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**Community Media as a Forum for Resistance:
The Case of the Romeo Theater Troupe**

Policy Paper

by

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Winter 2014



Abstract

Over the past several decades, mainstream mass media is increasingly becoming a conduit for the consolidation of political power and not as a vehicle to support and maintain democracy. Representing aspects of a western homogenous culture, mainstream mass media often lacks a means for local representation and can obscure coverage of important local and community issues related to social justice and the effects of structural violence. The Romero Theater Troupe in Denver, Colorado serves as an example of community media that acts as a network of local resistance. The Troupe uses community members instead of actors and a consensus model for developing plays. Employing a political-economic lens and utilizing data from participant observation, semi-structured member interviews and structured audience and demographic surveys, I argue that the Romero Theater Troupe represents a model of community media that acts as a strong body of resistance to the dominant narratives of the mainstream mass media. My analysis highlights three themes present in the Romero Theater Troupe: Power as increasing individual and community agency through projects, individual and community representation and solidarity through social cohesion and community building. Additionally, I utilize Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model to compare and analyze the political-economic structures of the mainstream mass media and the Romero Theater Troupe as a system of community media. My recommendations to the Romero Theater Troupe include: the pursuit of becoming a formal 501(c)3 organization, shortening the length of the plays, and including more dynamic methods of audience participation and forums similar to the methods of Augusto Boal's "Theater of the Oppressed."

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List of Acronyms

RTT	Romero Theater Troupe
KWIC	Key Word in Context
PM	Propaganda Model
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
AHEC	Auraria Higher Education Center

Introduction

Maybe the most important thing is the growth we see among our members from play to play and from rehearsal to rehearsal. People begin to find a stronger voice, to speak more forcefully and to grow more confident. I think that is the biggest part of our mission, to nurture a community where people can find their voice and strengthen that voice.

– Dr. James Walsh, Founder of the Romero Theater Troupe

Mainstream mass media is a complex system that involves a wide variety of social interactions, agency and countless power relationships. Journalists, news anchors, media outlets and a host of other individuals that participate in mainstream mass media hold a variety of opinions and viewpoints. However, as a whole mainstream mass media is limited in its ability to communicate a wider range of narratives and viewpoints (Howley 2005). Embedded within a capitalist system, mainstream mass media necessarily caters to the political ideology of investors and the ad agencies that provide funding (Herman and Chomsky 2002). Further, mainstream mass media (even local news channels) does not have the ability to address long term and complex community issues (Howley 2010). Finally, without the space for individual and community interaction, mainstream mass media often focuses on a minimal number of viewpoints concentrating messages that erode critical consciousness (Jackson 2009).

Some scholars suggest that independent media systems have the potential to combat mainstream mass media (Meek 2012; Fairchild 2010; Wallis 2011; Deuze 2006; Howley 2010) and to provide opportunities to defend cultural identities, in addition to challenging inaccurate media representations (Howley 2010). In particular, independent media frequently has a direct relationship with the community in which it resides (Carpentier et. al 2003). For instance, community radio in both Canada and the United States ally with their listeners as political constituents in order to create a sphere of civic

engagement by spreading information and organizing activities that often have no other form of public expression (Fairchild 2010). A theater organization founded by Brazilian activist Augusto Boal called, *the Theater of the Oppressed*, used theater as a forum to “rehearse for the revolution” against the oppressive Brazilian government in the 1970’s and 80’s. Later in Rio de Janeiro during the 1990’s the Theater of the Oppressed became a tool for crafting public policy (Singhal 2004). Further, in Andhra Pradesh, Indian, a group of low caste Dalit women formed a media organization called the Community Media Trust that brings together environmental scientists, policy makers, nongovernmental organizations and local farmers to address significant cultural and political issues by creating videos on a variety of locally relevant subjects, including seed sovereignty, bio diversity and local women’s issues (Mookerjea 2010). Finally, in England working class women use their independently created videos and public screenings to demonstrate the difficulty of raising children in poverty, a situation often ignored by mainstream mass media (Foster 2009).

A growing global interest in smaller scale, community media thus illustrates dissatisfaction with certain established western media systems and reveals a desire for some communities to reassert local autonomy and culture (Howley 2005). I argue that the Denver-based Romero Theater Troupe (RTT) represents a significant center for community engagement by reframing or exposing numerous social issues and rarely told historical events to the public. Counteracting mainstream mass media narratives that reassert the unequal distribution of power, or structural violence, the RTT focuses on educating the public on social justice issues and alternative narratives in history by utilizing internet media and an open stage that invites individuals, regardless of age,

ethnicity, gender, background or acting experience, to participate. Using data collected from participant observation of performances (n=5), rehearsals (n=17), community action events (protests/vigils the RTT coordinated or participated in) (n=9) and storytelling workshops (n=4); semi-structured interviews of RTT members (n=18); structured demographic surveys with RTT members (n=45); and structured surveys with performance audiences (n=55), I argue that the RTT is an example of how a system of community media builds solidarity amongst audience members and performers. I also suggest that the RTT serves as a forum for individual and community representation by discussing social issues and historical events that are rarely present in other forms of media.

Theoretical Framework

In an effort to examine the relationship between mainstream mass media and community media, I draw on a theoretical lens based in political economy. Borrowing from Ortner (1994), I define political economy as a Marxist influenced lens, which focuses on the relationship between global politics and capital and how the global forces local systems to change or evolve as a result. Additionally, I draw from Wolf's (1982) definition of political economy as modes of production impacted by larger social factors and historical networks that create an ebb and flow of cultural change. I also utilize Herman and Chomsky's (2002) structural analysis of the mainstream mass media known as the propaganda model (PM), which suggests filters that significantly limit the agency

of reporters and narrow the range of narratives that the mainstream mass media can cover.

To further interpret the systems of power within mainstream mass media, I draw from Williams (1977), Foucault (2010) and Scott (1992). Specifically, I utilize Williams' (1977) definition of hegemony, as a system of socially constructed common sense based on established systems of power and political ideology. In particular I focus on the concept of hegemony as it pertains to the concentration of ideological messages conveyed by mainstream mass media narratives. Further, my analysis considers Foucault's (2010) work on the formation of a disciplinary society by using tactics of surveillance that aim to increase docility and suppress systems of counter power at the lowest economic cost. Additionally, I draw on Scott's (1992) discussion of public and hidden transcripts. *Public transcripts* describe the open and public interactions between those in power and the oppressed, while *hidden transcripts* are the critique of the system of power that the oppressors do not see or hear.

Representation in the Media and Structural Violence

Mainstream mass media is one of the most powerful instruments in molding public consciousness and maintaining hegemonic perspectives. Indeed, mainstream mass media plays a key role in defining cultural tastes, situating history and creating ideas about the range of individual and community possibilities (Mantsios 2003). However, instead of focusing on stories that unite people and suggesting models that initiate change, mainstream mass media often focuses on stories that isolate individuals from

communities and can present dismal news to inspire a sense of hopelessness (Dreier 2005). Rather than representing the wider diversity of its audience in a democratic society, mainstream mass media is often a tool for the wealthy elite's consolidation of power (Herman and Chomsky 2002). Indeed, as Foucault (2010) emphasizes, every system of power must maintain its dominance at the lowest possible cost, while at the same time creating a way to neutralize counter power. Mainstream mass media often acts as a tool to maintain larger hegemonic structures and acts as method for both discipline and surveillance by creating a large body of cultural knowledge. Finally, mainstream mass media is a site of the expression of the public transcript (Scott 1992), creating a body of knowledge that represents the wealthy elite and acceptable public discourse.

An outcome of the mainstream mass media's attempt to maintain the dominant hegemonic structure is the reproduction of structural violence. Structural violence is a form of indirect violence that appears in society as an unequal distribution of power. Examples include lack of access to quality education, healthcare, healthy food and resources in general (Galtung 1969). Farmer (2004) examines structural violence in the form of lack of access to health care in Haiti, arguing that an understanding is only possible through an investigation of the social, historical and political-economic structures in which the problem exists. Farmer further demonstrates that structural violence is indeed pervasive and covert in its reach and is often invisible because of its indirect nature and its cultural acceptance as a system of power. Mainstream mass media can thus make those living in poverty appear as invisible, underserving of help, or at the very least responsible for their own situation (Mantsios 2003).

Media portrayals of gender, ethnicity, religion and class can attempt to prevent social change (Howley 2010) or the means to address issues related to structural violence (Walsh 2009). For example, Byng (2010) analyzed 72 publications penned between 2004 and 2006 in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* on American Muslims and found that the media created a common sense understanding that veiled Muslim women should not be allowed to participate in the American public sphere or exercise their rights to religious freedom. Further, Walsh (2009) illustrates that during the 2008 Presidential Election many 24-hour news stations challenged both Barack Obama's and Hillary Clinton's qualifications based on their ethnicity and gender. Lastly, mainstream mass media often exacerbates issues of urban poverty and crime by focusing only on stories that divide communities (Dreier 2005). Indeed, as mainstream mass media often reinforces structural violence, community media has the potential represent resistance to the overwhelming hegemonic narratives and economics that fuel American mainstream mass media.

Community Media, New Media and Theater

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines community media as an alternative medium to public and commercial media that is community owned or run and creates a platform for discussion or debate on social issues and/or community concerns (see www.unesco.org). It encompasses a range of community-based activities that often attempt to challenge the dominant media narrative put forth by mainstream mass media (Howley 2010). Some scholars (Fairchild 2010; Carpentier et. al 2003) warn that a specific definition of community media may be

problematic because it may create exclusions in political affiliation, ideology, ethnicity, geography or even create a false binary between community media and mainstream mass media. Instead these scholars suggest examining how community media functions.

Related to community media, new media (also known as internet media and social media) is frequently a tool of resistance against social injustice (Meek 2012). Both the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011 (DeLuca et. al 2012) and the Egyptian uprising in 2011 (Khamis 2011) utilized social networking websites, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, to organize and fuel their protests and spread vital information. The Occupy Wall Street movement in particular demonstrated that new media based on online communities created a context for activism that was not previously possible on television and radio (DeLuca et. al 2012).

Unlike other forms of media (print, radio, television), which usually shares information in one direction, theater has the ability to create a space for dialogue (Pratt 2012). Specifically, participatory theater allows for the wall between the audience and the performers (known as the fourth wall) to dissolve and create a forum for discussion. A cross section of community media, new media and theater, this case study, The Romero Theater Troupe creates arenas of activism and local cultural production that do not appear on mainstream mass media outlets.

Context: The Romero Theater Troupe

Named for peace activist arch bishop Oscar Romero, the Romero Theater Troupe centers its activity on the use of participatory theater and community engagement. Founded in 2004 by Dr. James Walsh of the University of Colorado at Denver, the RTT

uses theater performance and storytelling workshops as their primary method for community outreach on various issues of structural violence. Boasting more than 35 major theater performances, approximately 60 active performers (more than 200 over the course of its 9 year existence) and an email list that reaches thousands, the RTT rehearses out of empty classrooms on Sundays at the University of Colorado at Denver. Often, members of the RTT spend their weekends rehearsing plays and working with the community. As of February 2014, the Troupe has begun performing a play entitled *An Adjunct at Ludlow*. The RTT describes this current play on their Facebook events page:

Please join the Romero Theater Troupe as we continue to explore stories of struggles for justice in our state, past and present. This play is built around a story of contingent/adjunct labor in higher education and a growing movement to organize faculty to change this system. We also explore stories about Colorado's gay rights movement, desegregation of our public parks, an amazing act of civil disobedience to win access to public spaces for physically disabled community, a story of the immigrant rights community helping a woman fight deportation and remain united with her family, a brutal act of police brutality and how it transformed a young man, a homeless advocate's love for a man on the streets, Displaced Aurarians, the anti-Columbus day campaign in Pueblo, Martyrs of Denver's Chicano Movement, and other important tales that connect our past and present.

The Romero Theater Troupe performs plays based on the various social justice issues several times a year. Performances typically consist of a series of vignettes and

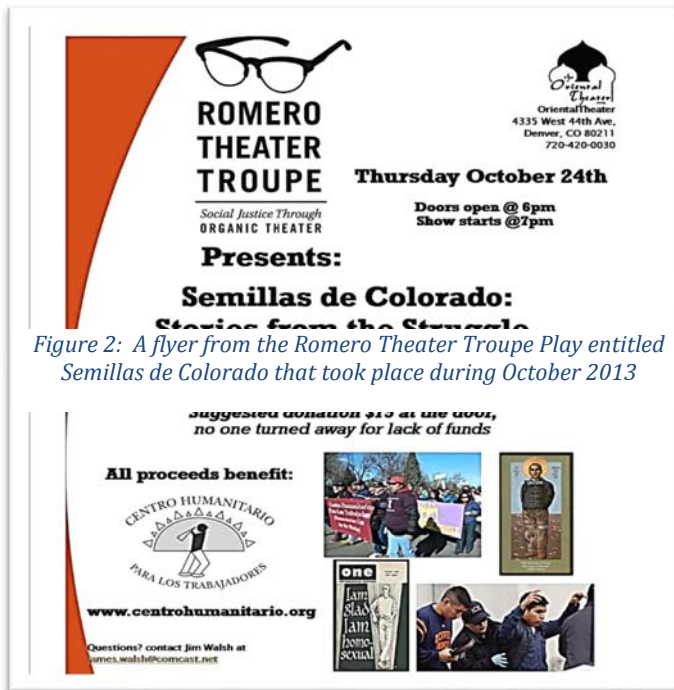


Figure 2: A flyer from the Romero Theater Troupe Play entitled *Semillas de Colorado* that took place during October 2013

each scene relates to a specific social justice issue or historical event. In order to tie scenes together into a singular play, a ghost, or guide (i.e. the ghost of Mother Jones or the ghost of Howard Zinn, homeless activists or veterans) often transports an observer from scene to scene. Plays frequently draw crowds

ranging from 100 to 300 people and independent theaters, union halls, churches and universities usually provide space for performances. Based on a suggested donation, admission to a performance is voluntary and 100% of ticket sale profits usually go to a local charity or nonprofit organizations such as the Harm Reduction Action Center or El Centro Humanitario. Individuals are only turned away in the event of sell out, which happened at one of the three plays surveyed.

With no formal scripts or professional actors, much of the Troupe consists of former audience members looking for a means to heal from painful encounters and communicate serious issues or unshared stories, such as encounters with wage theft, deportation and homelessness. One goal of the RTT is to humanize social issues through these plays in an attempt to engage the audience. During these plays, the audience is

encouraged to participate and interact with the performers. At the conclusion of each play a period for dialogue opens between the cast of the performance and the audience about the various scenes and issues highlighted in the play.

More than a space for catharsis, these plays open up community dialogue and resources to individuals who may have felt isolated previously. Solidarity is an important theme in the RTT, and it is a term heard often at rehearsals and social gatherings. Members of the Troupe also visit various homeless shelters, women's shelters, conferences and schools around the Denver area in order to host storytelling workshops that demonstrate their model so that anyone can use it. As I will demonstrate below, the Romero Theater Troupe is a remarkable example of community media that seeks to address local issues and highlight hidden histories in order to expose significant inequality and structural violence, not only in the past, but also in everyday life.

Research Methodology

In order to gauge the effectiveness of the RTT's role as a counter narrative to mainstream mass media, I sought to address four primary research questions about the Troupe: (1) What impact does the Romero Theater Troupe have on the Denver Metro community? (2) What impact does participation have on the performers? (3) How does the Romero Theater Troupe's message differ from mainstream mass media? and (4) Is the Romero Theater Troupe a viable form of resistance against the dominant narratives of the mainstream mass media, thereby addressing issues related to structural violence typically reinforced by those narratives?

My initial introduction to the Romero Theater Troupe began in November of 2012; I attended several rehearsals and planning meetings for upcoming performances. In January 2013, I began a formal internship as a media specialist for the RTT that lasted until June. For the internship I served two primary roles. First, as a media specialist; it was my job to create promotional videos and still photography for online interaction. This role has since expanded and I am currently in the post production process of a full length film on the RTT. Second, I was tasked with a critical analysis of the RTT, how it functioned, where it could improve, and how it related to its audience; the overall goal being to increase the scope and reach of the organization.

I conducted participant observation of 17 rehearsals, 3 planning meetings, 9 community activism events, and 5 plays. Additionally, utilizing a convenience sample, I carried out and filmed 19 semi-structured interviews (18 individuals) with past and present members of the Romero Theater Troupe (Appendix A), which I fully transcribed. In this component, lack of Spanish fluency proved to be a limiting factor in respondent selection. I also created a demographic survey (Appendix B) that was made available online to the RTT; in total, 45 members of the RTT, both past and present, participated in the survey. Additionally, I created a structured audience survey (Appendix C) that attempted to measure audience impressions of three RTT performances during May and June 2013. The audience survey included a demographic questionnaire and semi-structured questions based on the themes of particular social justice issues that were in the play. Over the course of the 3 surveyed plays, 69 surveys were administered (to a sample size of approximately 450 audience members) and 55 were fully completed¹.

¹ I had originally intended to survey community workshops, but due to the often sensitive locations of those workshops (women's shelters, homeless centers, etc.) the scope of surveying fell beyond my reach

Lastly, I collected online data from the YouTube and Facebook pages of the Romero Theater Troupe over the three-month period between April and June 2013, which included the following indicators: reach, number of unique visitors, age range, geographic location, total minutes videos are viewed, devices on which videos were viewed, viewer retention rates and virility rates².

My data analysis included four steps: (1) key word in context and content analysis of the interview transcripts³; (2) examination of RTT member and audience demographics; (3) analysis of audience objective surveys (I also include some of the 2010 Denver metro area census data in my analysis); and (4) analysis of data gathered from Facebook and YouTube's analytics tracking programs. Initially, I utilized a technique called key word in context (KWIC) on the interview transcripts, which is a method for finding key themes in textual data by constructing word counts (Bernard 2012). I also employed content analysis, a method for coding and analyzing qualitative data in order to explore implicit or explicit meanings of texts (Bernard 2012). In order to determine if RTT members and audience members provided an accurate comparison to the wider Denver metro community, I utilized descriptive statistics on local demographics. Using the audience surveys, I created a rating system designed to examine the relationship between the audience and performers as well as the impact a play had on its audience in terms of both knowledge and interest of specific social justice issues. The scoring system ranged from 1-10 (1 being the lowest) on five key issues that each of the three surveyed plays included in their scenes. Audience members were asked to rate their

² Internet data proved inconclusive and was not used in my subsequent analysis

³ I use the real names of interview participants when discussing members of the Romero Theater Troupe. All these participants went through informed consent before using their names and likenesses. Portions of the interviews are also available both on online promotional media and in the film, both of which are available to the public.

interest and interaction with the following five social justice issues: immigration reform, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights, prison reform, education reform, and alternative narratives in history. Finally, I used the data on social media in an attempt to determine if the RTT had a viable presence on the Internet.

Results and Discussion

To begin my analysis of the Romero Theater Troupe as a system of community media, I draw on my experiences in participant observation and the semi-structured interviews with members of the RTT. Starting from this point allowed me to identify important emergent themes in the body of the texts and within the structure of the RTT. Then, within these themes in mind, I utilized data from the audience surveys and the RTT member demographics to include in my subsequent analysis.

To begin, in the KWIC method, the six most frequent words used across the 156 pages of transcripts from 19 interviews⁰ were as follows:

Table 2: Six Most Frequently Appearing Words in the Transcripts N=19

Most Frequent Words	Occurrences
Voice	81
Media	94
Stories	82
Community	116
Audience	95
Power	69

Next, in a thorough examination of the context of these key words, I noticed the emergence of the three major themes contained within the body of the texts: *power as increasing individual and community agency through projects, solidarity through social*

cohesion and community building and *individual and community representation*. As a theme, *power* in this context indicates an increase in agency both on an individual level and community level through participation in project of the RTT. For example, as a system of community media, the RTT has the tools to create counter-narratives to those in the hegemonic mainstream mass media and to alter the discussion about social justice issues. In fact, the power of community media lies in its ability to create new cultural territories and structures for crafting new sites for local cultural production (Howley 2005) and make public the hidden transcripts. In terms of *solidarity*, the RTT acts as a mechanism to create social cohesion and community building. Through performances and various RTT community actions, a strong relationship builds between the RTT members and the wider Denver metro community. In general, community media has the unique ability to create a nexus of relationships that allow for cross-pollination of ideas, direct participation and even opportunities for greater civic engagement (Fairchild 2010). The theme of *representation* refers to the RTT's ability to allow for individuals and communities to represent themselves by creating a venue for participation.

Once I identified these themes, I generated 10 relevant questions that reflected the universe of my research questions for the content analysis (Table 2). Once I formulated the questions using this technique, I returned to each of the 18 participant transcripts and asked the 10 questions. Questions ranged from personal experiences that relate to the RTT and the individuals participation in activism, to inquiries about their interactions and perceptions of mainstream mass media.

Table 3: Content Analysis of Participants' Interview Transcripts N=18

Questions developed via Content Analysis of Transcripts	YES	NO	No Comment	Unsure
Has the participant personally felt or experienced oppression/discrimination in their lives or through family?	8	0	10	0
Does the participant feel the RTT is empowering or encouraging?	18	0	0	0
Does the participant feel a sense of community with the Troupe?	18	0	0	0
Does the participant feel they have a democratic voice in the decision making process of the Troupe.	16	0	0	2
Was the participant a former audience member?	9	9	0	0
Does the participant engage in mainstream mass media (defined as any corporate sponsored media)	16	2	0	0
Does the participant feel mainstream mass media accurately represents issues of structural violence?	0	18	0	0
Does the participant feel the RTT has an effective reach in their messages to the community?	16	0	2	0
Does the participant want the RTT to become a 501(c)3 organization?	10	2	1	5
Does the participant consider themselves an activist outside the context of the RTT and in the community?	16	0	2	0

The questions in the Table 2 attempt to highlight core elements of how the RTT functions as a system of community media and what social interactions it fosters between Troupe members. In my subsequent examination of the three major themes, I will occasionally reference the tables above to support my argument.

As mentioned previously, several scholars suggest that it is far more important to examine the outcomes and social interactions that community media fosters rather than

focus on particular definitions of the term (Fairchild 2010; Carpentier 2003). An examination of the RTT demonstrates how community media functions within a wider community system. I will now illustrate how the three themes of *power*, *solidarity* and *representation* constitute elements in a larger body of resistance in the project of the RTT as a system of community media.

Power: Increasing Individual and Community Agency Through Projects

In the face of increasingly powerful privatized media structures, community media represents local sites of resistance to an ongoing attempt to homogenize media and culture (Howley 2010). With its primary focus on issues based in Colorado, RTT plays act as interventionist strategies that build both individual and community agency through the project of theater and community media. By agency, I borrow from Ortner's (2006) definition as an expression of intention towards a project or goal influenced by social relationships, projects (intentionality) and the unequal distribution of power.

The RTT plays and activist networks frequently support undocumented workers when facing deportation and detention centers. Through plays, protests and networking the RTT provides undocumented workers a forum to contest the systematic injustice of for profit prisons that hold immigrants in detention for extended periods without legal representation. RTT member Arnie Carter talks about immigration and private prisons:

Most people don't even know that there is an immigration detention center right out in Aurora, (located about 15 miles outside downtown Denver) about six miles from here. They detain people, mostly just working people. These people were just going to work and got stopped on the way because of a broken windshield or whatever. Then they are detained there in this private detention center run by the GEO Corporation. GEO gets

paid \$135 a day per person that is in there... What's the motivation to fix the problem when you are making money off it? ...The crazy thing is, it's a civil case if you're undocumented, not criminal, civil. But they still put them in detention... Because it's a civil case, you're not required to have legal representation, so unless you can pay for it, you don't have a lawyer. And you will get due process but it takes a while. We know people who have been in the detention center for a year.

When I asked Carter if the Troupe had ever included a scene in one of their plays on this particular issue he responded:

Yeah we did this scene, well Jim (Dr. Walsh) calls it the mask scene. People are wearing masks, these plain white masks, walking around unaware of the immigration problem and the fact that people are in detention. Somebody comes up and they grab somebody and then they form a wall with their hands and lock them in detention. Then, somebody comes looking for them because it's their brother and they say "I can't believe they just took him away like that. I can't even go see him, because then I will end up in detention. It's wrecking my family. He was the bread winner." It's a real powerful scene.

By engaging the audience in conversations about complex issues that are often oversimplified on mainstream mass media, the RTT serves Denver by acting as a space to assemble community support on a variety of projects. Through performance and various activism events, members of the RTT engage in what Ortner (2006) describes as *serious games*. Set in a culturally relevant structure of society, serious games involve multiple players engaging in goals or projects within a variety of power relationships. The RTT, acts as a key player in these games and frequently challenge institutions of power on a variety of subjects. As mentioned above, one game the RTT plays is in the arena of immigration reform. In this example some of the players include: private prisons, the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), undocumented workers, businesses that hire undocumented workers, police officers, non-profit organizations and the Romero Theater Troupe. Each of these players has interests in the (serious) game,

intentionality (agency) and constraints surrounding their actions. In this example, the RTT provides additional support and avenues in which undocumented workers can take action by telling their stories on stage and rallying community support during deportation hearings.

RTT member Misty Saribal, a prison activist that focuses on juvenile offenders and ending solitary confinement, expressed how working with the Troupe has given her tools for new avenues in her activism:

My issue is prison and human rights violations. For example, solitary confinement for years when the UN and NGO's have declared anything beyond 15 days torture when it's just standard practice to have people in solitary confinement; and juvenile life sentences without parole. We have 50 people in Colorado in juvenile life without parole. I am actually in the process of making a skit with Jim and the Romeros and we're going to perform it on campus with a prison discussion panel, during the Art of Social Justice conference here (on Auraria campus)... I think the way that the Romeros do their process, which is, everybody comes together and talks about things that are happening in their life, then people just start talking about how that could be created into a skit... there are actual dialogues about how things can be handled better in life. I think that having that conversation on an equal platform for everybody inside of a prison, would be really amazing.

Relationships of power and experiences of oppression were a frequent topic both in the RTT interviews, on stage and at community events. For instance, scenes during the several performances of a play entitled *Semillas de Colorado* included the following topics: police brutality, the historical massacre at Ludlow in 1914 over poor working conditions for minors, wage theft from migrant workers and the system of structural violence built into illegal labor, the torture of a conscientious objector and Colorado resident Ben Salmon to the First World War for standing against nationalism, critiques of the criminal justice system in cases of juvenile offenders, and a host of other topics.

Eight RTT members shared stories in which they, or their family members, experienced instances of oppression or structural violence. For example, one of the most recent members of the Romero Theater Troupe, a college student named Alex Landau, helped to craft a scene about his personal experience with racial profiling and a nearly deadly encounter with police brutality. The scene on stage begins with an actor portraying Landau is pulled over for a routine traffic stop for an alleged illegal left turn. Through the use of spoken word poetry, Landau stands behind the scene and begins to narrate his internal dialogue, while the actor portraying him and another actor playing his passenger, are asked to step out of his car. As policemen from additional squad cars appear on stage, an illegal search of the car begins and the actor portraying Landau demands a warrant. Suddenly, the performers playing police officers turn and grab the actor playing Landau and drag him behind a curtain. While the audience cannot see what is happening behind the curtain, sounds of physical violence and screaming emanate into the audience as images of Landau's real injuries appear on a screen on stage. The police officers drag that actor playing Landau's injured body back to the center of the stage. After they mock and yell racial slurs at him for demanding a warrant, the scene freezes. It ends with Alex Landau coming to the center of the stage with one final poetic narration:

Why am I dying from being beaten so badly? Why do the police laugh and call me nigger? Victimized. Just another Jim Crow hate crime. And as the shock clutches my body I think to myself, will I survive? Will I live to see 21? The answer is Yes. Is there any other option? Yes, I am not a statistic. Yes, I will not be another dead 19 year old black male. Yes, I will be a voice for all victims and survivors of such violence. Yes, I will fear none and give way to no oppression. And No, I will not give you a statement until an attorney is present. And Yes, I am demanding photos be taken prior to any treatment.

As mentioned before, in order to understand and address structural violence, it is necessary to investigate the social, historical and political-economic structures in which the system of power and violence is embedded (Farmer 2004). In that vein, the RTT's strength lies in its ability to consistently revisit both rarely told historic events and present social justice issues that challenge the frame in which dominant media portrays our society. Alex Landau's scene on stage represents an example of a serious issue often underscored by the mainstream mass media (the public transcript) but that becomes a part of community dialogue (the hidden transcript) through the RTT plays. Thus, through the performance of his scene, Landau improved the agency of his group against an oppressive system of racial profiling and police brutality.

In a similar but more historic example of theater as an effective means to challenge established power, Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed (Singhal 2004) utilized community theater to address significant social inequality in Brazil. Between the 1960s and 1980s, Boal developed a model of theater that utilized an open venue wherein community members acted out stories that related to present social justice issues. This model also incorporated an audience that actively participated by getting up on stage and presenting solutions to a variety of problems, or by acting as a forum to negotiate solutions and real time strategies. Later, Boal became a city administrator of Rio de Janeiro (1993-1997) and incorporated the Theater of the Oppressed into part of his governance strategy as a means to source the community to create policy. Boal termed this *legislative theater* and attempted to turn the voters into legislators. Of the 40 laws crafted through legislative theater, 13 passed.

Mainstream mass media constantly reproduces the dominant hegemonic narratives that pervade our everyday culture (King and deYoung 2008). In contrast, community media, such as the RTT and analogous examples such as the Theater of the Oppressed (Singhal 2004), represent a space for a sustained and important conversation about inequality and issues of structural violence. With interview participants unanimously agreeing that being a part of the RTT as a performer was both an empowering and rewarding experience (Table 2), the RTT represents a space for both individual and community agency, while at the same time building strength through social cohesion and community solidarity.

Solidarity through Social Cohesion and Community Building

Performance arts have the ability to inspire participants and build solidarity in such a way that previously insurmountable barriers melt away and suddenly the possibility of social change becomes real and tangible (Pratt 2012). While mainstream mass media divides our communities by creating a sense of otherness (Howley 2005), or scapegoats for significant social issues, the RTT and various community media systems unite people through building cohesive social networks (Fairchild 2010). Considering the size and dominance of mainstream mass media narratives, building strong community networks is vital to effective forms of resistance.

In practice, the RTT utilizes a model of inclusion and community building at its core. For example, during one performance in Pueblo, Colorado, an audience member asked the RTT if she could act in the second half of the performance. Despite never

having attended a rehearsal or even seen a play previous to that day, the woman was welcomed on stage and performed in several scenes. RTT interview participants unanimously agreed that they both experienced a sense of community working within the RTT and a sense of empowerment through their participation. In fact, during several interviews RTT members described the organization as something like a spiritual community or a family. Arnie Carter, a long time RTT member expressed:

It's definitely a spiritual experience. The workshops are very spiritual. Rehearsals are very spiritual. Just riding to rehearsal with some of the Romero Troupe is spiritual. To me, you really feel the oneness. You feel that were all different, but you know, dangit were all one. We're all very connected and were not just individuals were literally one being. And I really feel that in the Romero Troupe.

RTT member Mike Ramsey shared:

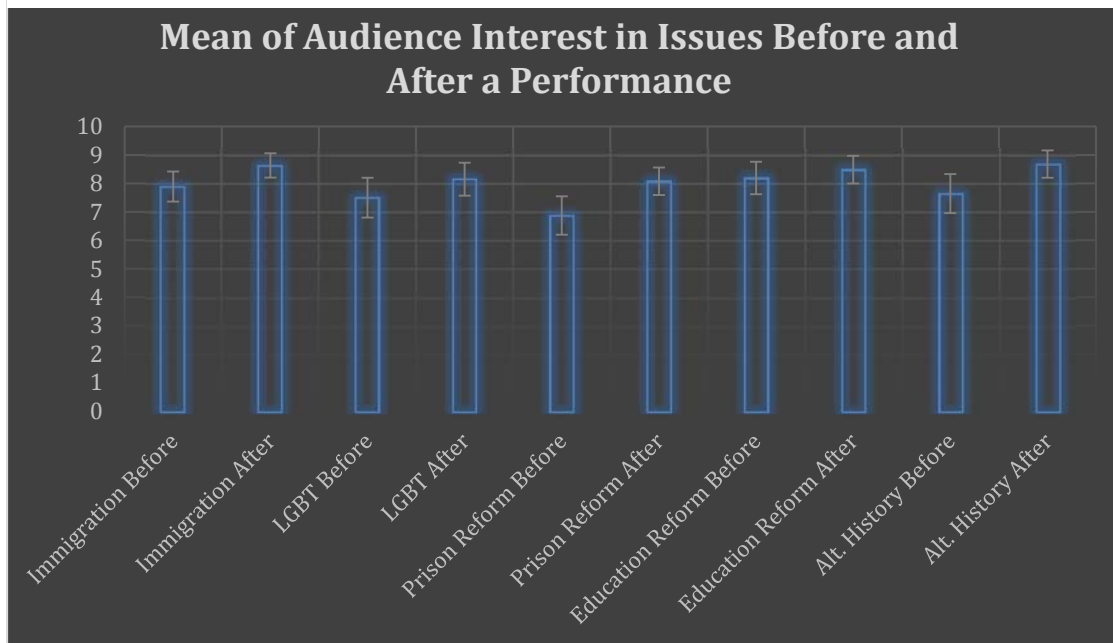
But there is something about when we gather before a performance and we are all holding hands and we are all holding on to each other and it is almost a prayer when we are setting our intentions for the show and what we hope to accomplish. There is a spiritualness to what we do. And there is something really sacred about taking these moments in history that are sometimes incredibly tragic and terrible and then making something beautiful out of it, that I don't think I expected and I don't think the audience often expects. But there is something really sacred about what happens open stage with the Romero Troupe.

In terms of decision-making, the RTT utilizes a consensus model. In their interviews, 16 out of the 18 participants felt that they had both a strong voice in the decision-making process and that the RTT has a significant impact on the audience and the community.

Audience surveys played a key role in examining solidarity and community building⁴. Figure 2 shows the results of the mean audience interaction with the issues.

⁴ A number of surveys were incomplete in both the qualitative and quantitative sections (14/69).

Figure 3: Mean of Audience Interest of Social Justice Issues Before and After a Performance. N = 55 based on 3 Theater Performances



Error bars indicate a 95% confidence interval within 1.0 standard deviation

Originally, I predicted that the RTT’s audience would experience a radical transformation in their opinions of social issue before and after they encountered a play; however, the results suggest something entirely different. Interest in each of the issues was high to begin with. It appears that most of the audience either knew about or was interested in the kind of stories the RTT shares before they arrive. Secondly, there was only a slight change in interest in the issues after viewing a play. In fact, when accounting for error the change, in my opinion, was minimal. Furthermore, the qualitative section of the survey did not have a single negative response to the play. This suggests that either individuals who filled out the survey did so because they were fans of the RTT, or that those with serious critiques simply did not complete the survey. Though the results of this survey could be viewed as the RTT “preaching to the choir” with their plays, I suggest that there may be another element to audience reactions, solidarity.

I argue that the primary motivator for audience members is not necessarily an educational experience, but instead an interest in building stronger community networks. With nine years of performances in the Denver area, the RTT has likely developed a reputation among the Denver activist networks. Therefore, I suggest (and will demonstrate below with a discussion of the custodians) that RTT performances provide a springboard for community action. At the beginning of every rehearsal members of the Romero Theater Troupe sit in a circle around a candle and discuss ongoing issues in both their personal lives and the community. During this time (and often through email) members of the RTT share information about upcoming events that often require additional support and participation. In fact, it is rare to go to some sort of protest or vigil in Denver, which is not in some way supported by either the RTT, or some of its members. Fairchild (2010) suggests, community media, unlike mainstream mass media, is not fueled by profit motives and corporate power, and can therefore act as a pivotal center of gravity capable of strengthening community networks. Through these networks, members of the community have a platform from which to air their grievances and defend cultural or class identity counter to mainstream mass media narratives (Howley 2010).

My results showed that the strength of community networking surrounding the RTT. Half of the interview participants (N=18) were former audience members and 16 of the 18 participants considered themselves activists beyond the context of the RTT. In many ways, the RTT served as a funnel for individuals seeking solidarity and social cohesion.

As an example of community network building and action, the RTT shared their storytelling model with a group of janitors attempting to form a union in order to fight back against poor working conditions and workplace discrimination on the Auraria Campus (A college campus which hosts the University of Colorado at Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver and the Community College of Denver). In collaboration with the janitors, members of the Troupe, staged a play on the Auraria campus in November 2012 that highlighted the everyday experiences of the janitors. Though many of the actors of the RTT were on stage, more than half the cast consisted of the janitors themselves, giving the janitors a direct voice to their audience.

The play boasted an attendance of over 100 individuals and a local newspaper (the Denver Westword) published an article about the performance⁵. The article and the play brought to light the unfair working conditions experienced by the janitors and created wider public engagement. However, in response to these allegations, Auraria Higher Education Center (AHEC) (the independent body responsible for facilities maintenance and the employment of the janitors on Auraria campus) began retaliating against the janitors using various tactics of intimidation. In reply, Dr. Walsh and other members of the RTT, along with several non-profit organizations including Colorado Workers for Innovative and New Solutions and Worksafe Colorado, helped the janitors to organize a march on April 29, 2013. The march represented an afternoon of solidarity between the faculty, students and janitorial staff to raise greater awareness on campus of the janitors' experiences. I created a short online video of the march for the RTT.⁶ At the

⁵See URL: http://blogs.westword.com/showandtell/2012/11/romero_theater_troupe_to_defend_auraria_custodians_in_activist_play.php

⁶ See URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80f_suw4jms

conclusion of the event, 12 janitors and supporters walked to the downtown Equal Employment Opportunity office and filed charges against AHEC. As a result of the march, Denver's CBS 4⁷ and the Denver Post⁸ both did stories on the march and the suit filed by the janitors.

Before these events, the janitors, who worked on a college campus of more than 30,000 students in the heart of downtown Denver, were virtually invisible. Like many underpaid and mistreated workers they had little hope of making a difference. Working with the RTT their union ambitions strengthened, as did their visibility in the community, and they are currently in legal negotiations for better working conditions. By building solidarity and creating momentum with the janitors play, the RTT created a method for building a strong coalition of individuals that would provide lasting support in a long term struggle.

The power and potential of theater does not rest on its value as an alternative form of media but rather in the development of the relationship between both the audience and the performers. Theater can create a space where it is not just possible to discuss equality, but also to perform it (Pratt 2012). By creating a form of media that is interactive, the stage, in many ways, becomes a rehearsal for revolution (Singhal 2004) that allows for participants both on stage and in the audience to move beyond a list of grievances or a set of obstacles and source the community for real and applicable solutions (Brown and Gillespie 1999).

⁷See URL: <http://denver.cbslocal.com/2013/05/09/auraria-campus-hispanic-custodians-claim-discrimination/>

⁸ See URL: http://www.denverpost.com/ci_23151085/janitors-file-discrimination-complaint-at-auraria-campus-denver

In many of the RTT plays the relationship that builds between those on stage and those in the audience is profound and moving. One troupe member, Mike Ramsey, recounted his experience with the audience during a scene about the historical event in which Martin Luther King Jr. visited Memphis to assist in a garbage workers strike and



Figure 3: An Image Taken at a Romero Theater Troupe Rehearsal

was assassinated. At one point at the end of the scene a historic image of men pointing towards where the gunshot that ended King's life came from flashes in the background of the scene. At this point all the members on the stage stop and point as a way of honoring

Dr. King's memory. Ramsey recalls:



Figure 4: A Historic Image of the hotel where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Was Shot. Men pointing in the direction of the

And there is something about that energy that really fed what we were doing. In the MLK scene we would all point (to honor Dr. King) There was one performance at the Oriental Theater that was filled with a lot of students; they were middle school and high school students. They started it (the students) but by the end of that scene, the entire crowd was up and pointing with us. And it was a moment that I will never forget, because we were all a part of it. It wasn't just us on the stage, every member of the audience felt compelled to stand. It was unbelievable, we almost couldn't go on because we were speechless.

Community participation, and the inclusion of non-professionals into media creation, is vital for the empowerment of both the individual and the community in which it is created (Deuze 2006.); however, in addition to the creation of media, bringing

individuals together for face-to-face discussions related to social issues is essential for building community, creating a space for catharsis and building solidarity (Berger et. al 2011). In order to engage in the wider Denver community (and even in some cases cross state boundaries), the RTT boasts performances in front of a variety of audiences including: the Arapahoe County Colorado Democrats, the National Conference for Media Reform, the Denver Conference for Non Violence; the 2013 American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees National Women's Conference, the Art of Social Justice Conference, and a variety of other large community events. By engaging in these events, the RTT builds social cohesion across the Denver community that they can (and do) draw on when needed. United with the community, the RTT transforms into a strong center for resistance against the attempt by mainstream mass media to homogenize culture through misrepresentation in western media systems. By building solidarity and creating an outlet for contesting political and economic power structures, the RTT becomes a space for both individual and community representation.

Individual and Community Representation

Employing solidarity and community agency through the project of the theater performance, the RTT allows for participants to have a voice. Special education teacher and RTT member Mary Robinson shared:

I think the thing that works about the Romero Troupe is that nobody is really a professional in any sense, in the form of a professional actor, or musician. Everyone is just passionate about what it is that we do, and you may not be as passionate about that particular scene or that particular play, like I really connected with *Which Side Are You On* (an RTT play performed between 2008 and 2009 primarily about famous Colorado labor

unions)... Even if you don't really have a background in it, there is a way to feel like your voice is being heard, in a way that I don't really feel it is in other places. When I first got involved in the Troupe, I was really upset about things that were going on politically. And sometimes it feels like you don't have a voice and don't have a say but in a little way you do have a voice with the Romero Troupe.

Through participation, members of the RTT have the ability to challenge representations present in the hegemonic narratives on mainstream mass media. Consider that, the representation of a particular social class, ethnic group, or even individuals often depends on the long-term portrayal of their identity through social channels (Hartigan 2005). Faciality is the social construction of the physical characteristics of faces through media, social typologies and power relations (Benson 2008). Faciality directly relates to the social station and the perceived roles of an individual or a community. Generic representations of facial characteristics can circulate as symbols of place or people, and can be tools of power and resistance. Consider the image of a destitute migrant worker on the cover of a magazine, the strong face of a confident political candidate, or the images of a wild indigenous tribe on the cover of a *National Geographic* as examples of the social constructions of the physical characteristics of faces. When asked about how the mainstream mass media represents communities, college student and RTT member Christina Castaneda expressed:

It represents minorities very stereotypically. Also, with the class issue, the mass media only talks about what the middle class is going through and what the rich class is going through, but they never really talk about what the lower class, the class in poverty, the people who make \$12,000 or \$25,000 (per year) or less, they don't ever talk about what they are going through with the economy, how they feel about war, how they feel about America, how they feel about being in the territories of Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq. You never hear about what the minority groups think either.

Graduate student and RTT member Chris Steele stated:

You turn on the mass media and the first thing you are going to see is the opening bell of Wall Street is about to open. You just know right there that the mass media is for the rich. And it's really not showing any other sides of history.

One large problem of the representations portrayed in the mainstream mass media is its size and reach. In fact, in terms of engaging in mainstream mass media, 16 out of the 18 RTT interview participants interacted with some form of mainstream mass media, despite the fact that the participants unanimously agreed that those corporate based media systems do not accurately represent important social issues.

Current estimates suggest that on average each individual consumes about 30 hours a week of some form of mainstream mass media (Curran and Seaton 2010)—a number that demonstrates the significant presence of media in everyday life. In general, mainstream mass media represents nation-states, ethnic groups and social classes based on the interests of the corporate investors and the wealthy elite (Herman and Chomsky 2002). For example, mainstream mass media often presents poor whites as ignorant, racist, dirty, and even culturally backward (Hartigan 2005). Often, Muslim women are represented as helpless victims of oppression that need the west to liberate them from the oppressive ideology of Islam (Abu-Lughod 2002) and Indigenous people are often portrayed as wild, exotic, and somehow closer to nature (Aufderheide 2008).

Since community media offers a means for self and community representation, I examined both the RTT members and their audience through demographic surveys. In addition to political and economic structures, Farmer (2004) highlights several additional factors needed for a thorough examination of structural violence; one element is

demography. Therefore, in addition to including demographic information from a convenience sample of 45 RTT members on an online survey and 69 audience members during three separate plays, I include some of the 2010 Denver metro area census data in my analysis. I felt that including census data would allow me to examine trends in both the RTT and audience in relation to the wider Denver Metro community so as to ascertain if the RTT presents a fair representation of the people that make up the Denver Metro area that they serve. Demographic surveys (Appendix B) included questions on race/ethnicity, age range, educational attainment, gender, and income.

In general, the participant demographics (Appendix D) suggested that both the RTT and the audience members represented a fair approximation of the Denver metro area both in ethnicity (with only minimal differences that I feel with a larger sample size would demonstrate a similar ethnic make up) and educational attainment. According to US Census Bureau, 40.5% of adults in Denver hold a four year college degree, while 46% of RTT members and 41% of audience member achieved the same level of education attainment (Denver Metro Demographics 2013).

A noteworthy element of the age data was the significant difference in the majority of audience age verses the RTT age. Within the audience 56% consisted of individuals 50 or older, while 75% of the RTT consisted of individuals 40 or younger. One explanation may in fact highlight a relationship of civil rights era activists and a newer generation of activism. During his interview, one of the original members of the RTT, a retired teacher and lifetime activist by the name of Phil Woods, highlighted the kinship he felt with a younger generation of activists during a RTT play about the Occupy movement:

That was an extraordinary experience (the Occupy Play) because, for one thing, we had about a two hour dialogue after we finished the play with the audience, about tactics and you know, can this work? Can that work? And I felt such a kinship with Occupy, it was just like, you know I've been waiting for you guys to show up for a long time. But uh, in some ways the Occupy process, the way that they did mic check and they make sure that everybody got to participate and people weren't drowned out, it wasn't just egotistical white males that dominated the proceedings, I thought in some ways you guys were better than we were at your process, inviting people in.

In the RTT interviews, the participants unanimously agreed that being a part of the Troupe was an empowering experience, one that helped to build confidence. When asked what she had personally gained in participating in the RTT, Anna Dominguez responded:

It's been a lot, truly it's been a lot. Because believe it or not, before this I was a really quiet person. In school no one really knew me. No one can say oh, her name is Anna, because I never really expressed myself. I was in the IB program, it helped me a lot in high school because it was small groups, the same people, so we created our family there. But the Romero Troupe has helped me become more, like more open, now I talk a lot with people. I don't get really nervous anymore, like being in front of other people speaking. So I think it's helped me in speech, talking more, being more open and really, really showing how I feel and all those things.

Participants frequently suggested that the RTT was a place that you could have your voice heard. Sitting in on any RTT rehearsal this becomes abundantly clear, because over the course of several hours there is much more democratic discussion of how to represent a scene and why, then an actual rehearsal of the scenes. Rehearsals also act as a hub of information exchange. Documentaries, newspaper clippings and shared historical knowledge are continually circulating amongst RTT members. In fact, in my experience the rehearsal of the scenes appear to be secondary to a larger discussion of the both personal and community obstacles that RTT members face.

When asked what she had personally gained working with the troupe, veteran RTT member and recent college graduate Abigail Freed shared:

I am not like a sign holder or a chanter. I'm not going to yell about things. I want to voice my experiences and my observations in a way that is accessible to people, but not only accessible, but also enjoyable... I think acting and singing are really great ways to reach people, to touch people.

When asked what he felt the value of the RTT was, David Bennett, a middle school student advisor who performed in an earlier RTT play called, "The People's History of Colorado," stated:

Man, I just think it gives them a voice. It gives them a voice and Jim, he will let anyone come in off the streets and join the troupe and I love that because he makes people feel valuable. And for the community, I think that the Romero Troupe makes the community feel valuable with the issues that they go through every day that might not have a voice in.

Asked if the RTT had a space for everyone who participated to have a strong voice, Dr. Walsh, replied:

That's our mission, to create a space where everyone's voice is welcome, everyone's voice is empowered and heard. That is entirely our mission. I would even go so far as to say, that is even above the mission of educating the public. When people enter our community, they will one day leave our community. It might be five years later, it might be five weeks later, it might be fifty years later, but when they leave our community they are a stronger voice, they are a confident person. They are more in tune and in touch with their place in the world. That's really, I would suggest, that is why we (The RTT) really exist.

In mainstream mass media even reporters can lack representation. Consider for example a 2008 study (Davies 2008) that examined 2000 news articles published by four major British news organizations (*The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, and the *Independent*.) Of the 2000 articles, 12% were written based on research done by

reporters. Over 80% of the articles were constructed from information provided by news agencies and the public relations industry. This study highlights the significant restraints placed on reporters that prevented quality journalism and a better media system.

The examples above illustrate only a small portion of a much larger problem. Mainstream mass media, in its current form, cannot provide a means for democratic discussion or fair representation of local communities (Dreher 2010). Instead, mainstream mass media constantly recycles the same discussions and the same viewpoints that prevent any real discussion of inequality or structural violence from developing (Dreier 2005). In contrast, community media (like the RTT) acts as a vital tool and effort to combat larger hegemonic structures that enables local cultural systems a greater degree of representation (Howley 2010, Fairchild 2010, Bresnahan 2010). Working in community media can also transform and empower individuals and communities to give them the confidence to represent themselves (Mookerjea 2010).

As demonstrated above, the RTT, as well as other community media, represent a more democratic system of media that allows for communities and individuals to have agency, build wider networks that encourage solidarity, and give them a means to represent themselves. As University of Colorado professor and RTT member Marty Otañez explained in his interview:

The Romero Troupe and the discussions they promote with their plays are fundamental at allowing people to come out of the woodwork to talk, to have conversations about issues that they normally don't have. But the conversations and the discussions that have perpetuated and created by the Romero Troupe are just the first step in a long set of steps that the Romero Troupe and its members are engaged in. The Theater Troupe itself and the performances are part of a larger context where they are promoting momentum that allows, for direct action, allows for demonstrations, allows for individual acts of resistance, for people to assert themselves in their own workplace and in their own community.

The Romero Theater Troupe through the Propaganda Model Framework

In the following section, I employ Herman and Chomsky's framework for analyzing the mainstream mass media known as the Propaganda Model (PM). I utilize this lens in order to examine the similarities and differences between mainstream mass media and the RTT's system of community media. Based on five filters, the PM offers a structural analysis of agency and power within media systems. The first filter in Herman and Chomsky's model is the concentration of ownership. This filter implies that by concentrating ownership (corporate buyouts of smaller media firms into giant media conglomerates) larger media firms create a dominant media message. It would be difficult to apply this filter to a community media or new media setting since these systems of media have a tendency to remain decentralized in their ownership and control (Fairchild 2010). In terms of the RTT, ownership of the troupe is ever changing. Dr.

Walsh shared:

The Romero Troupe is never the same troupe. Not only from one year to year, or from one show to another show, but even from one week to the next. It's a constantly transforming fluid group of people. The chemistry is constantly evolving and changing and flowing because of new people that are coming in and being involved. Other people come into busy places in their lives where they need to flow out for a while and so, it's never, ever the same chemistry. And I think for the people who have been around for a while that's what keeps people going. You just, every rehearsal you can't predict. So it's constantly new life, new ideas. There's a beauty about that, that keeps us all coming back.

As mentioned above, the RTT consists of approximately 60 performers and has had more than 200 individuals participate in its nine years. No individual experiences criticism for missing a performance or taking a leave of absence. In addition to being an open forum

for anyone to participate, the RTT welcomes anyone back at any time, allowing for ownership to remain community oriented.

The second filter incorporates advertisement agencies as a primary source of media funds. This insinuates that mass media must adhere to their sponsor's wishes in order to stay in business. In this case, community media represents a significant intervention into the structural inequalities of the contemporary media system. In a stark contrast with mainstream mass media, community media systems often rely on donations, underwriting, grant funding, and other noncommercial forms of support (Howley 2010). In a certain light, the second filter, in terms of a space to both perform and practice, could limit the RTT's ability to rehearse and perform. Organizations (usually non-profit) donate the use of space for the purposes of the performances. However, I would suggest that even if no private space (a theater for example) became available to the Troupe, they would likely continue to perform in public places. However, the second filter could become more applicable if the RTT gained 501(c)3 non profit status (a recent discussion amongst RTT members) and suddenly had more direct sponsorship.

The third filter in Herman and Chomsky's model is the use of approved experts to validate the claims of the mainstream mass media. Considering that the founder of the RTT and several other members of the RTT are college professors, this filter could apply. However, since the RTT consists primarily of members of the community and largely utilizes a consensus model I do not feel the use of experts could truly limit what the RTT shares. For example, the story of the janitors, as shared above, indicates that the RTT does not limit its performances to simply scholarly endeavors. On the contrary, part of the RTT mission is to take academic facts and figures and combine them with the human

element of the stories on stage, often using stories or experiences of members (as in the case of Alex Landau) for inspiration in the creation of their plays.

The fourth filter is *flack*, or methods by which disciplining the media or criticizing them through a variety of methods significantly restricts agency. At this current juncture the RTT is not under threat of this filter. This is largely because the RTT is still a fairly unknown group. However, as one interview participants by the name of Mike Adams expressed:

We lived in such a media saturated noisy world, that, I don't know how you could break through or if it's worth it. Is there something that the Romeros could do to go viral? I don't even know if that's desirable. I sort of doubt it. I think in a lot of ways it's good to stay under the radar at a certain level, to not get too well known. Because then, you become prone to attack, if you become really well known. I mean you don't want to be unknown of course, but the Romeros are not unknown. They are well known amongst a very broad, I guess, throughout the Denver Metro area.

While currently the forth filter is not applicable at this moment, that may not remain the case forever.

The last filter focuses on media that furthers nationalism in the United States. This filter highlights a frame that mainstream mass media must support anti-communist and pro-capitalist narratives. Community media is not constrained by specific political affiliations, religions, nationalistic ideologies or philosophies (Fairchild 2010). Community media is also not necessarily counter to mainstream mass media (Carpentier 2003). In fact, members of the RTT have a number of different kinds of political affiliations, national origins, religions, and philosophies.

Though the structural analysis of mainstream mass media does not really apply to community media systems (and in particular the RTT), other elements of political economic structures do apply. At this time the RTT recognizes itself as a community

organization. There is no consistent stream of funding, or active fundraising happening to support the RTT. The organization relies entirely on donations and often what little funds are needed are based off t-shirt sales (RTT t-shirts) during performances. As a result the scope by which the RTT can participate in the community is limited. In fact it appears that the RTT has reached the ceiling in terms of its reach to the community in its current form. Dr. Walsh, who as a professor at the University of Colorado at Denver teaches a full time, does the vast majority of the organizing for events. Other members do chip in with their time and effort when asked, but ultimately the bulk of the efforts of the RTT runs on Dr. Walsh's free time. This practice significantly limits the reach and community interaction of the theater troupe. However, I suggest that these constraints are not as limiting as the wider political and economic structure that mainstream mass media faces.

Conclusions

Mainstream mass media and community media are not a clear-cut binary system (Carpentier 2003). Rather than thinking of any media falling into some kind of binary category of opposing or supporting hegemony, it is important to consider each kind of media on a case by case basis and recognize that it is even possible that each kind of media can at one time another support or oppose the dominate hegemonic narrative or

perhaps even accomplish neither. In other words, media is a complex system that involves human agency and it would be a mistake to place any kind of media in a singular category without further examination.

That being said, my case study The Romero Theater Troupe has brought forth a model of community media that appears to be an effective means for opening discussion about important community issues by bringing forth the hidden transcripts into a public domain. Through the exploration of the three themes, power as increasing individual and community agency through projects, solidarity through social cohesion and community building and individual and community representation, I demonstrated that the RTT represents a significant site of local cultural production and resistance. The theme that focused on power relationships highlighted that participation in the RTT gave both performers and audience member's greater agency towards social action. Examining solidarity demonstrated the RTT's ability to build social cohesion and networks of resistance and civic engagement. An examination of representation displayed that in terms of demographics, the RTT both accurately represents its constituency of the wider Denver Metro area, and gives the community and individuals the ability to speak for themselves against the oppressive frame of the mainstream mass media. Finally an examination of the political and economic constraints on the RTT suggests that the structural limitations of the Troupe are minimal compared to that of the mainstream mass media. In fact, the case of the Auraria campus janitors is one of several ongoing community actions that use the RTT to build solidarity for their cause and create a space for educating the public that does not exist on mainstream mass media. In many ways the RTT represents sites of local cultural production, one that creates a body of community

knowledge that allows for both civic engagement within the Denver community and catharsis among RTT members and their audience members.

The RTT did not invent this model. In fact, Dr. Walsh during an interview on community radio station, KGOAT in Idaho Springs, Colorado on April 13th, 2013 stated, “people have been educated through theater forever, back to the ancient Greeks and before then. It’s in our DNA.” There are numerous historical instances wherein theater and community solidarity were used to face significant challenges (Pratt 2012; Singhal 2004). The RTT is simply a recent incarnation of a group of individuals that desire a system of communication that truly represents their interests and addresses the significant inequality that many members of their community face. Dr. Walsh explained it this way:

The Romero Troupe is a counter narrative against the kinds of oppression that people feel every day and the kinds of abuse that people are subjected to in our culture, the kinds of ways that people in their work places are dehumanized, are injured, I don’t mean physically but spiritually. And so the Romero Troupe can be almost defined as a space where, that kind of oppression doesn’t exist.

At this point it is hard to know if the small victories of the RTT could inspire the use of this model at other locations around the country (as many RTT members hope it will). It may in fact be that Dr. Walsh’s leadership is the key to the success of the RTT. Perhaps it is the core group of RTT participants or the unusually high level of education in the Denver Metro area that makes the Troupe so productive in the community. Out of context, the RTT forum may be ineffective. However, I suspect that something much more interesting is going on. I predict that the RTT is yet another form of local resistance in an age when there is an opportunity for media to be taken back by the people it is supposed to represent. Local communities are rallying together intermixed with new kinds of independent media, sharing their messages and building solidarity. The Arab

Spring, the Occupy Movement and the Romero Theater Troupe all represent sites of significant resistance in media making, distribution, and community building. I suspect as the mainstream mass media continues to represent corporations and established political power, community media and those who practice it, will fuel the social changes we so desperately need.

Future Recommendations for the Romero Theater Troupe

With all of the above information in mind I have several recommendations to the Romero Theater Troupe. The first and foremost is to shift some of the organizational responsibility away from Dr. Walsh by becoming an official 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Of the interview participants, ten individuals were immediately in favor of becoming a non-profit organization, five said they were unsure and needed more discussion, one did not provide an opinion, and two were against it.

Here I draw on both my own observations in this research project and suggestions made by interview participants. The reasons for becoming a non-profit organization are as follows:

- Hiring staff to manage and organize workshops, plays, and social media. This would take the burden off Dr. Walsh and provide a means by which to work with more areas of the community
- Have regular storytelling workshops and seminars for public outreach
- Host a multidisciplinary conference that demonstrated the value of the organic theater model.
- Traveling and sharing the model in places other than Colorado

- Establishing legitimacy in order to work with high schools, middle schools, and elementary education around Colorado on a regular basis.
- Creating a possible home base where Romero Theater Troupe members could host workshops, rehearse, and possibly perform.

Concerned about fracturing the consensus model, some individuals expressed concern over the idea of becoming a non-profit organization and establishing board and office positions. In all honesty, a board already exists among those 5 or 6 individuals who rarely miss a performance, rehearsal, or workshops. Called “Hardcore Romeros” by the majority of the group, these individuals already participate in the bulk of the decision making process, largely because of their constant attendance to meetings and events. Dr. Walsh is already the informal president, and though he often defers decision making to the group, he is forced to make regular decisions about organizing events and many other logistical elements of the Troupe. I suggest that moving from an informal board to an officially recognized board would minimally impact the flow and current structure of the Romero Theater Troupe.

A second frequent critique of the RTT is the length of its plays. Often the plays can run in the upwards of 3 hours in length. On several surveys and in several interviews there were concerns for the length of the plays. Additionally when plays were more interactive, the audience appeared to respond better. I therefore suggest limiting plays to no more than 4 scenes and creating more situations for the audience to interact.

Third, in my literature review for this paper I came across Augusto Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed (Singhal 2004). In the 60s -80s Boal discovered several tools and techniques that theater could be used for. One such model was the forum model. In this

model a scene would begin with a particular problem that many of the audience members may have encountered. At the point of conflict Boal would freeze the scene and ask anyone who had a solution the problem to come up on stage and try the scene again with their solution. This method allowed for an open community discussion about real time solutions to a variety of problems. It is in my opinion that the incorporation of one such scene within the context of a play, or in a workshop could deepen discussions on issues of structural violence. Phil Woods, one of the interview participants, suggested that something similar occurred at the end of the play entitled “Occupy” and the interaction between the audience and the RTT resulted in a very productive discussion over possible strategies and solutions to the problems that members of the Occupy movement faced.

The RTT is at a critical stage of growth. It has enough impact and momentum to become a larger and more successful organization for combating issues of structural violence; however, without funding and more structure within the organization, it is ultimately in danger of burning out in the long term, especially due to the time constraints of some of the more consistent members.

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Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions for Participants of the Romero Theater Troupe

1. How long have you been involved with the Romero Theater Troupe?
2. What roles do you play within the group?
3. Do you feel you have a strong voice in the decision making process of the organization?
4. What first attracted you to working with the Theater Troupe?
5. What do you feel you have gained from your experience?
6. Do you see yourself continuing on with the Theater Troupe?
7. What sort of messages are you trying to convey to the community with your involvement? Have they been effective?
8. How many people do you feel have been impacted by the Theater performances?
9. Do you feel there are other ways that Romero Theater could reach out to the community?
10. If you could do anything you wanted with Romero Theater Troupe to increase its reach or strength its message what would it be?
11. Can you offer any constructive criticism about the Theater Troupe?
12. Where do you get most of your news from?
13. Do you watch any of the 24-hour news stations?
14. How do you feel the media portrays the social issues that you have tackled with Romero Theater Troupe?
15. How do you feel the message of the Theater is different then messages in say a classroom or on News stations like CNN?

Appendix B: Romero Theater Troupe Members Online Demographic Survey

1. Age Range
 - a. 18 or less
 - b. 18-29
 - c. 30-39
 - d. 40-49
 - e. 50-59
 - f. 60 or older

2. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

3. Location of Birth

4. Annual Income Range
 - a. Less than \$20,000
 - b. Between \$20,000 – \$40,000
 - c. Between \$40,000 – \$60,000
 - d. Between \$60,000 – \$80,000
 - e. Greater than \$80,000

5. Education Background
 - a. Less than High school
 - b. GED or High school Diploma
 - c. Some College or Technical School
 - d. 4 Year College Degree
 - e. Graduate Degree

6. Ethnicity
 - a. White/Caucasian
 - b. Black/African Descent
 - c. Latino/Hispanic
 - d. American Indian/Alaskan Native
 - e. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - f. Indian Subcontinent
 - g. Middle Eastern
 - h. Mixed/Other

Appendix C: Audience Survey Prior to a Performance

1. Age Range
 - a. 18 or less
 - b. 18-29
 - c. 30-39
 - d. 40-49
 - e. 50-59
 - f. 60 or older

2. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

3. Location of Birth

4. Annual Income Range
 - a. Less than \$20,000
 - b. Between \$20,000 – \$40,000
 - c. Between \$40,000 – \$60,000
 - d. Between \$60,000 – \$80,000
 - e. Greater than \$80,000

5. Education Background
 - a. Less than High school
 - b. GED or High school Diploma
 - c. Some College or Technical School
 - d. 4 Year College Degree
 - e. Graduate Degree

6. Ethnicity
 - a. White/Caucasian
 - b. Black/African Descent
 - c. Latino/Hispanic
 - d. American Indian/Alaskan Native
 - e. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - f. Indian Subcontinent
 - g. Middle Eastern
 - h. Mixed/Other

On a Scale of 1-10 (1 being lowest and ten being highest) How would you rate your interest/involvement with the following social issues.

Immigration Reform

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) Rights

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Prison Reform

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Education Reform

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Alternative Narratives in History

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Short Answer Questions

1. How did you hear about this performance?

2. What attracted you to this performance?

3. What do expect to see/learn from this performance?

Audience Survey After a Performance

On a Scale of 1-10 (1 being lowest and ten being highest) How would you rate your interest/involvement with the following social issues.

Immigration Reform

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) Rights

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Prison Reform

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Education Reform

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Alternative Narratives in History

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Short Answer Questions

1. What are some of your thoughts on the performance?
2. Do you feel you learned anything about the above social issues that you did not know before? If yes then what?
3. For you, what was the most memorable scene? Why?
4. Would you attend another performance? Why or why not?
5. Do you have any interest in joining the Romero Theater Troupe? Why or why not?

Appendix D: Results of Demographic Data.

Table 3: Ethnicity of the RTT, Audience and Denver Metro 2010 Census Data

Ethnicity	RTT Race/Ethnicity N=45	Audience Race/Ethnicity N=69	Denver Metro Ethnicity (2010 Census)
White/Caucasian	62%	72%	66.6%
Black/African Decent	9%	2%	4.9%
Latino/Hispanic	25%	16%	22.1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%	1%	.5 %
Asian/Pacific Islander	0%	0%	3.9%
Middle Eastern	2%	3%	N/A
Mixed/Other	2%	6%	2%

Table 4: RTT and Audience Members Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	RTT Members N=45	Audience Members N=69
Less than High School	2%	2%
GED or High School Diploma	7%	1%
Some College or Technical School	25%	25%
4 Year College Degree	46%	41%
Graduate Degree	20%	31%

Table 5: Gender of the RTT, Audience, and Denver Metro Area

Gender	RTT N=45	Audience N=69	Denver Metro N = 2,845,140 (based on 2010 census data)
Male	41%	39%	50%
Female	59%	61%	50%

Table 6: RTT and Audience Members Annual Income

Annual Income	RTT Members N=45	Audience Members N=69
Less then \$20k	41%	29%
Between \$20k-\$40k	32%	33%
Between \$40k-\$60k	14%	18%
Between \$60k-\$80k	4%	6%
Greater than \$80k	9%	14%

Table 7: RTT and Audience Members Age Range

Age Range	RTT Members N=45	Audience Members N=69
18 or Less	5%	0%
18-29	43%	25%
30-39	32%	9%
40-49	2%	10%
50-59	2%	20%
60 or Older	16%	36%