to the design to choose a shade of plastic coded for race, never mind the fact that fetal skin is translucent until much later in development (though the same exact model, produced in brown plastic, is available on the website under the name

“The Young One – Ethnic,” it is clearly a secondary model and I am not aware of these having been distributed in Cork).

Since whiteness and maleness are, as Peggy Phelan calls them, the “unmarked” terms in the order of representation, and hence to be taken as somehow neutral, natural, and requiring no subtitle, the fetus we encountered is clearly meant to be an archetypal fetus, the most important and valuable and innocent fetus Western culture can produce (after all, an anatomical male cannot have an abortion) – and, at the same time, it is all fetuses at once, the essence of fetus, the “everyfetus.” But not even a navel indicates its connection to the maternal body-that-we-are-not-meant-to-consider. In one fell swoop, the object is anatomically skewed, racist, sexist, and ridiculous. But also, admittedly, strangely arresting to encounter.

The majority of the “Young One” product reviews on the Heritage House website specifically reference using these models in one of two situations. The first is with children (in classrooms, Sunday schools, and county fairs), and, as one reviewer with the username “Carrie” confirms, “My little ones love to play with these :)”. It is not hard to understand why children might find these kinds of models marvelous, indicators of how small they themselves once were, or play with them like baby dolls, since they are recognizably human in shape and made of plastic, which modern children know to be toy- material. Yet they are *not quite* toys, *not quite* dolls. Elsewhere on the Heritage House website, “art dolls” are available, at much higher prices, looking much more like miniature infants, with babydoll proportions, rosy cheeks, and button noses. Those do not make any claims toward representing *real* fetuses, but even the “Young One” and the more recently distributed, and supposedly more accurate, rubber fetus (called the

“Precious One”) are not *actual, accurate medical models*, which are extremely costly. So what *are* these models?

The answer is made clear, in part, by the other most commonly referenced use for the models amongst the product reviews, and that is within “crisis pregnancy counseling” centers. These are religious organizations that counsel people in crisis against abortion at all costs, and they greatly outnumber facilities that provide abortions in the USA – so they are a consistent source of business for Heritage House (Sherman and Gresko). The use of such models in facilities that, by design, discourage abortion, is concretely about intervention and persuasion. As one reviewer puts it, in a very pragmatic comment, “I think the model is powerful because of it's size but I agree that the soft ones are more realistic which provides the abortion minded mother with a more soft and 'real' picture...If you plan to give them away...these are more economical” (sic) (“Chelsea”). The supposed power of the model, like the supposed power of the ultrasound, is its ability to make the invisible visible, to make manifest the fetus, to concretize the separate humanity of the unborn. Yet, certainly from the perspective of the pro-choice campaigner, there is clearly a strong element of manipulation and fear-mongering involved in the use of these models in such contexts.

More illustrative of the use of the models as intimidation tools is the first half of the review cited above from “Carrie”: “These are great to get the message out quickly outside of an abortion clinic when time is of the essence” (Heritage House). In the USA, anti-choice protests outside of clinics have been ongoing for decades. This is perhaps the most dramatic use of the fetal model. The theater is the clinic that provides abortion services, the stage is the sidewalk or parking lot

(or regulated distance from the front door). The performers are the anti-choice activists and their performative objects, the plastic models. The audience is anyone who enters or exits the building, but the primary targets are women actively seeking terminations. Another reviewer on the Heritage House website, employing the oft- utilized anti-choice tactic of equating a developing fetus with an infant after birth, reports as follows: “Have used these babies when sidewalk counseling at an abortion clinic. It helps women in a crisis pregnancy to think about the baby in her womb” (sic) (“Teresa”). The object performance that all of these reviewers indicate is presumably, from the reviewers' perspective, one in which the model aides the imagination. The intention seems to be that the figure transmogrify into a healthy, individualized fetus, safely in situ inside its mother, in the mind of those encountering it.

Yet, as many of those who came to us in Cork after seeing the models on the street said, sometimes solemnly and sometimes with dark humor, they resemble nothing so much as a *dead* fetus. People would come to us to express their dismay, disbelief, disdain, and very often disgust after being confronted with the fetuses. Based on those reactions, which came from people quite removed from the context of the abortion clinic, the models are far more likely to shame or intimidate a pregnant individual, to function as an evocation of the dead before the fact, than to facilitate contemplation of the miracle of life. All reviews cited here refer specifically to the “Young One” model we saw in Cork; they bear the same “10-12 wks pre-born” stamp.

The only time a fetus of this gestational *ever exists* outside the womb is as a product of medical intervention or miscarriage. The only way anyone is ever likely to see a fetus that looks anything like the model – clean as a whistle, with limbs neatly arranged – is as an anatomical specimen.

The status of the object's referent is therefore unclear: is this a representation of a fetus-in-process or a representation of a dead fetus? This illegibility raises a variety of issues, for the real, developing fetus *should* be intertwined utterly with the maternal body; the real, dead fetus *should* be properly disposed of or properly preserved. It is neither a medical model (which *should* be in the anatomy classroom) nor a doll (which *should* have very different physical characteristics). The plastic fetus does not actually *belong* anywhere, other than the anti-choice spaces for which it is explicitly produced.

Thus, encountering the object, particularly while simply walking down the street, as happened to a number of people during the campaign, is inherently *uncanny*. The uncanny, as theorized by Jentsch and Freud, is an eerie sense of disorientation, of not being at home in the world, of meeting with something totally alien that is nevertheless strangely familiar. Jentsch focused particularly on the phenomenon of being uncertain whether something/one is dead or alive. The model fetus, belonging nowhere, with its questionable referent, is decidedly uncanny; however, it was more than merely uncanny for many of the people who came to us (as if we could stop their distribution). It was, instead, more like Julia Kristeva describes the experience of the *abject*, as “a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome” (2). For, though we are accustomed the public fetus as an image, with the medicalization of all things related to childbearing, modern Westerners are certainly *not* accustomed to encountering it in any material incarnation whatsoever. The physical object insists on its materiality as an image cannot.

In the sense developed by Julia Kristeva, the abject is something that “disturbs identity, system, order... borders, positions, rules” (4). In order to maintain the comforting fiction of a “clean and

proper” body (and society), people emphatically reject and exclude those things our society agrees are unclean or taboo and we set ourselves, and our cultures, in opposition to them (Kristeva 6). The abject is that which reminds us that we are not independent, self-contained, self-sustaining, and transcendent entities taking part in stable, civilized societies; we are mortal, material creatures, dependent on our environment, reliant on cycles of incorporation and excretion, and we take part in unstable societies that often seem very uncivilized indeed. Such reminders, says Kristeva, are frightening, revolting. The reactions arising from the model fetus are compounded by the fact that even a real, developing fetus is an ontologically unmoored (non)entity: neither independently alive but certainly not dead, neither complete subject nor mere object, neither fully self nor entirely other, neither external nor destined to remain internal. It is abject in the imagination. The real, dead fetus, by contrast, is a *literal* abjection in that it is something cast off from the body that collapses our carefully constructed conceptual borders.

Kristeva refers to excrement and menstrual blood as abjections, but she also asserts that the “utmost of abjection,” is “the corpse, seen without God and outside of science” (10). I suggest that the model fetus is *both* uncanny and abject, though neither Freud nor Kristeva ever approached the subject of fetuses in any format (real, imagined, model, dead, alive), in any depth at all. Perhaps they are *too* uncanny, *too* abject, too fundamental to approach.

Considering The Fetish: Abjection in the Iconography

The pregnant woman at the abortion clinic, inevitably anxious, with hormones shifting, is a particularly vulnerable audience for an object performance of the uncanny and abject. Macabre warnings of what the abortion procedure will render, the model fetuses evoke the physicality of

what is going to come out of the woman's body: a tiny corpse. The utmost of abjection. Revolting. Frightening. Boundary- collapsing. It is a reminder of the horror signified by the *dead* public fetus, and of the power of that horror over women's bodies in particular and society in general. This reading of the object makes its performance tantamount to psychological assault *especially* because it is accompanied by activists who are taught to be sympathetic in the many “handbooks” produced by anti-choice groups for sidewalk counselors. There is no evidence of cognitive dissonance in the instructions to such activists (which often include checklists of materials to bring, which in turn include fetal models), who are presented to themselves as potential saviors trying to help (“Pro-Life Wisconsin” 13).

The rhetoric on the Heritage House website is similarly cheerful, including the story that explains the history of their most famous product, one that is *explicitly* modeled on fetal remains. The founders of Heritage House, Virginia and Ellis Elvin, designed the “Precious Feet” lapel pin in 1974 after seeing a full-page anti-choice ad in their local newspaper on the one-year anniversary of *Roe v Wade*. The ad featured a photograph taken by Dr. Russell Sacco showing his latex-gloved thumb and forefinger pinching the ankles of a fetus that had been aborted at ten weeks in order to display its tiny feet to the camera. The Elvins, inspired, created the pin: a set of true-to-size feet from an aborted fetus at ten weeks' development. “Precious Feet” was declared the international anti-choice symbol in Dublin in 1979. Four years later, during the referendum that put the 8th Amendment into the Irish Constitution, the pins were distributed all over the country, through St. Vincent de Paul and other Catholic organizations (McGowan 117). Thus, along with gory imagery, the use of objects evoking dead fetuses has been standard practice within both the American and Irish anti-choice movements practically since their inception. Why use the exact things *against* which the anti-choice movement claims to stand as emblems within

the movement? Perhaps in a homeopathic effort, a desire to ward off the reality of the thing, an enchanting effort to harness the power of the public fetus, as if it were a fetish.

“Fetish” is a problematic term that deserves some exploration before continuing. In brief, it was posited by early anthropologists as a type of rudimentary religious artifact to which “primitive” (African) minds ascribed supernatural powers. Tomoko Masuzawa explains that, in the 19th century, the concept was ferociously dismissed. Denounced as unscientific, unenlightened, too vague, and too *slippery* to be of any use as a category (most anything can be a fetish), it inevitably crept back into the discourse like a repressed memory. According to Masuzawa, “one thing was certain about the subject: fetishism was *low*... [It] always marked the nadir of cultural value, the polar opposite of the telos of the civilizing process” (247). The term was taken up by Marx, for describing the nature of commodities, and by Freud, for explaining sexual fixations ultimately derived from masculine anxiety about the female body's lack of phallus. Feminist scholars have sought to retrieve the concept discard the colonialist, sexist past of this hybrid concept without falling into the traps that caught up its originators, for, as Baudrillard observed, fetishism, “instead of functioning as a metalanguage for the magical thinking of others...turns against those who use it, and surreptitiously exposes their own magical thinking” (qtd in Apter 2). According to Dawne McCance, traps *may* be avoided by “oscillating between poles, writing across social and psychic formations...[where] the writer is not positioned as the spectating subject of traditional fetish discourse” (203). With that in mind, I continue the discussion, because there simply *is* no better way to define the plastic fetus than as a fetish, in terms of its performance and reception. These figures, wielded like crosses against heretics, were presented

to pro- choice campaigners on multiple occasions during the Repeal campaign as if the sight of them would suddenly convert us.

I look to ethnologist Roy Ellen's synthesis of the anthropological, the Marxist, and the Freudian concepts of the fetish, for the model fetus performs somewhere in the interstices of religion, economy, and sexuality. Ellen identifies four mechanisms common to all three: “concretisation, animation, conflation of signifier with signified, and an ambiguous tension between person and object in terms of control” (18). The best example to illustrate how the model fetus works within these parameters comes from a fellow campaigner at the pro-choice stall. While she was handing out leaflets, a woman approached her and, cradling one of the model fetuses in her outstretched hand, declared passionately, “This is why I'm voting No.” The presentation of the plastic figure, as if it were an argument in and of itself, came across as odd and even absurd without the necessary ideological overlay to see it as that woman saw it, but the encounter was unsettling for the campaigner nevertheless. In this single action, the anti-choice woman demonstrated that the fetus was exhibiting all four characteristics identified by Ellen:

- a. “concretisation,” or the gathering of abstract ideas together into one object:
the model fetus, as an example of the public fetus, casts the same wide conceptual net.
- b. “animation,” or the attribution of living characteristics to the object:
apparent in the careful way the woman held the model was a sense of its fragility and importance, like that of a living thing.

- a. “conflation of signifier with the signified,” or the treatment of the latter as the former: the woman's statement, indicating that the object itself was her reason to vote No, demonstrates this conceptual conflation.
- b. “ambiguous tension between person and object in terms of control,” or a shifting power exchange that ascribes certain material changes to the interplay between the thing and the people around it: the woman expected that the object would have an effect on the campaigner (which it did), but, more importantly, it gave her a reason, and so compelled her, to approach the campaigner in the first place.

As an uncanny fetish object based on an abjection, the model fetus's power varies in accordance with context, but even those of us with some familiarity of anti-choice strategies found them particularly *weird*. The stated intention of presenting the humanity of the fetus in very early development obscures the origins of the model and pin, but it does not erase them entirely. That these plastic figures were brought out in an attempt to control reality through the political process perhaps makes more sense when considering the religious fundamentalism of the company that produces them. The centrality of religion to anti-choice ideology is difficult to overstate, and certainly in the USA and Ireland, the anti-choice movement is propelled by conservative Christian factions accustomed with fetishistic practices. In the history of Christian iconography, the depiction of Jesus as a baby in his mother's arms or lap is second in importance only to the depiction of his death on the cross. The innocence and holiness of the infant Christ extends to all infants; all aborted fetuses are martyrs; abortion amounts to a “slaughter of the innocents.”

In the history of Christian material culture, crosses of all sizes, bread or wafers, wine in ornate chalices, relics of saints (which is to say, preserved body parts), rosary beads, and any number of other holy objects have aided in prayer and devotional practices. The model infant Jesus that is traditionally added to the Nativity scene on Christmas morning is perhaps a sort of cousin to the model fetus. All of these elements combine to provide important context for the use of the object. However, the power of the Church has dwindled dramatically since 1983 in Ireland, and with it, the power of the images and objects associated with it. Though there is undoubtedly strong residual respect and even fondness, amongst a large proportion of the secular Irish population, for the Catholic icons that appear all over the country, like the grottoes shading statues of the Virgin Mary that appear in urban and rural settings alike, the cheap hollow plastic fetus does not qualify. In a changing Ireland, it seemed tied to a past that many wish to leave in the past. The style of enchanting object embraced by the contemporary culture has a wholly different intention and effect, and I turn to it in the next sections in an exploration of the pro-choice tactics that countered the anti-choice approaches.

Before moving on, I want to speak briefly to the uncanny effectiveness of the plastic fetal fetishes. Distributed worldwide by an organization that does not hide its religious affiliations nor its anti-choice intentions, they begin their “life-cycle” in a factory, with a molding machine for a “mother.” They are shipped to anti-choice groups, clinics, and churches, who proceed to give the models to children, who are likely to lose them, or adults, who, unless they are truly moved by the thing, are likely to throw it away, revealing the true object's true “value.” Eventually they will all add to plastic pollution.

Nevertheless, when I saw someone take one when offered and, a few steps later, with a confused look, toss it into the bin, I was momentarily stunned. This unintentionally mimetic enactment of a central anti-choice horror story obviously had no worse consequence than throwing away any piece of plastic, yet the moment was perhaps the uncanniest of any I personally had in relation to the fetuses. It was not real, it did not matter, it was merely an unconsciously produced theatrical moment, yet even I was struck by the discard of the public fetus: a testament to the intensity of the mythos of the sign, but also to the materiality of the thing itself. A common leaflet bearing images, thrown into the bin, produces no such effect. Whether they moved you, revolted you, or made you shake your head and laugh, the homunculi certainly produced an effect, as did the behavior of those who seemed to take their anti- choice message to heart. Donna Haraway believes that the fetish “is about interesting 'mistakes' – really denials – where a fixed thing substitutes for the doings of power-differentiated lively beings on which and on whom, in my view, everything actually depends” (qtd in McCance 203). I suggest the model fetus as a case-in-point, because it is a substitution that produces affective results. In this case, the discomfort the models produced only helped the pro-choice campaign.

The Pro-Choice Campaign

The heart of the pro-choice argument, namely that anyone who becomes pregnant must have the right to decide whether or not to continue that pregnancy in safety, is a message based on values of self- determination and bodily autonomy. These values do not easily translate into pictorial form, and pro- choice groups face a challenge trying to present the complexity of their ideology. As Adam May, a designer on the team that produced the branding for the *Together for Yes*

campaign together with campaign leaders and researcher Karen Hand, says, the intensity of anti-choice imagery “continue[s] to place advocates for abortion care at an initial disadvantage when it comes to public communications.” Creating a visually engaging campaign becomes a case of evoking concepts that are incredibly difficult to represent directly. Though the visceral image of the coat-hanger and the humorous image of the personified uterus making a rude hand-gesture are both part of the pro-choice lexicon today, neither have been used by any official body; the latter is perhaps too irreverent to appeal to more conservative factions and the former perhaps too painful. In any case, neither of them put forth the full intention of the pro-choice position. Perhaps no representational image can. The power of images in political branding, however, is incontrovertible, and for these reasons, most official pro-choice iconography is non-representational.

Between 2016 and 2018, artists and performers, public figures and celebrities, activists and private citizens had begun the public pro-choice push, telling stories and creating events to bring attention to the many sides of the movement as a whole. Several large groups based in Dublin kept the issue visible and relevant, but pro-choice efforts were largely made by individual groups and artists before the Referendum was finally announced. Designed by artist Anna Cosgrave, black jumpers bearing the word “Repeal” in white letters began to pepper crowds, and the jumpers became iconic within the pro-choice community. Artist Maser stoked controversy by painting a mural in the center of Dublin depicting a red heart against a blue background bore the words “Repeal the 8th” in friendly-looking white bubble letters; the city council had the mural painted over, officially because the artist had apparently not sought appropriate planning permission. Many believed the erasure to be politically motivated, however, and outrage fueled

the viral popularity of the image. These contributions helped set the visual tone for the pro-repeal campaign, and remained emblematic throughout.



Fig. 21. Maser's Dublin mural in support of Repeal. *Joe.ie*, www.joe.ie/news/repeal-mural-resurrected-621984. Accessed 28 July 2019.



Fig. 22. Widely-distributed *Together for Yes* campaign poster. *Newstalk.com*, www.newstalk.com/Disability-group-Inclusion-Ireland-to-join-campaign-to-repeal-Eighth-Amendment. Accessed 27 July 2019.

Once the Referendum date was confirmed, *Together for Yes*, the largest and most visible pro-choice group, revealed its neutral, non-representational branding, including the multi-colored speech bubbles on the posters pictured. The sparseness of the speech bubbles, a visual reference to the many different reasons for repeal, and to the many voices heard during the Citizen's Assembly, emphasized that the Yes campaign was based on measured discussion. As was underscored repeatedly in activist training events, the overall strategy was to remain as reasonable and calm as possible in order to avoid the usual accusations used to undercut any campaign piloted primarily by women: those of over-emotionality and “hysteria.” *Together For Yes* relied on slogans like the one above, as well as “End forced travel,” and “Save women's lives,” all simple appeals to decency, and on presenting an entirely rational and sympathetic public image. Activists involved in the Anti-Amendment Campaign in 1983 warned loudly and clearly in 2018 to be prepared for anti-choice attacks, both verbal and physical, in the course of the Referendum campaign, and *Together for Yes* sought to remain as uncontroversial as possible in an effort to preemptively neutralize any such possibilities.

Participation through the “Yes” Badge: A Visual Analysis of the Object in Performance

The chief actor in the pro-choice object performance leading up to the Referendum was the humble badge. It bore the word “Yes,” (with the Irish “Tá” also available) against a background of the same colors used in the *Together for Yes* speech-bubble logo, and had a smooth, matte finish. The badge is a time-honored object of political positioning, a simple declarative that announces the wearer's stance, where her loyalties lie, and what her intentions are in terms of how she will use her powers to advocate and to vote. The badge speaks simply and clearly, uniting an individual with a larger group and, in the case of the Yes/No Referendum, it identified one's “team” in a similar way as a sports uniform, alerting one to the presence of allies against a cultural, as well as legal, policy.

As part of the pro-choice campaign, which had less money flowing through it than the anti-choice campaign, I oversaw a wobbly table on the busiest street in Cork where we provided informational leaflets, discussed the issue with the public, and handed out “Yes” badges. The number of people who wanted to take badges was such that we consistently ran out. People who already had them would show them with pride while passing; on one occasion two older women who looked like they could very well be on their way to church opened their tweed jackets as they passed to reveal Yes badges pinned inside. They did not stop to speak, but we clapped and they smiled conspiratorially and carried on.



Fig. 23. *Together for Yes* badge design, in English and Irish, 2018. Image provided courtesy of Language Creative Advertising and Design.

The Yes badge simply features interconnecting, colorful arcs, reminiscent of the speech bubbles from the campaign posters, and the word “Yes,” as well as the Irish “Tá.” As a visual representation of different individual positionings on the issue, these overlapping bubbles and blending colors evoke a plenitude of voices united behind one strong declarative. The period at the end of the word disallows any possible response of “yes, but—” and brings the argument to a close. The badge is both individual and collective, an example of the collective in support of the individuals within it. In a personal communication, David May of Language Creative Advertising and Design explained to me that the color scheme is based on the colors of the Irish flag, expanded into a variety of rich secondary and tertiary colors to represent “inclusivity, diversity and unity.” The use of the Irish national colors, which none of the anti-choice campaigns used, was a deliberate appeal to nationalism. In contrast to the well-funded No campaigns, the grassroots Yes campaign was able to harness an attitude of defiance, of national

pride, of rejection of the ideological colonization that seeks to separate woman from fetus and pit their interests against each other. The very shape of the badge itself echoes the use of the circle, the floating bubble of the autonomous (white, male) fetus in anti-choice imagery. It reclaims the voice of the body that is always there, but always disappeared in the anti-choice iconographical lexicon.

The flash of the colors on the badge draws the eye, but the badge directs the viewer away from itself, and back into the discourse. The seduction of the fetish object is not the point here; an assertion of one's own voice and agency is the point. Direct simplicity is the point, removed from all the enchanting complications of anti-choice rhetorical misdirection. The badge urges one to look at *the person wearing it*, not at it, itself. The object reifies the subjectivity of the wearer. It worked *with* us on the campaign. More discreet than the "Repeal" jumpers, and so easier for many to wear in public where, recognition of these badges required a baseline knowledge of what was happening politically at that moment, and also inspired the increased circulation of information. Since the ban on information itself was an important part of maintaining the draconian abortion laws in Ireland, simply wearing the badge was an act of defiance.

The badge was in and of itself a speech act, one backed up by months of headlines about the Citizen's Assembly and their decisions as well as countless public statements disseminated through the media. It gave permission to the wearer to hold the pro-choice position "out loud" without having to speak. While many of the badges that appeared were mass manufactured, the *Together for Yes* campaign office was consistently full of volunteers using badge-makers to

create more personalized ones that named particular localities and groups, like “Mahon for Yes,” and “Grandparents for Yes.” This process of making brought activists together, giving energy to group leaders, and providing an entry point for new volunteers to become involved in the campaign. The personal was very much political over the course of the campaign, and the badges afforded us a way to explicitly enact the support we implicitly felt for each other, simply and easily.

What began to happen, as the campaign wore on and more and more badges were taken and proudly displayed, was a sense of homecoming, of safety in the public sphere, of understanding of the decisions people had had to make ever since the 8th Amendment was put into the Constitution, and of rejection of the difficulties they/we had inevitably encountered. By wearing a badge, we not only identified ourselves to each other as united in a political belief, we also identified ourselves as individuals who may (or may not) have had abortions. This group identification allowed people who had had abortions to show themselves, but it also cloaked them in sheer numbers, allowing a sense of both anonymity and self-disclosure. As the number of badges visible on the street increased, with the approach of the Referendum date, it became clear that the pro-choice position was popular (a popularity that anti- choice groups tried to explain away as misguided Millennial trendiness), but even so the weight of history made us unsure about what would happen. What we *were* sure of was that the uptake of badges far exceeded expectations, revealing how many like-minded people who believed in self-determination and bodily autonomy were all around us after all. Perhaps most importantly, badges revealed widespread solidarity.

This sense of being held by fellow citizens, sharing smiles as if we were all friends, bearing the same emblem on our clothing or our bags for all to see, was perhaps the most profound aspect of the brief campaign. The badges acted as gestures toward inclusion and acceptance – in other words, precisely those things which had always been denied to those forced to maintain secrecy and shame around the issue at hand. People collected as many as they could and distributed them amongst friends and colleagues; these were objects that invited people to join in a resistance against historical authority. In this way, the badges performed a political enchantment on streets all over Ireland, becoming badges of honor as much as talismans providing protection and connection.

Critically, these objects signaled an assertion of subject status and a rejection of the assigned role of mere vessel in the process of pregnancy. They were markers of citizenship being taken up and reminders of the power of citizens to make change in order to better care for fully-fledged members of society (as opposed to the paternalistic attitudes that sought to wrest control of pregnancy in the first place). Commenting on the need to combat the separation of maternal body and fetus, feminist scholar Rosalind Petchesky sets out a course of action thusly,

First, we have to restore women to a central place in the pregnancy scene. To do this, we must create new images that recontextualize the fetus, that place it back into the uterus, and the uterus back into the woman's body, and her body back into its social space. Contexts do not neatly condense into symbols; they must be told through stories that give them mass and dimension. (Petchesky 287)

The badges transformed public space. It was as if every badge-wearer was taking off an invisibility cloak, and none of us expected there to be so many others. It made an invisible community visible and showed unexpected types of people to be pro-choice, people from all socioeconomic backgrounds, all ages, all ethnicities, all genders. Wearing a badge in public

began as a brave stand – we expected harassment. There was some of that. But the most common form of engagement was simply strangers asking where they could get badges of their own.

As they became slightly more popular, it began to feel like a secret society, with the badges as our signs of membership. When I, wearing my Yes badge prominently, politely declined an anti-choice pamphlet, a nearby street performer broke character long enough to catch my eye, indicate on himself the placement of my badge, and wink at me. When the badges became overtly visible, then suddenly strangers became friends, sharing smiles openly. As a pro-choice activist for the five years prior to the Referendum, I had only been in small groups of other openly pro-choice people; it was exciting to get fifty at an event. The only other times I felt so surrounded by like-minded people were at the annual March for Choice, where everyone was galvanized to be there. The badges allowed relatively passive pro-choice voters into the community, and the sense of togetherness was moving.

Conclusion: Making the Referendum Our Own

Graphic designer for the Abortion Rights Campaign Adam May relates that he felt their efforts were becoming successful as he saw more and more badges and more and more personalizations of the campaign logo, as in the artworks below.



Fig. 24. A collage of individual usage of the *Together for Yes* logo, 2018. Image provided courtesy of Language Creative Advertising and Design.

In the digital age, in which political messages travel primarily through the television and radio for the older generations and social media for the younger, badges and plastic models are both somewhat antiquated formats. As I argue in earlier chapters, it is the very analogue nature of such performative objects that endow them with a particular power in contemporary Western culture. In this example, the proliferation of colorful engagements with the Yes campaign represent the hands at work in making Repeal possible. It was a reclamation of the materiality of lived experience, up to and including one's own body, which the laws of the land had deprived of agency for so long.

The many versions of the logo, the many appearances of the “Yes” badge, each connect to an individual story: an individual impetus to create, to wear, to support. Each story bears its particular shades of experience, and each one – even the most famous and legally consequential stories, as enumerated in this chapter – had been overwhelmingly shielded from public

consciousness for decades prior to the campaign in Ireland. Even more than that, these stories are silenced all over the world. The badges each represented an individual's stake in a particular story or set of stories, but they also acted as acknowledgments of the multiplicity of stories. They were points of connection between people, with both a national and international lived reality, and marks of resistance against governmental efforts to conceal the extent of the true struggle.

While the badges referred back to the individuals wearing them, and created an instant connection between strangers wearing them, thus creating a sense of being-at-home for pro-choice campaigners, the plastic fetuses were jarring to encounter, alienating in their oddness. Ultimately, performative objects tied the No campaign to deathly imagery, to fear and isolation. The performative objects of the Yes campaign provided signals of understanding and community and shared experience, alleviating the oppressive public silence on the issue that had left so many people haunted. A Yes vote was a vote against the abusive Church, against the Magdalene Laundries and the Mother and Baby Homes, against the illegal adoptions that separated children from their families, against the stigma and silence, against the patriarchy, against oppressive postcolonial forces that linger in Ireland's institutions and policies. It was a vote for a more just society. Irish people voted so overwhelmingly Yes that even those of us paying close attention to the polls and the commentary and the politicians were stunned. It was like standing alone in a dark room, convinced that the shape in the corner was a monster, only to switch on the lights and reveal it only to be a pile of clothes – and not only that, we had all been there together the whole time. Not alone at all. The transformation of public space and public sentiment that occurred over the course of the Repeal campaign, and the way those lights were switched on, was a truly enchanting process to witness. Then business returned to usual, the badges disappearing slowly

over the coming weeks. Enchantments do not last forever, but they leave traces. And sometimes, they leave true, tangible change in their wake.

This chapter has traced the emergence of these particular enchanting object performances in a very specific context. Reminding ourselves of the potency of this kind of enchantment allows us to resist its operations and reimagine the possibilities, taking the power of making, puppeting, and enchanting into our own hands.

Chapter Ten

Puppeting and its Consequences, or Enchanting Things

This thesis has examined the enchantment of the “ordinary thing” in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. It has charted a practice of seeing in an enchanting way, using the “puppet perspective” of “puppeting,” to call attention to the profoundly influential roles performing objects play below the level of cultural consciousness. This is not a practice that can reasonably be maintained all the time; it is deliberate and requires effort. It is an artistic strategy for devising performance, but following the performance studies mode, it is also an analytic lens; it can help us see the world in a way that makes us feel some empathy for the things around us, but it can also help us see the ways we are manipulated by their deployment. The idea of puppeting as a way of enchanting things, a way of seeing, a way of highlighting the object performances within everyday life *and* at the center of many significant events, grew out of developing a camaraderie with materials, developing a deeper and clearer understanding of our human selves as materials moving amongst materials, and of organic and inorganic matter as sharing in parallel processes of becoming.

The first chapter of this thesis documents, through the production of an original marionette as much as through field notes taken in my role as participant-observer, the initial theoretical development of that camaraderie in the Puppets in Prague Workshop. As demonstrated by the master craftspeople in that setting, there are explicit traditional processes of puppet-theater-making specific to the Czech context, but infusing those traditional processes are tacitly new materialist artistic philosophies that emphasize the fair treatment of tools and materials as collaborators, as well as local histories of social and political resistance – largely unknown to Western theatre history – that gives contemporary

Czech puppetry profound cultural significance. Participation in and observation of this context elucidated the nexus of physical material, cultural material, and their co-creative flows through invisible social-experiential structures, both in theatrical performances and performances in the every day. My thinking about puppeting emerged in this context, and I have encountered it repeatedly across contexts as elaborated in each chapter of the thesis: in the first half, I treat puppeting primarily within the framework of theatre-making, as a way to articulate objects' and materials' active performative input to that process; in the second half, I move into the analytic mode of puppeting, using it to draw out symbolic and affective aspects of events around me that contain equally vital, if less consciously employed, performing objects. Puppeting provides a thematic joining of each of the disparate sites that each chapter explored, and serves to present both an anti-hylomorphic philosophy of making and a fresh mode of approaching analysis of the contents of public events.

I remain in the mode of maker, working with materials and observing other makers' approaches, in the second and third chapters. Here we see the critical *and* creative application of Jane Bennet's notion of "strategic anthropomorphism," which she argues, "can catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations" (*Vibrant* 99). Puppeteers engage with this sensibility as a matter of course because it is the crux of their art form; they present objects *as* subjects, abolishing distinctions between the terms. More than merely mimetic, puppetry also activates our human tendencies toward pareidolia and anthropomorphizing. In this way, puppetry allows us access to the experience of the sympathy that always already exists between people and things. Puppetry, then, leads to a way of seeing, experiencing, *and relating to* materiality. I explore these ideas in the communal experience of working with the anti-capitalist Bread and Puppet Theater in Chapter Four and in my own process of adapting proto-capitalist fairy tale "Jack and the Beanstalk" into the anti-capitalist "Jackie and the Potato Plant" in Chapter Five.

Puppeting, in the process of making as experienced from within these contexts of theatrical production, opens the individual perspective to the object performances that are always right in front of us, if only we noticed. That experience led to the question: would happen if we were to “read” our relationships with the world's materiality in terms of performance – if we were to read the objects and materials in our non-theatrical environments as fellow performers? This is not a practice that can reasonably be maintained all the time, just as we cannot constantly focus on the sensations coming through the soles of our feet while walking. But it is a mode of perception that can be activated, from time to time, for more than artistic strategizing or performance-building; it can help us see the world in a way that makes us feel some empathy for the things around us. Heightened performative moments bring puppeting into the realm of the observable and tangible; the specialized atmosphere of events like the All Souls Procession in Arizona, as explored in Chapter Six, facilitates the perceptual shift necessary to move into puppeting as an analytic practice because of the mutual, communal influx of individual performances of grief and mourning into public space. In the course of this event, each participant engages in communal puppeting, creating a deeply affective cathartic, collective moment built on performing objects.

The problem with puppeting is that, as in Goethe's poem “The Sorcerer's Apprentice,” sometimes an enchantment is not so easily undone. Having enchanted things, I began to see potential performing objects everywhere. While this filled my comfortable surroundings with incipient theatrics for a short, inspiring time, as soon as I stepped into less comfortable territory, I recognized a fuller range of possibilities than I had naively expected to encounter. For, when the ongoing object performances in which we are enmeshed come into focus, we are confronted with the brutal realities of mass consumption and abject poverty, pollution and climate change,

political upheaval and a military industrial complex that drives interminably onward thanks to the participation of the objects we manipulate and whose manipulation we accept (and even, as in the case of our endlessly interconnected devices, welcome). Puppeting is a practice of bringing focus to the roles of our materials and objects, and how we use them to control ourselves and each other. The Anthropocene (or Capitalocene, as Donna Haraway clarifies) era in which we live is a direct result of relentlessly ignoring the world's deeply intertwined human and non-human materialities in preference to materialistic gains. Faced with the destruction all around us, which is of our own making, all we can do is attempt to live with the consequences of our actions; puppeting gives us the tools, not to undo the damage, but to recognize and reckon with it. Puppeting does have the potential to allow us to reframe, to look again, and to see unexpected beauties in the midst of the mess. Bennett, Holloway, Ingold, and all proponents of the bright end of enchantment believe it is necessary for thriving, even if it means we have to accept the dark end as well. The latter half of the thesis employs puppeting to examine much more fraught public and political arenas than the first four chapters.

The final three chapters use puppeting to access the accreted meanings of contemporary object performances in heightened moments of political and social tension; the immediacy of a recent performative moment placed beside the long history of enchanting object performance practices shows how important it is *not* to overlook the depth of our object performances and their historic and ongoing potency, their power to enchant us in all kinds of ways. My exploration of the use of effigies in European history provides deep context and clarifies the resonance of their contemporary usage, as powerfully exemplified by the recurring controversies around performative installations of effigies of Barack Obama during his presidency. In that chapter, and

in the following chapter about the campaign for abortion rights in Ireland in 2018, I approach an endemic historical conceptual placement of people on a continuum with non-human materiality, not from a humanist perspective that merely condemns that tendency, but from a new materialist, puppeting perspective that elucidates and obviates its operations.

The particular examples that I work through in this thesis, from the enchanted space of making to the contested space of political action, together cohere into the development of puppeting as a critical tool. It then becomes possible to recognize the object performances taking place at the heart of so many of our cultural scenes. A salient example arises in anti-war protests of the USA in the 1960s.

The Power in the Flower: A Parting Example of Puppeting in Action



Fig. 25. Boston, Bernie. *Flower Power*. Oct. 21, 1967, first published in the *Washington Star* (now defunct), en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=37905458.

In the context of American protest culture, performing objects have been particularly associated with the radical left ever since the 1960s. As scholars L.M. Bogad and David Graeber have argued, an effective protest *is* an effective dramatic performance. Bernie Boston's iconic photograph, "Flower Power," documents one particularly effective performative moment enacted during the 1967 March on the Pentagon, in which 50,000 protestors stood off against 2,500 armed paratroopers and military police outside the headquarters of the American Defense Department. Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, a member of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, is credited with popularizing the use of flowers, toys, candy bars, and other innocuous items to ensure the establishment of defiantly peaceful, theatrical atmospheres in protest actions. The image of the young man placing flowers into the barrels of rifles pointed directly at him has come to represent, not just the March on the Pentagon, not just the antiwar movement of 1960s America, but the enchanting spirit of peaceful resistance.

It is what Bogad would call an "irresistible image," one that is "so compelling or beautifully troubling that even one's ideological opponents must reproduce it" (32). Even though the intentionally light- hearted actions of the protestors (which included an attempt to levitate the Pentagon and exorcise it of demons with the power of group meditation) were scorned by the establishment and the more serious- minded alike as petulant, juvenile, and, worst of all, *unpatriotic*, "Flower Power" has eclipsed that narrative over time. What the image proves is the power of the performing object in political action, the strength of the symbolic in material form. Of all the iconic images to come out of this turbulent era, "Flower Power" is one of the few that does not depict horrific violence. Instead, it features something quite fragile, a "crack" in the machinery of capitalist warfare, that is no less effective now than it was in real time.

As Teemu Paavolainen writes, an irresistible image “may just become even more powerful as its specifics begin to fade from cultural memory: as the image itself becomes even more independent from, and indifferent to, the realism of what actually happened – in a word: *theatrical* – and the persons depicted, closer to the anonymous mask that anyone can relate to” (233). In the case of “Flower Power,” this is certainly true; the reality of the day is no longer of central importance; that the protest included hundreds of arrests and the use of tear gas, that the danger was reduced because protestors were predominantly middle-class white youth, that many of the soldiers were at least somewhat sympathetic to their cause – none of these details affect the power of the image. Even the individuals are unimportant, most of them wearing “the anonymous mask” from the outset because every face in the photo is obscured. We can *almost* see the young protestor’s face as he places a single carnation into one rifle barrel, and we can *almost* see the young soldier’s face as he seems to be pulling flowers from another, but their eyes are covered in both cases, which conceals their identities, blocks the fullness of their facial expressions, and hides the specificity of their experience. In fact, the people are not really the subject of the photo at all. The true focus, centered in the image as if in the eye of a storm, is an object performance: the encounter between flower and gun.

It is a meeting that overflows with symbolism. The flowers, with their myriad positive associations, rupture the frame in which the guns, with their singular purpose, operate. Flowers memorialize, celebrate, beautify, honor, and inspire. Guns intimidate, dominate, destroy, and kill. For the meek, humble flower, to suddenly penetrate the powerful, violent gun is actually a radical proposition. One interpretation of the action may be that the flowers render the guns non-

threatening by making them appear ridiculous, repurposing them as vases. However, a more irreverent reading only requires us to attribute to the flowers and guns their *most* obvious associations: in Western cultures, flowers are symbols of femininity and guns are symbols of phallic power. Therefore, to invoke the old binaries, “feminine” nature here challenges “masculine” technology. The object performance can be seen as an emasculation of the machinery of war, even a rape. However, based on the gentle and relaxed position of the young protestor's hand, the effect is something closer to a material incarnation of the phrase “make love, not war” (though the message of “fuck the war machine” is still clear). The general consensus that the protestor in the picture is a teenage George Harris, who would go on to become an active member of the San Francisco drag scene known as Hibiscus, delightfully deepens the subversiveness of the act. It is a prime example of a refutation of what Bogard calls the “hegemonologue,” the unending stream of hegemonic discourse, encapsulated in the unexpected juxtaposition of performing objects, each laden with meaning.

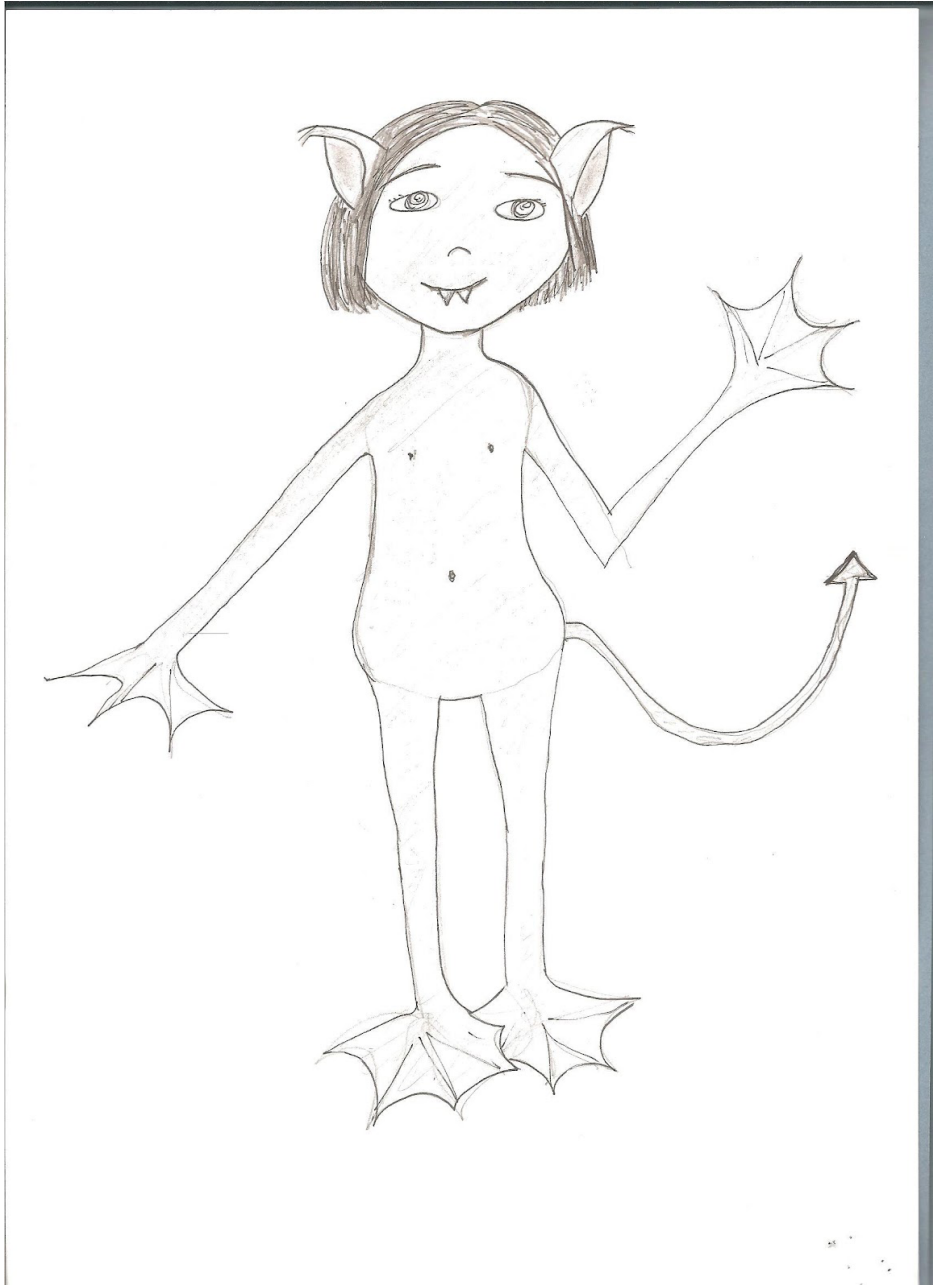
The flowers remind us of temporality ('gather ye rosebuds while ye may'). They speak without words, disarmingly, communicating the forethought of the gathering, the intention of the giving or the placing, and the miracle of the fact that they grow and exist at all in this world we inhabit. They are reminders of the processes of the earth, the interaction of soil and seed and sunlight and water. Within “Flower Power,” they are the opposites of shields, welcoming instead of defending, offering a world based on entirely different rules, a flower-world alongside the gun-world.

These two worlds continue to coexist, as was poignantly demonstrated in a news clip that went viral after the November, 2015 terror attacks in Paris. Cafes, restaurants, and a football stadium were targeted with mass shootings and suicide bombings. The clip shows a father and son discussing what has happened, the little boy fearing that they will have to leave home to avoid the danger, the bad men with their guns. The father comforts him by pointing out how many flowers have been brought to the sites of the attacks. “But flowers don't do anything,” the little boy says. “Of course they do, look – everyone is bringing flowers. It's to fight against guns,” his father tells him. He explains that the flowers and the candles are there to remember the people who are gone. “The flowers and candles are here to protect us?” the boy asks. His father says yes, and the reporter on the scene asks if he feels better. “Yes, I feel better,” he says (“Inspiring Father” 00:21-1:26).

The little boy is right that flowers do not do anything. But his father is also right. Flowers provide an alternative to despair to the humans that enlist their aid. They interact with the social and symbolic systems we inhabit, reminding us down the years that all is not entirely lost, that there can still, somehow, be hope. Paradoxically (according to traditional frameworks), *things* remind us of our humanity, and can bring us back our interconnectedness with the material world when we recognize our collaborative performances with them. This particular example is a private, individual experience of the flowers performing as a protective charm, something that allows the little boy to feel less fearful, and reenter the world. Performing objects that we *create* have a different part to play; rather than entry points back into the world, they are tools we can use, even in small ways, to make the changes we need to see in our surroundings.

Appendices

Appendix A: Vodníčka Original Idea Sketches and Supplementary Images



Front view of early sketch by author, May 2015.



Side view, early sketch by author, May 2015.



Myself (far right) and colleagues practicing with our finished marionettes. Photo courtesy of Mirek Trejtnar, Aug. 2015.



Final marionette after adaptations based on puppet bodies in the workshop. Photo taken by author, Nov. 2015.

Appendix B: "Jackie and the Potato Plant" Working Script and Supplementary Images

PROLOGUE:

Narrator: Hello there, out there! Are you ready for a story? Well do you know the story of Jack and the Beanstalk? Well, this isn't that story at all! No! This is Jackie and the Potato Plant! Very different story altogether! Here's Jackie's father's farm – yes, yes, yes. Now, Jackie's father is very sick, I'm afraid, and can't till the fields anymore – Jackie has to keep the farm all by herself, poor thing! Do you have to do chores? You don't? You do? What do you do? Well, Jackie had to do EVERYTHING! But she was only a young thing, and even the best farmer in the world has no hope of growing anything if there's no rain. And, when our story begins, there had been no rain for many months...

Music

SCENE 1: DAILY LIFE



Jackie's father admonishing her for not milking Mooney. Author and Michael O'Donnell. Still taken from first performance recording taken by *author*, 4th Aug. 2017.

Jackie's world stage: Mooey is mooing occasionally, trying to grab grass but there ain't none.

Jackie's Dad is in the house, calls Jackie from off. Coughs. He leans out of the window and calls again. He holds his hand out of the window

Dad: Hm... still no rain.... Mooey, have you seen Jackie?

Mooey: Moo (No I don't know where she is, haven't seen her in ages)

Dad: JACKIEEEEE!!!! (cough cough)

Jackie appears at the bottom of the stage (floor? Partway up?) and climbs up the side.

Jackie: I'm here I'm here I'm here

Dad: Where have you been young lady?

Jackie: I was climbing the trees down by the river and you can see all the way to –

Dad: Jackie, we've talked about this a thousand times! You can't go around climbing trees and all that carry-on -- there's too much to be getting on with here! (cough cough) Have you collected the eggs from the chicken house?

Jackie: Not since we sold the chickens... (aside) and the chicken house.

Dad: Ah..yes... have you collected the spuds from the THING? (cough cough) Jackie: There's none left, Dad. Same as yesterday (aside) and the *day* before. Dad: Has Mooey been milked?

Jackie: Ahmmm... no, Dad, I'm sorry, I'll do it now, I will, I'll do it now.

Dad goes inside, coughing, and Jackie goes to milk Mooey and tries and it's a struggle. A small drop. Dad comes to the window with the coin box, opens it, a moth flies out. He shakes his head and sighs.

Dad: Any milk to take to market, Jackie? Jackie: No, there's only just enough for us, Dad.

Dad: Well, then, take this. My pocket watch for my outstanding military service. I've been keeping it especially, it's the last thing I have. But it should keep us fed for another while anyway....I just hope it rains.... Oh, go on now and fetch as much as you can for it, Jackie.

He gives it to her, and off she goes to market.

SCENE 2: THE DILEMMA

Day-to-night transition

Next day, Jackie comes out of the house and climbs up the side. She stretches and yawns, and decides to be a pirate.

Jackie: I'm the pirate king! Get ready to walk the plank, ya scurvy divil, ya! Why I'll swab the decks with you!

Dad: Jackie!! Are you up on the roof again?? Come *down here* – it's too dangerous *up there!* You've the life frightened out of me.

J: Awww, Da-aaad – here, I'll come down.

She scrambles down the side of the house. D sees her, panics.

Dad: No, Jackie – be careful, girl!

She arrives in front of him.

Dad: Oh, you should have been born a monkey. Jackie, what about your chores? Have you milked Mooey today?

Mooey moos

J: Ahmmm... no, Dad, I'm sorry, I'll do it now, I will, I just –

Dad: Jackie, it's no use – Mooey never gave much milk, but if you miss days in a row she'll stop completely –

J: I'm sorry, Dad!

Dad: I know, my love, but I'm afraid with this drought, we have nothing left to send to market except for... Mooey. (cough cough)

Mooey moos

J: What? No! How can you say that?

Mooey moos

Dad: I'm sorry, Jackie. There's nothing else we can do – it's decided now. Take her to market and fetch whatever you can for her. Now that's that now.

J: I won't, Dad!

Dad: Oh I never heard such talking back in my life! What did I ever do to deserve you, Jackie!? *All* the other little girls are well-behaved and do their chores! If only your mother were still here, I'd....I'd... (sniffles, turns into coughing)

J: Oh, no no Dad, don't cry... Here, look, I'll take Mooey. See? I'm taking her. C'mon, girl.

Mooey moos.

Sad music, house transitions into woods after D goes inside, Jackie sadly begins to lead Mooey to market. A sign that says "To Market" maybe?

SCENE 3: THE POTATO SELLER



Jackie meets the Narrator. Photo courtesy of Anne-Sophie Cornelius, 2020.

Potatoseller *slides into view, perched up in a tree.*

Narrator: Now how did I get up here? And more importantly, how do I get back down? Help! Oh help.

Jackie: Hello? Who's that, who's there?

Narrator: Up here!

Jackie: Oh! Hello!

Narrator: Hello, dear! You don't happen to have something like a ladder on you, do you? Jackie: Oh, no... I'm afraid not –

Narrator: It's just that I've gotten myself into a little bit of a pickle up this tree – I can't seem to get back down again!

Jackie: Oh dear! Here, let me help you!

Jackie climbs up the tree and helps P down. They get to the ground.

Narrator: Thank you, little girl!

J: Of course, I'm glad to help. Welp, I must keep on to market. Come on, Mooey. Narrator: Why are you headed to market with that fine Bo-gheall?

J: Bo-gheall?

Narrator: The cow, dear! Why haven't I just been looking for a lovely cow like that...

Jackie starts crying

Narrator: What's wrong, dear?

Jackie: I have to sell my...my...Mooey! And I don't want to! And it's all my fault! And she's my only friend...!

Mooey and Jackie weep into each others' arms

Narrator: Hush, hush, hush now, my dearie --

Jackie and Mooey weep even more hysterically

Narrator: Quiet you two or I won't be able to do anything to help!

Jackie: (sniffing) Oh nobody can help – it's too late now! It's just that all I want to do is climb and climb and climb trees and rocks and walks and everything, until I can see the sky and everything looks so far away... but that's the problem – it's all I'm good at! I can't be a farmer, I'm no good at it – and that's why I have to sell Mooey – I just can't get my head out of the clouds....

Narrator: Well, my dear, let me tell you, sometimes our greatest weaknesses are our greatest strengths in disguise.

Jackie: Is that the moral of the story, then? Narrator: Well, it's one of them, yeah.

Jackie: So, wait, do we even need to keep going with the show then? Narrator: We're still only setting up the story, Jackie. Now, stay on script.

Jackie: Right, sorry, where were we... Ahm, I don't know what you mean, mysterious lady.

Narrator: I can see that you're a good sort, Jackie – sher, didn't you get me out of yonder tree? And because you did me a good turn, I'll do you a very special deal. (P shows J her basket) Do you know what these are?

Jackie: Well, sure, those are seed potatoes. We had some but they didn't grow because there was no rain this year.

Narrator: What if I told you that these can grow without any rain at all – all these need is the light of the full moon. And (she licks her finger and holds it up, then nods), the full moon is this very night. How lucky we ran into each other.

Jackie: But how can anything grow without rain –

Narrator: And I'll give you these magical seed potatoes in exchange for young Mooey here. (Jackie gasps, and P hurries on) Just until you can buy her back from me – I have need of a fine little cow to help in my garden. And if you do as I say, Jackie, then you'll be able to buy her back sooner than you could possibly imagine.

Jackie looks at the seed potatoes and back up at P.

Jackie: You're sure they're magic? Narrator: Absolutely!

Jackie: ... Alright...

Jackie takes seed potatoes and P takes Mooey, who moos.

Narrator: (heading off – drifting, floating? Sort of mysteriously, lights transitioning or something)
Be sure to plant those by the light of the full moon tonight!

Jackie: (looking at the potatoes, sort of dazed) Yeah....Uh-huh....

Scene transition happens sort of around Jackie.

SCENE 4: JACKIE'S SHAME

J: Dad Dad Dad you won't believe what happened – I met a woman up a tree and she gave me these magical seed potatoes and she'll let me buy Mooey back when we sell all the potatoes and they're magic so they'll grow in the light of the full moon and and and

Dad: Jackie! What are you on about? What have you done? Didn't you get anything at all for Mooey? Jackie: I told you, Dad, I got these magical seed potatoes –

Dad: Ah Jackie I never thought you were the sharpest pencil in the box, but I never thought you'd be so foolish as to believe some codswallop like that from a biddy in the woods! (cough cough)

Jackie: No, no, Dad, it wasn't like that – she was strange and sort of glowy and these are magical, she said so!

Dad: I'll show you what I think of magic like this!

He tosses the potatoes off the stage.

Jackie: Dad!

Dad: You go to bed without supper tonight, Jackie!

Jackie stomps away angrily.

Dad: And so do I. (cough cough)

SCENE 5: GROWING

Music. Potato plant grows. Maybe Narrator floats in and sort of waves her arms & watches? Maybe she comes up after Dad and says, "Poor Jackie...and her father....but at least potatoes are resourceful plants...." And then she does the wavey thing?

SCENE 6: CLIMBING

Sounds of morning. Jackie comes out, rubbing her eyes and yawning. Reacts to plant ("wowww"). Nearly calls her Dad, but figures screw him. Talks to herself "I wonder if I could..." and tests the stalk, then begins to climb. Climbs. Music.

SCENE 7: THE CASTLE

The Giant appears at the window, looking at his potted potato plant.

Giant: Hm, I don't remember planting you. (He waters it anyway). Coming up a treat, *though*, aren't you, little plant?

Giant sort of pats plant, sighs contentedly. There is a crash from offstage. Giant is clearly frustrated.

Giant: JIM?? What are you up to now, you tiny little *grumble grumble*

Giant exits to get Jim. Jackie appears up the potato plant stalk (should some dirt pop out?). She is amazed at her surroundings, of course. She measures herself against the plant pot, maybe the watering can. When she hears the Giant giving out to Jim, she hides on the far side of the pot.

Giant: Of all the diminutive, miniature... Jim, we've talked about this a thousand times! When you can't reach something, you have to ask me – you can't go climbing all over everything because.... (waiting for Jim to fill in the blank; they've said this to each other a lot, obviously).

G sets Jim down on table. Jim: Because I'll break things. *G sits at table.*

Giant: That's right, and what if you break something into a thousand pieces? What if there was a shard of glass the size of your whole miniscule self and you –

Jim: Dad, I know, I know, I'm sorry, I just wanted to try on my own –

Giant: But you can't do it on your own, Jim!

Jackie: (aside) Poor Jim.

Jim: Did you hear something? Giant: What?

Jim: Nothing...

Giant: Do you smell something? Jim: What?

Giant: Hm, no... couldn't be... you can't smell that, Jim? Jim: I don't smell anything, Dad!

Giant: So to top it off, my infinitesimal son hears things and has no sense of smell! Why me? All the other giants have *giant* sons. My parents *both* told me not to marry an elf, but did I listen?

Jim: Dad....

Giant: If your mother were still here, Jim, I...I.... (sniffles)

Jim: *Dad*, Dad, it's alright... here – don't you want to count your gold? Jackie: (aside) Gold?!

Jim looks around but doesn't say anything about hearing Jackie this time.

Giant: (shaking off his emotion) Ah, yes, right, good. Bring it here, Jimmy boy.

Jim pushes the bag/chest of gold over to the Giant, with difficulty. Giant rubs his hands together – he loves counting his gold, you see. Giant takes out gold a piece at a time, Jim stacks it, they both count – they get up to 5 (is the Giant really bad at counting? Can the audience help?) and there's a loud honking from offstage.

Giant: (calling) Goosey? You alright? Come on, Jim –

G picks up Jim and they exit together. Jackie leaves her hiding spot and comes out onto the table. She looks in the treasure chest.

Jackie: Ohhhhhh... there's so much; surely they wouldn't miss just one piece of gold...

She pulls one out, freezes.

Narrator: (to audience) Now, I know what you're thinking! Stealing is wrong – Jackie knew that! But she also knew that one piece of gold would feed her family for longer than she could even imagine. Now I don't condone theft, and I'm sure Jackie wouldn't either, but we're not here to make value judgments, we're just here for the story, right? Very good, carry on.

Jackie begins to move again, puts the piece of gold in her pocket. She notices the Giant's bowl. She makes a hungry noise and goes to it. She leans over the bowl and pulls out a giant lettuce leaf, tomato slice, then sticks her head in and makes gobbling sounds. She comes out, wipes her mouth with one hand, and smoothes herself. Sound of commotion from offstage? Something prompts her to leave – she climbs up to the window and hops down the potato plant. When she gets back to her house, she calls, "Dad! Dad! You'll never believe what I found!!"

SCENE 8: THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE BOURGEOISIE

Narrator: And everything began to look up for Jackie and her father.

Music.

Narrator: They got Mooey *back*, to start with. (Mooey appears and moos). And they made repairs that the house had needed for ages...and time passed....

With musical accompaniment, the house is transformed. Maybe there are trees to show a different season? Flowers fall off the potato plant....

D comes to the window, with his nice cardigan showing.

Maybe Jackie, in her jumper now, waters the potato plant or tends it somehow? Looks up?

Then we have the same as before with his moneybag and the moth.

Dad: JACKIEE!

Jackie: Dad?

Dad: Jackie, my girl, we are ruined.

Jackie: Ruined?

Dad: Ruined! The gold is all gone and we've had precious little income with the drought as bad as it is. I saved as much as I could for as long as I could, but with no more money coming in from the farm....

Jackie: (sad) I thought gold like that would last forever.

Dad: Oh, nothing lasts forever, Jackie. I don't know what we can do except sell Mooey again.

Mooey moos in protest.

Jackie: No, no, no, Dad, we can't, I won't part with her again.... I.. I'll figure something out...

Dad: Oh, Jackie, no more talk of castles in the sky and giants and their sons – I don't know what could have gotten into your head, my lass, but I won't listen to it all again! (cough cough)

Jackie: But, Dad!

Dad: No, no, no – Jackie, I don't want to lose Mooey any more than you do, but all we have left are our jumpers, and winter will be here soon! (cough cough)

Jackie: Just give me until tomorrow, Dad, please!

Dad: Oh, well...alright, Jackie, but there's nothing left to eat tonight. So it's to market tomorrow, first thing!

D closes shutters and we hear coughing? Jackie stands alone, looking at potato plant and upwards. Sighs.

SCENE 9: GOLDEN EGGS



Jackie and Jim meet. Author and Michael O'Donnel. Still taken from first performance recording taken by author, 4th Aug. 2017.

Music. The goose does a dance and lays a golden egg.

Jackie climbs the plant. Appears in the castle window. No one is around. She climbs down onto the table and sees the Giant's bowl. She goes and sees that it's spaghetti, which she begins to slurp up.

Suddenly, she hears the goose honk and a crashing sound – and the Giant roaring “Jim, look out! You can't ride a goose, even if you are half its size!”

Jim calls back, “But look, Dad, I'm doing it! No hands! See?? Whoa, Goosey, wait, Goosey, Goosey no– Aaahhhhhh!!”

Jim comes soaring in and lands on the table by Jackie – he's holding three golden eggs, which he drops. She has frozen. He groans, tries to sit up properly. The two lock eyes, and now Jim freezes too. She has spaghetti hanging out of her mouth. She wipes it, not moving any other part of her body. Is there then a chase? An attempt at escape? They can be on either side of the bowl, Jim can be like “Have at you!” He can grab her foot when she tries to climb away? Maybe this dialogue happens with his hand on her foot as she's trying to climb back to the window?

Jim: It was you! You're the thief! I knew I wasn't hearing things! Who are you?

Jackie: I'm not a thief, not really, we were just hungry and the lady gave me the seed potatoes and and and... and I'm Jackie – are you Jim?

Jim: Yeah.

Jackie: You're not so small as your Dad said, you know. I think everything here is just really, really big. Jim: That's not true – I've never even met anyone as small as you before.

Jackie: Well, where I come from, I'm not small at all, I'm just the right size! Jim: Where's that?

Jackie: Down that potato plant.

Jim: Huh?

Jackie: The one in the window.

Jim: You're crazy.

Jackie starts to laugh.

Jim: What's so funny?

Jackie: Oh, just that you don't believe me about where I'm from, and my Dad doesn't believe me when I tell him where I've been! Nobody believes a word I say!

Jim laughs with her, not really getting it.

*There is commotion from off and Giant saying "Good Goosey, good girl. I won't let Jim bother you any more... *sniff sniff* What's that I smell?"*

Jim: Oh, *you'd* better get out of here, Dad wouldn't like it if he found you here. Hurry!

She scrambles up and nearly gets in the plant pot, but the Giant begins his next line-

Giant: FEE FIE FO FUM

Jim: Too late.... Hide!!

Jackie hides on the other side of the plant pot again.

Giant: I SMELL THE BLOOD OF A.... (sniffs) OF A LITTLE HUMAN!

Jim: Dad, what are you getting all excited for? I don't smell anything – come on, let's count how many eggs Goosey laid.

Giant: No, no, son, FEE FIE FO *FUM*!

Jim: Dad, you know I can't deal with you when you get like this, come on now, sit down, there we go (coaxes G back to sitting, though G grumbles about it). Now, one, two, three

Giant: Three, three, three, fee, *feeee* fie fo fum –

Jim: Dad! Come on, focus! And there were two others from yesterday, so that's three plus two, and that equals..... (help from audience?) Five!



Jim and Giant count together. Michael O'Donnel, and Alex Hindmarsh. Still taken from first performance recording taken by author, 4th Aug. 2017.

Giant: Five, five, five, five, *fee* five, fee fie fo...

Jim: Dad! Snap out of it! You're a great, big, mad yoke of a giant!

Giant: WAUGH! There'll be no supper for you tonight, then! (giant knocks over the bowl?)

Jackie looks over begins to approach Jim, as he puts the bowl back to rights.

Jackie: My dad sends me to bed without supper sometimes, too.

Jim: ...I don't think he'd get so angry with me if I weren't so small.

Jackie: Well, I think you're just right.

Pause for them to have a moment.

Jim: You *did* steal from us, though.

Jackie: I'm sorry. And I'm even sorrier because I came back to take more.

Jim: What?

Jackie: I thought one piece of gold would last forever, but money seems to just disappear. And since the drought has been so bad for so long, we really don't have anything to take to market, and nothing to eat, and I don't want to sell my friend Mooey – you'd love her, she's the best cow.

Jim: Oh, I've heard of cows! But I've never seen one...

Jackie: You could come and meet her – she's very friendly! I had to sell her before, so we'd have enough to eat, and that's how I got up here – sure the audience was here for the whole thing, wasn't it so? And now we've nothing left.

Jim: *Gosh. Well....* I can give you one of these... (Jim picks up an egg and gives it to Jackie).

Jackie: Wow! But, won't you get in trouble if you give it to me?

Jim: No no – our goose lays them all the time; I'm sure Dad won't notice.

Jackie: Thank you, Jim. I...thank you.

Jackie kisses him on the cheek.

Jim: Jackie? Will you come back someday?

Jackie: (stopping and turning back) Yes, if you like.

From off, G calls, "I don't care if there's no one there, I'll find this tiny human, I swear! FEE FIE FO FUM!"

Jim: Oh dear, you'd better run! Jackie: Goodbye, Jim!

Jim: Go on!

Jackie clambers up the window, into the pot, and down the potato plant. When she gets to the house, she says, a tad wearily, “Dad? Maybe you’ll believe me about the castle now...”

SCENE 10: THE ECSTASY OF GOLD



Jackie's father wants more gold. Still taken from first performance recording taken by author, 4th Aug. 2017.

Narrator: And this time, he did believe her. And he decided to enter into the stock market – and found he was actually quite good at it.

Music, changes to house. Mooey appears, sipping from a bright pink cocktail glass with a straw. D appears with a feather in his hat, also with a cocktail. Sunglasses?

Jackie just sits on the roof.

Narrator: But enough is only very rarely enough....

D pulls out the money bag and the moth flies out – D swats it, laughs at it triumphantly.

Dad: Not this time, poverty moth! JACKIEEEE!!! (cough cough)

Jackie: (without budging) What is it, Dad?

Dad: Returns aren't what they should be – you need to go back to that castle! And this time, bring the whole goose, not just one egg! Stocks in farming have bottomed out – I need to buy NOW!

Jackie: But we have plenty already...

Dad: Jackie, don't answer me back! Now up you go, young lady! And don't you even think of coming back without that goose!

Dad closes shutters? Coughs. Jackie sighs and slowly climbs down the house, drags her feet over to the potato plant, looks up. She begins to climb.

SCENE 11: ALL THE GIANTS DO IT

In the castle, at the table. Giant eating spaghetti.

Jim: Dad, do you think there's anywhere in the world where people are my size?

Giant: Not anywhere near here, Jim.

pause

Jim: I think I have to go and find it, Dad.

Giant: YOU? Out in this huge world on your own?

Jim nods enthusiastically.

Giant: PAH! Don't make me laugh!!

Jim is downtrod. The soil rustles up from the potato plant and Jim notices that Jackie's on her way. Grabs some spaghetti, which he wipes all over the Giant's nose.

Giant: Jim! What are you doing! Gerrof!

Jim: Uh, sorry, Dad, I guess you'd better go wash your face or something.... Giant: What's wrong with the lad... (he gets up to leave the room, wiping face). Jim: Jackie! Is that you there??

Jackie: Hallo, Jim. My dad's sent me back up again to get more, but I think he's just being greedy now—

Jim: Oh, it's wonderful to see you Jackie, but you really can't stay – after last time, my dad's been talking a lot about his younger days when he used to...eat people.

Jackie: ...Eat... people?

Jim: All the giants do it...

Jackie: Oh, Jim!

Giant, from off, calls out "FEE FIE FO FUM, I smell the blood of a tiny human! Be alive, or be dead, I'll grind her bones to make my bread!"



Angry giant appears. Author, Michael O'Donnell, and Alex Hindmarsh. Still taken from first performance recording taken by author, 4th Aug. 2017.

Jim: You need to go!

Giant storms in and points at the pair.

Giant: YOU! I knew what I smelled! I knew you were here! Jim: Dad, dad, be *reasonable*! This is my friend!

Giant: Friend?! A human?? Humans aren't friends, my boy – humans are *lunch*! (he grabs Jackie and puts her up on the hook – Jim and *Jackie* protest throughout.). Grubby, ugly, little humans – you'd never think they would taste so good! In soup! With lots of herbs and butter...mmmmmmmm..... I'll build up the fire, the lovely lovely stove fire....mmmmmmmm.....yessssss.....

Jim: *Dad*, you can't eat her! I won't let you! Jackie, here, I'll help you down!

They do a maneuver to get her down. Giant starts singing some kind of food song.
Jim: Oh, we're running out of time – you have to go back down the potato plant, *now*! Jackie: Come with me, Jim!

Jim looks around and does so. Giant enters and shouts “What the??” He fusses with the shovel, etc., to follow them down the potato plant.

SCENE 12: THE ENDING

Jackie and Jim arrive at the farm.

Giant: (from castle? From clouds?) Jim! You ungrateful, disobedient little creature! When I get down there, you’ll get a what for you won’t forget!

Jim: We have to cut down the potato plant so he can’t follow us down! Do you have a big knife or – Jackie: (grabbing axe out of stump) An axe?

Jim: Perfect!

Jackie hacks at the potato plant until it comes down. Giant’s face appears in the backdrop.



Giant tells Jim to go to his room. Author, Michael O'Donnel, and Alex Hindmarsh. Still taken from first performance recording taken by author, 4th Aug. 2017.

Giant: Curse you, little human, stealing my son and my gold!

Jim: Dad, stop it! Eat something else! Be nice to my friends! She's the only person who ever thought I was the right size – look at me down here, Dad! It's like I belong here – I'm not out of place at all!

Dad: Jackie! What's going on out there?

Jackie: Nothing, Dad! Just stay in the house, alright?

Giant: Jim, you get back up here right now and go to your room! Jim: No! Not until you apologize!

Giant: Harrrrumph.... I'm sorry...

Jackie: And you have to agree to let Jim come visit me sometimes!

Jim: Yeah!

Giant: Alright, alright, look, son, you come back up here and I'll let you take Goosey for a ride now and then.

Jim: Deal! I guess I'd better go home, so, Jackie.

Jackie: Alright, Jim. I hope you can visit soon.

Jim: Me too.

Jackie: I'm sad for you to leave.

Jim: Me too. But, Jackie, I had a great idea, just you wait, ok?

Jackie: Ok.

Jim gets on Goosey.

Jim: Goodbye.

Jackie: Goodbye.

Jim flies away.

Dad: Jackie? Can I open the window now?

Jackie: Yes, Dad, everything's okay now.

Dad: Jackie, girl, I heard everything – I'm sorry I sent you back up there, my dear. I've been a great big fool.

Jackie: It's okay, Dad – there's no way to get back now, though, so we're going to have to think of another way to get by.

Dad: We'll find a way, Jackie, don't worry. Who knows, maybe it'll rain soon.

Jackie: Maybe.

She looks up, down where the plant was, sad music, transitions into night. Jim appears with a watering can in the sky.

Jim: Psssst! Jackie! Wake up!

Jackie: (*coming out from house*) Jim? Is that you? Jim: Yeah! Look!

Jim pours confetti down.

Jim and Jackie together: Rain! *Things grow. Narrator appears.*

Narrator: That's nice, isn't it? Etc.

Appendix C: Interview Transcripts

Nadia Hagen (NH) Informl Interview Transcript:

Interviewer: Author (LB)

21 July 2016, 19.30, Tucson, Arizona. In person, recorded with Quicktime software. Author's transcription.

PART 1

LB: Could you please give me your name to start?

NH: My name is Nadia Hagen.

LB: Do I have your permission to record you and quote you? NH: Yes, you do have my permission.

LB: Thank you – First off, what drew you to this project?

NH: Well this project evolved, I mean it...it was started by Susan Johnson, who's a sculptor here in Tucson, but I was already drawn to projects that were similar. I think the real underground, do-it- yourself energy of it – and that people wanted to make something that was not just about entertainment, that wasn't just about having fun, that it had this deeper resonance, and really creating culture for themselves instead of just taking the culture that was handed to them, but actually evolving something else out of whatever parts were at hand

LB: And how has it evolved since you've been involved?

NH: Well, it's gone from 500 people to over 100,000 people, so that's a huge evolution – and then, the amount of infrastructure and administration that it takes to hold down the fort and create something that's still safe and still really responsive and something that doesn't get stale but also – I think that balance of perpetually going between order and chaos in any organization is the toughest thing – especially in arts organizations because chaos gives you really interesting results, but it's not sustainable; it doesn't give you the kind of order and infrastructure you need to keep something going year after year and keep it financially solvent. So I think that bouncing back and forth, that's the huge evolution, the amount of people strategy, management tactics, organization that we've had to go through to be able to keep the event really alive and really responsive, even while having to raise over 200,000 dollars – now, the budget used to be 2,000... it was just as hard back then, though, to get 2,000 dollars as it is now to get 200,000 dollars, it's funny...

We had to develop the systems to get the money. Now people can indie-go-go and people do for individual projects within the All Souls Procession – so they'll crowd fund for their particular workshops or their crews, so if a crew has an individual

thing they want to do (build a float or make costumes) people will crowd fund that way.

We're taking individual donations, so you could say that we're doing crowd funding, but we have to use different platforms now – so we're using non-profit data-management platforms, just a little bit different than indie-go-go, where you're tracking all your individuals giving little gifts – that's sort of for 1,000 people or so that are gonna contribute to something, and our donor base is a lot bigger than that.

So it's just different management, but it's basically the same thing – I mean the calls are the same thing, we use social media and we go on community radio and we do all those same things to ask people, but none of that stuff was in place when we started. And the idea within the culture, that many people can contribute a little to make something is a matter of fact now, it's embedded in the culture now – but when we started in the 80s, you couldn't get 5 dollars out of somebody because they didn't believe – they felt like you asking them for that, they might as well just burn it in front of you, might as well just take a lighter and burn it, like it was a complete and total waste of time for them to do that – like people just didn't believe in it, it was like it wasn't real, it was like Tinkerbell – it's really funny, that change of consciousness, how something is real because (it's kind of Orwellian) it's real because everybody makes a conscious consensus around that – like, that will be the reality.

So certainly in the 80s and 90s, when we were trying to create that kind of sense of consciousness around what you could do by everybody pooling a little bit of resource – that was so wild & crazy. People were like “Whoa, I don't even know what you're saying. Your lips are moving but I don't even understand you.” Yeah, and then we started like “You can donate on your phone – people were like WHAT?! And then you know donate online – it took people like three years to be like Paypal? You want me to *what?*”

It was really hard, and then we went through that whole revolution of really only nerds using the computer, and then 'Sending money on the computer? You must be out of your mind!' Like that whole consciousness is so different now, like the difference over that 30 years is just, you know from what people just go matter-of-factly, like yeah, sure, no sweat, I just bought this thing on Amazon and it's gonna come to my door' and how people felt about that in the 90s, they were like “use a computer to *buy* something?” Just, no.

People were like, “What? The feds'll be at my door and they'll put me in prison.” People were really, really suspicious of the medium. And it's funny cuz people now really probably should be more, because now there's just people trawling – I mean back then nobody was trawling for your stuff, they didn't think it was worthwhile...

LB: It's funny how things used to be so much more secure...

NH: Yeah, now it's a fish farm, easy pickings.

LB: Can you talk a little bit about your vision for the procession and how select a theme?

NH: I guess there's different... I don't have a process.... But there's different levels of visioning... So, I have a board and my board has like three main members on it (core members – one of which is my husband and technical director) and then we have maybe another 12 working board members, that are in charge of different areas – We don't bother them all year round because we don't need them all year round, people are busy... So there's a visioning that's the kind of thing like the organization, like what does the organization need and what do we want over the next 5-10-20 years and we do visioning sections and people talk about that, and right now as far as the big vision for MMOS, we are engaged in a development project that – there's gonna be an arts and cultural and retail center built on part of the lot where we hold All Souls – so that means that we'll be a year-round cultural arts generator, instead of just a once-a-year festival maker.

So we'll also do our festival once a year, but that'll give us the potential to curate and to promote other arts organizations and I want to focus on mostly local – but also because we do new circus and we've been doing it so long, we know lots of new circus troupes, and it's very very hard to produce new circus in this country unless you're very very wealthy or you're doing corporate events for people who have a lot of money that are promoting a product. So we want to have a venue where new circus can be presented. So, we're working on that, all the architectural drawings are done and they're going to start breaking ground in September, so that's a big deal – so that's a vision for the organization, for MMOS. And then as far as this year, visioning... it's kind of funny, the theme usually just kind of comes to me. I mean, I wake up almost every morning and I draw for an hour, sometimes two – so I have journals and journals filled with meanderings and ponderings and so I'll just kind of open myself up to what seem to be the themes or the kind of general flow of what – I kind of try to open myself up and take in everything – take in my dreams, take in politics, take in conversations that my friends are having, and get a sort of a feel for what this year is calling for.

So last year, a lot of what we focused on was racial justice and some of the black lives movement... A lot of it was criminal justice, racial justice – themes that were more political... I mean, I think death is political, you know, I think war is political, well I mean I don't think it is, obviously war is political...

LB: I'd love to hear how you think death is political!

NH: Well untimely death, I guess, would be political. I mean certainly in the United States all of our culture around violence is tied into an economy that is tied to a military industrial complex. So if you want to make all of your money off making weapons, there's got to be somebody to kill. They're not just going to sit in a storehouse, you're not just going to dock millions of dollars into missiles and

warheads and fancy flying machines and drones and then not take them out onto some kind of a battlefield, and blow people up. And in Tucson in particular it's really economic and political because we're the home of Raytheon. 90% of the weapons that are dropped in the Middle East are made in our backyard, [it's right in our backyard] – they're made right there, like Tucson is the heart, like we're one of the main manufacturers of weapons of mass destruction in the world. (Laughing) So it also kind of makes sense that we have a death parade. That's not such a far cry, is it.

Yeah, so different aspects of that I feel like reveal themselves in different ways. I don't really like hitting people over the head and I don't like insulting their intelligence, but I like strong images that people can thread together in ways that just give them an opportunity to change their perspective, to have a different perspective on the repercussions of the things we do in our culture, of the place we live – I mean, when we did our collaboration with Tribe Called Red and Nem-Catacoa (Tribe Called Red are First Nations from Canada and Nem-Catacoa aren't indigenous but they're tied to indigenous issues in Colombia) – that was very much tied to *place*, very much about the indigenous consciousness that is inextricably tied to the land, and that seemed really important. But it's almost like I just kind of listen to hear what needs attention, what needs to be said right now, what's asking to be said.

LB: Do you have plans for this year? So much has happened this year (2016)...

NH: Well I had already picked the theme for this year before all of this happened (the many videos of African Americans being killed by police that year). One perspective is that we've been pretty bloody and awful for a very long time as a species, the other thing is *now we videotape everything*. We videotape all of our acting badly – and there's an argument there: are we seeing more crime, or is there more crime... But the theme is the hunter and the hunted.

LB: Oh my god.

NH: Yeah, I'd already picked that theme. And I'm going to stick to my guns (wow, that's a funny thing to say here). The theme was tied really strongly to... I don't want to call it environmentalism, but other species besides people. I was really interested in the predator/prey relationship, not as it relates to people, so taking humans out of that equation. And going into, as far as you can, the really ancient relationships. And maybe not going anymore into the current mindset of humans -

LB: Maybe you don't need to.

NH: Well I want to go really far back, where you have the sense of the main predator – as with most animals, the main predators are female. They guys just kind of lay around, fat-asses, waiting for her to bring some shit back, or they steal it from her or something. But most animals, lots and lots of pack animals, are led by an

alpha female. Lots of exceptions of course, wolves have an alpha male and female. I think that the beginning of a lot of very ancient civilizations, really ancient cultures, there's a really interesting sense of the cyclical nature of predation. I have some sketches over here, but there's lots of frescoes in the ancient Middle East and there's a goddess and she's being devoured by cheetahs, like there's ones where her hands are on their throats, like she's holding them, like as if she's killed them, and in other frescoes, they'll be eating her – like on her shoulders, biting her. So I think that sense of hunting and predation and that kind of cycle... is also that cycle of natural life and death – you know to die and then become food for something else, you know whether you're being killed before your time or whether you're dying of old age and then still becoming fodder. I think that was so much more intrinsic in the consciousness, and where we are now, it's so far removed – it's so strange, and just has nothing really to do with those... and then people talk about violence as if it's built into the human equation, but I think it's not, not on the terms that we have it now. I think we've altered it into a place where it's unrecognizable, from what aggression or predation is in its natural cyclical place in the planet. Like I don't think we can all just become vegetarians – you know, I think we're trying to look for all these different ways at like what is that human beast?

And I think the way to have an understanding of what the human beast is to almost take people out of the equation and just look at other beasts, look at other predators, look at how they operate. And the way they operate is very different from the way we operate – we only take the best and the biggest; they take the weak. They serve the evolution by pulling out the ones that shouldn't survive – so they make the herd stronger, and we make everything weaker – and we're actually doing that right now, making everything weaker by taking – like there's no longhorn sheep now, because they just don't - they're grown up, they're mature, they're as old as the other ones, but they won't grow their horns anymore – because you grow them, you get killed. So they're like “oh, well we just don't grow them.” So now you have longhorn sheep with no horns. So that's what *we're* doing to evolution, we're doing this crazy, backassward thing...

So the theme actually – it's funny – a lot of it got spawned by my daughter when we she was very little – we had to do head-checks. We couldn't go anyplace where there was a head. And I'm sure you've noticed, in the southwest, there is no place you can go where there's not a head. You can't go to Walmart, you can't go to Circle K – there is no place you can go that doesn't have a head mounted on a wall, and so we toured the southwest for quite a few years and we'd always have to do head-checks – we'd walk in and make sure there was no head – if there was a head, she couldn't go in. So we couldn't use any bathrooms going across the United States, like rest areas don't have heads, thankfully, so you can usually go in most rest areas...

But what I thought was interesting about that was her reaction – she would completely lose it. Her reaction was so intense that we wouldn't even try to make her go into restaurants and stuff with heads, any place with heads, and I think the thing that was most interesting about it was that everyone else had ceased to notice,

but for her it was this thing that was just so in her face – it was so apparent to her, and so alive to her, and so unnerving to her, but this aspect of life that everybody else had just completely forgotten. Like, if you ask people now, 'are there heads,' people have to think about it... like, *are* there heads? If you ask like how many heads are in the bar you go and hang out in every night, they'd be hard-pressed to tell you how many heads there are in there, depending on the bar or coffee shop or wherever you're at... or even what kind of heads they are – so I thought that was interesting to, that sort of denial space that we have around our own predation, around our own hunter aspect. But as far as the different kind of things that I want to create onstage, I'm going to try to stay away from human characters. I want to keep it in the animal realm as much as possible, because I feel like once you enter a human character, it's really easy for everyone to have a moral high ground and to draw these really quick kind of black-and-white delineations, and that's not what I want - that's never what I want from the ceremony. I always want it to be evocative, never a resolution, never really some kind of moral conclusion. That's not where I want it to go.

LB: When I spoke with Melanie, she said themes have sometimes been colors or elements or things like that, so it sounds like it's becoming a place for exploring a particular aspect of death?

NH: Yeah, the last two years, that's kind of what I've gotten – these kind of, more narratively thematic than they were. We took 7 years and we went through every color of the rainbow, and those are obviously tied to different elements by their nature. I mean, if I felt like it was really important to go back to that as a way to find a theme, then I would. But yeah, so far stuff has been coming to me wholesale. I'm going with it.

LB: Why death?

NH: Do you mean as far as the All Souls' Procession?

LB: Yes.

NH: Well originally it was Sue Johnson's procession. So her father died and so it was a very personal way for her to come to terms with his death and she didn't want to just do it by herself. And she doesn't have any affinity for the church, so I think she was in a position a lot of people find themselves in, that religion or your immediate family have really crappy answers, like really inadequate solutions to these kind of emotions that get raised when someone passes – and I think especially when you lose someone who you *didn't* like. You know, it's one thing when you're like “Oh they were awesome,” and you can stand up and talk about how great they were and like, you're so sad that they're gone, they're in heaven, they're watching over you – but lots of people lose lots of people who fuckin' suck. They fuckin' sucked, and that is way harder – like you don't get revenge, we don't really get to take revenge on those people, so you have a lot of unresolved issues with people,

and then you do have to listen to people, too, talk about them as if they were so great and you know they weren't. And I think we just have really— I think that's very obvious - we've distanced death.

In the United States, certainly, it's very clinical – it's very far removed. Half the time you don't even see the body. I mean, you might see it, for a minute, or an hour or something, and it's gone. I mean, you don't dress it, you don't touch it; you don't deal with it. Most of us don't see our relatives die. It's a really unknown kind of a territory for us, but it colors everything. Like the difference between who you are before someone very close to you dies and after – that's a different person – it's a rite of passage, you've gone through this really intense right of passage and we have no cultural answers and no good cultural markers for it, and so I would say that's why death (I mean, there could be a very similar movement around birth, there could be a really similar movement around adolescence and marriage, you know all those things – and probably there need to be). But Sue started a ceremony for death and I felt that that was very much needed. And I guess I've felt like I had the tools to do it – like I knew what to do, because I had already been doing lots of tribal ritual kind of experimentation in music and bands and through rhythm and stuff.

LB: Can you talk about that a bit, too?

NH: I have a background in performance art, slash, it became underground tribalism in the 90s – so reviving or exploring a lot of those traditions of setting up a trance state through rhythm, and then creating a sense of ecstasy in people.

LB: Do you still do that in Procession now?

NH: People say it's still like that; it still has this arc. The things I've learned as far as how to build an ecstatic arc does hold – it's the same work as sex; it's an ecstatic art. So those things hold true through the Procession and I feel like I'm using everything I've learned along those explorations then, to do this. But in those situations, I mean one thing was that it was music, so it was ticketed, it was like a band – you go see them, so it also has this elitist thing; there's only so many people who are going to be exposed to that or invited to it or feel welcome to it – and what I wanted was, I wanted that sense of *that*, but available to everyone, so out in the street. And I'd already started doing performance experiments where we were out in the streets and we were using the backs of abandoned buildings and empty lots and stuff – and fire, the fact that I was doing fire, fire is such a great medium – I mean, you have light, you have heat, you instantly have these things, and you have something that people are drawn to, inexplicably, like they can't not look at it. So I kind of had all these elements and resources that I'd been experimenting with, so I started just building the closing ceremony for the Procession when Sue was still running it – and she'd run it for 7 years and didn't want to run it anymore, and I was really excited about it. And her thing was for it to be very intimate and invite-only, and me, like I wanted it to be really large and chaotic and crazy – which it is! Careful what you ask for.

LB: But the fact that it's grown so much speaks to the *need* you were talking about.

NH: Yeah, I think that sense of catharsis, or that sense of moving through... the sense of loss is really assuaged when you know that death is what connects you to every other human being in the world. Like you're going to have a lot of very different life experiences, but those pivotal places, those portals, the thing that will not change with any human being on the planet, no matter what – everyone will go, everyone will die. And everyone will experience the death of all the other people that they love in their life – everyone will experience that, and so, just walking down the street in that realization, in that sort of saying yes to that experience of being human, really heals a lot of shit. It really makes people feel so much better, because we really cordon off everything – you know, we take everybody 'oh, you had this thing happen – well, go off in the corner over there and be by yourself.' I might not get all this right, but they sent these psychologists to Rwanda after the genocide, and the people were like “Why would you do this to me? This makes me feel so much worse,” and that is interesting – a lot of our answers in western psychology and how we respond to trauma, they're bad answers. They're crappy answers, like it's not helpful.

Really, you're better off going to a rave – you are, you're better off going in a dark room with a ton of other people and doing some drugs and dancing around until you can't feel your feet. You're doing yourself more of a favor in that situation than to sit by yourself and try to pore over this matter – that just isolates you more, when the problem is that you already feel disconnected. And that's part of what death does, it chops off this thread, you have this thread to someone. And that thread can be really strong, you know, it can be built with many different things, but when that thread is cut, you have this disconnection and the disconnection's really painful, and what we do is we disconnect you more. We don't reconnect you to anything. And of course, music and dance and ritual and all those things, reconnect you to the community and reconnect you to the earth, inevitably. I mean, you have to reconnect all your strands down into the earth so you can heal.

And we just have bad answers for things in general, so I think death is a really big puzzle and it's really painful and Paul has very different answers, and I love a lot of the things he says about the Procession and how he perceives it and why he does it, and his answers are really different than mine, but one of the things he talks about and he says really clearly is that, you know, part of the reason that we have so much pain and violence on the planet is that we're trapped in the cycle of revenge because we don't know how to heal our own wounds and so we re-wound someone else because we're wounded. And so at some point you have to find some other way to stop that cycle and I feel like this is a way. This is a way that one community has come up with as a response, as a way to stop that cycle from continuing over and over again. I think death is a really good place to start, I mean it's a universal conundrum, right?

LB: You use lots of masks and costumes and puppets – and people contribute pieces of paper with people's names on them and things, so there's a lot of *stuff*, a lot of *things*.

NH: Yeah, there's some stuff.

LB: It's very physical, tangible, tactile *stuff*, so I wonder do you ever think about how that helps? What do those things do and why are they necessary or useful?

NH: Well I think they serve different purposes, certainly. I think the masquerade allows you to be a different thing, it allows you to transform yourself in that moment. And people love to use the *calaveras* from the Mexican tradition of *Dias de los Muertos* and I think – there's lots of things written about it and people have their own personal blog posts and they're really quite beautiful, about what it's like to put on that makeup – what it's like to be in the mirror and draw a skull on your own face and have that sense of “Yeah, that's gonna be me. One day I won't have this skin and I won't be me, and all these wonderful things that I have, all these trappings of life will be gone.” And it's quite a beautiful process, it's quite a beautiful thing to engage. And people do different kinds of masquerades, but I think what it does is it frees you, it liberates you, you don't have to be the person that you are every day. And even though I think we're better in the scope of what we consider to be normal and the freedom we allow people in their persona, but I think we still have some things where we're pretty narrow – you can definitely see that in gender roles, how narrow we are, we're like “girls wear dresses and have hairspray and lipstick and heels and boys wear a suit and tie and have short hair” - I mean, we're still so locked in to our little definers, and those are also persona. And if you feel forced to be into that, then it's a prison. And I think of how people love Halloween and people love cosplay, and people love those things because it liberates you, because you don't have to be stuck in this time and place, this gender, your age. You don't have to be defined by all those cultural parameters. You can be an elephant. You can be a polar bear. You can be a sumo wrestler – although, we have lots of funny things where – you know...

People go Mardi Gras and they go to these other things that are festal culture that are more a masquerade, that are more a *carnevale* like in Venice and Rio, and these different ones – and so they all have their different thrusts but ours isn't about Lent, it's not about decadence, or the libido necessarily - it's more somber, it's about taking stock, it's about things you've lost, people you've lost. So there's a different flavor to it, but we certainly use all those same devices, as far as people not being their day-to-day person. And if they want to be, that's fine. But to be liberated from that, to be given the choice to be whatever they want to be in that moment, to walk in that moment as something else if they want to. Oh yeah, we had some guy... I don't remember what he dressed as but it was something really inappropriate, really off-subject, something like 'captain viagra' or something like that, like he wore the same thing he'd worn for Halloween, and he came to All Souls' and people just sort of looked at him like “Yeah... that's not right,” but nobody gave him any grief, nobody

said anything to him, and I guess he'd come from New Orleans, he thought it was another parade, another thing that was like that. He wrote us this big, long letter of apology, that he was so mortified. Have you ever seen Drop Dead Gorgeous? With the prom...? It's like these girls and they're all in the beauty contest and they're given these assignments, it's like the bikini one and the talent one and stuff, and there's this one famous scene in there where she doesn't understand it and she gets it wrong and she's standing there with this cake on her head and she's crying and she's like "I didn't understand the assignment," and I feel like that's this dude, saying like "I just didn't understand the assignment." Like, it's okay, dude, you can make it up next year, it'll be fine. It was really funny - the letter is long, it's really intense. And it's great, I appreciate how much self-consciousness around it, to realize that people are mourning their grandmother, and you're in a fat suit. And people are looking at you like "...Was your loved one fat?" People are just like "Uh, ok." And then people, for the most part, are like, "However you want it – maybe it was, maybe that was your lover's favorite Halloween costume, and you wore it." So people are pretty unquestioning of other people's motives.

LB: That's really rare to find a space like that, isn't it?

NH: I think that's the thing I love most about it, is the level of tolerance. And our DJ last year, Philistine, he came from Spain and he does gigs all over the world, and he's a pretty intense activist, so his whole history comes out of the G8 protests, so he has a lot of different people that come to see him that are all about environmental justice and human rights, but he said he's never played for a crowd that is so diverse. He's never played for so many people that were so different – just from every social class, every race, every age. I mean, a lot of times because he plays – his genre is electronica – so then there's a whole age bracket of people that will never go to his shows. You don't usually bring your grandma to that – unless I'm your grandma. So there's a whole level of this really incredible inclusivity and we're really dedicated to that, that's super important to us... But then you asked about the masks and something else?

LB: Puppets and why do objects help people or do they...?

NH: The puppets – a lot of times people build those. So I think the act of creation, that hands-on, even just something squishy and you mold it, that playing god, that sense of being a creator, you can put all this emotion into that object, and I think that really is the original intention of objects. I mean of course there's a practical application to objects, but that's why we acquire them. That's why we want to create them and acquire objects, and to me – you can see, in this room, I have a thing about dolls – and dolls are puppets. I think that's part of it. That thing like "I'm god so I'm gonna make this little thing in an image of myself" which is fun. And imbue it with emotion.

I think humans are crafty mammals. I mean, we're the only mammals that really make little sculptures, little objects, really complex tools – so I think that there's so much tied up into our species that is about creating. And then again, we're really divorced from that. We have a lot of objects all around us that are made, not even by someone else now, that are just punched out by machines. So I think we have a vacancy there. There's a void there. Like I really appreciate that almost all my dishes come from a festival in Cochise that we go and we perform at, and it's ceramicists from all over the state, create things out of clay and then they dig out an enormous pit, sometimes it's several hundred feet long by 5 feet wide, and they pit-fire everything. They lay the pallets on top of everything and then they light it on fire and will do the lighting ceremony for that and then pull everything out and there's pots and all sorts of stuff. And they take a lot of the pieces that really stand out, the really superlative pieces – and those they tour in galleries all throughout the southwest and people buy them, but that level of craft – to reconnect yourself to that kind of creation, is really grounding and gives you this real sense of appreciation, and a connection to the person who made the pot, what it's made out of, how it's made, which we don't have a lot of.

I mean, if you're wealthy... I think there's a big gap right in the middle. If you're really wealthy, then you can pay for all these hand-made, custom, one-of-a-kind type of things, but if you're in middle America then you've got a bunch of crap from Target in your house, right? And then, you could get really hippy about it – like how much of that stuff is made from somebody's pain and enslavement and misery? Like how much of your shit is just filled with someone's misery. You can cut yourself off from it, but I think... I think all those things are harm for us. I don't think we *really* can, I think we *try* to cut ourselves off from it, but then I don't think we can. It makes all of us miserable – it makes us sad. I think to be able be the creator and to be the maker, and to be able to reconnect yourself to that part of your humanity is just so good for us.

LB: That resonates with what you said about reconnecting with other people, as well, after you lose somebody, getting back into the world.

NH: Yeah, and people talk about it all the time, that amazing thing where you look around and you see all the beautiful things that everyone in your community made. Like, they *made* these things, like you look around... that really kills me, that's kind of the thing, like I go out in the street and I'm like “Wow, someone's grandma just built this big, crazy skull mask and she covered it with flowers,” and people's costumes and the amount of time they take to do their faces... It's really inspiring, it's really like the best part of what people are. Whereas a lot of times you just see the crappy things people do. And certainly there's that, it's like, you know people and they're walking next to them in the parade – one of Paul's favorite stories is like a wheel falls off someone's float, and you go to help them, and you take your masks off to help them, and then you look at them, and you're like “I hate you! I know you – you're an asshole, you owe me money!” That's a really funny – Barbara Ehrenreich in her book *Dancing in the Streets*, talks a lot about the social tool that *carnevale* and

these festivals are – they're like a reset button for the whole community. They're that moment where you really can bury grudges, you can not judge people by how they look because inside their mask you don't know if they're black or white or if they owe you money – you don't know who that person is – and so there's that great social reset that happens during *carnevale*. And in those really more decadent, kind of libido ones, there's a reset – in Mardi Gras, I think too, serve's that purpose, where everybody gets sort of drunk and then everybody hugs and forgives everybody else and they kind of kiss and make up... and then build up animosity over the next year... Because that's also the nature of what it's like to be in a community with people! Is that cycle of people fucking each other over and then resolving it (or not).

LB: I've done mask work, and if it falls off, you have that moment of “oh no!” but the initial feeling for other people in masks is pretty sympathetic – the default emotion when you're in a mask and you're dealing with somebody else in a mask is pretty kind, it's not animosity.

NH: Yeah, that's interesting. You kind of have to suspend your judgments – and because everybody arrived in this space at this time because they have similar intent, or you assume that they do. They're here. And you assume that everybody's there with their heart on their sleeve because everybody's there to mourn something, so everybody's there in this place of vulnerability and sadness, and for the most part, people are so good to each other in that space. And that reflection is really... that, I think, has been more healing for the cops than anybody else. Because I've seen our cops – and our chief of police is one of the chief of police that got interviewed on NPR after the incident in Houston, and he's super progressive. I haven't gotten a chance to meet him, but that's been really interesting for me, because as part of the organization we do a lot of like the civic event permit, and the meetings, and the lead-up, and the security and all of that – and a large part of our budget (I mean almost half of our budget used to just go to TPB), so I was resentful (I still am a little resentful, but now they're a smaller part of our budget).

But they would be very anticipatory, like this is a huge crowd of people – they already had this mindset that was, especially the new guys, they would come into it with this mindset from their training about the mob mentality – like, when a lot of people get together, they're going to be *bad*. And, over years of having their superiors working the parade – and now it's been like 26 years, so there's all of this built up history and experience from people talking about what people *are* actually like at this event, *how* they are, *what* that mob mentality actually is, and it's not bad. It's not what they expected – and I think that's really nice for them. To be able to be in a huge crowd of people, and be able to watch people, for the most part, be really good to each other. And certainly, as far as law enforcement, that's not the face you usually get to see, you know people don't call you and be like, “My husband's being really nice to me – you wanna come over and hang out?” That's not what people do, they only call you when someone's being a douchebag. So it's funny, we have a lot of cops that really want to work the Procession – they *want* to be on that staff, they

tell us, like, “This makes up for my whole year, this restores my faith in humanity, to see people act this way instead” of how they usually get to see people act.

LB: That's awesome.

NH: Who knew? Who knew people could *not* be douchebags all the time? Surprise! They actually can be – but I think we don't give people good intents, we don't give them good reasons to get together. Like, go root for your team? So go stand opposite a bunch of other people rooting for the other team and yell at them? Okay, so that's your activity, eat really bad hotdogs and drink really crappy beer.

LB: Yeah, it's such an in-group/out-group mentality –

NH: Yeah, the *other* –

LB: Yeah, it's such a massive *othering*, sports events!

NH: Yeah, it's just like so we won't have civil war – people can just have their *other* and get out their frustration about the Indians that only wear one feather instead of two feathers... I don't know, I don't get that. I don't know, I don't really like church ladies, if I was going to *other* someone. Or maybe like Sarah Palin.

LB: Yes.

NH: That's still it, right? That's othering somebody.

LB: I guess. I guess it is.

PART 2 (after tea-break)

LB: Do you have any images – any important, profound ones that stick out from the past years? Things that have happened at the Procession, moments or experiences?

NH: Thankfully, we get most of our amazing and powerful images do get documented now. I stole a – basically an image – from Hood By Air, you know, HBA, he's a black designer, he does men's and women's lines, he makes very, very cool clothing. So he did this kind of nod to slavery and he made these beautiful plexiglass stocks, and I think they were carved with his logo, they have HBA on them. So I stole that – we carved copies of his plexiglass stocks – I should send him some pictures, actually, I think he'd really like it. I mean, I'm not selling them for thousands of dollars, I'm just using them in a performance... And we carved, I had 5 different words for each one – and the theme for last year could have been *otherness*, I didn't call it that, but that was a line that ran through it.

So there was *slave*, *enemy*, *addict*, so each one of the stocks had these words carved and my stilt group had their hands stuck in there. And they also had banners with these words on them sewn to the back of their long skirts, and there's a shot of a cop who's standing on the side of the road and he's talking, and two of them are walking by, and one of them says "slave" and the other says "enemy," and the font that I used, by accident, is exactly the same as the little square that goes across his back that says "police." It's a really good image. And somebody caught it, and they knew they got the gold star.

So good. Like labels, right, like we all had these labels, and that one we just take for granted that he's got this label slapped on his back, and that's what he is, and in the same font – it just really altered the perception of those different labels. I hadn't counted on that at all.

Last year went really smoothly. I made a decision to include, there's a circus here called Circus Amperean, and they do work with Tesla coils, so all their stuff is with electricity, like they stand on Tesla coils and they spin electric poi and they have these crazy special effects, and they have a Faraday cage that they put people in. So they have a whole act, and every years they've always come and been on one of our peripheral stages and just done their own sideshow, but over the years they've asked to be part of the finale, part of the ceremony – and I was always just like, I don't know how to make that work. And then this year, all the thematic was really about racial justice, about our criminal justice system, the targeting of black men in that system, just our sense of being punitive around wrongdoing or mistakes, and that cycle of violence. How we have violent answers for violent problems. So I touched on all those different things, and I was like, I don't know what to do with them, I don't know how to include them, and Paul was like, what about an electric chair. And he was like, wasn't that the first thing that occurred to you, and I was like no! That was *not* the first thing that occurred to me! And then I was like, wow, I don't usually do images that are so modern, even. Like, I just don't do images that are... I guess you could just call it *modern*.

Like it's not the violence of the image that bothers me, because I play with lots of violent images, but I don't usually place them in modern day. So last year was interesting because I did a couple of things that were placed in the modern world, as opposed to this fantasy world, this other world. But something that could actually be tied to a time and place... and we still mixed a little. We fried a woman. Um. We did it kind of 1930s-looking. She was really good. I was really impressed because they're all very young performers – not that young couldn't be, but young as in they haven't done a lot of performance, and they're not coming from performance or drama first, they're coming from the fascination with the mechanics of the Tesla coil, and then trying to build performance out of that (and that can be really difficult). And they did so well. And one of the guys that was working on the crew, when I brought in the storyboard and presented it to them and was like, this is what I want you to do, this is the part I want you to do – and of course everybody was really quiet because it's really kind of a dangerous image, like it could just be really off-putting, like people

could just be like, “Wow, I really hate you that you just did that to me. Like my grandpa died and I came to put something in the urn and you made me watch someone die.”

It could also be kind of stagey, like haunted-house – it's got the potential to really cheese-out, and I was like, this is a really dangerous image, this could really backfire. And then he quit, just from the storyboard. He said it was, to him, just completely repulsive, that I would want them to present this image. And then Carl, the director, he's totally this 90-year-old mad scientist, he's got this white hair and sticks out and he builds the coils, he's like a cartoon of what you think that guy would be – he's that guy, like he's absent-minded, he forgets things, it's so funny. So I talked to Carl and I was like, I'm not going to *make* your group do this, I was like have a discussion, ask everybody else how they feel about this and how it's going to be perceived and what you think about this, and he was like “We're in it! And that he got offended? That made everybody want to do it more.” And I was like, okay, radical old man, okay let's do it! And I expected to get a *flood* of letters, you know, I've done things that were *much* less, I think, triggering or obvious – I've done lots of things that people have gotten really offended by that I was like, why? What are you writing this stupid letter for? People write me stupid shit like, I couldn't see because I'm short and you should build bleachers. Like, have you ever been to the Macy's parade or any civic event? *I'm* short! That would be tough shit, that's not how it works. That's not how large, civic-scale spectacle works, not making any concessions to you because you're short.

I didn't get any! It was only that one person. I got lots of letters that people that were like, “wow that was really intense, that was really powerful,” and they were like “Thank you for taking what we do” - you know, we execute people in this state - “Thank you for taking what we do in this state and recognizing it.” And then, also, it wasn't just blatant, I didn't just throw that image out there without context, like we gathered names from people in prison, prisoners, and we fed their names into the urn – that was part of the ceremony as well, so there was an integration of the concept, not just a shocker. So to speak.

That was really interesting. Sometimes I think that something is dangerous and that I might not have made the best choice, and I'll get really interesting feedback from people – and because of social media, people can tell us what they think. So I can get feedback really quickly from people about what parts, how it affected them, what thoughts or what feelings it evokes for them.

LB: The urn and putting things in – where did that idea spring from?

NH: Paul brought that, he manifested that. It was from a couple of different places – one, it kind of came from a vision that he had when he was onstage and he was cleaning up late at night. We built these little vessels, they were tiny, they were like little skulls (when we built them we were like, “We'll build these big skulls!” but they were tiny little things – scale is everything, the scale now is just completely

different... so something we thought was small then is like microscopic now, just invisible).

So people put prayers in them, like wishes and prayers in there. I think originally he may have gotten the idea of burning money for the dead and paper suits, paper watches, paper cellphones, burn that stuff for your relatives, and they'll have stuff, so they'll have a new cell phone. Apparently they need one every year. They need like an upgrade, to burn an upgrade. Sometimes they're really ornate, they'll even make them in different models, so when you burn that they'll have it on the other side. Sometimes people burn little houses, little cars, and of course you burn a lot of money for them so they'll have money in the afterlife to spend. So that's a tradition that's hundreds, thousands of years old in China.

And then in Burning Man, there was always the Man, but there was also the Temple. So the Temple gets built every year as well, and people go into the Temple and write their names and like prayers and wishes and things and they stuff them in the Temple and then the Temple gets burned, I think the day after the Man. So, merging these different traditions, Paul wanted to do little skulls because he wondered if people would do it, if they would put stuff in there. And so then he was cleaning and they were still burning, I think because they were full – we'd filled them up. So he was like, “Oh, people get it, they understand this thing.”

And then he had this vision of this enormous urn, so that was first one that he built, with a grant from Burning Man, he wrote it up as a grant – and they have a grant that they give for projects that are only off the playa. For them, we're a really important sister organization because we do something that's free in an urban space – it's civic, it's urban, it's free. So we validate the mindset, but in a very different way... that's more inclusive, honestly, than what they can do.

The old urn – we used it for 7 years, it's out in the yard and then Paul went and built a new one. People have this very – I mean, we were really surprised. We pulled the urn through the street the first year, and at that point the ambassadors, the attendants were the same thing – we only had attendants for the urn, and I think that's when we realized that we needed ambassadors, because we needed people who wouldn't just accept the prayers, but who would also be willing to talk to people about stuff, and that attendants don't really speak. They just hold presence. But then, also going out in front in a crowd, like people who would talk to people and answer questions, and also pass out prayer slips and pencils so that people were ready when the urn came along. And so the first year, we didn't get a lot, but then the second year, people were waiting out on the street, like you could see, and they had papers in their hands already. And we didn't expect that information to spread so fast and for people to get it. But they instantly got it. They were like, yes, this is this. This makes sense. And the difference that made in the finale was like night and day – that people all feel this really strong connection to the urn, like they have taken something that matters very very much to them, that's precious, and the put it in the urn with everybody else's stuff, and so when that burns, it's alchemical.

It's kind of magic. It really is magic. It reaches out to every single person that put something in it, and transforms that loss and grief and changes it into something else, something that's shared with every other person that they're standing in that field with. And it's really palpable. Like in a lot of situations, you know, where something's magic and you have to just imagine it or have faith? You don't have to have faith. You stand there, and you do that and you feel it. You feel it. You don't have to be convinced, you don't have to believe, it doesn't matter. It becomes like a tipping point of consensus, and it's real.

And that moment, just having that happen, it's... it's sort of the difference between the reality that everybody gives you, the sort of banal, mundane reality that everybody gives you, that this is how it is, and magic isn't real – and actually seeing a miracle. Like, being part of a miracle and being like, Oh shit. Oh shit. It's scary, too.

Because it opens up this possibility that there's this whole other level to reality that you have never recognized and you don't know how to traverse - necessarily. I think also that's what's really great about the puppets and the costumes and the craft, is that those are your tools to traverse the magical world. If you make something, then you've already created your vehicle, you've already manifested something into that other plane that helps you navigate it. And then when people get into that, they want to do it more. Like now, I've had the same attendants now for seven years, eight years. A month later, it's like December, and it's like, do you know what the theme is? And it's like, guys, go have a coffee, I don't have anything for you yet. And Paul was saying that, that they're going turn into these weird secret societies and they're all going to hang out together when it's not All Souls' and they're going to gather up all of their friends and it's going to be too many and we're going to have to have more and more, like branch out and have more ones, and I was like what? And he was like, you'll see. And he was right!

But that's how crews actually formed in New Orleans (I mean Mardi Gras's like 100 years old), but that's how those things started – it's social clubs. That's how carnevale started in Rio, and now it's enormous. And of course Rio is kind of a different thing than carnevale and like different parts of Brazil and like Colombia, different parts of South America - but that's what they are, they're these social clubs and they have their own dances and their own songs and their own costumes. And then they, as you're gearing up everybody gets together and starts seeing each other more and creating their part for that year's carnevale.

LB: That reminds me of Mystery Plays in Europe, where different guilds in the town would set up different parts of the Crucifixion... Another version of the ritual of it all... What makes a ritual a ritual?

NH: Intention. It's not the act... No, it's the intention. If you have one person, and you set your intention that this act is with the intent of this thing, then it's a ritual. That, to me, is it. And if you have two people, three people, ten people, the more people who

set the intention into an action, then... I mean some people would say the more powerful it is, the more chance it has of manifesting itself.

Melanie Cooley (MC) Informal Interview Transcript:

Interviewer: Author (LB)

15 July 2016, 15.45, Tucson, Arizona. In person, recorded with Quicktime software. Author's transcription.

LB: Can I ask your name and for your permission to quote you?

MC: Melanie Cooley. Yes.

LB: Let's start with a little bit of background - Can you tell me what your role is with Many Mouths One Stomach and that All Souls?

MC: Sure. I'm on the board of MMOS, which is the nonprofit that produces the All Souls' Procession, and with the All Souls' Procession I am formally the volunteer coordinator. And then I also lead a couple of the spirit groups, which are the community pods that work on putting the Procession together. So I lead the Ambassador and Usher spirit group, which is a portion of the (44 second mark - garbled) group. And then for many years I was one of the Urn Attendants which is the other portion of the community spirit group.

LB: Can you tell me something about how the Urn Attendants' process works?

MC: Sure, so, the urn is in its 12th year now, and the urn is about a 9-ft diameter metal sculpture - this is actually our second urn, this particular urn started in 2012. It is at the head of the Procession, and people are invited to put prayers, messages, remembrances of the dead in it, dried flowers, photographs, wedding dresses - anything that's safely burnable. And the Urn Attendants are a group of about a dozen people - it's a fixed number, that's what it typically is. And the attendants escort the urn through the streets of the procession, and have multiple functions - one's the honor guard of the urn, and we talk about being the hands of the urn - the hands of the heart of the urn - to go out and receive those prayers and messages from people and convey them to the urn - because we don't want people just bobbing in in the streets. So the attendants spend about 2 months before the procession rehearsing - or preparing - and that preparation includes a kind of process of ritual preparation to be that hollow bone, to do that spiritual sacred service for people, where each attendant is interacting with hundreds if not thousands of people over the course of the evening - and for the attendant, that's a lot of interactions, but for each person they interact with, that is their one moment to pass grandmother's ashes or a picture of their child to somebody to put in the urn - so it's a really sacred responsibility, and emotionally quite tense, so the preparation to do that emotionally and spiritually is a big part of the prep.

LB: Can you talk a little bit about what kind of preparations you do? Are there exercises...?

MC: Yeah, there's a range of things the director of that group does. It's partly simply sharing our own stories, why are we walking this year; who are we walking for, and also some visualized ritualized movements. So, let's take, she'll do a guided visualization through visualizing our own death, and what might that process be like, and moving with that emotion and that experience. So it really varies year to year what that is, and there's typically also a theme, so a conceptual theme to the procession, and that frequently informs the flavor of those exercises as well, so what is that movement like.

LB: What are some of the themes you've worked with?

MC: We had a theme one year where our movements were very much like a flock of birds - you know you have those flocks of swallows that do that movement, or if you watch a flock of pelicans or something, or, you know. So what we were practicing as a group was moving collectively, you know, how do we tune into each others' bodies and each others' presence in such a way that we can move across a room as a multi-organismal, single entity. So those are some of the ways that we create group cohesion, create a group dynamic.

In my work with the Ambassadors, which is a separate group, one of the exercises I have done is an exercise where we have everybody on one side of the room and each person had brought several mementos of somebody they had lost, and they walked with those mementos across the room, and they each had 4 people behind them, and 2 of them represented people they'd lost and 2 represented people that were still in their lives. And what they did is that they'd cross the room and every few steps and say goodbye to one of those people, and that person would walk off, and by the time they arrived at the altar, they were alone. And they placed those items on that altar, and then turned and walked back to the group that was waiting to receive them and hold them. And there's a culmination in that exercise of... bringing, you know, we're going to be there for others, but we're going to be there for others *through* our own experiences.

So practicing on multiple dimensions, when you're the person bringing your grief into that room, really practicing a ritualized expression of that grief, both the anticipation of loss - we will all either mourn or be mourned by everyone we love - or the actual, already experienced. So bringing your own and bringing it to bear there. And for everybody that's not making the journey at this moment, there is holding the space of the grandmother, the child, the whoever-it-is that you are representing as you walk across that room, and for everybody else who's witnessing, there is that focused attention. It took us 2 hours to get through the whole group. And that practice of focused attention on whoever is here, so you stay present, stay focused, stay engaged for that person who is walking - because that is what you need to do for the procession. And so that is one of the ways we practice that experience.

Other aspects of the Attendant prep is creating costumes - the Attendants create, again with an aesthetic theme, a conceptual theme, Attendants create their own costumes, which are pretty ornate. And for me, when I've done it, the creation of that costume is very much part of the ritual preparation and the creative act - it's part of getting ready, creating a costume, a headdress that will help me transform into this non-individualized servant of this sacred experience during the procession, it's part of getting there.

LB: What is that experience for you, when you're taking things from people and you have to be so present for so long?

MC: Over the years, I've become more and more engaged with the logistics, which is part of why I'm not in the Attendants anymore. My responsibilities are different and I can't do both of those things. But in the years when I was part of the Attendant group, uh..... there is a cohesion in the group where... each of us knows that we are all doing something that is emotionally very intense and that part of what we have to do to do that is kind of let it flow through us - not to cling to a particular story or a particular moment - but that also, we need each other's support to do that. So there may be moments where we just need to go squeeze another attendant's hand or look at another attendant for a moment, so being there for each other to help kind of ground into the moment. Also in that group, we developed essentially a mantra that we repeat a lot in rehearsals, and that has become something that's kind of throughout aspects of the of the procession, and that's "This is why we walk." So that's sort of our "amen," you know, so somebody tells a story in that group and "this is why we walk" is our response. And that has become one of our grounding verbal touchstones. We don't really talk as attendants during the procession, but having that grounding, that mantra, helps. And, for me, what happens in the streets with the procession as an attendant, is that, within our dominant culture, people don't really have an understanding, a tool set, for public grief, and for collective, ritualized mourning. And the procession, as I've kind of gone over here so far, has a lot of elements that are native to *it*, are its own traditions, which means that lots of people don't know what they are - so that's part of why we have the group of Ambassadors, who go out now and pass out paper and pencils and explain the urn - to help people get more engaged, more involved.

LB: They go out before the procession?

MC: Yeah, they go ahead of the procession so when the Attendants and urn arrive there are lots of people that know what's going on. But people will bring photographs, you know, simply because they know there's that ritualized aspect of "I'm remembering my dead with a photograph," and, as an Attendant, one of the things that all of us try to do is, if there is a photograph, regardless of whether that person is trying to offer us a piece of paper, we go, we acknowledge the photograph, we go, we acknowledge that photograph, you know, we hold our hand to the photograph - if someone's holding a photograph, I'd hold my hand to the

photograph, look at the person who's holding it, and look back at the photograph, and focus on being connected in that moment with that person - all this other stuff going on around me, but for this moment my job is to create a space of witnessing that goes beyond story, name, any detail of our lives. It is simply, I am a human being witnessing your loss which is very specific in its particulars but universal in its reality. So we do that, and also any time somebody's offering a piece of paper with whatever's on it, to try to also connect. And a lot of people will have this "ok, we're just gonna drop it in," moment, they're like "ok, we're just gonna do this," and, even though that person is gonna just drop it in, you know, I focus on holding that moment - and a lot of times, they'll start to do this (turns away) and then they'll see that I am staying, and turn and engage for a moment, drop emotionally in for a moment, and then I focus on making an ending to it - You know, it's short, but making it focused, and then an acknowledgement that is an ending and then moving on, not just to keep rolling

LB: That is incredibly intense.

MC: Yeah, it is, and there's moment after moment, and some moments are much more emotional than others, but to some extent you kind of just can't hold on to any of it because there's so much of it. So if you get caught in one particular one — you just can't really, you just can't

LB: It sounds like there's a sort of safety net in the fact that you are doing a job - you can't just stay, you literally can't.

MC: Yeah, you literally can't - it's not like I'm going to stand here and have a conversation with this person about this thing - and they may or may not even want to do that. There is a safety for them in that I am this otherworldly looking character who is - you know, you wouldn't necessarily entrust me with your father's ashes on the street as I am right now, you'd be like 'Who the hell are you? And no!' But because we are transformed into this clearly otherworldly, sacred, between-space character, I have had multiple people hand me their parents' ashes. And that is an overwhelming degree of trust.

LB: I guess that's through your preparation, being ready to receive that, and your costuming. What is that feeling of being not human but not-not human?

MC: It's hard to answer, it may be circuitous. I'll start for a moment about costumes in general at the procession, because a lot of people costume at the procession - and either they full-on costume, they make something ornate, huge, complex, or they just use faceprint and have that degree of costuming. And part of the power of that is, there's a combination of people who de-individualize themselves, but they also have these very individual photographs of a loved one on their costume, or elements of their costume that are specific to a person they are honoring. So there's this combination of an anonymity and a very specific loss and a very specific loved one and grief that's going on there. And there's some alchemy in that combination that I think really helps people connect to with others because part of what the procession makes *really* clear to the

people that participate is that this experience of love and grief is an absolute universal, and that part of the procession crosses a lot of dualities - between celebration and mourning, and creativity and solemnity, and takes a lot of things that people think of as disjointed, as opposite from one another, incompatible, and puts them in the same space.

So you've got samba music and bagpipers playing, and music and dancing and all these things happening in the street *and* tears and laughter and singing, and so part of what makes all of that possible is this way that people lose some of their boundaries, their definition of who they are, their story as expressed by how they dress or the color of their skin or whatever it may be, and start to see past that to the shared grief, the shared love of others. That's an idealized version - lots of things happen, but that's one of them. And the costuming aspect of it makes part of that possible, which is part of why we try to really encourage people toward creative expression in the procession, whether it's a float, a costume, a mask, a whatever it might be. And that participant-observer, consumer-creator boundary is part of that crossing as well.

And for me, in leading the Ambassadors, the Ambassadors also costume as the Attendants to, but it's generally much simpler, it's more of an entry-level group so the demands are not quite as high, and they are given, again, some basic aesthetic guidelines and then just a piece of fabric - long piece of fabric with a hole in it, a basic tunic, that they do whatever they're going to do with within those guidelines. And the Ambassadors, in creating that, have photos of loved ones, things that represent loved ones, and share a lot of those stories, so they are literally wearing their representation of who they're walking for. But they've shared these stories up to that point. Last year (2015), that group was given a specific assignment to focus on the forgotten ghosts of the road, which means the people who have created - built, literally built the infrastructure of this country, roads, railroads, buildings, and that frequently those people have been slave labor, convict labor, you know, Chinese railroad workers who were sort of paid(?) And so all of those histories of the literal construction of this country and who has done the sweat, labor on that. So we did a lot of talking, and we did a lot of finding photographs, using photographs on those costumes. And for some of us it was very personal - one woman's grandfather was a *bracero* (laborer), and so she had his photographs as a *bracero* combined with images of *braceros* in general.

And for others it was less familial, and for me, my family in part were, some of my ancestors were slave owners in the south, and my tunic was decorated largely with images of slaves and convict laborer - and for me, I felt, in creating that costume, that tunic, and touching each of the photographs as I transferred them onto the fabric, that though I had no way of knowing this person's name or anything about their story aside from what I could extrapolate based on that photograph, that this person and I had a relationship, that I was doing a sacred, ancestral duty by this person, by putting that photograph onto that tunic, and by touching it as I was absolutely intimately working with the image and the paper and the tunic - and for me, that imbued the tunic with a sacred object role. It was no longer just a piece of fabric, it was a ritual object, it was a sacred object - and how that was treated, and

treated after Procession and where it went, was critical. It was not adequate to hang it in the closet or whatever it may be. The pockets on the sides of the tunic were all rosters of prisoners who died in southern prisons in the late 1800s, early 1900s, and so there were names and photographs, and so what the Ambassadors all did at the finale ceremony, was we all took off our tunics and passed them to the Attendants who put them into the urn for burning onstage because that was the ritual closure for that particular object.

LB: It strikes me that there are these costumes, ashes, photographs, something about externalizing a person or feeling into a tactile thing that is really powerful for people and somehow, then it seems like another saying goodbye, saying goodbye to the object and sending it on a journey...

MC: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I mean, we help people make memorial objects, whether they're masks or puppets or whatever they may be, floats - and for me, one of the questions if I'm creating something like that, is then what? Is this an object that I keep in my space - and it may be. It may be something that I invest this energy in, I take it through the Procession, it serves that memorial function, and then I bring it home with me and it stays in my space and it continues to serve that function. Or it may be that, for the woman whose grandfather was a bracero, she didn't burn her tunic because she wanted to bring that home with her. The rest of us burned ours, but that was her preference. Or, to me, this is my take on it, if I'm creating a memorial object that is fragile, it is that tunic, it is a cardboard memorial for somebody - to me, where it goes is critical, and to have that come sit on a shelf and gather dust or sit in my yard and decay, it doesn't complete the cycle. And so for me, it goes in the urn and it burns, if I'm going to create something that isn't going to have a place of honor in my home or somewhere else, then closing that seems critical, to keep the level of sacred engagement of it. So, as an Ambassador last year with that tunic, when I was wearing it, I was conscious of bearing a responsibility, that I was walking, not for me exclusively, not for my personal dead, but for a kind of ancestral debt and a sacred duty of recognition, of acknowledgement, of honor.

And I was also logistically managing, on the one radio with the police and on the other with my team, so I had a very logistical role that year, but my walking was also infused with this. In prior years, when I was an Attendant and - like I said, part of the reason I stopped being an Attendant was the logistical duty that was starting to call on me was incompatible with being an Attendant, and that's partly about the literal, physical responsibilities of the Attendant, but it's also about, for me, the sacred space of being an Attendance which requires a focus and an altered way of being. So as Attendants, once we are fully costumed and once we leave our preparation space, we don't speak. Because our words anchor us in our personality, in our individuality. And our words are our quotidian was of interacting with each other. And as Attendants, part of our jobs is not to be those things. And so one of the kind of practical ways we do that is we don't speak, so all of our gestures and eye contact and all that kind of communication become critical and have additional layers of import.

And so, getting into that costume, the progression of getting costumed, is a getting closer and closer to that - the more parts are done, the less inclined toward conversation on logistical details, and the more the conversation shifts in the group as a whole even, to who are we walking for, how are we walking, how are we getting at that repetition - and we do a circle before we actually go out and walk, but that circle has, we enter our personal names, we repeat, 'this is why we walk, ' and we start to get into that ritualized space. And my costume, all of our costumes have been different every year, but the energy is really the same - my attendant is the same attendant regardless of the costume. And that character for lack of a better word has a serenity, a focus, a compassion, a global compassion, a both specific and generalized compassion, and so there are things like, when I'm in costume, when Procession's over, I don't want to go out to an after party in costume because that's not what that is.

And even in kind of the between times, you know between Procession arriving at the finale site and the finale commencing and us being 'in character' again, there's a level of responsibility that comes with being in that costume and being in that role, and that really doesn't leave until I get it off.

LB: It's really interesting the way that it is very much secular, non-denominational, but the sort of roles that are taken up, sound like priests or shamans, the spiritual people of the group that take that on.

MC: Yes, there's a kind of service in it that is that kind of service. I was raised atheist, so I've always grown up outside of a spiritual tradition - so for me, figuring out how to articulate the sacred without resorting to the language of religion or spirituality, you know, the secular sacred, is an ongoing challenge, because I think the sacred is very important - but when I say the sacred I don't mean a specific deity or any of those things. There is something that is sacredness independent of a spiritual belief system. It's got an element of the secular re-enchantment that you mentioned.

I think of the hand-made parade, their event was 6 months after a catastrophic flood in their community, so that became a way of processing and working with that flood - and I can see that working in a one-off way; if a culture or community has these tools of art-making that's of the people, not 'oh this is the designated artist,' but art-making that's of the people, of communal engagement, that communal trauma could be processed in that way — and in many places it is processed that way. But the hand-made parade isn't an annual event.

LB: There's the school of thought that says people do these kinds of rituals really just to get back control, which I don't fully buy, but I don't see how the Procession can do that - there's no controlling death...

MC: Well, this is a sidebar but control is interesting in relation to the Procession because we don't control much - we create a container - that's it. We have 100,000 people in the streets and there's a team of 25 ushers and ambassadors, tops, who are trying to be available for that, and some number of police but not a lot. And you know every year there's somebody that's like "how could you let so-and- so do what they did, be dressed in that costume, or whatever it is" - and there's this sense (and it's obviously not universal), but we get, every year from a few people who have this outrage that so-and- so did that thing that I think is not acceptable, that I think is not within the parameters of what this event is to me. And sometimes, I'm like, "Well, I get your point, they did do something that I'm like, well I don't love it - but that's fine." And our kind of standard answer to those folks who say something like "Tell people not to be political in the Procession," is "Well one person's political is another person's personal, and one person's personal is another person's political." And what we ask of people is that they be true to themselves and respectful of others, and you make your experience in the Procession. "I didn't have a good time at this year's Procession because - fill in the blank," well, you are responsible for your own experience at the Procession; the more you engage, the more you participate, the more you create an experience for yourself rather than expecting one to be delivered to you, the better your experience will be.

And it's fascinating the degree to which people A) want to control other people's behavior: "They're not doing x the way I think they should do x and therefore it ruined my experience." Really? Really, you're gonna let that happen? You're both giving up control and attempting to control something entirely outside your control. Fascinating! So there's that, and then *imagine* that we have control over what 100,000 people choose to express in the streets, or should have control, or can have control! And so there's just this fascinating stew that we're constantly working with - and this gets to the thing I said when we met before, that we are acculturating people to a different way of thinking about this sort of thing. You're not coming to it as a consumer, or you may come to it as a consumer, but there's no product; it is what you make of it. And "It was too crowded near the front of the Procession, I didn't like that and I'm never coming back" - Well, okay fine. But also, move! There's a degree to which many people, and it's obviously not all of them, but for many people in our culture there's this unwillingness to take responsibility for their own experience.

There's this expectation that someone else is going to provide this experience that they can then consume and critique. And that's not what we're doing. We're creating the permits, providing certain base-level logistical stuff: there's a DJ at the gathering site, we're always every year improving & figuring out how to do things better - where are the barricades, which street do we close - and we provide the urn and we have these volunteers who are doing all of these things, and the finale ceremony is a big show, but it is also a community-created, volunteer-done, free show, free event that, if you are paying attention, is a ritual that you are participating in. And so those are the basic things that we do, and other than that people fill it themselves.

The only person we have tried to restrict some is a hate-preacher in town - if you're familiar with Westboro Baptist? He's that kind of guy. He's been coming to the gathering site the past couple of years, and we've started having a crew who, that's what they do in town - they find him and kind of barricade him, drown him out. And various community members have taken it upon themselves to just go play a drum really loud next to him or whatever - they're taking responsibility for this thing in their midst. And there's a guy who comes dressed in a giant inflatable clown suit, giant boobs, giant ass, in a bikini, every year, huge wig, and I'm just like.... Dude, really? But maybe that has some deep significance for him and I don't know! I look at it and I'm like, oh god... but I'm also aware that I have no idea what that means to him

LB: I had a thought I wanted to share, which was that you have the urn itself as a central object and you gather an entire community's worth of objects in it. So it holds the memories that people have, but it also holds the whole community all together.

MC: Yes, absolutely. The urn, over years, the first urn and then the second urn, has really, I think, become a sacred object by being entrusted and charged with the energy of all those hopes and prayers and griefs, messages, you know, the heart of the community - and then that energetic focus, where it is the focal point of this ritual, it's a secular ritual but it is a ritual and we are a ritual species - there's a study about how ritual is so embedded in our human behavior, and the function of ritual independent of the details of the ritual... So yeah, it becomes a symbolic object, but it also becomes a sacred vessel.

And if you go to Mercado St. Augustin - the big dirt lot next to it, which is where we've had the finale ceremony the past 4-5 years, there's a couple of container cars at the far end of that lot, and the urn is on top of those container cars. And you can see that it is blackened with last year's burn. You can see that it is still contains some of the ashes of last year's burn. And we'll clean it, that's part of its preparation ritual, that it gets cleaned.

But there's a flow of the seasons of the urn, and, for the people who are keyed into what it is about, it starts to hold a real sacred place. I told you the story about Randy pulling the urn, and when we weighed the urn this year, there was about 400 pounds of material that had been offered from the community for burning in there. And that's a lot of focused energy and focused attention and catharsis. There's a veterinarian who's one of our longtime tech volunteers, and he talks about how one of the hardest parts of his job is euthanizing pets. And every year he puts a list of the names of every pet that he euthanized that year into the urn, and that to see it burn is really cleansing for him.

LB: That's great, thank you.

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