

# Landscape as Stage, Weather as Dramaturge: Pageantry in the Ecological Age

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*Figure 1. Woodprint by Ian McFarlane*

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A sail is made out of earth,  
a Bison is resurrected with light,  
trees walk, the stars dance, fish fly,  
and the sky descends to the earth singing.

The impossibility of these images stem from acts of collective dreaming, from an enchantment with the possibility of what could be. They emerged from several community-lead outdoor performances in the summer of 2017. These images can be interpreted as acts of emplacement, as political reactions, as events of community forming, as well as actions that extend beyond interpretation. I argue that they are acts of correspondence; they are ways of answering to the world.

I was able to experience these images first-hand on a continent-wide research trip in the summer of 2017. This research took me to three different communities, each exercising their own particular creative philosophies, each reacting to a specific political climate and each embedded within a unique landscape. The intent of my research was to experience community-lead protest art in rural communities while utilizing my work in puppetry as a discipline of emplacement. These communities included the broader community of Bread and Puppet Theater in Glover, Vermont, the community of New Glasgow, PEI, and a newly assembled community of artists, scientists, elders, teachers and students in Treaty 7 territory, Alberta.

The actions that these three communities engaged in all shared a similar form: a collective gathered, they conceptualized and constructed objects used for material performance, and they created a performance staged in an outdoor environment. This form I refer to as pageantry.

Pageantry is an ancient form of theatre. In Western culture, it stretches back to Roman models of theatre that were later developed by the church in Medieval Europe. (Aronson, 23) Similar performance traditions in India, such as *Ramlila*, Yoruba spectacles and festivals in Nigeria or Muharram Spectacles in Islamic traditions can be traced back even further. The Common characteristics of a “pageant” include an outdoor environment, a processional structure, both in audience and in performance, the use of material performance such as mask and puppetry, and a focus on a gathering of community, often taking the form of including locals in the performance, the blurring of audience and performer, as well as an embrace of the amateur. Pageantry has often taken the form of revolutionary theatre. Most notably, a mass “pageant” was staged following the French Revolution and the death of Voltaire, embraced as a form of “the people’s theatre”. This model was later adapted in the Soviet Union to celebrate the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Bread and Puppet Theater is well known for reinventing the American Pageant. The infamous series of *The Domestic Resurrection Circus and Pageant* were massive outdoor spectacles that brought upwards of 15,000 spectators per show. Reaching their peak in the 1990’s, these spectacles radically altered the traditional community History Pageants performed throughout New England in the previous century. These earlier folk plays celebrated significant events in colonial history and glamourized settler domination over

nature. *The Domestic Resurrection Circus and Pageant*, despite sharing similar structures in the use of an outdoor environment and a processional scenography, was a radical response to this tradition, often using the pageant as a means of protest to the capitalist regime. The content was rigorously responsive to current events, often aiming not to persuade but to allow the audience to sit together without understanding. (Bell, 18) The company also approached the environment as a collaborator, seeking a way to answer to the world around them as opposed to confirm control over it. Peter Schumann, founder of Bread and Puppet Theater, speaks to this in an interview with John Bell.

“[Y]ou approach the environment, you think of it as something that’s as important as your words, or as your other persuasions. When you allow it to do something, it persuades by itself... The best thing we can get out of a pageant here is the clouds or the turning of the light. The rest is very minimal compared to that. If we succeed in getting an audience to be perceptive only to these elements, this would be perfect, we wouldn’t have to do anything.” (qtd. in Bell, 5)

Schumann continues to create and direct pageants at the Bread and Puppet farm in Glover, Vermont. It is here that I began my research trip, helping the company prepare for their summer pageant. The content of these performances continues to respond vigorously to current events, specifically to the then recent presidential election. The pageants also continue to seek new ways to collaborate with the forests, creeks and clouds of Northern Vermont: a human-made pine forest that continues to collapse in on itself also happens to raise giant marionettes, a mass of cardboard clouds move with an approaching storm, and a growing garden of stone figures blossom in a patch of field.

The influence of Bread and Puppet Theater is immeasurable. *The Domestic Resurrection Circus and Pageant* can be said to have changed the face of material performance in North America, transforming mask and puppetry into political weaponry and turning pageantry into public protest rather than an affirmation of societal structure. *The River Clyde Pageant* in New Glasgow, PEI, can be seen as an extension of this transformation. This was my second research destination. Taking place along the banks of the tidal river that runs through the community, the River Clyde, the pageant brought attention to the environmental significance and ecological challenges surrounding the waterways of Prince Edward Island. This annual event focuses on community gathering, using local talent, resources, and materials to create a story that is unique to the people and the political climate of New Glasgow. Organized through theatre artists Ker Wells and Megan Stewart, *The River Clyde Pageant* is a unique event performed for and by a community in order to celebrate and critique its existence.

My third and final leg of my journey brought me to Kananaskis Country, Alberta. Situated on the traditional land of the Stoney First Nation, a group of artists, elders, scientists, teachers and students gathered around a significant ecological event in the Canadian Rockies. Organized through the Canadian Academy for Mask and Puppetry, *Iiniskimm* was a large-scale outdoor performance that celebrated the



Figure 2. The River Clyde Pageant. Photo by Robert Van Waarden



Figure 3. Inisikimm. Photo by David Lane

return of Bison to Banff National Park. The event was a series of nighttime performances located in alpine meadows, on mountain sides and in river valleys that featured large-scale lantern puppets. Leading up to the performance, this newly formed community camped together, were guests at a sun dance, and hosted community workshops in Banff and at Camp Chief Hector, actively bridging communities and disciplines.

It is my belief that theatre's strongest attribute is its ability to bring into embodied knowledge the concerns of its time; it manifests a living, breathing awareness of a crisis within the here and now. It goes without saying that there are many concerns in our present moment; one of the most prominent of those concerns is an ecological concern.

In 2000, Nobel-winning chemist Paul J. Crutzen proposed the term "Anthropocene" as the name for our current geological epoch. It is characterized by the escalating effects of human activity on the global environment. Although an unofficial term, the proposed shift out of the Holocene is recognition of human impact such as the gutting of biodiversity and significant contribution to an approaching climate crisis. As Dipesh Chakrabarty states, humans now "wield a geological force" (Chakrabarty, 2006), putting our very existence at risk.

How then, does Pageantry respond to this ecological concern? How can what appears to be a naïve and joyful human activity possibly do anything but contribute to the crisis? If it is ethical principle that needs to be transformed into ethical behavior, does performance play a role in this transformation? To address these questions, I turn to contemporary pageantry and its long-established traditions of responding to ecology.

## Landscape as Stage

Let us contemplate a theatre without the theatre. It is an old idea, perhaps even an obvious one. Indeed, before the proscenium arch, this was commonplace. A reflection on the history of environmental scenography will reveal that open-air or out-of-doors theatre is indeed the origins of western scenography.

In its simplest definition, environmental scenography is any staging that is non-frontal. By frontal staging, I am referring to any experience of performance in which there is a single frame that the spectator remains outside of and is viewed from a static position. Environmental scenography is a term applied to experimental theatre forms from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards and has primarily been defined by examinations of the theatrical use of space. It is important to note, perhaps even goes without saying, that non-frontal and open-air performances have been common throughout the history of theatre and indeed dominate many non-

Western performance traditions. The *Ramlila* spectacle in India, for example, employs multiple stages throughout a community and often has significant influence over the town's architecture and landscape. In this sense, the theatre can be considered not as an isolated, controlled laboratory contained within pre-existing architecture, but an integral aspect of societal structure, urban planning and ecology.

Outdoor performance has often been employed throughout history out of necessity. In Medieval Europe, suitable indoor public space was a scarce commodity. Public religious performances occurred sporadically and employed found environments, often transforming the entire town into a performance space. Without any preexisting presentation space, performance space needed to be carved out through the action of the participants. *Mumming*, referred to by folklorists as "visitations" (Aronson, 18), involved members of the community wandering from house to house, thus treating the entire town as a unified performance space. In Germany, a tradition known as "The Bavarian Wild Men" treated not only the town, but also the surrounding woods as an unrestricted performance environment. On St. Nicholas Eve, masked performers ski out of the woods and stir up various forms of mischief in the villages. Spectators watch the performance (or do not watch the performance) from the shelter of their homes. Richard Southern describes this form of theatre as having "no particular place of performance; no stage; no scenery; no playhouse; and no rehearsal. Here there is not even – and this is perhaps the most noticeable lack of all – any assembled audience as such". (qtd. in Aronson, 18) It becomes clear that the theatre, the proscenium arch and the singular stage frame are recent advancements in the discipline of theatre. For example, the first true proscenium, the Teatro Farnese, was constructed in 1618.

Despite these long-standing performance traditions that exist outside of the architecture of the theatre, environmental scenography has often been characterized by a revolt against the proscenium arch. Futurists such as Filippo Marinetti and Dadaist performances such as Zurich's Cabaret Voltaire were among the first leaders of these revolts. These performances relied on found space and techniques in "Tactilism" (Aronson, 35) in order to penetrate the audience and break the performer / spectator dichotomy. Once popularized, these revolts were translated to the theatre architecture itself, resulting in grand technical advancements such as Walter Gropius's *Totaltheater*, a proposed stage that utilized two revolving turn tables, one of which the audience was seated on. The *Totaltheater* proposal also included projection screens that surrounded the audience, and various mechanisms that would infuse the space with specific scents. The desired result was to completely immerse the audience in the performance. Although the proscenium arch was disassembled, consumed and spat out again, the intent of the performance remained the same: to frame a contained performance

space and control the elements within it in order to affect and/or manipulate the human spectators.

In 1952, John Cage staged the first “happening” at Black Mountain College, an event that could be said to have radically altered the way we think of what theatre could be, pointing to something outside of the contained laboratory. Cage defined theatre as “something which engages both the eye and the ear.” In his view, “Theatre takes place all the time wherever one is, and art simply facilitates persuading one [that] this is the case.” (qtd. in Aronson, 159) This same principle is evident in Cage’s musical compositions where “there is no such thing as absolute silence.” (Aronson, 159) In other words, the external world is always performing; art simply brings our attention to the performing of the world.

What else is performing? How can theatre bring this to the forefront of our consciousness?

It is curious that Graham Harmon, a central thinker in the development of object oriented ontology and speculative realism, uses a rather theatrical term, the *theatron*, when articulating how matter interacts with other matter. Harmon defines *the theatron* as the space that is opened up during the encounter of objects. (Florencio, 203) (Here, Harmon refers to objects, or performing bodies, as anything from a mammal to a thought to a unicorn.) According to Harmon, within the *theatron*, bodies never witness each other in full but, instead, “are only able to encounter the contingent mediating roles they perform to one another.” For him, the “real object” is the object that never reveals itself, that withdraws from relations, whereas the “sensual object” is that which is presented within an encounter. (Florencio, 206) This encounter is, in many ways, a performance.

João Florencio, a historian, lecturer and thinker whose work in performance theory contemplates the ongoing ecological crisis, references Harmon’s *theatron* in his article, *Encountering Worlds: Performing in/as Philosophy in the Ecological Age*. Here, Florencio sees the *theatron* as an opportunity to encounter objects as strangers, and to realize that bodies are always more than what they reveal or the roles they perform. To encounter an object as a stranger is to embrace Brecht’s act of *Verfremdung*, otherwise known as estrangement. This act foregrounds the *theatron* and, in doing so, highlights the “inaccessible core of a body and point(s) in its direction as if pointing towards its own horizon.” (Florencio, 206)

This notion of performance opens up a spectrum beyond the dichotomy of nature and culture. Harmon’s *theatron* is, as João Florêncio describes it, “the re-embrace of the ecosystemic nature of the real.” (Florencio, 210) In reference to performance theory, Harmon’s theory can be read as a re-discovery, as the history of environmental scenography reveals, of the opening up of performance theory to spaces beyond the theatre.



Such a gesture, in its willingness to think the parallels between what goes on inside the theatre and what takes place in wider social settings, can be said to have been the first attempt at understanding performance from an ecological viewpoint, a gesture that tried to look at the place of performance within the proverbial “bigger picture.” (Florencio, 210)

Treating the landscape as a stage, or rather, putting theatre in relationship to an ecology, brings into the frame this “bigger picture”.

This relationship was clearly embodied in a significant moment in the performance of *Inisikimm*. The performance approached the night sky as its stage, using darkness and celestial matter as a collaborator. Leading up to this moment, the audience has just seen a herd of Bison slaughtered in an open alpine meadow, their lanterns being extinguished one by one. There is a stillness. Elder LeRoy Little Bear begins to shake a rattle and sings a traditional song of mourning. An assemblage of “star” lanterns emerges in the distance, dancing in the open spaces. In a flash, the star lanterns halt in an image that mirrors the constellation of the big dipper in the night sky directly behind them. The choreography of the star lanterns thus answered to the landscape of the night sky, making their dance a duet between material performance and the external world, calling into focus a larger ecology.

In *The River Clyde Pageant*, the procession of the pageant is shaped by the human-made structures of New Glasgow that nestle up to the banks of the river: a garden, a bridge, a well, and a restaurant. The pageant ends with a community feast amongst the reeds of the River Clyde as the sun sets. This procession brings attention to important pieces of the community’s infrastructure, yet remains solely human-focused in its collaboration with landscape. The river, the reeds and the sun set remain as backdrops to this human celebration. Can a scenography of landscape serve more than this? Are there collaborations with earth, sky and water that we are avoiding in order to give human concerns the stage?

## The Role of the Puppet

When considering performance in relation to ecology, I believe that we must consider a world beyond human privilege and mastery. I am not alone in this desire. Here, I am referring to the contemporary thought of the Speculative Realists, the school of Object-Oriented Ontology (initially developed by Graham Harman and expanded through thinkers such as Timothy Morton), the New Materialists, the Post-Humanists, the Posthuman Feminists such as Donna Haraway, the theories of “vitalism” of Jane Bennett and the “agential realism” of Karen Barad. The long

established dichotomy of nature and culture has collapsed. A “flattened ontology” (Florêncio, 196) is proving to be the grounds for ecological dialogue.

What does pageantry contribute to this dialogue of a “flattened ontology”?

A major element of pageantry is material performance, namely the disciplines of mask and puppetry. In the pageants of Bread and Puppet Theatre, *The River Clyde Pageant* and *liniskimm*, puppets are the central players in which the majority of the action revolves around. Most of the puppets in these performances are exceptionally large in scale. In *liniskimm*, the spectacle climaxes to a circle dance around a giant lantern in the shape of a Bison. In *The River Clyde Pageant*, the central figure is a towering face that floats down the river by boat, a silent witness of the audience’s procession along the riverbank. In several of the Bread and Puppet Theatre Pageants, the Mother Earth Puppet has become a reoccurring figure of resurrection and forgiveness, whose head stands at thirty feet and whose body shelters an orchestra. Her arms, which stretch over a distance of fifty yards, are able to embrace the entire performing ensemble, often reaching numbers of over one hundred.

How can human manipulation of objects, the performing-of objects, be considered grounds for a flattened ontology? Puppetry, or instance, can be interpreted (is almost always interpreted) as inherently anthropocentric, built exclusively upon techniques of anthropomorphism and human domination over the material world. The very act of animation is defined as giving a “soul” (animus) to otherwise inanimate material. This would assume that the human is a superior being, gifted with the power of attributing vibrancy to certain matter and ignoring the matter that does not serve the theatrical intention. In other words, it is the human that decides what is animate and what is inanimate. This appears to be an epistemology of domination. Can this practice even exist outside of a stage that clearly divides culture from ecology? It seems that the puppet can only ever be shaped in the likeness of the human; it is always a reflection of the human form, the human mind, or more often than not, human fears.

It is this aspect of the puppet, the ability to bring our inner most fears into material form that provides us with a stimulating contradiction.

Kenneth Gross describes the puppet as uncanny. This strange familiarity evokes much in a human observer and gives us the sense that “we are both more and less than wholes, that we give birth to things alien to ourselves.” (p.35) More than that, a puppet “picks out our madness, or what we fear is our madness.” (p.2) It is here, in the realm of the uncanny that the ecology/culture dichotomy begins to blur.

The puppet exists in close relationship with death. It does not seem to respect the boundaries of life and death, and more often than not resists death at every turn. This relationship with death can be seen in Chinese shadow theatre,

where the shadow screen is referred to as the “screen of death”. This relationship with death can also be found in traditions indigenous to Java and Japan where puppets are constructed to provide homes for the souls of the dead, as well as in the British folk tradition of “The Cutting Wren”, where a bird corpse is dressed in lace and hailed as a king. This ‘leap of faith” that puppeteers make turns not inwards toward the living body, but outward, to the external world. (Bell p.1)

Is death then affiliated with the world of inert matter? Is this what we would refer to as the inanimate? Is it not this perception of the external world as “dead” that has encouraged humans to treat non-human matter as something to be harvested or conquered?

It is here that I turn to poetry. When considering poetry, I am guided by the words of Gaston Bachelard who considers the “poetic act” as a form of “direct ontology”. Here he is concerned with the onset of the image and argues that the reader perceives it not as an object or representation but as its own reality. For Bachelard, the poetic image “becomes our own” through the reading of it and in turn it “becomes our being.”

The grower of trees, the gardener, the man born to farming,  
Whose hands reach into the ground and sprout,  
To him the soil is a divine drug. He enters into death  
Yearly, and comes back rejoicing, He has seen the light lie down  
In the dung heap, and rise again in the corn.  
His thought passes along the row ends like a mole.  
What miraculous seed has he swallowed  
That the unending sentence of his love flows out of his mouth  
Like a vine clinging in the sunlight, and like water  
Descending in the dark? (Berry, 3)

Here, the poet Wendell Berry “enters into death” on an annual basis. His relationship with death appears not as an interaction with the inert and the inanimate, but rather the vibrant and the animate, which gives cause for rejoicing. Through this poetic act, one can touch the possibility of death being more than a lack of life. Death is a vibrancy that rises in the corn. Death is a face that peers out from beyond the shadow screen, causing the boundaries between worlds to tremor like curtains. Much like the man born to farming, the animacy discovered through the interactions with a puppet is an act of entering into death. Kenneth Gross describes this act as follows:

“[It] remind(s) us that we do not yet know what it means to be inanimate, that we do not know fully the different kinds of death that

humans own, or the shapes of the lives that can be lived by inanimate things.” (Gross, p. 47)

In this way, the puppet can be said to be “an ambassador or pilgrim to human beings from the world of things.” (Gross, 33) It has the ability to call attention to, not only our inevitable return to non-human matter, but how we are in fact composed of the non-human.

This relationship with death is also a relationship with the grotesque. For Wolfgang Kayser, “the grotesque world is – and is not – our own world.” (Kayser, 37) The grotesque here serves as the face of disorder, overthrowing natural orders and bringing the non-rational to the spotlight. Mikhail Bakhtin sees the grotesque as, not only antiauthoritarian, but “life as a whole” (Bakhtin, 50). This is indeed a source of great metaphysical liberation. “(I)n the system of grotesque imagery death and renewal are inseparable in life as a whole, and life as a whole can inspire fear least of all.” Bakhtin’s concept of the “grotesque body”, shares this liberation. “Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits.” (Bakhtin, 26) Here, Bakhtin is stressing the parts of the body that are open to the outside world, or rather, “the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world.” (Bakhtin, 26) This would include “the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.” For the puppet, a body that does not share the same “apertures and convexities” of a human body, yet can live out excessive violence and dismemberment, this unfinishedness is what Kenneth Gross refers to as the puppet’s “fragmentation”.

The life of puppets does not just survive destruction; it feeds on it... the domain of puppets is itself, at its most animated, a world of destroyed things. The puppet always exists in the shadow of its own destruction, being a thing made to be destroyed... It is “a sum of destructions” (as Picasso said of his paintings) The puppet belongs to a family of things partial, fragmented, and broken... parts enacting a whole, transforming our sense of the whole. The poetry of the puppet is a poetry of inadequacy. (Gross, 95)

The often clumsy or ridiculous act of manipulating objects is a way of wrestling with this “life as a whole,” of facing the complexities of death, the non-human and the incomprehensible. It is a way of outgrowing oneself.

Images of death are prominent in these contemporary pageants. In *The River Clyde Pageant*, a school of dead fish emerges from a bloom of jellyfish, smiling

ghoulishly. In *Inisikim*, a herd of bison is slaughtered from a distance, each lantern being extinguished by a single gunshot. In the *Overtakelessnes* Pageant at the Bread and Puppet farm, dismembered body parts are churned to the sound of a giant rattle, followed by stillness and a song of mourning. These faces of death stare back at us from the mud, from the rivers and forests, like messengers from the beyond, calling to our mortality and the festering ecologies that are our bodies.

## Weather as Dramaturge

Perhaps the greatest adversary of outdoor performance is the weather. There are countless parades or productions of “Shakespeare in the Park” that have been cancelled due to unfortunate weather conditions. On the closing night of *The River Clyde Pageant*, for instance, some major puppetry elements were lost due to a sudden downpour that saturated the delicate papier maché structures. It is no wonder that the enclosed space of the theatre has become the commons of performance, where conditions are predictable and everyone’s safety and comfort are accounted for.

It is precisely this dynamic, violent and discomfoting character of the weather that demands that the often-complacent discipline of theatre be moved out-of-doors.

“It is cold today.” “Do you think it will rain?” “Nice day today.” The topic of weather is on our lips at almost every turn in everyday life. Despite our best efforts to shut it out or to replace it completely with artificial light, humidifiers or air-conditioning, weather demands our attention every day of our lives. The theatre is not exempt from this. To shut out the weather is to shut out the world.

Let us contemplate the phrase, “It is cold today.” Often used to initiate a conversation, or to simply avoid a lengthy interaction, this simple phrase reveals much about the penetrating nature of weather. For Tetsuro Watsuji, coldness is not so much a physical sensation but the very quality that defines human empathy. Jin Baek speaks to Watsuji’s concept of climate:

“[C]limate is by nature the agency of collective sharing. Climate is the context through which self-enclosed individualism is overcome in favour of an empathy that cultivates collective, cultural measures.”  
(Baek, p. 382)

By stating “I am cold”, I am stating a fact of our mutual relation. I am calling into focus the very essence of our composition. If the act of theatre is to witness something collectively, then treating the weather as a creative

companion, curator or dramaturge is to collaborate with the very essence of empathy.

Tim Ingold describes the weather as “not so much what we perceive as what we perceive *in*.” (Ingold, p. 131) According to Ingold, the air around us has been largely overlooked in Art, Architecture, Anthropology and Archeology. The ‘material world’ is seen as being comprised of only landscape and artefacts. (Ingold, 132) The air, in contrast, is not an entity of any kind, but simply a medium. For Ingold, “[T]he medium is not so much an interactant as the very condition of interaction. It is only *because* of their suspension in the currents of the medium that things can interact.” (Ingold, 132)

Ingold calls forth the image of flying a kite. The kite, the kite-flyer and the air are engaged in an intimate dance in which there is no clear leader. Here, each player is acting upon, and in turn acted upon by the other players. The very act of flight is a collaborative effort. Within this image, Ingold describes agency as an illusion, built upon a false pretense. Human and non-human alike are instead “possessed by action”, entwined within a “dance of animacy.” (Ingold, 101)

The kite bears a striking resemblance to a puppet. Here, there is a human player, (The kite-flyer or the puppeteer) engaging with another performing body, a non-human player, (a kite or a puppet) with a sensitivity to its animacy. The main difference, it seems, is the presence of the air and its engagement with this interaction. What role does the weather have with puppetry? What are the possibilities of animacy when a puppet dances not only with its human counterpart, but with the medium? Perhaps there is something here that the puppeteer can learn from the Kite-flyer. In the flight of a kite, the kite, air and flyer appear not so much to interact, but to correspond. In Ingold’s words, “to correspond with the world... is not to describe it or to represent it but to *answer to it*.” (Ingold, 101)

There are moments in the pageants of Bread and Puppet Theater, *The River Clyde Pageant* and *Inisikimm* that glimmer with this answering: lanterns dance with the stars, a massive face moves with the wind, a field of cardboard cumulous clouds descends as a storm gathers in the distance. The weather makes for a stunning performer, yet it has the potential to play still a deeper role: that of the dramaturge.

During my time in New Glasgow, PEI, I reflected on the process of making the large puppets for the event:

I am building a sail out of earth. The sun has reached a climax and I pause to remove a layer of clothing, drink some water and look at the sky. There is a thin trace of cloud on the horizon. It hovers above the ocean like a thin curtain of silk, not so far away. If I were a meteorologist I might be able to put a name to this formation of

whispering stratus, undulating as if someone were bating it with a large fan. It resembles rolling hills, or ocean waves, or the shape of sound waves. Despite my lack of understanding of clouds, I can feel a shift in pressure, an approaching change; I can sense the rain.

I return to the earth. The dirt is red sandstone, an impossible bright red colour that is so distinct to this particular location. On top of a great mound of this red earth I have piled on buckets of grey clay, a rare treasure that my team of artists, farmers, teachers, carpenters and cooks were able to find upstream. We hauled it to this site over the course of three days, one canoe load at a time. The clay is fresh and smooth, another impossibility made possible from this place, this piece of earth.

This earth has been shaped by many hands. It resembles a face that is over twelve feet tall and seven feet wide. It protrudes from the hillside, as if relaxing in a bath. On top of this shape, layers and layers of starch and pulp have been smoothed out, creating a rich brown skin on its surface. If the sun holds its place in the sky for a few more hours and the approaching rain is merciful, this skin can be removed and transformed into a sail.

The sail, constructed using a papier maché technique, is shaped by sunlight, by humidity, and by the texture of the earth, which has also undergone several



*Figure 4. The River Clyde Pageant. Photo by Robert Van Waarden*

transformations through the movements of the sky. The maker, in relation to the shifting currents of clouds, discovers the interaction of materials and his imagination through the medium: the weather. In the stuffy workshops and studio spaces where theatre seems comfortable and at ease, the maker takes their climate for granted. Even within these environments, where the maker believes they are sheltered from unwanted influence, there are complex weather patterns that condition our interactions and that patiently inform our work as the most diligent and generous collaborators might, despite our best efforts to ignore them.

## Conclusion

When I speak of ecology, it is important to note what ecology I speak to.

In his essay *The Climate of History: Four Theses*, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that climate change has caused the dichotomies of natural history and human history, the fundamental assumption of Western thought, to collapse. He claims that “(h)umans now wield a geological force,” (Chakrabarty, 2006) thus putting humans in relation to geological time. “The geologic now of the Anthropocene has become entangled with the now of human history.” (Chakrabarty, 2012)

In contrast, Jim Moore argues, “the issue is not the Anthropocene, but the *Capitalocene*.” (Moore, 287)

(C)apitalism unfolds in and through the *oikeios*, the creative, generative, and multi-layered relation of species and environment. Humans, like all species, are at once producers and products of our environments. Humans, and also the civilizations we co-produce with the rest of nature. We find the spirit the *oikeios* when Wallerstein speaks of “ecological exhaustion” as a world-historical movement encompassing *human* natures alongside soils and forests. The health of bodies and environments are indeed dialectically bound. (Moore, 287)

For Moore, Capitalism is an “environment-making process”; it is a “world-system”. (Moore, 287)

For both Moore and Chakrabarty, ecology cannot be considered external to us. Change is co-produced between “nature” and “civilization”, or rather, between the environment-making actants of both humans and non-humans alike.

Unlike the poetic images of kite-flying illustrated by Tim Ingold, Makhail Bakhtin sees this co-producing not as a dance, but as a struggle. This refers to what Bakhtin calls “cosmic terror”: the reality that the non-human is too vast and incomprehensible for humans to be in equal exchange with. If humans are in a constant state of finding stability, ecology is that which is ever-changing and



challenging that stability. Bakhtin sees this struggle as a way of re-examining our relationship with the world. The “small experience”, the stable world of family and isolated life, closes humans off from the world rendering them inactive and susceptible to the consequences of change. Here, everything is closed, unresponsive, controlled, and predictable. In contrast, within the “great experience”, that of the cosmos and the incomprehensible, “everything is alive, everything speaks”. (qtd. in Last, 68)

For Bakhtin, this opening up to the “great experience” is a way of empowering the individual within the inevitability of change. It is a way of combating instrumentalization and stagnation. For him, the key to confronting this lies in the human body; sensory engagement is how one can “destroy the official picture of events.” (p.74) The body is a “site of disruption, error, aberration and surprise.” (Last, 71)

In her essay, *Negotiating the Inhuman: Bakhtin, Materiality and the Instrumentalization of Climate Change*, Angela Last applies Bakhtin’s concept of “cosmic terror” to our experience and navigation of climate change. She raises a salient point about Bakhtin’s notion of sensory engagement: “climate change seems to require not only ‘rational proof’ but ‘sensory confirmation’.” (Last, 75) In the face of ecological collapse, sensory engagement, specifically Bakhtin’s encouragement to re-familiarize ourselves with “the alienness of the world” (Last, 71) could serve as our strongest defense against instrumentalization, silence and stagnation.

Bakhtin’s vision could be taken as an encouragement to engage with the potential of catastrophe and find a way of making sense of it for oneself – against ‘the official picture of events’ – as an alternative to being held captive by one’s fear. (Last, 71)

In her preface for her book *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett states “if a set of moral principles is actually to be lived out, the right mood or landscape of affect has to be in place” (Bennett, xii) Here she is echoing Romantic thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Nietzsche. She believes that enchantment with the everyday world might motivate this move. “What seems to be needed is a certain willingness to appear naïve or foolish, to affirm what Adorno called his “clownish traits.”” (Bennett, xiii) She quotes Jodi Dean, who states, “If all we can do is evaluate, critique, or demystify the present, then what is it that we are hoping to accomplish?” (qtd. in Bennett, xv)

Enchantment is naïve, but perhaps naivety can be considered as a means of getting over our pessimism and dismissive rationality. It has the potential to be one of our greatest tools in the approach of ecological collapse. Naivety is an abandonment of the rational. Naivety is an embrace of the sensual and the

experienced. Naivety makes room for sensory engagement. If any of what I have said leading up to this paragraph has appeared naïve or foolish, it is motivated by Bennett's questioning of demystification and fueled by Bakhtin's encouragement to re-familiarize myself with "the alienness of the world". My use of poetics is grounded in the naivety and ridiculousness of puppetry, yet takes seriously the transformative potential of what Bachelard calls a "direct ontology". The poetic is that which escapes us.

Pageantry basks in this naivety. It is, after all, a spectacle. My aim here is not to fulfill the simple task of pointing towards how that spectacle has been capitalized, but rather the greater task of pointing in the direction of its horizon. Pageantry's potential lies in its direct collaboration with this "cosmic terror", corresponding with that which is incomprehensible and unpredictable. This will help us engage with something beyond ourselves.

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