SARGASSO Interview

Sargasso: Caribbean Theater 7 (1991)

island’s or group’s theater remains a relatively obscure appendage of European, North American, and/or Latin American theaters, but when seen as a whole, the region’s theater of the past forty years assumes a position as one of the most artistically accomplished theaters in the world today.

The economic and cultural infrastructures of developed nations simply do not exist in poorer, smaller societies, and Caribbean theater suffers from material needs and the lack of a more stable tradition. Yet, for all the time spent discussing them, the problems of the production mechanism itself—physical plants, budgets, training programs, audience development, and so on—are perhaps too related to what Derek Walcott once called "that cursed colonial hunger for the metropolis" and should not be confused with the ability to create theater in Caribbean contexts. The best theater of the region testifies to the notion that theater can happen anywhere, at times, even in theaters, and stands comfortably beside the work of the non-commercial, alternative, and/or experimental theaters of Europe, Africa, and North and South America.

Lowell Piet
Editor

Sources:


Peter Schumann and the Bread and Puppet Theater in Puerto Rico

Introduction: Stefan Brecht claims that "Peter Schumann is one of the great artists of this century" in his two-volume study entitled Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre (Methuen/Routledge, 1988). With the possible exception of the Living Theater, no other U.S. theater group of the past 25 years has been so well received abroad as the BREAD AND PUPPET Theater. Formed in the early 1960s by Schumann, a sculptor and German national living in the United States, the group gained high visibility during anti-Vietnam War rallies, when thousands gathered in New York's Central Park to watch free performances, and when their huge puppets, sometimes three stories tall, led protesters through city streets. The group then seemed emblematic of the "peace and love" generation, captured national media attention, and helped define the position of theater as a form of social/cultural analysis and dissent.

In the 1970s and 1980s, BREAD AND PUPPET toured extensively in the United States, Western and Eastern Europe, and in Central America. They also consolidated their accomplishments by establishing a permanent residence-museum-workshop-theater on the Glover, Vermont, farm that serves as the site of the week-long Domestic Resurrection Circus which incorporates dozens of artists and thousands of spectators every year.

Puerto Rican theater artists began working with the BREAD AND PUPPET Theater in 1979 and 1980 and have been traveling to Glover, Vermont, to participate in the annual Domestic Resurrection Circuses since 1983. Group members gave workshops in Puerto Rico in 1985 and 1986, with one of those culminating in a production of Diagonal Man at the University of Puerto Rico High
School. In 1987, BREAD AND PUPPET returned (this time with Peter Schumann) to give a four-day workshop at the Puerto Rican School for Plastic Arts and an open-air performance on the grounds of the Fort San Felipe del Morro that guards the entrance to the San Juan harbor.

In March, 1989, Peter Schumann and six other Vermont-based puppeteers worked with 60 Puerto Rican artists and students to develop and perform The Passion Play of Adolfinna Villanueva, a symbolic processional drama in which a contemporary protagonist—Dofia Adolfinna—assumes the passionate crucifixion position central to Christian faith and ritual (Adolfinna Villanueva was shot and killed in February 1980, while resisting eviction from her Pifones-Loiza community home. That area is now under consideration for tourism development).

The play, with its 65 performers, huge puppets, masked dancers on stilts, parade band, hand-painted flags and banners, group choreography, and processional action that covers acres, was first performed in the Pifones-Loiza community itself, and then once at each of the Río Piedras, Humaaco, and Cayey campuses of the University of Puerto Rico. (A review of the production is reprinted on pages 67-68 in this issue.)

The discussion that followed took place on March 30, 1989, the day of the final performance. Schumann and group members were staying at the Cayey Campus home of artist-in-residence Antonio Martorell. After breakfast and much conversation, we began tapping the answers to questions and general comments about BREAD AND PUPPET's stay in Puerto Rico, their visits to Nicaragua, the tours in Europe and especially a 1988 tour to Eastern Europe, and changes that have taken place in BREAD AND PUPPET's work in their 25-year history. While we spoke, Martorell painted the encounter. He also joined the conversation at various intervals. Group members Michael Romanyshin, John Bell, and Jody Moore also participated.

L. F.

**Interview with BREAD AND PUPPET**

**QUESTION:** If I've heard one critical comment about the performances in Pifones and Río Piedras, it has been exactly what we've been talking about. The whole notion that the show is visually wonderful but there comes a point where it stops. It starts again but stops again. Then it starts again. The normal spectator here who usually looks for what we could call "flow" begins to wonder, "Why is it so slow? Why are they taking so long to say these things? What's the repetition in the language about? And yes, it picks up again, it goes, it goes. It starts to flow but then it stops and gets slow again. And then it picks up and goes." That's the kind of comment I've heard. I think it's a concern for people seeing your work for the first time.

**SCHUMANN:** I think it's the most general criticism of our shows, the most general perception in an outside fashion of our shows everywhere, I think, in the States, in Europe, everywhere, this slow-pokiness, this slowness of things. But there's not a design to it. It's not that things are slow by design. They come out that way and they come that way for several reasons. One is the bigness of things. Of the space used, the bigness of the puppets involved—we have to move slower than we would like. And the other one is an interior desire to be out of that beat you describe, to be in another beat. It's a... (and I don't mean what is called "real time.")

There's also that talk about "real time" and I never quite know what that really means)... it's a time that has a lot of time, that doesn't see any reason for the hurry-up beat and flow and what comes out of that. But rather something happens, and the recollection of what happened before becomes part of that moment. And in order to understand you have to have that recollection.

One story that perhaps may describe it is a talk that I had about such a slow-paced play once with an engineer who came up after the show and said, "But why is it so slow? Look, I'm a normal human... American... I'm an engineer, Why?" And then I asked him to tell me what he saw. He could recollect the whole play that he had seen, in all of its details. And when he had finished telling it, he also had an interesting interpretation of what this thing was. And this...
would be impossible in another medium that would move by one beat or by an ongoing pulsating beat instead of this pace that allows the beginning to be included in the middle and the middle to be included in the end, to be the recollection of it, being part of what is next.

QUESTION: There's also a social sense in that, isn't there? A sense in which we are pushed to accept a different kind of speed. We are being pushed to think that things are happening only at this moment and nothing else matters.

SCHUMANN: There's a whole bunch of different things in there. What you just said, Ronny Davis [founding director of the San Francisco Mime Troupe] said when we talked in the 60s about how different our theaters are—his theater, the Campesino theater, and ours. "We are like traffic and you are like a meadow." Or something like that. "We are like the pulsating beat of a modern highway and you have something like you sit down in a field and listen to the things around you."

It's different things. There are different aspects. It's also the thing we discussed with the company yesterday. We had a talk with the kids who are in this show, and it's the absence of wanting to persuade the audience to like you. It's one thing to be successful in the sense of picking up the beat that the audience has or of wanting to be cheered. But it isn't there. Our stuff is sort of not wanting to be in that mold, not wanting to do that. It is in the pace that the audience has to do a little job, has to commit itself to a little doing, to some work, to stay outside, rather than that we go and cheer them on with something they have already.

QUESTION: But the group here, different from your first visit [two years previously], is very young, virtually all university students.

SCHUMANN: There are even thirteen and fourteen-year-old kids.

GROUP: Also one who's eight and another who's eleven . . . . But mostly they're between seventeen and twenty-three . . . . That's a different kind of experience . . . more usually there would be young people but also holdovers from another generation.

QUESTION: But the question really is what's happening to your audiences, either during the [Domestic Resurrection] Circus in Glover [Vermont] or when you're touring? What kind of audience is now seeing and participating in BREAD AND PUPPET? Is it a thirties and forties audience that has a memory of the 60s and 70s or is it like all the kids who are here? This for them is a . . . there's a certain kind of generational thing that's happening right now and this new generation here at least [Puerto Rico] is starting to do a different kind of theater.

SCHUMANN: I think it's similar in the States. This amazing group of young Puerto Ricans that we've come to know in the workshop, there's an equivalent in the States, there's a similar atmosphere. There are very young people making theater, and I know from my own kids that it's very, very different from what we are doing . . . on very different premises. We talked about just the fact that Vietnam, for example, or the 60s, is mythology for them. It's not the perception that we at mid-life have—the political arguments and all sorts of concrete things. Now it's so removed that when we talk with youngsters this is myth. It's a number of cliches established about this time.

MICHAEL ROMANYSHIN: Well they study it in school. People are doing their M.A. and Ph.D. theses on it all over the place. And it's sort of romanticized in a way and sometimes college students think that "this was a great time and I'm sorry that I missed it" and things like that. They sort of want to understand that and capture some idea of that—that a lot of things are possible—because the spirit of a lot of the 60s stuff is that things are not possible, advocating that philosophy, saying that social change is not possible, that it's not fashionable, that people are against it and even see it as wrong.

I felt that a lot on the Eastern European tour last year [1988], with the environment show. That's when I really began to feel this big change in attitude from audiences and how they . . . I mean for me.
when I first came into the theater that spirit from the 60s was still there—I sort of came in on the end of it—but now when we did this tour last fall I really felt that the audiences weren’t with it in the way they used to be. It was a really different kind of attitude and spirit.

SCHUMANN: Ya, that’s a very complicated sociological aspect of theater, this “who do you play for” perception. During the 70s we became too comfortable, not even questioning our audiences really. We went on the theater circuit and performed. We had our pieces ready like ready-made art sort of and we pulled them out, a couple, three, four, five new ones, and we went to perform in all those theaters. We didn’t look much at who was in those theaters. We didn’t discuss much. We had no trouble performing and getting audiences and all that, until we felt the decline: in audiences, in a lightening response, and all of that.

But the thing is that it depends on what you do. When you play in Glover at the Circus you do not get that sense or when you play here in [Pihones] you do not get that sense.

QUESTION: I remember seeing Ave Maria Estella in a high school in Portland, Oregon, in 1977 or 78. I don’t remember the composition of the audience but it was relatively small and the response was relatively subdued.

MICHAEL ROMANYSH: That show is also a very subdued show. It’s an abstract, indoor show. And playing in a place like that, you’re in a high school in Portland. That’s very different from being in Prague where the whole... the reasons you’re there, the whole economic situation...

SCHUMANN: But there’s a similarity. In Oregon, we didn’t do what they needed to hear at the moment, and you could say the same about Prague. The Fireman show didn’t tell them what they needed to hear at that time. It was a thing that was too general, too much a fairytale.

It wasn’t that way in the 70s, when we started off, or in the 60s. That sense of picking... happening to pick the right theme at the right time was a strong part of it, and for the right people. You found something for people that people were searching for... and that’s very much not in theater right now, I feel. It’s very hard to be lucky enough to do that. But naturally all this has to do with the exterior manner, and where do you go? If you play in a theater... theater ticket is $30 or something like this—that’s already a very definite crowd right there. Of if you play out here in Humacao or in Loiza, naturally... what a difference... it’s very different.

JOHN BELL: But wasn’t there a demand for it in the 60s, wasn’t there a call for it?

SCHUMANN: Yes, yes, you couldn’t possibly play everywhere that you wanted to...

JOHN BELL: Then in the 70s it was like you had to invent it yourself.

SCHUMANN: Another tour. Ya, you made up your art and you believed in your art and you kept producing and pushed it out as if it didn’t matter. Like God. Making apples and giving them out to the people. It didn’t matter. I remember not even discussing themes with the company or the audience anymore. There was no need for that really. You just picked a theme and there were enough of them. But it wasn’t this looking for what has to be done at this moment.

I think now, I feel that things are... the air is sharpening or getting more acid. It’s a period where things are calling for art that is in response to emergency, where art does want to produce dialogue with audiences on emergencies, wants to address itself like a political thorn, now in the late 80s.

QUESTION: Do you still tour as extensively in the United States?

SCHUMANN: No. Right now it’s very much changed. There’s a bigger mix of doing spontaneous shows, like this one [The Passion Play of Adolfo Villameca], where you go somewhere and the show gets made for a one-time occasion, for a one-shot performance. You perform and that’s it.
QUESTION: And Nicaragua, are you going annually?

SCHUMANN: No. We went twice. We would have liked to go this year [1988-89] but we couldn't. We didn't have the means to do so.

QUESTION: And the experience there has been . . . ?

SCHUMANN: Very, very powerful experience.


SCHUMANN: It's not amazing. The difficulties are enormous.

GROUP: And we had all that same experience too . . . . We expected it . . . . We knew that's what it would be.

SCHUMANN: We're lucky because we're . . . . Are we independent? No. We took puppets along the first time, but the second time we built all our stuff there, so there was no . . . we took our tools and we even took our paper along because we didn't want to take chances with relying on anything they had. Water, we were lucky enough to find that.

QUESTION: But that gives a sense, doesn't it, that the whole proposition of art and especially theater is more difficult in third-world situations. It's even more difficult here in Puerto Rico. It's harder, everything costs more and takes more time.

GROUP: But isn't it simpler in other ways.

JODY MOORE: When we were in France, we would do a parade and have different elements like a red dragon. A Frenchman would wonder does that mean a socialist, a communist, this labor union or that labor union. But when the North African people who were in the neighborhood where we were working asked "What's that" and we'd say "A red dragon," they understood. There was no problem. And in Nicaragua and in all the Latin American countries we've gone to—except maybe Cuba where we ran into more intellectuality—people are very ready to receive us. In New York, you can pull out the biggest most colorful puppet you can imagine and people walk by and they don't even see it. In these countries, if you start to unload a bus, people gather around, they want to know what it is.

SCHUMANN: Oh, I don't know. I was amazed how strong the response was in towns like Ithaca or in unlikely provincial towns in the United States where the middle-of-the-road people are the majority. And it was powerful. I thought, that a play you couldn't do in France because of the religious overtones . . .

JOHN BELL: You're talking about the Passion Play.

SCHUMANN: Ya, last year . . . I thought about it a whole day long on that tour. I think that one can't blame it on the audiences. It's us not being the right provocateurs at the right moment.

But what did you mean a little while ago when you said that art is getting more difficult in Puerto Rico? Do you mean economically more difficult or is it more than that? Because one of the points I tried to make last night when we talked with the students was about money. The difficulty of money or just the view of money an artist might have or should have or can have at this moment in our economies. And all the kids who came afterwards talking to me talked about that. "Oh, it's good to talk about money. It's very important, you know, that we talk about money." And it's true, it is something that artists or theater people don't talk about. It's the unadmitted big hangup that . . . it's not only that we don't know what to do, about
our function in society as artists, but also how do we make a buck to survive? How do young people start to make art? With what, with what means? Do they have to do slavery and then do art at night? Do they have to spend the best part of the day making these stupid bucks and then do their art work at night? Or do they have to get this smartass administrator who runs around to private companies and to government culture organizations and collects money from them and all those tricky things?

QUESTION: Let me try to frame another issue. BREAD AND PUPPET also seems to work best for me at the point where concrete specific or local concerns overlap more abstract, general or universal ones. That play between specificity and generality becomes particularly fascinating in its ability to translate nearly incomprehensible abstractions such as nuclear warfare, genocide, racism or survival of the planet into graphic images that form part of our day-to-day lives. I'm thinking of examples such as the execution of a chair or filling the entire stage with miniatures of farm animals and then tipping them all over or making a poor woman like Doña Adelfina Villanueva the subject of a "passion play." I don't know if that makes sense or if you care to comment on it.

SCHUMANN: Oh, it makes sense. But it's hard to separate it from things that are directly connected to it, namely the fact that in contrast to a play or film, the image that you use is educated by the fact that you are in a real situation, that people are sitting in front of you eyeball to eyeball, that this meeting them in a space at a certain time is fully realized, and that's the education of what you're making there, your basic education. And even to the extent it includes the social issue of the moment or the concept of grabbing the real emergencies at the real time and being able to bring them to that clientele that sees you directly, not on a screen, not in a pre-history, in a prepared setting like a nice theater. That's what's been there. It's a job that happens at the time and--that chair doesn't always work--there's a moment where that torture and killing of the chair makes sense and there's another moment that... like Michael said, when we took the Fireman show to Prague, it didn't make any sense to them. It may have been at another point, two years later or two years earlier, it may be just what these guys have to see. And when he took Diagonal Men to Poland...

GROUP: It was perfect.... Because they thought of themselves as "diagonal men" and they didn't know it...

MICHAEL: We didn't realize it until during the performance, what that narration, what those words meant to the people watching until they were actually said. That's the moment I realized it, when those words were said and you started to think about them in the context of where you were.

QUESTION: And Diagonal Men here [Puerto Rico, 1986] in terms of audience?

MICHAEL: It was similar. It wasn't as strong as in Poland, because in Poland that was the beginning of the... at the point where martial law had been declared...

SCHUMANN: That country has an underground culture, to a certain degree, the real culture is an underground culture and if you hit that, you are then connected with Poland more than official culture can be...

MICHAEL: In France, we went to France on that same tour and they were very blasé. It was very surprising.

JOHN: One aspect of what you're talking about very much concerns this technique of working with objects—masks or puppets or the chair, for example, or the animals being tipped over to show nuclear war and how it could never be done on television. I think some of the power of what BREAD AND PUPPET does is simply to present theater with what Peter talked about, with people really being there and eye to eye contact and also this theater that's not an actor or an actress trying to show you how they're affected by nuclear war but instead in this very straightforward manner that is both completely traditional, I think, but very radically different from mass media. A lot of it is rediscovering,
the audience rediscovering the power of these objects in motion, of the presentation of ideas in objects.

QUESTION: The object works to try to bring people back to the notion that there are still basic issues like food, shelter, clothing. These, in a sense, have stopped being issues in North American life. They remain issues but everything in the culture tries to make you forget that they are real issues... the old survival issues are entirely masked. Everything tells you that these are no longer issues, supposedly.

SCHUMANN: But to the largest degree ever they are now issues because it's not only the homeless in New York but it's now this general planetary fear, anxiety... more than that... there's a death wish in there. We get what we deserve finally. We erected it and it's coming down on us now like an earthquake or supernatural event. But it's another thing—let's talk about that chair again. That chair is not a theatrical device. It's not the smart picking of a symbol but is out of a respect for chairs. A chair, a chair that is picked with some diligence. It's done like the puppets or like the colors that I use in a manner of leaving things in their own right. Music in our shows isn't music, it isn't movie music, it isn't sentimental adornment or enhancement, it's counteracting the event more than supporting it. It's an activity that has to be seen as well as heard. The chair isn't just a symbol of a chair. The colors aren't chosen in order to harmonize an action that goes on while they are being used but they are meant to speak by themselves. It's sort of this idea, let's say, of the Burmaku stage... I don't know if it's a good idea to say that actually because the support of the narrator for the puppet is too obvious... but I've seen it in classical Japanese theater, this dividedness of the stage: the spoken stage, the musical stage versus the visual stage, not simply existing in a supportive manner with each other but existing purely and often in a discourse that's contradictory and fighting each other rather than just supporting each other. That's the idea of theater, I think, to have conflicts, real conflicts like color, music more biting and fighting than harmonizing...

You know what I mean? It would be an easy way out to see this as an all-round art. Puppet theater is where you use sculpture and music and dance and poetry and you make it into something comfortably fitting, nicely fitting and composed. And because of that use of many different means, the composition is Hegelian, Wagnerian and all that. But actually it isn't like that. It's more like you're looking for the purest leaving alone of what's painting or of what's music and especially with sculpture in our case, in puppeteering. Again, it's there in it's own right, speaking it's own language. The puppet wasn't made to be something other. It's the other way around. The puppet educates the eye to see that thing as other and not as part of another which is an around the corner way... it's a way of thinking of sculpture.

JOHN: I think that that's an important difference because of times people want to work with masks or puppets or sculpture to illustrate the text or the story. Whereas it seems like what BREAD AND PUPPET does often is have this attention or respect for the object or the puppet itself first and then that combines in often unthought-of ways with the intention to make stories. And then you get something that's bigger because there's a surprise there, an unknown involved because at a certain point you're messing around, maybe, trying to figure out how to use this coffee cup and then something clicks and it works. And often it seems like most of the time you see something in how it moves or it's juxtaposed in a new way and it makes sense and then you say "that works, that's something to use."

SCHUMANN: And [John] Cage and [Merce] Cunningham do that in a methodical way. They say here's the sound, here's the costume, here's the stage set, here's the dance. They have nothing to do with each other. They meet at the time of performance. They don't even have to rehearse with each other. That's a radical method. We don't have that. For us the way to get them together is the work. But we are doing that. We are using that method but not methodically.
QUESTION: Where is BREAD AND PUPPET going? Is there some foreseeable change, some kind of new plan?

SCHUMANN: I don't know, I don't know. I'm ready to give up at the moment, I don't know. It seems more and more difficult to make theater pieces that make any sense. This is an instance where it's nice, where it makes sense. It's fine here, so we're lucky. It's a lucky find of a story, a lucky find of a bunch of people, lucky time limitation, lucky nice-looking place. But it can go totally wrong too. It's also very unsatisfying to do this, to do this and nothing comes out of it, to speak. You do four performances ... weak ... and it's gone. So you learn something but what?

JOHN: I don't know. I mean this is a passion play and when I think of the first passion play ... 

SCHUMANN: In that sense, yes ... 

JOHN: ... you did, which was in Nicaragua, I mean the first in this style, using these puppets, and then it was done in Vermont and that was a whole new thing in the Circus, to do a traveling passion play. And then you toured it around, doing the story of the young tree, and now this is a new extension.

SCHUMANN: This play [The Passion Play of Adolfoina Villameva] is kind of an old tradition of doing passion plays. Originally they were more in the traditional mode and more about Vietnam or social issues in New York. Then we dropped them for many years and now we did one in Nicaragua first and later did an ecological one and now this one. That's true. This is one that's connected to many years of other things, and maybe in some other form it will be useful again.

MICHAEL: Because you said the same thing, sort of, after the Nicaraguan workshop too: it was a great project but what comes out of it?

SCHUMANN: It's the same thing I felt when we worked in New York, in Harlem. We, white, not quite middle-class. You know, people going to Harlem, to the South Bronx, and doing a very successful workshop with 200 kids, very amazingly successful getting these kids together to do what they did. And then we go away, and all the social workers and everybody saying, "What, you're going away? You started this thing, now is the time to go there, to become a teacher, to take these twelve kids who were great and ..." It doesn't make any sense. It's true. But you always drop it. Here in Puerto Rico it's not so bad because all these young people -- there's something there you can trust, at least something will stay. But the normal thing ... right now Meredith [a group member] and I did this thing in Colorado. What will stay? Nothing. It was a tremendous thing, in a way. Really a find, of a way to make this thing in a short time, finish it, about the area that it's in, about this defense thing. And you go away and you feel so terribly empty and lousy ...

JOHN: But then that same theme ended up in the New York show.

ANTONIO MARTORELL: But isn't that also part of the art process, regardless ...

SCHUMANN: I mean you can produce a play, like when you have a small company, when you have a company play, something contained. It's different because you get something there, and if you're lucky, it becomes part of a repertoire, even if we don't do that much.

JOHN: But then the repertoire ends too.

SCHUMANN: But you feel that you have something. I feel now that we can still take a cantata or plays from the years this and that, and didn't we just do that recently with ...

GROUP: ... Joan of Arc ...

SCHUMANN: ... ya... you can take this thing. You have something there.

JOHN: But you're not always happy working with a company either. I mean there are certain drawbacks to that. Or then to be a teacher in a college to continue that work.
Would you be satisfied with staying in Colorado . . .

SCHUMANN: No, no, definitely not, and also not to go back to Harlem and work with the kids.

MARTORELL: I think it has a lot to do with what we were talking about at breakfast. It's always beginning and finishing in order to begin again. This is art as the reluctant lover. You go to it precisely because it is reluctant and you try again and again, and you're always beginning.

MICHAEL: But the more you become conscious of that maybe the harder it becomes.

SCHUMANN: But talking like this it's very good to find out that there's somebody just as frustrated.

QUESTION: But the use of puppets itself is part of the urge for permanence, part of the urge to preserve the image and to be able to repeat and conserve that sense, by developing a kind of continuity, a kind of history. That's some of the meaning behind the puppet itself, right?

MARTORELL: I think the object remains. Many times you start with the object and the object is the steppingstone, the bridge, but it's also the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. You go back to it . . .

SCHUMANN: . . . and use it in different ways. It's true.

MARTORELL: It's the sacralization of the object. And it's always there. And when I go to Vermont and I see all those puppets, my God, it's like a cathedral. It has that quality. It's not a museum, it's a cathedral. It's a cathedral where all these plays are still happening. The memory of them and the future of them. They all get mixed together in some kind of visual music. It never finishes, it's always beginning.

QUESTION: When a performance is over, you have to ask, what remains? What remains after a BREAD AND PUPPET performance? Does the image remain, and what's that image? The image is the text, and the image in the audience's mind is what, the puppet? And the puppet remains as well.

SCHUMANN: Maybe it has to do with this moment in history a little bit because when you did travel in the 60s and early 70s there were discussions after the plays. It was not just that you left an individual and profitable image there, but you got jumped at for what was done there or you had to defend the politicalness of something or the non-politicalness of something else. There was the desire to see art and now there is not the desire to see art. I think that is fairly clear. There is not a clientele that wants to see art. We have to come, like we do here in Puerto Rico, and go out to people in an open plaza and then you get the feeling that you have a fresh relationship.

QUESTION: But was it ever really there? Or was the clientele just part of a temporary mass movement that was enjoying a discourse that was alive at that time. But the moment the issue subsided, the moment the war was no longer an issue, the moment the economy no longer allowed for those kinds of freer life styles . . .

SCHUMANN: Ya, ya, that's what it is. But then you ask yourself, now the issues are by so many years larger, bigger, more burning, more dangerous, more and more developed in a way, more coming to a point, and why is the climate then for this latent let it go as it goes . . .

JOHN: But those were like pre-revolutionary times in a way. People had the thought that there was the possibility for tremendous change. And now we're in post-revolutionary times without having the revolution. We suffer this depression that comes after the revolution, except we didn't have it, only the realization that the possibility is farther away than people thought at the time. But then it becomes rather cyclical at that point . . . But I think that there's always an audience. People are always interested to a greater or lesser degree.

SCHUMANN: Of course, you can make an audience by doing what we did yesterday or the day before. That’s making an audience.

MICHAEL: I think in some ways that these United States tours are like that too. There’s no real circuit. The theater made its own circuit by going to places that nobody goes to. There aren’t even art centers or anything there and after going back after several years there was an audience ... for a while. Now it kind of broke down again but there was a real circuit that didn’t exist before. And that was pretty great.

QUESTION: But that means that at least in the United States things are more difficult right now?

SCHUMANN: Definitely, and that’s not just me saying it. I say that after talking to other artists. Things are definitely getting worse. Money, as you say about Puerto Rico, is much harder to find and things get more expensive.

QUESTION: But is BREAD AND PUPPET any more endangered than it was, say, ten years ago?

SCHUMANN: No more so. It could have happened at any moment that we just couldn’t have continued. I guess the inspiration was always this feeling that you had to do something, that there was some response needed to the urgencies of the moment. So in that way it’s hard to talk about it in terms like the money situation is bad or the public isn’t there anymore or the sponsors don’t want us. It’s not really that. As long as you feel you have to do it, you find a way of doing it.

JOHN: In that sense I feel that it’s even more critical or important now because unlike in the 60s and 70s the idea of a kind of resignation and pessimism about doing things is kind of institutionalized. In the university, postmodern theory and stuff is all very post-68—why do it, why even think about changing things when we all know that it can’t happen any way? That’s a very down kind of attitude that’s institutionalized, and the politics of the past decade or so has made avenues more closed off.

SCHUMAN: Also, in a bunch of reviews from American dance journals that Alejandra [Martorell] had left lying around on a table here, I read about young choreographers’ problems and things of that sort. They evidently get money from foundations and as part of the requirement for getting that money they have to perform their dance pieces in unlikely settings ... They have to point out that they are playing grassroot-level or, I don’t know what you call them, reach-out or target audiences.

Then to read these youngsters describing the difficulty of doing that and the enjoyment of doing this extraordinary thing, and I was thinking this all begins with what we’re dealing with. How easily they could have gotten that information from us. Why do they have to go through the pain of making that into a jeweled kind of experience? They could have learned that from us before they got born, or right after. In their baby shoes they could have come and we could have talked ... ba, ba, ba, ba, ba. But we have no communication with this performing arts world, it seems. The papers don’t write about us. But also, we don’t do any communicating with them. It’s funny to read that, for me—the answers are like a great surprise, a great discovery. They go to an elderly citizens’ home and it’s a revelation ...

How do you think a show like this [Adolfo Villanueva] would work in Harlem? If it wouldn’t be Adolfo, if it would be a kid who got shot because he picked an orange and the guy who shot him—the cop who shot him, probably—thought it was a drug deal. I wonder. We should try it.