

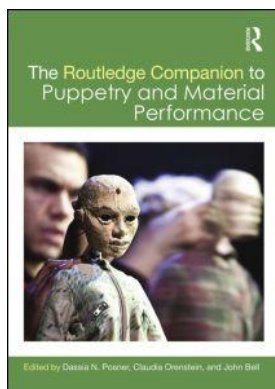
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 03 Oct 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## **The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance**

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### **Post-Decivilization Efforts in the Nonsense Suburb of Art**

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315850115.ch11>

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**Published online on: 15 Jul 2014**

**How to cite :-** Peter Schumann. 15 Jul 2014, *Post-Decivilization Efforts in the Nonsense Suburb of Art* from: The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance Routledge

Accessed on: 03 Oct 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315850115.ch11>

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# 11

## Post-Decivilization Efforts in the Nonsense Suburb of Art

*Peter Schumann*

Shoe is what you do  
Wherever you go it goes with you  
Because it has nothing more to do  
Than to understand you  
In as far as you're a shoe

Shoe is what you wear against dirt and ice. Shoeness is reasonable and allows you to have a down-to-earth relationship with the world. My name is shoe. Shoe is what I am designed to be and to do.

But, instead, I am working against my assignment, and my business is the opposite of shoeness and usefulness because I work in the frivolity business, which caters to the luxury market of society's trifles, providing the decorative nonsense that charms the civilized sense so that the civilized sense can measure the thickness of its seriousness against the flimsiness of nonsense.

Naturally this type of business has its nasty consequences and distorts the frivolity business executive's understanding of the most lavish portion of reality, which is called the ordinary and comes in three categories:

- 1 The What Ordinary;
- 2 The Why Ordinary;
- 3 The Extraordinary Ordinary.

The first category, *The What Ordinary*, is the cluttered house with its straitjacketed tenant inside, the eternal kitchen complete with coffee cup in hands, which are rattled by the daily news.

This in-the-absence-of-heaven ordinary also features the 100-watt light bulb officer in charge of the latest meeting of the We-do-as-good-as-we-can Club, a meeting that starts with the club's anthem: *There must be more to life than this.*

Heaven, the club-members say, is not simply a cloudless sky above whatever confused underneath but is really the product of thought and hand, and just as rain



Figure 11.1 Drawing by Peter Schumann (2012)

pours down from above to fertilize us, so must we pour down and fertilize, even if that fertilization is nothing but Paper-Maché.

The club members, fully aware of their ordinary, absence-of-heaven calamity, admit to be unable to design their life, simply because life refuses to be designable. The *successful* human-animal life, they say, is both horizontal and vertical. The horizontal is known as pillowjoy, lovejoy, and snorejoy. The vertical is the complicated pain-in-the-neck joy of everything else. (By the way, club members are granted privileged access to trickery that allows them to sneak the above-mentioned heaven into the everything else.)

The second category of the ordinary, *The Why Ordinary*, is the holy cathedral of our civilization, the most gigantic architecture ever, the road system with its congregation of ardent believers and forced participants, complete with road-kill slaughterhouse and accidental funeral parlor, officiated by the despised corporate high priests of the beloved auto industry and nourished by the innards of the Earth. No comment.

The third category of the ordinary, *The Extraordinary Ordinary*, consists of all extraordinary minor disturbances and major upheavals surrounded by air, which is stuffed to the brim with music noise, and the indispensable boredom of that noise, as perceived by the hopelessly clogged ear and observed by the one-directional eye, while the kitchen serves its dinner to the eater eating his cow meat thoughtlessly, he who used to be cow or horse himself, wolf or elephant, woodchuck or weasel, heron or hummingbird, goose or woodpecker, cockroach or inchworm.

Allow me to point out that this distance between the eater and his cockroach or elephant self is known as extraordinarily ordinary hypocrisy. What is extraordinarily ordinary hypocrisy and what does it miss to achieve? What ordinary pretense does it represent? What ordinary falsification does it manifest? What truth-proclaiming that



Figure 11.2 Drawing by Peter Schumann (2012)

proclaims uncertain truths and nevertheless issues certificates of certainty? These certificates are traditionally cast in stone and proclaim a stonecast Beyond, which also comes in the form of books as printed by ordinary printers and pretended by writers who apparently have never heard of the We-do-as-good-as-we-can Club. It should also be mentioned that the Beyond corresponds to the ordinary dreamer's nonsense-capability and even before dreaming the Beyond, the dreamer brightens his existence with dreaming up nonsense.

And because of these confusing circumstances, all shoes and shoe-related functionaries and committed non-essentialists – who all survive on the flimsy notion which holds that somewhere deep down in the guts of the un-essentials we'll find life's elixir – must nevertheless stop that search and must dirty themselves instead and must de-artify their art, because it is the job of the nevertheless-artist to be ordinary, it is the job of the de-artified artist to push the obscure, hypocrisy-injured ordinary into the sun's or the light bulb's brightness.

It is the job of the hypocrisy-artist to push the straitjacketed tenant of the cluttered house into the stars' vast landscape, even if that landscape is nothing but recycled junk. It is the job of the non-essentialist to service the carefully monitored, government-owned citizen who is only two things: either employed or unemployed and therefore needs the frivolity business to keep his blood from curdling, because what is the ordinary without the trapeze artist's death-defying stunt designed to cheer up the life-defying citizenry?

To sum it up: all the ordinarys – *The What Ordinary*, *The Why Ordinary*, and *The Extraordinary Ordinary* – are all in servitude and are stunted by capitalism's hold on the soul of the population and suffering like the human-animal body suffers from its

weakened immune system. The ordinary, its behind firmly glued to the 65-mph seat and flying high in its dream engine that mixes the countries of the world as if they all deserve to be the same, this condemned ordinary must be unraveled. It is the job of the capitalist artist to be unraveled. It is the job of the capitalist unraveled artist to take a pickaxe to the elegant mud with which the dumb ordinary is encrusted and pry it loose and unravel its brilliance.

It is the job of the nonsense artist to access the hidden reality inside the show-off reality of the obvious and to expose the asymmetrical battles that the 400 plutocrats who own this country fight against the occupants of the country or that other asymmetrical battle which the horrorists fight against the terrorists with so much money and religion that all the cops of the world don't dare to arrest their crimes.

It is the job of the aesthete to muscle the aesthetic with revolution. It is the job of the aesthete to revolutionize the revolution with the gut of the aesthetic. It is the job of the aesthete to create an aesthetic that lays bare revolution. It is the job of the revolutionary to discover an aesthetic that creates revolution.

What weapon system is available to the aesthete? What unaccommodated music can be unleashed against the doomed capitalist purposes?

What shoe, what trick, what stick, what tickle-tool, what roaring crocodile from which Punch and Judy show, what cardboard giant, what irresistible light, what irrefutable evidence, what garbage-retrieved model of Paradise, what overwhelming persuasion, what inevitable conclusion, what flight of thought, what idiot-proof argument, what visionary absolute, what final insight, what conclusive fact or heroic



Figure 11.3 Sleeper puppet, from Bread and Puppet Theater's *Things Done in a Seeing Place*, Glover, Vermont (2013). Photo courtesy of John Bell

act or far-out fantasy, what inner certainty or creative doubt, what single-minded stubbornness or communal resolve, what extreme prediction or sober assessment?

And why is the planet so goddamn flat, and why are the trees flying through the air, and why are citizens standing on their modernistic heads, and why is the good-taste-is-timeless furniture rising up against its clients, and why are the cities walking away from their own selves, and what is the meaning of Paper-Maché, and what are the puppeteers doing in the puppetry enterprise?

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