concretely organized, and then you realize, oh, no, nobody sent out the press releases, and then no one comes to the show. Stuff like that happens all the time. This group that's there now, we all tend to be more on the organized side. People make lists and have lots of meetings. Sometimes it's too much. There are constant meetings about organizing who's going to do what on this next tour and how we're going to do this or that, and that can be both good and bad. But each constellation of people behaves differently, but it is very loose. It's been loose.

David Cayley
This loose, anarchist style of organization has not prevented Bread and Puppet from creating a huge body of work. It has stayed afloat for 40 years as an independent, non-commercial, non-subsidized theatre. For Clare Dolan, looking back on the theatre's history, what amazes is the sheer scope of the enterprise.

Clare Dolan
So many people, so many puppeteers, so many volunteers, so many participants, so many neighbours, so many friends, so many John and Trudys, so many people. And in such a strange way, in a way that each individual's contribution is very individual. No one else is John Bell. No one else is Trudy Cohen. But also there's this massive sense when you're part of a huge, collective culmination of effort in that way, there's also this sense of, you could be anyone. It doesn't necessarily have to be you. If there wasn't Trudy Cohen, there would be something else in that spot, and that's such a strange, interesting contradiction, and it's such a strange, interesting way of making art and being involved in the artmaking process that is totally antithetical, I think, to particularly American — because that's what I'm familiar with — typical art production, which is all about the individual artist and all about that uniqueness or authenticity: the signature at the bottom of the painting, the uniqueness that that person made that object, and that's why it's a valuable art object or whatever. And what we're talking about here, with this body of work, is completely not that. And yet the character of Peter Schumann is this totally dominating... One could say that the theatre is only about him and only exists because of him, and yet there is this huge crowd of people behind that body of work. So complicated. I find that so complex to think about and so interesting.

David Cayley
Clare Dolan points to the contradiction between Bread and Puppet as a huge collective enterprise and Bread and Puppet as the expression of the artistic genius of Peter Schumann. This contradiction has been, from the beginning, one of the mainsprings of the Bread and Puppet Company. Of Schumann's genius, there can be no doubt. Since 1963, when he discovered in puppet theatre a way of combining his interests in sculpture, dance and political expression, his achievement has been prodigious, his talent prodigal. He has worked with the sureness, resourcefulness and absence of second thought that mark genius as virtually a force of nature. But this, of course, has presented a continuous challenge to those around him.

Massimo Schuster met up with Bread and Puppet when he was a theatre student in Milan in his native Italy. Before establishing his own puppet theatre, he worked with Peter Schumann at the farm in Plainfield, Vermont, where Bread and Puppet was based in the early '70s.

Massimo Schuster
The most striking thing when you work with him, he's volcanic. That means that basically when I lived on the farm, he was in the workshop before everyone else, and he left the workshop after everyone else, and you always had the feeling that you could never keep up with him. That's why he's invading in a way, because you're always under pressure, which is a good way of learning in a way. He doesn't teach anything, but if you want it — and it's up to you — you can develop a relationship, master to pupil, in a traditional, classical, old-time way. That is, it's up to the pupil to steal whatever he can steal, and once he considers he has stolen enough, he says "Thank you. Goodbye," which is fine. It's a good way of learning. So I see that today, my work is completely different from his work, but still I use things that I learned with him. Sometimes it's just little details in terms of rhythm or how to deal with a scene or how to say that bit of text. It's hard to point things out precisely. But the influence is still there definitely.

David Cayley
Massimo Schuster was part of the Bread and Puppet

Company in the early 1970s, at the end of what might be called the first phase of the theatre's existence. These were years of acclaim, when the theatre became an artistic sensation, but also of tumult. Many of Schumann's collaborators during this period were people of his own age, with a claim to be considered peers, and this often led to conflict. During the '70s, a second generation of puppeteers came into the theatre, and a working compromise evolved between Bread and Puppet as a democratic community and Bread and Puppet as an artistic dictatorship. This was when John Bell joined the company, and he remembers enjoying considerable freedom in fleshing out Schumann's vision.

John Bell
One of the brilliant things that Peter does is say to people — and I think this is unlike the way, say, Robert Wilson works or other people work — he'd say, "Okay, here is a mask. Go off and invent a character for that mask," which is a costume, which is a gesture, which is movement, which is action. Peter already has an idea what he wants. He's sculpted the faces, after all, so it's already a guy with a moustache or a beautiful, pink lady or a blue-faced character — Expressionist, this is what it is. But we would go off in our rehearsals, and we'd pick a mask, go to the costume room, put together a costume, find a prop — a handbag or a cane or something that that character does — and invent a character. How great! You get to invent your own character. You don't get to do this in most theatre.

David Cayley
John Bell was one of a number of people whose talents found scope within Peter Schumann's vision, but there was always a question about the nature of the relationship between Schumann and those who made his creations live and move. Michael Romanyshyn, then just 17, started working with Bread and Puppet at the same period as John Bell. He recalls how hard it was sometimes to understand and to name their connection with Peter Schumann.

Michael Romanyshyn
In this country, we don't really have that tradition of master-apprentice, and so we were always a little bit sensitive about being like disciples. I was. I was a total disciple. Bread and Puppet was like a religion for me. But it wasn't a cult. It was just that I lived and breathed it. It was what I totally believed in, and I imitated it. But then I also rebelled against it at a certain point. I started resenting that Peter had such a powerful... I'd want to break away from it.

But it was only later after meeting two Indian people that came to work with Bread and Puppet, and they were talking about that whole master-apprentice relationship and how common it was in India and so on that I started really understanding that that's what it was and what a good thing that was and how lucky we were to have had that.

David Cayley
What Michael Romanyshyn calls his "rebellion" happened for most of the puppeteers who aspired to an independent voice. But it was not so easy, Massimo Schuster says, to break out of the Bread and Puppet style.

Massimo Schuster
One of the problems once you have worked with Bread and Puppet and once you have come out of Bread and Puppet is to find your own way, which is a tough business because Peter is such a strong, volcanic, invading personality that actually it's very difficult to find your own way. So, when I left the company in '75, for almost ten years, my shows were bad copies of Bread and Puppet.

David Cayley
Today, Massimo Schuster has his own puppet theatre, with its own distinctive style, based in Marseilles. His ten-year struggle to find his own approach is mirrored in many of Peter Schumann's former colleagues. Amy Trompetter was part of Bread and Puppet in the 1960s and '70s. She too has gone on to start her own puppet theatre, Blackbird Theatre, as well as teaching at Barnard College in New York. She says that the difficulty for her was not just in finding her own voice, but in having to give up her participation in the visionary ardour of Bread and Puppet.

Amy Trompetter
To be with that many people in a unified purpose, there's a utopian feeling in this: to know exactly what you're doing, to be doing this for such pure reasons — it has nothing to do with fame nor gain — to be with this beauty of the puppetry and the experiment of

what I consider the most radical theatre that the world has — I feel that — and to be in that wildness of experiment so good-naturedly with a group of people who have that as the goal. There is a utopian feeling in that, and it's hard to step out of that.

David Cayley
The contemporary flowering of puppetry owes a great deal to Peter Schumann and the Bread and Puppet Theater. As I have mentioned, many of the Bread and Puppet veterans whom you have heard tonight have gone on to establish their own theatres. And this influence has been just as pronounced with the young puppeteers who have made puppetry such a prominent part of anti-globalization agitation. Two years ago, police raided puppet workshops and arrested puppeteers in Washington, where they were demonstrating against the World Bank, and in Philadelphia, where their target was the Republican National Convention. Many of those arrested had learned their craft from Bread and Puppet. Matthew Hart, who goes by the *nom de guerre* of "Mattie Boy," was one of those arrested in Philadelphia. He directs the Spiral Q Theater, and he spent several summers at Bread and Puppet.

Matthew Hart
In many ways, it's like the mother ship. People go there to get schooled, and meet other people who are doing similar types of work within that theatre tradition. And then they go back. People go back and do their own work or whatever. I came back to Philadelphia, and I chose to come back to the city and do a theatre project that was in the same vernacular as Bread and Puppet but that was really urban-based.

David Cayley
Mattie's Hart's Spiral Q Theater is one of a number of new theatres that use puppetry as a form of political action. In the summer of 2001, these companies were invited to the Bread and Puppet farm in East Glover, Vermont, for a week-long festival called "Radical Cheese," after the fermentation that cheese and political theatre have in common. Each group presented a piece of work, and then everyone cooperated in one big show. Peter Schumann had a mixed reaction.

Peter Schumann
It was good and disappointing. It was good to see folks. We saw some marvellous little pieces. Wonderful. One girl and her friends were just extraordinary. Really. Real beauty. And a lot of schlock, a lot of worthless, politicized, illustrative work, where you don't learn anything. In agitprop theatre, it's always the danger that you have this cliché art, and it's very inhibiting and makes me very uncomfortable to be part of that, and we were so much part of it by inviting it all here.

David Cayley
Peter Schumann's discomfort is summed up in an interview he gave with a magazine called Orion *Afield* a couple of years ago. The interviewer asks him how he came up with the idea of using puppets "as a tool for advocating social change." Schumann replies tartly that he doesn't think of puppets as a tool. This little exchange epitomizes the difference between Bread and Puppet and a lot of political puppetry. To Schumann, puppets are mysterious beings, and not merely mouthpieces or organizing tools, as they are for some of his successors. Mattie Hart wasn't at the Radical Cheese Festival in Vermont, but he says that for him art is definitely secondary.

Mattie Hart
In many ways, I have no artistic goals. In many ways, I think that art is bullshit and that it's the least important part of what we do. I feel like the value of this form of theatre and this type of artmaking is that it's totally accessible to anyone, and it's really easily taught, and it's a performance model that regular folks without degrees in theatre can plug into and make big outdoor plays about their own lives fairly simply with just a few people who have a little bit more information about it. And I think that organizing around discreet projects like a piece of theatre or a community parade that discuss and showcase these community issues is a powerful political organizing tool, and it really lets people work together in new ways. And we've been able to create coalitions and collaborations with organizations that have been in the same neighbourhood for 25 years and have never worked together. So, I definitely think that our model of ourselves is as community organizers.

David Cayley
For Mattie Hart, puppetry is a means for people to express their grievances and an activity around which they can come together. Artistic refinement is not the point. Peter Schumann also likes the idea of people without degrees in theatre making puppets — he's promoted it all his life — but he doesn't depreciate art in quite the same way. He thinks that politics needs art.

Peter Schumann
Generally, it's difficult for the young folks from the protest movement to get interesting language of any form, whether it's puppetry or language or music and so on, beyond the normal — what's the normal? The folksinging: "I'm so unhappy, atomic bombs are flying," strum-strum-strum and so on. To give that up and to make a real song or a scream isn't all that easy. I haven't heard any good folksinging around all these themes. The traditions don't click. You have to reinvent them. You have to step out of the historical pattern of those things, because they were originally coming from nature admiration or love storymaking or what have you. And that understanding isn't very common, I would say. People don't relate radicalism in the arts, in the formal sense of the arts, to radicalism in politics, but they are deeply related. Radical arts suffer from the absence of politics or the recognition how much politics plays into the arts, and radical politics suffers from the absence of radical arts and radicalism in the arts, because people use old, schlocky, outlived formalisms instead of reinventing them for the purposes of what they want to say.

David Cayley
Radical politics needs art, in Peter Schumann's view, because it only through art that the world can really see itself. An overwhelming world has to be enlarged, concentrated, slowed down before it becomes really visible. And for this purpose, images that are fresh, surprising and undeniable are needed. Tired, outworn refrains will not do.

Puppet theatre can provide this necessary art, Schumann thinks, because it is cheap and homely and owes no allegiance to either political or artistic establishments. It's a view which continues to attract young artists to Bread and Puppet as summer interns. During a visit in the summer of 2001, I spoke with one of them, while the band rehearsed outside for that afternoon's show. He's Jabari Jones, a public school teacher, artist and puppeteer from New York City. He has the last word in tonight's program.

Jabari Jones
What we love to do or what we love to think won't come from outside but from within, from things that we can do ourselves: bad poetry, puppet theatre, homespun newspapers and songs and these ordinary things. And that may be hippie, but maybe there's something to "hippie." Recently, puppets have been used quite a lot in political protest because of the commonness of puppets, because of the inner spirit of puppets. They say, "Everyone loves a parade." Well, who hates a puppet? And so, when the government or the police confiscate puppets that are going to be used in a protest, it exposes the ridiculousness, the absurdity of the military system, of the cop system. And even if they're not in the parade, even if, like in Washington, DC, they're confiscated and destroyed before the protest, still it was a counter-demonstration that these ordinary objects also have power, and that obviously the power structure is frightened of this ordinary power, which anyone has, everyone has. So, everyone secretly is a collaborator. Everyone is secretly a puppeteer at heart. That's what the wonderful thing is.

Paul Kennedy
On *Ideas*, you've listened to Part 3 of "Puppet Uprising: Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater." The series concludes tomorrow night with a final program about the religious dimensions of Peter Schumann's art.

Paul Kennedy
I'm Paul Kennedy, and this is *Ideas* on the art of Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre.

Peter Schumann
I thought of little puppets as big puppets. What a possibility! I very much thought of cathedrals, for example, and this overwhelming life that you have when you step into a cathedral, with all these saints and sculpted creatures that are there, and what a communal space that is by the fact that sculpture is so important in there, because they are so much like us, three-dimensional, and their faces remind us of our grandmothers. And to lift those off and to move them, I think that was one of my first thoughts when I thought of making big puppets and moving them around: animate the stones in the cathedral.

Paul Kennedy
That's sculptor Peter Schumann, the director of the Bread and Puppet Theater. The cathedral he imagined now exists in an old barn just off Route 122 in the little village of East Glover, in northeastern Vermont. It's called the Bread and Puppet Museum, and it's a place as teeming with life as any old cathedral. Arranged along its corridors are angels and demons, animals and gods, saints, garbage men and grandmothers, each with its own compelling presence — a cosmos in papier-mâché. It's hard to think of a comparable achievement in the annals of modern art, and yet there it sits, remote from the centres of fashion and influence, made of mouldering paper in a tinderbox barn — a work at once of grandeur and humility.

The displays in the Bread and Puppet Museum represent 40 years of puppet-making. Peter Schumann founded his theatre in 1963, in New York, and from the beginning, he has drawn on the great forms of Western religious art, creating nativity plays, passion plays, masses, cantatas and oratorios. But he hasn't used these traditional forms in a traditional way. His shows have engaged his own society and denounced the contemporary evils of war, injustice and political oppression.

Tonight, in the concluding episode of a four-hour series on the Bread and Puppet Theater, David Cayley examines the way in which Peter Schumann has taken on Christianity, and religion generally, in his work. Pictures of some of his puppets are available on our website at cbc.ca/ideas "Puppet Uprising," Part 4 by David Cayley...

David Cayley
In the mid-1980s, the Bread and Puppet Theater was invited to Nicaragua by a popular theatre company there called Macate. The small Central American country was then embroiled in a civil war, in which the American-backed Contras were attacking the revolutionary regime of the Sandinistas. Michael Romanyshyn was one of the four puppeteers who accompanied Peter Schumann.

Michael Romanyshyn
We went and lived in a very small village called San José de Masatepe, and we worked with 40 Nicaraguans, mostly men, who were part of this group, and they came from all over the country. Most of them were subsistence farmers who had been working with Macate for a number of years and were organized into little theatre and music groups. And we lived in this little town. The five of us lived in a little, one-room house, with no electricity and an outdoor kitchen. We had clay, and Peter sculpted this set of big puppets in the middle of town on posts, right in the schoolyard. And with this group of people, we made a new kind of Easter show, a passion play. So, we performed this play in the town, and the play took place all over town, with each station of the Easter play, each station of the cross in a different part of town, with a parade in between. And it was also during the Contra war, so it became sort of a contemporary passion play about someone that had been killed in the war. And the funny thing was that they were doing a traditional Easter play in that town, and the Church was quite conservative and not so happy with our presence there, and they did their own little Easter play. But for ours, the whole town came out. There were probably 6- or 700 people living in that town. And it was a beautiful play. It was with a lot of music and parades and these puppets that Peter made there.

David Cayley
As Michael Romanyshyn says, the Jesus puppet in this Bread and Puppet passion play represented a villager who had been killed by the Contras. The events leading to his crucifixion were given a local political colour and each scene set in a different part

of town.

Michael Romanyshyn
They had set up that week a fenced-in area to have bullfights, but not where they'd kill the bull, but just seeing how courageous the local men were and stuff. So, the parade went to the centre of town, and there was this barbed-wire area, and we did the trial there. Then there was a big wooden cross that got made, so he gets the cross. And then there was another parade to the crucifixion area. And this big wooden cross, really quite large, was put into the ground and had a pulley on it. And the crucifixion was done by tying the puppet in the shape of Jesus being crucified with lines going up to the cross, and then at the moment of the crucifixion, the puppet would fly off the operator and go up onto the cross, so it would be very high. It was very high above the performing area. And it ended up with the puppet being on the cross. It was quite a strong image.

David Cayley
The play concluded with a resurrection scene and was then followed by a community dance. The production was characteristic both in its incorporation of local people, local stories and locally available materials and in its adaptation of traditional religious narrative. Bread and Puppet has created scores of such passion plays over the years, with the crucified ranging from modern martyrs, like Archbishop Romero of El Salvador to a herd of caribou drowned by the James Bay Dam. Peter Schumann's guiding principle has been to use the stories people know, and he regards the Bible as one of the great master sources of such stories. His attitude was formed, he says, in his childhood.

Peter Schumann
My father read the Bible to us, I would say, not as a Christian — I don't believe he was — but like a grand, old human document of sorts, more than literature, not just literature, but as something like a mystery from ancient times that needed to be exposed to us kids — so things that were totally above our heads. But he would do that anyway. When we were very young, he would read The Iliad to us or various things, so he didn't mind that we didn't understand something. But for me, it was very important. And when I read myself in the Bible, I never read the Bible from beginning to end, but always like something you could open up anywhere — it didn't matter where — and just read and just get engrossed in this ancient language, in this grand simplification of reality, and always human reality beaten or punished or elevated or challenged by this God, by this voice from above — very powerful, beautiful.

David Cayley
Peter Schumann, as these comments suggest, takes religion seriously. The agonized dialogue of the ancient Hebrews with "the voice from above" is something more for him than mere literature or ethnography. But he, by no means, considers himself a Christian. In fact, he told me during a long interview in New York, he stands very much opposed to organized Christianity.

Peter Schumann
I'm totally divorced from that idea, particularly the incredible impression of hypocrisy, of the total wrong-going of the world that bases itself, even its laws and its institutions, on this belief, and then acts the exact opposite and goes out there and punishes the enemy, who is supposed to be kissed and embraced and taken close to you, and acts out the exact opposite of its own belief in every respect of the word, and yet confesses to it. It's so disgusting to me. Cardinal Spellman, when we were here in New York, blessed the B-52s before they flew their missions in Vietnam. For me, that act itself meant the end of Christianity as any meaningful institution.

David Cayley
Peter Schumann's opposition to institutional Christianity has not made him turn away from Christian themes and images. On the contrary, he says, he has tried to liberate the Christian story from the prison house of dogma and clerical domination and return it to the people.

Peter Schumann
We want to steal from this corrupt religion as much as we can. We want to reappropriate their terminology. We want to take their language and give it to people in a fresh and untainted way. We want to not allow them to use the word "resurrection" as if they were the owners of that word. We want to use these terms and cast new meaning into them and force them into political contexts, into human

contexts, into social contexts and make them be alive again.

Naturally, we are all religious. Everybody, any atheist, everybody can claim religiosity. Our language is religious. Our spirituality is religious. There is no use of language without spirituality. There is no thinking without spirituality. There is no dreaming without spirituality. So, in that sense, you cannot avoid religion, if that's what you want to call religion. But then religion also has become the name simply of an organized entity of a certain kind. Some of these entities we call "religions." Others we have blasphemous, other words for, right? So, we reserve that name as if it was the privilege of a few giant clubs, and whoever isn't in the club, there is something wrong with them.

David Cayley
Peter Schumann, one might say, has tried to rescue religion from religion, to extract the hope, the mystery and the praise embodied in the Bible from the shell of exclusive and authoritarian belief. He gives, as an example, resurrection, an idea which has played a prominent part in many Bread and Puppet productions. For many years, Bread and Puppet hosted a free outdoor puppet circus and puppet pageant that was called "Our Domestic Resurrection Circus." By the time, it was finally overwhelmed by its own popularity in 1998, it was attracting upwards of 30,000 people to the Schumann farm in northeastern Vermont. The pageant had a different theme each year and an ever-changing array of extraordinary puppets, but always the same underlying structure as the Christian Bible: Creation, Fall and Resurrection. I asked Peter Schumann about this pattern during a tour of the Bread and Puppet Museum.

David Cayley
What does the resurrection express for you?

Peter Schumann
First of all, it's circular time, springtime, the reality of things in the real world, not in our "real world," and foremost that. But also simply what happens inside people because drama as a storytelling device needs to have some goal. It can't just stop with somebody being murdered or somebody being downed or some evil force being defeated. It needs to resurrect. It needs to pick up things from where they are downed and flattened and dead and bring them to life again. For me, the cycle of what you want to do isn't finished unless that also happens. So, it's not like an arbitrary pick of a story where you can end any which way. In a big pageant like this, you feel you are responsible to make hope and regrowth and rebirth the final event after everything else. The event has to be finished, and the finishing of the event requires this last, biggest gesture.

David Cayley
His pageants, Peter Schumann says, had to end with resurrection. It was an obligation, first, because nature is continuously reborn, but also because resurrection expresses the deep structure of human hope and longing, regardless of whether we look for supernatural rescue or survival after death. And this hope has to be enacted and given form again and again.

Taylor Stoehr is a teacher, a writer and an admirer of the Bread and Puppet Theater. He was a regular at Bread and Puppet's annual "Domestic Resurrection Circus," and he says that, for him, the resurrection that was represented in Peter Schumann's pageants points to the existing world.

Taylor Stoehr
The better world that we all hope for, that gives meaning to your life to struggle for and you have to believe in in order to struggle for — in other words, you have to have faith and hope — is actually available at every moment. It's not something that's going to take place later. It is fully manifested, and every time that the spirit really moves people, that's the resurrection. And it never is final. It's not that it's going to be full later. I would say, "It's full now but it's not final. It has to be done over and over again. Human beings will always have to do it. And that's as good as you get. It's not just a foretaste. It's the real thing. And it will be again the next time."

David Cayley
Peter Schumann's project of putting religion back in the hands of the people has deep roots in Western civilization. Christianity in the Middle Ages and after was a living cultural form and not just a system of belief. It was a vehicle for people's hopes, fears, joys and grievances as much as it was an expression of a fixed dogma. One example of this religious vitality

was the mystery or miracle plays that dramatized episodes from scripture and were originally performed by the laity in churches. It was the expulsion of these plays from churches, Peter Schumann says, that gave rise to the popular tradition to which his work belongs.

Peter Schumann
To me, it seems that what we inherited as modern puppetry and whence it comes from is the moment when the mystery cycles in the churches were thrown out of the Church because they became too devilish, too real, too fresh, too mean and too ridiculous, and the Church threw them out and left the pious part of the mystery play inside the sanctuary. And from then on, the market puppetry started and left all the piousness inside the sanctuary and took the other elements, the politicalness of it and the direct address to the public, and to say all the forbidden things. And this was always an important element in puppetry, since it's outside the official culture. It's not royal. It's not aristocratic. It's not bourgeois. It's always on the other side. It doesn't have licences. It's very hard for it to get a licence to do what it does.

David Cayley
The throwing of plays out of the churches, what kind of plays were these?

Peter Schumann
I think when you read them, these gigantic plays that were done in churches were a reenactment of Easter mostly, more or less, and they became more and more elaborate, with more and more puppetry and masks. Haven't you heard of Leonardo building gigantic mechanical devices into churches for spectacles? There were appearance acts, disappearance acts, flying, *Deus ex machina*, explosions, hell scenes, the illusion of fire — all sorts of developments as part of the presentation of the mystery cycles. And the Church closed the door to it all and reformed it and made it neat, keeping the correct, politically correct religiosity inside the Church, and the incorrect stuff, the fresh stuff, outside.

David Cayley
Church Christianity after the Reformation became, in Peter Schumann's eyes, a pious shell. The exuberant popular energies it was able to contain during the Middle Ages were driven out into the street. Puppetry became one of the new expressions of what Schumann calls the "fresh stuff."

John Bell is a puppeteer who worked with Peter Schumann for many years and now is a professor of theatre at Emerson College in Boston. He says that the expelling of theatre from churches during the Reformation is just one expression of a persistent anxiety within official Christianity.

John Bell
We went to a museum in Germany — I forget where — that had all these religious artifacts that were kicked out of mainstream, I guess, Lutheran or Catholic services in the 19th, 18th century, and it was all ritual stuff and intense — the stuff you find still in, say, Catholic churches in Latin America — statues of Jesus with the blood and the bones laid out in a glass coffin and fetish objects and this intense material imagery. That's embarrassing.

In the medieval times, there's a lot of anxiety about performance with masks and puppets because the churches are often built on old pagan sites, and people persist in dancing and doing masked performance, and the Pope wants to stamp that out. So, there are repeated references to trying to suppress the use of masks in churches and dancing. Spain, interestingly enough, has a special exemption from the Pope which allows boys to dance in the Church, so Spain manages to persist in its use of theatricality in the Church. Otherwise, in Europe, that stuff was repressed, and I think it has to do with the fact that, once people start dressing up and doing puppets, they're tapping into a pre-Christian, pagan vibe. And at certain moments in the Church's history, this was threatening, I think, although an interesting thing is that early in the Church, the origin of the word "marionette" is Mary. The first marionettes were images of the Virgin Mary. A crèche play, where the nativity is performed, is, in a way, a puppet show. Even today in Italy, you see these incredible crèches with moving figures and stuff, so that's central. And Jesus on the cross: In Medieval times, they were these Jesuses, and the eyes moved, and the head turned. When Peter Schumann does, say, a passion play with a Jesus puppet, that's really hooking up to basic Medieval Christian religious stuff. So, even though the Church was made anxious or nervous by

a lot of this theatricality, they also originally used a lot of it.

David Cayley
Performances involving puppets or masks made the Christian Church uneasy, John Bells says, and they were eventually suppressed. But in every other culture and in surviving Western folk cultures, such performances remained the dominant form of theatre, as Western scholars discovered when they began to study the matter.

John Bell
In the 19th century, with the beginnings of folklore or anthropology, the understanding of non-Western cultures, again and again Westerners are confronted with the situation of puppets. The word "folklore" is invented in the mid-19th century in England, and you have these folks going around and digging up antiquities. (They used to be called "antiquities.") And they look, and, oh, there are these giant puppets all around England. Or they ask, what are these folk traditions of European village life and seasonal rituals? Well, they involve maypoles and hobbyhorses and masked performance and greenmen and carnival and on and on. Then when Europeans start to invent anthropology, and they go to Africa or they go to Asia. And what do they find? They find masks and ritual, they find puppets all over the place. Then you get somebody like Nietzsche writing The Birth of Tragedy, and he's writing about Greek tragedy and trying to rediscover that, and part of what he's writing about is a ritual performance with masks.

David Cayley
Modern puppet theatre, according to John Bell, is the inheritor of this tradition. At the Bread and Puppet "Domestic Resurrection Circus" puppets and masked performers played to an outdoor audience seated in a natural amphitheatre — a situation resembling the ancient theatre of Dionysus, which Nietzsche studied. Puppet theatre may seem marginal to contemporary theatre-goers, Bell says, but it is actually the modern actors theatre that's the exception.

John Bell
Every culture has mask theatre, puppet theatre. Not every culture has a performance tradition where there's a building, and inside the building, you paint it all black, or you have a proscenium arch, and you have lights, and people come in and pay money, and they sit down, and you perform a realistic drama, where the conceit is that we're watching an exact duplicate of a room in somebody's house where a drama takes place. That form of theatre is really a narrow tradition. If we talk about someone out on the street with a puppet or a mask, dancing and talking about religion and politics, you find that in Africa, you find that in Asia, you find that in European folk traditions, you find that in Native American traditions — you find that everywhere. So, our minor, little form of puppet theatre, which is not even developed enough to be properly recognized in today's Boston Globe, that's really the world theatre tradition.

David Cayley
Puppets and masks, John Bell says, possess an ancient and universal connection with ritual and religion. Religion, including Christianity, was performed as dance, drama and song, and these performances were wild, living expressions, like the mystery cycles Peter Schumann has described. To reinvent this fresh quality and to reclaim religion for the contemporary imagination have been Schumann's aims, and it is in this sense that he can be said to have created a modern religious theatre. His achievement is visible, first of all, in his puppets. There seems to be no other and no better word than "holy" to describe the aura of many of the faces Schumann has sculpted. He described for me what he thinks his sculpture does.

Peter Schumann
It takes that face, and by "stilling" it, it makes something in that face very, very big. If it would only be an actor playing that person, it would only be a duplication of the same thing. But in the case of the sculpture doing that, it's not a duplicate of the same thing. It's a much larger thing. It makes the face holy. It's just one element in it: its stillness. It's the holy self of that self.

David Cayley
Why "holy"?

Peter Schumann
Because of that possibility in that self to be holy and to be whole. And in sculpture, it is that. It doesn't do

any harm or wrong or evil or not even the possibility of it.

David Cayley
The faces Peter Schumann speaks of can be seen in the Bread and Puppet Museum, where his puppets are collected and displayed. It's in an old barn on his Vermont farm. We toured the museum together, and he told me he had conceived it as a papier-mâché cathedral, which, for him, means a space where things can be truly what they are.

Peter Schumann
They are a place where human beings can feel truly at home, not like they are at home, but where they are at home in the real community of everybody else. And it's a place of non-purpose. It's not a place like home, where you have to sleep, to eat, to prepare the meal, to fight poverty, to do nasty things et cetera, but it's a place where that's absent. So, you are only in the community of people who are either ready to die or have just been born. And this is similar. It's the whole representation of animals and people and spirits that belong together. They are all here. And if they are not all here, we will add them next year. They will be here. They are obliged to be here.

David Cayley
But this is a cathedral with a difference, in the sense that it's so highly perishable.

Peter Schumann
Yes, that's the reality of things. The other cathedrals try to pretend some form of human eternity, which isn't quite true, which all of the wars of modern times are proving again and again and again and again. And we don't pretend that. We are a little bit on the other side of that pretence. That doesn't exist for us. We say, "It'll go. It should go. Needs to go. It's fine that it goes." We're going to say "Bye-bye" or not. It's very ephemeral.

David Cayley
Peter Schumann sees the impermanence of his cardboard creatures as part of the marginality of puppetry, which he embraces. "Guaranteed made from garbage," he proudly tells his audience as he introduces an array of papier-mâché gods. And this low status, he says, protects the puppets from the inhibiting aura of "serious art."

Peter Schumann
You also feel easy about their death or about their going away or about their moulding in the barn or their melting in the rain or whatever. It's not important. It's part of their ridiculousness.

David Cayley
So, even though you must be pleased with how some of them have come out, that's also a detachment you practise, to let them go?

Peter Schumann
Oh, I don't mind at all that they go. I never thought or think of them as something very permanent or even longlasting. I'm amazed that the ones in the barn... But I'm also amazed that the barn hasn't burned down. It's such a firebox, a tinderbox.

David Cayley
All that paper.

Peter Schumann
Yes.

David Cayley
So, their transience is part of their beauty to you.

Peter Schumann
Absolutely.

David Cayley
You're not going to leave a mark when you go.

Peter Schumann
Right. Hopefully not. Enough is enough. The burdens of history are already overplentiful. I have no desire to contribute to those.

David Cayley
Peter Schumann's willingness to let his creations decompose reflects the attitude with which he composes them in the first place. The things he makes are things that he says "want to be." They come through him, but he doesn't see himself as planning, controlling or owning the process. "We think of the things of this world as objects," he once wrote, "because we deceive ourselves that we are subjects." For him, things are alive, and a discarded

wrapping paper can rise in the wind as angel. This sense of a world rustling and stirring with a life larger than our own informs his work and his attitude to materials. He takes what is available at the moment, makes what needs to be at the moment and then lets it go. And it is this deep respect for the living world, says Amy Trompetter, a former member of the theatre, that is what is finally religious about Peter Schumann's approach.

Amy Trompetter
I think it's like a pact with life to use a small amount of resource to make a big amount of productivity. There's that discipline to get up in the morning and grind the grain and bake the bread and be true to that work. It's practical in making something out of really modest means, without a desire to have more budget, more stuff, more technical...not at all. It's a spiritual pact with this stuff, which isn't harmful to the Earth and which won't last, and the papier-mâché is impermanent, and that truth is your contract, and the truth starts with knowing what you're working with, how much energy you're using, how much of other people's energy you're using, how much materials of the Earth you're using, what you're giving for what you're consuming. That's the spiritualness of it and the trust that what will come out needs to be said and will come out in a way that can be heard and that will open ears and help eyes to see again, because it's so cluttered, our world, with what we don't need and uses up so much in a harmful way. That is the spiritualness of it for me.

David Cayley
Peter Schumann treats his art as temporary, as something arising and subsiding within larger cycles of nature and time. And in this respect, I think, he shows a revolutionary difference from our existing museum culture, with its view of art history as an endlessly projected series of monuments. The same attitude is expressed in Schumann's insistence that the purpose of his theatre is to devise performances that fit the necessity of the moment. When he started a dance company as a young man in Germany in the '50s, he wanted to demonstrate what he called "moving in the right way." When he began his theatre, its mandate was to "say the right thing" for whatever occasion a given play was created for. The performance of such fitting gestures is also one of the functions of religion, but it is a function at which Schumann thinks that churches often fail because they are too pious or too officious or too authoritarian. He found an example of how he thinks things should be done when he gave a workshop at a Taoist temple in Taiwan a few years ago.

Peter Schumann
It was on a hill, at the bottom of a holy mountain, where people went for pilgrimages, in a very beautiful, central place in Taiwan. Giant stairs leading up to this wonderfully built temple, surrounded by dragons and religious stories carved in wood and painted wonderfully. In the central temple part of it, hundreds of gods and an Earth goddess in the middle, all gods with caps, which we imitate, nightcaps that get pulled over their eyes so that they can sleep and then, in the day, get taken off so that they can be awake. We had to attend a service in the temple because we were there at a bad season when there were violent storms and rain and wind and so on, so the priestess suggested that we must pray for good weather for these performances. We did, and we went in there and knelt down, and she lit things, and she hit the cymbals and attendants of hers uncovered gods and — whatever they did — and then we had good weather — it was quite fantastic — in the bad weather season.

And I was there at times when they had more public services for other reasons or occasions. And similar to the Russian Orthodox service, it had such an atmosphere of...they just did the right thing in there. They brought their babies. They smoked their cigarettes. They gossiped. They could do anything they wanted, as they would do as pedestrians in their street or at home. And yet they were participating, heart and soul and mind, with what the priestess and her companions did there for them. It's the same in the Russian Orthodox Church, where the bringing of the light into the church, the church being closed, the knocking at the door, the opening of the door, the bringing of the light from outside to the inside and, from that source of light, lighting all things — all of this is already holy. Never mind how the people behave. In the Episcopalian Church, the priests have to dress very neatly and behave very nicely in order to believe anything. In an old Orthodox church or in this Taoist temple, people can spit on the floor. It doesn't matter. It won't disturb their connection to the creation of light or to the opening of the space by properly opening

the door at the right side, at the right time, after knocking sufficiently and the priest saying, "Yes, He is risen" and opening the door for them. So, it seems to me, it's not the particulars of these religions that matter, but the need in us. And this is not something which is outside of our commonness, of our ordinariness. All of it goes into that holy place, and the light gets produced in front of it.

David Cayley
So, can that be done in the theatre as easily as in a church?

Peter Schumann
No, no, no, it cannot. And I'm not claiming to create rituals. I think rituals aren't just made. They happen upon us. They are created by our needs. "Us" meaning not the producers, but the general assembly of people who happen to be together. In modern theatre, one talks a lot about "ritualistic" and "ritual" and so on. I find that quite fake. I find that very similar to what I feel as fake in the Episcopalian Church.

David Cayley
Theatre cannot create rituals, Peter Schumann says, but it can reach for the right gesture within its own performance. The show I saw in New York during the time we were recording the conversations you're hearing tonight concerned the protests that occurred during the meetings of the leaders of the G-8 countries in the Italian city of Genoa in the spring of 2001. During those meetings, protesters were beaten, and one was killed by police. The play didn't try to represent these events, but instead transformed them into surprising sounds and images. The shooting of the protestor was enacted by Schumann clicking two small stones together, making the report of the gun real by reducing it to the tiniest of sounds. The oratorio, as Schumann called this piece, ended with the company at a table, solemnly drinking to the accompaniment of an old Georgian folk song.

Peter Schumann
That oratorio, at that moment, to my mind, has the need for that ancient Georgian festive song, which is for an occasion of sitting and drinking. This ancient world has to be present somewhere in this, because we only have the modern world. So, for me to, all of a sudden, have the ancient song there and to act properly and respectfully vis à vis that song, to sit down and take cabbage leaves and pour water on them and drink out of them is a simple thing. But it's only a little thing. It's not trying to establish something which then we propose to the audience, please go home and do that. We are only saying, in our oratorio, we need to sit down at that point and sing an ancient, ancient, ancient song of drinking and of eating. To think of this as a ritual would mean a proposal for everybody to join in, and to come again next week or the next day and so on. We are not doing that. But on the other hand, what we are doing creates and shows a formalism that people can understand as useful in their lives, to understand the doing of things as in need of a formalism that makes them communal.

David Cayley
Peter Schumann's Genoa oratorio shows its audience a possibility, a potentially useful formalism, he says. This is also how he views the larger purpose of his theatre. It doesn't prescribe rituals, but it does provide a kind of prototype or vehicle for unformed, collective aspirations.

Peter Schumann
It's an attempt to give form to a culture that doesn't have a form, a culture that isn't...where the upsetness against the culture doesn't have a form. The culture has a form, but that form is a corrupt, useless bulk of stuff. Whereas the human drive and strength and energy excluded from those culturally existing forms want to be, and they need form also. And I think what we do is an attempt to find that form, to find funerals, to find ways of coming into this world, to find how to be in the world as protester, how to insurrect against the government, how to insurrect against the culture, how to topple the government, how to topple the culture, how to establish possible real forms of government and of people living together and being together. So, that yearning in people needs form.

David Cayley
One of the examples Peter Schumann gives of this reaching for proper cultural forms is what he calls "finding funerals." And at the Bread and Puppet farm, in the pine woods that stretch above the field where circuses and pageants are performed, one finds a collection of small wooden houses built in

memory of puppeteers and friends of the theatre who have died. Each of these shrines is custom-built and decorated with reminders of that person. Spirit houses, they seemed to me when I first saw them, more personal and more satisfying than tombstones. Each house has been dedicated by a gathering of friends.

Peter Schumann
The funerals that I have attended prove to me a society that doesn't have real commemorative services, and I always understood our theatre to be a funeral institution, to be an institution that can provide proper services for people who are sad or for people who are about to die or for people who have died and who, for the rest of us, therefore, need to be commemorated. So, to provide that service in our hurt state of human community is a function of our theatre.

David Cayley
Now, how would you reconcile what you just said with the earlier statement that you're not providing ritual?

Peter Schumann
The commemoration is freewheeling. It doesn't force people to do it a certain way. It usually opens up for them the possibility of inventing that way at the moment at which we do it. In the case of a theatre piece, that's limited. But when we do a real one for Mabel Dennison or for the other people who died last year in our pine forest where we have the commemoration places for them, then it involves all the elements we can pull together. It's the singing and the parading and the speaking that people wish to do and the beauty of the space and the seating of people into the pine forest with their screaming children. It's not a ritual. It's a very open form, where people contribute immediately into it or can change it immediately, as they partake.

David Cayley
Peter Schumann is speaking here about private gatherings of the Bread and Puppet company, and its large extended family of friends and former puppeteers. But he also says that it is part of the public work of the theatre to invent more satisfying ceremonies and services than those that presently exist. And this, for him, demands a rebirth of popular religious vitality and the courage to invent new gods.

Actuality:
Peter Schumann
"These are the gods that are presiding over the Insurrection Mass. They are small, papier-mâché, guaranteed made from garbage, and they are the exact opposite of the monotheistic super-Gods of our monotheistic super-culture. And I will now introduce to you each of these gods..."

David Cayley
The occasion is a performance of what Peter Schumann calls an "insurrection mass" at New York's Theater for the New City. A number of small Buddha-like statues line the front of the performing area. Like the gods Schumann admired at the Taoist temple in Taiwan, each wears a cap. There's a god of the light bulbs which illuminate the room, a god of woodchucks and foxes endangered by the interstate highway system, and a general "thank you" god.

Actuality:
Peter Schumann
"And this is the special god of the day, the god of papier-mâché, and its opposite, civilization."

Peter Schumann
When we say "papier-mâché gods," it's a ridiculous thing, sure. But it's also very real to say that to people because we know that, in their hearts, they are neither Jews nor Christians; they are papier-mâché god believers, and they just don't dare to say it. But since we say it to them, "Be. Confess it. You believe in papier-mâché gods," they might join us.

David Cayley
What does that mean "to believe in papier-mâché gods"?

Peter Schumann
To believe in the freewheeling, ancient concept of many, many gods for any occasion and for everything in your mind, not this horrendous idea of this super-unity of a singular figure or a singular thing there, but instead this wonderful Greek giganticness of gods for everything, gods for every occasion and gods for all cells in your brain. Gods are, after all, productions, our productions — we make them, it's our job, and that can be said negatively as well as positively. Once we realize that we made them, we can abandon them and make other ones. And yet,