

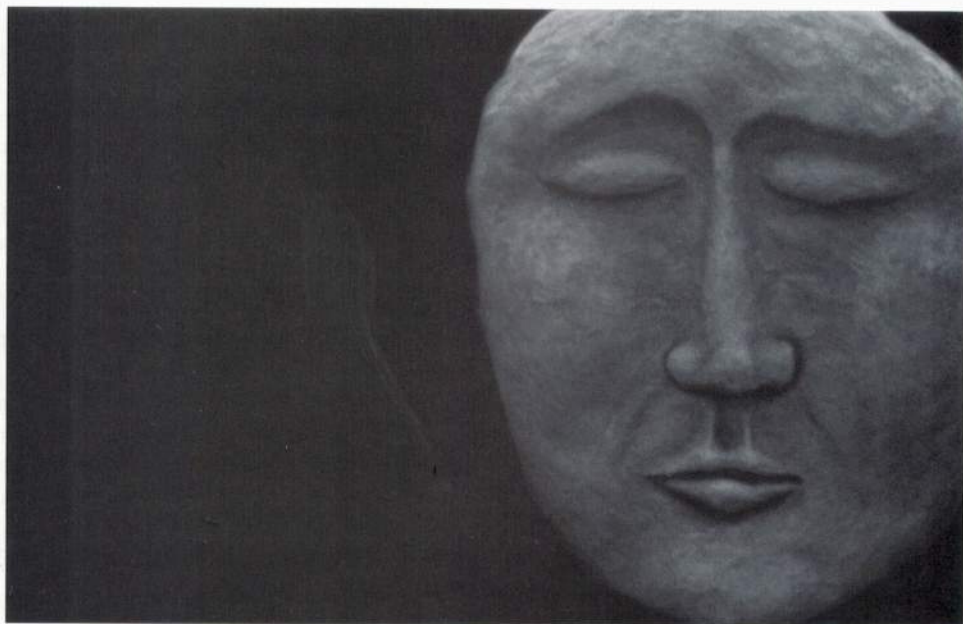
WHAT IF?

Journal of Radical Possibilities



Trickster's Time:

the art of transforming protest



When human culture turns against human beings themselves the trickster appears as a kind of savior. When we have forgotten that we participate in the shaping of this world, and become enslaved to shapings left us by the dead, then a cunning artus-worker may appear, sometimes erasing the old boundaries so fully that...creation must start as if from scratch, and sometimes just loosening up the old divisions, greasing the joints so they may shift in respect to one another, or opening them so commerce will spring up where the rules forbid it. In short, when the shape of culture itself becomes a trap, the spirit of the trickster will lead us into deep shape-shifting.

—Louis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*

The Power of the PUPPETS



It is an old, old scene, present in just about every culture in the world: to the sound of drums and flutes, masked and costumed figures perform before a crowd of onlookers. Who are these characters, and what is it they mean to those who have watched them, through all the long centuries, in a clearing by a fire, a circle of huts, on a village green, a town square, a city street, and—most recently—from behind lines of police barricades?

In many traditional cultures, these performers are the gods themselves, the spirits with the power and knowledge to shape the human world. In some traditional African societies, the gods inhabit the masquers while they perform, so that they can communicate their will directly to humans. In other societies the representation is more symbolic, but still, it means the great presiding powers that shape the world we know are walking among us. And their purpose is nothing less than to tell us who we are, and what the world is.

But as we have moved away from the dark, irrational world of nature, to the rational, sensible, “democratic” world of commodities, the masked figures have evolved too—from gods to clowns, and finally from clowns who exposed the follies of the powerful to clowns who merely trademark, that is who humorously identify a product for us to consume. They wave to us from gas station and supermarket openings, they cavort in football stadiums, and show up in thousands of pictures hugging smiling kids in Disneyland. They still try to tell us, in a limited way, who we are—we are the kid who likes Donald Duck, we are the Colts fan—but they tell us lies about the world from the get-go. They tell us the world is a safe, cheery, cute place where we can all be happy if we have the right stuff—that is, if we consume the right things. Rather than put us in touch with the powers in charge of our world, they obscure and confuse and distract us from them. Under their changeless, monstrous smiles, it is not they who become literally meaning-less, but we.

Meanwhile, the old figures, the shadowy gods, have never really disappeared, even in the U.S., arguably the most amnesiac of societies. Through the modern decades, at small arts and theater festivals, at school pageants and street fairs, they have sometimes appeared to delight and amaze. And at the end of the 20th century, suddenly (it would seem) they returned with a vengeance, leading processions of tens of thousands of people protesting—what? The horrific, sterile emptiness and brutal injustice of a world which threatens these same persistent gods with final extinction in the name of the new, single god: Profit. And for their temerity, they received the ultimate tribute authority can bestow on those who advocate resistance to their own annihilation—attack, arrest, confiscation and destruction. At the dawn of a new century in America, the old gods have been locked up, disappeared, silenced before they could touch minds and hearts with their message.

What is the power of the puppets? Read on and find out.

Wise Fool Puppet Intervention: Conversations with Amy Christian and K. Ruby

You can trace the many of the artistic techniques being used in the wave of creative street protest that crested in November 1999 in Seattle at the WTO Ministerial to the decade-long work of two dedicated and creative women, who formed a small, grassroots theater project called Wise Fool.

Wise Fool Puppet Intervention emerged from the 1989 encounter and continuing collaboration of San Francisco Bay Area artist-activists, K. Ruby and Amy Christian. In the decade after its founders first met and conceived the idea of bringing large-scale puppetry and processional theater to Bay Area political protests, Wise Fool became an essential participant in what had seemed to be a vanishing tradition in the U.S.: community-oriented folk art and-street performance.

K. Ruby describes the lineage of Wise Fool: first, in the earlier wave of political street theater of the 60's and 70's came Bread and Puppet, the Vermont-based processional puppet theater founded by Peter Schumann. They are the "grandparents of all of us," Ruby says. For years, Bread and Puppet was pretty much synonymous with large-scale puppetry with a political and social message in the U.S. The company still exists, and its farm in Glover, VT was, until recently, the host of a yearly gathering for political puppet theater attended by thousands.

In the mid-seventies, after working with Bread and Puppet, a Minneapolis artist named Sandy Spieler helped to form what became In the Heart of the Beast puppet theater in her

city. It was through Ruby's internship with In the Heart of the Beast in the late 1980s that she got some of the ideas for putting together what was then to become Wise Fool Puppet Intervention. Ruby became interested in their work because, as a mask maker and dancer who had participated in groups producing theater for social change, she wanted to learn what larger-than-life puppetry could do to motivate and inspire an audience to action.

In the Heart of the Beast had a broad concept of the uses of street theater and puppetry for social change and community building. They were key organizers of Minneapolis' May Day celebration, which included not just processional and street theater but puppet-making workshops for adults and children. They involved large numbers of people in brainstorming the themes of the event, and designing and building the puppets and masks for the parade and performances.

Ruby says she returned from her six-week stint with Heart of the Beast "incredibly jazzed," and immediately began looking for local organizers who might be interested in applying some of what she had seen in Minneapolis to Bay Area work for social change.

Meanwhile, Amy Christian had come to the Bay Area from the East Coast as an art student and activist, who had worked on campus in the student movement for divestment from apartheid South Africa. She says: "Though I wanted to study art, I became disgusted with the 'straight' art world. It was so

limited, so self-involved." She started working with the Bay Area Peace Test, participating in actions at the Nevada Test Site for nuclear weapons, and at Lawrence Livermore labs in California, where high-tech nuclear weapons and the Star Wars defense system are designed.

Actions in these remote, sparsely-populated areas were powerful to those who participated in them, and involved a direct challenge to the system in the form of mass civil disobedience. However, they seldom received any attention from the mass media, even in their own local areas. Activists were becoming frustrated with their isolation and the lack of larger impact their demonstrations were having.

The person who became the link between Ruby and Amy was David Solnit, a local organizer for the test site actions. David worked with anarchist collectives in a number of areas organizing direct action on issues from housing to old-growth forest protection to the anti-nuclear movement. When Ruby returned from Minneapolis, she decided to look up David. At the same time, David and Amy had the idea for a Hiroshima Day "art action" at Livermore, which would involve dancers and other performers in a march to the lab. David contacted Ruby about sharing her skills. A core group, including David, Ruby, Amy, and her then-partner David Keyek, met to brainstorm ideas. Ruby's basement on Ashbury Street in San Francisco became the workshop for the construction of four giant puppets including a Bird of Liberty and Toxie, the Toxic Waste Monster. "It was very challenging," says Ruby. "I had never built these puppets on my own before, never showed anyone else how to build them." Her skills were already apparent, though.

The result was a uniquely powerful anti-nuclear action. "Our community had not seen

an action like that, ever," according to Ruby. There were butoh dancers, stiltwalkers, drumming, and the big puppets. "The local papers all covered the march for the first time—with a photo on the front page of the puppets," says Amy. "It was an epiphany for me. Visual art and performance and activism—all these things I wanted to do coming together."

They decided to prepare more puppets for the next Nevada Test Site action in March of 1990. There was at this point, still no sense of "ownership, of a project" as Amy puts it. "But the three of us [herself, David Keyek, and Ruby] were now definitely the main people involved." This time there would be a theme, a story line, a full-scale processional performance: "The Mask of Rage." They also invited other participating groups to learn how to make their own puppets. The puppets then led over 2000 people in a "Procession of Fools" at the test site. "People loved the puppets and the drumming. They kept asking if we were Bread and Puppet Theater!" says Ruby.

Returning from the test site action, they decided they needed to call themselves something. After discussion, they settled on the name Ruby had already been using for her mask-making workshops, Wise Fool. "The concept of the wise fool is a very old and powerful one," she says. She cites an article called "The Fool, the Clown, the Jester," from *Gnosis* magazine. The author, Fred Fuller, calls the Fool, that traditional figure of western folk culture "a canny, amoral rebel against all authority." He traces the origin of wise fools, who offered cryptic counsel and social satire to kings and lords, back to ancient Celtic tales, where they are also presented as "poets, seers and wizards."

Both Amy and Ruby proudly mention that soon thereafter, they received the first grant

either of them had ever written. This enabled them to do six weeks of workshops on creating large-scale puppets for the San Francisco Day of the Dead procession in November. The theme was "Spirits of the Forest." Honoring the disappearing ancient forests of California was appropriate for this celebration, which has its roots in Latin American culture, and traditionally commemorates the ancestors who gave us life.

As far as setting up and administering a formal project was concerned, that is, getting funding, finding a fiscal sponsor, or developing non-profit status: "Amy and I were both very resourceful people; we just sort of figured it out as we went along. We kept saying, 'Oh, this can't be so hard!'" says Ruby, laughing.

Then, as both women remember, came the Gulf War. Ruby: "Nineteen ninety-one put Wise Fool on the map." Amy: "The Gulf War [protests] definitely propelled Wise Fool into being something. We were constantly present and involved. We taught stiltwalking, drumming. We made new giant puppets. We were also doing direct action. The puppets became a huge force supporting people doing civil disobedience." There were significant actions happening two or three times a week. Amy talks about the power and courage that friends in street blockades and lockdowns felt when they found themselves confronting the police, and could hear the drummers and see the puppets supporting them. It gave them the sense that "we were bigger than the police, stronger than the police. This really inspired me." Ruby says: "We made puppets that represented rage and grief, that said 'this is the normal response to war.' The puppets were really effective because they made what people were feeling larger than life."

As a company, Wise Fool began designing and putting on its own performances, while

continuing to participate in street festivals like Carnaval and Día de los Muertos. Among them were the Chasky, in 1992, whose theme was the European conquest of the Americas, BABEL, about immigration, racism and diversity, and Touch/Prayer, about living with HIV/AIDS. They developed a yearly event, the Feast of Fools, held at a San Francisco soup kitchen. The Feast of Fools is a medieval celebration, in which, according to Ruby, "the rich play poor, and the poor play rich. Our guests would come all dressed up. We made a five-course meal, and there was theater that went with each meal, and the food was related to the theater; it was all woven together. One year we flambéed the Capitol building. One year we made a sheet cake in the shape of a dollar bill and reapportioned the wealth." They toured Europe shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. They developed the Wise Fool School, and taught workshops on mask making, puppetry and music.

Then Amy became involved in founding In the Street, San Francisco's only street theater festival, with Moshe Cohen, who performed as a clown with his own troupe Clown Conspiracy. "We just met at a party and started talking about how there was no street theater in San Francisco. Then later he called me and said 'So, about the street theater—do you want to put a festival together?' She brought in Darryl Smith, who directed arts programs in the Tenderloin, a vibrant inner city neighborhood that was considered a high crime area and thus had few public events of any kind. He suggested they hold the festival there. The result was a colorful, inventive mix of street performance: dance, highwire, puppetry large and small, clowning, acrobatics. There was a high level of participation by youth and people of color. It was also a completely vendorless and sponsorless event. Wise Fool's remarkable

puppets and stiltwalkers led the procession through the streets on opening day in June 1996. Ruby put together a sculpture garden in an alley, where kids could use the materials they found to make their own sculpture and take it home with them. In the Street continues to be an annual event in San Francisco's Tenderloin at this writing.

In August 1996 Amy and David Solnit went to the Active Resistance anarchist conference in Chicago, and the seeds were planted that would end with Wise Fool's work having a national impact through its influence on Art and Revolution (see *following article*). "Our ethic has always been to teach others how to do this," Amy says. "It's really great to see our tiny company now become part of something that's spreading all over the country. We've been part of the resurgence of a movement." "This is what makes us different from a normal art company," says Ruby. "We give it away, constantly. What we do is no secret. This is art for the people."

Then in 1997 Amy and Alessandra Ogren, a long-time Wise Fool collaborator, joined a project of Moshe's, Clowns Without Borders, and took a Wise Fool show to Chiapas, Mexico, the heart of the Zapatista indigenous rights and resistance movement. They found the laughter they generated with a simple clown and puppet show was transformative and liberating to the indigenous communities facing almost daily violence and repression there.

A chronology of Wise Fool's work in the 1990s, prepared by Ruby, lists almost 60 separate major events organized solely or with significant involvement by Wise Fool.

Amy, and later Alessandra, relocated to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where they formed their own 'branch' of the company, along lines which took Wise Fool in a different direction from its historic Bay Area work. Together with

Jaime Smith, from the Center for Cooperative Arts and Dialogue, they used puppets and theater to do trainings and workshops on conflict resolution, rejuvenating Native American languages, and also with children, disabled adults, substance abusers. They participated in another Chiapas tour, and took steps towards becoming involved in a longer-term project there. And they organized a wildly popular all-woman circus, the One Railroad Circus, which has performed in backlots and festivals in the Southwest. "We're working on long-term issues. For example, with the circus, some people were shocked at first when they realized we were all women. We've found you can take that step, and politicize them through the back door," says Amy.

Ruby, in the Bay Area, organizes the Puppet Love festival every year, which brings together dozens of groups to perform and share skills. She produced an excellent handbook which teaches the basic techniques of large-scale puppetry that Wise Fool has developed, along with stiltwalking, mask-making, and street music. At this writing she has plans to set up an internship program that will train artists in puppetry and processional theater, some of whom may become new members of the Wise Fool company. "We need to involve new people on a regular basis, so there isn't burnout," says Ruby. "We always said the company was kind of like an onion. There's the small core group in the middle who come to meetings, make decisions about what organization will be involved in and do the work to make that happen. In the second layer there's a group of 10-15 people, musicians and performers who work with us on a regular basis. The outer layer are the people who are involved marginally throughout the year: workshop participants, people who carry a puppet in a procession or a demonstration, people who volunteer to help out at a show."

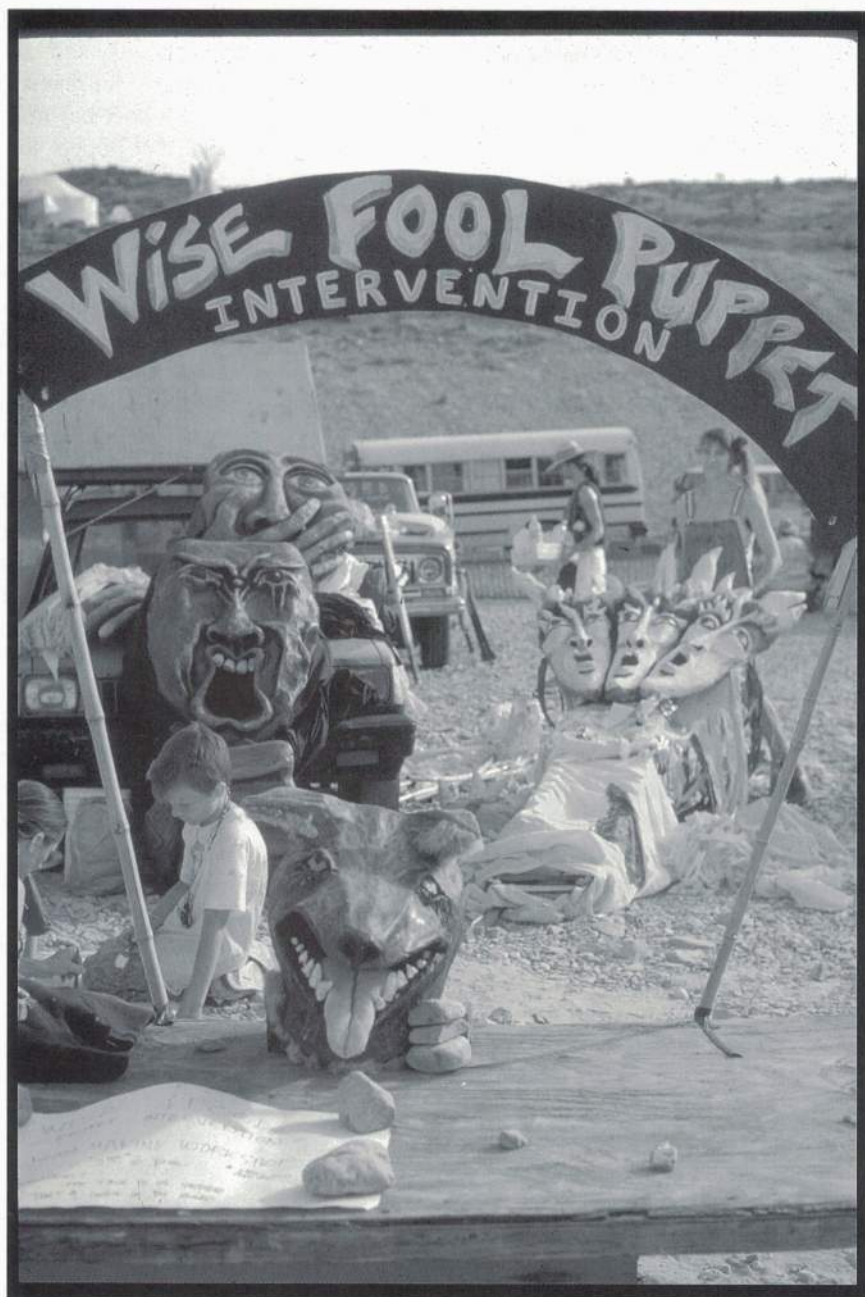
Both Amy and Ruby are upbeat about the future of Wise Fool. Outside Santa Fe, Wise Fool New Mexico now has its own workshop, gathering space and home for the core members. "I see a lot of different directions [we] could go in. I would like to see Wise Fool keep doing what it does," says Ruby, "touring, doing workshops and events. But in a way, it doesn't matter what happens to us. We are just one grassroots theater group in the lineage of folk art, and we have already done a really good job of passing on the knowledge, and creating new technology, and passing that on, and revitalizing this art form. We've already spawned new groups, and influenced thousands of people. Wise Fool now has an identity that's bigger than any of us individually."

At the end of the conversation, Ruby reflects on what the power of the puppets is for her.

"This is an ancient tradition. People have been making images of themselves ever since they could use their hands. There's a tradition of puppetry in every country: from the Vietnamese water puppets to the Balinese shadow puppets to the subtle, amazing Bunraku puppets of Japan and China. And Europeans have Punch and Judy, from Punchinello, of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition. Puppets are *like* people, but they can

express things that we can't. Just as the clown can stand outside of society and comment on it to the king. Because the tiniest degree of separation that the puppet has from being a real human allows that puppet to get away with it.

"Why is this art effective?" she asks. "It's effective of course, because it's visual and interesting. But also, even though the puppets can be big and ominous, there's something very friendly about them. They're made out of paper and wood and cloth. They are something people can understand and relate to. And definitely something they could make themselves, with a little instruction. I think it incites the imagination. And there is not much in our culture these days that really incites the imagination. We have a culture that's been bankrupted by TV, mainstream media. There are a lot of people who are bored and frustrated with that culture, they don't want to sit watching a little screen, they want something else, something they can participate in. They are tired of parades that they just stand and watch go by. But they see these [puppets] and it incites their creativity. They think: I could do that. I could be *in* the parade. All puppetry, pageantry, circus arts, outdoor festivals, touch that need. There is a natural human desire to participate and to create."





"Fire" puppet, Nevada Test Site, 1990. Photo by K. Ruby.



The founders of Wise Fool (on stilts, left to right) Amy Christian, K. Ruby, David Keyek, Gulf War demonstration, San Francisco 1991. Photo by Rick Claymore.



"Tenderness" mask, Carnival parade, San Francisco, 1992. Photo by K. Ruby



First Annual "In the Street" Theatre Festival, San Francisco, 1996. Photo by K. Ruby



"In the Street" Theatre Festival puppets. Photo by K. Ruby



"From My Window: A Folk History of the Tenderloin," San Francisco, 1997.

Photo by Jaime Smith.



Wise Fool in Chiapas, Mexico, 1997. Photo by Jaime Smith.

Art and Revolution: a Conversation with David Solnit

Art and Revolution was born out of the Active Resistance anarchist conference at the Chicago Democratic National Convention in 1996. Bay Area activists like David Solnit, Alli Starr and Amy Christian had seen the power that adding artistic elements to public protest brought to demonstrations. They conceived of a way to make these elements integral, not just add-ons, to a whole technique of building protest actions and training participants. In Chicago, they first developed what would become the Art and Revolution "convergences:" during the period before a major action, a whole series of workshops would be held on all aspects of effective protest, from building giant puppets and performing street theater, to talking to the news media, to confronting police blockades and dealing with medical emergencies.

David says he came to Active Resistance burned out on single-issue organizing, and bored with the increasingly irrelevant and marginalized dynamics of traditional street protest. He felt U.S. opposition movements were always on the defensive, and they had become too easily "manageable" by the system they were supposedly challenging. There was little real structural criticism being advanced, and not much vision of what a better system might look like. Protest actions did not generally engage those who weren't participating, nor did they involve much creativity or responsibility from most of those who did participate.

The idea of the convergence, as David explains, was to get artists and performers,

who know how to engage and enlighten, to learn how to organize, and organizers, who know how to mobilize, to learn how to be artists. The result, after a week of workshops in Chicago, was the creation of a protest action featuring a giant Corporate Tower of Power, a headless structure covered with corporate logos, from whose mammoth hands the two major party presidential candidates dangled like, well, puppets! It was hauled by workers who, when they got tired of its weight, could transform it into a completely different structure; its sides were rolling murals that could portray images of a harmonious, healthy society instead of one dominated by big corporate influence and power.

The procession the participants organized went through working class Chicago neighborhoods, not downtown or in front of the convention center. It was not a "permitted" march. Large street intersections were taken and held, police tried to provoke fights but failed as the marchers held their ground.

The activists saw that this type of protest worked on many levels: challenging ideas could be conveyed, clearly, simply and powerfully, both to onlookers and the mass media, the repressive role of the police was clearly shown when they attacked and threatened peaceful demonstrators who were armed only with beautiful, painstakingly crafted objects, and perhaps best of all, the whole action was designed and carried out collectively by its participants. The "no leaders" approach confused and challenged authorities, and made selective repression

much more difficult. The stage was set to begin taking this concept around the country to help groups structure actions that were powerful and effective enough to "force a crisis" in the system.

David also talks about the mid-'90s cross-fertilization between anti-capitalist struggles in Europe, the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Mexico, which was the first expressly anti-globalization armed insurgency, and U.S. radical direct action groups. In Britain, activists had taken up Earth First! tactics like encampments and lock-downs (where activists chain themselves to a site so that they cannot be forcibly removed without serious physical harm). They applied them to build an anti-roads movement challenging the destruction of neighborhoods and public space for automobiles. They also tapped into the energy of the clandestine rave scene, turning protests into huge street parties. This "Reclaim the Streets" movement was thus a direct challenge to the repressive Criminal Justice Act, passed in Britain in 1995, which criminalized squats, peace camps, raves and outdoor festivals.

At the G8 summit, the yearly meeting of the world's eight most economically powerful countries, in Birmingham, June 1998, the movement held its largest action ever. It was, David says, the largest anti-corporate globalization protest to that time. Then in June 1999, when the G8 met in Koln, Germany, Reclaim the Streets issued a call to protest (and celebrate) in financial districts around the world on that day, and 100 cities, including San Francisco, took action.

In the U.S., several Art and Revolution convergences were held, starting in the Northwest in 1997. Art and Revolution artist-activists helped specific social change organizations from the United Farm Workers to welfare and housing rights groups build puppets and other props and design street

theater for their public actions. In general, such actions received greater public attention than they ever had before.

Art and Revolution of San Francisco was also instrumental in rescuing the tradition of May Day as a celebration of struggle and cultural survival. May 1st, recognized as a holiday around the world honoring the Haymarket martyrs, who died in Chicago in 1887 protesting for the eight-hour work day, has never been officially celebrated in the U.S. Art and Revolution artists and organizers and a coalition of local groups pulled together the city's first May Day celebration in decades in 1998, and over 5,000 people—hundreds of whom were participants—showed up for a series of permitless actions and events: the first of which was a procession from the San Francisco waterfront to a neighborhood park. There were street theater, music and dance along the way, and more performances at the park, including a dramatic reading of speeches by Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, and a traditional Maypole dance. Reclaim May Day brought many organizations working on single issues together in a large-scale celebration of the powerful but much-ignored history, and future possibilities, of the struggle for social change.

In early 1999, the World Trade Organization, the body whose task was to clear the legal obstacles to corporate globalization, announced that it would hold its third Ministerial Conference in the U.S. For the U.S. activists who were motivated and inspired by the growing Third World and European movements against corporate-dominated globalization, "this would be our Birmingham," David says. "We wanted to do large-scale street theater and direct action at the WTO." They put out a call for a "street party and direct action," and began forming a west coast network of groups from L.A. to

Vancouver, B.C. The network formed was entirely of grassroots groups without paid staff, though it was soon obvious that larger, reform-minded organizations, including the AFL-CIO, would also be mobilizing to have a presence at the talks.

By late spring, according to David, there was little focus yet on what the protest in Seattle (the site eventually chosen by the WTO) would look like. "Our mission was to put out a radical and visionary analysis," he says. "We were advocating one day of mass, nonviolent direct action," the goal of which would be to shut down the opening meetings of the conference. They began to dialogue with fair trade, human rights and environmental organizations, and won their support for the idea of a shutdown. They organized a "road show" of artists and activists to do agit-prop theater up and down the coast to help build interest and support for the November 30 mobilization. The road show included speakers from People's Global Action, an alliance of primarily Third World peasants' rights organizations which was formed at an anarchist gathering in Spain, which in turn had been inspired by similar gatherings hosted by the Mexican Zapatistas. With the U.S. at last taking part, the globalization of resistance to transnational corporate capitalism was now a reality.

The rest really is history. Paul Hawken's article (page 38) is required reading for anyone who wasn't in Seattle and wants to know what it looked and felt like to be there, as well as an excellent analysis of the issues confronting society at that historical crossroads. Art and Revolution's influence was evident everywhere on the streets, from the street party with music and sound system provided by the Teamsters' local, to the giant Globalize Liberation puppet and the variety of dance groups, marching bands, "radical

cheerleaders," clowns, puppeteers, stiltwalkers and other performers who filled the streets around the convention center on November 30, 1999.

It was also evident in the massive, generally well-organized and effective direct action that took place. There was no question, from the resulting police riot and the ultimate collapse of the talks, that it indeed forced a crisis in the system. For the last twenty-five years, large-scale marches and rallies alone, no matter how well-attended, had failed, as had "voluntary-arrest" civil disobedience, to have the effect that the two combined created in Seattle. This crisis was also the result of the "radical and visionary analysis" that publicly outed the economic system itself, not just one or another of its effects, as the culprit. For a moment, in the very society supposedly benefitting most from corporate globalization, the mask of beneficence slipped. The ugly reality of just how many people were losing ground, and how brutal the maintainers of the status quo could be to keep it that way, emerged into the light.

After Seattle, in ten months, the same period it had taken to organize that one mobilization, three significant U.S. mass actions were held, all of which involved many or most of the elements that Art and Revolution convergences had first brought together. In all of these actions: at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund meetings in Washington, DC, and the Republican and Democratic Conventions for the 2000 presidential campaign, the response by the authorities was designed specifically to neutralize the effect that art, mass civil disobedience and a coordinated strategy by protesters would have. The power of the puppets as symbols of resistance was confirmed by the fact that in Washington and Philadelphia they were confiscated, and in the

latter city destroyed by the authorities before they could appear in street protests there.

David reflects on the meaning of Seattle, and the evolution of the movement in its wake. "Seattle blew a big opening in the gloomy, overcast sky of the possible in this country," he says. But the grey clouds began gathering again quickly. "The powers that be learn too. We have to stay creative and smart. We can't just repeat what's been done before." The stakes are higher when the system is actually threatened by protest, and activists have to learn how to move in a more repressive atmosphere, where the consequences for confronting authority are severe. And it isn't just the authorities or the mass media who sabotage the effectiveness of street protest—groups on the left themselves often try to straightjacket new forms of protest or jockey for control of protest movements instead of working to make them ever more seriously challenging to the status quo.

Street theater and culture are one way to create political space, to raise consciousness and motivate people to participate in advocating change. But, says David "we have to broaden our movement, de-marginalize ourselves. To be strong enough to do what we need to do we can't just be young, white, counter-culture. We need to engage the larger society in a dialogue about what change they want to see. We have to stay in dialogue with more reformist sectors. We have to work to convince parents, neighbors, workers, that social revolution is necessary. We need to have the majority on our side." This search for an inclusive movement makes a difference with European radical activism and the U.S. sectarian left, which have never been interested in, or at the very least, never learned how to communicate with the great majority of people whose political awareness is limited, though their experience of oppression may be direct.

Visionary and poetic imagery, David says, can help keep people focused on the bigger picture, and help keep the minds of those who merely seek reform open to the idea of more radical change.

Another essential in his view is the leaderless, directly democratic affinity group structure. The fundamental difference with traditional left structures is that "we are actually organizing ourselves along the lines of the world we want to see." Staff-driven reform organizations and the traditional labor movement function internally like small corporations. Affinity groups, drawn from the anarchist collectives of the Spanish Civil War, use consensus-based decision making and a non-hierarchical structure. There are new forms of organizing evolving now as well, which involve fluid structures that form around specific actions and then dissolve.

Art and Revolution itself is not a formal structure, David says—the name belongs to anyone who wants to learn its techniques and put them into practice, like Food Not Bombs, which challenges the structural injustice that causes hunger and homelessness, or Critical Mass, the group bike rides that take place sporadically in cities around the world.

What is to come for the movement? At the August 2000 Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, some of the most powerful, well-crafted and beautiful giant puppets that Art and Revolution could create managed to escape the threat of confiscation only to find themselves virtually ignored by cops and mass media. There was the giant Riot Cop, with his limp foam baton and his pepper spray canister that actually spritzed onlookers (with water). Sundry social ills, from Militarism to Racism, processed in dark garb through the streets. The two-headed, single-bodied Major Party Candidates puppet carried a giant Death Penalty syringe and dragged a shopping cart

stuffed with corporate money. The huge cardboard happy-face specter of False Democracy collapsed when people carrying giant multi-colored puzzle pieces representing aspects of the social and political solution began to fit them together. People of color were in the leadership of actions and participated in significant numbers, a change from the new movement's earlier mobilizations. But the eye of the commercial media was elsewhere, drawn only to the titillating possibility of violent confrontation, or to the protest fashions of the Black Bloc, groups of young white anarchists dressed to thrill in bandanas and black sweats.

David continues to stress the need to link issues, see connections, out the structures that create and perpetuate injustice. He talks about the goal of a direct, participatory democracy. He reminds Americans that "all of us in Seattle were only a small percentage of the total number of people who mobilized around the world against the WTO on November 30th" in India, Brazil, Turkey, Korea, throughout Europe and elsewhere. This is a world-wide movement. "And I still tell people to make their art convey a single, simple idea, and how to make their message concise, so the media can get it," he says, without irony. We must use all the tools we have.

The Return of the Puppet Spirits

At the end of the millennium during which they, like tens of thousands of species in the natural world, reached the verge of extinction, the puppet spirits returned in force to speak truth to power. But power has many ways of turning its head. Protest has been transformed by audacity and art, but this transformation has yet to seep through the walls of control that have created and maintain a bewildered, politically passive, and poorly informed populace in the United States.

Engaging the public seems key to the future success of this—or any—protest movement. Only an engaged and informed public can truly effect, or even discuss, progressive social change. The visionary art of the streets is a way of scaling the wall of indifference and ignorance that the system has raised. But it cannot reach millions at a time, repeatedly, like a commercial or a news sound bite. There is a slow, house-to-house process, an infiltration of ideas, that must take place for a new culture to begin to be born.

So the end of this play has by no means been written yet, and in the streets new scenes are being performed now. Their power comes from deep roots in a human culture that defies alienation, poverty and despair. Only those who participate in that culture can know its real power to transform. From behind the barricades of a world of passive, fearful spectators and vicious police, the puppets keep calling us to come join the play. ■

Further reading:

Handbooks and Puppetry Companies:

Wise Fool Basics: A Handbook of Our Core Techniques by K.Ruby. 2633 Etna St, Berkeley, CA, 94704. 415-905-5958, wisefool@lmi.net.

In addition to being a great resource for practical puppeteering, the Handbook has an excellent bibliography on radical theater, puppetry and street theater.

Puppet Cookbook. In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre, 1500 Lake St., Minneapolis, MN, 55407. 612-721-2535, hobt@hobt.org

68 Ways to Make Really Big Puppets, and Bread and Puppet publications catalog. Bread and Puppet Theatre, Route 122, Glover, VT, 05839.

The Activist's Cookbook by Andrew Boyd.
Published by United For a Fair Economy,
37 Temple Pl, 5th fl, Boston, MA 02111.
617-423-0191.

Websites:

Art and Revolution:
www.agitprop.org/artandrevolution

Bread and Puppet: www.theaterofmemory.com

In the Heart of the Beast Puppet Theatre:
www.hobt.org

Puppetry homepage:
www.sagecraft.com/puppetry

Puppeteers' cooperative homepage: www.gis.net

Wise Fool Puppet Intervention:
www.zeitgeist.net/wfca/wisefool.htm

